

Historic Day at the Kotel



Today history was made. The Israeli government has agreed to give unprecedented recognition to Reform and Conservative Judaism at one of Judaism's holiest places, the Western Wall. For decades, Israel has given full religious authority at the Kotel to Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Judaism. That is about to change. The Reform Movement, the Conservative Movement, Women of the Wall, and the Jewish Federations negotiated a deal that was just publicly announced and approved.

The decision will create a permanent and official, fully-egalitarian space at the Kotel, a space where men and women will be able to pray together without gender barriers; where women will be able to read from the Torah and wear prayer shawls; and where families will be able to celebrate bar- and bat-mitzvah ceremonies and other events together.

The new, egalitarian section of the Western Wall will be officially registered in Israel's Law of Holy Sites. Access to the new section will be from the main public plaza. Visitors to the Kotel will now be able to decide whether they want to go to the gender-segregated Orthodox section, or to the section where men and women can pray together in the spirit of Reform and Conservative Judaism.

Today's decision also designates the Kotel plaza as an official public space that is no longer under exclusive Orthodox control. This will put an end to the embarrassing spectacle of male and female soldiers and officials being segregated at government and military events, and to situations where the Kotel's Orthodox rabbi refuses to let women light menorahs or female soldiers sing our national anthem, the Hatikvah, in public.

This landmark decision gives expression to a fundamental truth: There is more than one way to be Jewish. There is more than one way to pray. There is more than one way to connect to Jewish traditions and identity.

On this exciting day, as we take another step towards full equality for all Jewish movements in Israel, we recognize that our struggle for full equality in marriage, conversion, burial and other lifecycle events for Reform and Conservative Jews in Israel continues.

Today's victory would not have been possible without the vision and leadership of our own Anat Hoffman. For 27 years, Anat has been on the forefront of this issue. She has persevered through decades of protests and prayers, arrests and activism. We are inspired every day by Anat's leadership and her tireless creativity. Anat, we are all grateful to you for your prophetic voice for equality, which has borne such sweet fruit today.

Those who sow in tears will reap in joy. (Psalms 126:5)

Yours,

Rabbi Noa Sattath, Director
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Rabbi Gilad Kariv, Executive Director
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