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Rabbis for Religious Freedom & Equality in Israel



“The State of Israel... will guarantee freedom of religion and conscience...”
Israel's Declaration of Independence (May 1948)

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Editorial

February 29, 2016

Dear Friends

[The Chief Rabbinate under Rabbi David Lau has instructed all the public mikvahs in Israel to not permit any conversions from any movement \[link in Hebrew\]](#), and in that manner to prevent Reform conversions to Judaism. This in the aftermath of the Israeli Supreme Court decision two weeks ago permitting conversions in public mikvahs by all of the streams equally. The Orthodox would, under Rabbi Lau's request, continue to have access to private mikvahs, to which Reform Jews have no access.

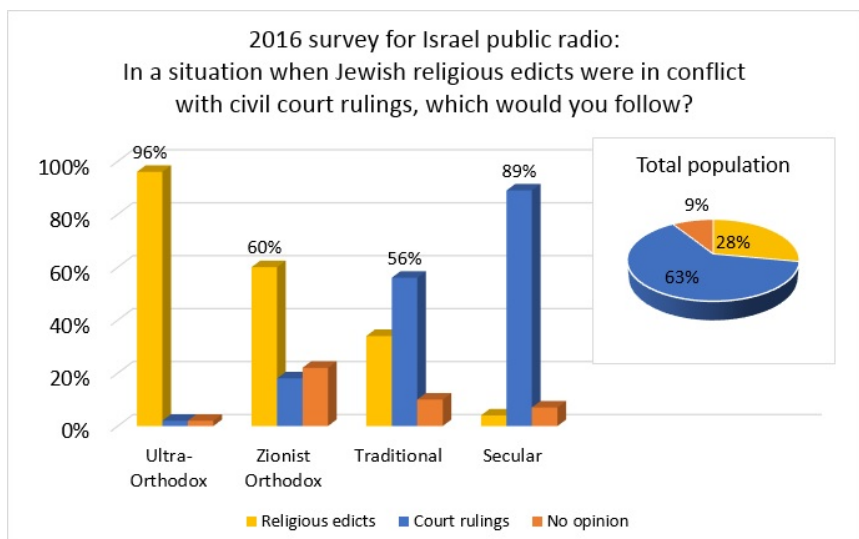
The attacks on Reform Judaism and Liberal Judaism in general are heating up in the aftermath of the Kotel decision by the Israeli government, the mikvah decision by the

Discuss this and other issues with fellow RRFEI members in the network's new Facebook group by clicking [HERE!](#)



Public opinion poll: only 63% of Israelis would abide by civil court rulings over religious edicts

"In a situation when Jewish religious edicts were in conflict with civil court rulings, which would you follow?"

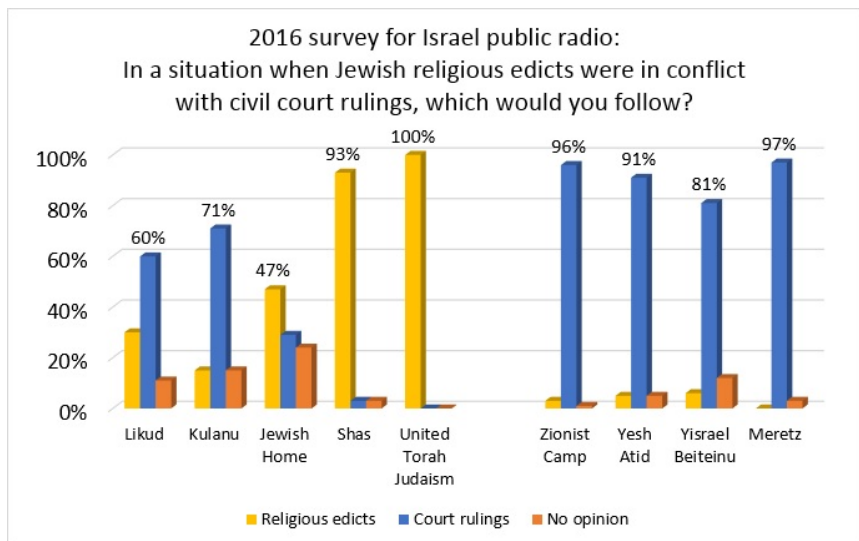


[click for full size graph](#)

Supreme Court, and the CCAR convention just held in Israel, which organized a liberal prayer service at the Southern Wall involving hundreds of participants.

In Dr. Alexander Guttman's book [The Struggle over Reform in Rabbinic Literature](#) he states that the early debates between the Reformers and the Orthodox ultimately had little effect, and when they figured that out, the leaders stopped arguing and proceeded to work within their own movements. He also stated that the common people had little interest in the arguments, and continued to intermingle with one another. Why have the disputes started up again? Obviously, the principle question is who controls the religious lives of Jews. It's not primarily theological: everyone may continue to hold their own theology privately and may continue his/her own practice. The question is: who controls the religious life of the Jewish people?

