

## [The Conversion Controversies Continue](#)

Submitted by mdangel1 on Fri, 04/01/2016 - 15:32



The Israeli Chief Rabbinate has recently rejected the applications of several Orthodox Jewish converts who have applied to live in Israel. This rejection has been reported widely in the Jewish media, and has generated much discussion--and anger, frustration, disgust. These cases are being appealed, and we hope that these converts will indeed be allowed to settle in Israel as Jews.

The Chief Rabbinate only accepts Orthodox conversions performed under their jurisdiction and/or with their express approval. Orthodox rabbis who refuse to bend to the will of the Chief Rabbinate are excluded from the Chief Rabbinate's "approved" list.

This policy is problematic on many levels.

1. Conversions performed by non-Orthodox rabbis in the diaspora are routinely accepted in Israel as proof of Jewishness for the purposes of the law of return. Such converts are not subject to the authority of the Chief Rabbinate. Only Orthodox converts are under the aegis of the Chief Rabbinate, so only Orthodox converts must suffer the injustices and indignities inflicted upon them by the Chief Rabbinate.
2. Conversions performed by Orthodox rabbis are done in conformity with the requirements of halakha. For the Chief Rabbinate to deny the Jewishness of such converts is a sin of the first magnitude. It causes pain and humiliation to such converts, and thus violates 36 (some say 46) Torah commandments. It also undermines the status of Orthodox rabbis in the diaspora (and in Israel!) who refuse to comply with the most extreme, Hareidi views on conversion.
3. In rejecting the Jewishness of Orthodox converts, the Chief Rabbinate wittingly or unwittingly turns potential converts away from halakha. It encourages them to prefer non-Orthodox conversions, so as to avoid confrontation with the Chief Rabbinate. Moreover, if Orthodox converts were really to take the Chief Rabbinate seriously, they would feel free to violate halakha--even though they are in fact halakhically Jewish!
4. The Chief Rabbinate has itself agreed to have Orthodox converts approved by the Jewish Agency, rather than through the Chief Rabbinate. This agreement was reached so that Orthodox converts would have a means of having their Jewishness validated by a body that is familiar with the Orthodox rabbinate worldwide, and that is able to evaluate properly the credentials of the sponsoring rabbis of conversions. Now, the Chief Rabbinate is reneging on its own formal agreement with the Jewish Agency.
5. The policy of the Chief Rabbinate is detrimental to the interests of the State of Israel. It alienates the very people who have shown great desire to be Jewish and to live in Israel.

6. A person who has undergone a halakhic conversion is 100% Jewish, regardless of anything the Chief Rabbinate says or does. The halakhot of conversion must not be allowed to be held hostage to the misguided and extreme views of the Chief Rabbinate or to the Chief Rabbinate's struggle to maintain power and authority for itself.

7. A great many Jews are rightly outraged by the Chief Rabbinate's egregious sins against converts, and its blatant disregard for the best interests of converts and the State of Israel. Many see this as a rabbinic power grab, not as a righteous way of providing religious leadership.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has been outspoken on behalf of a halakhically valid, compassionate and inclusive policy relating to conversion to Judaism. We have worked with like-minded people in Israel and the diaspora to defend the honor and rights of halakhic converts. At the forefront of these battles in Israel is Rabbi Shaul Farber, who heads an organization known as Itim. He deserves our appreciation and support.

Please stand with and support the work of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals ([jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org)) and the work of Itim ([itim.org.il](http://itim.org.il)), and of other like-minded organizations that fight for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism. Together, we can accomplish great things.

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