



Update: The Little Kotel in the Muslim Quarter, Ateret Cohanim and Hanukkah

1 message

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Wed, Dec 12, 2018 at 3:19 AM

The Little Kotel in the Muslim Quarter, Ateret Cohanim and Hanukkah

During the festival of Hanukkah this past week, the settler group, Ateret Cohanim, held several candle-lighting ceremonies at the Little Western Wall (the Kotel Ha’Katan) in the presence of various public figures. Among the candle lighters was the incoming mayor of Jerusalem, Moshe Leon, who lit the candles on the eve of his inauguration. While Ateret Cohanim took pride in his participation in the event, Moshe Leon did not publicize it. Other figures who came to light candles were Ze'ev Elkin, the Minister for Jerusalem Affairs, and Yair Netanyahu, the son of the prime minister. It is hard to imagine that latter would have participated in such an event without his father's knowledge.

The Little Western Wall is a section of a wall located in a narrow alley in the Muslim Quarter, at the end of a street leading to the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif. The wall is adjacent to the Iron Gate (Bab el-Hadid), on the western side of the compound, and constitutes part of the western retaining wall of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Some claim that it dates to the Second Temple period. The Little Western Wall is identified as the closest spot to the Holy of Holies of the Temple where Jews are permitted to pray, and since 2006 it has been recognized by the State as a Jewish place of prayer. The fact that the Little Wall is located near a Muslim residential neighborhood means that there are often conflicts between the Muslim residents and Jews who come to pray at the site, requiring intervention by the various authorities. Thus, for example, in August 2013, the Knesset Internal Affairs Committee held a discussion about the placement of rubbish bins used by the Palestinian residents that, according to the Jewish worshipers, threaten the sanctity of the site.[\[1\]](#)

[Ateret Cohanim](#) is the leading settlers organization operating inside the Old City, mainly in the Muslim and Christian quarters. It has dozens of houses in the Sa'adia and Bab-Hutta neighborhoods of the Muslim Quarter and a row of houses in the Christian Quarter, near the Moristan market. Ateret Cohanim was behind the purchase of the Jouda family home near the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif a few months ago.^[2] The group is also active outside the Old City in the neighborhood of Silwan, and is associated with the effort to Judaize the neighborhood of Batan al Hawa and expel hundreds of Palestinians from their homes.^[3]

The recent Hanukkah ceremonies demonstrate an increase in political support for Ateret Cohanim and, no less important, the growing importance of the Little Western Wall, a politically and religiously charged place, attesting to a growing consensus among the Israeli Right regarding strengthening Jewish presence in areas immediately adjacent to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.

Moshe Leon (left) on the eve of his inauguration as mayor of Jerusalem and Matti Dan, head of Ateret Cohanim, at a candle-lighting ceremony at the Little Western Wall



Moshe Leon (left) on the eve of his inauguration as mayor of Jerusalem and Matti Dan, head of Ateret Cohanim, at a candle-lighting ceremony at the Little Western Wall



[1] Reports of the Internal Affairs and Environmental Protection Committee, MK Miri Regev, Chairwoman of the Interior Committee, at a discussion on the condition of the Little Kotel: "Why do we not treat the Little Kotel as part of the Western Wall?" the 19th Knesset, August 31, 2013.

[2] Nir Hasson, [News of Jews taking over House next to Jerusalem's Temple Mount Spur Palestinian Media Uproar](#), *Haaretz*, October 9, 2019.

[3] Nir Hasson, [Court Allows Eviction of 700 Palestinians From East Jerusalem Neighborhood](#), *Haaretz*, November 22, 2018.

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