



## 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

May 11, 2017  
15 Iyyar 5777

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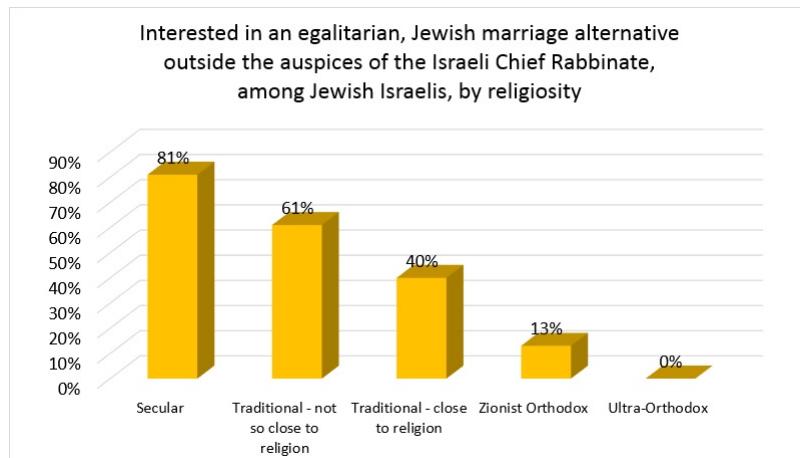
Dear Friends,

How can it be that the fulfillment of Herzl's and Ahad Ha'am's visions of Jewish political independence and cultural renewal with freedom from oppression results in a state that oppresses Jews and rejects the very existence of the State and its laws? How could such a thing occur? And how does world Jewry allow its continuation?

We all know the details of the story, but had you told us in the 60s, when the State was daily experiencing real military existential threats from the surrounding nations, that the existential threat 50 years hence would be internal, no one would have believed it! Yet, that is the world we inhabit.

### 55% Jewish Israelis interested in weddings outside the Chief Rabbinate

Hiddush public opinion survey for Lag Ba'Omer, 2017



[Click HERE for the full article](#)

**55% of the Jewish Israeli public and 81% of the secular Jewish Israeli public are interested in alternative marriages outside the auspices of Israel's Chief Rabbinate. This is the first time that a majority of the**

We see in the enclosed article about the survey done by the Smith organization regarding civil marriage, done for Hiddush in anticipation of Lag B'Omer, that more than half of the Jewish public in Israel would prefer a wedding that is not under the auspices of the Rabbinate. It's no longer a theoretical question. The Israeli population feels oppressed by official state religion and its representatives. Yet, Israel lives under the thumb of the Rabbinate that rejects not only other Jewish movements but the law of the Jewish State itself.

Perhaps this is the most incredible part: the rejection of the efficacy of civil law courts for the modern state. The very people who demand the government's largesse deny the right of the governing body to rule! And yet, such is today's reality.

Whether the issue is oppression of women who seek a divorce, a matter that could be resolved by the rabbinate if it chose to apply Jewish law humanely, or the creation of a Judaism appropriate to the modern world, the Hatam Sofer's rejection of all cooperation with modernity continues even

### ***Jewish Israeli public has expressed a personal preference for marriages outside the Chief Rabbinate.***

55% of the Jewish Israeli public is interested in the alternative of egalitarian Jewish marriages outside the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate, including 81% of secular Jewish Israelis. These are the findings of a survey conducted by the Smith Institute for Hiddush - for Religious Freedom in Israel, in advance of the Lag Ba'omer holiday, which represents the beginning of the Jewish wedding season. The survey was conducted on April 19-20 among a representative sample of Israel's adult Jewish population.

This represents the first time that a majority of the Jewish Israeli public has expressed not only principled support for marriage freedom in Israel, but also personal interest in marriage outside the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate. A common argument heard in Israeli public discourse is that even if civil marriage and non-Orthodox Jewish marriage were instituted by the Government, there would not be much demand for them among the public. Now, it turns out that this assumption no longer reflects reality.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the battle for freedom of religion and equality in Israel is not only one of principle over the values of democracy and human rights, but actually a personal and existential battle. It is important that the State of Israel's leadership open their eyes and their hearts, and that they understand that the time has come to put an end to religious coercion and to allow every couple in Israel to marry in ceremonies that reflect their choices, their beliefs, and their ways of life.

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### **"The Calamity of Independence"**

**Hiddush, May 5, 2017**

as the demand for state funding explodes.

What is our responsibility as leaders among the diaspora community? In two weeks we will be sending an article written by noted scholar, Rabbi Michael Chernick, Ph.D. regarding the use of the ketubah to resolve the agunah issue, and his suggestions of possible ways to move forward in the spirit of halakhah and the modern state. We will suggest ways that we can together advance democracy and preserve Judaism for our people. We seek a Jewish state for the entire Jewish people.

