



בית המשפט העליון
المحكمة العليا

THE SUPREME COURT OF ISRAEL

Public Affairs Department

قسم العلاقات العامة

המחלקה לקשרי חוץ

The Supreme Court of Israel

The Supreme Court Building

With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, The Supreme Court was housed in an old, rented building in Jerusalem's Russian Compound. In 1984, Dorothy de Rothschild proposed to the government of Israel that Yad Hanadiv (The Rothschild Foundation) donate a permanent structure for The Supreme Court of Israel in Kiryat David Ben Gurion, the government center in Jerusalem. The new building would commemorate the work in Israel of Dorothy's husband James and of her father-in-law, Baron Edmund de Rothschild (*Hanadiv Hayadua*, the "well-known benefactor"). Ram Karmi and his sister Ada Karmi-Melamede, from Tel Aviv, won the architectural competition held in 1986.

A Tour of the Supreme Court

The building incorporates several contrasts: Inside and Outside, Old and New, Lines and Circles.

- Inside and Outside: Natural light and walled spaces suggest inside and outside areas.
- Old and New: Architectural elements from Israel's history, and in particular from the history of Jerusalem, are found throughout the building.
- Lines and Circles: Concepts of law and justice are expressed visually. Lines represent law and circles represent justice.
"You are righteous....and Your laws are straight" (Psalms 119:137);
"He leads me in the circles of justice" (Psalms 23:3).

The Main Entrance

Visitors face a stairway that resembles an old Jerusalem street. The wall of unhewn stone on the right is similar to walls of buildings in ancient Jerusalem. Mirrors in the open space at the base of this wall create the illusion that the building's foundation extends deep into the earth. This effect recalls the foundations of the Old City of Jerusalem and suggests that the roots of law and justice are also deep. The wall on the left is modern, white and unadorned.

The Panoramic Window

The curved window at the top of the stairs floods the area with natural light and provides a view of the city, including the 19th century neighborhood of Nachlaot, easily recognized by its red roofs. Visitors are now standing on the east-west axis of the building. This axis reflects the growth of the city from east to west. Westward growth is seen in the development of the Ben-Gurion Precinct, the site of government buildings including the Knesset, The Supreme Court, The Prime Minister Office, The Bank of Israel and The Foreign Ministry.

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The Pyramid

Walking toward the library, one enters the pyramid area, a large space that serves as a turning point before the entrance to the courtrooms. This serene space acts as the inner “gate house” of The Supreme Court building. Zacharia’s Tomb and Yad Avshalom in the Yehoshafat Valley in Jerusalem inspired the pyramid. Natural light enters round windows at the apex of the pyramid, forming circles of sunlight on the inside walls and on the floor.

The Library

The library surrounds the pyramid. The volumes, which contain centuries of legal thinking from many countries, embody principles of social justice and moral values. The prominence of the library and its proximity to the entrance to the courtrooms affirms the centrality of law in Jewish history.

The Foyer

The foyer of the courtroom area expresses all the architectural contrasts of the building: inside and outside, old and new, lines and circles. The natural stone wall on the left is a continuation of the wall that begins at the entrance to the building. Courts in biblical times were situated at the gates of the city. *“You will appoint judges and officers in all your gates . . . and they will judge people with a just judgment”*(Deuteronomy 16:18). The three-tiered design of the courtroom entrances represents these gates and is reminiscent of the three-tiered design used for entrances to many public buildings in the ancient Near East. On the right, in striking contrast to the rough stone wall, is a modern white wall with high niches and circular benches- small corners of privacy for lawyers and their clients and the general public. Natural light enters these niches through pyramid-shaped skylights creating changing shadows on the white walls during the day.

The Courtrooms

While the courtrooms differ in size and interior design, their basic structure is similar. Natural light enters through skylights located between the outer walls and the columns. The columns themselves suggest a separation between inside and outside. Each courtroom (except Courtroom 1) has a prisoners’ dock and a press box. A law clerk and a court recorder sit at a small desk just below the Justices’ dais. Lawyers sit at the semi-circular table facing the Justices. Visitors may enter the courtrooms during the proceedings, but must observe rules of conduct.

Please turn off cell phones and do not take photographs or record the court proceedings.

The Knesset Passageway

On the way to the Courtyard of the Arches the visitor passes a window overlooking the passageway to the Knesset. This path, on the north-south axis of the building, represents both the connection and the separation between the legislative and the judicial branches of government.



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The Symbols

At the entrance to the administrative wing, visitors pass a wall design consisting of nine symbols representing various areas of the Court. Each symbol is made of a building material used in the area depicted.

The Courtyard of the Arches

The Justices' chambers, located on the top floor of the building above the Courtyard of the Arches, are not open to the public. The Justices are thereby able to work in a quiet environment, separated from the litigants who appear before them. Each chamber consists of an office for law clerks, one for a secretary and a separate office for the Justice.

The courtyard, made of stone, suggests the arid conditions of the desert that borders Jerusalem. A narrow water channel bisects the Courtyard. The arches resemble the gates of Jerusalem during the Roman Period. The stone quarried from the earth and the water reflecting the sky represents the biblical symbols of truth and justice. The Courtyard of the Arches is inspired by a verse "*Truth will spring up from the earth and Justice will be reflected from the heavens*" (Psalms 85:12).

