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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

April 27, 2017
1 Iyyar 5777

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Dear Friends,

This week's articles deal with the non-fulfillment of the government's promise to provide burial for all Israelis, and what needs to be done to sustain life with religious meaning. We go on to the politicization of Lag B'Omer, and then the attempt to coerce Shabbat observance despite the wishes of the government and people of Tel Aviv. See Rabbi David Stav's comment that shabbat observance cannot be coerced. As a result, he agrees with the Rabbinat's order to move Lag B'Omer to Sunday night to allow preparation for Lag B'Omer observance that will be in accordance with halakhah for shabbat.

Once again we witness the failure of the Jewish State

Explained: Why Secular Israelis Are Burning Mad Over Religious Coercion

Allison Kaplan Sommer, Haaretz, Apr 24, 2017

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

A last-minute switch of the school schedule for an odd religious holiday is the latest spat to worry Israelis about their country's democracy

As the Israeli spring kicks in – with April temperatures shooting to record highs – the religious-secular divide is also heating up. The secular majority is furious over the muscle-flexing by the politically influential ultra-Orthodox parties and their ability to make mainstream politicians bow to their will.

The latest conflagration comes over the minor Jewish holiday of Lag Ba'omer. It's a bizarre controversy over a somewhat bizarre holiday. The spat has hit as controversy flares over the opening of stores on the Sabbath in the secular stronghold of Tel Aviv and as mainstream Israel glowers at the many ultra-Orthodox Jews refusing to take part in the commemorations for Holocaust Remembrance Day and Memorial Day.

“All of this together is giving us a glimpse of what Israel looks like with the ultra-Orthodox parties in charge and what their vision is for

to fulfill the Zionist vision of a place and home for all Jews. Previously we have focused on the inability of Jews to marry in Israel. But what about burial? Is burial not even more essential because it cannot be accomplished by flying to Cyprus? These basic human and religious functions are absolutely necessary to the functioning of individual lives, communities, and a State. We see the question broached of whether Jews will be coerced in Israel as we have been coerced by non-Jewish governments: not with life threatening measures in Israel, but with coercion to compel one sort of religious practice rather than the Judaism that people believe and prefer to sustain themselves in life's most critical and meaningful moments.

Israel's physical existence has been achieved, but not it's spiritual existence. Our imperative is clear, even if our strategies are still developing.

We would love to hear from you at: organizers@RRFEI.org, or on our Facebook group for Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality.

Kol tuv, as we count our way to Sinai,

Mark

the state," says Rabbi Uri Regev of Hiddush, a group that promotes religious freedom in Israel. "And those who want Israel to be both Jewish and democratic need to pay attention," he says, adding that the recent rifts "are examples of the excesses that are possible when they crack the whip and the secular parties obey."

...

Orthodox politicians to fight Shabbat business ruling

Ilana Messika, Ynet, April 21, 2017

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Despite the politicians' opposition, a prominent chief rabbi argues that religious authorities who want to promote the sanctity of religious law must inspire people to follow it, not force them.

Orthodox politicians said on Thursday that they would fight Wednesday's High Court of Justice ruling permitting mini-markets to remain open on Shabbat.

Leaders of the ultra-Orthodox Shas and United Torah Judaism parties, as well as Bayit Yehuda Ministers Naftali Bennett and Uri Ariel called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to convene an urgent session for coalition members to draft a series of measures to defend a verdict they consider a "breach in the walls of the Shabbat."

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Notably, not all religious elements in Israel disagree with the ruling. The Hiddush organization, headed by Reform Rabbi Uri Regev and which bills itself as being "for religious freedom and equality," hailed the decision, calling it a victory over religious coercion.

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Israel Appoints First Female Judge to Muslim Religious Court

Judy Maltz, Haaretz, April 25, 2017

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

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Hana Mansour-Khatib's appointment is not only a precedent for Arab women but for Jewish women as well

For the first time in Israeli history, a woman has been appointed to serve as a judge, or a qadi, in a Muslim religious court.

Hana Mansour-Khatib, a family lawyer from the northern town of Tamra, had her appointment confirmed on Tuesday by the Judicial Appointments Committee, which oversees appointments judges to all Israeli courts. All nine members of the committee, including several from the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, voted in favor of her appointment.

Her appointment is a precedent for Israel. Jewish women are prohibited from serving as judges on religious courts. Issues of marriage and divorce in Israel fall under the mandate of religious courts.

...

Israel Must Make Good on Its Pledge to Assist Civil Burial

Haaretz Editorial, April 16, 2017

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

Twenty-one years after the Knesset passed a law guaranteeing a civil burial for any citizen who wished to have one, this elementary right is far from being applied

An agreement signed recently between the National Insurance Institute and the Finance Ministry bears a worthy message – the state will now fund the transport of deceased people who asked to be buried in non-Orthodox cemeteries. This decision will limit the power wielded by private ambulance companies, which often exploit the families of the deceased at their most difficult moments. It will make this transportation cheaper.

The decision, however, also highlights civil burial's marginal status in Israel. The state's decision is an unsatisfactory solution. Correcting the situation will require the establishment of several non-Orthodox graveyards.

Twenty-one years after the Knesset passed a law guaranteeing a civil burial for any citizen who wished to have one, this elementary right is far from being applied.

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Resources

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- [Courts - religious & secular](#)
- [Conversion](#)
- [Death & burial - ancient & now](#)
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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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