

ASCENDING THE TEMPLE MOUNT: AN INTRODUCTION AND BRIEF GUIDE



This is meant to be a brief summary of pertinent *halacha* (requirements of Torah law) and guidelines for ascending to the Temple Mount (*aliya*) in purity. It is not intended to be a substitute for in-depth study or at the very least, consultation with a Torah scholar who is acknowledged to be an expert in this highly specialized, often neglected subject.

Background

The Temple Mount, in Hebrew *Har Habayit*, known in the Torah as Mount Moriah, is the holiest spot in the world for all mankind. It is the location of both the First and Second Holy Temple. Here, G-d commanded Abraham, father of the Jewish people, to bind his son Isaac. According to all the prophets of Israel, when the Third Temple is rebuilt on this same spot, this will usher in an era of peace and universal harmony unparalleled in the history of mankind. It is a fundamental principle of Jewish faith that the Temple will be rebuilt.

The Temple Mount is unlike any other place on earth, for it is the one spot where G-d chose to rest His presence and to make Himself known to man. Thus we find many expressions in the Torah such as "*the place that I will choose*" and "*the place that I will show you.*" From the very beginning of time, this one location was set aside and sanctified by G-d as the focal point for mankind's spiritual energy.

When the Holy Temple stood, the experience of being there was to be in the presence of G-d. All people, Jews and Gentiles alike, were able to come there and partake of this direct, purposeful, and unfolding relationship. All came to recharge their spiritual batteries and come away renewed and invigorated by the reality of our constant, vibrant and intimate relationship with the Creator.

According to Biblical law and understanding, the holiness of the Temple Mount is unlike that of any other physical location on earth. For the Jewish people, there simply is no other holy site. Nothing else, no synagogue or house of study – or even the Western Wall – could be compared to this level of sanctity. This, despite the fact of the Temple's destruction and the desecration of the Mount.

Thus we find in the words of the great Torah sage Maimonides that visiting the Temple Mount today – as he himself did in his day, despite the risk of great personal danger – is similar to making a pilgrimage to the Holy Temple. Since the levels of holiness are still in place, we are obligated to conduct ourselves accordingly, with the utmost reverence, and in accordance with Biblical standards.

It is of primary importance to note that when we ascend to the Temple Mount in purity and under *halachic* guidelines, at no point will we actually tread on any of the areas where the Holy Temple actually stood. According to Biblical law, this is forbidden for all people. Rather, we shall be tracing a path around the periphery of the sanctified areas, coming as close as we can to the actual Temple location, but remaining all the while in the outer areas of the Temple Mount (see http://www.templeinstitute.org/birds_eye.htm" http://www.templeinstitute.org/birds_eye.htm for a mouse-over map of our approximate route).

The route of our visit is based on the rulings of great Torah authorities such as the *Radbaz*, Rabbi David ben Zimra, (1479 - 1573), who was one of the Torah giants of all generations. His *halachic* responses to thousands of questions posed to him by Jewish communities the world over, have been preserved in writing. When questioned as to where on the Temple Mount Jews are allowed to enter in order to perform the commandment of "*morah mikdash*" - showing reverence to the site upon which the Holy Temple stood - he answered in great detail. His vivid description of existing structures found on the Temple Mount, some of which are still standing today, and his clear answers concerning where one may approach the site of the Temple, form a *halachic* basis for all who go up to the Temple Mount today, (to perform the commandment of "*morah mikdash*" in accordance with Jewish law).

The laws of Biblical purity are extremely complex, and all their nuances cannot be clarified in this limited space. The magnificent dimensions of renewal experienced in everyday Jewish life by those who follow the eternal values of family purity, is living proof of the timeless wisdom and validity of these Divine principles. Suffice it to say that in the context of the Holy Temple, there are many more variables and dimensions of purity that form an integral part of the equation when coming to the place of the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence.

Thus even though the Temple veritably lies in ruins, we are still considered as pilgrims to the Holy Temple (*olei regel*), and we are encouraged to prepare ourselves as the pilgrims would, and once there, to conduct ourselves with due reverence as well.

Every effort should be made by tour participants to follow these minimal guidelines. This will help to ensure that our ascent to the Temple Mount will be extremely meaningful, both as a spiritual experience, and also as an educational experience. After all, we would expect to have to prepare ourselves both physically and spiritually, before entering into a holy place, wherein the pres-

ence of G-d is felt so strongly... how much more so if we are about to enter into the holiest place on earth. If we know that a visit to the Temple Mount is so significant in G-d's eyes, and such a powerful statement of spiritual alignment and identification, then we have every right to anticipate a life-changing experience. As such we can readily understand the need for intense preparation and *kavanah*, intent, so that we do not fall prey to the dangers of complacency.

