



**For Young Women**

**Declaring Religious  
Observance**

**Overcoming the obstacles facing young women trying to obtain an exemption from military service and instead volunteer in National Service.**

**Note:** all of the materials below are based on experience in the field and true facts.

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## **Background: Interrogation as part of the interview for those declaring religious observance.**

In recent years, many young women declare that they are religiously observant to receive an exemption from military service and are consequently summoned for an interview at the recruitment office. Unfortunately, this interview is a cheap propaganda tool meant to undermine your belief in your path and to cause you—who decided to volunteer in National Service—to act against your free will and enlist in the IDF instead.

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Many young women report that they underwent an intrusive and aggressive interrogation, including questions on personal matters, an in-depth examination on Jewish concepts and laws, and even attempts to persuade them to enlist.

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Many young women who weren't adequately prepared for this interrogation left with a very difficult, negative experience.

The goal of this booklet is to give you the tools to prepare you for this interrogation, both mentally and practically. It will also provide you with important information on your legal rights relating to this interrogation—rights that in light of the experiences of many, may be taken away from you if you don't stand up for yourself and demand them.

Chotam is here to provide you with personal guidance and legal assistance to preserve both your religious and legal right to receive an exemption from military service in the IDF, and instead serve in National Service.





## The IDF and you – the process

Israeli law exempts religious young women from IDF military service, acknowledging that military service is against their lifestyle; contribution in a program commensurate with their spiritual and social world would be more significant and appropriate.

Starting at the age of sixteen-and-a-half, you are considered a security services candidate. Soon after, you will be mailed your first summons (*tzav rishon*)—the first step in the screening process prior to recruitment. Later on, generally at the end of 11<sup>th</sup> grade, security service candidates are summoned to what is called *Yom HaMe'ah* (day of sorting, evaluation, and matching: *miyun, itur, hatamah*). Additionally, you will be sent a questionnaire about your preferences regarding the various positions available.

If you want to receive an exemption from military service due to religious observance,



you are supposed to do the following: after the age of sixteen-and-a-half and receiving your Israeli ID card, you need to appear before a rabbinic court and sign a declaration before the rabbinic judge that you: (1) do not drive on *Shabbat*, (2) observe the laws of *kashrut* inside and outside the home, and (3) you do not want to enlist due to religious reasons.

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**If you meet the above three criteria, you are legally entitled to an exemption from military service.**

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We recommend that you to start this process right away when you reach the age of sixteen-and-a-half-don't wait.

You will receive two copies of the declaration from the rabbinic court. You keep one (it's a good idea to photocopy it); the second you are supposed to send to the IDF. Optimally, upload your declaration in your Personal Area (*eizor ishi*) on the *mitgaisim* website ([www.mitgaisim.idf.il](http://www.mitgaisim.idf.il))



or App, and call to verify that your declaration was duly entered into the system.

It is not recommended, but is nevertheless possible, to bring the document personally to the recruitment office. If you do, however, it is important to insist that it be taken by the guard at the entrance to the office, without going inside. Experience has proven that when you enter the recruitment office, for any given reason, you may be summoned to an interrogation called an “interview for those declaring religious observance,” without any prior preparation. It is important to request a confirmation that you handed in the declaration. Approximately three to four weeks afterwards, you should be sent the exemption.

Legally, this stage is supposed to be the final stage in the process, and the exemption should be mailed to you.





## Complications

There is definitely a chance that instead of receiving an exemption, you will be mailed a summons to an intrusive interrogation as part of an “interview for those declaring religious observance.” Why?

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Unfortunately, certain officials in the IDF have a hard time coming to terms with your legal and legitimate decision to contribute to the State of Israel through other programs. They are prepared to invest major efforts in persuading you do enlist in the IDF.

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Experience has shown that often to achieve their goal—your enlistment in the IDF—they put aside all other rationale, including your religious identity.



