

Jews Renew Begin's Battle For the Right to Pray Near Temple Mount

Yehuda Avner, a former adviser to multiple Israeli prime ministers, has written an essay titled The Mughrabi Gate Incident, which is worth reviewing for those who wonder about the Jewish right to pray at the Temple Mount. Keep in mind that some years ago Jews were forbidden to pray—and blow the shofar—at the Western Wall as well.

Avner wrote: “Some brave hearts defied the ban. Each year, as the Yom Kippur service ended, Ne’ila—a member of Betar, the youth movement of Ze’ev Jabotinsky and Menachem Begin’s Irgun underground—would surreptitiously sound the shofar, and the police would move in and hit out in every direction. Menachem Begin was witness to one such incident involving Ne’ila on the Yom Kippur of 1943.

“What he saw was a battalion of British policemen, armed with rifles and batons who, in starched, ironed uniforms, brassy parade-ground belts, navy-blue peaked caps and polished boots, looked invincible. With the cool confidence of jailers taking the measure of a prison yard’s inmates, they scanned the worshippers cramming the Western Wall’s narrow alleyway, trying to pick out who might turn out to be the blower. When the sun went down and the shadows lengthened. The police squeezed in among the pious, elbowing their way toward the Wall, weapons angled and primed.

“And when they heard it, it drove them into a frenzy. A ruddy-faced sergeant, livid at the insolence, dashed toward a short figure clutching a shofar to his lips and, slapping the lad hard across the face, bellowed, ‘Ere, stop blowing that thing.’ Other policemen set upon worshipers trying to defend

him, clobbering them with their batons.

"Choked dumb with emotion, Begin later wrote: 'Our ancient stones are not silent. They speak of the House that once stood here, of kings who once knelt here in prayer, of prophets and seers who declaimed their message here, of heroes who fell here, dying; and of how the great flame, at once destructive and illuminating, was kindled here. This House and this land, with its prophets and kings and fighters, were ours long before the British were ever a nation.'"

Begin vowed that Jews would have the right to pray freely in Jerusalem.

As Avner continues, "Came the Ne'ila climax of Yom Kippur and in the ever-deepening twilight the white-clad cantor, facing the gigantic shadowy blocks of the antique Wall's weathered stones, chanted in a voice that swelled and soared, 'Sh'ma Yisrael ... Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One,' and the whole congregation affirmed this declaration with single-minded intensity."

As the shofar sounded then, the Jews rejoiced. Today at the Temple Mount, the Jewish right to prayer is restricted. Many years ago, Begin fought for the right of Jews to pray at the Western Wall—and today too Jews must fight for the right of freedom of prayer.

The Temple Mount is the historical location of the First and Second Temples, the holiest place in the world for Jews. They must be allowed to pray there.

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