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The Israeli Education Minister's Test

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The High Court of Justice unanimously overturned Thursday the decision of former Education Minister Yoav Gallant to withhold the Israel Prize in mathematics and computer science from Prof. Oded Goldreich. But in a second ruling, this one split, the justices voted to return the decision to Gallant's successor in the post, Yifat Shasha-Biton. [She must now choose](#) whether or not to confirm the prize jury's original decision to give the prestigious award to the Weizmann Institute scientist. The first decision, which was based on rulings on similar petitions in the past against Israel Prize laureates, indicates the road Shasha-Biton must take: to award the prize to

The three justices who heard the case did not spare Gallant their criticism. [They methodically dismantled](#) all the arguments presented by the former education minister. "We must make a distinction between the personal views of the prize winner, even if they are outrageous and extreme and controversial, and the professional issue that is put to the prize jury, wrote Justice Isaac Amit in the ruling overturning Gallant's decision. Justice Noam Sohlberg noted that Gallant "chose to pursue a course that was inconsistent with case law."

The justices made clear that it was unacceptable for Gallant to arrogate to himself, for the first time in the history of the Israel Prize, the authority to reject the prize jury's recommendation. Such decisions are not supposed to be made on the basis of political whim. At the same time, it is regrettable that the same justices enabled, through their previous ruling, Goldreich's [de fact exclusion from the award ceremony](#). It is also disturbing that the attorney general and the courts hold that in certain cases, remarks against Ariel University could justify denying someone the prize.

In early July, ahead of the High Court's ruling, Shasha-Biton announced that she would not intervene in the decision to deny Goldreich the prize. Her attempt to evade responsibility suggests that she is struggling to understand the principles of governance – or, even worse, that she has chosen, with a self-righteous rolling of the eyes, to cooperate with Gallant's brand of McCarthyism. Instead of making the self-evident decision themselves, two of the three justices preferred to pass it on to the minister. The time has come for Shasha-Biton to repair the injustice of her original decision and should reverse her position and award the Israel Prize to Goldreich. This is a test that she must not fail.