



ITIM

The Right To Live Jewish

CHANGING
JEWISH LIVES
TRANSFORMING
ISRAELI SOCIETY

2018 IMPACT REPORT



From the Founder & Director

Thank you for enabling ITIM to provide essential services and to be an agent of positive change.

Credit: Koko



Dear Friends:

2018 was a great year of progress for ITIM.

We repeatedly and successfully challenged the exclusionary practices of Israel's religious establishment. We won landmark cases that limited the State's ability to investigate citizens' Jewish identities, enabled the first woman ever to hold a professional position within a State rabbinical court, required the State to recognize a Giyur K'Halacha conversion, and democratized the process of electing the Chief Rabbinate Council, its decision-making arm. ITIM's work led to substantive public policy reforms, including the redrafting of a monopolistic Conversion Bill, and of the Chief Rabbinate's criteria for accepting the authority of non-Israeli rabbis.

At the same time, ITIM provided critical assistance to thousands of people who called our free hotline for help establishing their official Jewish status, getting married, burying loved ones, or otherwise navigating matters of Jewish life administered by the State. Our groundbreaking conversion court network, Giyur K'Halacha, grew in size and influence. In addition, ITIM was increasingly recognized as a leader of the civic movement that is demanding change on key religion-and-State issues.

Thanks to the support of our devoted board members and generous donors, ITIM is well-positioned to build on its 2018 successes. Thank you for enabling ITIM to provide essential services, and to be an agent of positive change for Israel and the rest of the Jewish world.

Sincerely,
Rabbi Seth Farber, PhD



Credit: Koko

Israel's Ministry of Aliyah and Integration presented Rabbi Seth Farber with an Award for Outstanding Contribution to Israeli Society, November 2018

Mission, Goals & Strategies

ITIM's mission drove its leadership and staff. Its goals inspired action. Its strategies yielded results.

Mission

ITIM is committed to increasing participation in Jewish life by making Israel's religious establishment responsive to the diverse Jewish needs of the Jewish people

Goals

- ▲ Strengthen Israel's Jewish character
- ▲ Protect Jewish Israelis' civil rights
- ▲ Advance the cause of Jewish pluralism
- ▲ Ensure equal access to State religious services
- ▲ Bridge the divide between Jewish life in Israel and around the world
- ▲ Moderate the State's extreme interpretations of Jewish law
- ▲ Improve government transparency and accountability
- ▲ Reduce religious coercion
- ▲ Build Israeli democracy

Strategies

ITIM WORKS WITH Israel's religious establishment to facilitate participation in matters of Jewish life administered by the government

ITIM CHALLENGES Israel's religious establishment to protect civil rights, promote Jewish pluralism, improve government transparency, and ensure equality under the law

ITIM OFFERS ALTERNATIVES to Israel's religious establishment to meet the needs of the broad Jewish public

ITIM LEADS a civic movement for change

The ITIM Assistance Center: Facilitating Jewish Life

The ITIM Assistance Center helped thousands of people gain official Jewish status, marry, convert to Judaism, bury loved ones, and more.

The ITIM Assistance Center is *the* address for solving practical issues of religion-and-State in Israel.

The Center's Hebrew, English, French, and Russian-speaking staff provide information, guidance, and support—free of charge—on every government-administered religious matter, from birth to burial, with special expertise in marriage and conversion. The Center is a unique resource, widely recognized for its professionalism, breadth of experience, and direct lines of communication with social welfare organizations, government authorities, and members of the rabbinic establishment.

2018 was a busy year for the ITIM Assistance Center. The Center took on more than 3,000 cases, and staff accompanied dozens of people to State agencies and rabbinical courts to provide practical guidance and emotional support.

A common cause for calls to the Assistance Center was the State's increasingly stringent standards for gaining official Jewish status. The Center helped nearly 400 people prove their Jewish identities to the State's satisfaction, enabling 250 of them to marry in State-recognized weddings, and more than 100 to immigrate to Israel.

The ITIM Assistance Center also solved an issue most people know little about: Israel's archaic practice of limiting parental involvement in the burial of stillborns and newborns. The Center's sensitive staff helped more than 100 people exercise their rights to participate in their children's burials or locate their graves. A major TV news feature on ITIM's work brought the issue to the public's attention, and the ITIM Advocacy Center advanced policy reforms that will make parental exclusion a thing of the past.



