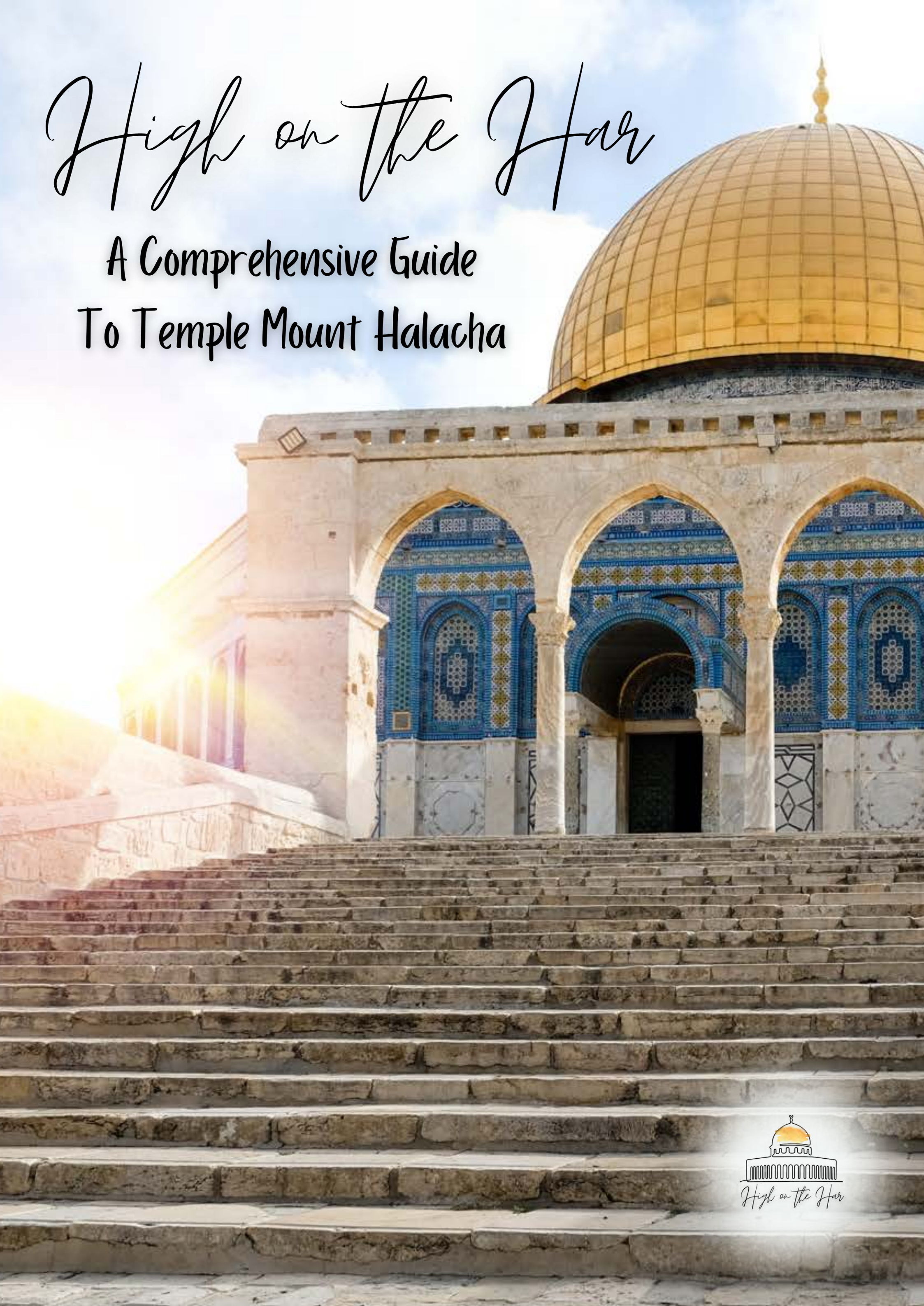


High on the Har

A Comprehensive Guide
To Temple Mount Halacha



The most important question asked
by those considering or preparing
to visit the Temple Mount today is:

AM I ALLOWED TO ASCEND?

The short answer is...

