

THE PROCESS OF CONVERSION IN LIBERAL JUDAISM

Guidance for those wishing to join the Jewish community

A FIRST STEP

Liberal Judaism warmly welcomes sincere converts who wish to join our communities. We recognise, however, that the decision you are contemplating is a life-changing one. We suggest that you arrange an appointment with a rabbi, if you have not already done so. Over the months ahead, your rabbi and members of your chosen community will help you explore what becoming Jewish means for you. We hope that you will find the process both spiritually satisfying and personally enriching.

Your first step along the path is to start attending services regularly. All are welcome at synagogue services, and you need not feel awkward about attending just because you are not yet Jewish. At first the services might seem unfamiliar, especially the Hebrew parts, but after regular attendance, you will begin to feel part of the worshipping community. This is an important step in becoming Jewish. If you have a Jewish spouse or partner, naturally we expect this person to attend with you and become a member of the synagogue you are attending before you yourself can become affiliated.

REGISTRATION

After some time the rabbi will talk with you again. If she or he doesn't ask to see you, then it is up to you to arrange an interview with the rabbi. Please remember that all along the impetus to take the next step comes from you. We do not persuade anybody to convert, so the rabbi makes sure that, at every stage of the process, it is your eager desire to progress onwards.

At this interview the rabbi, if she or he accepts that you sincerely wish to convert to Judaism and that there are no impediments to conversion (e.g. problems with existing beliefs or marital status), will discuss with you the programme of study that will lead to conversion. Your intention to convert will be formally registered with the Rabbinic Board of Liberal Judaism, and you will be told the fee for the course.

At this point you should join the synagogue as an Associate Member or Friend. You will not normally be charged a fee for this, since you are paying the fee for the conversion course to Liberal Judaism.

THE COURSE OF INSTRUCTION

The purpose of the course of instruction is to help you feel at home within your chosen community and at ease in any Jewish situation. It aims to give you a solid background knowledge of Judaism, complemented by experiential learning of what it means to live as a Jew. Subjects that will be covered include Jewish history, the Bible and other Jewish source books, religious obligations and belief. You will also learn where Judaism differs from other faith traditions, and where Progressive Judaism differs from other forms of Judaism.

Part of your tuition will include basic Hebrew language skills. Hebrew is an integral part of Jewish culture, and a basic familiarity will help you to understand key concepts. It is expected that all candidates will learn to read Hebrew sufficiently well to follow the service and to perform the important rituals in home and synagogue.

You will be expected to acquire your own copies of the Liberal Judaism's prayer books, Siddur Lev Chadash and Machzor Ruach Chadashah (for the High Holy Days). These contain not only prayers, but also many inspirational readings that will help you to acquire a sense of our approach to Jewish life.

Students are encouraged to view the course as only the beginning of their Jewish learning. Ongoing study and continued personal and spiritual growth are important elements within Jewish life.

LENGTH OF THE COURSE

It is difficult to say how long the course will take, but the shortest will be a calendar year from registration as a candidate. All candidates will need to have personally observed the full cycle of festival services; otherwise this could delay acceptance. Remember that the pace will depend on your own motivation; the rabbi will not try to hurry you through.

ASSESSMENT

At the end of the course you will be asked to submit the following for assessment:

An essay entitled "What Being Jewish Means to Me". This essay should demonstrate a good working knowledge of the main teachings of Judaism, and include material on the principles of Liberal Judaism and the duties of a Jew.

Either: A. An essay concerning **one** of the following: "The Jewish Life Cycle", "Jewish Ethics", "The Jewish Festivals", or a topic of Jewish history or interest by agreement with your rabbi.

Or: B. A document confirming that you have passed an oral test of the above subject areas. The oral test will generally be administered by a rabbi other than the sponsoring rabbi, who will submit his or her report to the Rabbinic Board.

THE BEIT DIN

When you have completed your course and submitted your essays, your rabbi will meet with you again to review the process with you. She or he will check on the standard of your Hebrew, your level of attendance at Shabbat and festival services and your general involvement in the community. With males, she or he will check on the position regarding circumcision, which is normally required.

If she or he is satisfied that all the requirements are complete, she or he will recommend you to the Beit Din (Rabbinic Board). The Beit Din consists of three rabbis and meets approximately monthly in central London. You will receive an invitation to attend on a specific day and time. If you have a spouse or partner, they are invited to come with you. One of the three rabbis will have read your essays in advance and will discuss them with you. She or he and the other rabbis will then discuss with you your motives for becoming Jewish, your experiences of Jewish life, any difficulties you have encountered, and so on.

After this, the presiding rabbi will ask you to leave the room and will then discuss your application with the other rabbis. If you are accepted, the rabbis will sign a certificate that authorises your admission as a Jew. The certificate will be sent to the rabbi who has sponsored you.

To mark the experience of becoming Jewish in a personal way, you are encouraged to visit a mikveh (ritual bath) as a symbol of spiritual renewal. Please speak to your rabbi for more information. She or he will then arrange an admission ceremony and thereby formally welcome you into your new community.

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