

— THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE —

CONVERSION CANDIDATE

— INFORMATION PACK —



THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE
SYDNEY ק"ק בית ישראל



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So you're considering a conversion to Judaism?

Whatever it is that brought you here,
congratulations!

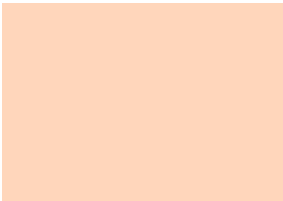
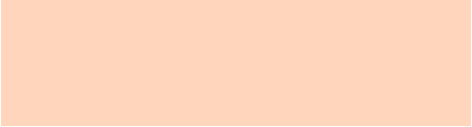
The Great Synagogue is home to Sydney's most successful and longest running group conversion classes and we are here to support you from the beginning to the end of your path to Orthodox Judaism.

This information pack is designed to help demystify the conversion process so you feel comfortable and excited for the beautiful journey that awaits.

No matter your reasons for converting, your age, or life stage, as a conversion candidate, you will be a welcome addition to The Great Synagogue and our inclusive and supportive community.

We look forward to having you join us!

CONVERSION



STARTING YOUR JOURNEY

INITIAL CONVERSATION

The first step to converting to Judaism is simple... START! An initial conversation with Rabbi Elton will kickstart the process. In this chat, you'll learn more about The Great Synagogue, be able to ask any questions, and understand more about conversion.

BETH DIN

Contact the [Sydney Beth Din](#) which oversees the process of all conversions. Provide all relevant forms and supporting documentation. You will be required to attend two meetings with the Beth Din before you are officially accepted into the conversion program.

CLASSES & LEARNING

Weekly group classes and learning are a core part of the process.

These interactive and engaging classes cover all elements of the approved curriculum and will also teach you steps for observance.

PROGRESS UPDATES

You will be required to have regular progress updates with Rabbi Elton (or the Rabbi at the synagogue you choose to attend), as well as progress check-ins at the Beth Din.

WHY THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE?

Located in Sydney's CBD, we welcome members from all over Sydney, no matter the synagogue you attend, to join our classes.

Overseen by the Sydney Beth Din, and following the Beth Din curriculum that meets international standards, The Great Synagogue offers interactive group learning within an accepting, fun and supportive environment.

By participating in our weekly classes you will have the opportunity to meet and engage with other conversion candidates of different ages and life stages who are all embarking on the same journey, and build lifelong connections and friendships in the process.

The Great Synagogue exists to create a beautiful community for its members and their families, including our conversion candidates. We are proud that The Great Synagogue was the first congregation in Australia and it has become a renowned place of aesthetic beauty, inspiring services with a history that spans many generations.

Inclusivity is at the heart of what we do, and we aim to build an engaged community that is deeply connected to the traditions and values of Judaism that will stand the test of time. We welcome diversity and deeply care for our community. We also recognise that everyone is at a different stage in their Jewish journey and accept them without judgement.

We offer an affordable learning solution, with conversion classes included completely free in your Great Synagogue Conversion candidate membership.





We offer the most affordable conversion classes in Sydney - our classes are FREE with your conversion candidate membership

We have the longest running and most successful group conversion classes in Sydney



Our conversion classes are overseen by the Sydney Beth Din

Our classes are inclusive and supportive, with members of all ages and life stages



Our Rabbi has a Modern Orthodox approach, and a unique understanding of the path to observance

OUR CLASSES & CURRICULUM

The foundation of conversion is built on learning and practice. It's about understanding the values, history and practices of the Jewish people, accepting the Mitzvot (commandments) and living in accordance with the Torah.

We have extensive experience in delivering our classes and have a tried and tested format that works. Occurring weekly for one hour, our class format is conversational, initiates questions and discussion and supports the learning of our candidates. Questions are encouraged outside of class to further accelerate your learning and observance.

