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Israel's Declaration of Independence (May 1948)

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April 4, 2016

Dear Friends

It's reported by Leonard Baker that Mahatma Gandhi advised Rabbi Leo Baeck around 1938 that "All of the Jews of Germany at a given moment should commit suicide." Gandhi thought the collective action would shock the conscience of the world. Gandhi clearly did not understand the Jewish nature. Baeck himself once commented that Judaism is the most life-affirming religion among world religions. With the possible exception of Masada, suicide is not the way Jews protest.

We may be entirely life affirming, as Baeck suggested, but we can be vicious with our opponents. It happened in the battles between the Hasidim and the Mitnagdim; it happened in the disputes between the Reformers and the

RECOMMENDED LINKS

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- [\[Click for:\] Religious equality in Israel is strategic and moral necessity](#) by Sue Fishkoff, Jewish News Weekly
- [\[Click for:\] Haredim attack and threaten: "We shall pass a law to circumvent The Supreme Court's ruling on conversions" \(Heb.\)](#) by Yishai Cohen, Kikar HaShabbat



Standing Up to Hate

By Rabbi Pamela Frydman, RRFEI Chairwoman

Sinat hinam, free flowing hatred between different branches of Judaism is not new, but it is once again virulent. As we watch the cauldron of intra-Jewish hatred boil over in the Israeli government and the Haredi and Orthodox Zionist establishments, many of us are at a loss for how to proceed toward Jewish unity. Perhaps it is time for the leaders of the major non-Orthodox movements to take the helm in *Klal Yisrael* and call for unity. Perhaps it is time for non-Orthodox leaders to declare that there is more than one valid form of Judaism and that Orthodox and Haredi



traditionalists; and it is occurring again in Israel in the renewed fight over modernity and religious inclusion in Israel.

But, one might claim, the closer we get to making a difference, to threatening the establishment, the fiercer the fight will become.

I have little doubt that ultimately Israel will become an inclusive state among Jews. But when, and at what cost to North American and Israeli Jewry? The recent rhetoric over women's status, the Kotel, gerut and mikvahs clearly demonstrates that the Haredi powers feel threatened by current events, most particularly at the Supreme Court. Now's the time for action, but how to proceed is the real question.

Hiddush Chairperson, Rabbi Pam Frydman, suggests, in this week's article, that we demonstrate the attitude we wish to receive through our own actions. It's a different approach, so please let us know what you think.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts. Please send your comments to:

organizers@rfeif.org

You may also find our FB group at: [\[link\]](#), and our website: www.rfeif.org.

Kol tuv,

Judaism are just as valid as non-Orthodox Judaism.

I have no doubt that this will cause our Orthodox and Haredi colleagues to laugh at us and mock us, but they are already mocking us and worse.

So why do this? I recommend doing this because it will address the sinat hinam in our own hearts and among our own non-Orthodox constituents and the unaffiliated. Look at the gender issue for example. Non-Orthodox women participate in "women only" Rosh Hodesh, sisterhood, Hadassah and secular activities. Yet many of them refuse to attend a worship service where women and men sit separately. Similarly, non-Orthodox men participate in "men's only" activities sponsored by men's clubs, brotherhoods, and secular organizations, yet they insist on sitting with their wife, mother or daughter during worship. I am not suggesting we give up egalitarian Judaism. Rather, I suggest that we focus on the empowerment of women as an issue that is separate from where we sit during worship and how we view the reasons for where we sit.

Gender based seating is just an example; we could accomplish the same goal by thoughtfully addressing kashrut, Shabbat or other forms of Jewish practice.

I do not suggest that our leaders call for unity while ignoring attacks on themselves and their movements. I do suggest, however, that our leaders take the lead in calling for unity while defending themselves, their colleagues and their movements.

I once asked a Haredi rabbi who works closely with non-Orthodox rabbis, "why do you work with us?" He said, "raising the water level helps to float all boats." The more Jews affiliate and practice at some level or at any level, the more potential for Yiddishkeit to flourish. I like his answer because it is honest, it is not sugar coated, and the truth is that we need each other, and we should be supporting each other, regardless of whether we like each other or agree with each other.

My interest in Jewish unity increased after I experienced sinat hinam at the Kotel in 2010. I stood outside Kotel

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security holding Women of the Wall's Torah scroll, because the security guards would not let us bring in our Torah for fear that we would read from it. So I held the Torah outside security while Women of the Wall and our male supporters prayed on either side of the mehitzta. As I clutched the Torah, Orthodox and Haredi men on their way to and from the Kotel regaled me with venomous shouts of "Reform!" "Arab!" and "Whore!" Some even said that people like me caused the Holocaust.

When Women of the Wall and their male supporters finished Hallel, we all walked together to Robinson's Arch where we read from the Torah and prayed musaf. After the service, a male colleague told me that while the men were praying in the Kotel Plaza, a large group of Orthodox and Haredi men suddenly, and without warning, body-pressed their full weight against our male supporters, crushing them against the mehitzta. My heart ached from their abuse and mine, and I felt my heart fill with sinat hinam.

It took a great deal of effort to let go of the hatred that filled my heart that morning at Robinson's Arch, but I finally did. I think it is important to view this kind of hatred as prejudice and to work to overcome it when it fills us.

Perhaps it is time for Masorti / Conservative and Progressive / Reform Jewish leaders to rise above the stench of hatred that is being lobbed on them and to call for Jewish unity as though they had the power to achieve it. Rather than waiting for Haredi and Orthodox Zionist leaders and Knesset Members in Israel to overcome their religious insanity, perhaps it is time for our leaders in the non-Orthodox movements to take the lead and show the world what Jewish religious sanity actually looks like.

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

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4/7/2016

Bulletin: 'Standing Up to Hate' by Pamela Frydman

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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