A Free Guide on Conversion to Judaism

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Yael Deilli, a recent convert to Judaism in Israel, has prepared a guide to help others who are considering halakhic conversion. It is a free service, offering guidance in English, Hebrew and Russian.

What I wished was in one place

Earlier this year I stood in front of a Beit Din in Israel and answered questions I had been studying for a long time. I am originally from Moscow and I live in Tel Aviv, where I work as a financial analyst. Nothing in that sentence explains why I spent my evenings building a website for conversion candidates, so let me try.

When I began the process I expected the hard part to be the content. Shabbat, kashrut, the order of the prayers, the laws of family life, the holidays and their reasons. The content was hard, but it was not the hardest part. The hardest part was that it lived in so many places. One topic was in a photocopied booklet from class, another in a Hebrew sefer I could read only slowly, a third in a forum thread where half the answers contradicted each other. More than once I knew I had seen an answer in four places and could not find it in any of them. Candidates who think in Russian have it worse, because the good material is mostly in Hebrew or English, and the Russian material is often outdated or written by people who never sat in front of a Beit Din themselves.

So I started keeping my own list of questions and answers. After my giur, the list became Jewish Path.

Jewish Path https://jewishpath.online/en is a free site in English, Russian and Hebrew. There are eleven study topics, written the way I would have wanted them explained to me: what the halacha is, where it comes from, and what it looks like on an ordinary Tuesday. There are 153 practice questions of the kind a Beit Din actually asks, with answers, and flashcards for the ones that refuse to stay in memory. Each week there is a short summary of the parasha in all three languages. There is also a blog on practical halacha, the first time you put up a mezuzah, the first time you kasher a kitchen, how a visit to the mikveh works, written for the person who is doing it for the first time and is a little embarrassed to ask.

Two things about the site I want to say plainly. There are no ads and nothing for sale. And it is a study

companion, not a program. Every page says to follow one's sponsoring rabbi. A candidate who reads something on the site and hears something different from their rabbi should follow their rabbi. The site exists to make the hours between classes more useful, not to replace the teacher.

The halachic material draws on the Shulchan Aruch, the Mishnah Berurah, the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch and the standard Orthodox guides, and the practice questions follow the curriculum I studied in Israel. I have asked rabbis to review it and I keep asking. When a rabbi wrote to me recently about something on the site that should not have been there, I removed it the same day. I would rather be corrected than be read uncritically, and I say so to everyone who writes.

Why three languages? Because the people who need this are rarely one kind of person. In my own program there were Israelis who grew up in Jewish homes with a non-Jewish mother, new immigrants from Russia and Ukraine who learned about their family history late, Americans who came for a year and stayed, and spouses of all of the above. They sat in the same room and took notes in different alphabets. A site that spoke to only one of them would have missed the others, and often it is the same person who studies in Hebrew and thinks in Russian.

I do not know how many people the site will reach. What I do know is the feeling of finding a clear answer at eleven at night when the next class is on Thursday, and I would like other candidates to have that feeling more often. If you work with people on this road, the link costs nothing to pass along. And if you read something on the site that is wrong, missing or explained badly, please write to me at hello@jewishpath.online. Every such letter makes it better for the next person.