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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

June 22, 2017  
28 Sivan 5777

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***“We want our students to feel that the Jewish story that’s playing out in the Jewish state is their story, and that they have a stake in it” -***

**[Benjamin Mann](#),  
Principal of the  
New York  
Schechter school**

Dear Friends,

Zionism possessed a dual purpose: Herzl founded Zionism to save Jews from physical persecution. Ahad Ha'am foresaw the renaissance of the Jewish people in a Jewish homeland, where a reborn culture could thrive and restore the Jewish creativity after the Enlightenment among our people in our own land.

Israel rejects a majority of our children as Jews.

### Israel's rabbinate stops Jewish kids from reading from a Torah scroll

By Larry Yudelson, Jewish Standard, June 8, 2017

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

A group of eighth graders from New Jersey visiting Israel last month got an unpleasant message from two kibbutzim they stayed at: Don't let us catch you praying with our Torah scrolls.

Why couldn't they?

Because, like 90 percent of American Jews, the students from the Academies at Gerrard Berman Day School in Oakland believe that both women and men can read from the Torah and lead prayers.

It's not that the two kibbutzim that wouldn't share their Torah scrolls with the Conservative school's students were Orthodox. But they had been threatened with loss of their kosher certification from their kashrut supervisors, who are Orthodox. In Israel, kashrut supervision is a legal monopoly overseen by the government's Orthodox rabbinate.

The student group could use the kibbutz Torah scroll, they were told, only on condition that they use with a mechitza — the barrier used in Orthodox services to separate women from men. The

Thus, in the article "[We Never Had a Problem Before.](#)" the very Jewish children of whom we are most proud are rejected by Israel's Jewish establishment!

How ironic to watch Israel's Zionist government exclude from Judaism the very people Ahad Ha'am and Herzl intended to ingather and save from extinction. What is *kibbutz galuyot* if not day school children visiting Israel? How hypocritical that Israel demands the political and financial support of all the Jewish people and then excludes the children of the majority from belonging. We establish institutions, out of *ahavat Tziyon*, go to great pains and expense to attach Jewish people to the land of Israel and Israelis. Then what is Israel's response to the very children on whom we are building future Jewish life: deny their Judaism.

Ahad Ha'am envisioned Israel as the hub of the wheel from which Jewish culture would be exported. Now, with the fulfillment of that seemingly impossible dream, the very intention of Zionism is being denied and the rim of the wheel told, "*Your Judaism is not Judaism, and you are not Jewish.*"

kashrut supervisor would attend to make sure the mechitza was up.

The leaders of the tour group rejected the offer. Berman is a Solomon Schechter school, affiliated with Conservative Judaism, as were the two other schools taking part in that trip: Solomon Schechter School of Manhattan, and the Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Hartford in Connecticut.

Instead, the students davened without a Torah scroll and read the day's Torah reading from photocopied sheets

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## The Chief Rabbinate vs. The State of Israel and the Jewish People

By Rabbi Uri Regev

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

*"The Supreme Court does not have the authority to adjudicate the petitions regarding... matters pertaining to prayer arrangements at the Kotel... The authoritative element for deciding halakhic matters... is the Chief Rabbinate of Israel..."*

*"The core position of the Chief Rabbinic Council is against the groups that are called 'liberal' and 'progressive' who have raised the flag of uprooting the Torah from its essence and uniqueness... They have no connection to authentic Judaism..."*

Developments in the last few days regarding the Kotel controversy bring me to focus again on the Chief Rabbinate, pointing to the fact that the institution itself stands in sheer conflict with the notions of democracy and the rule of law in Israel, as well as the realities and interests of the Jewish people worldwide. A lengthy document presented by the Chief Rabbinate this week manifests a real threat to the State of Israel and the Jewish people, which is frequently underestimated and misunderstood by both Israelis and Diaspora Jewish leadership.

[For the benefit of RRFEI members, the original 13 page document submitted by Chief Rabbi Lau's team, in Hebrew, can be download \*\*HERE\*\*.](#) The document is intended for public consumption and was presented at a Knesset hearing. It presents the Chief Rabbinate's position on the pending Supreme

What is Israel's purpose?  
Who are the legitimate beneficiaries of Ahad Ha'am's vision? Was Israel founded to perpetuate some narrow definition of Jewish life, or to save the Jewish people in its entirety?