It is almost certain that in this interrogation you will find yourself dealing with difficult and intrusive questions, such as:

- **Intrusive, detailed questioned** about your lifestyle, that of your parents and your family members.
- **Questions about your religious lifestyle, including intimate questions** about modesty in dress, if you have a boyfriend, if you are *shomer negiya*, and more. At this point they might even show you embarrassing pictures of yourself or of family members to contradict you and your declaration in general.
- **Questions on Jewish law and concepts.** These questions also go into minute details. The point is to portray you as not adequately religious and that there is no justification to exempt you from military service.
- **Questions that attack you**, such as: Why do you think that you deserve an exemption from military service? Why are you different from everyone else?!



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Again, the interview is conducted like an interrogation. The point is to trip you up, to find contradictions in your statements, and to prove to everyone—and especially to you—that you have no good reason to avoid enlistment, and that you are just a draft dodger.

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At the end of the interrogation (or in the months following it), you will receive an answer whether your exemption has been approved or whether your right for exemption has been denied and that the IDF is planning to draft you.

## **Were your rights infringed on? We are here for you!**

We provide legal assistance to young women who are denied an exemption to military service despite their declaration of religious observance. For this reason, if you are summoned to such an interrogation, or told that you are not entitled to receive an exemption and you feel that this is unjust,



please feel free to contact us. You can call, e-mail, or leave a message on the Chotam website, and we will be happy to help you.

## What will we do?

After looking into the details of your case, we will decide together with you and your parents if it is best to have our lawyer contact the recruitment office and demand to cancel the interview, or if it is better to prepare you and your family for the interrogation. In either case, we will guide you throughout the entire process until you receive the exemption you are legally entitled to.

Please note that we will not be able to help if it turns out that you submitted a false declaration of religious observance.

\*We respect your privacy. Your information will remain strictly confidential.

**Contact us at: 073-3904102**





## The golden rules for the interrogation

### General rules

- If you have not been summoned to an interrogation, but want to submit your declaration, do not go to the recruitment office. Experience has shown that many young women who arrive at the recruitment office are interrogated without prior notice. By law, you are allowed to upload your declaration on the *mitgaisim* website. We recommend this route. Alternatively, you can send the declaration via registered mail and keep the written confirmation that it was sent. You need to then follow up to ensure that the office received it.
- We recommend that you inform your parents, homeroom teacher, or other adult about the interrogation that you are about to face. This will make the process much easier.



- The draft personnel are not authorized to detain you at the recruitment office. If you are being detained there, and they do not allow you to leave for no good reason, call the police or the Chotam hotline and report your predicament.

## During the interrogation itself

- First, it's important that you are aware that you are being interrogated, in the full sense of the word. The goal of the interrogator is to find conflicting statements, to prove to you that you are wrong, and to lead you to say things that will advance their goal—even when this can harm you. For this reason, it's important to stay cool, calm, and collected. Don't let the interrogator lead you to places that you don't want to go to.
- Define for yourself what your religious identity includes. Stick to your definition, and don't let the interrogator undermine your identity.

**Remember: no one has the right to undermine your religious identity.**



- **The interrogator is not authorized to look through your cellphone** and find personal pictures. Under no circumstances should you agree to hand the interrogator your cellphone.



- **You do not have to answer prying, personal questions** about your parents, the mode of dress of your family members, and the like.



- **If the interrogator is a man and tries to embarrass you** by showing you intimate and personal pictures, demand that another woman be with you in the room.



- **You don't have to know the answer to every question about Jewish law** that you are asked. Knowledge of the details of any given Jewish law or custom is irrelevant to how appropriate service in a secular military is for you as a religious young woman.



- **Ask the interrogator for their personal details.**



- Following the interrogation: the recruitment office may attempt to draw out the process of granting your exemption, sometimes for a very long period. If this is the case, contact Chotam's legal department.



## FAQs

**Question** I received my first summons and I haven't yet declared that I'm observant. Do I have to go to the recruitment office?

**Answer** As a rule, by law, you have to comply with any summons you receive from the military authorities. However, even if you don't appear for your first summons at its first official date, nothing bad will happen to you. This is true as long as you make sure that you take care of your declaration and exemption **as soon as possible**, and don't let it go. We do not recommend appearing at your first summons.

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**Question** Until when can I submit my declaration to the IDF?

**Answer** It is possible to submit your declaration up to 90 days before your draft date. Of course, it is not recommended to wait until this date—you should take care of it as soon as possible.