While there have been other epochs in Jewish history in which specific issues rose to the fore, only now has this fight occurred in the first Jewish State in 2 millennia. The flash points of conflict, the use of



[click for full size graph](#)

Two weeks ago, [the RRFEI bulletin \[link\]](#) included an analysis of the Supreme Court landmark ruling on access for non-Orthodox converts to public mikva'ot, demonstrating that there is a lot more to this than first met the media's eyes. We reported on the immediate, horrific backlash from ultra-Orthodox circles. **The three religious parties (namely the Zionist Orthodox Jewish Home and the two ultra-Orthodox parties) have joined forces in submitting a legislative proposal that would undo the Supreme Court ruling.** This is their attempt to grant absolute control of the publicly funded mikva'ot to the Chief Rabbinate.

As [Hiddush has noted \[link\]](#), this is yet another case of Dr. Jekyll / Mr. Hyde syndrome, exemplifying the Jewish Home party's head & **Minister of Diaspora Affairs Naftali Bennett's split personality.** He goes out of his way to appear inclusive, tolerant and pluralistic outside of Israel, to you, our friends and colleagues in North America; but **he has no problem swerving 180 degrees when it comes to our non-Orthodox colleagues, converts and movements in Israel.**

An important, further development occurred in the last few days, as [the Chief Rabbinate publicly turned to Israel's religious councils that operate the public mikva'ot \[link in Hebrew\]](#), instructing them not to abide by the Supreme Court ruling. What was self-evident to the Supreme Court, [as Hiddush indicated in its analysis \[link\]](#), namely: **"the rabbinate is not authorized to establish a discriminatory policy"** is not only not self-evident to the Chief Rabbinate (a state organ established by civil law and subject to the rule of law!), but **it openly and rebelliously flaunts this!** We have repeatedly suggested that the battle over religious freedom and equality is not merely a battle over religious diversity, but is **-at the core- a battle**

mikvahs or the Kotel, are not as important as the right of Jews to control our own religious lives. This struggle involves the destiny of all Jews, even though they may be unaware it's occurring. How ironic that the principle battle for the right of Jews to control their religious lives is taking place in Israel. But it's our destiny as rabbis to play a critical role in that existential battle on behalf of all of our people. Jews must be allowed the right to religious self-determination.

Please post your comments, or send them to: organizers@rfeif.org

Also, see our FB group: [\[link\]](#), and our website: www.rfeif.org.

Kol tuv,

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Resources

- [2016 Supreme Court ruling on mikva'ot](#)
- [Western Wall compromise agreement](#)
- [Chief Rabbi Lau attacks Bennett over pluralism](#)
- [J-REC / AJC Mission to Israel](#)
- [Giyur K'halacha](#)

over the rule of law and democracy. The Chief Rabbinate's gall is but another compelling demonstration of the serious problem we face.

We would like to share with you another dimension of that very challenge; it so happens that this week the Israeli public radio commissioned a **poll, which included the question "In a situation when Jewish religious edicts were in conflict with civil court rulings, which would you follow?"** Looking at these graphs (above), we get a quantitative perspective of the extent of the challenge. **While the overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews respect the law, the ultra-Orthodox and most of the Zionist Orthodox indicate clearly that they would view the civil court's rulings as merely advisory,** not to be adhered to, in the case of such a clash. Obviously there would be instances in which all of us would maintain such a position. For instance, if, under unimaginable circumstances, the court ordered the public to violate the Sabbath or eat treif... But these are NOT the questions that come before the judicial bench. The mikva'ot case (as an example) involves state funded public mikva'ot, and their use by non-Orthodox converts does not make them impure, regardless of whether the Rabbinate likes it.

Pashkvil published last week in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods

"The Reform shall shatter us to splinters and split us into factions"

- [Acts of violence](#)
- [Kashrut regulations for hotels and event halls](#)