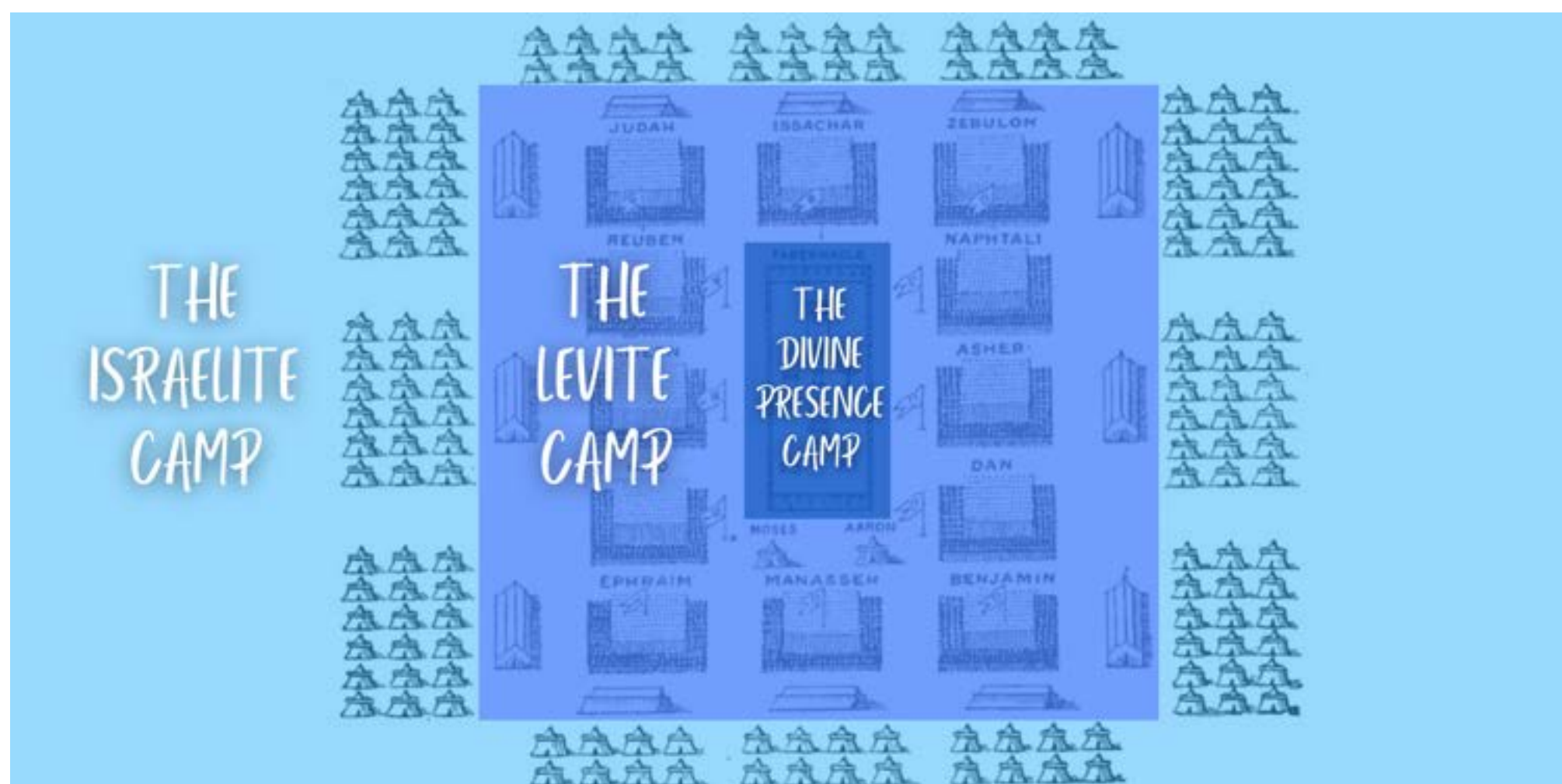
YES,

YOU CAN!



It is a great mitzvah to ascend to the Temple Mount, and experience the spiritual connection we have to this holy space... in those areas we are permitted to enter. All Jews are allowed to ascend, provided that you have fulfilled three criteria: 1) you do not wear leather shoes; 2) you have purified yourself from any impurities (or bodily tumah) by immersing in a Kosher mikvah; and 3) you follow the rules of Moreh Mikdash or reverence of the Temple sanctuary as described in Moses Maimonides (Beit Habechira, Chapter 7).

The Temple Mount area comprises different zones, each with different levels of purity required for entry. These zones are bound to the zones of purity followed by the Jews after leaving Egypt, while they traveled across the Sinai desert on the way to Israel.



