

INCREASING COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TEMPLE MOVEMENTS & THE ISRAEL POLICE



WRITTEN BY AVIV TATARSKY, IR AMIM FIELD RESEARCHER | NOVEMBER 2017

TRANSLATION: CONNIE HACKBARTH

ENGLISH EDITING: BETTY HERSCHMAN

Over the past year, the Temple movement has refocused its agenda, prioritizing the goal of increasing the number of Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Much of the movement's success stems from a demonstrative change in the attitude of the Israel Police toward its activities. Over the years, as part of their scope of responsibilities to prevent disturbances within the sensitive compound, and in response to Temple activists' repeated violations of their instructions, the police have imposed various restrictions on activists' entry to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. In the past year, not only have they lifted some of these restrictions, the police have actually been working in close coordination with Temple activists. This deepening of relations leads to a clear erosion of the status quo and may rekindle confrontations on the Mount/Haram. As will be explored in this document, it appears that the root of this provocative change in police conduct is the minister of public security himself, Gilad Erdan.

I. TEMPLE MOVEMENT STRATEGY: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF JEWS VISITING THE TEMPLE MOUNT AS A LEVER FOR CHANGING THE STATUS QUO

In the past year, there has been a significant increase in the number of Jews visiting the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Compared with some 14,000 visits during 2015/2016, there were more than 22,000 visits by Jews recorded over the past year – a sharp increase of almost 60 percent. An increase of some 30 percent¹ was documented during the 2017 High Holiday period, when over 3,300 Jewish visitors ascended the Mount, compared to 2,600 in the corresponding period last year. While these numbers are not comparable to the hundreds of thousands of Jews who visited the Western Wall during the High Holidays, they clearly represent a significant increase that merits close examination.

¹ Yeraeh: Volunteers Encouraging Ascent to the Temple Mount, summary of 2016/2017, from the group's [Facebook page](#), accessed 15/10/17 (in Hebrew).

Temple movement activists explicitly declare that increasing the number of Jewish visitors is a central plank in their strategy to break the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. According to their statements, the number of Jews visiting the Mount is a pressure lever that will eventually impel the Israeli government to change the status quo in the Holy Esplanade – first, to grant permission to pray there; later, to divide the holy site between Jews and Muslims; and ultimately, as demonstrated by frequent and explicit declarations, to promote construction of the Jewish Temple where the Dome of the Rock currently stands. As an example, MK Yehuda Glick, one of the authors and leaders of this strategy, stated in 2009:

"Without the Temple our existence is only 'as if' ... if the public understands this, and wants to connect through learning, **by ascending the Temple Mount** ... then the demand to build a Temple will come not from two or three people but from a large and wide public that the **State of Israel will be unable to deny**. ... Open for me a hole as big as the eye of a needle, and I will open the door of the hall. What is the hall? The hall is the Temple² [emphasis added]."

Numerous Temple activists have adopted this approach. Attorney Aviad Visuli, who has filed numerous petitions on behalf of Temple activists, recently claimed, "Netanyahu will have to approve prayer for Jews on the Temple Mount when their number of ascents surpasses 100,000 a year. This means no more than 300 Jews on average each day³." Arnon Segal, one of the most prominent Temple activists, is on record as saying: "The moment ascents to the Temple Mount are legitimately permitted, hundreds of thousands of Jews will visit, there will be prayer and afterwards, sacrifices and a Temple. It will be impossible to prevent this. People's hearts will follow the actions taken⁴." Similar quotes can be found in abundance.

In response to the police taking action to prevent Jewish activists from offering the Passover sacrifice on the Temple Mount, Minister of Jerusalem Affairs and veteran Temple movement supporter Ze'ev Elkin recently stated, "The more people ascend the Mount, the more likely the police will eventually have to change the rules⁵." It should be emphasized that Minister Elkin's remarks concerned the offering of sacrifices on the Temple Mount.

²² Yitzhak Lampart, "[Preparing the Temple – Interview with Yehuda Glick](#)", *Tal Hashamayim magazine*, issue 67, summer 2009 (in Hebrew).

