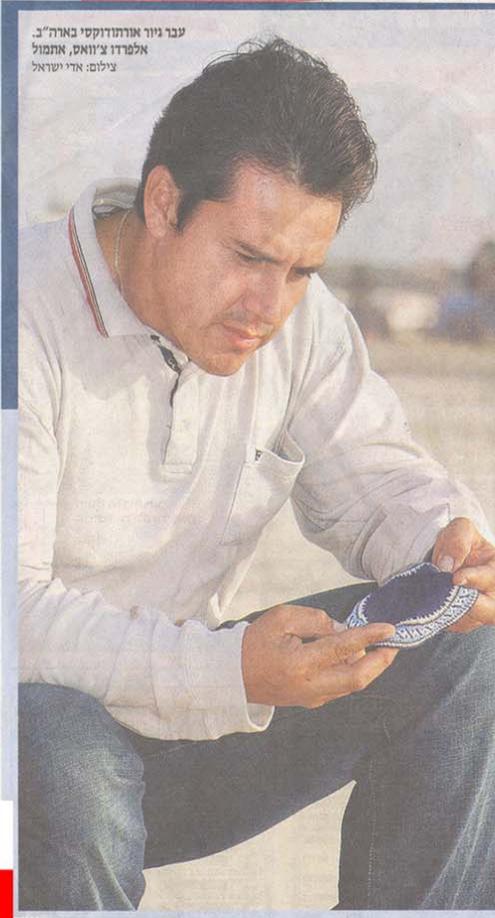


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## From the Jungle to Judaism

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# מהג'ונגל בעקבות היהדות

כשמלאו לאלפרדו צ'ואז שלושים, הודיע לו סבו: אתה יהודי ■ הוא עזב את ביתו באל-סלוודור, למד יהדות בארה"ב ומשם המשיך לישראל ■ הוא רוצה להיות אזרחי – אך משרד הפנים מסרב לתת לו אזרחות

מאת משה כהן

בשנת 1980, גילה לו סבו סוד משפחתי: "אתה יהודי דתי, אמר לו, שמוצאך מטורקיה". כשנמטר דמב, חזר לים אלפרדו לתתמבר לשורשיו ואף התגייר כחי לחסד ספק בודדותו. צ'ואז, יהודי לכל דבר, רצה לחשלים את מפק החוזה למסורות שלו ולחיות בארץ – אלא שמשרד הפנים אינו מאשר לו להתארח בארץ.

לאחר שגילה את מוצאו היהודי, ומצא תעודת לידה שמוכיחה שאמו היא יהודייה ספרדייה ממוצא טורקי, נסע אלפרדו לארצות-הברית ללמוד בישיבה, מספר שבאלי-סלוודור אין קהילה יהודית פעילה. לאחר מספר חודשים התכירו אותו הרבנים בארצות-הברית ג'ור מסר דר, עקב ספק הלכתי בנוגע לבית המילה שעבר ביגיד תו. לאלפרדו ניתן אישור על כך מבית הדין החרדי, וני תו לו גם שם חדש: אליהו דוד בן אברהם אבינו. לפני כשנה שלחו אותו הרבנים ללמוד בישיבה בישראל.

אלפרדו, או אליהו, עבר להתגורר באשדוד ולמד ביי שיבה. בית הדין הרבני באשדוד קבע בתחילת שנה זו שהגידו שעבר אלפרדו תקן, ואלפרדו הוא יהודי לכל דבר ועניין, כעת, כיהודי, הוא קיבל להתיישב לתמיד לטוב.



### Interior ministry denies Orthodox convert Israeli citizenship

When Alfredo Chavez turned 30, his grandfather let him in on a family secret: he was Jewish. He left his home in El Salvador in search of his Jewish roots. He converted in the US, but Israel refuses to give him citizenship. An Israeli organization is trying to help

**Moshe Cohen**  
When Alfredo Chavez turned 30, his grandfather let him in on a family secret: he was Jewish. "You're Jewish", he told him, "and you were born in Turkey". When his grandfather died, Chavez decided to search out his roots, and left the little village he lived in and go off to the US to convert so that there would be no question about his Jewishness. Although Chavez is considered Jewish, he wanted to complete the spiritual journey he had embarked upon, and live in Israel. But the Interior Ministry doesn't want him here.

After discovering he was Jewish, and finding his birth certificate which proves that his mother was a Sephardic Jew of Turkish descent, Alfredo went to America to study in a Yeshiva there because there is no active Jewish community in El Salvador. After several months there, rabbis in the US converted him according to an Orthodox conversion because there was some reservation with the circumcision he had undergone as a baby. Alfredo received a certificate of conversion from the Haredi rabbinic court in the US, along with a new name: Eliahu David ben Avraham. Several months ago, the US rabbis sent him to study in an Israeli yeshiva.

Alfredo, or Eliahu, went to live in Ashdod, and studied in a yeshiva there. The Ashdod rabbinic court ruled at the beginning of the year that Alfredo's conversion was acceptable and that he is Jewish. As a Jew now, Alfredo decided to stay on in the Promised Land, and become an Israeli citizen.

Not quite as easy as it looks. The Ministry of Interior refused to honor his request because of a little known protocol that requires someone who undergoes conversion overseas to maintain residence in that community for at least one year. This despite the fact that Chavez was declared "a kosher Jew" by the rabbinic courts in Israel and the US.

Chavez approached ITIM, a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting Israelis through the beauracratc hurdles of Jewish life in Israel, for help. ITIM handles hundreds of cases like this a year, but Rabbi Seth Farber, director of ITIM, says this situation is absurd. "Chavez couldn't have stayed in America for a full year, nor could he have stayed in El Salvador. In the US, his visa did not allow him to stay for that long, and in El Salvador, there is no active Jewish community. In the meantime, Chavez's tourist visa in Israel will expire in a couple of weeks", the rabbi said.

An interior ministry spokeswoman said that the protocol in Chavez's case is "a requirement by the ministry to allot a certain amount of time before acts such as conversion or marriage for the purposes of gaining Israeli citizenship are recognized. The goal is to determine the integrity of each person who applies for citizenship. We don't determine who is a Jew, but we do decide who will receive the status of "Oleh" in Israel".

ITIM and the Ministry of Interior are trying to resolve the matter. And Chavez? He continues to study in the yeshiva in Ashdod, hoping for the best.