

# Conversion to Judaism - The Masorti Way

The Conversion Institute of the Masorti Movement and the Rabbinical Assembly in Israel provides a unique opportunity for those interested in joining the Jewish people in a meaningful way, both in accordance with Halacha (Jewish Law) and in a religiously tolerant atmosphere suitable to modern Israeli society. Potential converts will become deeply, intellectually and practically familiar with the Jewish traditions, mitzvot (commandments) and culture.

We respect those who sincerely seek to join the Jewish People, personally and sensitively accompanying each candidate with, attentiveness and friendship, until their integration into the Jewish faith and a Masorti kehilla (congregation).

At the conclusion of the course, prospective gerim (converts) appear before a rabbinic court (Bet Din) composed of three Masorti rabbis, who will evaluate the level of preparedness of the candidates to join the Jewish people in the framework of a Jewish lifestyle according to the mitzvot.

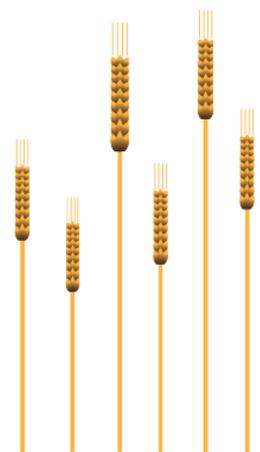
The conversion process concludes with immersion in a mikveh (ritual bath), which is a special spiritual ceremony marking the start of a new life as a Jew. Men are required to reach this stage after having undergone brit milah (circumcision).

The gerim receive a Conversion certificate, allowing them to change their registration in the Ministry of the Interior to "Jewish" (with legal counsel).

The State of Israel, following a Supreme Court ruling from 2002, recognizes Masorti conversions and allows gerim to be registered as Jews in the Ministry of the Interior.

The Chief Rabbinate, which is Orthodox, does not yet recognize Masorti conversions and because according to State law, the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate controls marriage, divorce and burial laws in the country - they do not allow our converts to marry within the State of Israel.

To be married or buried in a state-sanctioned Jewish ceremony, Israeli citizens must be Jewish according to halakha (Jewish law): That is to say, they must be able to prove that they were either born to a Jewish mother or that they were converted by a rabbi recognized by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate. Not only are non-Orthodox rabbis completely disqualified from this list, but in recent years, the Chief Rabbinate has been blacklisting Orthodox rabbis it views as overly progressive and even ultra-Orthodox rabbis who perform private conversions.



## The Case of former Soviet Union Jews:

There are hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens, mainly from the Former Soviet Union, who the overwhelming majority are children of Jewish descent (non-Jewish mothers) who, growing up in the former Soviet Union, never thought of themselves as anything but Jewish. Although the government once made conversion a top priority and has invested in classes through the official (Orthodox) rabbinate, it has so far failed to provide an adequate structure to deal with this issue. Moreover, we have witnessed the rabbinate retroactively annul conversions, causing distress and anger to those involved.

A study published by Netanel Fisher, of the Open University and the Israel Democracy Institute, has found that efforts by the Israeli government to promote conversion among Russian-speakers have largely failed. Only about 8 percent of the hundreds of thousands are not considered halakic Jews have converted. Many consider themselves Jewish and see no reason to convert. But many others are put off by the cumbersome process, and in particular, the need to embrace an Orthodox lifestyle as part of it. After all, most of Israel's Russian-speakers are very secular. (1)

## The Case of Same Sex Couples

In recent years, the Conversion Institute of the Masorti Movement has received many requests from Israeli gay couples who have undergone a process of bearing children with the help of a surrogate mother.

Conversion law maintains that a child born to a non-Jewish surrogate mother – as most of the North American surrogates, and certainly all those in India and elsewhere in Asia would be – needs to be converted to be considered Jewish. This is the case even if the sperm donor is Jewish, and even if both the sperm and egg donor are both Jews. The law pertains to all couples in Israel – heterosexual and homosexual – wishing to register their children born with the help of non-Jewish surrogates.

But while such a conversion would be little more than a formality when it comes to the babies of Jewish heterosexual couples, there is a problem when it comes to the gay community. The Orthodox State run conversion board, which, according to halakha, or Jewish law, does not accept homosexual couples, cannot and will not convert babies whom they know will be brought up in a household with a same sex couple as parents. (2)

"גר אנכי בארץ, אל תסתר ממני מצוותיך"  
(תהילים קי"ט:ט)

"I am a stranger in the Land, Do not deny me your Mitzvot" (Psalms 119:19)

---

(1) <http://www.haaretz.com/st/c/prod/eng/2015/08/not-jewish-enough/>

(2) <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/the-trials-and-treasures-of-tel-aviv-s-gay-by-boom.premium-1.504343>

