



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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August 29, 2016
25 Av, 5776

Dear Friends,

You'll read articles this week about the decline in the marriage rate in Israel, Israel's investment in college students in Diaspora through 2 Orthodox organizations plus Hillel, and Israel's approach to Jewish birkinis. While the beach article indicates an acceptance in Israel's public life of a variety of approaches to Jewish beliefs, Naftali Bennett is attempting to spread Israel's exclusionary recognition of Orthodox Judaism to the Diaspora. The attempt to legitimize only one form of Judaism in the Diaspora communities disregards not only the communal structures that vitalize North American Jewry, but attempt to undermine those structures through funding a single approach. According to the Ministry to the Diaspora Orthodox practice

Below, please find Hiddush's analysis: Number of unmarried couples living together in Israel up by 29%

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Jewish Identity Plan Raises Ire of non-Orthodox Jews in U.S.

Or Kashti, *eJewish Philanthropy*, Aug. 19, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Anger sparked by Israel's decision to fund mainly Orthodox organizations in new project to 'strengthening Jewish identity and the connection with Israel' among university students around world.



Leaders of the Reform and Conservative Jewish movements in North America are up in arms at Israel's decision to task mainly Orthodox organizations with "strengthening Jewish identity and the connection with Israel" among university students around the world.

The two movements, as well as another major United States Jewish organization, apparently were not invited to present their activities on campuses or to submit their candidacies for the project.

determines the standard of Jewish practice not only in Israel but in the Diaspora as well.

Even as the disgust in Israel with the Chief Rabbinate grows and couples walk away from registering marriages rather than subject themselves to the rabbanut, the Israeli government doubles down and attempts to export the monopolistic hold of Orthodoxy ordained by Israel's incumbent government and supported by Israeli tax dollars. Clearly the attempt to export Israel's version of Judaism to North America is not only an affront, but in the long run, if it continues, an assault on our communities and modern theologies. The indignation expressed in response is both real and appropriate, and Rabbi Lau's pronouncement that were he in charge there would be 45 million Jews in the U.S. is quite simply an insult and as presumptuous as excluding Rabbi Lookstein's conversions from legitimacy k'halakhah.

We hope to hear from you, as we all approach the Yamim Noraim and search for topics appropriate for the spiritual renewal of *Amcha* for another year. We hope we are helping you consider issues of Jewish life both domestically and internationally, and you'll speak about Israel to your people this year to

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Reform Movement in North America, said the decision “continues the Orthodox monopoly in Israel and extends it to the Diaspora. This is unacceptable to the large majority of Jews here. We don't like being told how to strengthen our Jewish identity.”

The Diaspora Affairs Ministry said at the beginning of this week that it had launched the first stage of a comprehensive project to strengthen the ties between Israel and Jews living abroad. The program, to be introduced in hundreds of universities worldwide this year, will cost an estimated 250 million shekels (\$65.6 million), one-third of which – approximately 80 million shekels – will be paid out of the state budget, with the rest coming from Jewish groups and philanthropists.

The ministry chose Hillel, Chabad and Olami to operate the program. The latter two are ultra-Orthodox organizations identified with the political right in Israel.

...

In Israel, women-only beach days allow the religious to relax

Michele Chabin, *Religion News Service*, Aug. 24, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

TEL AVIV, Israel (RNS) It was Sunday — women's-only day — at the so-called religious beach in this Israeli city on the Mediterranean, and several hundred women and girls sat on the sand or frolicked in the gentle waves with an abandon they rarely exhibit elsewhere.



While some European beaches are banning women dressed in “burkinis” and other modest swimwear, and Americans are challenging women's-only swimming hours at public pools, this Israeli beach has long been a haven for women whose strict religious beliefs, community norms or fears of sexual

help them gain a more complete understanding of the current state of Israel and the homeland of all the Jewish people.

We'd love to hear your response in [our FB group](#), Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel, or at organizers@rrfei.org.

B'yedidut,

Mark

Rabbi Mark H. Levin
RRFEI Editor in Chief

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harassment, among other reasons, make swimming or sunbathing alongside men undesirable, even impossible.

“Were it not for the religious beach I couldn’t go to the beach,” said Molly, a young Orthodox woman who asked that her last name and photograph not be published because her religious beliefs require modesty.

“I can be myself here,” Molly said solemnly, perched on a piece of municipal exercise equipment as she looked out at the sea.

Established decades ago, Tel Aviv’s religious beach is one of about a dozen gender-segregated beaches sprinkled around Israel. Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays are designated for women only, with alternate days for men.

