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## Rabbis for Religious Freedom & Equality in Israel



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### Editorial

January 18, 2015

Dear Friends,

Many in Israel are working toward a return to halakhah as intended by our tradition, and not as a political gambit to secure power in the Jewish State.

We have heard in past weeks from Rabbi Aaron Leibowitz, who is working for a rational and traditional standard of kashrut that does not coerce Israelis into paying exorbitant fees or discriminating against other religions: a kashrut that is about food and not about politics. [\[link\]](#)

We heard from Rabbi Michael Chernick about those groups working to reform the marriage laws in Israel, so that the hundreds of thousands or perhaps even millions of Israelis excluded from marriage in Israel by the Chief Rabbinate will be able

**Discuss this and other issues with fellow RRFEI members in the network's new Facebook group by clicking [HERE!](#)**

### A compilation: Thou shalt love the convert

by Rabbi Chuck Davidson

[\[Click to download\]](#)

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, Israel has been privileged to receive more than one million Olim from the former USSR. This Aliya has continued for over two decades, blessing the State of Israel in many ways, including economically, academically, technologically, demographically and culturally. These Olim share a great desire to contribute to their new home, including serving in the IDF's combat units in larger percentages than the general population. The second generation has been successfully absorbed into the country, and are no different from their Sabra peers who were born in Israel.



On the one hand, the successful absorption of these Olim has been a blessing to the whole country, and on the other hand it has presented significant challenges to Israeli society. This is a result of the approximately 300 thousand adult Olim who immigrated under the Law of Return, which grants the right of return to anyone with a single Jewish grandparent (provided they have not chosen another

marry the person they love in the land of their citizenship and the land they serve. [\[link\]](#)

This week we are sending the booklet of halakhic statements [\[download here\]](#) collected by Rabbi Chuck Davidson of Jerusalem concerning historical positions important rabbis have taken on gerut. Hiddush staffer David Bogomolny has done us the favor of translating Rabbi Davidson's introduction to his hoveret into English for ease of reading. We know your time is precious, and thought an English translation might save a few moments. The Hebrew is also included. There follows over 170 statements of rabbinic opinions, some from rabbis you know and some less famous, who have defined conversion as a process of joining the Jewish people for those who sincerely seek membership in Am Yisrael.

You will see that Rabbi Yisrael Be'eri, who was the Chief Rabbi of Nes Tsiyona, contended that the intention to be a Jew who acknowledged that Judaism has mitzvot, even though the convert did not intend to keep those mitzvot, was sufficient for conversion. In other words, to convert to live a Jewish life as other contemporary Jews live as

faith), who are not Jewish according to Halacha. Another 80 thousand children and adolescents who were born or raised in Israel are not Jews according to Jewish law. Of these 380,000, who are officially classified as "having no religion" according to the Ministry of the Interior, most consider themselves Jews in all respects.

Additionally, almost all of these Olim are considered "Zera Yisrael" (the seed of Israel), descendants of Jews, who themselves are not considered Jewish according to Halakha. Unlike the conversions of non-Jews, conversions of "Zera Yisrael" are considered a mitzvah of "bringing back the lost ones," i.e., bringing back into the Jewish fold those that were lost to the Jewish people, which is especially true for Jews of Soviet ancestry who were cut off from all things Jewish by force of the communist regime for more than seventy years. And so, the Halakhic requirements for converting those who are "Zera Yisrael" are significantly less stringent than the requirements for converting those who have no Jewish roots.

This blessed Aliyah resulted in a number of challenges, including:

1. The rate of intermarriage, which had been negligible in Israel before the fall of the Iron curtain, has grown tenfold, and now stands at about 5%, i.e. one in twenty. This phenomenon has penetrated even the Zionist Orthodox community, among those who no longer live their lives according to Halakha.
2. Those who are classified as "having no religion" according to the Ministry of the Interior cannot get married in Israel due to the Chief Rabbinate's monopoly on marriage.
3. The cohesiveness of Israeli society, which is already fragile and tearing along political and ideological seams, has further weakened due to this incomplete absorption of the Olim from the FSU.
4. Facing the historic opportunity of bringing Olim from the FSU towards Judaism, the Rabbinate's inhospitable approach results in exactly the opposite and pushes them further away from their Jewish heritage.

Today, the pathway to government recognized conversion through the Ministry of Religious Services and the Chief Rabbinate requires those who are converting to convince the rabbinic conversion courts that they intend to live a Halakhic lifestyle as do Orthodox Jews, which most of them do not plan to do. Even most of those who do manage to complete this conversion process don't actually live out this commitment. Therefore, the government's conversion program actually puts the majority of this population off from pursuing conversion at all.

This booklet I have compiled addresses the critical question of the

Jews in our time suffices.

As long as the convert accepts the authority of the Torah and the punishment for not observing the mitzvot, some would say l'hathila and some would say b'diavad, that person is accepted as a Jew.

