

Legend of the Red Cow: How Does It Threaten Al-Aqsa?

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The Israeli Channel 12 has renewed the discussion about the seriousness of religious Zionism in its systematic aggression on the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque to establish the alleged temple in its place. The report, aired on July 29, 2023, emphasized the five cows imported by the Temple groups and their reliance on them to impose new realities in Al-Aqsa Mosque. This underscores the need to address this religious issue and its potential implications, highlighting the government's adoption of this plan with all its recklessness and unpredictable consequences for the Zionist entity.

Regarding Religious Zionism and Temple Groups: A Necessary Introduction

Temple groups represent the interface of the Religious Zionist movement in its endeavor to establish the Temple. This movement reinterprets Zionism, transforming it from a nationalistic idea seeking to provide a homeland for Jews as a presumed people into a simultaneous national and religious concept. It realizes a national homeland for the "Jewish people" based on Torah-based religious visions, essentially becoming a nationalist-religious movement reinterpreting Jewish nationalism on religious grounds. It also reinterprets Torah religious texts from a Zionist national perspective, thereby transitioning the Zionist entity from being a secular political entity to a Jewish, rabbinical political entity living by the laws of God and fulfilling His will. At the heart of this will is the construction of the Temple.

This movement, once marginal during the emergence of the Zionist movement and the establishment of the political entity, is now expanding and ascending to become the forefront of settlement in the West Bank. It aims to decisively shape the religious identity of Jerusalem and stands as a middle ground between secular nationalist forces like the Likud party and traditional religious forces like the United Torah Judaism and Shas parties. This position makes it a pivotal player in Netanyahu's current governing coalition, holding significant sway over policies, especially considering that adherents to its ideology constitute 27 out of 120 seats in the current Knesset. Moreover, they control 15 ministerial portfolios in Netanyahu's 32-member government.

During its ascent, this religious colonization movement crystallizes as a colonial practice added to territorial and demographic colonization. It specifically targets Islamic sanctities through complete substitution, imposing Jewish sanctities in their place. At its core is the Al-Aqsa Mosque, alongside the Ibrahimi Mosque and the Tomb of Joseph in Nablus, as well as Bilal ibn Rabah Mosque in Bethlehem, in addition to several Islamic cemeteries.



Why do Temple groups rely on red cows?

In attempting to incite its audience to storm the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, described as the alleged Temple, Temple groups were aware of facing a rabbinical consensus prohibiting Jews from entering it for two reasons: first, the construction of the Temple and its entry are contingent on the arrival of the Messiah or the descent of the Temple from the sky, both divine actions that must be awaited. Second, the condition of ritual purity, unanimously agreed upon by rabbinical authorities, is believed to be absent in any contemporary Jew. "Entering the Temple," meaning practically storming Al-Aqsa, would be considered a desecration, bringing divine punishment unless the purity condition is met.

As religious Zionism, by its nature, is a redemptive movement believing that human action is the source of salvation or at least a necessary precursor until the awaited Messiah is sent by the Lord, the first condition has practically been bypassed. The obstacle that remains is the condition of ritual purity.

In Jewish law, impurity comes from bodily fluids, menstruation, postpartum bleeding, and it can be purified with water through various rituals. However, major impurity in this law is contact with the dead body of a Jew, meeting with the dead body under the same roof in a house or hospital, or even entering a cemetery. This major impurity, if contracted by a person, can be transmitted to other Jews through touch. Hence, there is a consensus that this major impurity includes all Jews worldwide today. This explains the official rabbinical rejection of incursions into Al-Aqsa and the limited number of intruders. Even supporters of religious Zionism adhere to this, as Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has never stormed Al-Aqsa for this reason, despite being the political head of this movement with its diverse components.

The purification from this major impurity is through the ashes of the red cow: a cow that must be two years old with no deviation in color, not milked, not used for plowing or transportation, never given birth, and completely free from any physical blemish. It is then slaughtered and burned along with cedar wood and some branches of the hyssop plant. The ashes of this mixture are then mixed with water from a nearby source, and a small amount of it is sprinkled on those contaminated with the impurity of the dead, purifying them. It is essentially a ritual of moral purification. The entire process must be conducted by a priest from the descendants of Aaron – the prophet in Islamic vision. The role of priests from his lineage has evolved to serve as intermediaries between the Lord and the Jews, facilitating the transmission of blessings, purity, and the acceptance of repentance.

