

Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount

Who Will Build
the Third Temple?

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Introduction

The Temple Mount is the most sacred site of Judaism and the third most sacred site of Islam, after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. The sacred nature of the site has made it one of the main foci of tension and friction in the context of the Israeli-Arab conflict.¹

The year 1996 marked an important milestone in the world of Religious Zionism. The Committee of Yesha Rabbis (a group of Orthodox rabbis from the settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip) ruled that Jews are permitted and even encouraged to enter the Temple Mount. The committee imposed restrictions regarding specific areas where entry is permitted, and urged visitors to undertake special ritual purification before doing so. Nevertheless, every rabbi was encouraged “to go up [to the Temple Mount] himself, and to guide his congregants on how to do so in accordance with all the constrictions of Halacha (Jewish religious law).”² Since 2003, when the Temple Mount was reopened to Jewish visitors after a three-year closure due to the Al-Aqsa Intifada, this ruling has been put into practice. Every day, dozens, if not hundreds, of Jews, mainly students from the nationalist yeshivas, visit the Temple Mount and engage in solitary prayer.³ According to Israel Police records, some seventy thousand Jews visited the site between November 2003 and October 2004⁴—an average of six thousand visitors a month.

The ruling by the Committee of Yesha Rabbis is contrary to long-standing religious edicts, to the position of the leaders of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, to the position of the Chief Rabbinate, and to the opinion of the majority of Haredi rabbis. All these authorities argue that it is a grave religious transgression for Jews to enter the Temple Mount. According to Halacha, all Jews are considered impure because they have been in contact with the dead, either directly or with others who have been in such

contact. During the Temple Period (536 BCE–70 CE) Jews were cleansed of this impurity by virtue of the “sin water”—the ashes of the red heifer mixed in water. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, red heifers have not been available. Moreover, the precise dimensions of the Temple have been lost, including the location of the *Kodesh Kodashim*—the most sacred site—identified as the dwelling place of the Shechina, the Divine Presence. Entry into this section was absolutely prohibited, with the exception of the High Priest (who was cleansed with the sin water before performing his sacred duties) on the Day of Atonement. Since the location of the Temple is no longer known, and since red heifers are unavailable, it was ruled that Jews are prohibited from entering the entire Temple Mount area, even though this area is known to be bigger than that of the Temple itself. Accordingly, a person who enters the Temple Mount area incurs the (theoretical) penalty of *Karet* (the divinely imposed death penalty). This position that prohibits Jews from entering the Temple Mount has been supported in numerous Halachic rulings.⁵

While the rabbinic prohibition defused the interreligious tension on the Temple Mount, the declared purpose of the ruling issued by the Yesha Council was to change the status quo on the site. This was manifested in a dramatic manner after the opening of the Mount in 2003, as thousands of students from the nationalist yeshivot flooded to the site. An explanation must be provided regarding this development in the Orthodox Jewish world.

This book discusses the changes that have occurred in Israeli religious society regarding the question of the Temple Mount and the vision of rebuilding the Temple, as part of an idea of establishing a theocracy over the secular state. The book ends with the examination of the theological responses to the implementation of the Disengagement Plan (2005). These changes are partly the result of an ongoing campaign that has been waged by several institutions in the Orthodox world that advocate the construction of the Third Temple. The study presents those movements, identifies their historical and ideological roots, and describes the nature of their public activities. This examination relates to the following movements and organizations: the Temple Institute, headed by Rabbi Israel Ariel; Yehuda Etzion and the “Chai Vekayam” movement; the Temple Mount Faithful, led by Gershon Salomon; the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple, headed by Rabbi Yosef Elboim; and Rabbi Yitzhak Ginzburg and his students from the “Od Yosef Chai” yeshiva.

The Temple Mount: Historical Background

The Temple Mount is the holiest site for Judaism. The Jewish Temple in Jerusalem stood there: the First Temple (built circa 967 BCE, destroyed circa

586 BCE by the Babylonians), and the Second Temple (rebuilt circa 516 BCE, destroyed in the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE). According to a commonly held belief in Judaism, it is to be the site of the final Third Temple to be rebuilt with the coming of the Jewish Messiah. Known to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary, it is also the site of two major Muslim religious shrines: the Dome of the Rock (built circa 690 BCE) and Al-Aqsa Mosque (built circa 710 BCE).

According to an *Aggadah* (legend) in the Talmud, the world was created from the Foundation Stone on the Temple Mount (Babylonian Talmud Yoma 54b). And in the Bible, it is written that upon the cessation of a plague King David purchased a threshing floor owned by Aravnah the Jebusite on which to erect an altar. He wanted to construct a permanent temple there, but as his hands were “bloodied,” he was forbidden to do so himself, so this task was left to his son Solomon, who completed the task (2 Sam. 24:18–25).

Around 19 BCE, Herod the Great expanded the Temple Mount and rebuilt the Temple. In the course of the First Jewish-Roman War, it was destroyed by Titus in 70 CE. The Romans did not topple the Western Wall (also known as the Kotel). The Western Wall is holy because of its proximity to the location on the Temple Mount of the Holy of Holies of the Temple, the most holy place in Judaism. Due to Jewish religious restrictions on entering the most sacred areas of the Temple Mount, the Western Wall has become, for practical purposes, the holiest generally accessible site for Jews to pray. Upon the destruction of the Temple, the Rabbis revised prayers, and introduced new ones to request the speedy rebuilding of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem.⁶

The primary reason for the importance of the Temple Mount is the Muslim belief that in 621 BCE Muhammad arrived there after a miraculous nocturnal journey aboard the winged steed named Buraq to take a brief tour of heaven with the Archangel Gabriel. This happened during Muhammad’s time in Mecca, years before Muslims conquered Jerusalem (638 BCE).

After the Muslim conquest of this region, the Temple Mount became known to Muslims as al-Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary). In 690 BCE an octagonal Muslim building topped by a dome was built around the rock, which became known as the Dome of the Rock.

In 715 BCE the Umayyads built the al-Masjid al-Aqsa, the Al-Aqsa Mosque or the “furthest mosque,” corresponding to the Muslim belief of Muhammad’s miraculous nocturnal journey as recounted in the Qur’an and hadith.⁷

Until the Six-Day War (June 1967), when Israel conquered the site, the question of Jews entering the Temple Mount was purely theoretical. Since the thirteenth century, Jews had not, on the whole, entered the Temple Mount because of rabbinical prohibition and because those controlling

the site (particularly the Muslim authorities) did not permit Jews to enter. In the thirteenth century the Muslim authorities ruled that non-Muslims were not allowed to enter the site, and a death penalty was sentenced for disobeying the rule.⁸

During the nineteenth century a number of Jews visited the Temple Mount, but the traditional Jewish community in Palestine sought to prevent such visits because of the religious prohibition. After Israel's War of Independence (1948), the Temple Mount was left under Jordanian control, and Jews were not allowed to enter the old city of Jerusalem. The status of the site changed only after it was taken by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in June 1967.

Since the 1967 war, Israeli governments have always sought to mitigate the tension raised by this subject, allowing the Muslim Waqf to maintain its control of the Temple Mount. The status quo arrangement that was introduced by Moshe Dayan (Israel's minister of security at the time), following the occupation of the holy sites stated that the Temple Mount would continue to serve as a Muslim place of prayer, while the Western Wall would be a Jewish place of prayer. Under this arrangement Jews and Christians are permitted to visit the site. As a security measure the Israeli government has agreed to enforce a ban on non-Muslim prayer on the site. In 1968, the Israel Supreme Court decided not to intervene in the question of Jewish prayer on the Mount, ruling that this was a political issue rather than a judicial one. The court permitted the Israel Police to establish procedures for entry into the Temple Mount on the basis of security considerations.⁹

Since the occupation of the Temple Mount by IDF forces in the Six-Day War, however, a number of groups within Israeli society have demanded a change in the passive approach of the Jewish religious establishment and the Israeli government on the question of the site. These groups advocate action to end Muslim control of the site and to start a process what will lead into the establishment of the Third Temple. This book describes those groups.

