

Bennett's support for civil marriage may finally align policy with practice

You can already circumvent the chief rabbinate's monopoly, but no couple should have to

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[Aaron Leibowitz](#) April 26, 2026

Last week, Naftali Bennett [expressed support](#) for civil marriage in Israel, stating that “every person in Israel should be able to realize their love in this country and not travel abroad.”

For an Orthodox political leader — and a prime ministerial candidate — to say this publicly is a breath of fresh air, as it reflects a recognition that has long been absent from the public discourse.

It is also an opportunity to confront a deeper inconsistency in Israel's legal framework for marriage.

Civil Marriage Already Exists in Function, Just Not Form

In practice, the State of Israel already recognizes civil marriage. Israeli couples routinely travel abroad to marry, and in the last few years, many have made use of the Utah online marriage platform, completing legally recognized civil marriages without leaving their homes. These marriages are fully acknowledged by Israeli authorities.

The result is a system that does not prohibit civil marriage in substance, but only in form. It requires Israelis to circumvent their own country and nation in order to exercise a basic personal right. In practice, the absence of civil marriage is not a principled legal stance; it is an artificial constraint that imposes an unnecessary burden on Israeli citizens while maintaining the appearance of control.

In effect, the state is not preventing civil marriage; it is outsourcing it. In doing so, it effectively penalizes citizens for seeking to mark the most personal decision of their lives in a way that reflects their own values. The restriction is not substantive at this point; it is merely symbolic. The tragedy here is that the symbolic restriction does not feel neutral to the Israeli public; it is often experienced as deliberately exclusionary or spiteful.

A system that undermines trust

This framework does not strengthen Jewish law, Halacha; it weakens public trust.

The broader issue is not marriage alone, but the Chief Rabbinate's monopoly on religious life. This monopoly is also detrimental to the very values it controls: where there is no competition, there is little incentive for accountability or responsiveness. Monopolies tend to produce exactly what we would expect: higher costs, poorer service, and inevitable corruption.

During his previous term, Bennett recognized this in the context of kashrut supervision. The reforms advanced under his leadership introduced a model in which certified private agencies could operate alongside state structures, reducing the Chief Rabbinate's exclusivity. While those reforms have since been partially rolled back, the underlying principle remains sound: public trust is strengthened when systems are competitive, transparent, and accountable.

Why Change Has Been So Difficult

Marriage should be treated in the same manner.

For many years, efforts to address questions of Halacha and state have faced political obstacles. Israeli voters tend to prioritize security concerns, especially now, and to a lesser extent, economic one, leaving our elected representatives free to neglect these decisions and make painful concessions on these crucial issues since they know there is seldom an electoral price to pay. As a result, even widely acknowledged problems persist without resolution.

Bennett's statement may indicate a shift – an acknowledgment from within the Orthodox establishment that the current system is neither sustainable nor justifiable.

At Hashgacha Pratit and through the work of [Chuppot](#), the argument has long been that meaningful reform does not require weakening Halacha, but rather disentangling it from state control and enforcement. The principle is straightforward: do not forbid what Halacha permits, and do not permit what Halacha forbids. Beyond that, Halacha should not be instrumentalized as a mechanism of exclusion and control.

Israel does not face a crisis of Halacha; it faces a crisis of monopoly and coercion.

From Principle to Policy

If there is to be meaningful progress, statements of principle must be accompanied by policy that reflects them. The current moment is a rare opportunity to advance such change, and anyone who cares about meaningful change in matters of Halacha and state should be paying close attention. Those seeking a more moderate and balanced government — one capable of advancing change in matters of Halacha and state — should take note of this shift.

The vital question is whether we will take the opportunity right now, and that responsibility belongs to all of us.

About the Author

Rabbi Aaron Leibowitz is an Orthodox rabbi, social entrepreneur, and leading voice for religious freedom in Israel. He is the founder and CEO of Chuppot and Hashgacha Pratit, pioneering initiatives that have challenged the Chief Rabbinate's monopoly over marriage and kashrut. Ordained by Rabbis Shlomo Riskin and Chaim Brovender, he previously led the Sulam Yaakov Rabbinical Seminary and served on the Jerusalem City Council. Rabbi Leibowitz also directed the Rabbanut Yisraelit program at the Shalom Hartman Institute. A respected educator and community rabbi in Jerusalem, he is widely recognized for advancing halachic solutions grounded in dignity, inclusion, and Jewish continuity.