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## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

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,<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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]."<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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 lost<sup>13</sup>), 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)<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup> 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.”<sup>16</sup>

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.”<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup>

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."<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.”<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup>

## 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.”<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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.