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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

August 20, 2017
28 Av 5777

Dear Friends,

Much has occurred in the 2 months since [our last edition of the RRFEI newsletter](#). We are heartbroken over the shocking events both in Charlottesville and Barcelona, and our hearts go out to the victims and the larger implications of growing racism, antisemitism, and violence.

Before the summer, we concluded with [a feature article from Rabbi Michael Chernick regarding the problem of agunot](#), regarding what can be and is being done among the Modern Orthodox to resolve the problem of the agunah among the Jewish people.

Simultaneously we sent the reactions of three scholars: Rabbis [Mark](#)

ANNOUNCEMENT:

2017 [ISRAEL RELIGION & STATE INDEX](#) COMING SOON!

Given recent developments, we hope that your High Holiday sermons will feature an analysis and appeal regarding religious freedom in Israel.

Just 1 week before Rosh Hashanah, Hiddush will release its annual [Israel Religion & State Index](#), including comprehensive, in-depth data on Jewish Israeli public opinion on most matters of religion & state.

Halakhic Pre-Nuptial Agreements: Why Are They Needed? How Do They Work? Do They Work Here and Abroad?

By Rabbi Michael Chernick

[Click HERE for Rabbi Chernick's full article](#)

- [Click HERE for Rabbi Elliot Dorff's response](#)
- [Click HERE for Rabba Sara Hurwitz's response \(new\)](#)
- [Click HERE for Rabbi Daniel Siegel's response](#)
- [Click HERE for Rabbi Mark Washofsky's response](#)
- [Click HERE for Deborah Waxman's response \(new\)](#)

[Washofsky, Elliot Dorff,](#)
and [Daniel Siegel.](#)

Now, in this edition, we reprint those along with two other responses. We have the privilege of hearing from [Rabba Sara Hurwitz](#), Dean of Yeshivat Maharat, and [Rabbi Deborah Waxman](#), President of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Seminary.

Our goal is to demonstrate, with these original pieces of research and other articles that we are including, the breadth of modern halackhic creativity and problem solving, along with the attempts of the Chief Rabbinate to stifle any Jewish interpretation other than their own. This, of course, is nearly unique in Jewish history, that we would have one and only one halakhic opinion that is acceptable in a given time and place.

In our next edition we will be sending a translation of an interview with Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat, in which he makes remarkable comments regarding the activities of the Chief Rabbinic and the results for Israel and the Jewish people. The virulent disagreements are, of course, not exclusively between the Orthodox and

Social justice, rather than immutable precedent, must govern the civic life of Jewry

**By Rabbi Deborah Waxman, President,
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College / Jewish
Reconstructionist Communities**

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

The ongoing existence of agunot in the aftermath of World War I and the inadequate responses of modern rabbinical authorities to the unjust and painful situation of these women were critical factors that impelled Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan to move beyond a halakhic system and begin to articulate a Reconstructionist approach to Judaism. In his 1936 essay “The Status of Woman in Jewish Law,” Kaplan analyzed ways that halakhah mandates women to second-class status, most especially around marriage (“it is in the marriage relationship chiefly, where the woman’s inferior status is fraught with tragic consequences to her”) and divorce (“the woman experiences the worst effects of her status when she can no longer continue to live with her husband”). After assessing contemporaneous efforts to resolve this problem as either regressive or ineffective, Kaplan concluded that halakhah was an insufficient medium of repair and declared: “[S]ocial justice, rather than immutable precedent, must govern the civic life of Jewry and underlie...juridical institutions...”



Reflections on the Agunah Crises

**By Rabba Sara Hurwitz, Co-Founder and President of
Yeshivat Maharat**

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

In 1776 , in Germany, a young man named, Isaac, son of Eliezer Neiburg of Mannheim, was engaged to marry Leah, daughter of Jacob Guenzhausen of Bonn. In the week leading up to the wedding, Isaac seemed pre-occupied exhibiting some strange behavior. The wedding, however, took place in the groom’s home

the more liberal movements. Rather, clearly many rabbis are speaking out about the attempt at arrogating all religious authority among the Jewish people to a small group of Haredi rabbis who deem themselves, by virtue of political power rather than meritocracy, to be the sole decision makers for religious practice among not only Israeli but also world Jewry.

Ours is a great tradition of constant debate and renewal among those trained in Jewish practice and law. In these articles we see the result of both scholarly debate and political coercion, with the positive and negative impacts of both.

We look forward to hearing from you at: organizers@rrfei.org and on our [FB group](#).

Kol tuv,

Mark

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RRFEI Editor

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town with much celebration, on the 8th of Elul 5526, August 14, 1766, and all seemed to bode well.

A week later, on Saturday night, after they had spent several days in Bonn, Isaac Neiburg told the community rabbi, that his life was in danger and that he must leave Bonn immediately, but in order not to leave his young wife an agunah, he wished to give her a divorce. He did admit that he had not found the bride to his liking, but noted that he was not divorcing her for this reason, rather because of the mortal danger threatening him. Rabbi Copenhagen's attempts to dissuade him were to no avail, and therefore it was agreed by both sides that Isaac Neiburg would divorce his wife. Financial matters were agreed to, including payment of expenses by the husband, and Isaac consented to everything. Since there was not a recognized rabbinical court in Bonn, it was decided to turn to the rabbinical court in Cleves, a city on the border between Germany and Holland.



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- [Israel's rabbinate stops Jewish kids from reading from a Torah scroll](#)
- [High Court rules women must be allowed to administer rabbinical courts](#)

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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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