Classes are mandatory for all conversion candidates and their partners (if applicable), ideally in-person. Zoom attendance is permitted if traveling or in special circumstances.





Having worked with a large number of successful converts over a lengthy period, we have continued to evolve our program based on feedback to improve our learning experience.

We have interactive classes focused on Shabbat (the Sabbath) and Kashrut (keeping kosher) including a tour of a Shabbat observant and kosher home, we host afternoon tea in a Sukkah over the High Holy Days, hold a mock wedding ceremony so we can walk through the rituals together, play games to learn brachot (blessings) and even speak to past converts about their own journeys in classes and host Alumni gatherings.

Over the 12 month curriculum, we teach key units including:

- Glossary of Terms
- Life cycle
- Shabbat
- Kashrut
- Jewish History
- Morals and Ethics
- The Jewish Calendar
- Blessings and Prayer

While Hebrew is not part of our curriculum, we have recommendations for teachers and tutors who will be able to support you in unlocking, decoding and understanding Hebrew which is a cornerstone of Jewish life and prayer.

Not the beginning of the year?

Don't worry! You can join our cohort at any time. We welcome you with open arms.

ABOUT OUR RABBI



RABBI DR BENJAMIN ELTON

I grew up in a traditional Jewish family home in Manchester, England. As a child, I was deeply connected to my Jewish roots and immersed in Jewish life. Our family had Shabbat dinners on a Friday night and kept a kosher home, even though we weren't fully observant.

In my teenage years, having gone to Jewish and non-Jewish schools, I made the choice to walk down a path of full observance, feeling called to keep fully kosher, keep Shabbat (including keeping the TV off from Friday sundown to Saturday dark!) and observing other mitzvot.

In making a decision like this, it's easy to fall down a rabbit hole and become more insular and reject wider societies and cultures, but I made sure to keep my interest in the broader world, studying history at Cambridge University and working in the British Civil Service for seven years. It was at this point I felt the desire to continue my own journey further into Judaism and I took a sabbatical which evolved into a complete career change. I went to train for the rabbinate in New York, where I studied for four years, before coming to Sydney in 2015 as Chief Minister of The Great Synagogue at the age of 35.

My path to observance and becoming a Rabbi is different to some other Rabbis I know. While many Rabbis continue a family tradition of generations of observance, my journey was not dissimilar to that of a convert; learning, trying, stalling and trying again until it felt doable and became an integrated part of my life.

I've tried to bring this feeling into our Great Synagogue Conversion Classes and in my role as a mentoring Rabbi; creating a safe space to learn, try and to ask questions, all within a supportive and inclusive community. No question is silly, everybody is a lifelong learner and we enjoy ourselves and have fun as we go, even if the process can become challenging.



No matter your reason for conversion, whether it's fulfilling a religious calling to join the Jewish faith, having paternal Jewish lineage and wanting to become a full part of the Jewish people, or meeting a Jewish partner and wanting to create a Jewish home and family together, I am here to help and support you on that path.

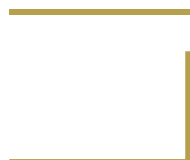
My wife Hinda is also connected to our conversion candidates, teaching occasional guest classes, working with our brides-to-be on their pre-marital learning, as well as generally supporting those who are going through the program. Hinda is in the process of completing her Master's Degree in Social Work alongside co-parenting our children Lizzie (5) and Salo (2) and the newest addition to our family, David. We look forward to meeting you, hosting you in our home over a Shabbat or a festival, building a connection and celebrating with you.

I have been delighted by the wonderful people who have come through my classes and I have built special relationships with our students and alumni of all ages, family circumstances and life stages that I hope will last a lifetime.

The conversion process always starts with an informal conversation with me, so please get in touch with me to get the ball rolling and start the journey.



SUCCESS STORIES



I started my conversion journey from an Irish Catholic background and was quite nervous about approaching an Orthodox synagogue. I shouldn't have been! The Great Synagogue community has been warm, welcoming, and inclusive.