Historically conversion was not intended to build up and sustain a particular interpretation of Judaism. Rather, for many rabbis, it's to build up the Jewish people in its entirety with true believers who accept the mitzvot as incumbent upon them, whether they perform the mitzvot or not.

From the writings of Shlomo Zalman Urbach we see that the issue, built on a p'sak from the 13th century, is that the ger accept becoming a Jew entirely of his own free will, without any coercion. The ger must desire to be Jewish. Rabbi Urbach wrote that the critical issue is to ask the potential ger if he wants to convert, and that acceptance constitutes acceptance of the commandments.

And see Rabbi Yehoshua ben Meir's statement about Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's opinion that joining the Jewish people is doing what others in the Jewish community do as normative in the community, in Israel

above mentioned population's future, as well as the continuation of Halakhic Jewish status for an increasing number of Israeli citizens who have Jewish identities, but are not considered Jewish according to Halakha.

The booklet introduces the reader to more than 170 rabbinic citations on the matter of Jewish conversion over the centuries and millennia. The quotes have been shortened in order to present the material in simple and accessible language. However, the exact references are noted on every page, and in any case, the selected quotes represent the rabbis' final opinions on this matter, to the best of my understanding.

The opinions included in this booklet only represent lenient Halakhic rulings. Clearly, in the matter of conversion, as with every other Halakhic matter, legitimate disagreements arise. Since the more stringent rabbinic opinions are better known among the wider public, this booklet aims to include the lesser known rabbinic opinions. This booklet was written with the intention of raising interest in the subject of conversion in the hopes that its readers will become inclined to deeply study the sources. Further, the booklet does not intend to represent any particular position as practical Halakha (Halakha le-ma'aseh).

My many thanks go to the great Rav Haim Amsalem, SHLIT"A, author of the monumental book "Zera Yisrael," from which most of the citations were drawn, with the addition of a few gems that I uncovered with my own efforts, representing the Halakhic rulings of the leading rabbis of their respective generations. I merited the immense privilege, which is impossible to describe, of getting to closely know the Rav, pouring water on his hands, and learning the Torah of conversion from his mouth.

Kalman Pesach (Chuck), son of Pinchas, Davidson  
2015

## החברת: ואהבתם את הגר

## נערך על ידי הרב צ'אק דוידסון

[\[לחץ להורדה\]](#)

מאז נפילת מסך הברזל, זכתה מדינת ישראל לעלייתם של כמיליון בני אדם מברית המועצות לשעבר. עליה זו על פני יותר משני עשורים הביאה ברכות למדינה מבחינות רבות וביניהם הכלכלית, האקדמאית, הטכנולוגית, הדמוגרפית, והתרבותית. רצונם של העולים לתרום למדינה הוא גבוה ביותר, כולל במישור הצבאי כאשר משרתים ביחידות קרביות באחוזים גדולים מכלל

including serving in the IDF as the other members of the community do, but not necessarily living according to the demands of halakha.

I hope you will peruse the piskei din. I found them surprising, and delightfully refreshing. Clearly there is much here that would unite the Jewish people in practice. Perhaps we could find a way for the different streams to come much closer in interpretation to what it means to live a Jewish life. Reading these opinions I became truly hopeful, and I'd love to hear from you what your opinion is.

I want to thank Rabbi Davidson for his superb work, and for sharing that work with us, his colleagues.

In this article by Rabbi Nathan Lopez Cardozo [\[click here\]](#) you'll see the claim that halakha intends to make us a moral people. I need remind no one of Hillel's restatement of the Golden Rule in Shabbat 31a, or the questions about entering heaven also found there, the first of which is whether the person conducted his affairs honestly. Halakha's intention is clearly to refine the soul and bring us closer to God, regardless of the movement we happen to



האוכלוסייה. הדור השני נקלט היטב בארץ עד שאינם שונים מעמיתיהם הצברים.

מצד אחד, קליטתם המוצלחת של העולים היא ברכה למדינה כולה, ומצד שני מציגה בפני החברה הישראלית אתגרים משמעותיים. וזה מכיוון שכ-300 אלף עולים מבוגרים, שעלו מתוקף חוק השבות המעניק זכות עליה לכל מי שלו סב אחד (בתנאי שאין לעולה דת אחרת), אינם יהודים על פי ההלכה. עוד כ-80 אלף ילדים ובני נוער שנולדו או גדלו בארץ אינם יהודים על פי ההלכה. מתוך 380 אלף אלה, המוגדרים כ"חסרי דת" במשרד הפנים, רובם ככולם רואים בעצמם יהודים לכל דבר.

