



Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Founded six years ago, Hiddush has become one of the leading organizations in Israel that is advocating for religious freedom and equality. Dedicated to these values and recognizing the important role rabbis play as communal leaders and change agents, we invite you to join with Hiddush in the creation of a rabbinic leadership network to turn these principles into reality. Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel (RRFEI) will represent a broad spectrum of Jewish belief and practice and will help to bring the message of religious freedom and equality to a wide swath of North American Jewry, while partnering with Hiddush to advocate for these values in Israel and the Diaspora.

Recognizing the important role rabbis play as communal leaders and change agents, RRFEI will (1) help mobilize the rabbinate, (2) advise Hiddush and help to shape and convey its message to the local, national and international Jewish community, and (3) help amass support for the cause beyond the rabbinate.

We hope you will agree to become a RRFEI member and to help us grow the rabbinic network by taking these steps: (1) **go to our link (<http://rrfei.org/registration/>) to sign up as an RRFEI member and;** (2) provide names of – and help us reach out to – colleagues whom you believe would be interested in receiving an invitation to join RRFEI.

Prior to the spring elections, Israel had begun to address many issues of religious freedom and diversity. New legislation was introduced to facilitate freedom of marriage and other human rights issues, particularly regarding the inclusion of women in every sector of society. Initiatives were underway to launch a new structure for conversion that would make it more accessible; and the Supreme Court handed down landmark decisions declaring unconstitutional the continued mass exemption from military service and stopped governmental subsidies, as they were based on mixing religion and politics rather than upholding religious freedom, gender and economic equality.

Hiddush played a leading role in much of that progress. Its leadership was again illustrated in a decision that the Chief Rabbinate made in March. Acceding to a legal challenge launched by Hiddush, the Rabbinate issued Kashrut guidelines for hotels and restaurants, removing the intolerable and, in fact, illegal, restrictions it had established for granting certificates of kashrut for their food services. For example, they revoked their prohibition against the use of music and video equipment on Shabbat and the displaying of non-Jewish symbols around New Year's, neither of which have anything to do with the food itself. As a result of our initiative, groups who so wish may now use musical instruments in their Shabbat Services or *Oneg Shabbat* programs. The new policy is a real step forward in advancing religious diversity in Israel.

The momentum that has been building regarding religious freedom and equality must continue. With the results of the elections and the makeup of the new coalition, Israel is facing real challenges as it addresses the issues of religion. The efforts of RRFEI can and will play a critical role in generating constructive pressure to encourage progress and prevent a roll back.



Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel

We will be working with a growing network of organizations in Israel and North America that recognize the importance of advancing religious freedom and equality not only for Israelis but also for world Jewry and for ensuring the bond between Israel and Diaspora Jews. In the U.S., the Jewish Federations of North America, the American Jewish Committee, the National Council of Jewish Women and local boards of rabbis will continue to focus on advancing freedom of marriage, in particular. Through RRFEI, our collective, rabbinical multi-denominational voice will greatly strengthen these endeavors.

Together, we will rise to the challenge as we strive to achieve religious freedom.

לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין ליבטל ממנה

[Please go to \(http://rrfei.org/registration/\) to join us in this critical – and exciting – initiative.](http://rrfei.org/registration/)

We look forward to welcoming you.

Bivracha,

Conservative

Rabbi Prof. Elliot Dorff
Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin
Rabbi Gordon Tucker

Orthodox

Rabbi Prof. Michael Chernick
Rabbi Chaim Seidler-Feller

Reconstructionist

Rabbi Les Bronstein
Rabbi Jason Klein
Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D.

Reform

Rabbi Prof. David Ellenson
Rabbi Laura Geller
Rabbi Mark H. Levin

Renewal

Rabbi Dennis Beck-Berman
Rabbi Marcia Prager

[Denominations and names above in alphabetical order]

Executive Committee

Rabbi Stanley Davids

Executive Committee Chair

Rabbi Pam Frydman

President of Hiddush

Rabbi Uri Regev

Hiddush's Mission

Hiddush is committed to the advancement of “freedom of religion and conscience” and “full social and political equality without distinction on the basis of religion,” as promised in Israel’s Declaration of Independence. Hiddush believes that fully realizing the promise of religious freedom will strengthen Israel both as a democracy and as a Jewish state, and will bolster Jewish Peoplehood and Israel/Diaspora relationships.