Orthodoxy and the Temple Mount: Historical and Sociological Background

Since around the middle of the nineteenth century, a new discourse began to emerge among a number of Jewish religious authorities that anticipated the renewal of the religious rites on the Temple Mount. This narrative was a result of the perception that modern times carry a divine sign of the ultimate redemption. Thus, Tzevi Hirsch Kalischer (1796–1874) was the first to suggest the renewal of the Passover Sacrifice on the Temple Mount because this ceremony can be preformed by a layman and does not require the appointment of priests.¹⁰

At the beginning of the twentieth century, several Orthodox leaders advocated the resumption of study of the Talmudic tractates relating to the sacrifices. Israel Meir Hacoen of Radin—the Hafetz Haim—ordered his followers to start studying the Kodashim order to prepare for the immanent redemption. In 1921, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacoen Kook established Torat Cohanim yeshiva in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. Members of the traditional priestly caste studied those tractates in the yeshiva as part of their anticipation of the arrival of the Messiah (this topic is discussed at length in chapter 1).

A different approach may be found in the teachings of Rabbi Hayyim Hirschensohn (1857–1935), a unique philosopher who attempted to combine Jewish religious law with the values of democracy. Hirschensohn emigrated from Palestine to Hoboken, New Jersey, where he was hired as a chief rabbi.¹¹ The Balfour Declaration (1917) supporting the Zionist goal of establishing a Jewish “national home” in Palestine created a vast wave of enthusiasm among many Jews. In 1919, Hirschensohn published his book *Malki Ba-Kodesh*, presenting the idea that a House of Peace be established on the Temple Mount to function as a “Court of Nations.” This institution was not perceived as a Temple or a synagogue in the traditional sense, but would serve as a house of prayer for all the nations (in keeping with Isa. 56:7). The institution was to enjoy supreme authority over the Court of Peace in The Hague and the League of Nations. It would represent a universal vision of peace, where all nations would live next to each other in harmony, as prophesized in the Bible.¹²

In addition to the religious statements summarized earlier, a secular approach also developed. During the second half of the twentieth century, the adherents of the Lechi movement (known also as the Stern Gang) an armed underground Zionist faction in the Palestine Mandate, discussed the construction of the Third Temple as part of their nationalist ideology. However, they viewed the Temple as a national symbol rather than a center for religious practice. In the Principles for Revival (1940, 1941), the manifesto of the movement, this last principle was articulated as follows: “The building of the Third House as a symbol of the new area of total redemption.” According to Zeev Ivinsky, it should not be assumed that Yair Stern, the leader of Lechi, took a traditionalist position on this issue. Rather, he perceived the Third Temple as a manifestation of admiration for Hebrew religion and culture, as part of the future Kingdom of Israel. Ivinsky also stated that Lechi leaders such as Eliyaho Lankin and Shlomo Ben-Shlomo were opposed to the inclusion of this chapter in the manifesto in view of the secular nature of the movement.¹³

Another approach, which was a synthesis of religiosity and nationalism, was embodied by the Brith HaChashmonaim youth movement. This movement was established in 1937; its followers volunteered in the Lechi

underground movement. The movement advocated the establishment of a Jewish theocracy. They argued that the exile of Jews from their homeland had distorted true religious practice; accordingly, the return of the Jews to their land requires the repair of their faith. This can only be achieved by observing all of the commandments of the Halacha. Thus, the establishment of the Temple was perceived as part of the organic observance of Jewish law. After the establishment of the State of Israel this movement was dismantled and its followers were integrated in the Mizrahi movement, the Religious Zionist organization. The unique feature of the movement was its combination of a radical nationalistic vision and zealous adherence to the Halacha.¹⁴

All the different approaches to the Temple Mount were dramatically changed after the site was conquered by IDF soldiers during the Six-Day War. During the postwar period we can detect two major developments in the religious approaches. The first contains several key trends: a demand to pray on the mount, a demand to make the Mount the center of Jewish nationhood, and several operational plans to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount to facilitate full redemption. The second development focused on education, seeking to change opinions in the Religious Zionist public regarding the question of building the Third Temple.

This book focuses on the second development, although it also contains a short discussion of the prestate period and the impact of the Six-Day War. The focus on the past two decades enables an examination of the growing public interest in this phenomenon and the intensification of related activities—processes that in turn permit the location of sources for the study.

Orthodoxy and Zionism

Before discussing the issue of the Temple Mount and the demand to change its status, it is important to review the enormous changes that have occurred within Orthodox Judaism on the broader subject of messianism and Zionism. This theoretical discussion is important in order to understand the demand to build the Temple and to appreciate the unique nature of the phenomenon examined by this study.

The central foundation of classical Orthodoxy was the principle of passivity. According to Jacob Katz, all three types of Orthodoxy that emerged in the late nineteenth century in Germany, Russia, and Hungary shared this principle, which was a hallmark of Jewish society in the premodern era: “This was far reaching passivity with respect to long range planning for the future of the Jewish community.” With the exile from their homeland, the Jewish people lost faith in their capacity to engineer their redemption. This change could come only as the result of Divine and miraculous intervention.

The modern era brought new opportunities for Jews: emancipation, emigration, and in 1948 the establishment of a Jewish state. However, Orthodoxy—or more exactly, Haredim (ultra-Orthodoxy)—seemed reluctant to free itself from its premodern mentality, and refrained from taking a leading role in any of these enterprises. In the case of the Jewish national movement, the Haredi leadership found theological justifications for its opposition. It is true that other voices could be heard, most notably those of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, but his support of Zionism was rejected by most of the Haredi leadership.¹⁵

The dominant Haredi theological position continued the tradition of passivity and refused to consider the Zionist enterprise as connected to the process of redemption. For the most part, rabbinic literature did not envisage an interim state between exile and redemption, and in this sense Zionism constituted an illegitimate deviation from the course of history. Moreover, the theological interpretation adopted by some of the most extreme Haredi elements, such as the Eda Haredit and Neturei Karta, views Zionism as no less than the work of the devil, aimed at confusing the Jews and diverting them from their path to redemption. Drawing on mystical and Kabbalistic perceptions, the dramatic historical events undergone by the Jewish people—the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the subsequent dazzling victory in the Six-Day War—were interpreted through the prism of a cosmic struggle between God and the diabolical forces of the Other Side, and all these events were seen as a manifestation of the growing force of evil. Those who took this approach argued that Jewish people would be returned to their homeland and to sovereignty not by their own hand, but only by the Divine hand. Any attempt to “hasten the End” would actually delay the coming of the Messiah and the ultimate redemption. Accordingly, they were fiercely opposed to the Zionist entity, and refused to recognize it or to participate in its institutions. Aviezer Ravitzky has argued that while this group is considered to represent a small minority of the Haredim, its moral influence extends far beyond its inner circle.¹⁶

Orthodox Zionism (commonly referred to as Religious Zionism) continued the ideological approach of Rabbi Kook, coloring the development of the Zionist enterprise with a messianic dimension through its definition as the “the first stage of our redemption,” and attaching innate religious significance to secular and even heretical actions. According to this approach, the time would come when secularity would give way to sanctity, and the final process of redemption would then be possible.¹⁷ In 1974 the Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) movement was established. Comprised of Orthodox youth and the graduates of Orthodox Zionist yeshivot, Gush Emunim presented a much sharper version of this position, claiming that they knew God’s will, and that by settling all the

parts of the biblical Land of Israel conquered in the 1967 war, they could expedite the end and bring redemption nearer.¹⁸