³ Aviad Visuli, "Jews, Ascend the Temple Mount!" Temple Mount website, accessed 10/10/17 (in Hebrew).

⁴ Netael Bandel, "[Arnon Segal Wants to Build the Temple Mount Already from Yesterday](#)", Kippa website, accessed 28/11/13 (in Hebrew)

⁵ Arnon Segal, "[Elkin: Hallucinatory that in Israel Jews are Detained for Attempts at Worship](#)", Makor Rishon, accessed 26/3/17 (in Hebrew).

The strategy of increasing the volume of visitors as a means of overturning the status quo has long since permeated large segments of Temple movement sympathizers. From conversations with Jews visiting the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif and by reading the impressions they publish on their Facebook pages, it is apparent that many are ascending the Mount motivated by the idea that their visits signify participation in the ongoing campaign to alter the status quo.

II. DRAMATIC SHIFT IN POLICE RESPONSE: FROM RELAXATION OF AUTHORITY TO CONFERRING OF OFFICIAL PUBLIC STATUS

In the last year there has been a radical shift in the relationship between police officers and Temple movement activists. In the past, police in and around the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif have been careful not to demonstrate personal bias favoring political activists with whom they come into contact in the line of service. In recent months, police officers – headed by Jerusalem District Commander, Yoram Halevy – have frequently been photographed with members of the Temple movement in public displays of affection. Halevy accompanied Temple activists during a visit to the Mount during which he and his officers took part in a group photo against the backdrop of the Dome of the Rock, after which they captured pictures of Halevy embracing the activists. Halevy and Yuval Kaminitz, the commander of the Mughrabi Gate inspection point, were photographed by Movement members at the entrance to the Temple Mount while one of the activists placed his hands on Halevy’s head and conducted a ritual blessing⁶. Attending a farewell party held near the Mughrabi Gate for Kaminitz, upon conclusion of his posting, were Temple activists alongside the commander's family⁷. In August of this year, when the commander of the David Precinct (which includes the Old City and specifically the Temple Mount) was completing his appointment, Temple activists were officially invited to the ceremony marking transfer of responsibilities. The outgoing commander went so far as to acknowledge them in his farewell speech⁸.

The photographs taken with police personnel are embedded in official Temple movement videos calling on Jews to visit the Mount, which serves to stoke the motivation of their supporters⁹. The message conveyed through these photographs

⁶ [“Ascent to the Temple Mount in Memory of Hallel Ariel](#), YouTube channel of the Joint Headquarters of the Temple Movements, accessed 30/1/17 (in Hebrew).

⁷ Yeraeh Organization, [“Weekly Summary from the Temple Mount”](#), Temple Mount website, accessed 13/10/17 (in Hebrew).

⁸ Yeraeh Organization, [“Weekly Summary from the Temple Mount”](#), Temple Mount website, accessed 25/8.17 (in Hebrew).

⁹ [Joint Headquarters of the Temple Movements](#), Facebook, accessed 8/10/17 (in Hebrew).

is that the police stand alongside the Temple movement and support their accelerating actions to promote changes on the Mount. This trend amounts to a blurring of boundaries between the police – by definition, committed to professional conduct that remains impartial on political issues – and activists who are conducting an intense political struggle on an issue over which the police play a decisive role.

The clouding of boundaries between officers and activists does not stop at inappropriate personal relationships. In the past, there has been significant friction between police officers and Temple activists due to strict inspections of those suspected of deliberately violating the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Now Temple activists report enhanced coordination with the police, intended to facilitate increased entry of Jews. While coordination in and of itself isn't problematic, when coordination morphs into officers responsible for maintaining the status quo on the Mount/Haram passively condoning activities by turning a blind eye – and often times demonstrably granting their support – it is cause for alarm.