Basic guidelines of preparation:

Immersion in a *kosher mikvah*

On the morning of the day of ascent to the Temple Mount, all Jewish males, regardless of age (even under bar mitzvah) should immerse in a *kosher mikvah*. Gentiles, who are equally welcome to visit the permitted places on the Temple Mount – "*for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations*" – are not required to immerse.

Those who must immerse in a *mikvah* should first prepare themselves by making sure that nothing is present on the body that would constitute a separation between the body and the water of the *mikvah*. It is customary to trim the fingernails and toenails before immersion. Any questions regarding the complex laws of what constitutes a separation (*chatziza*) regarding immersion, should be directed to a competent authority.

Regarding Women's aliyah

According to Torah law, Jewish women should refrain from ascending the Temple Mount during the days of menstruation (*niddah*). No Jewish woman can ascend the Temple Mount in a state of *niddah* and without having immersed. Regarding the *aliya* of women there are other factors and considerations as well. Because the details of these principals involve issues of modesty and are private and sensitive by their very nature, and because there are a number of situations that may apply to various individuals (such as widows, divorcees, unmarried women) we will not list all the details here. For questions regarding the *halachic* requirements for women's preparation for ascent, including *mikvah*, and what other circumstances may prevent women from ascending, and for questions regarding the *halachic* status of particular individuals, please contact me via our website: <http://www.templeinstitute.org/feedback.htm>

All who ascend the Temple Mount, whether man or woman, Jew or Gentile, are encouraged to wear non-leather shoes. This follows the understanding that we are visiting the Mount as pilgrims to the Holy Temple, and pilgrims do not enter into the hallowed area of the Mount in leather shoes. All plastic, rubber, canvas, or man-made materials are acceptable. It is also acceptable, and even praiseworthy, to ascend the Mount barefoot; however this is not always allowed by the police.

Regarding Dress

As befits conduct at any religious site, modest dress is requested. Furthermore, the Moslem wakf guards are quite insistent regarding this point. Women should be aware that if their attire is considered immodest by the Moslems, they will not be permitted to ascend. This includes bare arms

and shoulders, low neckline, or shorts. Men, too, are not permitted by the Moslems to ascend in shorts.

Additional Information and Restrictions

Cameras are permitted.

It is imperative to have government-issued photo ID with you, as in all likelihood you will not be allowed to ascend without it

The Israel Police, acting out of disproportionate fear of Moslem sensitivities and acting in collusion with the Moslem authorities, do not permit any non-Moslem religious expression on the Mount. Thus no Bibles, prayers or religious publications or paraphernalia, including jewelry, of any kind are allowed. We will be told that we are not allowed to engage in any prayer or express any non-Muslim religious sentiment on the Mount. All those who arrive at the gate for ascent to the Mount are scrupulously searched. Anyone found with these materials on his or her person or in a bag or case, will not be allowed up. Men are permitted to wear *kippot* and to have *tzitzit* showing, however no other religious iconography is allowed. Furthermore, and ironically unbelievable, t-shirts or caps with the Israeli flag, or "provocative" political statements, are not allowed.

It is most unfortunate that in keeping with the oppressive "rules" set by the Wakf, (the Muslim authority granted de facto control of the Temple Mount, by the Israeli government, since 1967), we are, under threat of "expulsion" from the Mount, not allowed to pray, carry any religious objects, or in any way intimate that we are engaged in worship, while on the Mount. In spite of these draconian restrictions, the aliyah can still be an intensely spiritual and religious experience, and we will learn how to deal with these restrictions.

Also please note that in the face of deliberate aggression by the Moslems who control the Mount, including the calculated destruction of the evidence of Jewish presence and the remains of the Temples, and subsequent Israeli governments attempts to "compromise" on the "status" of the Mount, (that is, to hand over sovereignty to the Palestinian Authority), the daily presence of Jews and righteous Gentiles on the Temple Mount, has taken on crucial significance. Our peaceful presence is testimony to the paramount significance of the Temple Mount to the Jewish people and the spiritual life of all mankind. No less importantly, our peaceful presence on the Mount is a daily reminder to the Israeli government, and to freedom loving people around the world, that our most fundamental and inalienable rights of freedom of worship are being denied.



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In August, 2005, the latter half of the month of Av, Rabbi Chaim Richman, accompanied by several friends, ascended the Temple Mount. This visit was documented on camera. In this classic visit to the Mount, in strict accordance with Jewish halachic law, Rabbi Richman takes the viewer on a complete tour of the holiest site on earth. You will learn the history of the Mount and where the Sanctuary and its courtyards were located, and you will also see stark evidence of the illegal Moslem destruction on the Mount presently taking place. You will witness the difficulties experienced by all Jews who visit the Temple Mount today. You will stand literally meters away from where the Holy of Holies once stood and will stand again. Footage of this nature has never before been presented for public viewing. It can be viewed online at <http://universaltorah.com/programming/2008/01/31/exclusive-temple-mount-footage.htm>