



# 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

November 24, 2016  
23 Cheshvan, 5776

Friends,

Happy Thanksgiving to all. Most of all I am thankful for our freedom, and pray to broaden that freedom for us all.

We are sharing [\[LINK\]](#) **Rabbis Marc Angel's and Avi Weiss's article regarding new standards of conversion that threaten to alter, post facto, the status of those converted in the U.S.**

before the 2008 agreement establishing a centralized Orthodox conversion court in North America. They claim the new regulations are contrary to the announced agreement to allow all prior conversions to stand, and decry the new regulations:

*"By invalidating halachic conversions, the Israeli Chief*

## ISRAELI REFORM SYNAGOGUE VANDALIZED, DEATH THREATS CONVEYED WITH A KNIFE



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**The Reform synagogue in Ra'anana was vandalized last night [\[LINK\]](#) in conjunction with the Western Wall controversy. Death threats were conveyed by placing a knife branded with a reference to Maimonides' Laws of Killing, Chapter 4:10 - "If there is the possibility, one should kill them with a sword in public view. If that is not possible, one should develop a plan so that one can cause their deaths." Next to the knife were notes bearing the names of the leaders of Reform Judaism in Israel and the USA. Graffiti was sprayed on the walls, referring to the sanctity of the Kotel, and reference to Obadiah 1:18,1:21, which speaks about burning down the "House of Esau" and re-establishing the Kingdom of God.**

*After the shock and nausea wear off, one might say that good may yet come from this act of violence: 1. This will strengthen the public's and the police's understanding that they must exercise a firm hand against these thugs who act in God's name. 2. Verses quoted out of context are a danger to our society and country, whether they are used by violent goons or rabbis. 3. This is living proof of the shared fate of Diaspora and Israeli Jewry (Rabbi Rick Jacobs, Anat Hoffman, & Rabbi Gilad*

*Rabbinate continues on the path of alienating the masses of Jews in Israel. In linking itself to the Chief Rabbinate, the RCA undermines its credibility as an honest broker relative to conversions, placing power politics ahead of its responsibility to the Jewish people."*

**The Muezzin Bill in Israel, a complicated interfaith matter** to be sure, threatens to change the religious status quo in a way that contradicts custom in Israel but is part of daily life in many other countries. With modern technology, there's really no reason other than recent tradition to maintain the amplified sound, a modern phenomenon in any event. Yet, the motives are clearly not religious, but political, as **Uri Regev explains in this op-ed [\[LINK\]](#)**. The alignments in both articles demonstrate the cultural tragedy of legalized religious coercion.

As noted here months ago [\[LINK\]](#), **the Western Wall controversy becomes increasingly complicated with the objection of archaeologists** who claim the prayer area would destroy a unique site that is

*Kariv were all singled out in the death threats). Together, we ought to change this reality, and bring Israel to actualize its founding vision, which guarantees freedom of religion and equality for all.*

## The 'Muezzin Bill' – a masquerade

Uri Regev, *The Jerusalem Post*, Nov. 22, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

***It's the Litzmans and Deris of the religious Jewish leadership that have never hesitated to deny these very freedoms to fellow Jews and non-Jews whenever they have had the political ability to do so.***



While much international and political discourse focused in the past few days on the "Outposts Bill," another highly controversial bill was also moving forward in the Knesset, having obtained the approval of the Ministerial Legislative Committee, and may come up for a preliminary vote Wednesday. It too has attracted political, legal and international attention, but has also generated heated religious argument. I'm referring to the Muezzin Bill (a more appropriate name than its formal title: the "Bill Forbidding the use of Public Address Systems in Houses of Worship").

This bill, which aims at banning the use by mosques of public address systems for the daily call to prayer, is a masquerade, which all participants are party to. Nobody really thinks that those who proposed this bill aren't actually motivated by nationalistic and religious considerations (the bill's explanatory note states its intention to forbid "the use of PA systems to call worshipers, to convey religious or nationalistic messages, and sometimes even words of incitement"). Likewise, some of the bill's opponents disregard the real disturbance muezzins cause for non-Muslims and present the issue as an exclusively racist and anti-Muslim initiative and therefore not requiring reassessment.