Temple groups rely on the belief that performing this complex ritual will break their isolation, making their audience, particularly those close to religious Zionism, respond to their discourse and actively participate in storming the Al-Aqsa Mosque. This aligns with their phased plans, involving temporal division, spatial division, and the spiritual establishment of the Temple by imposing Torah rituals. This transition aims to increase the number of daily intruders from hundreds to thousands, with the numbers multiplying during major holidays from thousands (the highest recorded in a single day so far is 2,200) to tens of thousands, even though such figures are presented in an exaggerated manner, speaking of millions.



At the same time, the Temple groups consider this red cow as the "tenth in Jewish history," claiming it to be the promised cow to inaugurate the Christian covenant. They view it as a necessity to find it as a prelude to the descent of the Messiah and the construction of the Temple. They see their endeavor in this as a human role leading to the fulfillment of the Lord's works.

Relentless efforts to impose the Red Cow ritual

This purifying ritual has two fundamental requirements that Temple groups are working to achieve: reviving the priestly class and finding the Red Cow. The "Temple Institute" has dedicated itself to fulfilling these requirements since its establishment in 1987. It works to revive the priestly class by identifying Jews descended from Aaron, ensuring their birth and upbringing under conditions that prevent the transfer of impurity from the dead. They then train them in the rituals described in the Torah and Talmud to lead prayers in the Temple, prepare their clothes and belongings, and subsequently encourage them to storm the Al-Aqsa Mosque in their white garments to practically lead those rituals there. The institute has almost completely achieved this, evident in the "Priestly Blessing" prayers they insist on repeating periodically in the eastern corner of the Al-Aqsa courtyard.

As for finding the Red Cow, the institute has dedicated a special program to it since its inception. In 1997, it announced that it had found a nominated cow, but it did not meet the conditions as it reached the age of two. This was repeated in 2002. Then, in 2014, the institute announced a similar birth in the United States on June 12.

On July 12, 2015, the institute decided to establish a program to raise a herd of Red Cows in occupied Palestine. It launched a popular fundraising campaign to implant frozen embryos into a cow raised in a local barn in an attempt to use biotechnology to fulfill the Torah prophecy in a program called "Raising the Red Cow in Israel." The institute announced on September 4, 2018, the birth of a nominated cow within the same program using frozen embryo implantation, but that cow also did not meet the specifications.

The current attempt has shifted the search to the United States, considering it the largest cattle-raising market. It appears that this effort is not far from employing a more advanced form of biotechnology. It has received support and financial care from a right-wing Zionist organization calling itself "Building Israel," which has a sister fund funded in the United States through donations from evangelical Christians. The farm, calling itself the "Trinity Ranch" in Texas, USA, supervised the raising of a herd of Red Cows of varying ages, approximately six months to one year. Then, the best five cows were selected as candidates to meet the specifications and were airlifted to occupied Palestine on September 15, 2022. This herd is being raised on a farm affiliated with the Temple Institute in Beit She'an in the northern Jordan Valley.

The media uproar generated by the Israeli media today, amid the escalating internal division in the Zionist settler community, may be attributed to the level of support this messianic movement receives, despite the divergence of its rhetoric from rationality and logic. There is an attempt to associate this support with the current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. In



reality, this rise is continuous, even under the coalition governments formed by Gantz with Netanyahu or those formed by Yair Lapid, the current leader of the secular opposition, with Naftali Bennett, who is affiliated with the Religious Zionist stream. It was during Bennett's term that the five cows were imported, and the Director-General of the Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage and the Director-General of the Ministry of Agriculture facilitated their import, organizing a reception ceremony at the airport attended by 300 Temple groups' activists. Additionally, a project for a park on the Mount of Olives was presented to serve as a venue for the purification rituals with the Red Cow.