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

Kol tuv,

Mark

Rabbi Mark H. Levin  
RRFEI Editor

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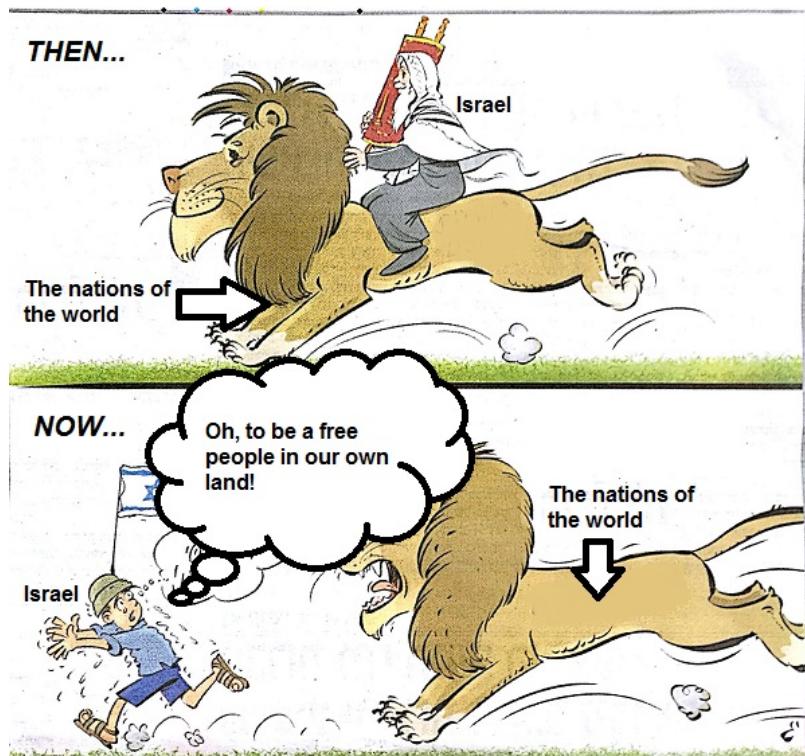
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## Contact us

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***"Not only has the State of Israel not solved the problem of anti-semitism, but it has become the direct cause for the suffering of masses of Jews scattered in Jewish communities across the globe."***

The quotes and caricature above are just samples of feature articles and editorials published in the mainstream ultra-Orthodox media this week. They relate to Israel's independence, as we celebrated Israel's 69th Independence Day this week. The 'Yated Ne'eman' newspaper, for instance, is the organ of Degel HaTorah, which is a key component of the United Torah Judaism faction in the Knesset and a key partner in the Government Coalition.

The disparity between the pride Israel's Government Coalition takes in its Zionist backbone and its absolute dependence upon the anti-Zionist, ultra-Orthodox parties is glaring. Hiddush has often pointed to the tension and contradiction between the ultra-Orthodox parties' outlook, and the values of the State of Israel as a "Jewish and democratic" state, as well as the will of the majority of its population.

It's notable that in regards to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Israeli Government insists strongly that we pay attention to what the Arabs say and write among themselves, rather than what they utter for public consumption. Hiddush believes that this very same yard

## **Editors note**

**The issue of agunot is heating up, as we reported recently on the issue of a ketubah that might help resolve future issues. In two weeks we will send you original articles by noted scholars about the agunah issue and the use of ketubot to prevent future occurrences, and ask for your help in attaining civil marriage in Israel**

stick should be applied to the ultra-Orthodox political parties in order to truly understand the ugly challenge Israel is facing from within.

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## **Zvia Gordetsky - Another Sad Agunah Story**

Rabbi Harry Maryles, May 10, 2017

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

**An Israeli woman by the name of Zvia Gordetsky has been seeking a Get (religious divorce) for 17 years. She is now 53 years old. Which means that she was only 36 when she first sought it. Her child bearing years are over. Why did she seek a divorce? From the [Times of Israel](#):**

*Gordetsky first asked for a divorce “because of a tragic incident of domestic violence” in which she lost a baby, days before she was due to give birth.*

The Beis Din ordered her husband to grant her the Get within 30 days - on penalty of incarceration if he didn't. He refused. He has been sitting in jail – solitary confinement - since then. Still no Get. The Beis Din has since done everything in its power to pressure her husband to do it. Nothing doing

I cannot fathom the depths of depravity of such a man. This fellow is willing to stay in jail for the rest of his life (it seems) just so that his wife will suffer? What kind of human being does that?

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## **Resources**

- [Vision of Hiddush and Rabbis for Religious Freedom](#)
- [Hiddush resources](#)
- [Courts - religious & secular](#)
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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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