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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 15, 2016  
10 Av, 5776

Dear Friends,

Journalist Dennis Mitzner writes in [his recent Tech Crunch article](#):

*“We now find ourselves at a critical junction: If the education minister will truly work to incentivize institutions that are interested in teaching the core curriculum, and help to train teachers and provide proper books in cooperation with interested parents, I think we will see a gradual integration of English, math, science and other core subjects into even the most conservative Haredi institutions,” said Malach.*

We all have watched the constant debates in Israeli politics this spring and summer regarding the status of Liberal Judaism in Israel. Clearly the Rabbanut and their Knesset representatives and allies feel increasing pressure to include all Jewish religious

Friends, please click [HERE](#) to petition Mr. Natan Sharansky to advance religious & marriage freedom in Israel!

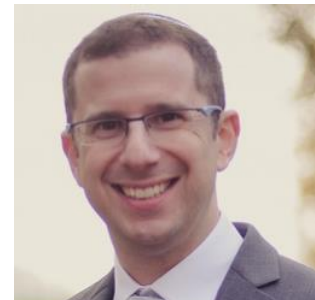


## Women to get greater representation on local religious councils says AG

Jeremy Sharon, *The Jerusalem Post*, August 9, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Attorney General Mandelblit has instructed the Religious Services Ministry to significantly increase the number of reserved seats on local religious councils for female representatives.



streams equally within Israeli society and government structures. The more pressure they feel, the stronger their backlash.

**Now is the time to act!**

Please [sign the petition](#) to the right by clicking on the picture and adding your request to the head of the Jewish Agency, Natan Sharansky. **Let us speak with a single voice to achieve marriage rights for all Israelis, regardless of the Jewish stream they prefer.**

Hiddush has long said that the unemployment rate among Haredi men and women is a strategic drain on the nation, both economically and militarily. The statistics in this article demonstrate the impact of policy changes that encourage Haredi employment, the rise of employment in the IT sector for both women and men, and the possible result of the reversal of the policy to include the core curriculum of science, math and English from the last government to this one.

The dramatic rise in Haredi employment over the last eight years, among both women and men, and not only in education but in a field that puts Israel on the cutting edge of world economies, may very possibly lead to social integration and familiarity with ideas of the modern

Religious councils run Jewish religious services including the municipal kashrut licensing system on behalf of the Chief Rabbinate; the local marriage registration bureau; mikvaot, or ritual baths; and administrative requirements for burial.

**According to statistics provided by the Hiddush religious pluralism lobbying group, there are 49 women serving on 40 of the total 132 religious councils in the country, representing just under 17 percent of all council members.**

However, 66% of the 132 councils do not have a functioning panel due to political deadlock on appointments, and are instead run by a council chairman appointed by the religious services minister, none of whom are women.

Critics of the way religious services are provided have argued that the manner in which representatives are elected to the religious councils is often not sufficiently representative of a city's population.

...

## In Israel, Let's Destroy Jewish Fundamentalism Before It Destroys Us

Rabbi Uri Regev, *The Forward*, August 15, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

This week we marked Tisha b'Av (the ninth of Av), a date commemorating a series of horrific events throughout Jewish history. According to rabbinic tradition, these spanned from the destruction of the first Temple in

Jerusalem in 587 BCE to the 1942 liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto. While one common thread binding these calamities is persecution by gentiles, the rabbis of old also turned inward for explanations. They were perceptive and bold in attributing responsibility to the Jewish community. Was their soul-searching merely an exercise in history, or should we draw contemporary lessons relating to these very days?

Rabbinic introspection left us with the following mindboggling statement in Tractate Bava Metzia 30b: "Jerusalem was destroyed because the rabbinic courts strictly applied din



world. All of these portend advancement for Hiddush's goal of a pluralistic Jewish State, if, in fact, the trends continue and are not stymied by the recent changes in the government coalition.