Thus, within the reality of the State of Israel, Orthodoxy, which had begun as a passive doctrine, became an active and aggressive force, at least among some of its exponents. Manifestations of this change can be found not only within Religious Zionism, such as in Gush Emunim, but also in other sectors, such as the developments within the Chabad Hassidic movement since the early 1990s. The Chabad movement has become a key advocate of the Greater Land of Israel, and has also been swept into a radical messianic approach that identifies its late leader, Menachem-Mendel Schneerson, as the King Messiah. Many members of Chabad fervently anticipate his return from death and his ultimate coronation as Messiah. David Berger has even argued that the majority of Chabad shares this position despite the fact that in theological terms it is closer to Christianity than to Judaism, recalling the Christian doctrine that Jesus the Messiah was crucified, died, and resurrected, and will return at the end of history.¹⁹ Additional manifestations of Orthodox extremism may be found in the increasing support among Haredi circles for fundamentalist and theocratic ideologies such as that of the Kach movement, a far-right political party in Israel founded by Rabbi Meir Kahane. Neri Horwitz argues that the connection between Religious Zionist activism and Haredi radicalism creates the potential for fundamentalism. He believes that the processes of fragmentation already at work within the Haredi society may provide a fertile breeding ground for the “fanatical potion,” which blends the activism of Religious Zionism—without the restraint that comes from the identification of Israel as “absolute sanctity” and hence without the commitment to the State of Israel and its laws—with Haredi radicalism, without the restraint of its former passivity.²⁰ A study of voting patterns among the Haredi public in the Knesset elections suggests that this trend is expanding, leading to the systematic loss of votes for the Haredi parties in favor of other parties. For example, the elections for the Sixteenth Knesset (2003) produced a high level of support among the Haredi party for a political list identified with the Kach movement, who developed a fiercely nationalistic religious theology.²¹

These extremist tendencies created the space within which the movements for the Third Temple could function. Since their followers come mostly from Religious Zionist circles, it is important to explain briefly the changes that have occurred among this population.

From its establishment, Religious Zionism stood between two hostile camps: secular Zionism and non-Zionist or anti-Zionist Orthodoxy. Religious Zionism sought to bridge the gap between them while presenting a model of Orthodox religiosity in the framework of Zionist commitment. Its position between the other two groups put Religious Zionism in a weak

position; on the one hand, the political leadership of the Zionist movement largely ignored the demands and needs of the religious camp.²² On the other hand, their religious institutions did not manage to develop significant religious scholarly works, and it was difficult for them to find teachers for the religious studies. Many of the young adults left the camp—either to Haredim or to secularism.²³

The younger generation of the National Religious camp sought to free themselves from what they considered the inferiority complex of their parents' generation and to assume a leading role in Israeli society. Their opportunity came after the Six-Day War.

The Israeli victory in the war led to the strengthening of the activist wing of Religious Zionism, which was dominated mainly by the younger generation of the National Religious Party.²⁴ In the course of the war, areas of the biblical homeland were occupied by the IDF, and Motte Gur, the commander of the Paratrooper Division, made the famous declaration that “the Temple Mount is in our hands.” These dramatic events created a groundswell of opinion that would later fuel the establishment of the Gush Emunim settlement movement. Although the movement was only established in 1974, it quickly became the dominant stream within Religious Zionism.²⁵

Support for the settlement drive in the Territories united the Religious Zionist camp, which tended henceforth to focus on this issue. Many Religious Zionists viewed their pioneering acts in the settlements as tools of leadership for the entire state. Beginning in the 1990s, however, those channels were blocked as the result of the political process starting from the Madrid talks (1991), and later the Oslo Process (1993) and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. Above all, Israel's Disengagement Plan (2005) led to the uprooting of all the Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip, as well as four settlements in northern Samaria. Therefore, the energies of leadership were forced to be channeled to other directions.

These challenges have resulted in a number of conflicting developments within the religious camp. One trend is increased liberalism in religious practice. During the past two decades there has been a gradual improvement in the status of women within the religious institutions. More women pursue religious studies and women have also entered the rabbinical courts as rabbinic pleaders and have served on religious councils.²⁶

Conversely, signs of increased extremism can also be seen, particularly in terms of the abandonment of the perception of the State of Israel as a holy institution; this trend in public discourse has been particularly prominent since the Disengagement Plan. A further example is the emergence of the phenomenon of the Youth of the Hills.

The basic argument of the Merkaz Harav yeshiva, a leading religious institution within this community established by Rabbi Kook (the father),

is that the ingathering of Jews in the State of Israel is a manifestation of God's will to redeem His people. Israel's victories are considered revelations of the divine plan. Accordingly, the followers of Merkaz Harav have emphasized two key concepts: the holiness of the Land of Israel and the holiness of the State of Israel. According to Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hacohen Kook (the son) (1891–1982), the leader of this institution, the Land of Israel is one unity, a complete organic entity imbued with its own will and holiness. This entity is connected and united with the entire Jewish people—present, past and future—so that the people and the land are in a complete oneness. Therefore, no one has a right to give away any parts of the land because it does not belong any more to one group than to another.²⁷

This unity came as a result of the actions of the Zionist movement. Therefore, if the tool to implement God's will can be found in Jewish nationality, then the Israeli state should be sanctified as part of the messianic process, even if it is secular.²⁸

According to the Merkaz Harav philosophy, these two sanctities are expected to complement and complete each other. This has not always been reflected in Israeli reality, however. After the peace process between Israel and Egypt (1978) and the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai (1982), many Gush Emunim supporters were forced to confront the increasing erosion of their basic beliefs regarding the character and destiny of the State of Israel. The Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, and the subsequent Madrid talks and Oslo Process, which led to an Israeli withdrawal from parts of Judea and Samaria, provoked a profound theological crisis that was intensified by the demolition of Jewish settlements during the Disengagement. The fundamentalist religious dilemma is of a profound character: how can a state that uproots settlements and hands over parts of the biblical Land of Israel to Arab rule be considered “absolutely sacred?” What sublime religious meaning can be attributed to the actions of a secular state unaware of its purpose of serving as “the foundation for God's throne in the world,” which threatens to destroy by its own hands the chance of realizing the messianic hope?

These sentiments led many rabbinical authorities of Gush Emunim to reconsider their attitude regarding the sanctity of the State of Israel and the nature of the actions required to expedite the redemption process. This aspect is elaborated on in the concluding chapter.

One of the manifestations of these ongoing ideological crises can be found in the development of a new phenomenon among the young generation of the Religious Zionist camp—the Youth of the Hills. This group is estimated to number a few hundred activists. They represent the second generation of settlers in Judea and Samaria, but their behavior and ideology differ dramatically from those of the parent generation that founded Gush Emunim. These young people are leaving their educational institutions and isolating themselves in the hills of Judea and Samaria. According to Shlomo

Kaniel, this group reflects a crisis in the Religious Zionist education that is the result of the dissonance between modernity and self-fulfillment and the religious way of life that demands commitment to the halachic world. This group is well known for its lack of regard for authority and its radical ideology (this subject will be discussed in chapter 6).²⁹

These trends of change in the Orthodox world have fueled the emergence of the movements for the Temple Mount, and this is the background against which they should be considered. First, however, a brief definition of the main terms used in the book is called for.

Definitions

Over the past two decades or so, there has been substantial growth in the strength of religious movements that are commonly termed “fundamentalist” and that seek to manifest their religious faith in the political arena. This process is often characterized as a counterreaction to broader processes of modernization and globalization.

A comparative study on fundamentalism by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences founded several components that have “family resemblance.” Fundamentalism was defined as a spiritual phenomenon that was created as a counterreaction to secularism, which threatened the very existence of religion. Thus, this reaction is not just a conventional response, but it holds characteristics of a cosmic battle of good and evil. The fundamentalists are afraid to lose their struggle, and they therefore tend to retreat from society and form their own enclaves. Their retreat is not escapism, but an attempt to strengthen their position in preparation for an assault on secular society. This assault will employ modern tools; while they may reject modern philosophy, they use modernity to disseminate their message. Fundamentalist movements will also tend to become messianic; since they claim to know the ways of God, they also claim to know the path for redemption.³⁰

Another term that needs to be explained is “messianism.” Our discussion will adopt the definitions proposed by Dov Schwartz, which distinguish between apocalyptic and naturalistic Jewish messianisms.