בנוסף, כמעט כל העולים האלה הם מוגדרים כ"זרע ישראל", צאצאי יהודים שאינם יהודים מבחינה הלכתית. שלא כמו גיורם של סתם נכרים, גיורם של זרע ישראל הינו מצווה של השבת אבידה, כלומר השבתם של אלה שאבדו לעם ישראל, דבר שנכון במיוחד כלפי יהודי ברית המועצות שנותקו בכוח מכל דבר יהודי במשך כ-70 שנות המשטר הקומוניסטי. ובכן, הדרישות ההלכתיות לגיורם של זרע ישראל מקלות משמעותית לעומת גיורם של סתם נכרים.

כתוצאה מעליה מבורכת זו, מספר אתגרים עולה, וביניהם:

1. קצב נישואי תערובת, תופעה זניחה בארץ לפני נפילת מסך הברזל, גדל עשרת מונים וכיום עומד על כ-5% אוחזים, אחד מכל עשרים. תופעה זו כבר הגיעה גם לציבור הדתי בעקבות תופעת הדת"שיות בקרב המגזר.
2. חסרי הדת בישראל אינם יכולים להתחתן בארץ כי לרבנות הראשית יש מונופול על הנישואין.
3. לכידות החברה הישראלית, שכבר שבירה בעקבות קרעים פוליטיים ואידיאלוגיים רבים, עוד יותר נחלשת מאי קבלת העולים בצורה מלאה.
4. מול הזדמנות היסטורית לקרב יהודי ברית המועצות לשעבר ליהדות, גישת הרבנות שאינה מסבירה פנים גורמת בדיוק ההיפך ומרחיקה אותם ממורשתם.

כיום, מסלול הגיור הממלכתי של המשרד לשירותי דת והרבנות הראשית, דורש ממתגיירים לשכנע את בית הדין שהם מתכוונים לשמור תורה ומצוות כהלכה כמו ששומרים הדתיים, מה שרובם לא מתכוונים לעשות; ואף רוב המצליחים לעבור את המסלול עד הגיור לא עושים בפועל. אי לכך, מסלול הגיור הממלכתי כיום מנטרל את רצונם של רוב האוכלוסייה הנ"ל להתגייר.

חוברת זו פותחת צהר לשאלה קריטית לעתידה של אוכלוסיה זו ובכלל להמשך יהדותו ההלכתית של מספר הלך וגדל של אזרחים בעלי זהות יהודית אבל שאינם יהודים על פי ההלכה.

החוברת מציגה בפני הקורא יותר ממאה ציטוטים בסוגיית הגיור מרבני ישראל על פני מאות ואלפי שנים. הציטוטים קוצרו על מנת לפרוס את החומר בשפה קלה ושווה לכל נפש. יחד עם זאת, בכל עמוד הובא המקור לציטוט, ובכל אופן, נבחרו הציטוטים בכוונה להציג את דעתו הסופית של המצוטט למיטב הבנתי.

בחוברת הובאו הדעות המקלות בלבד. ברור שבתחום הגיור, כבכל תחום אחר

represent. Rabbi Cardozo's warning, I feel certain, is near to all of our hearts, as we watch Israel seclude itself behind a wall of religious chauvinism. We see we have many allies in the Jewish world.

Please see our Facebook page for RRFEI here: [\[click here\]](#), and I'd love to get your feedback at [organizers@RRFEI.org](mailto:organizers@RRFEI.org).

B'yedidut,

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בהלכה, קיימות מחלוקות לגיטימיות. ומכיוון שהדעות המחמירות יותר ידועות בקרב הציבור הרחב, חוברת זו מביאה את הדעות הפחות ידועות. אין בחוברת שום כוונה מעבר לעורר עניין בתקווה שקוראים רבים יעמיקו בלימוד הסוגיא, ובודאי שאין הכוונה להציג שום עמדה הלכה למעשה.

תודותיי לג"ר חיים אמסלם שליט"א, מחבר הספר המונומנטלי זרע ישראל שממנו נדלו רוב ככל הציטוטים בתוספת פנינים בודדים ממה שאני דליתי בכוחות עצמי מדברי הפוסקים לדורותיהם. זכיתי זכות שאין לתאר בלהכיר את כבוד הרב מקרוב, ליצוק מים על ידיו, וללמוד תורת הגיור מפיו.

קלמן פסח (צ'אק) בן פינחס דוידסון  
תשע"ה

## Resources

- [Chief Rabbi Lau attacks Bennett over pluralism](#)
- [J-REC / AJC Mission to Israel](#)
- [Giyur K'halacha](#)
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email: [organizers@rrfei.org](mailto:organizers@rrfei.org)  
Phone (US): [646-334-5636](tel:646-334-5636)  
Phone (Isr): [054-779-1179](tel:054-779-1179)

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Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel represents a broad spectrum of Jewish belief and practice, and champions the values of religious freedom and equality fundamental to World Jewry, in partnership with Hiddush for the realization of these principles in Israel and the Diaspora.

Rabbis for Religious Freedom and Equality in Israel

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