In recent months, police at the Mughrabi Gate have begun to disregard, intentionally or not, Temple activists violating the prohibition against Jewish worship on the Temple Mount. Activists have reported that during the October holiday of Sukkot, Jews prayed on the Mount and even brought a lulav (a ceremonial branch): “This year numerous Jews had the good fortune of praying individually on the Temple Mount. Many completed the Hallel and said the Hoshanot prayers. A few, including known Temple activist Michael Puah, even brought a lulav and the other species hidden under their clothes, some of them with the knowledge of the police.¹⁰” Until recently, a well known activist like Puah with a record of violating the rules on the Temple Mount would have been searched before entering and therefore prevented from concealing the lulav under his shirt. This past Sukkot not only was he allowed to bring in the lulav, the policemen who saw him recite blessings over it treated him with leniency. Events such as these, as well as the Hallel and Hoshanot prayers for the construction of the Temple, were videotaped by Temple activists. The videos were then distributed on social networks and websites to spur more activists to visit the Mount and to publicly evidence the effectiveness of the strategy of increasing the Jewish presence as a means of overcoming the status quo.

Another example of increasing police permissiveness is the entry of activists wearing provocative tee shirts – for example, a shirt with a picture of the Dome of the Rock and the question 'Doesn't it bother you?' or one with a picture of the Temple Mount

¹⁰ Assaf Fried, “[Summary of the Sukkot Holiday on the Temple Mount](#)”, Temple Mount website, accessed 13/10/17 (in Hebrew).

in which the Temple has supplanted the mosques, along with the phrase ‘Beginning to build’.¹¹ In the past, such inflammatory messages would have precipitated immediate removal from the Mount and sometimes even a prohibition against returning for a defined period of time. Temple activists now report a tolerant response to violations of the status quo. "The police ceased to arrest those who whisper prayers... Unlike in the past, those bringing lulavs [ceremonial branches] were allowed to end their circumambulation on the Temple Mount after the four species were carried more discreetly, and were detained only upon leaving the Mount."¹²

Beyond expressions of personal approval and turning a blind eye to activities, last summer the police allowed Temple activists to hang their official signage at the entrance to the Mughrabi Bridge, which serves as the entry point for non-Muslims to the Mount/Haram (encountered after passage through the police inspection point), as if they had been granted official public status over the area. During Sukkot, the police allowed Temple activists to build a sukkah at the foot of the Mughrabi Bridge. Anyone who entered the Temple Mount through the Mughrabi Gate first passed through the police inspection point and then through the sukkah bearing a sign with the logo of the Temple movement¹³.

Since April of this year, the police have also permitted regular Halacha classes on the subject of the Temple, which take place every day at the Mughrabi Gate just a few meters from the entrance to the Mount/Haram. The Temple movement refers to this activity as the “Temple Mount Yeshiva,” the website of which states that "After nearly 2,000 years of destruction, when the paths to Zion were mourning, without [Jewish] pilgrims, the voice of the Torah is again heard on our Temple Mount, which we see as fulfillment of the passage ‘Restore us to yourself, Lord, that we may return’... The students learn the laws of worship and read the order of the sacrifices, as the High Priests performing their ceremonies." The ad hoc yeshiva is exploited by the activists in order to create an appearance of authority over the entry of Jews to the Mount: “Temple Mount Yeshiva students instruct pilgrims in laws and interpret the rules prohibiting entrance to the Temple Mount... The Temple Mount Yeshiva provides light refreshments and quenches the thirst of the pilgrims.”¹⁴

¹¹ For example, [during the Sukkot holiday](#) and also after Sukkot during the [visit of MK Yehuda Glick](#) to the Mount on day of the marriage of his son (in Hebrew).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ [Joint Headquarters of the Temple Movements](#), Facebook page of Uri Erlich, accessed 8/10/17 (in Hebrew).

¹⁴ Ibid.