Apocalyptic messianism is not merely “miraculous” or “supernatural,” but refers to a profound and basic transformation in the cosmos, amounting to its very demolition and reconstruction. Divine providence plays a crucial role in a dazzling messianic sequence with strong mythological overtones. Naturalistic messianism challenges the assumption that the end of the world is a requirement for redemption. According to this approach, hope should not be abandoned that this present world can be repaired, and accordingly it is wrong to seek to establish a new world out of the ruins of the present one. This approach lessens, and sometimes completely removes, direct Divine intervention as a force in the process of redemption.

The visions in the biblical, Talmudic, and Midrashic sources prophesized a day of vengeance and reprisal, and anticipated a totally transformed world for those who fear God (and, in most cases, only for the Jews among them). A popular perception anticipated a great and terrible Day of the Lord on which He would wreak vengeance on the Gentiles for the suffering they had caused to His Chosen People. Intellectual Judaism struggled to counter this dramatic approach through authorities (such as Maimonides, the Rashba, and others) who confronted the apocalyptic stream. An effort was made to soften the messianic descriptions and to give them a universal and enlightened quality. The apocalyptic approach despaired of the potential of this world to bring redemption, and instead established an imaginary new world. By contrast, the naturalistic approach believes that the messianic era will occur within history, and not on its collapse. The world will continue to function normally, and the essence of redemption will lie in the establishment of a just authority and society—a future world that will devote its energy and resources to cultural development and to spiritual and intellectual productivity.³¹

Fundamentalist movements that hold a messianic belief and view themselves as leading toward the End of Days could adopt apocalyptic or naturalistic perceptions. For example, American fundamentalists follow the Dispensational theory. They believe that this earthly reality is at the point of collapse. The events of the End of Days are about to begin, even if it is still not known exactly when they will occur, and the world we currently know will be destroyed, paving way for the Second Coming. The only way to survive the horrors of the apocalypse is by accepting Jesus as a personal messiah. Only the true believers can escape the Great Tribulations and remain intact. Therefore, the activities of American Christian fundamentalists are driven from a sense of urgency to save humanity by accepting the Christian faith.³²

Contrary to these apocalyptic approaches, other fundamentalist movements adhere to the naturalistic approach. An example can be found in the school that developed from the Merkaz Harav yeshiva and the Gush Emunim movement. Driven by the Kook family philosophy, the followers of this movement claimed that the creation of secular Zionism is a divine sign of full redemption. Full redemption itself, however, can come only after secular Jews acknowledge the errors of their ways and repent. Only then can redemption be fulfilled by establishing a Torah state and adopting religious law. The way to expedite redemption, according to the Gush Emunim movement, is by promoting the settlement enterprise in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and by strengthening a repentance movement among the seculars.³³

Another term I employ in this study is “cognitive dissonance.” When applied to messianic movements, this familiar sociological theory argues

that a crisis caused by prophetic failure may paradoxically reinforce, rather than weaken, religious faith. The failure of the prophecy, which might in logical terms be expected to have led to a weakening of confidence in its accuracy, sometimes creates the completely opposite phenomenon, with a strengthening of religious belief and practice, in an effort to set the messianic process back on course. This theory is founded in the assertion that an individual will attempt to maintain his or her faith. When someone who believes wholeheartedly in something—is committed to this belief and has even taken irreversible actions on the basis of this belief—is confronted with ostensibly irrefutable evidence contradicting the erroneous belief, the individual may strengthen his or her faith, and invest renewed efforts in convincing others that his or her worldview is accurate.³⁴

This theory, developed over half a century ago, has been the subject of lively academic debate. Criticism focuses on the argument that the major tool for coping with failed prophecy is to convert others to the faith. Subsequent research has shown that not all movements cope with failure by proselytizing to others.³⁵ However, none of the studies in the field have challenged the basic claim that millenarian movements have to find logical explanations for their failed prophecies that reaffirm their faith; this is the only way for them to maintain their belief system.³⁶

In this study, I examine the question of whether a failure of faith can lead to strengthening of messianic belief. The preconditions, however, are different from all those who studied it before. The cognitive dissonance theory emphasizes that to get into that situation, a messianic movement must accept fully its miscalculations. Also the following research examined the situation in which it was absolutely proven that the calculations were wrong. Therefore, what happens when failed prophecy is not yet proven? Can we still also detect a cognitive dissonance in a place where there is a fear of failure, but in which it was not absolutely proven? Can a messianic movement that holds a naturalistic vision without end dates come into a dissonance?

In this book, I raise an assumption that messianic radicalization can be a counterreaction. The facts on the ground that prove a gap between faith and reality create a process of radicalization, to impose the faith on the reality. The fear of losing creates a dissonance that leads into messianic radicalization.

Other Publications Written on the Subject

Over the past two decades there have been dramatic changes in the attitude of the Religious Zionist population over the question of entering the Temple Mount and promoting the ideal of reestablishing the Third

Temple. Those changes became more visible during the last decade, after the emergence of the Oslo Process.

However, when I started my research, I was surprised to find out how limited the scholarly work is on the subject. Moreover, much of it was not up-to-date. Even the semiacademic literature, written in the journalistic jargon, did not study the last decade.

To date, no comprehensive academic study has been published relating to the Temple Mount groups and including attention to the events of the 1990s and the first years of the new millennium. The present book aims to fill this gap.

Two important journalistic works about the Temple Mount have appeared, however. In 1995, journalist Nadav Shragai published his book *Mount of Dispute* in Hebrew.³⁷ Shragai's work was published a decade ago; the present study includes attention to an extensive and highly significant period in activities relating to the Temple Mount and the Third Temple, including discussion of the ramifications of the Oslo Process. Another work is *The End of Days*, by journalist Gershom Gornberg.³⁸ This work focuses on the connection between fundamentalist and premillenarian Christianity and the idea of rebuilding the Temple, and pays less attention to the Jewish groups that have demanded the rebuilding of the Temple. Gornberg reports on the latter groupings in a more factual and journalistic manner, without the systematic and analytical approach I attempt to bring to the present study.

Accordingly, this book exposes movements, individuals, and opinions that have received little research attention to date, and provides an additional strand in professional knowledge relating to contemporary religious society in Israel, and extreme right-wing circles in particular. It also delineates the different attitudes toward the Temple Mount, showing the connections between the different trends and revealing the inherent potential for subversion and violence.

This book places the subject of the Temple Mount at the center of discussion relating to contemporary Orthodox Judaism and it presents an examination of a political process underway that is contributing to changing religious law and to overcoming the grave prohibition against Jews entering the Temple Mount area. It also reveals the growing penetration of the Temple Mount issue among diverse population groups, and the manner in which the question of Jews entering and worshipping on the Temple Mount has become an issue of utmost importance.

The research will also make a contribution to the study of the place of the Temple Mount in Zionist ideology, an issue that has been largely ignored. This issue will be raised in the context of the fundamentalist and messianic right-wing.

How I Conducted the Research

Locating sources for this study—which relates to small, extremist, and semiclandestine groups—was one of the main problems I faced during the research stage. Regrettably, the publications of the groups examined are rarely to be found in libraries and archives; accordingly, I was obliged to locate them independently.

I gathered much of the reference material through active participation in the groups that formed the subject of the research. During the course of my work, I participated in religious classes, demonstrations, visits to the Temple Mount, ceremonies held by the gates to the Mount, political conventions, seminars and study days, working meetings of the Temple Admirers and the Committee of Yesha Rabbis, prayer services, and fund-raising evenings. During and after these events, I held extensive conversations with other participants in a relaxed and noncommittal atmosphere. I also held formal interviews with various individuals, including current members of the organizations and others who had since left these groups.

Above all, however, the study is based on the written materials produced by the various groups, to which I gained access thanks to the contacts I developed with activists in the Temple movements.

