

# The Cowardice of Israel's Education Minister

In one of her first tests as the new education minister, Yifat Shasha-Biton failed. She chose not to intervene in the decision of previous Education Minister Yoav Gallant to deny Professor Oded Goldreich the Israel Prize for mathematics and computer science. Nothing can be done, the minister actually claimed – the decision was already made.

Such an evasion, which falls somewhere between feigned innocence and public deception, is unacceptable. This non-intervention sends a clear message. While Gallant will go down as a McCarthyite who polluted the Israel Prize with political considerations, the person who stood by and let it happen will also bear responsibility. These are not the winds of change that the new government promised to bring.

According to a report on Sunday on Kan 11, the education minister plans to inform Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit that she will not change Gallant's [decision to reject the judging panel's choice](#) to award the Israel Prize to the esteemed scientist from the Weizmann Institute, due to his call to cease cooperation with the University of Ariel. "Professor Goldreich's contributions as a researcher are negated by his ongoing actions aimed at harming the State of Israel and parts of Israeli academia," Gallant asserted two days before the new government was sworn in, citing – with the aid of an extensive internet search – petitions and letters spanning a 15-year period. Now Shasha-Biton is also a party to this disgrace.

The minister says she "does not intervene in decisions that were made before her time." People close to the minister added that the Israel Prizes have already been distributed and that it was a "peremptory decision." It's hard to tell whether Shasha-Biton was referring to the former education minister's decision or to Mendelblit's. The confusion was probably intentional and meant to distance her from any involvement in the matter. With this, the new minister has shown appalling cowardice.

Shasha-Biton's arguments don't stand the test of reality. Two weeks ago, the state had to provide its updated statement on the matter to the High Court of Justice so the court could decide whether to reject or approve Goldreich's disqualification. Representatives of the State Prosecutor's Office requested a further postponement, "so the new education minister could study the matter, as the minister only assumed her post a few days ago."

In other words, Shasha-Biton studied the matter and decided to uphold her predecessor's deplorable policy. The "winds of change" are perpetuating the persecution of someone who had the audacity to remind people that the academic institution in Ariel was born and exists in sin. On Sunday, Mendelblit is due to announce whether he will defend Gallant and Shasha-Biton's joint decision, after which the High Court hearing is due to take place. After this failure by Shasha-Biton, others will have to explain to her the principles of democracy again.