



Israel HaYom, Published on [05-02-2022 07:10](#)

## Rakefet Ginsberg

Rakefet Ginsberg is executive director of the Masorti Movement in Israel.

# Time for Israel to call traditional Judaism by its name

**The decision to avoid calling the liberal streams of Judaism by their names in the population census raises concerns the State of Israel wants to deny the existence of Reform and Conservative Jews in the country.**

A few years ago, when my son was in a commander's course in the Israel Defense Forces, he and his friends were tasked with choosing two streams of Judaism from a prepared list to present to their team. My son approached the task with some level of excitement. You see, while different streams of Judaism are not frequently discussed in every home, they are in ours. That's just how it is when you are a descendant of the Vizhnitz Haredi dynasty, the son of a father who was raised Conservadox and a mother who was brought up secular, and in recent years, you and your family have been a part of the traditional, Conservative Jewish community in Israel.

My son thought he would finally be able to talk about liberal Judaism in Israel and explain the differences between Conservative and Reform Judaism that most Israelis are unfamiliar with. But when he saw the list of streams, he was appalled. National-religious, Chabad, and Lithuanian ultra-Orthodox all appeared on the list. Conservative? Reform? Not one mention. Not even the term "traditional," which could be used to describe most Israelis, made an appearance on the list.

When he approached the commander and shared his concerns, he was told that those streams were "irrelevant." My son pressed him on the matter, noting, "After all, the chance of my commanding a Reform or Conservative soldier is immeasurably greater than the chance of my commanding a Lithuanian Haredi soldier." This would be especially true of someone who completed a general commander's course in the IDF and had not been trained for the Haredi Nahal Brigade.

"This is the list. These are the names," the commander replied.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Haredi sector represented 13% of the Israeli population in 2021. One year later, a survey by the Jewish People Policy Institute found that around 13% of Israeli Jews identify as either Reform or Conservative. This is not my opinion but fact.

The CBS is now carrying out a population census, which it says is aimed at describing trends and mapping the lifestyles of the Israeli public to help determine policy and provide services in the future. The census asks you to choose your lifestyle from the following options: secular, traditional, religious, very religious, Haredi, mixed lifestyle, or other.

The decision to avoid calling the liberal streams in Israel by their names raises suspicions the State of Israel is trying to continue to close its eyes to Reform and Conservative Jews in the country.

The use of the term "other" in the census is a blatant denial of the reality in Israel. Erasing the needs of 800,000 citizens of the state is equivalent to erasing all of Jerusalem's residents from the map. Is that something we should accept? It is under a government that from the get-go spoke about correcting the situation that a group that reflects pluralistic Judaism is now being excluded.

The next time you hear that liberal Jews are an "un-Israeli movement," remember this statistic: Thirteen percent of the Jewish public in Israel sees themselves as belonging to this stream.