The Structure of This Book

Chapter 1 offers an introduction to the question of Jews entering the Temple Mount among Religious Zionist circles, in general. It describes the positions of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva and examines the debate on the question of entering the Temple Mount within the Israeli Chief Rabbinate. This is followed by a discussion of the decision by the Yesha Council. The chapter's conclusions form the foundation for our subsequent inquiries.

Chapter 2 describes the activities of the Temple Institute, a central and leading body in Temple Mount circles. It examines the circumstances that led to the establishment of this institution, the activities it undertakes, and the ways in which the Religious Zionist mainstream views the institute.

Chapter 3 presents the political establishment of the Temple Mount builders. It begins by examining the work of Yehuda Etzion, best known for his involvement in a plot to blow up the mosques on the Temple Mount. Etzion based his ideology on the writings of Shabbtai Ben Dov (1924–1979), a largely forgotten member of the Lechi underground movement who elaborated a practical plan for transforming Israel from a parliamentary democracy into a religious theocracy. This chapter also includes a discussion of Ben Dov's ideology.

The following chapters focus on movements situated on the periphery of Religious Zionism. Chapter 4 examines the Temple Mount Faithful

movement, established by Gershon Salomon in the late 1960s. This movement differs from the others examined here in its institutional, religious, and political behavior.

Chapter 5 discusses the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple, which was established by a Belzer Chasid by the name of Yosef Elboim in 1988. Its activists come from the Haredi neighborhoods of Jerusalem, and are joined by a number of Kach activists. The main significance of this movement has been the development of a worldview that combines messianic activism with strict adherence to the Haredi way of life.

Chapter 6 discusses in depth the worldview of Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburg and his students from the “Od Yosef Chai” yeshiva in Yizhar. Ginsburg is considered the leading religious authority of the extreme right. His actions reflect a sense of messianic urgency.

The conclusion considers the influence of the Temple Mount movements within the broader public. The reactions to the Disengagement Plan are taken as a case study for examining the penetration of their theocratic narrative.

At first glance, the subject of my research may seem esoteric, restricted to marginal groups within Israeli society. From a broader perspective, however, it should be noted that this subject is not confined to the esoteric sectarianism of small groups, but extends far beyond. While these groups are indeed considered to represent a small minority of Zionist Orthodoxy, their moral influence extends far beyond its inner circles.

Moreover, the question of the Temple Mount is highly sensitive, with far-reaching political and strategic ramifications that could influence the world peace order. Avi Dichter, until recently the head of the Israeli General Security Service, has commented that the possibility of Jewish extremists launching an attack on the Temple Mount constitutes a key strategic threat to the State of Israel, and that it is right to be extremely concerned about such an eventuality.³⁹

Accordingly, the book will examine extremist groups, expanding knowledge of their ideological sources and patterns of behavior. This will contribute to a more precise evaluation of their social and political power. The comparative dimension may also contribute to research into messianism as a general phenomenon that remains powerful in modern times. The study will also offer a further angle for examining the wave of fundamentalism that has swept the Middle East—a phenomenon whose ramifications extend beyond the confines of the Israeli-Arab dispute, impacting on the entire Western world.

1

Religious Zionism and the Temple Mount Dilemma

Key Trends

Since the latter half of the 1990s, a shift can be observed in the Religious Zionist approach to the question of praying on the Temple Mount. The reopening of the Mount to Jewish visitors in 2003, after it was closed for three years, made this change very clear. In May 2007, for example, forty leading rabbis from the National Religious camp visited the Mount, as a declaration of their attachment to the site.¹

To understand the dynamics of the transformation on this subject, it is worth examining in greater depth the common perceptions among Religious Zionist circles relating to the question of entry into the Temple Mount and the reinstatement of religious worship on the site. To that end, in this chapter I review the key trends among Religious Zionist rabbis on the subject. I begin with a discussion of the approach of the leaders of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva school: Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook and his son Zvi Yehuda. Their philosophy has shaped the approach of the majority of rabbinical leaders in contemporary Religious Zionist circles. After the death in 1981 of Zvi Yehuda Kook, leading representatives of this approach include Rabbi Shlomo Aviner and Rabbi Zvi Tau. I then examine the position taken by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, the supreme Jewish religious governing body in the State of Israel and the Halakhic authority for the state. This historical discussion provides the background for our discussion of contemporary developments, informing our analysis of the changes that have taken place among the approaches of the settler rabbis.

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook and Merkaz Harav Yeshiva

The activist messianic approach of Religious Zionism, which was fueled by the vision of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook (1865–1935), mandated the goal of the reestablishment of the Temple as a key Zionist objective. Secular reality was perceived as temporary and transient—an external shell that would later be replaced by a messianic future, whose overt purpose was the reinstatement of the religious ritual on Mount Moriah.² This dialectic was also manifested in the positions of Rabbi Kook on entering the Temple Mount in the present period and on the construction of the Third Temple.

According to Rabbi Kook, the process of national revival of the Jewish people was perceived as a Revealed End, and was ultimately due to lead to the full redemption of Israel, namely, the establishment of the religious kingdom and the renewal of the rites on the Temple Mount. To this end, he established the Torat Cohanim yeshiva in 1921. This institute of religious higher learning was intended, as its declared intentions stated, to study the “Talmudic order of Kodashim, the regulation of worship in the Temple, the commandments that relate to the Land of Israel and the religious laws relating to the state.”³ The yeshiva was founded on the basis of the expectation that the movement of national revival led by Zionism, which was characterized by a disconnection from religion, would rapidly return to the fold of sanctity, the completion of ultimate redemption, and the building of the Temple. As is clear from his pamphlet *Sefatei Cohen* (Lips of a Priest) in which he described the goals of the new yeshiva, Kook believed that the revival of the Hebrew nation, despite the fact that it constituted primarily a secular initiative by Jews who rejected religious authority, was nevertheless intended to secure a sublime spiritual purpose. It would ultimately emerge that the final purpose of this revival was to bring religious redemption to the Jewish people, the zenith of which is the building of the Temple:

The anticipation of seeing the priests at their worship and the Levites on their stand and Israel in their presence—this is the foundation that bears this entire revival.⁴

According to Rabbi Kook, this day was steadily emerging, and preparations must therefore be made. Torat Cohanim yeshiva was thus intended to attend to the practical preparation of priests and Levites for their worship in the Temple, based on the acute messianic expectation that the Temple would indeed be built “speedily and in our days.” Rabbi Kook may well have found a precedent for this approach—which demanded that priests and Levites be prepared for the Temple worship on the basis of

the expectation that redemption was near—in the spiritual heritage of an important Orthodox leader, Israel Meir Hacoen (1838–1933), the author of the *Chafetz Chaim*, who was considered one of the architects of the Orthodox position.⁵

Hacoen's position on the issue was articulated in "The Anticipation of Redemption," which was composed in Radin, Russia, where he lived. The *Chafetz Chaim* attempted to address the question of the secularization of the Jewish people, and to withstand the powerful attraction of the Hovevei Zion and Zionist movements among the Jewish masses. In his article, which was dominated by a pessimistic sense that Jewish religious values and tradition were being abandoned, the rabbi offered a dialectic interpretation of the phenomenon of secularization, seeing the very weakness of religion as a positive sign. He believed that the period in which he found himself was consonant with the "birth pangs of Messiah"—the period that preceded the ultimate redemption, which is characterized by a serious decline in both spiritual and material terms.⁶

In the face of the Orthodox vulnerability when challenged by the changes of the period and by the pseudomessianic fervor aroused by Theodor Herzl and his Zionist message,⁷ the *Chafetz Chaim* proposed a different messianic program: In previous generations, when affairs were running smoothly, there was no great need to accelerate the process of redemption, since the Torah passed from father to son in an orderly and uninterrupted manner. In the present generation, however, there was a real danger that no one would remain to whom the Torah could be transferred, and traditional Judaism would be obliterated from memory. Accordingly, God must open the eyes of the people through the miracles of redemption. This call seems to have been formulated, in part, as a response to the sense among observant circles that the Jewish masses had abandoned religion and embraced sin to the point that it was no longer worthy of redemption.⁸

The *Chafetz Chaim* did not confine himself to messianic rhetoric, and sought to show his audience that Torah study also leads to action. To this end, he established a special yeshiva for priests, teaching the Talmudic tractate of *Kodashim*, which includes sections discussing the Temple worship that had been largely neglected over the long period of exile. The *Chafetz Chaim* also demanded that every Jew (and not only every priest) familiarize himself with the Temple worship and the sacrifices. He explained that this was necessary because if the Messiah were to appear suddenly and the people did not know how to worship the Lord, "this would be a disgrace to him [the Messiah]."⁹

Rabbi Kook taught the tractate of *Kodashim* in the context of this hope that the sacrifices would be reinstated, and this seems to have formed the background for the establishment of *Torat Cohanim* yeshiva.

