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# State & Religion

## JPW Knesset Update

### What We Saw Last Week, and What We Can Expect This Week in the Knesset



Dear Friends,

This week, diverse and interesting aspects of state and religion arose both in committee meetings and in the plenum. The Education, Culture and Sports Committee debated the issue of pluralism in education; the administration of Israel's holy sites was discussed by the Committee for Jewish Religious Services; in the Knesset plenum, the motion of no-confidence in the government targeted the Reform stream in Judaism; our Education Department's weekly activities included a lecture to participants of the pre-army Mechina Bina, and a seminar for Mechinat Kol Ami participants which included thought-provoking panel discussions and a meeting with an MK.

All the best,

**Adv. Sharon Banyan-Primor**

Director, Jewish Pluralism Watch

**Emily Levy-Shochat**

Chair, Jewish Pluralism Watch

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# Last Week in the Knesset

## In the Plenum

A no-confidence motion in the government was submitted to the plenum: “A government that capitulates to Reform organizations and harms the basic values of the Haredi public is not worthy of trust.”

**MK Yisrael Eichler (United Torah Judaism)** who presented the motion: “They want to desecrate the Western Wall, to destroy its essence as a place of faith and turn it into a national site. Thus I say to the people who dwell in Zion, that the war of the Reform against Judaism is an existential war. Their war will lead to bloodshed at the Western Wall.”

**Minister of Communications Yoaz Hendel (New Hope)** responded: “My Haredi brethren, you need to assimilate into society, to work and study, to become entitled to produce equal rights and obligations. This is a sacred privilege. We are in the State of Israel, in Jerusalem, the capital of a sovereign state. This government will continue to work in a serious and professional manner to address the needs of all parts of Israeli society.”



Another bill **Regulation of swimming Places (Amendment – Determining Areas for Separate Bathing)** was also raised before the plenum.

The initiator of the bill **MK Yitzhak Pindrus (United Torah Judaism)**: “When an Arab woman in Haifa wants to swim, is she not entitled to do so? We have been abandoned, we are not relevant, because when you speak of human rights, we do not seem to be taken into account. We are apparently not human beings. But by all means take care of that Muslim woman in Haifa. Take care of that same Muslim woman in the North who goes down to the Sea of Galilee.”

**Minister of Intelligence Elazar Stern (Yesh Atid)** responded to the bill: “I am in favor of separate beaches; I believe that people who wish to swim separately should be able to do so. I support human rights, also allocating places to suit people’s needs. You know what I mean, right? Everywhere. Not only at the beach. I support a state in which every person is able to get married.”

# The Committees



**The Education, Culture and Sports Committee** discussed the failure to uphold the Supreme Court's ruling regarding the non-pluralistic teaching of Judaism in schools by external NGOs.

One of the initiators of the discussion **MK Michal Rozin (Meretz)**: "I think this is a misconception for Israel. I endorse the study of Judaism, but I think that the Orthodox conception of Judaism

alienates children rather than brings them closer. I am very much in favor of Jewish studies, but they should be conducted in a spirit of open-mindedness."

**MK Alon Tal (Blue and White)** underlined the importance Judaism places on pluralism:

"Every week in the synagogue we repeat the words: 'The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.' As someone concerned with ecology, on the one hand, we have the desert tree, the palm, and on the other there is the cedar that needs cold and rain to thrive. We also go on to say: 'Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.' I would like to emphasize that Judaism has always been concerned with pluralism. Given that we have decided in favor of diversity, let's make sure that the Ministry of Education implements this decision."

**MK Rabbi Gilad Kariv (Labor)** added:

"Because most of the girls graduating from state religious schools do not serve in the military, but enrol rather in Sherut Leumi (National Civil Service), around 200 educational positions in Sherut Leumi are subsidized annually by the government. The young women who serve in Sherut Leumi work in these same NGOs and when they visit schools they offer the schools that most valuable asset – additional personnel for free. These NGOs have a distinct advantage in the market for state schools."

The **Committee on Special National Infrastructure Initiatives and Jewish Religious Services** discussed the management and operation of the holy sites in Israel.