Meitav Tessler-Schimmel, ITIM Assistance Center Team Leader, championed the cause of parents' rights to participate in the burial of stillborns and newborns

2018 ITIM Assistance Center Cases

3,024 | Total

1,145 | Conversion

507 | Marriage

426 | Burial

420 | Divorce

390 | Jewish Status

94 | General Assistance

42 | Mikveh Use

ITIM Saves a Wedding Day

Stephanie Nelson grew up in a traditional Jewish home in northern New Jersey. In 2010, she realized her dream of immigrating to Israel. All went well: she lived on a kibbutz, served in the Israeli army, fell in love, and got engaged.

But when Stephanie and her fiancée, Erez, applied for a State marriage license, things began to unravel. The Rabbinate informed the couple that it did not consider Stephanie Jewish, because it rejected the authority of the American rabbinical court that had overseen her conversion 20 years earlier. They could not have a Jewish wedding that would be recognized by the State.

Hurt by the rejection, and unsure what steps to take, Stephanie called the ITIM Assistance Center hotline. An experienced staff member explained Stephanie's options, and guided her through a State rabbinical court process that led to recognition of her Jewish identity. In June, Stephanie and Erez had the wedding of their dreams - a wedding recognized by the State of Israel.

“What a comfort it was to know there was an organization I could reach out to when the system was so cold and unhelpful, and made me feel alone and helpless... Having a place to turn gave me the back-up plan I needed, and a know-how person who made all the difference.”

— ITIM Assistance Center Hotline Caller

Credit: Herschel Gutman



Stephanie Nelson and Erez Cramer married in a State-recognized wedding in June, thanks to the help of the ITIM Assistance Center

The ITIM Advocacy Center: Challenging Israel's Religious Establishment

Winning three Supreme Court cases. Enabling a woman to serve as a professional in a State rabbinical court for the first time in Israeli history. Gaining State recognition of a Giyur K'Halacha conversion. These are just a few of the ITIM Advocacy Center's 2018 achievements.

The ITIM Advocacy Center is Israel's preeminent religion-and-State watchdog and legal action center. The Center monitors State policies and practices, contributes to Knesset hearings, drafts policy reforms, petitions authorities, and, when necessary, initiates litigation. **In 2018, the ITIM Advocacy Center addressed the State's inconsistent approach to the question "Who is a Jew," gender and ethnic discrimination, and poor provision of religious services.** The Center was particularly successful in addressing an increasingly prevalent civil rights violation: unwarranted State investigations into citizens' Jewish identities.



ITIM Advocacy Center staff regularly worked with Knesset Members and participated in Knesset Committee Hearings

2018 ITIM Advocacy Center Achievements

Authority of Non-Israeli Rabbis

- Represented non-Israeli rabbis whose authority the Israeli Rabbinate rejects
- Exposed a whitelist of non-Israeli rabbinical courts

State Investigations into Citizens' Jewish Identities

- Won two Supreme Court cases that required the Interior Ministry to reinstate families' Jewish status
- Prevented the Rabbinate from conducting third-party Jewish identity investigations
- Reduced the Rabbinate's list of citizens whose Jewish identity it questions

Chief Rabbinate Elections

- Won a Supreme Court case that required members of the committee that elects the Chief Rabbinate Council to be elected, not appointed

Conversion Rights

- Led a coalition that blocked passage of a Knesset bill that would have cemented the government's monopoly over conversions
- Won a case that required the Interior Ministry to recognize an individual who converted through the Giyur K'Halacha Conversion Court Network as Jewish

Burial Rights

- Drafted Knesset bills to ensure efficient and consistent burial practices

Gender Equality

- Won a case that led to the first-ever appointment of a woman in a professional position in a State rabbinical court
- Drafted and distributed a prenuptial agreement aimed at preventing women from becoming agunot
- Won a case that prevented the Jerusalem Religious Council from requiring women to sign waivers to use mikvehs without attendants
- Successfully advocated for the state to require local religious councils to make an appropriate number of mikvehs accessible to the disabled

2018 ITIM Advocacy Center Activities

56 | Due Diligence
Letters

41 | Knesset Committee
Hearings

25 | Knesset Member
Meetings

25 | Freedom of Information
Act Requests

10 | Civil Court
Cases

8 | Position
Papers

6 | Supreme Court
Cases

5 | Knesset
Bills

Defending the Rights of Soviet Immigrants

Israel may have welcomed more than one million immigrants from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, but today's State authorities headed by ultra-Orthodox politicians often discriminate against them by refusing to recognize their Jewish identities, imposing impossible documentation requirements, or discouraging their conversions.

Michaela Levin refused to be treated as a second-class citizen. An immigrant from the former Soviet Union, daughter of Zionists, and granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, Michaela contacted ITIM when the Interior Ministry refused to register her son and daughter as Jewish in the official State Population Registry.