At least half the Jewish children in greater Kansas City, where I live, are not *halakhically* Jewish by Haredi interpretations. They practice Judaism. They attend synagogue. They are educated as Jews. Yet, when they reach the very country we teach them to love, the government sponsored Judaism tells them their Judaism is not Judaism, their rabbis not rabbis, their rituals are not Jewish rituals, and their *ahavat Tsiyon* is inauthentic. They make us out to be liars and scoundrels rather than bearers of the covenant.

Between conversions and intermarriages, a majority of our children are the direct descendants, within 3 generations, of people not born Jewish. Many, if not most, of the conversions were done with *hatafat dahm brit* and *mikvah* by Reform and Conservative rabbis. Many families who affiliate with congregations and even educate their children in school have one parent

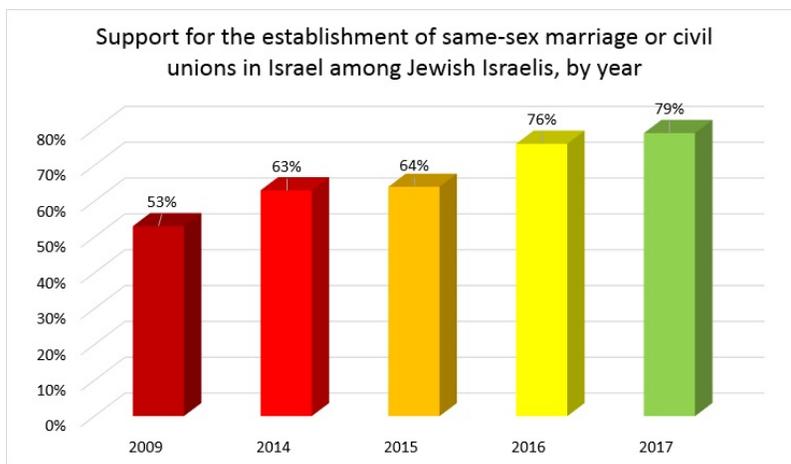
Court case regarding the Kotel and the demand that the Rabbinate be allowed independent representation before the Supreme Court, rather than be represented by the Israeli AG who represents all agencies of the state.

The above quotes are both a grievous misperception of the Chief Rabbinate's authorities, reflecting a disregard for the law and the State authorities and perception of itself as standing above the law and the government. This document misrepresents past Supreme Court rulings, and forces Israel to move further and further (if the Chief Rabbinate's position prevails) onto a collision course with world Jewry.

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### Hiddush survey:

#### Support for same-sex marriage / civil unions - record high of 79%!



[click HERE for Hiddush analysis](#)

Hiddush seems to have annoyed a rabbi in Jerusalem with its surveys of the Israeli public on matters of religion and state, particularly with [Hiddush's recent survey on same-sex marriage and civil unions](#).



This threatening connection between religious extremism and violence often rears its ugly head, but Hiddush is proud to be at the forefront of the battle for religious freedom and equality in Israel. Hiddush will continue to act, to fight, and to publish the truth without fear.

...

whose lineage the Haredi rabbinate might accept and one they would not accept.

[Take a look at the Jewish Standard article.](#) What is your reaction? How shall we move forward? Did the school react properly, and how might we respond?

We look forward to hearing from you at:

organizers@rrfei.org and on our [FB group](#).

Kol tuv,

Mark

Rabbi Mark H. Levin  
RRFEI Editor

[facebook](#)

[email](#)

## Contact us

email: [organizers@rrfei.org](mailto:organizers@rrfei.org)

Phone (US): [646-334-5636](tel:646-334-5636)

Phone (Isr): [054-779-1179](tel:054-779-1179)

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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

Website: [WWW.RRFEI.ORG](http://WWW.RRFEI.ORG) | Email: [organizers@rrfei.org](mailto:organizers@rrfei.org) | Tel. [US] [646-334-5636](tel:646-334-5636); [Israel] [054-779-1179](tel:054-779-1179)

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Freedom of Religion for Israel

182 East 95th St., Suite 24G

New York, New York 10128

US

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