

The Spirit of the Covenant and a Summary of its Proposals

With the aim of promoting Jewish solidarity, a sense of unity and shared destiny among the various segments of the Jewish people and especially within the State of Israel, and dignity for each and every one of its sectors,

And out of a deep faith in two principles: that the State of Israel is the state of the Jewish people with all that this entails, and that the State of Israel upholds equality for all citizens and full respect for their human rights as individuals as its *raison d'être* -

we propose to agree upon the following guidelines:

The State of Israel is the place where the Jewish people is exercising its right to self-determination in part of its historical homeland. The state's existence, security and prosperity depend upon a sense of a shared destiny among the different sectors of the Jewish people and of mutual responsibility between them. Profound disagreements currently pose a threat to this partnership, to the point of generating baseless hatred among different groups. The covenant provides a consensual operating framework that enables the preservation of the lifestyles of the respective groups while emphasizing the common ground.

Israel is a Jewish and democratic state. Israel will continue to respect the equal rights of all its citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish, along with freedom of religion and conscience, in the spirit of the Proclamation of Independence. In addition to this social covenant between sectors of the Jewish public in Israel (and in the Diaspora), it would be appropriate to seek out a common civil-political framework for all citizens of the state.

The best way of addressing fundamental disagreements is to establish a practical framework that is acceptable to all sectors of the Jewish public in Israel, through a process of dialogue. In this manner the dignity of all groups is upheld, with an attendant commitment to protect the beliefs and lifestyles of each, enabling all groups to act in a coordinated fashion to promote shared existential goals. The spirit of the covenant rejects the use of coercion against any group in order to persuade it to relinquish that which it holds as holy and dear. It permits and even mandates agreements concerning the shared public domain, which take into account the beliefs of every group. Given that division of the public domain completely among the various groups is neither possible nor desirable, its ordering requires coordination and balancing. The covenant also rejects the introduction of unilateral changes in agreements, and changes achieved through political or juridical decisions, while welcoming the institution of a consensual decision-making procedure.

We appeal to the leaders of the Jewish public in Israel to embrace the spirit of the covenant in all future discourse on matters of religion and state. This would be in the interest of maintaining peaceful conduct. It is also the call of the hour, in view of the disastrous consequences of exacerbating the social divide.

Acting in the spirit of the covenant as we understand it, we have drafted proposals for consensual arrangements concerning several issues currently steeped in controversy – relations between Torah and state and relations between different communities within the Jewish population. We believe that the adoption of these proposals will significantly advance the basic objectives of the covenant.

We therefore call upon the Israeli Jewish public to study the spirit of the covenant, its fundamental tenets and the proposals it comprises, and to work towards the adoption of such a document.

Following are the proposals in concise format:

Principle of Return: Every “member of the Jewish people” will be eligible to immigrate to Israel, including the child of a Jewish father and a person who has converted through a recognized procedure. Even someone who converted in a manner that diverges from the tradition of the “Shulhan Arukh” will be entitled to register himself as a Jew in the population registry.

Personal Status: The right to establish a family will be recognized. The law of the state will permit weddings conducted according to any ceremony the couple chooses, and the marriage will be recorded in the population registry. No individual in Israel will be allowed to marry who is not single both according to state law and according to a strict interpretation of the laws of his religion.

The Sabbath: Saturday is the official day of rest in Israel. Persons will not be employed and will not be required to work in manufacturing, trade or services on the Sabbath. Cultural events, entertainment and a reduced schedule of public transportation will be permitted to meet demand.

Principle of Non-Coercion: The elimination of any monopoly exercised by a particular group on overall arrangements; at the same time, the right of every group to preserve its own lifestyle according to its own conception and interpretation will be respected. The same will hold true in matters of burial, dietary

laws, the Sabbath, religious services and prayer arrangements at the Western Wall.

Legal Implementation: The covenant will be anchored in law such that it will be difficult to introduce partial and unilateral changes into its mechanisms. It is in the spirit of the covenant as a whole to give preference to mechanisms for negotiation and compromise over legislative and judicial decision-making. The courts, therefore, will not be granted the authority to invalidate laws concerning the covenant. The interpretation of the covenant, insofar as there is no court case involved, will be entrusted to an accepted representative public body, in order to encourage consensual interpretation without the need for recourse through the courts.

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