



State & Religion

JPW Knesset Update

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



Dear Friends!

This past week, issues of state and religion continued to dominate the Knesset agenda. The controversy surrounding the Western Wall was the center of a heated discussion in the plenum, and the Committee on Special National Infrastructure Initiatives and Jewish Religious Services discussed the matter of conversion. Furthermore, the Constitution, Law and Justice Committee approved a bill determining that Israel's rabbinical courts hold sway over Jews in the Diaspora. The media featured MKs' comments and responses to these central issues of state and religion.

As always, we would love to have your comments, ideas and thoughts. One great idea we received is to enrich our newsletter every week with an expiations of one or two terms mentioned in the newsletter. You will find it in the further.

Also, you are welcome to invite English speakers to sign up to receive this newsletter by writing to us at: JPW@masorti.org.il

All the best,

Adv. Sharon Banyan-Primor
Director, Jewish Pluralism Watch

Emily Levy-Shochat
Chair, Jewish Pluralism Watch

Last Week in the Knesset

The Plenum

MK Miri Regev (Likud) raised a proposal for the plenum's agenda entitled: "Maintaining the sanctity of the Western Wall." In her speech, MK Regev attacked the Kotel Resolution:

"After all, what do they want, those people who would like there to be pluralism and gender equality and egalitarian prayers with both men and women together without a partition? What has this to do with sanctity? What has this to do with the longing for the Temple and with solidarity? You have turned our heart and our soul, the Kotel, into a controversy."

Minister for Religious Services Matan Kahana responded:

"We will do whatever necessary to restore the unifying status of the Kotel. Unfortunately, over the last few years, it has become a stage for arguments and bickering and there are those with ulterior motives who feed the flames for political gain – this will not happen under my watch."

Following the discussion in the plenum, the proposal will be moved to the agenda of the Internal Affairs and Environment Committee.



In the Knesset committees

The Committee on Special National Infrastructure Initiatives and Jewish Religious Services

reviewed the conversion system in Israel. Data pertaining to the workings of the conversion system were presented to the MKs and other participants and much adverse criticism was heard during the discussion.



The Committee Chair MK Yulia Malinovsky (Yisrael Beitenu) announced that the legislation on conversion would be advanced:

“There are half a million citizens who have no nationality and no religion, and if we do not address this issue we will find ourselves in a Jewish state with a majority without religion or nationality. There is an obvious solution, we have to give people an option. What do we want? Certified pure blood or finding solutions that take into account that the situation has changed? We will advance legislation and the Conversion Law will pass.”

MK Rabbi Gilad Kariv (Labor) criticized the rabbinical establishment:

“Half a million citizens are the sons and daughters of the Jewish people and most Jews accept them as such. It is the rabbinical establishment that loses out and is becoming irrelevant to 80% of the Israeli public. Most minors are not converted through the rabbinate but rather through the Reform or Conservative movements or Orthodox organizations outside the rabbinate. We are reaching the point where the state conversion system is irrelevant. We have missed the boat – most of the adult population in Israel will not convert because the conversion system wants them to be ultra-Orthodox before they are Jewish.”

MK Yorai Lahav Hertzanu (Yesh Atid): My partner and I do not yet have children but we very much wish to have. The surrogate process is expensive, but I don't know what will happen with my children. They will not be born to a Jewish mother, but they will be Jewish like me. They will serve in the army and pay taxes. They will celebrate the festivals but as things stand at the moment they will not be registered as Jewish. My children will be as Jewish as I am. Judaism does not belong to anybody. Israel was founded so that every Jew and Jewess can live here according to their conscience.”

Following this discussion, [an article written by JPW's Director, Adv. Sharon Banyan-Primor was published on Israel Hayom.](#)

The Constitution, Law and Justice Committee approved the Rabbinical Jurisdiction Bill, Marriage and Divorce (giving permanent status to temporary provisions), granting jurisdiction to the Israel Rabbinical Court over divorce cases of couples who are not citizens or residents of the country. The bill has been passed on to the Knesset for its second and third reading in the plenum. The bill passed on the plenum on Tuesday.

MK Rabbi Gilad Kariv (Labor): “This legislation will not be a temporary provision but will have permanent legal status. It will contain an obligation to report to the committee for about five years so that we can monitor the implementation of it.”

Former MK Aliza Lavie (Yesh Atid) who promoted legislation in the past applauded the law: “This is a ground-breaking law – whoever saves one soul, saves the entire world and releasing one *aguna* (a woman whose husband refuses to grant her a *get*, a Jewish writ of divorce) is like rebuilding one brick of the ruins of Jerusalem.”

Bills

A bill for State Conversion in Israel initiated by Shas MKs Moshe Arbel and Yinon Azoulay was brought before the Ministerial Committee for Legislation.

“The aim of this bill is to enshrine in law the existence of the state conversion system and its underlying principles and to determine that conversion in Israel will only have legal standing when executed through the state conversion system.”

MKs comments reported in the media

Minister of Transport Merav Michaeli (Labor) addressed the issue of public transport on Shabbat in a meeting of Yedioth Ahranoth’s Transport Committee:

“I have no doubt that we will reach agreements that will grant every Israeli true freedom of movement every day of the week, even those who do not own a private vehicle. I am sure everyone in this government shares the understanding that the weekend siege in Israel is over.”

In an interview with S’rugim Studios (a religious media outlet) **The Minister of the Interior Ayelet Shaked (Yamina)** commented on the Kotel Resolution: “This should not be on the government’s agenda at the moment and this is not the time to stir up passion and provoke arguments on all sides. I am unequivocally opposed to dealing with this at the moment – it is just a source of bickering.”

The chair of the Committee on Special National Infrastructure Initiatives and Jewish Religious Services, **MK Yulia Malinovsky (Yisrael Beitenu)** was interviewed by S’rugim Studios and referred to trends in the area of state and

religion: “No one has a monopoly on our Jewishness, it is neither yours nor mine. The status quo has changed and not in favor of the secular or traditional. The status quo has become more and more extreme, moving increasingly in the direction of the ultra-Orthodox and I am simply trying to restore the previous situation.”

Term of the Week

The Conversion Reform – a bill, drafts by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in order to give local Rabbis the authority to convert in Israel in a way that will be recognized by the ministry of interior and for the application of Law of Return. For many years, only the Chief Rabbinate had the authority to convert people in Israel. However, in several rulings the High Court of Justice changed it and ordered the state to recognize conversions made by congregations of the Masorti (conservative) and Reform movements in Israel and abroad in addition to the Chief Rabbinate. The Bill aim to give local Rabbis the authority to convert in addition to the Chief Rabbinate and according to the High Court of Justice rulings.

JPW's Education Desk

Last week we were pleased to have the opportunity to meet with the rabbinical students from JTS (Jewish Theological Seminary) and from the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies who are currently studying at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies.

We spoke with the students about current topics in state and religion, and discussed their potential to influence the political system and to effect change in the communities to which they will return as rabbis. Afterwards, Tammy Gottlieb, Deputy Chair of Women of the Wall and Associate Director of Communications & New Initiatives of the Masorti Movement, spoke to them about the struggle being waged by Women of the Wall and the future of the Kotel Resolution. We ended the day with a fascinating panel on activism in the field of marriage and divorce in Israel.

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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