

A description of the fences, gates, and hills surrounding the Western Wall of the Jewish Temple Mount

[by Rabbi Shraga Simmons](#)



The new temporary ramp (with white roof), and the old broken ramp at the right.

Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: This week (Feb 9, 2007) has seen violence in the area of the Jewish Temple mount because of Jewish repair work being done to the ramp leading up to the top of the mount. This handout helps the reader understand the layout of the area of contention.

The Mechitza (fence between men and women)

The prayer area at the base of the Wall is separated into two side-by-side sections. This separation (in Hebrew, *mechitza*) is mandated by Jewish law, since it is considered immodest for men and women to pray together. In this way, the holiness of the area is preserved, and all segments of the Jewish nation are able to pray comfortably at the Wall.

Ornamental fence between prayer area and larger plaza

Notice the fence separating between the prayer area and the larger plaza behind it. Tourists who visit the Wall to look and take pictures stay behind the fence where they do not disturb those who are praying. The fence is made of pillars of stone, topped by a metal grating. In 2004, this fence was moved back to make the prayer area larger.

Running the length of the fence is a large white awning. This is to accommodate the many Bar Mitzvah celebration that take place at the Wall, offering a shaded area during those hot summer months.

The larger plaza is also used by the Israel Defense Forces for its induction ceremony of new soldiers, where they receive both a Bible and a gun.

Hill up to the Temple Mount

To the right of the prayer area is a path going up a hill, leading to a doorway that opens onto the Temple Mount itself. The original pathway was damaged in an earthquake in 2004, and a temporary wooden walkway has been installed just to the left of the hill. The Israeli government has decided to remove the hill, for fear that it might collapse.

Archeological excavations will take place in the area below, which promises to reveal treasures from the Second Temple Period. A new steel bridge will be constructed to access the Temple Mount. (This will also expand the women's section of the Wall.)

Since it is not known exactly where on the Holy Temple stood, Jews are prohibited by Torah law to set foot onto the Temple Mount, until such time that the Temple is rebuilt. Groups of Christian tourists and Muslim worshippers, however, can be seen ascending the hill leading to the Mount.

Doorways to the left of the prayer area

To the left of the prayer area, you will notice another wall which forms the northern end of the Western Wall Plaza. This wall is the edge of the Muslim Quarter, and above and behind it are homes.

There are three doorways built into the base of this wall. The two smaller ones, farthest from the Western Wall, lead into small rooms where prayer books and other religious articles are kept.

The doorway which is largest and nearest to the Wall, leads into a large room with arched ceilings. This room contains several areas for prayer and study, and is used round the clock and particularly during inclement weather. In this area is also a small women's section, the entrance to which is through a separate doorway farther back from the wall.

Room to the right of the prayer area (women's side)

To the right of the prayer area in the women's section are some stairs leading to a doorway. Inside this doorway is a selection of prayer books, and a prayer area for use during inclement weather.

Booth to the left of entrance to men's side

At the entrance to the men's prayer section is a small booth. At this booth, men who approach the Wall are asked to cover their heads as a sign of respect for the holiness of the site. It is a Jewish custom Jews to cover one's head during times of prayer. This head covering is called a Kipah or Yarmulke, which is a contraction of the Hebrew words *Yira Malka*, meaning "Respect for the King." The purpose is to remind us of God, the Higher Authority "above us."

Nearby, you will frequently see a table set out with spare pairs of Tefillin -- phylacteries. These boxes (containing parchments of Torah verses) are worn by Jewish men during morning prayers. For those who have not had the opportunity to wear Tefillin that day, they can borrow a pair at this booth in order to fulfill this important mitzvah.

Washing sinks

At the entrance to both the men's and women's prayer areas are sinks for washing hands. It is customary to wash one's hands before prayer in order to remove any impurities -- physical or spiritual -- that might be carried on the hands, and may hinder the effectiveness of one's prayers.