A correspondent with the London newspaper *The Christian* visited the yeshiva, which was situated in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. He informed his readers that Rabbi Kook had established the yeshiva because of his sense of extreme urgency regarding the establishment of the Temple. The Zionist executive in London demanded an explanation following this report, and Rabbi Kook replied that the requirement to study the Temple worship was now more pressing than ever:

Our faith is firm that days are coming when all the nations shall recognize that this place, which the Lord has chosen for all eternity as the site of our Temple, must return to its true owners, and the great and holy House must be built thereon . . . An official British committee some time ago asked for my opinion regarding the location of the Temple according to our estimation. I told them that just as you see that we have the right to the entire Land [following the Balfour Declaration of 1917], even though the entire world was distant from this . . . so days shall come when all the nations shall recognize our rights to the site of the Temple.¹⁰

This position reflects the characteristic dynamics of Rabbi Kook's work. His messianic activism, which led him to prepare priests and Levites for their worship, stopped at the gates of the Temple Mount. He argued that the building of the Temple was conditioned on the recognition by the gentiles of the Jewish people's right to the Temple Mount. The preparation of the priests was intended to take place outside the area of the Temple Mount, and the establishment of the yeshiva did not imply that he actually intended to enter the site with his students, let alone commence the sacrificial rituals.

In support of my argument, I would note an additional source from the period, found in a rabbinical responsum published by Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook in his book *Mishpat Cohen*, published in 5681 (1921). In the responsum, Rabbi Kook issues a strong warning against entering the Temple Mount area.¹¹ It seems that this responsum was issued in reaction to the proposal by Rabbi Chaim Hirschenson, mentioned in the book *Malki Ba-Kodesh*, to construct a house of prayer on the Temple Mount.¹² In his responsum, Rabbi Kook gives the explanation of *mora hamikdash* (Awe of the Temple), according to which, given the sanctity with which this holy place is to be treated (and since its holiness has not been lost¹³), the public must stay away from the Temple Mount and refrain from entering the area. The dialectical explanation he offered for this was that distancing oneself from the site of the Temple would lead to a deeper spirituality, and hence to a profound sense of attachment: "The power of the memory of honor and the awe of sanctity is all the greater

when it comes through denying proximity and through distancing.” The rabbi ended his responsum with the following comments:

And when, through God’s infinite mercy, a fragment of the light of the emergence of salvation has begun to shine, the Rock of Israel will, with God’s help, add the light of his mercy and truth, and will reveal to us the light of his full redemption, and bring us speedily our true redeemer, the redeemer of justice, our just Messiah, and will speedily fulfill all the words of his servants the prophets, and will build the Temple, speedily in our days. . . . And, until then, all Israel shall as friends associate in a single union to steer their hearts toward their Father in heaven, without bursting out and without departure, *without any demolition of the fence and without any hint of transgressing against the prohibition of profanity and impurity of the Temple and its holinesses.* (emphasis added)¹⁴

The Six-Day War created a new reality in the Middle East. In the course of the war, Israel occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. The Israeli victory created fervent hope among the younger generation of Religious Zionists. The dominant school within this population, the graduates of Mercaz Harav yeshiva in Jerusalem, headed by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hacohen Kook, propagated the perception that the Israeli victory in this war reflected God’s will to redeem His people. The postwar era therefore represented a higher stage in the process of redemption. The Gush Emunim mass settlement movement, established in 1974 and led by the graduates of the yeshiva, aimed to settle the territories occupied by the IDF to establish facts on the ground, and to settle the biblical Land of Israel with Jews. They saw settlement as a manifestation of God’s will to redeem His people.

On the issue of the Temple Mount, however, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hacohen Kook did not diverge from his father. Although Zvi Yehuda is considered the spiritual guide of the Gush Emunim movement, which acted out of a strong sense of messianic urgency, he continued to view the Temple Mount as out of bounds. Zvi Yehuda signed the declaration issued by the Chief Rabbinate immediately after the occupation of the site, prohibiting Jews from entering the Temple Mount.

Indeed, Zvi Yehuda sharply criticized Shlomo Goren, the Chief Rabbi of the Israel Defense Forces, and later a Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, who advocated Jewish prayer on the Mount, as discussed in the following section. Zvi Yehuda felt compelled to oppose in the fiercest possible terms the idea of Jews entering the Temple Mount area in order to pray.¹⁵ Indeed, both of the Kooks ruled that the sanctity of the Temple Mount was so great that it was prohibited even to place one’s fingers inside the cracks

in the Western Wall. Zvi Yehuda fiercely opposed the demand to undertake archaeological excavations on the Temple Mount, since it “is surrounded by a wall. We do not pass this wall and we have no need for [the site] to be studied.”¹⁶

It should be emphasized that the principled position of Zvi Yehuda against Jews entering the Temple Mount was not intended to weaken the demand for Israel to demonstrate its sovereignty on the site. He argued that the Jewish people enjoyed “property ownership” of the area of the Temple Mount. However, he explained that the State of Israel had not yet attained a spiritual level permitting Jews to enter the area of Mt. Moriah. Only after the state had been built in the spirit of the Torah, in both the practical and spiritual realms, would it be possible to enter the holy site.

The Chief Rabbinate and the Temple Mount Issue

After the Six-Day War, and the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount, the Chief Rabbinate decided to continue the passive tradition on the question of the Temple Mount. In other words, Jews were to confine themselves to the reintroduction of prayers at the Western Wall.

Just a few hours after the Temple Mount came under the control of the Israeli forces on June 8, Israel Radio issued the warning by the Chief Rabbinate not to enter the site. At the first convention of the Council of the Chief Rabbinate after the war, Chief Rabbis Yitzhak Nissim and Isser Yehuda Unterman continued to argue that Jews must not be permitted to enter the site.

The Rabbinate’s announcement was drafted by Rabbi Bezalel Jolti, who was invited to the meeting even though he was not a member of the Council of the Chief Rabbinate. He wrote, “Since the sanctity of the site has never ended, it is forbidden to enter the Temple Mount until the Temple is built.”¹⁷

The minority position in the meeting was represented by Rabbi Chaim David Halevy, then rabbi of Rishon Lezion, who proposed that the question of entering the Temple Mount be left to the local rabbis, who would issue their edict to those following their authority. Shaul Israeli (a prominent teacher at Mercaz Harav yeshiva) sought to prepare a map identifying the permitted areas on the Temple Mount. Despite the minority position, the Council of the Chief Rabbinate ruled that the entire Temple Mount area was off limits. Yitzhak Abuhatzzeira, rabbi of Ramle, was the first rabbi to demand that warning signs be placed at the entrance to the site forbidding Jews to enter.¹⁸

Despite the firm ruling of the assembly of the Chief Rabbinate prohibiting entry to the Temple Mount, two Chief Rabbis—Shlomo Goren and Mordechai Eliyahu—have, in a personal capacity, permitted Jews to

enter. In addition, former Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira's opposition to entering the site has weakened in recent years.

