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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

September 5, 2016  
2 Elul, 5776

Dear Friends,

What are we to make of both the insistence of Haredim to refuse modern education, and the demand that rejection of modern education typifies Judaism? When in Jewish history have Jews held it necessary that the broader society support the pious and pay their way while Torah study alone is held in high esteem?

In his commentary on Pirkei Avot 4:7, Maimonides explicitly states, commenting on "Not to make the Torah a spade to dig with," that "Not to think of it as a tool with which to live. Anyone who benefits in this life from honoring the Torah removes his life from the world to come." My point is that we have entered into a new era in which that which Judaism once opposed is now proposed as not only normative but required.

Let us hear where you are on these issues!

 [join facebook group](#)

### Train crisis goes to heart of religion-state debate, but won't derail government

Raphael Ahren, *Times of Israel*, Sept. 04, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

***Dispute over what public work gets done on Shabbat has brought chaos on the streets and within Likud, but the Haredim ultimately got what they wanted — and so the coalition will live another day***



More than the Jews have preserved the Sabbath, the Sabbath has preserved the Jews, Agriculture Minister Uri Ariel told reporters Sunday morning as he headed into the weekly cabinet meeting.

Ariel, a senior member of the Orthodox-nationalist Jewish Home party, recycled the much-cited bon mot from early Zionist thinker Ahad Ha'am in order to justify his position in the current traffic-crippling controversy over the state conducting maintenance work on the national railways during the Jewish people's day of rest. The holiness of the day, Ariel argued, trumps (nearly) all other considerations.

In this week's edition we see both how politics and Judaism have been consciously intermingled over this past shabbat to disrupt transportation in Israel, creating quite a political balagan; and how members of the American Satmar sect are denied an education, and their exit from the community is often blocked as well. The article states that the Satmar, in particular, utilize welfare programs to support themselves rather than study subjects that will enable them to earn a living in the modern world; and that for political reasons politicians don't want to "point out the obvious."

I wonder where the mainstream American Jewish community stands on these issues, and why those who exploit both American and Israeli government sponsored largesse are held in the public imagination to be paragons of piety? And why does our religious establishment not speak out and proclaim that ignorance is not the Jewish way? How did the strand of Judaism that demands ignorance of the world become the paradigm for religiosity, and what forces allow that to persist?

The place to begin to change all of this in Israel clearly requires the uncoupling of religion and State.

In response, political analyst Amit Segal — himself an Orthodox Jew — quipped on Twitter that more than Israel has safeguarded the Sabbath, trains running on the Sabbath have safeguarded Israel. Segal was presumably implying that in order to survive in today's world, the Jewish state had (and still has) to make certain compromises.

The always-contentious conflict between religion and state in Israel reared its head again loudly this weekend, resulting in nasty political mud wrestling within Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling Likud party and bona fide chaos on Israel's streets. Here's a look at what caused the crisis, how idling trains and angry commuters could have shaken up the government, but why the dispute won't topple the coalition.

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## In Brooklyn, Stifling Higher Learning Among Hasidic Women

Ginia Bellafante, *The New York Times*, Sept. 02, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

***In the mid-1940s, Joel Teitelbaum, an eminent and charismatic rabbi, immigrated to the United States, colonizing a section of Williamsburg in Brooklyn for his Hasidic sect, the Satmar, its name taken from the Hungarian town of Szatmar, where Rabbi Teitelbaum had fought to resist the encroachments of a modernizing society.***



Subsequent decades have seen virtually no retrenchment in the sect's mistrust of the larger world.

Among the Satmar in Brooklyn, use of the internet is condemned and secular education is considered of little use. In recent years, though, it became the fashion among some Satmar women to pursue special-education degrees after high school, typically online or through religious colleges. The women often go to work not in philosophically suspect places

Let us hear where you are on these issues at [our FB group](#), Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel, or at [organizers@rrfei.org](mailto:organizers@rrfei.org).

B'yedidut,

Mark

Rabbi Mark H. Levin  
RRFEI Editor in Chief

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like Greenwich Village, but in schools within their community. Now, even that minor advance has been rolled back; some Satmar leaders issued a decree proclaiming that the practice would no longer be tolerated. A letter from the United Talmudical Academy, the governing body for a consortium of schools, meant for girls entering the 12th grade and their parents, stated that they “shouldn’t God forbid take a degree which is according to our sages, dangerous and damaging.”

The letter went on to say that girls shouldn’t learn college subjects and that those who refused to obey would be denied positions as teachers. Leaders, they said, had a responsibility to protect the religious educational system from outside influences. The notion is not an invention of the Hasidim, Allan Nadler, the director of Jewish studies at Drew University and a scholar of Hasidic practice, explained. The Mishna, a multivolume compilation of Jewish law that predates the Talmud, contains a prohibition against “external books.” Still, Mr. Nadler maintained, the recent decree reflects what he has observed over the years as a deepening fear of wider society.

The Talmudical Academy did not return calls seeking comment.

A history of pandering to the ultra-Orthodox in Brooklyn goes back at least to the days of Mario M. Cuomo. Politicians who might otherwise feel free to lecture black and Hispanic communities on the importance of grit, self-reliance and the sacred path of higher learning express remarkably little outrage over the habits of a group that essentially enshrines its own dependency on the system. According to a 2011 study by the UJA-Federation of New York, the Jewish philanthropic organization, just 11 percent of Hasidic men and 6 percent of Hasidic women in and around New York City hold bachelor’s degrees, while the poverty rate among Hasidic households stands at 43 percent, nearly twice the figure citywide.

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## Laws of Torah Study 3:10

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*

## Contact us

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***Anyone who comes to the conclusion that he should involve himself in Torah study without doing work and derive his livelihood from charity, desecrates [God's] name, dishonors the Torah, extinguishes the light of faith, brings evil upon himself, and forfeits the life of the world to come, for it is forbidden to derive benefit from the words of Torah in this world.***



***Our Sages declared: "Whoever benefits from the words of Torah forfeits his life in the world." Also, they commanded and declared: "Do not make them a crown to magnify oneself, nor an axe to chop with." Also, they commanded and declared: "Love work and despise Rabbinic positions." All Torah that is not accompanied by work will eventually be negated and lead to sin. Ultimately, such a person will steal from others.***

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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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