Statements made by the yeshiva activists leave no room for doubt concerning their intentions. A Facebook status update posted in August quotes the rabbi of the Hebron Yeshiva “wondering about the government that did not erase the mosques they built on our Temple Mount.¹⁵” As they explained to Arutz 7, their role is to “train a large number of well-versed scholars and experts in Temple matters, who will be ready for worship in the Temple the minute it becomes possible.¹⁶” In this way, the Temple movements are gaining ground in their efforts to erode the status quo by increasing the number of Jewish visitors to the Mount/Haram. Along with the surge in the number of visitors, the police enable violations of the status quo in the form of public expressions of worship and further strengthen the status of the Temple movements by conferring the appearance of an official status at the entrance and near the inspection points.

There is no doubt that the minister responsible for the police, Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan, has played an important role in enabling these changes in police conduct. During Erdan’s tenure, new officers have been appointed to sensitive positions relating to the Temple Mount, including district commander, commander of the David Precinct [Old City, including Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif], and officer in charge of the Mughrabi Gate inspection point. Temple activists report that the minister's door is open to their representatives and that he is attentive to their concerns.

SUMMARY: UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE MINISTER, PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES INSTEAD OF PRESERVING THE PEACE

Despite the reinforcement of the Temple movements and the cumulative contributors to the erosion of the status quo, there are currently no Muslim demonstrations against the events on the Mount. As compared to previous periods, the Waqf is careful to employ moderate language in relation to the increasing number of visits by Temple activists and their supporters. But instead of acting to ensure that a fragile calm is maintained, Israeli authorities participate in pushing the boundaries, conveying a problematic message to the Waqf and the Muslim public at large. It is clear that for Muslims, the growing spirit of affinity between the Temple activists and police, violations of the status quo on the Mount, and the apparent official legitimization of status to the Temple movements in the area of the Mughrabi Gate raise serious questions about police bias. The Muslim public could easily infer

¹⁵ [Homepage of the Temple Mount Yeshiva website](#), accessed 6/8/17 (in Hebrew).

¹⁶ [“New Kollel on the Temple Mount”](#), Arutz 7 website, accessed 27/7/17 (in Hebrew).

that instead of the authorities acting to protect the holy place, they are joined to those who aspire to deprive them of it.

The achievements of the Temple movements buoy the motivation of their members while heightening the appeal of the movement to potential new recruits within the national religious public. This is precisely the basis of the strategy: a field campaign combined with the support of senior politicians will lead to changes in the status quo, which in turn will further intensify the attraction of the Temple Mount within the Jewish public. This process will lead to the consolidation of more political power, which will enable the Temple movements to force the government to change the status quo – first to permit Jewish prayer, then to divide the Mount between Jews and Muslims and finally to lay the groundwork for building the Temple. The scenario of building the Temple may appear unrealistic in the Israel of 2017 but in recent months we have clearly witnessed that the police are progressively acting in tandem with those advancing precisely this goal. These processes must be halted before they become more threatening.

As noted above, these dangerous trends are gaining momentum with the blessing, not to mention the guidance, of Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan. The combination of Minister Erdan's desire to strengthen the Temple movements and the police perceiving that erosion of the status quo does not meet with strong Muslim protest may encourage the Israeli authorities to take more hazardous steps. Recently, the minister of public security announced the establishment of a special police unit to secure the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif¹⁷. Preventing violent incidents in the holy place is in the interest of both Israelis and Palestinians. At the same time, security measures alone, without cooperation with the Waqf to sustain and strengthen the status quo, will not succeed in preventing renewal of the conflict on the Mount/Haram over time. If the strengthening of the police presence in the compound leads to the Israeli authorities believing it is possible to risk erosion of the status quo, the situation on the Mount could deteriorate quickly, as it did during the summers of 2014 and 2015 when the cost of attempts to infringe upon Muslims' freedom of worship on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif was bloodshed in Jerusalem¹⁸.

¹⁷ Alon Hachmon, "[Gilad Erdan: Special Police Force will be Established for Securing the Temple Mount](#)", Maariv, accessed 31/10/17 (in Hebrew).

¹⁸ Aviv Tatarsky, "[Collective Restrictions on the Entry of Muslim Worshipers to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif](#)", Ir Amim, 2/11/15.