The ITIM Advocacy Center represented Michaela before the Interior Ministry, then took her case to the Supreme Court. Before the Court issued its verdict, the Ministry conceded, and granted Michaela's children official Jewish status.

"Sometimes you find yourself in a situation you don't know how to handle, to heal, or to make go away. My family and I found ourselves in such a situation when we were investigated by the Interior Ministry. ITIM brought hope and professionalism that were second to none. You were a ray of light in a dark place."

— Plaintiff in ITIM Supreme Court case against Israel's Interior Ministry



ITIM attorney Ella Sakat (l) and plaintiff Michaela Levin (r) hold Jewish Identity Certificates for Michaela's son and daughter, issued by the Interior Ministry following ITIM's Supreme Court victory

The Giyur K'Halacha Conversion Court Network: Embracing Those Who Wish to Join the Jewish People

ITIM's groundbreaking Giyur K'Halacha Conversion Court Network is changing the nature of conversion in Israel.

Giyur K'Halacha is Israel's leading, non-governmental conversion court network. Giyur K'Halacha provides a meaningful, supportive Orthodox conversion process for Israeli citizens, particularly immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and children under the age of bar- and bat-mitzvah. Its caring staff assist candidates from initial inquiries to educational programs and rabbinical court hearings, which take place in Alon, Be'erot Yitzchak, Efrat, Lavie, Ma'ale Gilboa, Shoham, and Tel Aviv.

In 2018, the Giyur K'Halacha team did an outstanding job spreading the word about the program's availability. **It opened four branch offices, ran ten educational programs in cities with high concentrations of immigrants from the former Soviet Union,**

partnered with 18 new educational institutions and organizations to offer pre-and post-conversion support to Giyur K'Halacha conversion candidates, and recruited 23 new rabbis to join the ranks of nearly 40 others who serve as Giyur K'Halacha conversion court judges.

The importance of Giyur K'Halacha as an alternative to the State conversion program was vividly clear in 2018. Giyur K'Halacha restored the dignity of hundreds of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, served as a model of Jewish inclusion, and offered a promising solution to the demographic problem created by the Rabbinate, which, in 2018, considered the majority of new immigrants to Israel to be non-Jewish.



Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Rabbi Yehuda Gilad and Rabbi Benny Holtzman were among 60 rabbis who served as Giyur K'Halacha conversion court judges

“I will never forget how, in my childhood in the Soviet Union, my father would close the shutters so we could light the Chanukah menorah we had been given by my grandfather. And I will never forget the shock I felt when I arrived in the Israel of our dreams only to discover that Israel did not recognize me as a Jew. When I got past the anger, I decided to convert through Giyur K'Halacha, where I felt validated, accepted, even loved.”

—Giyur K'Halacha convert



2018 Giyur K'Halacha Achievements

2,217 | Conversion Queries

60 | Conversion Court Judges

29 | Conversion Court Hearings

10 | Educational Programs

7 | Conversion Courts

4 | Branch Offices

Aviva and David Levi Find a Conversion Solution

Aviva and David Levi desperately wanted to have a child. After years of unsuccessful fertility treatments, they, like thousands of other Jewish Israeli couples, opted for surrogacy. Given Israel's strict surrogacy regulations, the couple searched for a surrogate abroad. Eventually, they found a woman in Georgia, the Caucasus, who agreed to conceive and deliver the baby that they would raise, legally, as their own.

Aviva and David knew from the start that they would convert their child to Judaism, and raise him or her as a Jew. They also knew that the State conversion program was not an option for them. When their son was born, they celebrated at a brit milah, then turned to Giyur K'Halacha.

Giyur K'Halacha's staff guided them through the traditional conversion process with sensitivity to the long road Aviva and David had taken to become parents. In December, a Giyur K'Halacha conversion court made it official: Baby Levi became Jewish, just like his parents.



Giyur K'Halacha Conversion Court meeting, Tel Aviv

ITIM Activism: Leading a Civic Movement for Change

ITIM strengthened its communications efforts in 2018. Communications staff ran social media campaigns and generated traditional media coverage, while program staff tended the grassroots through public presentations and partnerships with like-minded organizations. Combined, these efforts built public awareness of key religion-and-State issues in Israel, and energized people to demand change.

In 2018, ITIM's websites, www.itim.org.il and www.giyur.org.il, had nearly one million pageviews, and its Hebrew, English, and Russian Facebook pages had more than 50,000 followers. The Hebrew media covered ITIM stories on a near-daily basis, and the English-language media on a weekly basis. ITIM Director, Rabbi Seth Farber, regularly appeared on TV news programs, wrote a blog for *The Times of Israel*, and was widely cited in the press. In August, *The New York Times* invited Rabbi Farber to publish an opinion piece, "Fighting for Judaism in the Jewish State," which attracted significant attention.