In conclusion, despite the high confidence expressed by the Temple groups in the success of one of these five cows in meeting the Torah conditions—a confidence that may result from the use of undisclosed biotechnology—the 36-year-long organized search for the Red Cow has seen four unfulfilled announcements to date. While this does not necessarily imply its inevitable failure this time, it dictates treating the current fifth announcement as a gamble with the possibility of success or failure.

What if the Red Cow ritual were to be successfully performed?

Many Palestinian and Arab media outlets have inaccurately covered and analyzed the Channel 12 report with exaggerations. Some, for example, suggested that slaughtering one of the five cows would inevitably mean "building the Temple." Slaughtering a Red Cow and using it for purification signifies an increase in the number of intruders to Al-Aqsa, but it does not necessarily mean "building the Temple." Concluding that the slaughter directly leads to construction surpasses the capacity of Palestinian action and overlooks dozens of struggle experiences by Palestinians defending Al-Aqsa, which have thwarted previous attempts to change its identity and judaize it.

To clarify further, if the Red Cow purification ritual is successfully performed, it would mean mobilizing the religious Zionist audience, bringing them actively into the incursions of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Temple construction plan. This audience is viewed as the missing essence of Zionism, and the human effort to establish the Temple is seen as a precursor to invoking divine intervention that would change the balance and resolve the Zionist entity's crises.

Until 2021, official statistics did not separate a sector under the name "Religious Zionism" in their breakdown of religious affiliations within the Jewish community. However, due to the differentiation of this group from other religious categories and their rising political influence, official Israeli statistics now estimate their proportion at about 16% of the Jewish society in the Zionist entity, which is approximately 1.1 million people. Considering their high birth rate, the adult population in this sector, both men and women, is estimated to be around 400,000. This is the audience susceptible to influence by the rhetoric of Temple groups if the Red Cow ritual is executed, with the possibility of additional sectors joining, including traditional religious (Haredi) and nationalist fundamentalists.



There is no precise count of the active supporters of Temple groups involved in incursions currently, as sympathizers outnumber participants significantly. However, analyzing the daily average of intruders, reaching 200 intruders, and the annual figures of 48,000 intruders in 2022, with the highest daily intrusion reaching 2,200, a reasonable estimate for this audience is between 10,000 to 15,000, each intruding Al-Aqsa Mosque four to five times annually, as witnessed by the recurrence of the same intruders multiple times.

If Temple groups succeed in mobilizing 10-15% of the religious Zionist audience for active participation in the incursions of Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is a high estimate considering political indifference, personal circumstances, geographic distance, and security considerations, the active audience for Temple groups is likely to become between 40,000 to 60,000. This could potentially quadruple the daily intruders' average, reaching around 800 daily intruders. The annual figure for intruders might be around 200,000, and the maximum number of intruders during major Jewish holidays could be around 9,000.

If these figures are practically realized, it could effectively shift Al-Aqsa Mosque from being solely an Islamic holy site to a shared holy site between Muslims and Jews. This would necessitate a comprehensive restructuring of the occupation police's role within and around the mosque, likely involving an increase in their presence, new entry points, waiting areas, and security measures. This explains the Israeli police's survey of using the Asbat Gate and the Ghazali Square northeast of Al-Aqsa Mosque during major incursions over the past year.

Considering the average age of these cows, the first one is expected to reach the age for slaughter in October 2023 if it continues to meet the Torah conditions, while the last one is expected to reach that age in April 2024. Given that the ashes of a single cow are sufficient to spiritually purify all Jews in the Zionist entity, the commencement of the consequences of this new upheaval in the scale of aggression against Al-Aqsa Mosque would likely occur between the Torah Masakharot celebration on March 24-25, 2024, intersecting with the second week of Ramadan and the Torah Easter celebration that follows a month later.

In conclusion, as peculiar and seemingly unrelated to political dynamics as the Red Cow ritual may appear, its potential achievement would result in a fourfold increase in the number of intruders to Al-Aqsa Mosque on average. This would intensify the role and presence of the occupation police, introduce new gates and adjacent spaces into the realm of Zionist monopolization, practically transferring Al-Aqsa Mosque to the shared holy category. This shift would escalate the confrontation over its identity, warranting separate consideration for preparedness and anticipation.