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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!

As we emphasize in our weekly reports, matters of state and religion occupy center stage in the present Knesset and this week, as in past weeks, they were the focus of much attention on a number of occasions. The Labor, Welfare and Health Committee discussed the implications of the Kashrut reforms on kashrut supervisors and workers; state and religion figured prominently on the Knesset plenum agenda; the Minister of Religious Services discussed his conversion proposal in the media; and our Education Desk has made a welcome comeback, returning to the Knesset for the first time since the start of the coronavirus outbreak.

As always we will continue to keep you up to date with the latest developments.

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Last Week in the Knesset

In the Plenum

Matters concerning state and religion were prominent on the plenum agenda this week with many MKs frequently referring to the subject. During the discussion on the no-confidence motion, ultra-Orthodox MKs voiced criticism of the government's current policy in the area of state and religion from the Knesset podium.

MK Yoav Ben Tzur (Shas) referred to the changes in the status quo:

"You are causing serious damage to the status quo – we will have to work very hard to put it right. I pray today that Shabbat observance in the country will be strengthened and that the operation of public transport on Shabbat] will not be permitted to break down the walls of the Shabbat nor change customs that we have cherished for generations."

MK Yakov Asher (United Torah Judaism): "We are not fighting for ourselves nor for the Haredi community – this is not a Haredi war; it is a Jewish war."

MK Michael Malkieli (Shas) criticized the Conversion Bill advanced by MK Yulia Malinovsky (Yisrael Beiteinu):

"The government is competing among themselves to see who can propose a more interesting law, one that is more lenient and offers a more wholesale conversion. And now the Ministerial Committee has come up with the brilliant idea of allowing heads of Religious Zionist yeshivot to perform conversions while heads of Haredi yeshivot are not authorized to do so."



MK Avi Maoz (Religious Zionism) raised the Rabbinical Courts Jurisdiction Bill (Consensual Jurisdiction) before the Knesset plenum. This bill authorizes the Rabbinical Court to settle civil disputes according to Torah law with the consent of both parties.

MK Avi Maoz: "Around two million people are entitled to litigation according to Torah law. Where is democracy? I ask the government. Where is human dignity? Where is everybody's fundamental right to live according to their beliefs?"

MK Moshe Gafni (United Torah Judaism) added:

"Knesset members in the coalition do not want to allow me to adjudicate in the Rabbinical Courts. I do not force this on anyone; I don't dictate to a party

that they have to litigate in the Rabbinical Court if they do not wish to do so. Why am I not allowed to live according to my beliefs? Why?"

Minister for Religious Services Matan Kahana (Yemina) responded to the bill:

"As Minister of Religious Services I work to strengthen the status of Jewish Law in Israel and to bolster the standing of the Rabbinical Courts. This is my aim and I intend in the near future to advance government legislation granting additional authority to the Rabbinical Courts.



The Committees



The Labor, Welfare and Health Committee discussed the ramifications of the kashrut reform and its impact on staff and supervisors.

MK Uri Maklev (United Torah Judaism) referred to the situation of kashrut supervisors:

"These people, this is their profession – they have studied long and hard for it – and they would find it very difficult to find alternative employment today. Nothing

like this has ever happened in Israel's entire history – thousands of supervisors are being shunted aside by the state and the Knesset is not up in arms."

MK Uriel Busso (Shas) criticized the Minister of Religious Services:

"From the moment the Minister of Religious Services took office he has referred to the Chief Rabbinate as a monopoly and has deligitimized it. It's as if a new Minister of the Interior would declare that the municipal authorities are a monopoly. I am here to voice the distress of the kashrut supervisors and the thousands of families who are living in a state of total uncertainty."

Committee Chair MK Efrat Rayten Marom (Labor):

“I have not heard of any coherent plan to deal with the implications of the reform for workers. In the name of the committee I appeal to the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry for Religious Services to come up with a plan, to present data and to give the subject the attention it deserves. You bear a great responsibility and I know that this reform is important but there is no need to harm the supervisors and their families.”

Photo Credit: Facebook

Bills

MK Yitzhak Pindrus (United Torah Judaism) submitted a bill **Regulation of Bathing Places (Amendment – Determining Areas for Separate Bathing)** to the Ministerial Committee for Legislation.

This bill cites the changes that have taken place over the years in the demand for separate beaches. There has been no growth either in the number or the area of separate beaches and therefore the area of separate beaches and the number of beach facilities must be determined according to the average number of bathers. Furthermore, the local authorities should be allowed to open six designated beaches, to declare a separate beach for women and a separate beach for men that will operate every day of the week.

MK's comments reported in the media

Minister for Religious Services Matan Kahana (Yemina) was interviewed by radio host Kalman Liberman on KAN, Israel Public Broadcasting Corporation's channel.

“We are opening halachic conversion in Israel to enable conversion by municipal rabbis. The implication of being a Jew according to the halacha is accepting the yoke of the mitzvot and it is not acceptable for someone with a secular outlook to convert because that is plain and simply against the halacha. I am a man who believes in the halacha and I insist that conversion be carried out in accordance with the halacha.

Minister of Finance Avigdor Liberman addressed the conversion proposal in a meeting of the Yisrael Beitenu faction: “Within 60 days, the coalition will pass the law allowing municipal rabbis to perform conversions.”

In a meeting of the Blue and White faction, **Minister of Defense Benjamin (Benny) Gantz** spoke about the bill Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty (Amendment – the Right to Equality) that **MK Eitan Ginzburg** and other Blue and White MKs are advancing:

“Blue and White has submitted a bill Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty that will enshrine the principle of equality in law. Equality between human beings is at the root of how Israeli society defines itself.”

Term of the Week

The Knesset Committees - The parliamentary structure in Israel divides the legislature into the government and the Knesset. The government (the prime minister and the ministers) remains in office only as long as it enjoys the confidence of the Knesset – in other words, as long as there are 61 MKs or more who support the government's continued existence. For this reason, the coalition (comprised of all MKs who support the government) must always consist of 61 or more members. The Knesset's function is legislative while the government has an executive role – to lead and oversee the implementation of government policy in accordance with legislation. The Knesset has an additional role which is to oversee the work of the government. This is carried out by the committees which are part of the legislative process and where in-depth discussions of the various topics – concerning both legislation and issues of principle that are on the agenda – take place. The committees are comprised of representatives from the coalition and the opposition. There are 11 committees in the 24th Knesset that deal with the various issues.

JPW's Education Desk

It was with great excitement that we resumed our activities in the Knesset after a very long break (since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic) with a study day on the subject of state and religion in the Knesset. We were delighted to have the participation of some 45 young members of Habonim Dror from Australia, New Zealand, Britain and North America who are spending a year in Israel. After an introductory talk with the Director of the Education Desk and a meeting with Tammy Gottlieb, Deputy Chair of Women of the Wall and Deputy Director of the Masorti Movement, who told them about the battles that Women of the Wall have to fight, the group paid a visit to the Knesset where we witnessed a stormy discussion in the plenum and met with the staff of **MK Mossi Raz (Meretz)** to discuss his activities in the area of state and religion and also to hear about the fascinating work in the Knesset.



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

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