

## Guidelines for Conversions at Ohev Sholom - The National Synagogue

The decision to convert to Judaism is one of the most powerful and life-changing decisions that someone can make. Below are the guidelines to convert at Ohev Sholom - The National Synagogue. These guidelines include information on the application process, the requirements of the conversion candidate, and the obligations of the clergy and synagogue to the conversion candidate (e.g., the rights of all conversion candidates).

If you have any questions please contact Maharat Ruth Balinsky Friedman at [MaharatRuth@ostns.org](mailto:MaharatRuth@ostns.org)

### **Application Process**

Information on the application process can be found online at [www.ostns.org/conversion](http://www.ostns.org/conversion).

### **Requirements for converting under the auspices of Ohev Sholom<sup>1</sup>**

These guidelines are based on Rabbi Herzfeld and Maharat Friedmans's years of experience working with conversions in the Orthodox community. All conversions that are performed through them and Ohev Sholom are in accordance with Orthodox interpretation of halacha (Jewish law).

#### *Belief*

- All conversion candidates must commit to the belief that there is only one God.
- All conversion candidates must commit to the belief of reward and punishment.
- All conversion candidates must commit to the belief that God revealed the Torah to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai.
- All conversion candidates must commit to becoming a part of the destiny of the Jewish people.

#### *Participation in synagogue life*

- According to Orthodox interpretation of halacha, one may not drive on Shabbat. Therefore, all conversion candidates must live within a two mile radius of our synagogue so that they can walk to the synagogue on Shabbat and participate fully in our synagogue and community. If a candidate would like help finding a place to live, please contact the synagogue clergy or administrative staff.
- All candidates must attend at least two services on Shabbat on a regular basis, one of which must be Shabbat morning.
- All male candidates must attend daily minyan on a regular basis. Women are expected to participate in services during the week and pray on a daily basis, but they are not required to attend daily minyan.

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<sup>1</sup> Conversion candidates are from a wide range of backgrounds. Individual cases, such as an individual who has a Jewish father, or a mother who converted outside of an Orthodox setting, will be handled on a case by case basis.

- All candidates must attend one class per week at the synagogue.
- All candidates must make a Google spreadsheet or other record of their shul attendance, which will be shared with Maharat Friedman on an ongoing basis.
- All candidates must listen to two Jewish podcasts every week.
- All candidates must attend the conversion check-ins with Maharat Friedman

*Personal commitments*

- All candidates must demonstrate a familiarity with Jewish prayer and the prayer service.
- All candidates must be able to navigate the siddur.
- All candidates must fully observe the laws of Shabbat and Kashrut inside and outside the home.
- All candidates must study the laws of niddah (menstrual purity) with Maharat Friedman and must commit to observe these laws when applicable.
- All candidates must make a commitment to providing their children with a Jewish education.
- All candidates must commit to continue to live within an Orthodox Jewish community.
- All candidates must have a familiarity with the recommended reading list that the synagogue's clergy provides (see below).
- All candidates must work with a mentor in the Ohev Sholom community, to be arranged by the clergy. The mentor will study with the candidate and help guide the candidate on his or her journey.
- All candidates must demonstrate exemplary character.
- All candidates must learn to read Hebrew to the best of their ability.
- If a candidate is living with a partner to whom the candidate is not married, they will have to separate for up to 3 months prior to conversion. The conversion will be scheduled for three months before their wedding.
- All candidates must promise always to be truthful with Rabbi Herzfeld and Maharat Friedman throughout the conversion process, and never hide any information that would be relevant to their conversion process.
- All candidates must demonstrate self-motivation and education. Classes will not provide all comprehensive knowledge necessary to lead an observant Jewish life.