The conversion classes, led by Rabbi Dr. Elton, are supportive and comprehensive. They help me feel prepared for the rigours and beauty of a halachic life. I enjoy the attention to detail and the incredible intelligence and humour that the Rabbi brings to his lessons.

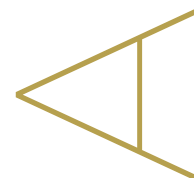
It is a joy and an honour to walk this path with the excellent guidance of the Rabbi, and I highly recommend you pursue an Orthodox conversion at TGS. Don't let anything dissuade you. When your soul wants you to become Jewish, you'll know!




Rabbi Elton has been a dedicated, kind and detailed teacher who has shepherded my journey through Judaism with warmth and patience.

I have felt completely supported throughout this process and cannot recommend the Great Synagogue as a place to begin your immersion in Jewish life highly enough.

The curriculum and lessons are thorough and practical and have prepared me well for the final exams






We decided to join the conversion program through TGS after meeting Rabbi Elton in person and a long conversation with one of the “would be converts” going through the class.

Having initially “shopped around”, we felt that TGS was our place. What I particularly like about this conversion program is that it is a group setting, rather than an individual one and there is a sense of camaraderie and shared experience.

We have loved the diversity of the class and learning from each person’s unique perspective and experience.

Rabbi Elton is funny, kind and welcoming, and always makes the classes accessible.
I would highly recommend this program to anyone considering converting.

CHARLOTTE & CRAIG

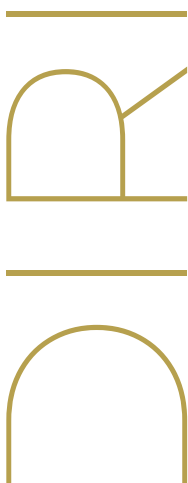


Like the Israelites wandering the wilderness for 40 years, so was my 40-year life journey, that led me to the doors of Judaism and finding The Great Synagogue in Sydney”.

Here I found my spiritual foundation, and an ancient tradition of wisdom, strength, courage, respect, and humility.

Through the conversion course with Rabbi Dr Benjamin Elton, I have been able to immerse myself into Jewish customs, traditions, culture, history, ethics and most importantly - The Torah.

As within my Fijian culture/community, the Jewish community here in Sydney have been warm and welcoming. I feel like I have found my own small piece of the promised land here.



SORAYA & RICHARD



Our path to conversion through The Great Synagogue has been seamless! We are now finished the conversion process, are newly married, and could not be happier with our experience.

We knew that Rabbi Elton was the right Rabbi for us from our first meeting; he's young, fresh and approachable but also extremely knowledgeable and intelligent. It's rare to meet a Rabbi as invested in your progress as you are, but Rabbi Elton embodies this, going above and beyond to support you on your journey; even answering calls, texts, WhatsApps and emails at all hours.

The learning experience has also been fantastic. Not only has it been fascinating, there's no fear of not getting it right, or not understanding something. We joke and laugh while learning, and we've made lifelong friends with like minded people going through the same journey.

If you're thinking of converting, The Great Synagogue is without a doubt, the place to go! And the bonus? You are surrounded by the beauty of Sydney's most historic Synagogue.







Rabbi Elton was our conversion teacher from 2022 to 2024. He intelligently taught the curriculum in a way that was palatable while diving deeper into areas of focus.

We thoroughly enjoyed the weekly classes and couldn't recommend the classes highly enough. The benefit of these classes was their well-structured nature and the ability to go on the same journey with a close knit network.

Rabbi was always very prompt in responding to our questions whenever and wherever they arose.

We will always be grateful to have had Rabbi Elton guide and support us through this journey, providing unparalleled learning during the theory and observance phases of conversion.

ANIKKA & JOSH



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Our experience of converting through The Great Synagogue was hugely rewarding.

