

# EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

The Sages of the Talmud extolled the reform instituted during the Second Temple Period by Yehoshua ben Gamla, the High Priest:

Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: Truly, that man is remembered for the good, and his name is Yehoshua ben Gamla. If not for him the Torah would have been forgotten from the Jewish people. Initially, whoever had a father would have his father teach him Torah, and whoever did not have a father would not learn Torah at all... Until Yehoshua ben Gamla came and instituted an ordinance that teachers of children should be established in each and every province and in each and every town, and they would bring the children in to learn at the age of six and at the age of seven. (Bava Batra 21a)

Yehoshua ben Gamla's educational reform has informed the Jewish people's deep connection to education ever since. The community bears responsibility for educating the next generation. They are responsible for the children of tomorrow.

The Religious Zionist Party seeks to focus on the issue of education, specifically religious education, in the upcoming Knesset. The understanding that education is of paramount importance to parents, and their willingness to invest significant financial resources toward their children's education, stands at the heart of our position that the state must act decisively and use all means at its disposal to ensure the success of the next generation.

Like any educational system geared toward a minority group, the religious education system is unique and distinctive. The fact that religious Israelis are not concentrated in one geographic region, alongside the

reality that this sector is subdivided into different subsectors and groups, coupled with the fact that classes are often conducted separately for girls and boys and many teens attend dorm schools, make it extremely difficult to offer this sector of the population excellent education at a reasonable cost.

Through the years, the religious education system's funding needs were never included independently in the government's annual budget. Instead, each year, the lay leaders of the religious community needed to beg their government representatives to allocate funding earmarked for discretionary use by coalition members toward the religious education system in order to bridge the gap. Year after year, the religious education system needed to knock on doors and beg for handouts from its representatives in government.

This situation is untenable! The religious education system is entitled to funding on par with the funding given to the secular state education system. We seek to maintain high academic standards and high-quality religious education while simultaneously easing the financial burden on parents.

## **WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THIS PROBLEM? HOW WILL WE RESOLVE THESE ISSUES IN THE UPCOMING KNESSET?**

### **BUDGETING**

- We will work to adjust the base formula for tuition expenditures to reflect the distinct needs of the religious education system.
- We will work to ensure that the budget recognizes the distinct role of the religious education system and provides necessary funding, obviating the need to fund schools with discretionary funds allocated to coalition members.

- We will aim to decrease tuition costs by 30 to 50 percent.
- We will restore the Ministry of Education scholarship program that provides matching scholarship grants for tuition costs incurred by parents.

## RECOGNITION AND STATUS

- We will advance legislation to amend the 'State Religious Education Act' and establish that the religious school network is entitled to pedagogic independence and funding.
- We will establish a department for Talmudei Torah within the religious school network to address these schools' distinct needs.
- We will recognize the Chabad school system as a subdivision of the religious school network.

## SCHOOL DROPOUTS

- We will fund programs designed to prevent students from dropping out of the religious school network.
- We will initiate programs to provide support and therapeutic intervention for hilltop youth.

## YESHIVOT GEVOHOT, YESHIVOT HESDER, MIDRASHOT, AND PREMILITARY ACADEMIES

- We will work to endorse the official status of these institutions and ensure that funding is allocated by the official budget.

## NATIONAL SERVICE

- We will advance a reform to improve the work environment and living conditions for girls performing National Service.

## YOUTH GROUPS

- We will work to increase state funding for youth groups.
- We will work to allocate funding for youth groups for special education students (shivtei yovel).
- We will advance a five-year plan for constructing and renovating buildings allocated to youth groups.

## MISCELLANEOUS

- We will promote legislation and education directed at increased online safety.
- We will promote programming that provides ongoing guidance and support for graduates of the religious school network.
- We will work to promote programs to address the 'shidduch crisis'.