When at rest, the Jewish people established three camps around the tabernacle. The outer camp, where the tribes lived, was called Machaneh Yisrael (The Israelite Camp). The inner camp was called Machaneh Leviah (The Levite Camp). And the Tabernacle was called Machaneh Shechina (The Camp of the Divine Presence).

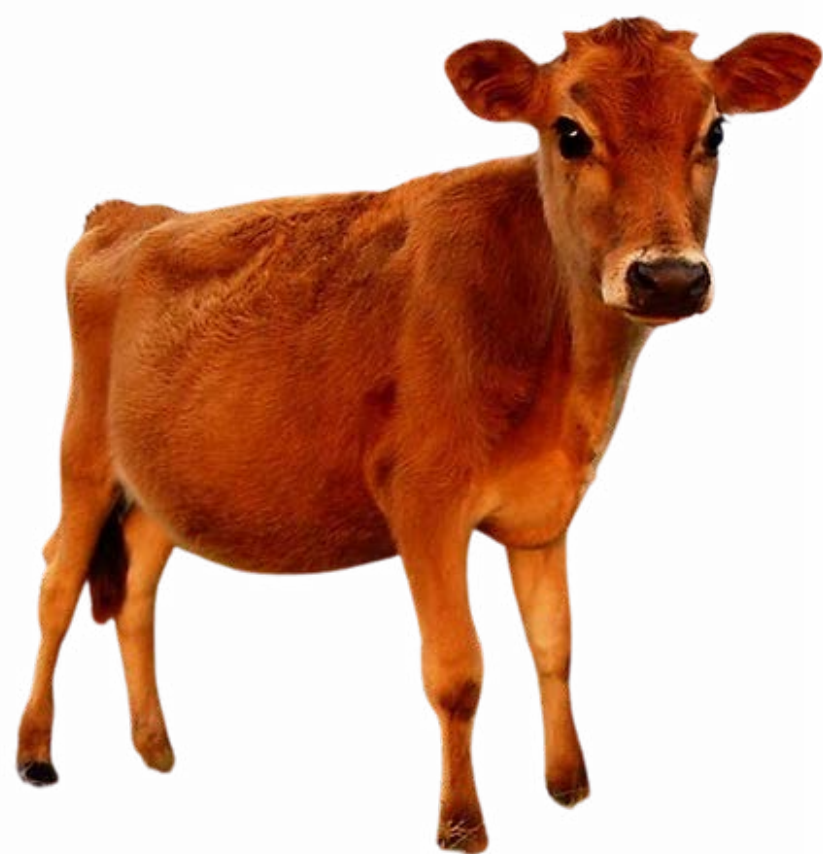
The Torah (Numbers 5:2) defines three types of ritual impurities which were not permitted in certain camps:

”Command the Jews and they must send out of the camp every Metzora (leper), every Zav (one who is impure from a flux that flows from the body), and every person that is Tamei Met (one who came in contact with a corpse).”

The Talmud (BT Pesachim 67b) explains that this is not a commandment to send all three types of impurities out of all three camps. A leper was sent out of all three camps. A Zav was permitted to remain in the Israelite Camp, but was removed from the Levite Camp and (by extension) the camp of the Divine Presence. And a Tamei Met was permitted to stay in the Levite Camp and was only removed from the Divine Presence Camp.

A Tamei Met is prohibited from entering the location of the actual Temple, and the Temple Courtyard or the Azarah, comprising the Court of the Israelites, the Court of the Priests, and the Temple building or the Heichal. Entering into these areas would make one liable for a karet penalty (a Biblical punishment given by heaven and not an earthly court). The only way for a Tamei Met to purify themselves and be permitted to enter these areas is to be cleansed with the ashes of the Red Heifer, which are not available today.

However, a Tamei Met is still permitted on the rest of the Temple Mount. As such, the route taken around the Temple Mount by Jewish worshippers today avoids these areas, and ensures a significant buffer zone.



The Talmud (BT Zevachim 116b:14-19) further rules that these zones apply directly to Jerusalem, when considering the city of Jerusalem as having the status of the Israelite Camp, the general area of the Temple Mount as having the status of the Levite Camp, and the location where the Temple stood as having the status of the Divine Presence Camp.

