
“The Words of the Rabbi, The Words of the Rebbe, The Words of the Ruler, Whom Should We Obey?” Dual Loyalty and Conflict of Interest of Haredi Civil Servants

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Religious civil servants, particularly those who are Haredi, may find themselves confronting situations of dual loyalty and conflict of interest. This may be the case on a purely theoretical level, as regards civil servants' very identification with the secular public authority – be it the executive branch, the Knesset (the Israeli parliament), the judicial system, or public administration authorities. All of these institutions consider themselves subject only to the sovereign order, civil law and government decree, whereas the person of religious faith regards himself as bound to the authority of a rabbi or Rebbe (a Hasidic leader), or some other religious authority. On the practical level as well, though, this conflict may come into play where the civil servant is obligated to perform acts that are contrary to his religious beliefs or forbidden by religious dictates.

The issue of dual loyalty and the existence of some concern that a person may find himself in a situation of conflict of interest that goes along with it, move in separate circles, which at times line up with one another and at other times collide. At issue are ideological dilemmas that have educational, religious, sociological, philosophical, theological, legal, Halakhic and psychological consequences.

The issue of dual loyalty and conflict of interest is not exclusively the province of religious people, yet it resonates with greater intensity when it comes to them because nonreligious people are often (of course, not always) more willing to compromise than religious people, who assert that they can make no compromise where their religious beliefs, principles or practices are concerned.

This article examines various theoretical-conceptual and practical dilemmas that concern the tension between dual loyalty and a possible conflict of interest, and offers ways to resolve or at least reduce them. The article examines specific issues such as the conflict between religion and democracy on a conceptual level; the question of the religious judge, in Israel and abroad, and cooperation with civil "nonreligious" courts that render judgments contrary to religious law; and the feasibility of Haredim serving in various public posts such as a government minister, mayor, etc.