Such changes must be accompanied by greater representation for women not only on the religious counsels, but in other areas of religious functioning as well. The second attached article of the greater representation for women on religious counsels demonstrates a necessary advance due years of effort. The rise of such figures as Dr. Ruth Calderon demonstrates a pressure building among Israelis for a truly democratic interpretation of Jewish tradition. Perhaps it is not incumbent upon us to complete the task, but certainly seeing progress in our work must embolden our actions to build a just, democratic and Jewish State that represents all legitimate, modern Jewish religious aspirations. The advance in the core curriculum and employment must rank high as a priority to achieve our goals.

B'yedidut,

Mark

Rabbi Mark Levin  
RRFEI Editor in Chief

Torah (Jewish legal judgments) rather than allowances of lifnim mi-shurat ha-din (equity).” The Talmud acknowledged that the Divine Torah law, strictly applied, may cause destruction!

The other classic rabbinic explanation for the second Temple's destruction is *sinat hinam* (baseless hatred). The famous story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, often quoted, demonstrates the extent to which intolerance and hatred can deteriorate into destruction. The rabbis did not spare their predecessors the lion's share of responsibility, claiming that such instances of abuse and humiliation took place in the presence of the rabbinic leadership, who held their peace, rather than counter the hatred and heal the community.

The first example placed the responsibility upon the overzealousness of the adjudicating rabbinate. In the second example, responsibility was attributed to the rabbinic leadership due to its inaction in the face of social strife. Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin of Volozhin (the Natziv, 1816-1893) critically describes people in Second Temple times who deviated from the Divine Will, as they labeled fellow Jews “Sadducees” for pursuing a religious path not identical to their own, and at times did not even refrain from bloodshed, “for the sake of Heaven,” bemoaned the Natziv. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

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## As brain drain looms, new rules create roadblocks for ultra-orthodox to enter Israel's tech sector

Dennis Mitzner, *Tech Crunch*, August 8, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

The Israeli government's decision to reverse math and English learning requirements for the country's ultra-Orthodox schools could deal a serious blow to Israel's vital technology industry and seems to fly in the face of the wishes of the ultra-Orthodox community itself.



## Resources

- [Vision of Hiddush and Rabbis for Religious Freedom](#)
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On July 24 the Israeli government announced that Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) schools do not have to teach math, science and English to qualify for state funding. The original law, introduced by former education minister Shai Piron, was killed as part of coalition talks with ultra-Orthodox parties.

“Ultra-Orthodox men who lack basic English and math skills from a young age find it very hard to integrate into the hi-tech world. Cancelling the law that would have required cheders (ultra-Orthodox schools) to study a core curriculum, can be seen as a harsh blow to the national effort to integrate Haredim into the realm of hi-tech,” said Gilad Malach, a researcher at Israel Democracy Institute.

### Poor timing

The news comes at a time when ultra-Orthodox workforce participation is at an all time high and the government is desperately looking for solutions to avoid any disruption to Israel’s burgeoning tech industry. Avi Hasson, Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Economy, said that the country is facing a shortage of about 10,000 engineers and programmers.

Encouraging developments in the ultra-Orthodox community show that talk of manpower shortages might be premature as for first time in the country’s history workforce participation rate among ultra-Orthodox men is over 50%, compared to 86% in the general population.

The increase from low 30s in 2003 to over 50 can be partly attributed to welfare cutbacks, but also to the explosive expansion of Israel’s high tech and strong economic growth visible not only in Tel Aviv, but also in Haifa, Jerusalem and Beersheba.

Today the ultra-Orthodox in Israel comprise 11% of the population and about 8% of the workforce. In 20 years time, according to Kamatech, an organization that facilitates the integration of Haredim into the Israeli hi-tech workforce, the number of ultra-orthodox will be 18%, and by 2030, 40% of the population.

“Israel’s ultra-Orthodox community is in the midst of a revolution, both in terms of women in the workplace and employment in general. However, given that their leadership encourages the men to continue with Torah study, rather than employment, all the progress that is being made must take place quietly, without the explicit support of the rabbinic

leadership,” said Goel Jasper, managing director of Finn Partners Israel. Jasper works with ultra-Orthodox organizations to integrate their community into the hi-tech work-force.

“Behind the scenes, on a case-by-case basis, even the women are encouraged to seek employment, and the hi-tech sector is right in the middle of the action,” Jasper said.

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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.

Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel

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