Therefore, Maimonides rules (Mishneh Torah, Sefer Avodah, Admission into the Sanctuary, Chapter 3:2-4):

”A person who is afflicted with leprosy is sent outside of all three camps, i.e., outside of Jerusalem. Men with a Zav condition, women with a Zavah condition, menstruants, and women after childbirth are sent outside two camps, i.e., outside the Temple Mount. A person who is impure because of contact with a human corpse - and even a corpse itself - is permitted to enter the Temple Mount [but not into the area of the Temple].”



In summation: one who is impure from any of the impurities that come from bodily fluids cannot enter the Temple Mount. The only way to purify oneself is to first immerse in a mikvah (or ritual bath), and one who suffers from gonorrhoea must immerse in a spring or any other source of free-flowing water.

To better understand why and how we are permitted to ascend to the Temple Mount today, depends on knowing exactly where the Temple was located on Mount Moriah.



The esteemed Rabbi David ben Zimra writes (Radvaz II, Responsa 691):

"It is clear beyond doubt that underneath the Dome is the 'Even Shitiya' (or Rock of Conception) without any doubt, called by them (the Arabs) as 'al-Sakhrat'... There is no doubt that this stone that is found under the dome is the 'Even Shitiya' that upon it sat the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies."



This tradition did not begin with Rabbi ben Zimra. It is an unbroken tradition, or Mesorah, with a long paper trail, tracing back to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. The greatest Rabbis of each generation make note of this tradition, and the location of the Temple, employing this fact for a variety of Halachic (or Jewish legal) rulings.

These Rabbis include, but are not limited to: Rabbi Eliezer Ben Rav Chiya HaNasi (Megillat HaMigaleh), Rabbi Binyamin M'Tudla (Maasot Rabbi Binyamin 24), The Tosafot (Saviv Rabbi Petachya of Ragensburg), Rabbi Yehonatan of Luniel (Otzar Masaot 56), Rabbi Yaakov of Paris (Otzar Masaot 53), Kaftar Vaferach (Tiur Masiotav 1), Rabbi Obadia Bartenuira (Otzar Masaot 119), Chatam Sofer (Yoreh De'ah 236), Bach (Orach Chaim 561), Sharei Teshuva (Orach Chaim), Chida (Birkei Yosef Orach Chaim 561), Pat Hashulchan (Laws of Eretz Israel 3:2), Chafetz Chaim (Likutei Hilchot Zevachim 5), Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tikuchinsky (Ir HaKodesh V'HaMikdash, Eretz Israel 22), Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (Maadanei Melekh I, page 321), Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (Shmaitta Baei Tziluta, chapter Korban Pesach), and Rabbi Avigdor Nebinzahl (Piskei Zaka).



