

The Israel Prize Is Not About Excellence, but Government Loyalty

In her decision not to grant the Israel Prize for mathematics and computer science to Prof. Oded Goldreich, Education Minister Yifat Shasha-Biton has made it clear that the new government is no harbinger of change when it comes to the ongoing effort, which crosses party lines, to obliterate all trace of the occupation.

The objection of the Weizmann Institute scientist to another academic institution established in the West Bank is a reminder that in today's Israel one must hide any trace of the Green Line, or at least [punishment those who recognize it](#), to demonstrate to all the limits of what is permitted and what is forbidden.

Shasha-Biton's decision is thus contributing to the gag culture that has taken root in Israel. It's too soon to know what achievements, if any, the education minister will have in other realms, but she is already responsible for this disgrace.

Like her predecessor, Yoav Gallant, Shasha-Biton decided to deny Goldreich the Israel Prize because he signed a petition calling on the European Union not cooperate with Ariel University.

"I [cannot grant the prize](#) for academic achievements, impressive as they may be, to one who calls to boycott an academic institution in Israel," she agonized on Thursday, blatantly ignoring the fact that Ariel is not an ordinary academic institution. It was built in sin and continues to act in it, even if it is difficult for the education minister to hear it. Goldreich, who refuses to normalize the university of the occupation, [paid the price](#).

Although the prize committee reiterated that Goldreich is worthy of the prize for his research, Shasha-Biton chose to contaminate the prize with political considerations. From now on the most prestigious prize awarded by Israel will not be the mark of scientific excellence but of loyalty to the government. Disqualifying Goldreich is a harsh blow to the Israel Prize's status and marks a further erosion in the basic right of freedom of speech.

The education minister cited High Court Justices Noam Sohlberg and Yael Vilner, who had said in a lawsuit seeking to block Gallant's decision that calling to boycott Ariel University is a "severe act" and refrained from ruling that a person's political stance is irrelevant to the Israel Prize. The committee that awarded the prize to Goldreich turn again to the High Court. One may hope that this time the justices demonstrate greater commitment to the principles of democracy.

The above article is Haaretz's lead editorial, as published in the Hebrew and English newspapers in Israel.