

Temple Beth Rishon Life Cycle Events

Conversion

How long does the process of conversion (*gerut*) take?

That depends upon the emotional, spiritual, familial, and intellectual needs and background of the individual wishing to become a Jew. However, the average time is approximately twelve to eighteen months. Since each individual is unique, the Rabbi will determine the course of study and the length of time required for conversion.

What is included in the instruction?

The instruction encompasses:

- ritual observances of *Shabbat*, holy days, festivals, and life-cycle *mitzvot* in the home and in the synagogue
- basic theology and values
- Jewish history
- Bible
- liturgy
- Hebrew language.

All candidates must regularly attend Sabbath services and participate in holy day and festival observances and other Jewish communal activities.

What commitment must a convert [*ger* (m), *gioret* (f), or *gerim* (plural)] make with regard to his or her children?

The candidate is asked two important questions:

1. Do you promise to establish a Jewish home and to actively participate in the life of the synagogue and of the Jewish community?
2. Do you promise to raise your children as Jews?

Any person contemplating conversion to Judaism must seriously consider the effect it will have on children, because Judaism is firmly anchored in family harmony.

In addition to the candidate, are there others who participate in the formal learning process?

If the candidate is married or is to be married, his or her spouse or future spouse will be required to attend formal learning sessions in addition to worship services. This will enhance their Jewish experience together during their marriage.

Are any rituals required before the conversion is officially completed?

All candidates must immerse themselves in a ritual bath: the *mikvah*. Every male convert must undergo circumcision. If he is already circumcised, he must then fulfill the requirement of *Harafat Dam Brit*, the drawing of blood from the shaft of the penis. In addition to the aforementioned necessary rituals, *gerim* are required to be formally questioned by a council of three rabbis who constitute the *Bet Din* (Jewish court). Through this questioning, the *Bet Din* is able to ascertain information about a candidate's knowledge of and commitment to Judaism.

Is there a specific conversion ceremony?

Yes. The ceremony, which usually takes place in a synagogue, includes appropriate liturgical passages as well as readings dealing with *gerut* such as Ruth 1:16-17. The *ger* or *gioret* is given a Hebrew name. A certificate containing the signatures of the rabbis and other witnesses is also presented to *gerim*.

Is there a fee for conversion?

It is customary to make a donation to the synagogue. One may also choose to present the Rabbi with a personal gift in appreciation of the time and effort he or she has devoted toward the conversion.

What is involved in the conversion of an infant or a minor (a child under the age of 13?)

Both males and females are required to be immersed in a *mikvah* in the presence of a *Bet Din* consisting of three rabbis. Children who are old enough can recite the necessary prayers; if not, a rabbi does so for them. Prior to immersion, a male must have a *brit milah* or a *hatafat dam brit*. (Please refer to the sections on *Brit Milah* and Baby Naming for a Girl.)

If the minor's mother is not Jewish, are there any other requirements for the minor to be accepted into the Jewish faith?

Initially, the Rabbi should be contacted to assist in making the arrangements for conversion. Prior to the naming ceremony, the Rabbi will accompany the parents and the baby to the *mikvah*. The father will immerse the child in the water in the presence of three rabbis who serve as witnesses and who then sign the conversion certificate.