And many Israeli pools offer a few hours of separate male and female swimming.

Enshrined into law decades ago by ultra-Orthodox Jewish lawmakers...

...

Ramban synagogue in south Jerusalem appoints a woman to serve as spiritual leader

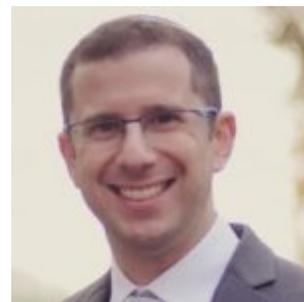
Jeremy Sharon, *The Jerusalem Post*, Aug. 22, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Rabbanit Carmit Feintuch will be the first female communal leader in a synagogue in Israel.

In a landmark step for an Orthodox synagogue in Israel, the prominent religious-Zionist Ramban synagogue in south Jerusalem has appointed a woman to serve as a spiritual leader alongside the head of the community Rabbi Benny Lau.

Carmit Feintuch, a teacher and educator at the Migdal Oz seminary in Gush Etzion since 2008, was unanimously approved by committee two weeks ago after a lengthy process and will bear the title of “rabbanit.”



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email: organizers@rrfei.org

Phone (US): [646-334-5636](tel:646-334-5636)

Phone (Isr): [054-779-1179](tel:054-779-1179)

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Although women have been increasingly involved in communal Jewish life in the Modern Orthodox and religious-Zionist world in recent years, it is thought that Feintuch will be the first female communal leader in a synagogue in Israel.

Last year, The Jerusalem Post reported on the appointment of Dr. Jennie Rosenfeld, the first communal spiritual leader in the religious-Zionist community in Israel who was appointed by the chief rabbi of Efrat Rabbi Shlomo Riskin to serve the residents of the entire town.

Speaking to the Post, Lau said that he was very excited for Feintuch to start work who, he said, would enrich Ramban's communal life and help the synagogue grow. "All congregations must, like a tree, renew themselves, grow and develop," the rabbi said. "Carmit is going to help our community grow bigger, sweeter and more beautiful fruit and this is why we have made this appointment."

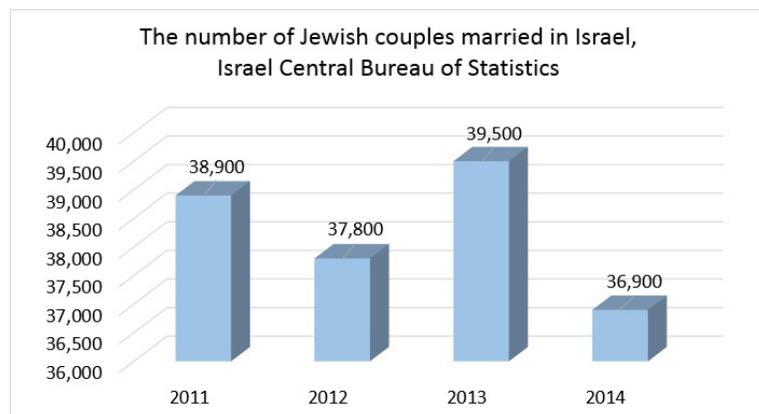
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The number of unmarried couples living together in Israel is up by 29%

Hiddush analysis, Aug. 28, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Over the course of two years, the number of unmarried couples living together in Israel increased dramatically by 28%, or nearly 20,000 couples. During this same period, the number of Jewish couples who got married in Israel fell by 6.5%. These are the findings of Hiddush's analysis of Central Bureau of Statistics data.



Israel's official, state empowered religious establishment arouses disgust among Jewish Israeli couples considering marriage. This is due to the needless tribulations many couples experience at the hands of the Rabbinate on their paths to marriage, and due to their fear of being required to conduct their divorces via the State rabbinical courts. Israel's Chief Rabbinate and rabbinical courts are Judaism's greatest enemy.

The irony is that the Chief Rabbinate is directly responsible for eroding the institution of family in Israel. Clearly, the Rabbinate's monopoly must be dissolved, as per the wishes of the majority of the Israeli public, which wants freedom of choice in marriage. Civil marriage must be instituted in Israel, and the weddings of all Jewish streams must be recognized by the State.

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

Website: WWW.RRFEI.ORG | Email: organizers@rfe.org | Tel. [US] [646-334-5636](tel:646-334-5636); [Israel] [054-779-1179](tel:054-779-1179)

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