

## **Mickey Gitzin from Israel Hofshit (Be Free Israel)**

To fulfil the vision of its founders, Israel must always be a country for all its citizens, including all its Jews, whatever their beliefs, background and practices.

However, the current reality in Israel does not reflect that. The Ultra-Orthodox control over personal status issues like birth, marriage, divorce and burial in Israel creates a restrictive environment. This means progressive rabbis are not recognised by the state, only rabbinite-sanctioned Orthodox rabbis may officiate at Jewish weddings, gay marriage is impossible, and a Jewish woman cannot get divorced without the permission of her husband ("agunot").

Similarly, until recently, some bus lines in Israel enforced separate seating, with women forced to sit at the back of the bus. Issues still exist for women and non-Orthodox Jews wishing to pray as they want at the Kotel, with restrictions on singing, wearing tallitot and saying Kaddish.

If Israel is to be a state for all the Jewish people then changes need to be made. NIF in Israel works to promote religious freedom in Israel, to foster a more tolerant society that embraces the rich diversity of Jewish identity, and that creates a sphere of non-religious, civil law for all Israeli citizens. **This is the type of work being undertaken by New Israel Fund grantees in Israel. One such organisation is Israel Hofshit.**

**Mickey Gitzin** is the executive director of **Israel Hofshit**, the only grassroots organisation in Israel dedicated to promoting freedom of religion and pluralism as core democratic values. Created in 2009, the organisation believes that all forms of belief and practice among Jewish people are legitimate and should be accepted and supported by the state of Israel and that doing so enhances democratic values, which are critical to the success of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

Israel Hofshit aims to:

- achieve the right to a civil marriage for all Israel's citizens
- eliminate gender segregation on public transport and in public spaces
- gain state recognition for Reform and Conservative conversions and weddings
- provide equal opportunity for Jewish prayer at the Western Wall to women and non-Orthodox Jews
- end the Rabbinate's discrimination against women with regard to divorce
- end segregation of Ashkenazi, Mizrahi (Sephardic & Middle Eastern) and Ethiopian students within religious schools
- end the exemptions provided to religious schools from teaching the core curriculum (basic maths, science and English). This is in the hope that more ultra-Orthodox citizens will achieve gainful employment and the large number living on welfare will be reduced.

### **About Mickey Gitzin**

**Mickey Gitzin** is the Executive Director of **Israel Hofshit** (Be Free Israel). Previously, Mickey was the spokesperson for MK Ilan Gilon (Meretz), and worked as the Associate Director of "Festival Beshekel" an Israeli non-profit, which works to develop avenues for cultural and artistic expression in the periphery of Israel. After completing his military service as an Intelligence Officer at the IDF, Mickey served as an Emissary (Shaliach) for the Jewish Agency for Israel under the auspice of the Jewish Federation of South Band, Indiana.



Learn more at <http://www.nif.org.au/mickeygitzin>