

## Reaching New Heights: Temple Movement Activists Build Support from within the Political Establishment



Tisha B'Av 5778, July 21, 2018

### **Members of the Government and the Knesset Are Once Again Actively Collaborating with Temple Activists while the Prime Minister's Office Maintains its Silence.**

Each year the summer vacation, and particularly the holiday of Tisha B'Av, is attended by an intensification of Israeli pressure designed to erode the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. This year, precisely within this timeframe, the Prime Minister lifted the ban on members of Knesset (MKs) visiting the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif after having prohibited such visits for more than three years. Following his decision, members of the government and Knesset have repeatedly exploited their renewed visits to the Temple Mount and adjacent spaces to promote activities that mirror and reinforce the Temple movements' agenda.

The Temple movements operate according to a clear strategy, the details and logic of which they openly publicize. Their immediate goal is to steadily increase the number of Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. According to their logic, as the number of visitors increases so too will the public demand to reverse the status quo and permit Jewish worship on the Mount. That demand, they reason, together with persistent attempts to pray and challenge the government's prohibition against Jewish worship at the holy site, will eventually force the government to authorize Jewish prayer on the Mount. Such a policy shift will increase the Jewish presence on the Temple Mount and consequently enhance the political power of the Temple movements to realize their end goal: reversal of exclusive Muslim status (i.e. right to worship on the Mount/Haram, Waqf management of the holy site, etc.); damage to the mosques, and in the most extreme cases, their removal; and initiation of real steps to build the Temple.<sup>1</sup>

We have witnessed this pattern before: from 2012 to 2014, when cooperation between MKs and Temple Movement activists precipitated an escalation of the conflict on the

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<sup>1</sup> For an expansive treatment of the declared strategy of the Temple movements, see the Ir Amim position

Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif,<sup>2</sup> continuing in 2015 with infringements of Muslims' freedom of worship and widespread incidents of violence.<sup>3</sup>

The events of the past two weeks – only a month and a half before the Jewish High Holiday period in September – reveal that as a result of the removal of restraints imposed on Israeli politicians three years ago, they have hastened to resume behaviors that triggered an erosion of the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and outbreaks of violence in Jerusalem. In the summer of 2015, coordination between the Temple movements and members of Netanyahu's coalition during the fall holidays brought tensions at the Compound to new heights. Without any formal intervention from the prime minister, we are liable to witness a regression to those conditions and perhaps even a more serious inflammation of tensions this year.

#### **I. Members of Knesset and Senior Ministers Ascend the Temple Mount, Calling for Jewish Prayer and Construction of the Temple**

In October 2015, Prime Minister Netanyahu issued an order prohibiting members of the Knesset from visiting the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. The decision was made after clashes on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif precipitated a wave of widespread violence involving near daily stabbings in Jerusalem and other places on both sides of the Green Line. In Israel, the Prime Minister's decision was framed as a security measure – in other words, a requisite response to Palestinian violence – and the fact that Knesset members on the right were regularly exploiting their visits to the Mount in order to undermine the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif went unacknowledged.

On July 3, 2018, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced his decision to lift the ban. On July 5, Speaker of the Knesset, Yuli Edelstein, published guidelines and rules governing visits of Knesset members on the Mount/Haram and on July 8, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Uri Ariel (Habayit HaYehudi), and MK Sharren Haskel (Likud) hastened to make their ascents. The next day, MKs Yehuda Glick (Likud), Shuli Moalem-Refaeli (Habayit HaYehudi) and Amir Ohana (Likud) quickly followed suit.

During the course of these first visits, members of the coalition chose to repeat behaviors which three years prior had helped provoke the crisis on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and the consequent prohibition on their entry. As an example, in contravention of the guidelines governing officials' visits, they published footage of

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., the Ir Amim follow-up papers for June-September, 2014 and the Jewish holidays in the fall of 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Ir Amim, *Collective Limitation of the Entrance of Moslem Worshippers to the Temple Mount/the Noble Sanctuary Complex: Change in the Spirit of the Status Quo and a Central Factor in the Outbreak of Violence in Jerusalem*, Policy Paper, November 2015.

themselves declaring their intentions to annual the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Some went even further:

MK Amir Ohana, in a filmed visit to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif proclaimed:

When will we see the Israeli flag here? Quickly in our days. We see more and more Jews who ascend the Mount. And as this continues and increases, our sovereignty will approach 100 [percent]. The Temple Mount is in our hands but only partially, not fully. On the day that Jews can ascend the Mount, to pray, then the sovereignty will be more absolute. And we look hopefully towards this day and are acting to realize this day.<sup>4</sup>

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Uri Ariel, also issued a filmed proclamation from the Mount in which he declared:

