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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

January 5, 2017
7 Tevet, 5777


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Dear Friends,

Do you have a sense that things are changing around us, and the forces against change are battling mightily? In this case, both sides view ourselves as the Maccabees! I don't know that we are in hevlei ha-mashiach, but it certainly feels as though "the times they are a'changin'." I don't know whether to be excited every day as we face the future or worried sick. Just take a look at the articles this week.

A minority of Haredi women are standing up for their status and some are joining the Zionist Union Party because they seek equal rights! It's no wonder that people who work and support their families are determined to achieve a measure of power over

Jerusalem rabbis instruct hotels to drop Christmas trees

Times of Israel, Dec. 20, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Israel's Chief Rabbinate says the city's directive, which also takes aim at New Year's parties, is a 'private initiative'



Illustrative image of a Christmas tree (CC BY Johnny Lai, Flickr)

their own destinies. But the quiet work of such people as Adina Bar Shalom, daughter of the late Chief Sefardi Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Esti Reider, Esti Shoshan, Tali Farkas and Michal Tshernovitzki should be better known to our people in North America for the courage they are showing and another side of ultra-Orthodoxy.

As reported in our newsletter of December 2015 (see our website: www.rrfei.org for the newsletter) in an article by Rabbi Aaron Liebowitz, the founder of Hashgahah P'ratit, there's a movement to privatize the validation of restaurant kashrut, as has historically been the case in the diaspora. Now Knesset member Aliza Lavie (Yesh Atid) has introduced legislation to further that goal and remove kashrut supervision from the hands of the official government rabbinate.

Contrary to Israeli law and a decision of Israel's Supreme Court, the Rabbanut this year "warned" hotels about putting up holiday decorations for Christian pilgrims to Israel during the Christmas season, and informed hotels that it would not be Jewish to

The Jerusalem rabbinate has called on hotels in the city not to erect Christmas trees or host New Year's Eve parties, according to a letter that emerged Tuesday.

The letter, addressed to hotel managers and signed by the two chief rabbis of Jerusalem, stated: "As the secular year ends we want to remind you that erecting a Christmas tree in a hotel contravenes halacha [Jewish law] and that therefore it is clear that one should not erect [a tree] in a hotel.

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Meet the women shaking up Israel's ultra-Orthodox community

+972 Blog, Dec. 11, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Israel's ultra-Orthodox community has been experiencing tremendous changes, all led by women, over the past few years. At a recent conference, a group of Haredi women spoke about the personal price they pay, and the chance we could one day see them in the Knesset.

In mid-November, women from the organization "Nivharot" ("chosen" or "elected" in Hebrew) held a conference in Jerusalem's Mishkenot Sha'ananim quarter. It was attended by activists in the ultra-Orthodox community, both women and men, who are struggling to ensure Haredi women have the right to run in the next elections under the slogan: "Not Elected — Not Voting."

Already in the months preceding the conference, which was designated for leading activists in the social struggles within the Haredi community, the breakthrough was clearly visible. The struggle had repeatedly been declared as having no chance of success by ultra-Orthodox men who control the Haredi parties. What started as an esoteric campaign eventually become the subject of one of the most intensely debated issues within the Haredi community.

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celebrate the secular New Year. The implied threat of removal of the hotel's kashrut certificate is illegal. In addition, the rabbi of the Techniyon achieved a certain amount of notoriety by forbidding students from the dining area where a Christmas tree was set up to allow Christian students to feel at home during the holiday. As we noted two weeks ago, such battles go to the heart of the kind of Jewish state Israel seeks to be: welcoming of all people as the Declaration of Independence declares, or exclusively for one Jewish sect. We have included an article on whether the rabbi of the Techniyon was halakhically correct in banning students from eating in a room with a holiday tree.

In a [new development](#), the Office of Religious Services intends to fund congregational rabbis from monies left to the State of Israel through private estates when a person dies. This is a new announcement, and has not yet been implemented. The applications are being taken for funding congregational rabbis, and clearly favor Haredim, another source of government support for exclusively one form of Judaism, the one

Sephardic Chief Rabbi: Women in the army? Only to cook and do laundry

Kobi Nachshoni, *Ynet*, Dec. 11, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef says women serving in the IDF is 'not the way of the Torah,' further determining that women should not do national service either; he claims his father Rabbi Ovadia Yosef 'died of the sorrow he felt over the drafting of yeshiva students' just as Chazon Ish, a religious leader in Israel's early days, might have 'died of the sorrow this holy struggle against the enlistment of women caused him.'

Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef determined during his weekly Torah lesson on Saturday night that women must not serve in the IDF or in national service—and certainly not in combat roles.

The chief rabbi mentioned a ruling made by Sephardic Torah scholar the Rambam who said that "to wars commanded by the Torah all go out, even a bridegroom from his chamber and a bride from her canopy." Yosef said that one must not draw from this ruling the conclusion that women are allowed to join the military.

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Unlikely Alliance: Why Israel's Secular Labor Party Woos the ultra-Orthodox

Judy Maltz, *Ynet*, Jan. 1, 2017

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

The Haredi world is changing, and new political initiatives are starting to emerge in this community.

Labor has long struggled with the stigma of being the party of Israel's secular elites. Not quite as left as the smaller Meretz perhaps, but nonetheless, a problematic fit for strictly Orthodox voters.

Yet in recent months, thanks to an unprecedented and largely under-the-radar recruitment drive, several hundred ultra-Orthodox Israelis have signed up with the party. Not enough to sway election

sponsored by the government.

While things may look the same from the outside, Israel is anything but status quo these days, with ferment just below the surface. We would love to hear from you on what you think of these new developments, either in our [Facebook group](#) or at: organizers@rfeif.org.

Kol tuv,

Mark

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results one way or another, but a sufficient number to have doubled, if not tripled, the size of the existing ultra-Orthodox contingency in Israel's largest opposition party.

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Sephardic Chief Rabbi: Women in the army? Only to cook and do laundry

Kobi Nachshoni, *Ynet*, Dec. 11, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Proposal seeks to transfer kashrut authority from Chief Rabbinate to private "kashrut corporations."

A new bill to privatize control of the kashrut system was submitted to the Knesset by MK Aliza Lavie (Yesh Atid) with the support of the Hitorerut movement in Jerusalem.

The proposal is co-signed by MKs Yehuda Glick (Likud), Amir Ohana (Likud), and Elazar Stern (Yesh Atid). The proposal seeks to transfer the authority over kashrut policy from the Chief Rabbinate to private entities - "kashrut corporations".

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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.

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