

Women, Judaism, and Israel

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A gender-segregated concert last month in Afula, funded by the town's municipal government, followed by the Haifa municipality's plan to hold a men-only performance in the city, has returned the question of women's rights into the headlines in Israel, just as parties make their final push ahead of the September 17 elections.

Clearly, the issue of gender segregation in Israel, along with other women's status issues, such as "modesty standards," marriage and divorce laws, and equal opportunities generally, is tightly interwoven with the question of Jewish religious law, the role it should or shouldn't play in Israeli society, and how it is regarded and interpreted by the adherents of the various streams of Judaism.

With us to this complex issue was explored on September 10 by two outstanding figures integrally involved with the struggle for women's rights in Israel: Anat Hoffman, Executive Director of the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), the public and legal advocacy arm of the Reform Movement in Israel, and Attorney Yael Rockman, Executive Director of Kolech: Religious Women's Forum, the first Orthodox Jewish feminist organization in Israel. The conversation was moderated by Rabbi Deborah Waxman, President of Reconstructing Judaism.

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[Back to Conversations](#)