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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 19, 2017
21 Tevet, 5777



Dear Friends,

Clearly the most important event of this week from our perspective is the Israel Supreme Court decision that the Kotel should be a place of prayer for women and men, and stopping the insulting searches of women by guards looking for Jewish contraband, like Torah scrolls, talliyot and tefillin. The Supreme Court has agreed with the contention make by the litigants, as well as other groups like Hiddush, that the Kotel is a shrine for the Jewish people, not for a single group. The Supreme Court has given the government 30 days to respond.

We are sending two articles in Hebrew. One describes the effort by Knesset member David Stern to convince the

More Controversies at the Kotel

Rabbi Marc Angel, *jewishideas.org*, Jan. 2, 2017

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

The Shas party recently submitted a bill to the Knesset that would criminalize prayer at the Kotel if the prayer does not adhere to Orthodox/Hareidi standards.



The platform for egalitarian prayer at Robinson's Arch, under fire

Thus, if an "egalitarian" minyan gathered to pray at the Kotel, participants could be arrested as criminals. If non-Orthodox/pluralist groups pray as a group, they would be deemed

Diaspora community NOT to fund the 70th anniversary celebration of the founding of the State. The last line says, "I say this in great sorrow, but this simply doesn't make sense. We [i.e. - Israel] speak out to the Jews of the world and say to them 'from our perspective a portion of you are not Jews,' but please bring money and help us regarding the American government." Some are standing up to establish our rights within the Jewish State.

The other Hebrew article speaks of the corruption of funds allocated within the Knesset not only through parties but to individuals to do with as they please, particularly regarding the settlements, but without accountability. Nahum Barnea writes that there is no longer shame in the private use of public funds within Israel. These funds might be applied to do some good for the Israeli public at large.

A fourth article asks the question of whether and how the Reform and Conservative movements might take advantage of this moment of democracy in Israel. Rabbi Rick Jacobs forcefully makes the point that Israeli politicians neither

to be breaking the law and would be subject to punishment. Although this bill is highly outrageous in so many ways, there apparently is a real chance that it will pass.

Can we really envision a time when Jews will be arrested at the Kotel for praying? With all the problems the State of Israel faces, would the Knesset also want to alienate the overwhelming majority of Diaspora Jewry, as well as a considerable percentage of Israeli citizens?

The problem at the Kotel reflects deep divisions within the Jewish community in matters pertaining to religious observance. The Hareidi Orthodox--who have religious control of the Kotel--strive to limit women's role in the public sphere. The rest of the Jewish community--whether moderate Orthodox, non-Orthodox, non-observant--is compelled to adhere to Hareidi standards, as though only the Hareidim have a legitimate claim to the Kotel and other religious sites.

The status quo is unsatisfactory...and even disgraceful! ...

...

In landmark decision, High Court rules for women's Western Wall prayer

Amandal Borschel-Dan, *The Times of Israel*, Jan. 11, 2017

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Government given 30 days to show 'good cause' why women can't read from Torah scrolls at the holy site

In a landmark High Court decision Wednesday, the state was given 30 days to find "good cause" why a woman may not read aloud from a Torah scroll as part of prayer services at the Western Wall.

The sweeping decision, jointly addressing three petitions on related topics, ruled that assuming the government cannot find "good cause," not only may women read from the Torah at the Western Wall, but also that the government may no longer argue that the Robinson's Arch area of the plaza constitutes "access to the Western Wall." The court did not address a January 2016 government decision to build a permanent pluralistic prayer pavilion in the Robinson's Arch area, which is currently also an archaeological park.

understand nor attempt to understand our movements, the good we do, and the fact that we are not going away. The Conservative and Reform movements are growing and are an increasing part of the body politic of Israel, representing the religious aspirations of a significant segment of the Jewish community.

Finally, a suggestion by Rabbi Marc Angel in which he argues, "No public prayer services should be allowed at the Kotel. Not Orthodox, not Conservative, not Reform, not egalitarian...no public services of any kind! No one should wear a prayer shawl or tefillin at the Kotel." Angel proposes that the Kotel is a shrine for all of the Jewish people, and ought not be used as a place of sinat hinam.

Please let us know your reaction. Clearly issues are transforming in Israel even as we in the United States see the passage from the Obama Administration to the Trump Administration, with all that transition will mean to Israel, and ultimately, the Jewish people.

