

Kotel Agreement FAQ

January 2022



What are the components of the Western Wall compromise agreement?

- “One Kotel for one people” – Currently, those seeking a pluralistic prayer space at the Western Wall have to leave the main complex to go to the adjoining Robinson’s Arch area. Under the compromise plan, Robinson’s Arch will be expanded and connected to the main Western Wall plaza, giving the area a single entryway with three sections: One for men only, one for women only, and one for mixed-gender prayer.
- Management – The men’s and women’s sections will continue to be run by the Orthodox rabbinate, while the egalitarian section will be overseen by a government committee that will include representatives of the Masorti/Conservative movement, as well as from the Reform movement and Women of the Wall.
- Funding – The government will pay for the construction of the expanded plaza, as well as cover ongoing operating costs for the egalitarian section, just as it currently does for the men’s and women’s sections. Operating costs at Robinson’s Arch are currently being funded by the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest New Jersey.

Can I read the full text of the agreement?

The full agreement can be found in Hebrew [here](#) and in English [here](#), with an English translation of the official executive summary [here](#).

How did the compromise come about?

After decades of advocacy for equality, then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appointed an advisory committee in 2013 to analyze the issue of prayer arrangements at the Western Wall. After three years of meetings with testimony from dozens of witnesses from every major Jewish movement, including several representing Masorti/Conservative Judaism, the committee released a report in January 2016 calling for the compromise. The cabinet quickly voted 15-5 to approve the plan.

Why hasn't it been implemented yet?

Despite the vote, Orthodox parties pressured Netanyahu to not initiate the plan, and the government never actually began any of the processes to implement it. In June 2017, after Masorti/Conservative and Reform movements petitioned the Supreme Court to force Netanyahu to fulfill his government's promise, he formally announced that he was freezing implementation, leaving the status quo in place – which continued for as long as he remained in office. After Naftali Bennett was elected prime minister in 2021, his government announced that it would implement the compromise, but by the end of the year, some Orthodox members of the ruling coalition have again pushed for a delay or a cancellation, this time citing the threat that Orthodox Jews would attack people praying in an egalitarian fashion.

How exactly is it a compromise?

Like any compromise, this agreement was difficult for all sides. The non-Orthodox movements and Women of the Wall gave up their long-sought push to have egalitarian prayer services in the existing Western Wall complex, which has been the focus of Jewish consciousness for thousands of years, and forswore bringing Torah services or prayer with tallitot in the women's section.

The Haredi leaders of the Western Wall complex had to agree to have egalitarian prayer in an adjoining section, and implicit recognition of Masorti/Conservative and Reform Judaism by the State of Israel.

Do Israeli Jews really care about this too, or is this just a Diaspora issue?

Multiple polls have shown that the majority of Israeli Jews support the compromise agreement at the Western Wall. This majority includes not just the 7% of Israelis who associate with Masorti (Conservative) and Reform Judaism, but the hundreds of thousands of Israelis who wish to pray at one of Judaism's holiest sites without being forced to abide by the rules of the controversial Orthodox rabbinate or segregate themselves by gender.

What else can I read to learn more about this issue?

- Op-ed in [English](#) and [Hebrew](#) by Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal, CEO of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and the Rabbinical Assembly, and Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism.
- Op-eds by World Zionist Organization vice chairman and former Masorti CEO [Yizhar Hess](#) (English) and Rabbinical Assembly global engagement associate Rabbi [Idit Lev](#) (Hebrew)
- [Times of Israel Blog Post](#) by Mercaz Olami Chairman Rabbi Alan Silverstein
- [Times of Israel editorial](#) by founding editor David Horovitz
- [Haaretz op-ed](#) by Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt
- [Timeline](#) of the decades-long struggle for egalitarian prayer at the Western Wall
- [Analysis](#) by Schechter Institutes president Rabbi David Golinkin showing the centuries-old history of egalitarian prayer at the Western Wall