

Regarding the Kotel Compromise

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The Kotel compromise is like manna. (Exodus 16:4) The sages say that manna tasted like whatever the Israelites felt like eating, but Rashi quotes Midrash Sifri to explain that manna could not taste like cucumber, melon, leek, garlic or onion, because those foods were not good for infants, so nursing mothers refrained from them. The Israelites wanted to go back to Egypt to enjoy adults' flavors.

HaKotel HaMaaravi (the Western Wall) is the western side of the retaining wall built by the Romans in 20 B.C.E. to secure the Temple mount from mud slides. The entire expanse of the western wall is needed so everyone can pray in peace and dignity. The Kotel Compromise will allow Haredim and Orthodox Zionists to pray in separate men's and women's sections according to their custom. Egalitarians will pray in a new egalitarian section. Women of the Wall will pray once a month and on special occasions in a women's section surrounded by a portable mehitzta. That mehitzta will be in the egalitarian section because the egalitarians are the only ones willing to welcome Women of the Wall in their prayer section.

On the occasion of the Kotel compromise, I want to acknowledge all of our colleagues who negotiated the agreement. I want to also give a shout out to our colleagues in the Reform Movement who have stayed the course while being called every sinat-chinam-filled name in the book. I want to also give a shout out to our colleagues in the Conservative Movement who engaged in, and absorbed the costs of the pay-to-pray-and-by-appointment-only egalitarian arrangement at Robinson's Arch for over ten years. That arrangement only ended when Naftali Bennett used 80,000 sheqel from his budget to build a temporary platform that will now be torn down to make way for an egalitarian plaza. In addition, I want to give a shout out to Anat Hoffman and Batya Kallus for their courageous leadership in negotiating the compromise on behalf of Women of the Wall and the board and staff they represent. I also want to acknowledge the Conservative and Reform Movements for insisting on a truly egalitarian section that is not encroached upon by mehitzot. And last, but not least, I want to acknowledge Rabbi Rabinowitz, Prime Minister Netanyahu, Avichai Mandleblit, the supportive Cabinet Ministers and Natan Sharansky.

In our euphoria that the Conservative and Reform Movements are finally recognized in Israel — albeit in one tiny way with much more still needed — we need to also be careful to not abandon the Modern Orthodox and Open Orthodox who pray with separation of the sexes; where men say amen to a women's Kaddish; or where men lead Maariv, Shacharit, Musaf and Mincha while women lead other parts of the service, give divrei Torah, etc.; or where women hold their own women's minyanim. It is unfortunate that there is no overt plan in the Kotel compromise to address these needs, but that is not a reason to blame those who have successfully negotiated the historic compromise. We can both support the compromise and call for a solution to address these additional needs. One possible way to do so is to envision an additional men's section and an additional women's section with a mehitza between them and a dignified entrance and accessibility 24/7.

We are not going to achieve our future goals by continuing to beat up on one another. We are going to achieve our goals by laying down our swords and turning them into plowshares at the negotiating table. Moshe Dayan z"l reminded us that we do not make peace with our friends; we make peace with our enemies. The gem of the Kotel compromise is the joint meetings at least five times a year between those who oversee the Orthodox/Haredi men's and women's sections and those who oversee the egalitarian and once-a-month-Women-of-the-Wall section. I look forward to the day when those who oversee the Modern/Open Orthodox men's and women's sections also have a seat at the table. If those new men's and women's sections and their attendant Modern/Open Orthodox governance turn out to be the present men's and women's section, that will satisfy some and horrify others; we need a compromise that does not leave our Haredi sisters and brothers out in the cold and also does not leave any of the rest of us out in the cold.

Manna was not a burden on the Israelites because it lacked diversity of flavor. Rather, manna was a burden because the Israelites lacked imagination. We need to imagine the manna of olam habah where adult flavors and the flavors for nursing mothers are side by side. The nursing mothers of our people are no longer the egalitarians and Women of the Wall; they are our mehitza adhering sisters and brothers of the Modern and Open Orthodox movements. If we abandon them, then we are in danger of being in collusion with those religious leaders who have abandoned us when fulfilling their governance roles in the modern State of Israel.

The government's description of the Kotel compromise is described in [Hebrew here](#), and in [English here](#).