The Temple Mount must be open to Jews – including publicly elected officials – for prayer every day of the year. The Muslims are not the owners of the Mount and it is forbidden for us to reconcile ourselves to the threats and violence that lead to limitations on ascents to the Temple Mount. We hope and pray that Tisha B’Av will be a joyous day. As the prophet said, may the Temple be built so there will no longer be days of mourning and we will be able to bring all of the sacrifices we read about this Shabbat in the weekly Torah reading of Pinchas; and we will be able to fulfill it, not just learn about it, may it be His will, with the help of God, the priestly blessing on all of those who ascend the Mount.<sup>5</sup>

After MK Haskel visited the Mount, she was interviewed by Yinon Magal on 103 FM radio. Magal, who remarked in the course of the interview that “It is clear that the Temple will be built...the Dome of the Rock is not a mosque,” asked Haskel if she believes the Temple will be built. Haskel responded, “This is a question that is somewhat more complicated. We could if we really want it. It won’t fall from the sky.”<sup>6</sup>

On Tisha B’Av eve (Saturday, July 21), Minister Ze’ev Elkin (currently running for the mayorship of Jerusalem) participated in the Tisha B’Av Eve March around the Old City organized by the Women in Green movement. Elkin made the following pronouncement:

The very fact that this march takes place around the Old City says that the work has not yet been completed. A great deal lies ahead of us in order for us to truly be able to say the words of the verse with which we completed the reading of the Book of Lamentations, “Return us to You O Lord and we shall return; renew our days as of old.”

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<sup>4</sup> Facebook page, “Students for the Temple Mount – the Official Page,” July 2, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> YouTube channel of Temple Mount News, July 8, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Yinon Magal and Anat Davidov’s program on 103 FM, July 9, 2018.

This march must not be held around the gates of the Old City; it must enter into the Old City from every direction and flow to the Kotel and toward the Temple Mount exactly as happened in those very days of old... With the help of God we will arrive at the point where we will renew our days as of old, when we will be able to ascend in this march upon those same stones on which Jews ascended to the Temple Mount 2,000 years ago. This too shall come to pass if we are determined and continue with determination [to impose] our sovereignty over this city in all of its parts, over all of the Land of Israel. With the help of God we will finally be able to fully renew our days as of old.

Elkin uttered these words moments after another speaker had declared “Soon the Muslims will have to remove all of these green lights from their mosques and go to another country.”

Two weeks have now elapsed since Ministers Elkin and Ariel and MKs Haskel and Ohana issued their explicit calls to subvert the status quo, without any official response from a senior Israeli official. Specifically, the Prime Minister’s office has yet to respond to MK Ohana’s provocative threats against the status quo – to which the government of Israel is purportedly committed – nor to the brash calls of Minister Ariel and MK Haskel. The Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Knesset have also opted to ignore that members of Knesset have violated the condition barring a media presence during entries to the Mount, as outlined in the recently issued guidelines regulating visits. Not only have officials widely distributed videos capturing their proclamations on social networks, material was also made available to the Broadcast Corporation and appeared in a news broadcast on Channel 11.<sup>7</sup>

## **II. Coalition Members on Temple Activists’ Declared Strategic Mission to Subvert the Status Quo**

The statements cited above constitute more than merely problematic declarations; coalition members’ declarations precisely echo the current activities of the Temple movements to challenge the status quo.

MK Ohana’s call expresses the Temple movements’ declared strategy of increasing the number of Jews visiting the holy site as a direct lever for changing the status quo. In previous reports, Ir Amim has documented how this shift in emphasis has now become a central strategic thrust of the Temple movements. According to their methodology, when the “demand to build the Temple comes not from two or three people but rather from a large and broad sector of the population... the State of Israel will not be able to

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<sup>7</sup> Channel 11 of the Broadcast Corporation Kan, Evening News, July 9, 2018.

continue to refuse.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, invitations disseminated by the Temple movements in their call to ascend the Temple Mount on the fast day of Tisha B’Av carried the headline, “Stop crying [for the destruction of the Temple]; Start Building [the Temple].”

Since their joint visit, Minister Ariel and MK Haskel have distributed videos in which they recite the blessing of the Mount – Ariel reciting the blessing of the Cohanim (priests) and Haskel blessing a boy on the occasion of his bar mitzvah. One of the ways in which the Temple activists continually defy the status quo, which maintains a prohibition against Jewish prayer on the Mount, is to recite blessings from Jewish prayers aloud. Ariel’s and Haskel’s statements served to transmit to their followers the message that Jews should continue to violate the status quo in this manner.