Let us hear your reactions at our [Facebook group](#) or at: organizers@rrfei.org.

Kol tuv,

Further, contrary to current practice under the plaza's administration by the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, women will no longer be subjected to body searches for "contraband" Jewish ritual objects by foundation staff.

If the state fails to find "good cause" for not permitting women to read from the Torah, it is yet to be determined whether they will be granted access to the hundreds of scrolls now located in the men's section of the Western Wall plaza.

...

Kotel 'Provocateurs' Provoking Outcry

Michele Chabin, *The Jewish Week*, Jan. 12, 2017

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Conservative Jews in Israel say they're seeing growing Orthodox presence — often intrusive — at Robinson's Arch, as Supreme Court rules in favor of egalitarian prayer.

Jerusalem — Earlier this month Tsvi and Julie Landau drove from their home in northern Israel to Jerusalem so their daughter Noa could celebrate her bat mitzvah at Robinson's Arch, the secluded section of the Western Wall where the Conservative movement facilitates bar and bat mitzvahs.

After waiting for other worshippers to vacate the small platform that touches the Western Wall, the Landaus, who are Conservative Jews, and their guests placed a Torah scroll on the site's reading platform, took out some prayer books, and began to recite Shacharit, morning prayers.

Then something odd happened.

Partway through Noa's Torah reading, an Orthodox Israeli family with several young children stepped onto the platform. The father, with four young sons in tow, wedged his way into the narrow space between the Wall and the Torah platform, obstructing the bat-mitzvah girl's immediate view of the Wall. After pointing out the site's historical significance to his children he began to silently pray. His wife and daughters, meanwhile, prayed next to the wall, but several feet to the left.

...

Mark

Rabbi Mark H. Levin
RRFEI Editor

סרבני גיוס

עמיחי אתאלי, *Yediot Ahronot*, Jan. 13, 2017

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מסר מח"כ "יש עתיד" לדוד מאמריקה: אל תממנו את חגיגות ה-70 למדינה

לח"כ אלעזר שטרן יש הצעה מפתיעה ליהודי העולם: תפסיקו בבקשה לתרום, לפחות בינתיים. או אם להיות ספציפיים יותר, הוא קורא לראשי הקהילות שלא להיענות למסע ההתרמה של מדינת ישראל לקראת יום העצמאות ה-70. זאת בעקבות ההחלטה התקדימית והשנויה במחלוקת שקיבלה ממשלת ישראל לפני שבועיים:

המדינה תגייס תרומות מבעלי הון ומגופים עסקיים כדי לממן את החגיגות שיצוינו באפריל 2018. מי שהופקדה על הגיוס היא שרת התרבות מירי רגב. הסיבה העיקרית לקמפיין השנור הלאומי היא העובדה שתקצוב חגיגות ה-70, שעומד על כמאה מיליון שקלים, לא נלקח משום מה בחשבון בתקציב הדו-שנתי 2017/18. מטבע הדברים, ה"שוגר-דדי" הראשון שרגב תפנה אליו כדי לממן את השמחה שלנו כאן יהיו יהודי העולם. אבל יש מי שמתכוון לנסות לסכל את זה, והוא פועל מהכנסת.

...

עלייתה ונפילתה של הבושה

נחום ברנע, *Yediot Ahronot*, Dec. 29, 2016

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

מאות מיליונים, בכל מיני כותרות יצירתיות, מושקעים ב"זהות יהודית" – שם קוד למוסדות דת שמקורבים לבית היהודי ולש"ס.

"הממשלה קנתה את הח"כים בכסף כדי להשתיק אותם ולמנוע בקרה. אני רואה במו עיניי איך ועדת הכספים הופכת ממפקחת על התקציב לאחת שמחלקת כספים לפוליטיקאים כמו בקזינו.

34 מיליון שקל שיילקחו כל שנה מתקציב משרד החקלאות ל"פעולות גרעיני משימה עירוניים". מדובר בתוספת למימון הגרעינים של השר אורי אריאל, שעיסוקם בין השאר בהשבת צעירים דתיים לדת, בהתנחלות בשכונות חילוניות או ערביות ובחיזוק כוחו של אריאל במפלגתו.

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- [Hiddush resources](#)
- [Courts - religious & secular](#)
- [Conversion](#)
- [Death & burial - ancient & now](#)
- [Diaspora-Israel](#)
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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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