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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)

Newsletters

Resources

Archives

Contact Us

Introduction

August 31, 2017
9 Elul 5777

Dear Friends,

We all know that Israel is the first Jewish State since the Hasmonean period of the Second Temple. It's the first autonomous, independent Jewish State since the origin of the halakhah, the instrument by which rabbis and officials ruled the Jewish communities of Europe during the Middle Ages. Is it any wonder that the proper role of halakhah in modern Jewish life and a modern Jewish State must be hammered out in the governing institutions of this Jewish political entity?

The Enlightenment rise of individuality and the separation between religion and State has rendered government sponsored Judaism not only an anomaly but inconceivable to members of most contemporary

ANNOUNCEMENT:

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

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.

Comprehensive interview with Rabbi Shlomo Riskin in Israeli media

Select paragraphs translated below:



[Click HERE for translation of interview](#)

Jewish streams. And yet, here we are, debating the role of government sponsored Orthodoxy as though it were 1800 not 2017.

Today's newsletter opens with a shortened form of an interview with Rabbi Shlomo Riskin of Efrat, in which he struggles with the role of State sponsored halakhah that is controlled by the spiritual descendants of the Hatam Sofer rather than Samson Raphael Hirsch. Rabbi Riskin's comments are followed by an interpretation through the eyes of our own Rabbi Uri Regev, President and CEO of Hiddush. Rabbi Riskin seeks inclusion in the ruling religious establishment, but makes clear that the major streams of Jewish practice in the United States, Conservative and Reform Judaism, are not to have a place among the decision makers in Jewish Law. He rankles at his exclusion from power as an Orthodox rabbi, but does not see a means to include other methods of grappling with and modernizing Jewish Law. You'll find a brief message from Rabbi Micky Boyden, an Israeli, Reform rabbi reminding us of the progress made by the

A recent detailed interview with Rabbi Shlomo Riskin appeared in the original Hebrew in Makor Rishon earlier this month, with select paragraphs translated into English below.

"If I could ask God one thing, I would ask: How is it possible that the Talmud is the most pluralistic piece of literature, but those who study it are the most narrow minded?" says Rabbi Shlomo Riskin. "It's a shame, and it destroys and distorts the halakhah. Without adhering to halakhah [the Jewish people] cannot hold out, but in my opinion the greatest praise [due to] the Torah is that it is not singular. Our halakhah is pluralistic. The Chief Rabbis of the past understood this as well. Chief Rabbis Herzog and Goren did brave things when necessary. That's how halakhah has always been, and that what we teach our students."

[Click HERE to continue reading](#)

Rabbi Uri Regev's comments on the Rabbi Riskin interview

[Click HERE for Uri Regev's reaction to the interview with Shlomo Riskin](#)

Special Symposium: Judaism's internal crisis has been deferred

By Elliot Jager, Jerusalem Post

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

The Jerusalem Report invites prominent Diaspora figures to offer their ideas for how Jews can make religious peace among themselves.

...

Reform Judaism in Israel: an amazing success story

By Rabbi Micky Boyden

[Click HERE for the full article](#)

liberal Jewish movements in Israel over the last three decades.

Finally, we have included two paragraphs from the writings of the founder of Cultural Zionism, Ahad Ha'am. We've included this as a reminder of two things: that the cultural revival of the Jewish people was also a pressing goal of the Zionist movement, and that that goal is actually being achieved. But State sponsored Judaism stifles Ahad Ha'am's vision, and thereby thwarts the development of both the State of Israel and the Jewish people. We include Ahad Ha'am as a comparison with Rabbi Riskin's comments, a way to measure the impact of State sponsored Judaism that limits the Jewish creativity of our revitalized people.

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

Kol tuv,

Mark

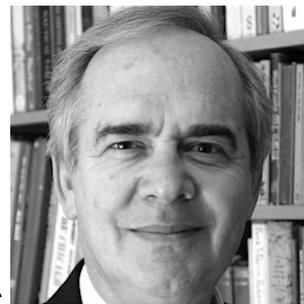
Rabbi Mark H. Levin
RRFEI Editor

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Reform Judaism in Israel is, by and large, an amazing success story. Thirty years ago there were only a handful of congregations and not one single purpose built Reform synagogue anywhere in Israel apart from at Leo Baeck in Haifa and HUC in Jerusalem. We were viewed as an American outpost, whose supporters were almost entirely from English speaking countries. There were maybe two or three couples a year who dared have a Reform rabbi officiate at their wedding.



...

[The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem \(1897\)](#)

By Ahad Ha'am

[Click HERE for the full quote](#)

The spirit of our people desires further development; it wants to absorb the basic elements of general culture which are reaching it from the outside world, to digest them and to make them a part of itself, as it has done before at various periods of its history. But the conditions of its life in exile are not suitable for such a task...

...

Resources

- [Vision of Hiddush and Rabbis for Religious Freedom](#)
- [Hiddush resources](#)
- [Courts - religious & secular](#)
- [Conversion](#)
- [Death & burial - ancient & now](#)
- [Diaspora-Israel](#)
- [Diversity & inclusivity among Jews](#)
- [Diversity & inclusivity in relations with non-Jews](#)

email: 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 | Email: 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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