**The Committee Chair MK Yulia Malinovsky (Yisrael Beiteinu)**: "Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch has served in this position since 2000. I am trying to understand, are there no term limits? This person has had this job for 21 years even though there are term limits in public service. There needs to be an explanation for how this position – Rabbi of the Western Wall – originated. This is a managerial and not a halachic position. The appointee is required to operate the entire system and at the end of the day, we discover that this is not the case."

**MK Gilad Kariv** proposed legislation on this subject:

“This whole story was born in sin. The holy sites have to be regulated by primary legislation. If this government really wants to address these matters, there has to be government legislation. The appointee and the Chief Rabbinate alone determined the nature of the role of Kotel Rabbi.”



**The Caucus for Strengthening Diaspora Jewry** chaired by **MK Yitzhak Pindrus (United Torah Judaism)** was launched in the Knesset this week. The caucus will join forces with organizations in the Diaspora to strengthen Jewish communities and combat assimilation.

**Caucus Chair MK Yitzhak Pindrus (United Torah Judaism)**: We will strive to maintain Jewish identity throughout the world, even when we have here a flourishing Jewish state. We need to know, to cherish and to assist those organizations who are helping to achieve this. This is precisely why we are

here today and why this caucus was established.”

**Minister of Diaspora Affairs Nachman Shai** referred to all the streams in Judaism: “Our approach to this national Jewish issue is egalitarian. We want to enable every Jew or Jewess to live a Jewish life no matter where they are. We are now facing the question of the Kotel and I know that there are some who would like to stir up a war around the Kotel and I say to you –make room for everyone at the Kotel in accordance with his or her customs. We have enough enemies – spare us this rift.”

## Term of the Week

### A No-confidence Motion



Article 28 of Basic Law: The government states that the Knesset is entitled to express no-confidence in the government. The basic law determines that the expression of no-confidence in the government shall be done by means of a resolution of the Knesset, adopted by a majority of its members to express confidence in an alternative government that shall announce the basic guidelines of its policy, its make-up and the distribution of functions among the ministers. The new government shall be established once the Knesset has expressed confidence in it.

For the purpose of submitting a motion to express no-confidence in the government, a parliamentary group shall hand over to the Knesset Secretary a written announcement on the policy outlines of the proposed government and its make-up, signed by the Knesset Member designated to stand at the head of the proposed government. The consent of the prospective ministers shall be attached.

The government, by means of one of its ministers, shall present its response to the motion of no-confidence, and if several motions have been submitted on various topics, the government presents its answer after each one. Following the government's response, a parliamentary group debate is held, and if several motions of no-confidence have been submitted, a consolidated parliamentary group debate is held. At the conclusion of the debate, the Knesset votes on the motion or motions of no-confidence.

(Source: The Knesset Website)

## JPW's Education Desk

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This week we conducted a seminar on state and religion in Israel for participants of **Mechinat NOAM - Kol Ami**. The seminar's opening day was held at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies and participants met with JPW Director, **Adv. Sharon Banyan Primor**, for an introductory lecture. This was followed by a conversation with **Katya Kupchik** of Yisrael Hofsheets (Be Free Israel) on the subject of who is a Jew and the challenges facing conversion in Israel, and a panel of activists discussing marriage and divorce in Israel today. We met with **Dr. Yizhar Hess**, Vice Chairman of the World Zionist Organization, who captivated us in a fascinating conversation. At the Knesset, **MK Alon Tal** (Blue and White) updated us on his activities on issues of state and religion and other matters. The seminar concluded with a guided tour of the Knesset building where we learned about the functioning of the Knesset.

On Wednesday this week, JPW's Director met the participants of **Mechinat Bina** for a talk about religion, state and everything in-between.



JPW conducts tailor-made seminars, webinars and conferences - physically or online - on contemporary issues of state and religion, meeting with MKs and in-depth discussions on the political aspects of freedom of religion and pluralism in Israel. For further details please email to [devora@masorti.org.il](mailto:devora@masorti.org.il)

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