*A typical conversion takes at least one year after admission in the program, to ensure that the candidate experiences the full cycle of holidays and fasts. When one fulfills these requirements then he or she meets with the beit din, immerses in the mikvah, and becomes a member of the Jewish people.*

*If the candidate is transferring from a different acceptable program then the process may take a shorter amount of time.*

## Rights of all conversion candidates at Ohev Sholom

The Ohev Sholom clergy's and community's commitments to conversion candidates:

- We will treat all conversion candidates with respect.
- We will pair each conversion candidate with a mentor at Ohev Sholom to help provide support to the candidate as he or she embarks on his or her religious journey.
- We will not ask for any donations from conversion candidates at any point during the conversion process. There are no fees for studying to convert except a \$20 mikvah immersion fee.
- There will not be a fee for participating in the conversion process or for the beit din on the day of conversion. The beit din will be comprised of three full-time male rabbis. No tips will be accepted by anyone participating in the beit din. There is typically a fee for circumcision, but that is paid directly to the Orthodox mohel of the male candidate's choice. There is also a \$20 fee for the use of the mikvah.
- Ohev Sholom only accepts members who are Jewish. While a conversion candidate may not be a member of the shul before the conversion, conversion candidates are entitled to membership rates on shul activities and access to the communal list serv.
- At the time of her immersion, the female convert's modesty will not be compromised.
- If a conversion candidate has a concern during the conversion process, he or she is encouraged to speak to the board member designated to receive these concerns. This board member will provide full confidentiality and work to ensure that the concerns are addressed. The board member is committed to notifying the conversion candidate how the concern was addressed.

## **References and Resources**

Below is a list of resources that can help support a conversion candidate throughout his or her journey. We will discuss some of these books with all candidates.

1. A Letter in the Scroll *Jonathan Sacks*
2. With Perfect Faith *J. David Bleich*
3. Ethics from Sinai *Irving Bunim*
4. Practical Judaism *Rabbi Israel Meir Lau*
5. How To Run A Traditional Jewish Household *Blu Greenberg*
6. To Be A Jew *Hayim Halevi Donin*
7. A Guide to Jewish Prayer *Adin Steinsaltz*
8. To Pray as a Jew *Hayim Halevi Donin*
9. To Raise a Jewish Child *Hayim Halevi Donin*
10. Judaism: A Historical Presentation *Isidore Epstein*
11. The Sabbath *Dayan Grunfeld*
12. The Dietary Laws *Dayan Grunfeld*
13. The Sabbath *Heschel, A.J.*
14. The Jewish Timeline Encyclopedia *Mattis Kantor*
15. Waters of Eden *Aryeh Kaplan*
16. Handbook of Jewish Thought *Aryeh Kaplan*
17. The Living Torah *Aryeh Kaplan*
18. Maimonides Principles *Aryeh Kaplan*
19. The Fundamentals of Jewish Faith *Aryeh Kaplan*
20. Shabbos: A Day of Eternity *Aryeh Kaplan*
21. The Jewish Way *Irving Greenberg*
22. The Book of Our Heritage *Eliyahu Kitov*
23. The Jew and His Home *Eliyahu Kitov*
24. Jewish Way in Death and Mourning *Maurice Lamm*
25. The Jewish Way in Love and Marriage *Maurice Lamm*
26. Becoming a Jew *Maurice Lamm*
27. Lise Stern, *How to Keep Kosher*
28. Kashruth *Yacov Lipshutz*
29. The Artscroll Chumash Mesorah
30. The Artscroll Prayer Book Mesorah
31. Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism *Prager, Dennis & Joseph Telushkin*
32. Why The Jews? *Prager, Dennis & Joseph Telushkin*
33. Pardes Rimonim *Moshe Tendler*
34. Judaism and Christianity *Trude Weiss-Rosmarin*
35. This Is My God *Herman Wouk*
36. Biblical Literacy *Joseph Telushkin*
37. Bible Basics *Jerome S. Hahn*
38. Encyclopedia Judaica editors
39. The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism, *Norman Lamm*
40. Koren siddur introduction, *Jonathan Sacks*
41. Holistic Prayer, *Avi Weiss*
42. God, Man and History, *Eliezer Berkovitz*
43. As a Driven Leaf, *Milton Steinberg*