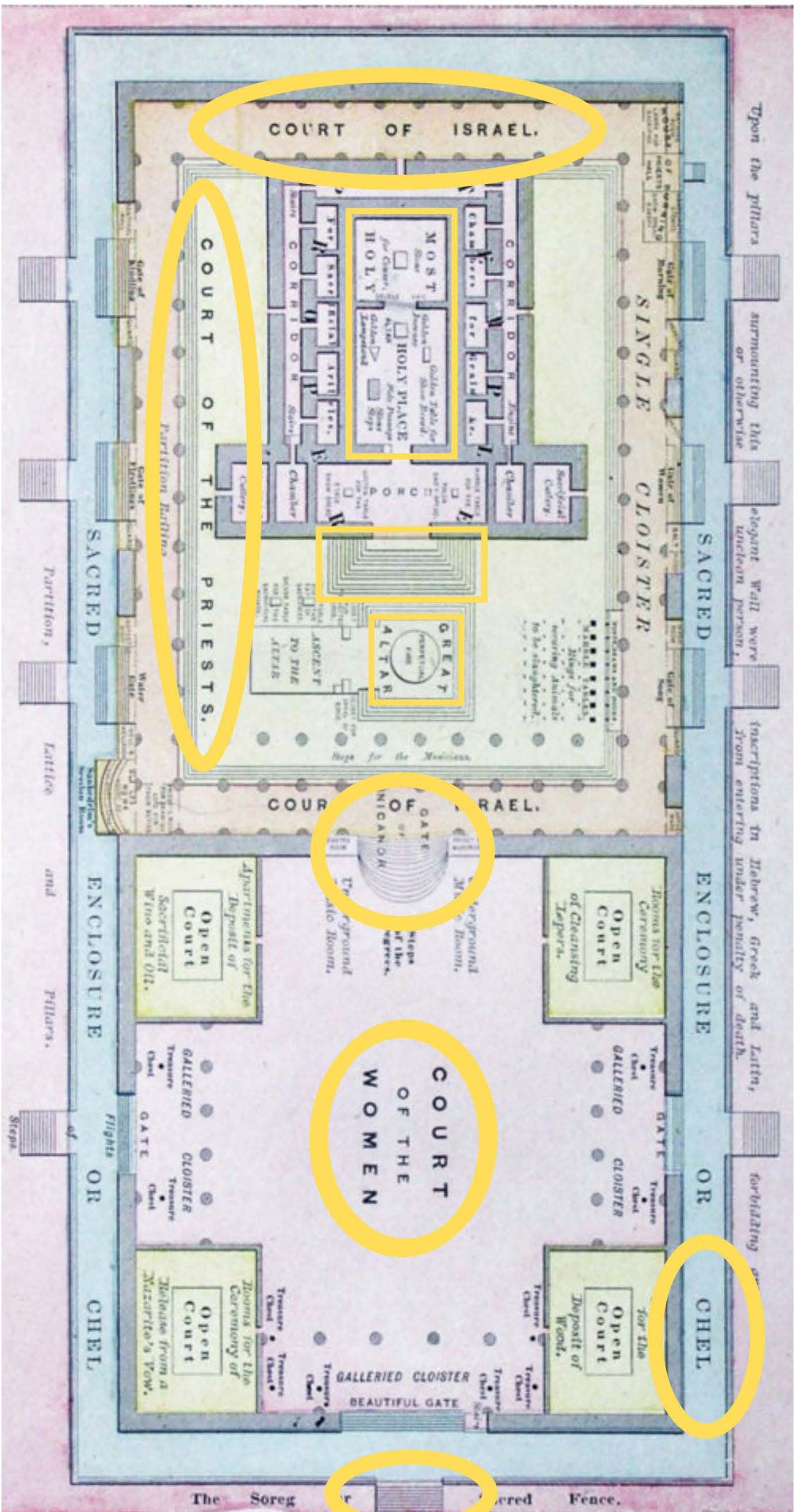
If the Even Shitiya (or Rock of Conception) is the location where the Holy of Holies stood in the Temple – and since the Mishnah (Middot, Chapter 2) lists the exact dimensions of the Temple – if we can pinpoint the location of the Even Shitiya on the Temple Mount today, we can accurately know the boundaries of the Temple building, and thus, the rest of the previously enumerated boundaries. The Mishnah enumerates the height of the Temple Mount from East to West:

”The Chel was the height of ten cubits. There were twelve steps there. Fifteen steps led up from the women’s courtyard to the Israelite courtyard...

”The Priestly Court was two and a half cubits higher than the Israelite Court...

”Between the Temple building and the Altar were twenty-two cubits. There were twelve steps there. All the steps in the Temple were half a cubit high. Here is a stone from the days of the earlier prophets, called Shitiya, [the height of] three fingers [jutting out] above the ground [of the holy of holies].”





Upon the pillars surrounding this or otherwise elegant wall were inscriptions in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, forbidding from entering under penalty of death.

