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# Orthodox-only conversion will end the Jewish people

Israel's Chief Rabbinate, which opposes any attempts to reform the conversion process, is keeping more people away from Judaism than any other institution in the Jewish world.



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This is a remark based on condescension and a patronizing attitude toward anyone who wants to join his or her life to that of the Jewish people. Come on, it's not as if there are hundreds of thousands beating on our door. The numbers presented in the same meeting should shock all the organizations that espouse transparency and purity: starting in 2014, the number of converts has dropped by half. The percentage of those who finish the conversion process has dropped from 60% to 24%. On the other hand, the budget for the state's conversion program has only grown in the past three years. What is surprising are the data from conversions in the Reform and Conservative streams, which are not government-funded (except for classrooms). It turns out that these conversions are seeing a steady rise.

The discussion, which took place at a meeting of the Knesset Committee on Special National Infrastructure Projects and Jewish Religious Services, should have led to headlines that would have made waves for at least a few hours. Other than the Chief Rabbinate's usual condescension to anyone who thinks differently, Orthodox and Haredi rabbis also made various remarks during the meeting that could be indicative of support for Religious Services Minister Matan Kahane's move on conversion reforms.

A representative of the private Haredi conversion courts stated that the Chief Rabbinate was too stringent in not allow professional female singers to convert. Rabbi Haim Amsalem said, his voice shaking, that the Rabbinate was "perverting Jewish law" and acting in an overly conservative manner that did not serve the Jewish people. On this matter, like with kashruth certification, the Chief Rabbinate opposes anything that might detract from its monopolistic power. But unlike kashruth, when it comes to conversion, there are more voices from within the hegemony that support the move for reform. Still, the discourse about conversion and the changes that need to be made to it do not indicate any real change.



In contrast to many other issues, conversion deals with the future of the Jewish people, rather than how it expresses itself currently. Therefore, it must be adjusted to the time and place and mainly to meet the needs of the men, women, and children who want to undergo the process. The numbers presented in the committee meeting left no room for doubt: the Chief Rabbinate continues to close the doors to the Jewish people and – more than any other institution in the Jewish world – keeps people away from Judaism, whether they were born to a Jewish parent or whether they opt to join us. This is what happens when Orthodoxy, the third-largest stream in the Jewish world, retains unlimited power.

Israel is home to some 400,000 citizens who have "no nationality or religion." Many of them served in the army, pay taxes, and see Israel as their future home. No to mention that many were raised in Israel as Jews in every aspect of their lives, and only discover that they "are not Jewish according to Jewish law" when they want to get married through the Rabbinate. The stories shared in the committee meeting about conversion, the humiliations, the exhausting process that does not always end with the coveted certificate, say it all. This whole process must be dismantled and rebuilt.

People like to talk about assimilation in North America "because of the [non-Orthodox] streams" of Judaism. So let's get down to the facts and figures, and put feelings aside for the moment. The rate of assimilation in European countries like France and Germany is over 60%, and these are countries where Orthodox Judaism prevailed. On the other hand, assimilation in North America stands at 45%. Let's not get confused – both these percentages are frightening, but it's not a competition. Everyone loses. Nevertheless, there is a way of preventing the phenomenon from expanding, and that is to understand that conversion must adapt to the time and the place. In this matter, it is important to remember that the High Court of Justice has already done most of the work and or

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But this isn't enough. Minister Kahane must realize that leaving conversion and the fate of the Jewish people in the hands of the Orthodox alone will eventually lead to the end of the Jewish people. Reforms to kashruth supervision and certification – important and progressive though it may be – doesn't apply to most of the Jewish people. This cannot happen with conversion.

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