Program staff made presentations at synagogues, community centers, and other venues throughout Israel, and Rabbi Farber addressed international audiences, including the International Progressive Halacha Conference at Harvard Law School, the American Jewish Press Association in Cleveland, Ohio, and Limmud Oz in Melbourne, Australia.



Attendees at an ITIM-Beit Prat "Right to Judaism" lecture

2018 ITIM Communications Highlights

952,067 | Website Page Views

380,205 | Website Unique Users

51,041 | Facebook Followers

18,788 | Newsletter Subscribers

522 | Media Coverage (articles, TV interviews, etc.)

55 | Partner Organizations

43 | Public Presentations

Social Activism: The Next Generation

Young people are the driving force behind social change. That's why ITIM partnered with Beit Prat, a Jerusalem hub of Jewish learning, activism, and pluralism for young people, to create the ITIM-Beit Prat Social Activism Project in 2018. Through a weekly lecture series and an internship program, the project is giving a cadre of young social activists an education on religion-and-State issues, and the tools they need to improve them.

The project's "Right to Judaism" Lecture Series provided a stage for Knesset Members, leading social activists, and ITIM staff to address today's most pressing religion-and-State issues – determining Jewish identity, gender and ethnic inequality in the religious establishment, Israel's conversion crisis, and more – before hundreds of attendees and tens of thousands of Facebook viewers. Its internship program attracted six young professionals, who will work alongside ITIM's experienced staff once a week over six months in 2019.

ITIM plans to build on the momentum the project has generated by expanding it into a year-long fellowship program for young Jewish social activists in the coming years.

"I did not simply receive information from ITIM; I worked alongside ITIM staff on a real project to contribute to a cause I support. I am already passing on the knowledge and critical thinking skills I learned to other audiences."

