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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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### Introduction

September 19, 2016  
21 Elul, 5776

Dear Friends,

What do you do when the Hatam Sofer's "*Hehadash asur min haTorah*," runs smack dab into conflict with Herzl's "*Im tirtzu ayn zoh agadah?*" Or to put it differently: modernity cannot be denied, and a Jewish State presents new realities.

Hopefully many of us will be speaking about Israel during the *Yamim Nora'im*, and we offer this week's articles as additional helpful and up-to-date information.

The majority of our articles this week deal with the percentage of North American and Israeli Jews who see Israel as the State of the entire Jewish people, and oppose the failure of

Suggested articles for the Yamim Nora'im below:

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### Large majority of American-Jews, Israelis call for end to Orthodox monopoly in Israel

Tamara Zieve, Gil Hoffman, *The Jerusalem Post*,  
Sept. 14, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

***Seventy percent of American Jews and 61% of Israeli Jews said that they support establishing a pluralistic section in the Western Wall plaza to be used for egalitarian prayer services.***

A series of new polls commissioned by The Jerusalem Post in partnership with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) reveals a growing rift between the State of Israel and the American Jewish community when it comes to the Orthodox monopoly over religion- and-state issues in Israel.

The polls reveal that 74% of American Jews and 62% of Israeli Jews believe that the State of Israel should officially recognize the various pluralistic Jewish denominations – namely Reform and Conservative – and allow them to conduct marriage ceremonies and conversions in Israel.

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Israel's government to recognize and implement that Herzlian fact. The distinction between the feelings of Orthodox Jews as opposed to the more liberal streams comes through loud and clear, alongside the intensity of emotional commitment to Israel of the majority of adherents to each stream. The more liberal our religious stance, the less statistically likely we are to care deeply about Israel.

But the problem goes deeper. The extreme constriction of official Jewish religious recognition in Israel, and the failure to meet the real day-by-day needs of living Jews has led to the corruption of religion within Israeli society. One example was portrayed in last week's articles: the high percentage of Israelis who choose to live as unmarried couples. This week we are sending two perspectives on Haredi rabbis who are performing traditional weddings for a high fee for couples in which one of the partners has not yet converted, due to the denial of conversion to so many who desire it.

## Exclusive: Rabbis perform 'fake' weddings for mixed couples in exchange for money

Omri Ariel, *Jerusalem Online*, Sept. 16, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

***The Tzohar organization of rabbis blames the Chief Rabbinate for setting the ground for such phenomenon by imposing immense difficulties on people who wish to convert to Judaism.***

Certified rabbis in Israel are secretly performing illegal wedding ceremonies for couples who are halachically forbidden from getting married in exchange for money, a Channel 2 News report has revealed. The Ministry of Religious Services stated they would examine these findings and handle them, calling them "very serious."

The ceremonies, according to incognito audio statements from some of the rabbis themselves, look exactly like any "kosher" wedding except it has no legal status whatsoever and is done solely for the purpose of putting on a show for the couple's families and friends.

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## ערוץ 2 חושף: רבנים חיתנו יהודים וגויים - תמורת אלפי ש"ח

אלי רוטמן, כיכר השבת, Sept. 15, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

**תחקיר ערוץ 2 חושף כי רבנים בישראל נתפסו מחתנים בני זוג שאחד מהם אינו מוכר כיהודי בתמורה לאלפי שקלים. בין המכבים בתחקיר - שדרן בתחנת רדיו חרדית שטוען הערב: "הכל שטויות" (בארץ)**

שבירת כוס, טבעות וכתובה - כל התפריט הקבוע, הכל כלול בחופות ה"ייחודיות" שנערכים בישראל על ידי כמה רבנים. אלא שהפעם מדובר לכאורה בנישואים של פסולי חיתון, בהם כאלה שלפחות אחד מבני הזוג נחשב כאינו יהודי מבחינת הרבנות הראשית. כך חושף תחקיר שמפרסם הערב (חמישי) ערוץ 2.

"כיכר השבת" נודע כי אחד הרבנים שמכבים בתחקיר משמש במקביל לעורך חופות גם כשדרן בתחנת רדיו חרדית מוכרת. בשיחה עם "כיכר השבת" נשמע הערב השדרן מופתע מהטענות נגדו ואמר כי "לא היה ולא נברא. הכל שטויות".

This difficulty in converting has been a focus in past newsletters, as well as proposing possible solutions.

Finally, we offer a history of the Kotel Controversy, and the possible current solutions to the crisis.

This may be the best known clash between North American Jewry and the Rabbanut, and the best publicized, but it is by no means the most significant within Israeli society in terms of affecting real lives.

Please send us your feedback, particularly regarding how you use the articles we are sending. We look forward to hearing from you at:

[organizers@rfeif.org](mailto:organizers@rfeif.org).

Kol tuv, and L'shanah tovah tikateyvu,

Mark

Rabbi Mark H. Levin  
RRFEI Editor in Chief

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## Resources

- [Vision of Hiddush and Rabbis for Religious Freedom](#)
- [Hiddush resources](#)

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## MKs call for greater religious pluralism following 'Post' poll

Jeremy Sharon, *The Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 16, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

**Oren: Israel must be a nation state for all Jews •  
Lavie: Public wants 'more inclusive Judaism'**

In reaction to a poll showing that 62% of Israeli Jews believe that the state should formally recognize the Reform and Conservative denominations, several MKs have called for greater religious pluralism.

The poll, commissioned by The Jerusalem Post and the American Jewish Committee, also showed high levels of support for the stalled Western Wall agreement among Israeli and American Jews, while 54% of Israeli Jews said they were opposed to the Orthodox monopoly over matters of religion in the country.

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## Majority of Jewish Israelis want egalitarian prayer site at Kotel

Gil Hoffman, *The Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 16, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

**'Jerusalem Post' poll finds younger Israelis less supportive, however.**

A significant majority of Jewish Israelis would like there to be a site for egalitarian prayer at the Western Wall, near Robinson's Arch, according to a Smith Research poll taken for The Jerusalem Post Magazine.

The poll found that 61 percent of Israelis favor creating such a site, 39% oppose it, and there is no difference in support between men and women.

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While 83% of Orthodox respondents oppose creating the site, 82% of secular Israelis and 59% of those who define themselves as traditional support it.

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## 'Equality comes before peoplehood for American Jews'

Tamara Zieve, *The Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 16, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

### ***AJC says lack of religious pluralism could distance US Jews from Israel.***

Issues of equality trump issues of peoplehood for American Jewry, a recent poll commissioned by The Jerusalem Post in conjunction with the American Jewish Committee has indicated.

The poll, carried out by the AJC on an annual basis, this year spotlighted religious pluralism, a subject which the organization feels is of key importance to US Jewry's relationship with Israel.

Research company SSRS conducted the poll, via telephone interviews held between August 8 and 28, with a sample of 1,002 American Jews over the age of 18. The margin of error is approximately 3.57 percent. "For American Jews, the issue of equality speaks more strongly than the issue of peoplehood," remarked Steven Bayme, AJC director of contemporary Jewish life.

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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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