The Judicial System

The Supreme Court is the highest judicial authority in Israel. The judicial branch, which is independent, is one of the three State authorities. The Judiciary's independence is both personal and substantive. Personal independence is ensured by the manner in which judges are appointed and promoted. Substantive independence is ensured by the fact that in discharging their duties, judges are subject only to substantive law, not to any other authority or person.

The State of Israel's court system is comprised of three levels: Magistrates' Courts, District Courts and The Supreme Court. The **Magistrates' Courts** are courts of original jurisdiction for criminal cases in which punishment is up to 7 years in prison and civil cases concerning damages or claims of up to 2.5 million shekel. **District Courts** are courts of original jurisdiction for criminal cases of more than 7 years imprisonment and in civil cases, of more than 2.5 million shekel in damages or claims. District Courts also hear appeals from Magistrates' Courts. The **Supreme Court** hears appeals from the District Court in both civil and criminal cases as well as appeals on decisions of special tribunals. The Supreme Court also functions as The High Court of Justice with original jurisdiction for petitions brought by individuals against acts and decisions of governmental bodies; i.e. State and local authorities or against individuals in public office. The Supreme Court, sitting as The High Court of Justice, may review the decisions of courts and tribunals that may have acted beyond the scope of their authority. The Justices of the Court usually sit in panels of three, both on appeals and petitions. In special instances, the Supreme Court may sit in odd-numbered panels of more than three. The Supreme Court may conduct a further hearing when a decision of the Court conflicts with an earlier ruling or where the importance, difficulty or novelty of the decision makes a further hearing desirable. A ruling of the Supreme Court is binding upon every court, other than the Supreme Court itself.



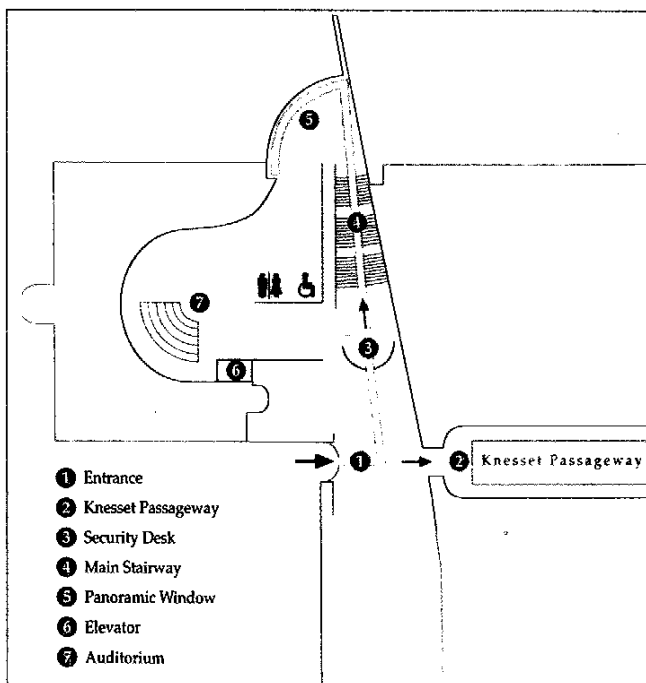
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Entrance Level

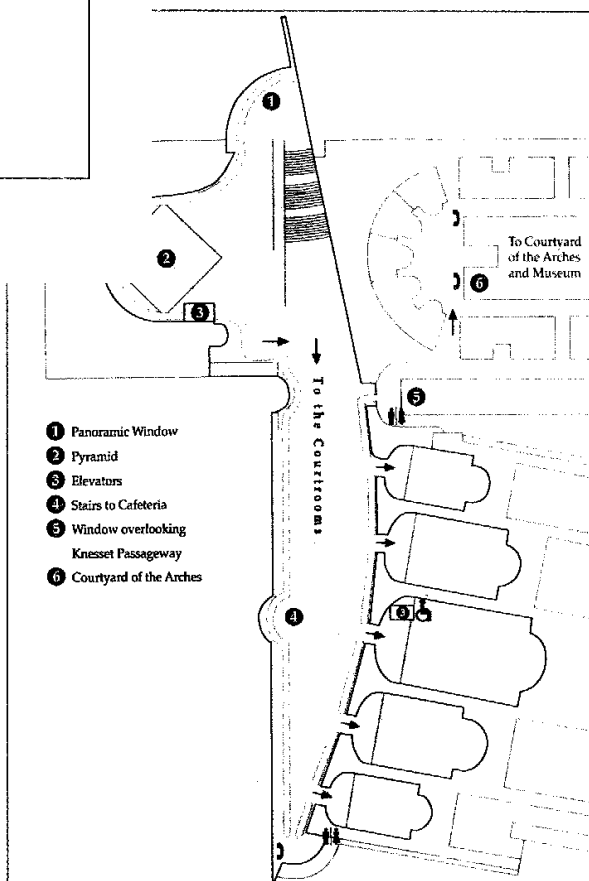
Please do not talk as you enter a courtroom. Take a seat immediately and do not stand in the aisle.

Photographs are not allowed in a courtroom that is in session.

Please turn off all cellular phones.

Visiting hours:
Sunday through Thursday:
8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Hebrew Tours: 11 a.m.
English Tours: 12 Noon

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Courtroom Level