Over the course of 2 years we were thoughtfully taught by Rabbi Elton and Rabbi Kaplan who guided us through every step of the journey.

We are so grateful to have been surrounded by a caring and supportive community and have made life long friends in the process



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO CONVERT?

The answer really depends on you! At The Great Synagogue, we aim to provide you with all of the tools to be able to allow you to experience a streamlined and simple Orthodox Jewish conversion.

We find the conversion process will take, on average, between 12-24 months. This is dependent primarily on each candidate themselves, their individual circumstances and how quickly they wish to take up observance.



HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

We offer our conversion program completely FREE! It's included in the Conversion Candidate membership fee of \$150. This membership also includes a guaranteed seat over the High Holy Days, member pricing for all of our communal events and subscription to Great Synagogue publications including the annual Great Vine Magazine

Should you have a Jewish partner, they will also be required to attend classes. In order to do so, they will join The Great Synagogue as a regular member or a seatholder.



ARE THERE ONLY COUPLES IN YOUR PROGRAM?

No! Inclusivity and diversity are some of our key values and we welcome a variety of students including singles, couples, people of different ages and life stages.

Come as you are, no matter your circumstances and you will be warmly welcomed.



DO I NEED TO ATTEND CLASSES EACH WEEK?

Classes run weekly over a year long period. We strongly recommend you attend classes in person in the Sydney CBD on a weekly basis to ensure you are learning the curriculum, to allow you to engage with other students in the class, and allow you to ask questions and participate in the interactive elements.

We understand that due to travel or illness, in person attendance might not always be possible. In this instance, a Zoom link will be provided to allow you to still join.

Progress updates will be dependent on class attendance.



HOW OFTEN DO I NEED TO ATTEND A SYNAGOGUE?

Initially, we encourage you to just start attending. As you continue your journey through conversion and increase your observance, regular Synagogue attendance becomes more important and is a key part of your progress updates and check-ins.



DO I NEED TO GO TO THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE TO ATTEND YOUR CLASSES?

No! You don't need to attend The Great Synagogue to join our classes, however you will need to sign up for the appropriate membership at The Great Synagogue to be eligible to attend.

Should you choose to attend another Orthodox synagogue over Shabbat, the High Holy Days etc. and still come to our classes, this is fine. We will simply need to speak to the Rabbi of the synagogue you attend as another element of your progress and check-ins.





WHAT'S THE TIME COMMITMENT?

Classes run for one hour, once a week from February - December, with a mid-year break. We also have classes off for High Holy Days, Fast Days and other festivals. Dates are confirmed in advance.

We also recommend additional study outside of classes to further your knowledge and learning and prepare for relevant exams at the end of the conversion process. This is up to the individual.



IS YOUR CURRICULUM RECOGNISED AND APPROVED?

Absolutely! The Great Synagogue has been working with the strict requirements of the Sydney Beth Din for our conversion classes for many years, and our curriculum follows international conversion standards.

We are the longest running and most successful group conversion program, with more than 30 students who have undertaken classes, with a high volume of successful candidates completing their path to conversion through The Great Synagogue.

We have the benefit of knowing what works, having taught many successful cohorts, and as such we've optimised our classes to keep them interactive, engaging and encourage group conversation and questions.



IS THERE AN EXAM AT THE END OF THE PROCESS?

Yes. Held by the Sydney Beth Din, we aim to cover the content and curriculum that you may be asked during your exam.

The exam process depends on the progress of the individual and is an oral exam which may be held in several parts.



WHAT NEXT?





We would love to speak with you to answer any additional questions. Please email admin@greatsynagogue.org.au to book in a time to chat with Rabbi Elton.

CONTACT US



THE GREAT
SYNAGOGUE
SYDNEY

ק"ק בית ישראל

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-  greatsynagogue.org.au/conversion

We look forward to being a part of your conversion journey!