Shlomo Goren was the Chief Rabbi of the IDF at the time of the Six-Day War. This biographical fact constitutes a key point in the development of his personal approach and his vigorous campaign to open up the Temple Mount. After the war, he initiated the mapping of the site by soldiers from the Engineering Corps to identify areas prohibited to Jews, since the Temple Mount site of today is considerably and indisputably larger than the original dimensions of the First and Second Temples. When he realized that his initial expectation that the Islamic presence would be removed was not going to materialize, and that the mosques were to remain, Goren sent a confidential memorandum to Prime Minister Levi Eshkol demanding that entry to the Temple Mount be closed to both Jews and gentiles; but this was rejected. After the war, Goren established his office on the Temple Mount. On Tisha B'Av (a day of mourning to commemorate the destruction of the First and Second Temples,) the rabbi and a group of his supporters brought a Torah scroll, ark, and prayer benches to the Temple Mount, where they prayed Mincha (the afternoon service). After the prayer, Goren announced that he would also hold Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) prayers on the site. His plans were thwarted by the intervention of Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan and Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin.¹⁹

In 1972, Goren was appointed Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel. In this capacity, he attempted to change the position of the Chief Rabbinate on the subject of Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount. He initiated a discussion in the plenum of the Rabbinate, and at two sessions in March 1976 lectured at length on his research. Despite his vigorous demand, the council refrained from making any changes to its original decision, while nonetheless urging Goren to publish his studies. They later added that when his recommendations were presented in writing, it would be possible to convene a broader forum than that of the Council of the Chief Rabbinate. This served as a pretext for removing the issue from the agenda.²⁰ At the same time, Goren's efforts in the political arena to persuade Prime Minister Menachem Begin to ease the government position regarding Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount also failed.²¹

In the absence of political and rabbinical support, Goren was unable to issue an official and public permit allowing entry to the Temple Mount. Moreover, the question of the entry of women was one of the aspects that deterred him from issuing an independent declaration opening the Temple Mount to all Jews. Goren believed that women must not be permitted to enter the Temple Mount area due to the question of ritual impurity, and was afraid that a sweeping permit for Jews to enter would also result in women entering the site.²²

Goren found a faithful supporter in Mordechai Eliyahu, Israel's Sephardi Chief Rabbi from 1983 to 1993. Eliyahu adopted an innovative and creative Halachic approach when he proposed that a synagogue be built on the Temple Mount, within the permitted areas. The wall facing the Mount would be constructed of glass, so that the worshippers would look through the clear wall toward the square occupied by the Dome of the Rock. He proposed that entry into the synagogue would be directly from the entrance to the Temple Mount, and that the building would not have an exit point on to the Mount, thus avoiding any danger of Jews entering forbidden areas. Eliyahu proposed that the synagogue be higher than the Al-Aqsa and Dome of the Rock mosques to manifest its superiority over the Muslim houses of worship, whose presence he saw as a reminder of the destruction. This idea also failed to materialize.²³

Among other proposals, Eliyahu advocated the formation of a sub-committee within the Council of the Chief Rabbinate to define the permitted areas on the Mount. He initiated a discussion in the council, and permitted Gershon Solomon, the leader of the Temple Mount Faithful movement, to speak at the session. Ultimately, however, the Council of the Chief Rabbinate decided not to alter the existing prohibition against entering the Temple Mount as it had determined in 1967. Eliyahu's colleague, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira, was opposed at that time to permitting Jews to enter the Temple Mount, following the approach of Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook. After the 1995 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty, which granted Jordan preferential status in the future management of the Temple Mount, Shapira softened his opposition to entering the site, as noted earlier, commenting that "those who wish to rely on Rabbi Goren should do so."²⁴

In conclusion, although the position of the Chief Rabbinate continues to prohibit entry to the Temple Mount, the first cracks in this position have begun to emerge among several leading figures. It should be noted, however, that while they were in office, Rabbis Goren and Eliyahu did not publicly express their position permitting Jews to enter the Temple Mount in the current era. They seem to have taken pains to avoid expressing this opinion out of deference to their official status as Chief Rabbis, although their opinions were well known among the general public.

The Committee of Yesha Rabbis

After the disclosure of the Oslo Process, which was based on an attempt to secure a compromise between Israel and the Palestinians regarding the territories of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza within the framework of a political process, and which was expected to culminate in a further compromise on the Temple Mount, positions and attitudes among the

messianic school of Religious Zionism were profoundly shaken. While the followers of the approach of Mercaz Harav yeshiva believe wholeheartedly in a determinism that is leading the Jewish people and the State of Israel toward complete redemption, the emerging reality showed precisely the opposite position: the State of Israel seemed, in some respects at least, to be growing more secular, and its governments were leading a political process founded on painful concessions of parts of the Land of Israel in return for a partial peace agreement. The establishment of the Palestinian Authority and Israel's recognition of this body inevitably challenged the vision of the Greater Land of Israel. In the background, there was also concern that the Temple Mount would be lost and handed over to Palestinian control. Thus, the zenith of messianic expectation—the anticipated establishment of the Temple as the peak of the messianic process—now faced a grave danger due to the gradual surrender of sovereign territory.

This alarming situation led some of the rabbis most concerned about the issue of the Temple Mount into a dissonant paradox, whereby their concern at the possible failure of messianic faith led to a strengthening of religious practice and intensified messianic expectation. The risk that the vision of redemption might collapse led some members of the Committee of Yesha Rabbis to believe that they were facing the ultimate test, in which they were required to demonstrate supreme spiritual elevation.

I shall briefly mention some of the reactions to the challenge of faith faced in the wake of the Oslo Accords. Rabbis, such as Shlomo Aviner and Eliezer Melamed, felt that the way to withstand this test was to advocate the intensification of the settlement enterprise, which would foil the implementation of the accords.²⁵ A further way to cope with this tension was to issue Halachic rulings prohibiting the relinquishing of sections of the Land of Israel and prohibiting the removal of settlements and of IDF bases.²⁶ In 1995, Shaul Israeli, head of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, went further still, urging people to stop reciting the prayer for the welfare of the state, which includes a blessing for “its leaders, ministers and counsels.”²⁷

In this situation, an increasing number of religious authorities, including leaders of the settlement movement, began to express positions that interpreted the Israeli withdrawal from territories in Judea and Samaria as divine punishment for the lack of Jewish attention to the Temple Mount, due to the rabbinical prohibition against entering the site. For example, Dov Lior, rabbi of Kiryat Arba and one of the leading spiritual leaders of contemporary Religious Zionism, stated:

We, who believe in reward and punishment and in Divine providence, must know that one of the main reasons why we are suffering torment is the profound apathy among large sections of

our people concerning the Temple Mount in general and the construction of the Temple, in particular.²⁸

The fear of further concessions led to practical measures designed to thwart any such developments. In 1996, during the high point of the opposition to the Oslo Process among the settlers, the Committee of Yesha Rabbis issued a bold ruling urging all rabbis who held the position that it was permissible to enter the Temple Mount to “ascend the Mount themselves, and to guide their congregants in ascending the Mount within all the limitations of the Halacha.” Effectively, the committee thus adopted the original minority position as presented by Rabbi Chaim David Halevy at the meeting of the Chief Rabbinate Council in 1967. The ruling of the Yesha Rabbis stated that their position had been adopted in response to “the facts that are being established on the ground by the Arabs.” The argument behind the ruling was that the lack of a Jewish presence on the Temple Mount, due to the Halachic prohibition against entering the site, had led the Israeli governments to see the site as one that could easily be relinquished. Accordingly, if masses of Jews began to enter the Mount to pray, it would be harder for the Israeli government to transfer sovereignty over the site to the Palestinian Authority.²⁹ This decision also constituted an expression of defiance vis-à-vis the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, challenging its repeated rulings. It should be noted that the change of line was preceded by an unsuccessful request to the Chief Rabbinate to change its position on the matter.³⁰ The decision of the Yesha Rabbis also challenged the traditional position of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva, which prohibits Jews from entering the Temple Mount “for the present time,” despite the fact that most of the members of the Committee of Yesha Rabbis are graduates of this institution.

