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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

Sept. 28, 2017
8 Tishrei 5777


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Dear Friends,

*Gmar hatimah tovah --
May you be inscribed for
blessing in the Book of
Life.*

A personal note: Over these *Yamim Nora'im* I've asked myself and attempted to examine whether I am failing the Jewish people. I believe Israel to potentially be the Redemption of the Jewish people, the most significant Jewish project in 2,000 years. I believe whether Israel is the state of all the Jewish people or of just a portion of our people will determine its success or failure, and that a piece of that responsibility rests on my shoulders, personally. I believe the emergence of Israel is divine providence, and its outcome will affect the nations of the world. Therefore, this work is

This week's RRFEI articles

Summaries & Links

1. **From the JTA: *Worried about Jewish pluralism in Israel? So are Israelis.*** "Many of this year's findings [in the Religion and State Index] are in line with those of previous years. Notably, 65 percent of Israeli Jews support giving Reform and Conservative Judaism equal official standing to Orthodox Judaism. Among secular Jews, who account for some 40 percent of Israeli Jewry, the number was 92 percent... Also, 84 percent of Jews agree Israel should uphold the freedom of religion and conscience promised in its Declaration of Independence, 67 percent support state recognition of non-Orthodox marriage and 50 percent would personally prefer it." [\[LINK\]](#)
2. **2017 Israel Religion & State Index.** 65% of the Jewish Israeli public supports granting equal official status to the three largest streams of world Jewry. A majority supports the involvement

both essential and holy. Thank you for allowing me to walk with you in this sacred work.

We present two highly significant developments this week:

Item #3 is **Vision**

Statement: Israel as A Jewish and Democratic State. Please read, add your name if you have not signed, and distribute to your people. Consider, please, sharing it with your people. Many members of my congregation found their own vision expressed in it, and signed.

Second: **The 2017**

Religion and State Index: which makes clear that Israelis' vision, by and large, matches the work of Hiddush and RRFEI, for a pluralistic, democratic and Jewish Israel.

I am going to be chutzpadik and close with one thing I said to my congregation at Rosh Hashanah:

"I want you to change your vision. I want you to stop being a Herzl Zionist who supports a political state in which you do not live, and start being an Ahad Ha'am Zionist, who shares in renewing the Jewish people. We are a world-wide people, no matter where we live. Our history and destiny are the history

of Diaspora Jewry in promoting freedom of religion and equality in Israel. 65% of the Jewish Israeli public believes that the Nation-State Bill should anchor the guarantee of freedom of religion and conscience in law. [\[LINK\]](#)

- Freedom of marriage for all: 67% of Israeli Jews support Israel's recognition of all forms of marriage. 50% would prefer non-Orthodox marriages for themselves or their children, outside the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate.
- Kashrut certification outside the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate: 80% support the opening of the kashrut certification market to competition, with the State serving as supervisor, and doing away with the Chief Rabbinate's monopoly.
- Free movement on Shabbat: 73% support the operation of public transportation on the Sabbath, in full or on a partial basis.
- Service should be mandatory: 83% believe that all yeshiva students should be required to serve in military or perform national service.
- Less for yeshivas: After the government's yeshiva budget reached an all-time, historic high, 80% think it should be canceled or drastically cut.
- Core Curriculum: 82% believe that ultra-Orthodox schools should be obligated to teach core curricular studies. 72% believe that the way to enforce this is by denying funding to those that refuse to comply.
- A place for women too: 79% support that the Parties' Law should be amended to require all parties to include women in realistic positions on their lists of Knesset candidates. This is an increase of 28% in support from last year.

3. **Vision Statement: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State.** Written by Rabbis Marc Angel and Uri Regev, scores of colleagues have

and destiny of the Jewish people, just like Israelis. Our lives are inextricably linked."

May we be a blessing to the Jewish people in the coming year.

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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signed this strong support for equality among the Jewish streams and a Jewish and Democratic Israel. PLEASE SIGN AND DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR PEOPLE. [\[LINK\]](#)

Mark's personal note: My RH sermon addressed the importance of Israel, and many in the congregation signed the statement as a result. If you would like to see the sermon, please send me a note at markhowardlevin@gmail.com. It's the most convincing sermon I have given about Israel in 4 decades, and had the best results. I will be placing it on my personal blog: www.markhlevin.com, after Y"K.

4. ***Haaretz: Bernie Sanders, Jewish Senate Colleagues Blast Netanyahu for Blocking Equality Among Israeli Jews.*** On Thursday, a day after the letter was sent to the Israeli Embassy in Washington, the State Prosecutor's Office notified the Supreme Court that Netanyahu did not intend to reconsider the decision to suspend the Western Wall deal. This notification came in response to a request by the court that the government reconsider its actions in light of a petition by the Reform and Conservative movements, as well as the feminist prayer group Women of the Wall. [\[LINK\]](#)

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](#)
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- [Western Wall](#)
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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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