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## RRFEI Analysis:

**A new twist in the unfolding Kotel saga**

essential to Jewish history. While the opposition is not monolithic, and there may well be a way forward, it adds weight to the objections of those who oppose a separate area for combined prayer. If one looks at pictures of praying the Kotel before 1948, it was not a synagogue but simply a prayer area for those who chose to gather at this holy place. Clearly, we could return to such a time. Government and politics are truly an unholy mix.

We look forward to hearing from you. Please take a look at our [group on Facebook](#): Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel.

Kol tuv,

Mark

Rabbi Mark H. Levin  
RRFEI Editor in Chief

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## Resources

- [Vision of Hiddush and Rabbis for Religious Freedom](#)
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## Leading archaeologists insistently weigh in against the Government's Western Wall agreement

*This week witnessed a new twist in the unfolding Kotel saga.*

At the initiative of leading Israeli archaeologists that approached a ready and willing Knesset committee chair, **a public hearing was held regarding the Kotel agreement from an archaeological perspective** [\[LINK\]](#). Early on, we assessed that the archaeological angle could indeed develop as **a significant challenge to the implementation of the Kotel compromise** [\[LINK\]](#).

While there is no consensus among archaeologists as to the extent of the potential damage that implementation would cause to this singularly precious historic site, among the opponents one may find some of Israel's leading archaeologists. They come to the issue without religious malice, but at the same time express a strong rejection of the compromise, based on objective scientific and historical concerns. When such opponents turned to a typical ultra-Orthodox opponent to the compromise who does indeed bear religious malice towards both the Women of the Wall and the Reform and Conservative movements (and happens to chair **the Knesset Education Committee** [\[LINK\]](#), whose turf includes archaeological matters) there is little wonder that their plea is met with a full court welcome; and the deliberations of the committee result with a public appeal to the Reform and Conservative movements and the Women of the Wall.

Two additional interesting elements of the meeting are worth mentioning.

1. Anat Hoffman, leader of Women of the Wall, participated in the deliberation, and she responded to the archaeologists' plea, saying: "we never wanted this, and we said so."
2. While the opposing archaeologists put forth a weighty challenge to the agreement, another senior archaeologist said that he did not share the all-out assault upon the agreement, but rather pointed to the potential to maintain a proper balance between archaeological value and the current needs of worshippers, indicating that the agreement can be regarded as meeting that necessary balance.

None of this is surprising, and it indicates that there is yet a turbulent path forward, in which significant circles that come from outside the pluralism debate insistently weigh in, and they play into the hands of those who never wanted to see the site turned over to

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the Women of the Wall and the non-Orthodox movements. At the same time, given the impediments put in the agreement's path, this may serve as a basis for giving greater credence to the new front opened by the non-Orthodox movements, reflecting the wishes of the Women of the Wall. Namely, moving the eye of the storm back to the traditional Western Wall plaza, rather than the Robinson's Arch section.

## Reflections on the Current Conversion Crisis

Rabbis Marc Angel and Avi Weiss, *Jewish Ideas*, Nov. 21, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

***Let us begin with the facts: Converts whose conversions were conducted according to halachah, or Jewish law, are 100 percent Jewish.***

***In the eyes of God and Torah, they are full Jews, just as Jewish as any born Jews. Their Jewishness is not contingent on the Israeli Chief Rabbinate or anyone else. Halachic converts are Jewish, their children are Jewish, they are obligated to fulfill the mitzvot like all other Jews.***

Anyone who casts aspersions on the Jewish status of these converts is in violation of one of the most important laws in the Torah: not to oppress the convert.

Yet there are those who raise doubts about halachic converts. With a heavy heart, we note that modern Orthodoxy's Rabbinical Council of America is doing just that. (The RCA is a national organization that includes in its ranks several hundred synagogue rabbis.) Indeed, new information that has come before us leads us to believe that Jews who were converted by RCA rabbis prior to its institution of a centralized conversion system in 2008 known as GPS (Geirus Policies and Standards) should beware – their conversions are now being questioned by the RCA itself. This affects not only them but their progeny as well.

Let us explain:

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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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