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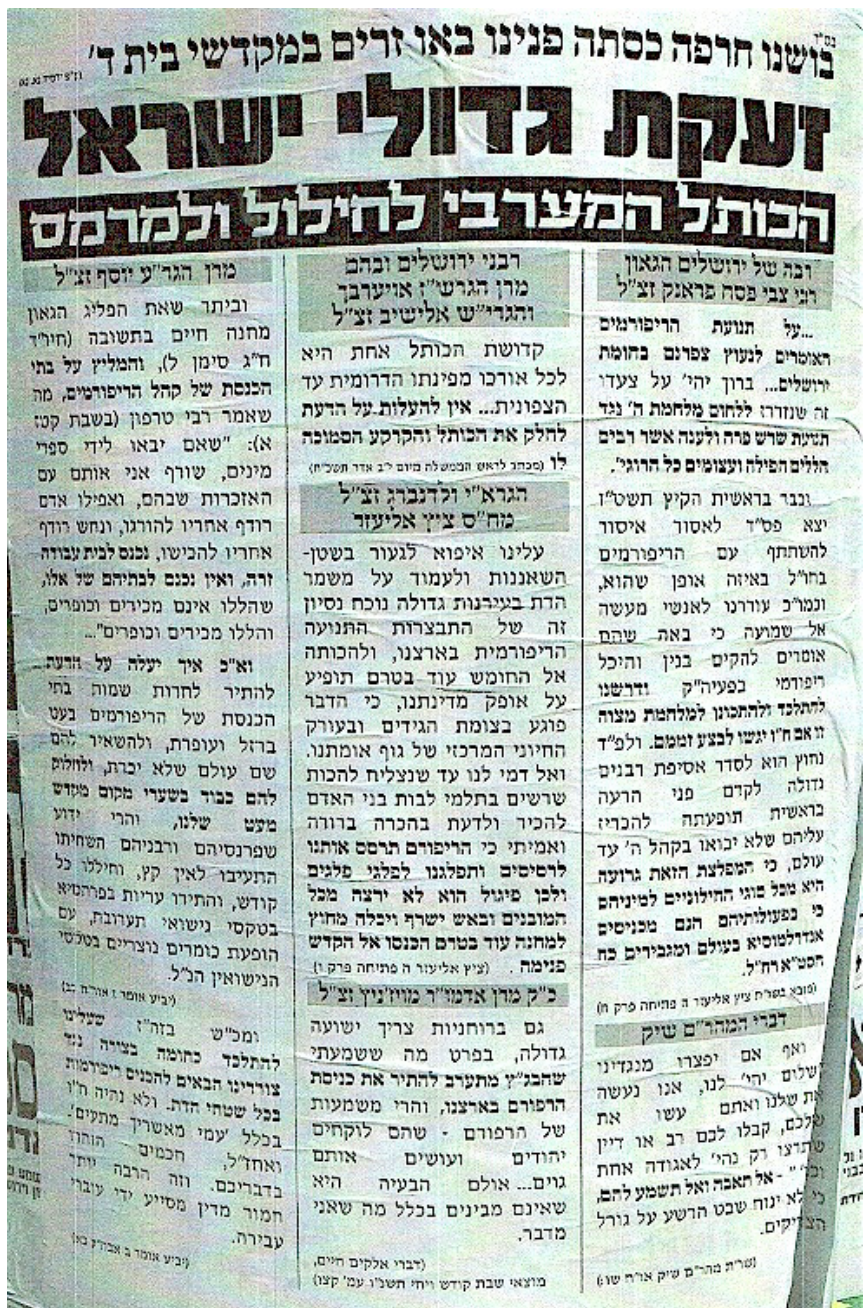
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[click for full size pashkvil](#)

Last week, more than 500 posters were put up in Israel in the neighborhood of Meah Shearim and other ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods that include the following quotes:

"We are shamed. Disgrace has covered our faces. Strangers have come into My Temple, Beit Adonai. The cry of the great rabbis of our time is that the Western Wall is to be desecrated and trampled upon." - header of this *pashkvil*

"It is inconceivable to allow the etching of Reform synagogue names in iron pen and letters of lead for them to receive Shem Olam that can never be erased. We shall not honor them within the gates of our Temple." - *Yabia Omer*, responsa by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (1920-2013)

"We must unite as an un-breachable wall against our arch enemies that want to enter the Reforms into all areas of religion." - *Yabia Omer*, responsa by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (1920-2013)

"The holiness of the wall extends its whole length, from its most southern corner to its most northern corner. It is inconceivable to divide the Kotel or the area adjacent to it."
- *letter to the Prime Minister*, from the Chief Rabbis of Jerusalem

"The Reform shall shatter us to splinters and split us into factions. An abomination, unwanted by all, it shall be burnt in fire and consumed outside our camp and not enter the Holiness." - *Tzitz Eliezer*, Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg (1915-2006)

"We need salvation in spirituality, especially now that the supreme court has intervened to allow the Reform into our land, and their essence is to take Jews and make them Goyim." - *Vizhnitzer Rebbe*, Rabbi Moshe Yehoshua Hager (1916-2012)

"The Reform movement intends to sink its claws in the Wall of Jerusalem...We must hurry and fight the Lord's battle against this hemlock and wormwood movement that has brought the fall of many and taken a huge, deathly toll." - *Tzitz Eliezer*, Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg (1915-2006) quoting former Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem Tzvi Pesach Frank (1873-1961)

"This monster is worse than all the secular people we know. In their actions they bring chaos into the world and increase the power of Satan, God forbid..." - *Tzitz Eliezer*, Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg (1915-2006) quoting former Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem Tzvi Pesach Frank (1873-1961)

Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel represents a broad spectrum of Jewish belief and practice, and champions the values of religious freedom and equality fundamental to World Jewry, in partnership with Hiddush for the realization of these principles in Israel and the Diaspora.

Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel

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