— Maayan Mirchin, ITIM Intern

2018 English-language media attention included:

The New York Times



THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

THE JERUSALEM POST

HAARETZ



Tablet

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JEWISH JOURNAL

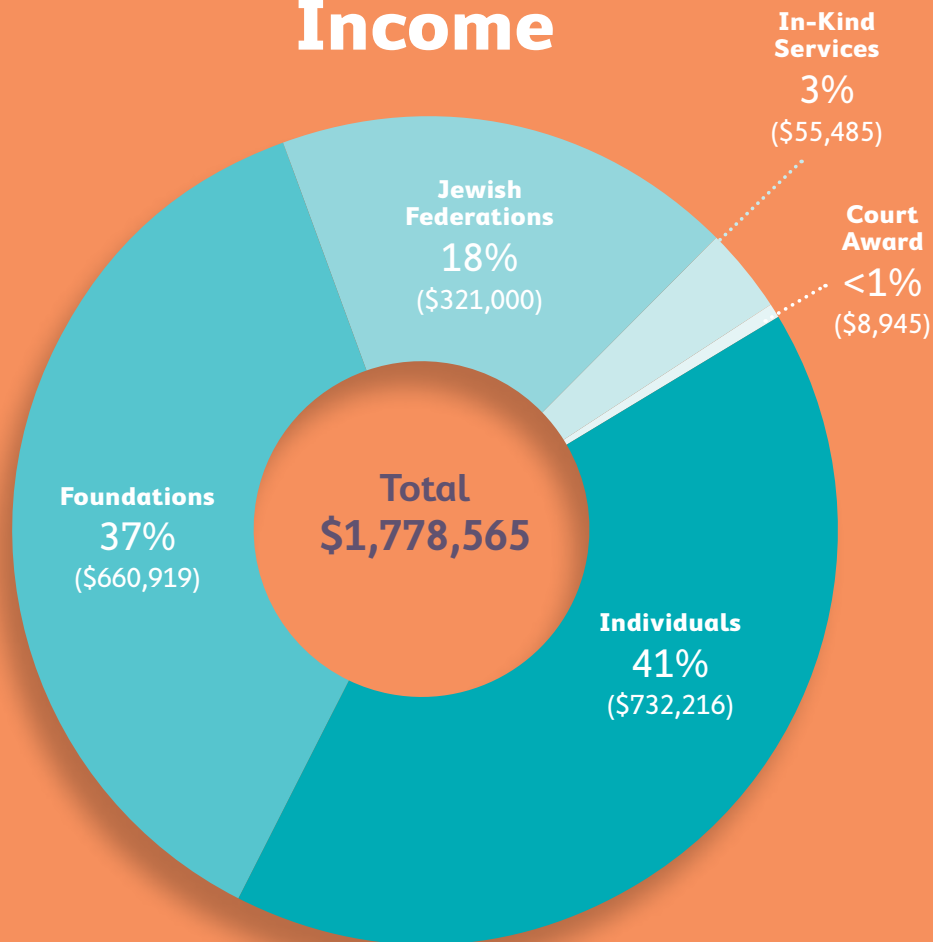
Forward

The Jewish Week

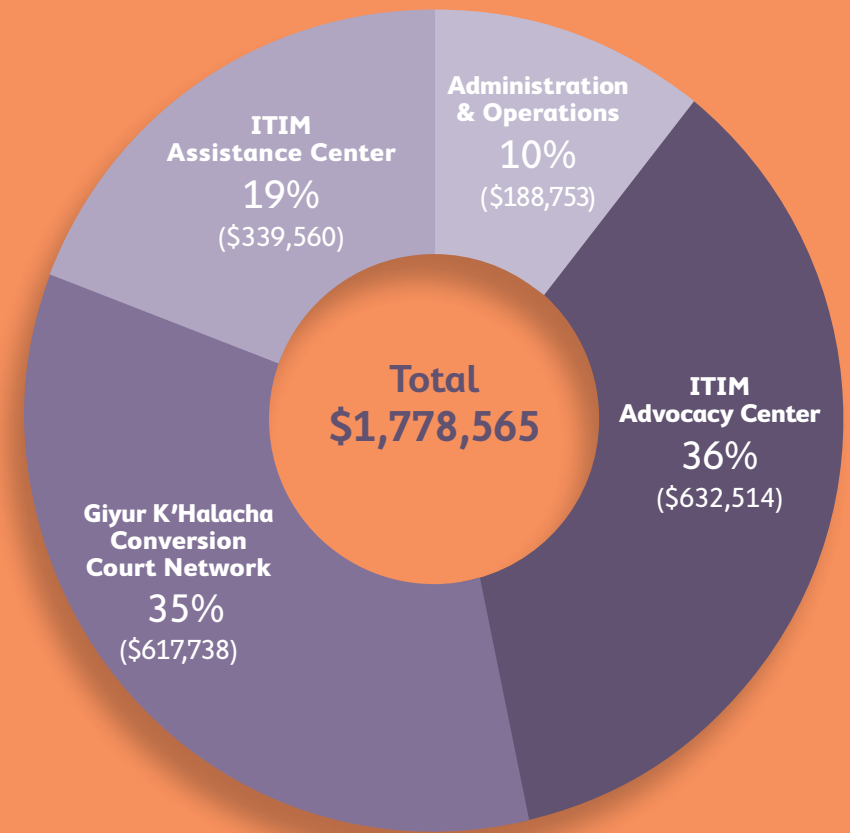
Financial Summary

ITIM was on sound financial footing in 2018. Its individual donor base increased by 19%, and foundation and Jewish federation support was up 33%. As in previous years, ITIM directed nearly its entire budget – 90% – toward programs.

Income



Expenditures



Income and expenditures are unaudited

Supporters

ITIM gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the following donors and of hundreds of others who gave anonymously.

Jewish Federations

Greater Miami Jewish Federation

Jewish Community Federation
of San Francisco, the Peninsula,
Marin & Sonoma Counties

Jewish Federation
of Greater Kansas City

Jewish Federation
of Greater Los Angeles

Jewish Federation of St. Louis

Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation
of Metropolitan Chicago

UJA-Federation of New York

Foundations

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Blaustein Foundation
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Foundation
Teaneck, NJ

Yoreinu Foundation
Syracuse, NY

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Giyur K'Halacha

Conversion Court Network

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Menachem Yosefi

Marketing & Communications

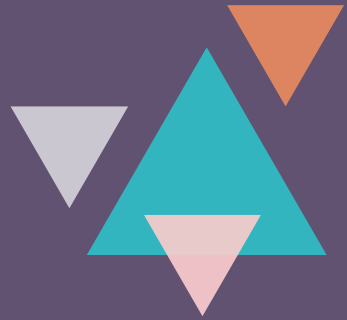
Einat Levin, Director
Sheryl Abbey
Orly Uliel

Finance & Operations

Sarah Cramer, Vice President
Michelle Cohen
Hila David



Rabbi Seth Farber and the ITIM staff



**Thank you for helping ITIM change
Jewish lives and transform Israeli society**





ITIM

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