

Shut down the Kotel!

NATHAN LOPES CARDOZO | FEBRUARY 17, 2016, 10:05 AM |

With utter astonishment, I have been following the debate about the Kotel.

I was not planning to write about this, because by now the issue has sparked so much debate of such low quality that it has embarrassed Judaism, the Jewish people and the Kotel itself.

But since many of my readers have been asking me what my thoughts are, allow me to add my two cents.

I cannot help but believe that all parties have grossly blundered: the Orthodox, by insisting on inflexible halachic standards, thereby impeding every possible solution to this problem; the non-Orthodox parties, as well as the multi-denominational Women of the Wall, by not taking the opportunity to achieve a real breakthrough — they've only compounded the problem of separation; and the government, by lacking the wisdom to rise above all these battling parties.

Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein and Rabbi Daniel Bouskila hit the nail on the head.

Rabbi Adlerstein made the correct observation that by adding still another separate section, we have now erected an even larger psychological mechtza (barrier) dividing millions of our people ("Mixed Emotions about the Kotel Compromise," *Jewish Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 48, February 5-11, 2016).

We are not even able to maintain enough unity to preserve one single place in the entire world where we can come together and express our Jewishness in prayer without any discord.

Rabbi Bouskila made an even more important point. The Kotel was never a synagogue; nor should it ever become one. It is a place where people can pray, be spiritual, and meditate ("The Kotel Decision: A Sephardic Jew Responds," *Ibid.*).

It should not have minyanim, synagogue services, or bar mitzvah celebrations; nor should it be a commercial tourist attraction.

No denomination should have control over it, and it should have no barriers separating people. It

must be designated as a place where people can touch Heaven and experience a feeling of true holiness.

This so-called “landmark decision” is in reality a run-of-the-mill tragedy. Nothing to be proud of.

Just to clarify: I see no halachic problem with women wearing *tallitot* and tefillin, or reading from the Torah. In fact, I keep wondering whether the time has come to obligate women as much as men in the observance of all the commandments. But the Kotel is not the place where this should be played out.

Items such as a tallit, tefillin or Sefer Torah do not belong at the Kotel. They belong in the synagogue. People should come to the Kotel, baring their souls and pouring out their hearts in prayer before the Lord of the Universe.

Next in line will be the Jews for Jesus. They will also claim their separate place at the Kotel, and who knows what they will bring?

I wonder whether perhaps the time has come to close the Kotel to the public until we get our act together.