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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

August 9, 2016  
5 Av, 5776

Dear Friends,

When I was preparing to get married, my father disowned me. His reasons would have made a lot of sense had I been a son, but I was a daughter and he disowned me anyway. The issue for my dad z”l was that he and all his ancestors back to Aharon HaKohen were Kohanim – Priests – at least as far as we know. Had I been a son, I would have been a Kohen on the merit of my father’s Kohanut. Being a daughter, I am a Bat Kohen. I married a man who was previously divorced. In 1984, according to halacha, it was forbidden for a Kohen to marry a divorced woman. Today it is also forbidden, but in the 1990s, the Conservative Movement issued a responsa determining that it is allowed by Conservative standards for a Kohen to marry a divorced woman.

See articles below by  
Rabbis John Rosove and Uri Regev

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### ‘A worthy tribe’ by Yizhar Hess, Executive Director and CEO of the Conservative Judaism movement in Israel

The Jerusalem Post, June 7, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Leading Israelis, quite properly, have been paying increased attention to recognizing the importance of Mizrahi (Sephardi) music, poetry, culture and overall contributions to Jewish life. Both the Education Ministry and Culture and



Sports Ministry have created new committees and prizes to stress the significances of Mizrahi contributions to all aspects of Israeli life, and to Jewish life throughout the world.

All of this is wonderful – and surely deserved. But think for a moment about another community, ironically generally Ashkenazi, that has also for years been subject to neglect and even scorn. I refer to American Jews, half the Jewish population of the world.

American society is pulsating with Jewish life, culture and scholarship.

My father and I reconciled in accordance with Talmudic principles, but the upshot for me is that he held me to a higher standard than necessary because I was a rabbinic student at the time I became engaged. How can I fault my father for honoring me as a rabbinic student by holding me to the same standard to which he would have held me had I been a man? I don't fault him for that, but I agonize over how it felt to be disowned. It was unspeakably painful, and while I did not break off the engagement to please him, my heart shattered when he severed his bond with me.

Yizhar Hess of the Masorti Movement has raised equally painful issues facing our entire generation. The Modern State of Israel must once again become as important and central to the Jews of the Diaspora as it was at the time of its founding. That will only happen, however, when the Jewish people living in the State of Israel begin to partner with those living in the Diaspora, rather than thwarting Diaspora Jewry just because they can.

When my dad disowned me, my life changed forever. I came to understand what it means to follow my heart while my heart was completely shattered. When Israeli officials disown Diaspora Jews who are part of the

Yet Israeli government ministers, with impunity, refer to large numbers of American Jews as clowns or dogs. And what happens then (if anything)? Perhaps an exceedingly gentle slap on the wrist. Can you imagine what would happen if the same government officials made the same comments about Mizrahi Jews? Are American Jews, largely Conservative and Reform and historically so supportive of the State of Israel, the only ones upon whom it is permitted for Israeli officials to heap abuse and disdain? What a wonderful Jewish history there is in America. Jews first arrived in America after the expulsion from Spain, but the largest movement occurred between 1880 to 1935. Two million Jews (yes, two million) emigrated from Europe to the US. That is the largest wave of immigration in Jewish history. For the sake of comparison, in exactly the same years, the first to fifth aliyot (waves of immigration based on the Zionist ideal) arrived in Palestine; altogether, they numbered 300,000 (and a considerable number of them went back to their land of origin). Our Israeli education system, quite rightly, taught us about the individual characteristics of each and every one of these five waves of immigration. That is how these mass movements became legendary.

...

## **'An open letter to Natan Sharansky' by Uri Regev, Executive Director and CEO of Hiddush**

**The Jerusalem Post, July 16, 2016**

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Dear Natan,

You will forever be remembered as a valiant warrior for freedom, and now as head of the Jewish Agency for Israel, you have the opportunity to take up the mantle of bold leadership in the battle for religious freedom, Jewish diversity and equality, whose time is long overdue.

Last week, you spoke before hundreds demonstrating for full recognition of Rabbi Haskel Lookstein's conversions. To the assembled crowd (which I was part of) you said, "At a time



Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal, Liberal and Progressive Movements, we in the Diaspora are forced to follow our hearts while our hearts are completely shattered. The sages tell us Kol Yisrael areyvim zeh bazeh. (Shevuot 39a) Every Jew is responsible for every other Jew. Haredi and Orthodox Zionists would do well to remember that their future is in our hands as much as our future is in theirs.

B'yedidut,

Pam

Rabbi Pamela Frydman  
RRFEI Chair

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## Resources

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when... our enemies attempt to sever the ties between young Jews and the Jewish state...the Jewish Agency fights to strengthen Israel's stature among world Jewry, and we protest this unacceptable blow to the vital bond between Israel and Diaspora Jewry....” In an interview you clarified that the Chief Rabbinate should accept all Orthodox conversions performed by rabbis ordained at recognized Orthodox seminaries.

You praised the rabbinate for “connecting the Jewish state with Judaism.” Sadly, you are wrong, for the monopolistic and coercive rabbinate is alienating Israeli Jews from Judaism.

It is no surprise that the Rabbinic Court of Appeal refused to recognize Rabbi Lookstein's conversions in spite of your pleading.

...

As head of the Jewish Agency, doesn't non-Orthodox Judaism deserve that you urge the State of Israel, if not the rabbinate, to do so? For Israel's sake and for the relationship between the Jewish state and the Diaspora, these converts must be able to be fully absorbed into Israeli society! How can they, if they are not allowed to marry in Israel? As the state handed total control over marriage of Jews in Israel to the Chief Rabbinate, which does not recognize them as Jews, none of them can legally marry here. Neither can some 350,000 Israeli citizens from the former Soviet Union, born to Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers. Don't they deserve that you, as head of the Jewish Agency, demand that Israel grant them the right to family, and not subjugate them to the anachronistic rabbinic establishment that refuses to accept even Rabbi Lookstein's legitimacy? Even with your goodwill, the Agency's funding and the handful of lenient Orthodox rabbis willing to defy the rabbinate's intransigence, few will undertake Orthodox conversions.

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**'Reform, Conservative Leaders to Netanyahu: Incitement Against Us Could Lead to Bloodshed – Haaretz' by John Rosove, National Chair of ARZA**

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## The LA Jewish Journal, July 12, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Eight months ago, following two years of intense negotiations between representatives of the Reform and Conservative movements, the North American Jewish Federations, Women of the Wall, and the Ultra-Orthodox Chief Rabbi of the Wall, an agreement was reached to create an independent egalitarian prayer space in the Southern Kotel Plaza.



The agreement stipulated that this plaza would be designed by a leading world architect and would be equivalent in size to the traditional Northern Kotel Plaza. The liberal streams and Women of the Wall would control and oversee how prayer services would be conducted without interference from the Ultra-Orthodox or Chief Rabbi of the Wall. A common entrance to the plaza would be shared by all worshipers with equal sight lines to the Northern and Southern Plazas.

Right-wing ultra-Orthodox extremist rabbis and their communities have risen up in protest using incendiary rhetoric and threats.

Prime Minister Netanyahu, though stating that the entirety of the Jewish people must feel “at home” in Israel and at our holy sites, has back-pedaled and sought to reopen negotiations that would effectively kill the original agreement. Our leadership has told him that a deal is a deal and that any change now is unacceptable.

The Prime Minister is fearful of losing the ultra-Orthodox parties in his government and being forced either to form a new government or to call new elections. There are times, and this is one of those times, that the best interests of the Jewish people are more important than cow-towing to an extremist minority.

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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.

8/10/2016

Bulletin: Israeli & Diaspora Jews must be partners

Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel

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