I should add that this position on the part of the Yesha Rabbis has been a source of controversy within Gush Emunim. Those opposing this approach are led by Rabbis Shlomo Aviner and Zvi Tau, among the leading figures of the Mercaz Harav school. Their principal thesis is that the current generation is not yet ready for the reconstruction of the Temple. They argue that first the nation must be further prepared. The Temple is perceived as the tip of a pyramid, while the people are currently merely constructing its first foundations. Moreover, the Third Temple cannot be a temporary and imperfect structure along the lines of the First and Second Temples, which were destroyed as a consequence of their imperfection. The Third Temple should be built only after the spiritual foundations have been established in the form of the ideal Kingdom of Israel acting in accordance with the laws of the Torah. The Temple must stand for eternity, and accordingly must be built on flawless foundations. Thus, until that time, entrance to the Temple Mount is prohibited.³¹

The Opening of the Temple Mount

As already noted, the three-year period following the outbreak of the second Intifada (2001), when the Temple Mount was closed to Jews, provoked public and rabbinical discussion in Religious Zionist circles. Just before the Temple Mount reopened to Jewish visitors in September 2003 this intense awakening was challenged in a fierce written debate that appeared over a period of more than a month in the weekend supplements of *Hatzofe*, the journal of the National Religious Party and the representative of Religious Zionist interests in the Knesset. Various articles appeared examining the question of the Temple Mount. Rabbi Shlomo Aviner provided the focus of the discussion, presenting the traditional position prohibiting Jews from entering the Temple Mount. In the first of three articles, he noted that he had received numerous requests from young people informing him of their intention to enter the Temple Mount area to pray. Aviner responded that his reply to those who asked him was that, on this matter, they should follow the ruling of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, which had weighed the issue and prohibited Jews unequivocally from entering the site.³² He emphasized that most of the leading rabbis had signed the statement by the Chief Rabbinate, as had Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hachohen Kook, who even claimed that the mere discussion of the issue reflected a grave weakness in observing the commandment to “hold the Temple in awe.”³³ He added that it was his belief that Maimonides did not enter the Temple Mount and pray on the site during his sojourn in the Holy Land.³⁴

Each of Aviner’s columns was answered by two articles opposing his position. Haggai Huberman, a leading correspondent for the newspaper, replied that Shlomo Goren had prayed on the Temple Mount as part of a religious quorum, as he had himself.³⁵ Yisrael Meidad claimed that the Chief Rabbinate’s position was of a political rather than a religious character. Meidad urged rabbis to issue a new ruling on the question, given the changes that had occurred in the status of the Temple Mount, and the destruction of ancient remains on the site by the Waqf.³⁶ Rabbi Israel Rosen forcefully and rhetorically wondered why the obligation to obey the rabbinate was “wedged like a sword” into the foot of the Temple Mount. Rabbi Daniel Shilo, the spokesperson for the Committee of Yesha Rabbis, wrote that were Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hachohen Kook alive today, he would surely permit Jews to enter the Temple Mount. On the question of “awe for the Temple,” Shilo responded that Shlomo Goren was surely not among those who did not share this sentiment.³⁷

The stand taken by Rabbi Shlomo Aviner may be seen as a rearguard battle. As soon as the Temple Mount reopened, dramatic changes could be observed regarding visits to the site. During the first three months after the site reopened for Jewish visitors, some four thousand Jews entered the

site.³⁸ This trend has continued, and almost every day Jewish religious communities, sometimes numbering hundreds of people, come to pray on the Mount. As of October 2004, some seventy thousand people had visited the site.³⁹ This outburst of enthusiasm has been led by important religious and political leaders from within the Religious Zionist camp, and not necessarily from its more extreme wings. Thus, for example, those visiting the site have included not only such highly nationalistic rabbis as Dov Lior, Nachum Rabinowitz, Zefaniya Drori, Israel Rosen, and Shabtai Rapoport, but also more moderate figures such as Rabbis Yuval Sherlo and Shlomo Riskin.

The demand to enter the Temple Mount, which has been led by students from the national-religious yeshivot, now seems to have swept through the more moderate leadership, even those opposed to entering the site. For example, in July 2004, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner participated in a convention whose title speaks for itself: "Drawing Near to the Sacrifices." He even attended the "Circling of the Gates," which took place after the convention. This was an event in which the participants circled the walls of the Temple Mount reciting dirges mourning the destruction of the Temple. Aviner conditioned his participation in the conference when his reservations regarding entry to the Temple Mount were published.⁴⁰ My assessment is that Aviner was pressured to participate in activities he did not support, and which in the past he would have avoided, because of the dynamics created on the Temple Mount issue. The fact that the conference and the march around the gates took place outside the Temple Mount allowed him to participate in the events, responding to public pressure. Activities held apart from the Temple Mount pose a dilemma for the moderate religious leadership of the settlers. As Orthodox Jews, they cannot negate or deny the anticipation of the reinstatement of the sacrifices, and accordingly, they cannot oppose the substance of such informational activities, as long as these do not take place on the Mount itself.

Conclusion

The general rabbinical approach to the question of entering the Temple Mount may be divided into four main schools. The first rejects such a possibility, which is left to messianic times. This position is shared by the majority of members of the plenum of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate.

The second seeks to prepare actively for redemption, but within the legitimate religious frameworks, through theoretical study of the laws relating to the sacrificial worship. This approach does not include actual entry into the Temple Mount site, and remains within the accepted framework of Torah study. The approach of Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook reflects this position.

The third school argues that the construction of the Temple is indeed a public commandment, but before this takes place, spiritual elevation is needed, through settlement across the entire Holy Land and the dissemination of the light of faith, which constitute the foundation on which the Temple may be constructed. Thus, until that time, entering the Mount is prohibited. This approach is the most common among the Mercaz Harav yeshiva school.

The fourth and most activist school permits Jews to enter the Temple Mount, with certain restrictions. To this end, much effort is devoted to identifying the borders of the Temple area to avoid problems of ritual impurity that arise in entering the prohibited areas. This fourth school is becoming more dominant among the Religious Zionist leadership, both political and rabbinical.

The study also discusses the clear phenomenon of the erosion and weakening of the prohibition against Jews entering the Temple Mount. It is difficult to ignore the growing support for this approach among ever wider circles. The research also discusses the manner in which a political process—the Oslo Accords—led to a series of counter reactions, influencing religious approaches that had previously been considered immutable. We see that strict Orthodox circles have changed their religious behavior as the result of changing times. The fear that the Temple Mount will be lost and transferred to Arab control legitimized far-reaching changes in a long-standing religious ruling.

The yearning of the religious population for the Temple Mount and for the ideal of reestablishing the Temple grew stronger because of the threat to Israeli sovereignty over the site. As long as Israel controlled the site and the idea of handing the Mount over to Palestinian sovereignty as part of a peace agreement was not raised, even activist circles among the Religious Zionist community did not, for the most part, seek to change the reality on the Temple Mount. Although the desire to build the Temple is a central theme among these circles, it was postponed until a later stage of the process of redemption, as they see it. By contrast, since the emergence of the Oslo Accords and discussion of the division of sovereignty in the Holy Basin (the Western Wall and the Temple Mount), there has been an increasingly strong counterreaction demanding that Jews enter the site and create facts on the ground. The proof of this is the large number of people who have entered the Mount over the years since the Mount was reopened in September 2003, despite the Halachic prohibition. It is reasonable to suggest that it will be difficult to continue to ignore this growing support for action on this question among ever-widening circles.

It is still too early to determine what will become of these trends. It is also possible that the further developments would be a result of the changing political reality. It may be, on one hand, that the question of

Jews entering the Temple Mount will become a routine. On the other hand, if the crisis and violent situation continues, there could be found those who would desire to attack the mosques on the site to promote the messianic process.

Based on these conclusions we shall enter our discussion on the Temple Mount activists. Chapter 3 examines the activities of the Temple Institute headed by Rabbi Israel Ariel. This institute is the leading force among the Temple Mount advocates.