Not surprisingly, on Tisha B’Av Temple activists exploited the large number of Jewish visitors on the Mount in order to replicate Ariel’s and Haskel’s provocations against the prohibition on prayer on the Mount. The Organization “Yeraeh – Volunteers Encouraging Ascent to the Temple Mount” reported that “During the course of the day the police removed 15 Jews from the Temple Mount who did not abide by the government’s prohibition on demonstrative Jewish activity on the Temple Mount – ten who prostrated themselves, three who sang and lamented aloud, one who shouted “Sh’ma Yisrael,” and one who tried to go off the path.”<sup>9</sup> Support of violations of the status quo from ministers and members of the Knesset has already led to a change in police policy, which betrays an increasingly lenient attitude towards violation of its own regulations. Yeraeh reported that “those ascending reported that those who hurriedly prostrated themselves were not detained today and were not expelled from the Mount.”<sup>10</sup>

### **III. Temple Activists Expand their Protest Activities into the Heart of the Muslim Quarter**

Prior to and during the Tisha B’Av fast, Temple activists held actions at various sites in the Muslim Quarter next to the gates through which Muslim worshippers enter the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. For more than 48 hours, groups of Temple activists repeatedly appeared at the Suq al-Qattanin, the Bab al-Salsala Gate, Bab al-Asbat Gate, and other significant spaces to hold demonstrations under the guise of prayer and participate in

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<sup>8</sup> Aviad Visoli: “Netanyahu will be forced to permit Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount when the number of those making the pilgrimage exceeds 100 thousand per year. That is only about 300 Jews per day on average.” Arnon Segal: “The moment that it will be permissible to ascend the Temple Mount as it should be, hundreds of thousands of Jews will go up. There will be prayer and afterwards sacrifices and the Temple. It will not be possible to prevent this ... hearts are pulled after actions.” Yehuda Glick: “[When the] demand to build the Temple doesn’t come just from two or three people but rather from a large and broad sector of the population ... the State of Israel will not be able to continue to refuse.” For complete documentation, see *supra*, note 1, [\*Increasing Cooperation between the Temple Movements and the Israel Police\*](#), November 2017.

<sup>9</sup> From the organization’s Facebook page, July 22, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

Torah study. These gates are located in the heart of the Muslim Quarter.<sup>11</sup> Temple activists exceeded these provocations by staging demonstrations disguised as prayers, three times in the course of 24 hours, in the large Muslim cemetery Bab al-Rahma located adjacent to the eastern side of the Temple Mount.<sup>12</sup> On Sunday morning, activists from “Students for the Temple Mount” arrived at the entrance to the Mughrabi Gate, the entry point to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif for Jews, to conduct mock construction work for the building of the Third Temple. In several incidents in the Bab al-Rahma cemetery and in the Suq al-Qattanin, these activities were accompanied by harassment of Palestinian passers-by, leading to confrontations.<sup>13</sup> MK Yehuda Glick also went to the Suq al-Qattanin at least once to carry out provocative actions.

In essence, these actions are a practical response to Minister Elkin’s call “To enter the Old City from every place ... to flow to the Temple Mount.” Elkin stated the objective clearly: “To renew our days as of old as is written in the Book of Lamentations.”

#### **IV. Before the Jewish High Holiday Period, Urgent Intervention Needed from the Prime Minister’s Office**

All of the events described herein took place during a period of no more than two weeks, quickly gathering momentum during the two days of Tisha B’Av. In six weeks, the three-week High Holiday period will commence – traditionally, the annual height of Temple movement activity on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and in its surrounding space.

Three years ago, the month of Av, 5775 (July-August, 2015) marked the end of the period of calm on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif that had been painstakingly achieved by Israeli officials, Palestinians, Jordanians and Americans after the violence that rocked Jerusalem during the summer of 2014. Within the space of less than two months, frictions on the Mount escalated, due in no small part to the actions of Israeli politicians like Minister (then, of Housing and Construction) Uri Ariel, who visited the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif on the eve of Rosh Hashana, 5776 (2015) and published a video from the site in which he issued a call to build the Third Temple.

In September 2015, these actions led the Israel Police to impose stringent collective restrictions against the entrance of Muslim worshippers to the Haram al-Sharif, in complete contravention of the spirit of the status quo to which the government maintains it is committed. Soon after, the knife attacks began in Jerusalem, spinning the city and all of Israel and the Occupied Territories into a sustained period of violence.

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<sup>11</sup> *E.g.*, the demonstration of presence through Shabbat evening prayers next to the entrance to the Temple Mount/the Noble Sanctuary in the Suq al-Qattanin. The Facebook page of Temple activist Arnon Segal, July 21, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> *E.g.*, documentation from the Facebook page of the Information Center in Silwan, Friday, July 20, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> *Documentation: Confrontation between Jews and Shop Owners in the Old City*, YNET site, July 22, 2018.

Along with the renewed pattern of behavior by supporters of the Temple movements in the Knesset and government, Prime Minister Netanyahu is replicating his mistakes from three years ago. As then, the prime minister has refrained from issuing any statements or taking actions to curb members of his government and party who are consistently acting in defiance of status quo arrangements, some going so far as to publically convey support for building of the Third Temple and, by extension, destruction of the Dome of the Rock. If the Prime Minister is indeed committed to the agreements that he himself negotiated with the governments of Jordan, the United States and the PA, the public intervention of his office is essential to halting actions proven to be incendiary just several summers ago.