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# State & Religion

## JPW Knesset Update

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



Shalom to all our friends!

This week we celebrated the festival of Hannukah. The aroma of sufganiyot and latkes suffused our homes and the light of the candles illuminated and filled our hearts. Matters of state and religion continued to figure prominently in the political and public arena during this week as well: The Minister of Defense joined the Masorti kehilla Shalhevet Maccabim in an egalitarian candle-lighting ceremony; the President met with delegates from the Conservative and Reform Movements and Women of the Wall to discuss the Kotel Resolution; the Minister of Transportation pushed forward with plans for public transport on Shabbat; and a bill for state conversion was brought up before the Knesset plenum.

All this and more, in the newsletter below!

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# Last Week in the Knesset

## The Plenum

A bill was raised in the Knesset plenum by **Shas MKs Yinon Azoulay and Moshe Arbel.**

**MK Arbel** referred to the Supreme Court's ruling regarding conversion:

"Recently the Supreme Court decided to recognize Reform and Conservative converts as Jews for the purposes of the Law of Return, contrary to the state's position and to the Ministry of the Interior's accepted practice. In order to prevent public division and rifts, it is important to regulate the state conversion system and to determine that in everything concerning conversion, only conversions performed by that same system will be legally recognized."

**Deputy Minister Abir Kara (Yamina)** responded to the bill in the name of **Prime Minister** Naftali Bennett (Yamina):

"The bill offers a fitting solution whereby conversion in Israel will be preserved as state conversion. Today the Minister for Religious Affairs revealed the conversion plan that he is spearheading. The status of the existing state conversion system will be maintained and enshrined in primary legislation."

**MK Rabbi Gilad Kariv (Labor)** alluded to the conversion legislation on Twitter:

"Thanks to the High Court of Justice's rulings there is no longer a monopoly on conversion. The condition for any further government legislation in this area (such as MK Kahana's conversion proposal) is that no damage be done to the recognition status of non-Orthodox conversions."

## Bills

The bill **Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty (Amendment – the Right to Equality)** was submitted to the Ministerial Committee on Legislation. The bill was proposed by **Blue and White MKs Eitan Ginzburg, Alon Tal and others.**

According to the preamble of the bill, "it is proposed to protect within the basic law the cardinal principle that all citizens are equal before the law for the reasons mentioned in the Declaration of Independence – religion, race, gender; for additional reasons that have been identified in other laws concerning equality, and, other causes that have historically been prone for discrimination – sexual orientation, personal status, country of origin, age and disabilities."

The bill **The Rabbinical Courts Jurisdiction Bill (Consensual Jurisdiction)** proposed by MK Avi Maoz (Religious Zionism) was also brought before the Ministers.

The preamble to the bill states that "it is proposed to protect within the law of the authority of the rabbinical courts to deliberate with the agreement of the parties on civil matters that may serve as a basis for agreement between the parties. It is proposed that the manner of the appeal to the rabbinical courts will ensure that the rabbinical court will deliberate in a dispute only on

condition that all parties concerned submit to the court their explicit and written agreement to these deliberations.”

**Minister of Transport Merav Michaeli (Labor)** published proposals for reforms in traffic regulations which are now open for public comments. These reforms may open the way to limited public transport on Shabbat, which will be privately run without government subsidies and at unregulated prices, so as to provide mobility to individuals on Shabbat and not only to public entities as is currently the case.

photo credit: Facebook



## **The Kotel Resolution – the President enters the picture**



Even over the Hannukah holiday, the Kotel Resolution continued to occupy a central place on the public and political agenda. **President Isaac (Bougie) Herzog** met with delegates from the Reform and Conservative movements, with **MK Rabbi Gilad Kariv (Labor) and MK Alon Tal (Blue and White)** also in attendance. The President expressed his support for the need to find a fitting solution acceptable to all parties and

condemned the violence at the Kotel against the Reform and Conservative Movements and Women of the Wall, adding that every effort must be made to avoid bloodshed at the Western Wall's egalitarian plaza.

On Rosh Hodesh Kislev the President appealed to MKs Kariv and Tal, urging them to refrain from attending, with Torah scrolls, the Women of the Wall's Rosh Hodesh prayer service. In return, the President promised, the Director General of the President's residence would hold meetings with delegates of these organizations to discuss the advancement of the Kotel Resolution.

Photos credit: the President's Spokesperson; The Masorti Movement

**Minister of Defense Benjamin (Benny) Gantz (Blue and White)** joined the Shalhevet Maccabim kehilla to light the third candle of Hannukah. During his visit, he spoke about the Kotel Resolution:



"I have said in the past that the Kotel is long enough to accommodate all sectors of Israeli society. I believe in our ability and our need to live together with those who hold beliefs that are different to ours, but with the understanding that we are all bound together by a connecting framework. We have to succeed in accommodating all parts of Israeli society. It is all written in the Declaration of Independence – irrespective of religion, race or gender. We have not yet fulfilled the Zionist mission."

## Term of the Week

**Basic Law** – the Declaration of Independence states that "*With effect from the moment of the termination of the Mandate being tonight, the eve of Sabbath, the 6th Iyar, 5708 (15th May, 1948), until the establishment of the elected, regular authorities of the State in accordance with the Constitution which shall be adopted by the Elected Constituent Assembly not later than the 1st October 1948...*". Despite the 73 years that have passed since this phrase was written, Israel still does not have a Constitution. What we do have are Basic Laws. These 11 laws have a superior status in the Israeli legal system so "regular" law cannot contradict them, unless it has a special phrase which expressly states that it shall be of effect, notwithstanding the provisions of a Basic Law (*for example*: Article 8 to the Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation (1994)).

## JPW's Education Desk

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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