

101 Rabbis Call for Sharing Temple Mount

December 7, 2000

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More than 100 American rabbis have issued a statement saying that there is no religious reason to require exclusive Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount, the massive stone plateau in Jerusalem, considered holy by both Jews and Muslims, that has been at the center of the recent violence in the Middle East.

Control of the Temple Mount has proved the major stumbling block in peace negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian officials, which are now stalled. The current round of violence erupted in September after the Israeli opposition leader, Ariel Sharon, led a contingent of Jewish officials, news teams and armed policemen to the mount.

Two Islamic shrines, Al Aksa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, sit atop the mount, which Muslims call Haram al Sharif, or the Noble Sanctuary. Promoting the idea that the recent Palestinian uprising was begun in defense of the mosque, many Muslims now refer to the violence as the Al Aksa intifada.

The rabbis say they are seeking to calm Muslim fears that Jews are seeking to destroy the two sacred structures on the mount. The rabbis cite a well-known scriptural passage from Isaiah that refers to the Temple Mount as a "house of prayer for all nations" as proof that Islamic holy places belong on the site.

"There is no reason why it can't be shared," said Rabbi Arthur Green, a professor of Jewish thought at Brandeis University, who helped write the statement. "The prophecy of Isaiah says the mount is meant to be a house of prayer for the whole human race, and not just the Jewish people. The Jewish people should therefore welcome the Muslim presence, and of course we think the Muslim authorities should also welcome the Jewish presence on the mount."

The statement, signed by 101 rabbis, was written and circulated by Dr. Green and Rabbi Rolando Matalon of B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue in New York City, who was unavailable to comment. Most of the signers are from the Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist movements, though a few are Orthodox, said Dr. Green.