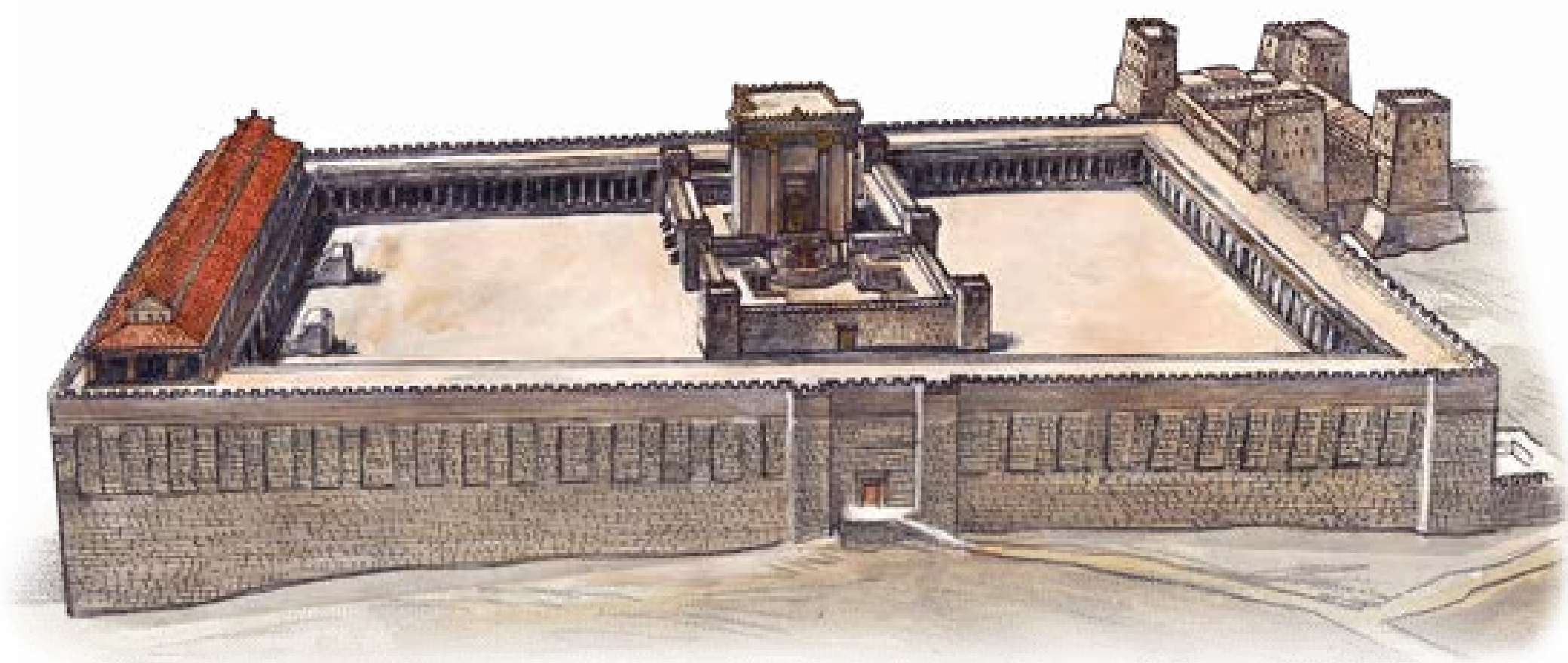
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forbidding

The Soreg or Covered Fence.

To summarize, the Even Shitiya was 22 cubits and three fingers higher than the floor of the Temple Mount.

Maimonides (Mishneh Torah, Sefer Avodah, Chapter 6:1-5) explains that these stairs were in parallel to the ascent of the natural mountain:



”The entire Temple complex was not built on flat ground, but rather on the incline of Mount Moriah. A person who entered from the Eastern Gate of the Temple Mount would proceed to the end of the Chel on one level. He would ascend from the Chel to the woman’s courtyard on twelve steps. Thus, the ground on which the Temple building was located was twenty-two cubits higher than the ground on which the Eastern Gate was located.”

The Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrash also describe the Even Shitiya as the peak, and the bedrock, of Mount Moriah, not just a rock resting on top of it. Therefore, if we were to find within the Temple Mount compound a stone that is higher than its surroundings by the aforementioned amount, we can safely assume that stone is the Even Shitiya.

