

CONVERSION TO JUDAISM – 5777 (2017/2018)

If you wish to become a Jew, the study course is an important part of the process. However, conversion to Judaism is not merely an “academic course.” In addition to learning you are expected to actively participate in Jewish communal life, especially on Sabbaths and Holidays. Beit Polska and its affiliated congregations seek to build a vibrant Progressive Jewish community in Poland. You are invited to be part of building a renewed Jewish community.

Here are guidelines for conversion to Judaism in **Beit Polska (Polish Progressive Judaism)**:

1. An interview with our rabbi to explain your personal background and why you are interested in conversion. We will also invite you to consult with one of the Judaism Step by Step course teachers and with one of Beit Polska’s Board Members as conversion also means joining a community.
2. Filling and signing an ‘intake form.’
3. The minimum age for joining the Judaism Step by Step course is 17; the minimum age for beginning the conversion course is 18. When parents wish to convert together with their underage children, the children may convert with a written agreement from both parents.
4. A period of **at least two** years in which you experience the annual Jewish calendar cycle of Sabbaths, Holidays and Memorial days with a Jewish Congregation, and wherever possible with a Jewish family. The Step by Step class may be completed in a year but no candidate for conversion will be advanced unless they have participated in the community for over two years.
5. Attendance is expected at every class. In the case of unavoidable absences, appropriate reading and video materials will be provided by the teachers.
6. It is strongly recommended that participants in the class keep a journal that they will share with the teachers. The journal will include your personal reactions to the material, questions, and additional experiences that inform your period of study and meditation.
7. Progressive/Reform/Conservative rabbis recommend that you experience prayers and celebrations also in other Jewish denominations.
8. Jewish tradition is observed in the family-home no less than in the Synagogue. If you are married and/or have children living with you, it is essential that your spouse and

child/ren convert with you. Only in rare cases does the Rabbinic Court agree to convert you when your spouse does not convert. In such a case your spouse will be asked to sign a declaration pledging to cooperate with you introducing Jewish life style at home, and educating your present and future children in the Jewish way. We also encourage the candidate's family to participate in Shabbat and holiday celebrations to learn more about the Jewish religion and culture. Please consult with the Rabbi regarding the status of children.

- 9.** In most Progressive/Conservative congregations there are regular Friday evening and Shabbat morning services, but rarely weekday services. Hence it is essential that you participate on a regular basis in Friday evening and Saturday morning services. If you are working during these hours you should attempt to change your schedule. You should also attempt to take days off on the main Jewish Holidays. If it cannot be worked out, please discuss this issue with your rabbi. We do not 'take attendance' on Sabbath, but you should send our office a monthly report of what you have attended.
- 10.** While you are in the process of preparing for your conversion and, hopefully later on as well, you will be part of our community. Besides the course materials you will want to attend special lectures on Jewish topics and involve yourself in on-going Jewish learning. A central part of being Jewish is a constant commitment to Jewish learning. Your active role in the life of the community is essential: e.g. special seminars, community discussions, conferences, setting tables or decorating the Synagogue before a holiday celebration/party, koshering the kitchen before Pesach, special seminars, community discussions, conferences etc.
- 11.** When your rabbi is convinced that you acquired basic Hebrew reading skills and made a good acquaintance with Jewish practice, you will take a written exam and an oral exam:
A. Reply correctly to at least 40 out of fifty multiple-choice questions on different aspects of Jewish tradition
B. Reading aloud a paragraph of Hebrew text (no transliteration) from the Prayer-Book. One is not expected to understand Hebrew, however, if the paragraph contains significant terms (e.g. Shalom, Shabbat) you may be asked to explain them.
- 12.** The next step for male candidates is Brit Mila= (covenant of) circumcision. It is conducted by a professional certified mohel using anesthesia. If you were already circumcised for medical reasons, there should be 'Hatafat dam Brith'- taking a drop of blood.
- 13.** Around four months before the Beit Din you will be asked to fill in a conversion form in

English. The form is prepared by the EUPJ [European Union for Progressive Judaism] Beit Din office in London. The form includes questions concerning your present professional and family life, as well as questions about your preparation for conversion. You will also be asked to attach copies of some legal documents, if applicable to your situation: marriage certificate, legal divorce papers, proof of circumcision/'hatafat dam brit' certificate, birth certificates of children etc.

- 14.** You will be interviewed by a 'Beit Din' consisting of 3 rabbis, who will question both your knowledge [Examples: What food we eat and what food we refrain from eating on Passover? What blessing do you recite when lighting Sabbath candles and when do you light them? What age is Bar/Bat Mitzvah?] and questions about how you plan to conduct your life as a Jew. You should also tell the Beit Din what Hebrew name you choose for yourself. If you were a member of a church you should renounce your membership in the former religion: Either sign a declaration before the Beit-Din or present a document issued by the Catholic Church confirming this.

- 15.** The final step for either male or female candidates is immersion in a 'mikveh' -- a bath of 'natural' water, with your body entirely covered by water (In places where there is no 'mikveh' the sea or other body of natural water are just as good). After you complete this requirement (and dress up), the three rabbis of the 'Beit Din' will sign a 'Conversion Certificate' and we will hand it to you during a Shabbat service celebrated with your community.

- 16.** The entire course of preparing toward conversion costs 1000PLN. In addition there is a fee for convening a Beit Din, for using the mikveh and for the certificate. The conversion fee is determined by the central office of the EUPJ [European Union for Progressive Judaism] in London. Financial aid is available but it is limited.

- 17.** Candidates should be aware that we are not an Orthodox Court, and generally, our proceedings are not recognized by Orthodox Rabbis or synagogues. If your intention is to convert in order to become an Israeli citizen, you will want consult with the rabbi early in the process. Currently, there is an orderly conversion process for Progressive Jews coming from Poland who are planning to make aliyah but there is not one for other denominations including Orthodox.

We will be glad to answer your questions concerning conversion to Judaism.