



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

June 14, 2016

“I know how hard it was for the Tzohar rabbis to agree to this compromise,” said attorney Yizhar Hess, director of the Conservative Masorati movement. “The negotiation was indeed exhausting, punctilious and inglorious, but the agreed-on solution would not have come into the world if not for the huge wave of public condemnation.”

Dear Friends,

We Jews study. It's a unique part of our religious culture. Ketubot 40b famously comments, "Talmud mavi liday ma'aseh." Why would Jews not study together? And who gets to choose?

We all know that Yoma 9b teaches that the Second Temple was destroyed



PLEASE HELP US SERVE YOU: Click [HERE](#) for an urgent question regarding holding a pre-High Holy Day RRFEI webinar on “Addressing the Challenge of Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel.”

‘Post-denominational’ Orthodoxy gains new leadership in historic ordination

The RRFEI Perspective



A Jerusalem ceremony for 21 male and female students of modern Orthodox Rabbi Daniel Landes celebrates their alt-neu role in halacha while pushing the egalitarian envelope

- Amanda Borschel-Dan, Times of Israel
[\[link to full TOI article\]](#)

Rabbi Daniel Landes' semikhah ceremony last week in Jerusalem was nothing less than history in the making, and a shot of positive infusion in an otherwise frustrating religious

because of *sinat hinam*, and that *sinat hinam* is equal to the big 3 sins: murder, idolatry and sexual misconduct. But is exclusion of Jews from study *sinah*?

Former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in his recent blockbuster book, Not in God's Name, adduces that all evil comes from dualism, classifying human beings as "other," and then excluding them as "less than." Yet, Rabbi Sacks would not participate in the Limmud study sessions in Britain because he would not recognize liberal Jews. Yet, his successor, Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis does.

It's a curious thing that the House of Hillel and the House of Shamai would associate and even permitted marriage among their children, but we have come to such a state that Jews must decide who is ideologically pure enough to teach Torah, among Jews who observe mitzvot!

Clearly the people of Israel will need to decide this one, and I predict it will be determined by where they choose to attend. The phenomenon of Tikkun Leil Shavuot has become hugely popular, and people will choose to attend according to their own criteria over time. So we witness the emergence, once again, from the grass

scene.

This is yet another sign of Orthodox feminism's rise in Israel. World Jewry's two largest communities (in North America and Israel) are both moving forward in this regard, each supporting and contributing to the initiatives on the other side of the ocean.

RRFEI and Hiddush have highlighted historic battles over the role of women and women's rights in Jewish society, such as the current battle over public mikva'ot in Israel. The Court and the headlines have captured the issue of non-Orthodox converts using these ritual baths, but no less dramatic is the issue of Orthodox women using the mikva'ot, subjected to the Chief Rabbinate's coercive, narrow interpretation of Halakha. This refers, only in part, to unmarried Modern Orthodox women who desire to immerse themselves ritually, but are refused entry by the mikva attendants, irrespective of state law.

Rabbi Landes' semikhah ceremony hinted at the much larger picture of progress taking place in the Orthodox and Halakhic world, which is all encouraging. There have been small scale ordinations of women by progressive Orthodox rabbinic scholars, but the scale of this co-ed ordination was especially notable. Some 500 guests were in attendance, including key scholarly and activist figures in the Modern Orthodox community.

This event was also yet another significant indication of the demise of yesteryear's denominational dividing lines, for Rabbi Landes' religious approach represents a commitment to halakha, rather than an organizational or sectarian label. The musmakhim may not all identify as Orthodox, as he does, but they are all committed to living their lives according to Halakha and to serious Torah study and scholarship. This was a celebration of a much wider Halakhic framework than currently accepted under the formal label of "Orthodoxy," and we should consider this in the context of numerous challenges faced by Open Orthodoxy in the USA, which identifies as "Orthodox," but is clearly rejected by other mainstream North American Orthodox institutions, including the OU and the RCA.

It feels - *both in Israel and in the USA* - that Rabbi Landes' approach is the way of the future. At this point, the djinni will not be pushed back into the bottle!

roots, a religious expression that is not just indigenous to Israel, but, in its modernity and attractiveness could bring together *amcha* for the core mitzvah, unique to Jews, of the study of sacred texts among the masses.

We live in exciting times.

Please visit us on our FB group [\[link\]](#), or send messages to: organizers@rrfei.org.

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Contact us

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Not yet a member?

Tikkun Leil Shavuot in Israel

A story of two cities: Jerusalem & Tel Aviv

While not new, and not revolutionary, there is a refreshing and exciting unfolding tradition of *tikunei leil shavuot*, which take Jewish tradition light years beyond the limited rituals and liturgy into all-night Torah studies, and an experience of Torah in its widest sense.



The many *tikunim* represent a growing pluralistic tradition. In Jerusalem, the list of more than 35 *tikunim* was published and promoted under the same umbrella -

<http://www.rashut.org.il/>. Some *tikunim* were strictly Orthodox, and others were Reform, Conservative, Renewal, trans-denominational, feminist, etc... They covered a wide gamut of topics ranging from the human genome in science and its impact on Jewish law, presented by Rabbi Prof. Avraham Steinberg at the Jerusalem great synagogue to an Acappella performance of the Book of Psalms at the Tower of David.

The story in Tel Aviv was unfortunately less encouraging, for the Tzohar rabbinical organization collaborated with the progressive cultural center Tzavta in organizing a *tikun*, and had no problem sponsoring sessions featuring secular scholars and Orthodox rabbis (like last year), but vehemently opposed the inclusion of non-Orthodox rabbis in their Shavuot programming. This led to a problematic compromise, which we see all too often - namely, the

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adoption of the "separate but equal" policy, and the implementation of two parallel tracks for Shavuot night: One cosponsored by Tzavta and Tzohar, and the other a pluralistic track (Reform, Conservative, etc.).

This "compromise" is reminiscent of the mikva'ot compromise discussed this week at the Knesset, which would exclude non-Orthodox converts from Israel's public mikva'ot (in spite of the Supreme Court ruling to the contrary) by coopting the Jewish Agency to build non-governmental mikva'ot for their use. Ironically, converts of the private Orthodox *Giyur keHalakha* program also face obstacles from the established Rabbinate, and would likely also make use of these private mikva'ot. The Kotel compromise was also based upon the principle of "separate but equal," as the area designated for non-Orthodox prayer services is Robinson's Arch - an area that has never been under the Orthodox establishment's control.

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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