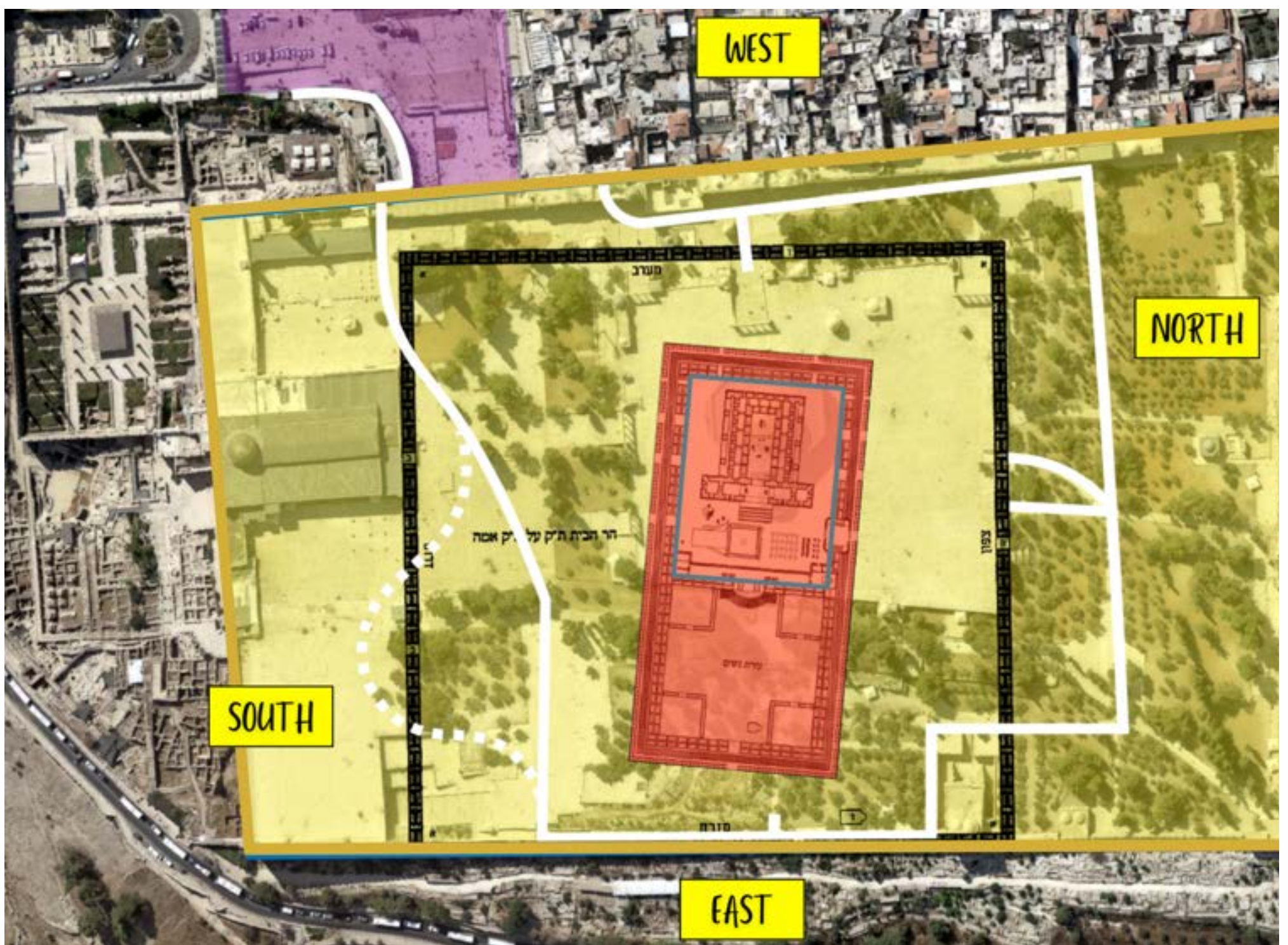
Today, the summit of Mount Moriah resides inside the Dome of the Rock, protruding approximately one and half meters above the floor of the building. The Dome of the Rock building itself is elevated, rising even higher above the Temple Mount.

Thus, there would have to be a descent from the Even Shitiya of 16 cubits in a span of 139 cubits, due east. The only location on the Temple Mount where there is such a steep descent is from the stone located in the Dome of the Rock, descending due east. It is therefore clear that the Even Shitiya is, without question, the stone inside the Dome of the Rock.

Understanding that the Dome of the Rock was the location of the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount, it is now possible to accurately locate where the Temple stood using the measurements laid out in the Mishnah.

Thus, we can know with certainty where we are prohibited from entering and where we are permitted to enter, after having undertaken the appropriate preparations.

Adding to the stringencies we observe, today's leading Rabbis have established a specific route on the Temple Mount, in conjunction with the Israel Police, which does not approach any area of entry which is forbidden by the Halacha (or Jewish law).



All Jewish worshippers who visit Har HaBayit are required to ascend with a group that follows this route.

It is not possible to deviate from this route, therefore ensuring that no one can enter any area that carries a karet penalty, even by accident.

High On The Har is committed to providing a meaningful spiritual experience for all Jews who wish to ascend to, and pray on, the Temple Mount, in strict accordance with the Halachic requirements.

Before ascending we will provide you with a comprehensive ascension guide that includes accessible, step-by-step preparation instructions. In so doing, we can assure all our guests that we are protecting the sanctity of this holy site while enhancing and elevating your spiritual experience. Our team is always available to answer your questions and we sincerely look forward to welcoming you home on your first Aliyah!

Learn more, book a tour or contact us

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