

The Challenges of Israel's Chief Rabbinate – **Legal, Religious and Cultural aspects**

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The Chief Rabbinate Council (CRC), headed by the two Chief Rabbis, is Israel's leading authority for Jewish religion affairs. As such, the CRC regulates most important aspects of Jewish religious acts in Israel, such as marriage, circumcision, Kosher food industry, burial and others.

The huge range of areas that the CRC deals with, along with the commitment of the State of Israel to be Jewish and Democratic, raises some basic questions regarding legal rights, equality, and justice. Israel's non-separation model of state and religion emphasizes these questions, since the CRC is a government unit.

Thus, Israel's Supreme Court demands the CRC to take more liberal measures in implementing its regulations and interpreting the Jewish tradition. Moreover, the Supreme Court lately is taking an activist role and intervenes in the CRC's decisions, checking its logic and interpretation of the traditional texts, thus limiting CRC's authority using legal principles which are external to Jewish Law. This approach puts the Courts and the CRC on a head-on collision track, since it threatens the CRC's exclusivity to implement and interpret Jewish Law, thus escalating legal, religious and cultural conflicts between religious and liberal parties.

One of my most important missions, as the legal counsel to the Chief Rabbinate, is exploring the ways the CRC needs to deal with these conflicts while keeping the balance between the Jewish and Democratic values of the state of Israel. Although the limited power and scope of legal means, especially when it comes to conflicts between two different normative systems, I was able to find a path that enables the CRC to maintain its authority and power while preserving democratic and legal concepts.

In this paper I will show how legal creativity, combined with religious knowledge, can lead to a working program that promotes religious and democratic values, in a legal system that forces them to work together.