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**Question** I'm still deliberating whether to enlist in military service or to volunteer in National Service. If I appear at my first summons or at the *Yom HaMe'ah*, will that mean that I won't be able to receive an exemption?

**Answer** Again, by law, it is possible to submit your declaration up to 90 days before your draft date, even after the beginning of the screening process. Nevertheless, be prepared that if you appear for your first summons or to the *Yom HaMe'ah*, the authorities will probably summon you for an interview to try to understand why you suddenly changed your mind.

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**Question** Do I have to go to the interview if I'm summoned?

**Answer** Once again, by law, you have to comply with any summons you receive from the military authorities. In practice, though, they won't come to your house to take you to an interview by force. However: if you don't take care of the matter—either by failing to show up for the interview or by not pursuing legal action—you will eventually be drafted.

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**Question** I showed up at the recruitment office to submit by declaration, but the guard at the gate refused to accept the form, demanding that I enter the office. What should I do?

**Answer** You don't have to go inside. It is specifically because of these situations that we strongly recommend uploading your declaration to the website or App, or sending it by registered mail—not submitting it in person at the office.

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**Question** I arrived at the recruitment office, and the official there is demanding that I follow through with the first summons procedures. They aren't allowing me to leave the office. What should I do?

**Answer** You are a private citizen, so no one can force you to any such thing. Furthermore, detention for no reason is against the law. In such cases, call is or your lawyer immediately, and if necessary, call the police and complain of being unlawfully imprisoned (*keli'at shav*).

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**Question** I'm a religious teenager but I attend a secular high school. Will this get in the way of receiving an exemption?

**Answer** By law, your educational institution is not relevant to your entitlement for an exemption. However, experience shows that the recruitment authorities exploit such situations to summon you to an interrogation to verify, they claim, that the declaration you submitted is not false.

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**Question** I heard that they ask personal, intrusive questions and want to look at your phone. What should I do in such a case?

**Answer** You do not have to answer any question that you feel is harrasive or intrusive. You certainly have no obligation to give anyone your cellphone so they can look through it. No one has the right to demand to look at your phone without a court order.

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**Question** I wear pants and I am not *shomer negiya*. Does that mean that I won't get an exemption?

**Answer** The law does not define modesty as an index for receiving an exemption. However, for some reason the IDF thinks that it has the authority to decide who is religious and who isn't according to the level of the candidate's modesty. For this reason, you can expect that they will take advantage of this point to make it difficult for you to receive an exemption. In this case, assuming that you do meet the legal requirements (you observe *Shabbat*, *kashrut*, and you don't want to enlist due to religious



reasons), please contact us and we will be happy to help you.

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**Question** There are pictures of me on Facebook and Instagram that don't exactly line up with halachic requirements. Will the recruitment authorities make an issue about this?

**Answer** These are definitely two of the places that the recruitment office will look into when reviewing your case. They will use this material to try to embarrass you and portray you as a liar. For this reason, we recommend that already at the beginning of 11th grade and certainly before you submit your declaration, make sure that there are no pictures on the social media that anyone could use against you or that would make anyone suspect that you aren't religious (including your WhatsApp profile picture). In general, we don't recommend posting immodest pictures on the social media.

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**Question** I heard they ask lots of questions on Jewish concepts and laws during the interview. I'm not sure that I'll know all the answers. Does this mean that I won't be able to get the exemption?

**Answer** These interviews do, indeed, include an examination of the level of your general knowledge. Many of these questions are so difficult that not every religious teenage girl would know the answer. Again, unfortunately, these questions don't show that young women are lying, but use them the recruitment authorities to pressure you into enlisting—no matter what. This is one of the reasons that we recommend that you contact us before your interview, so we can help you prepare.

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**Question** If they ask me why I don't want to enlist, what am I supposed to answer?

**Answer** At the rabbinical court you signed a declaration that you don't want to enlist due to religious reasons. To answer this question, you are supposed to explain the true religious reasons why you don't want to enlist. We



recommend that you come prepared, after you have a clear and cohesive answer to this question. Past experience proves that investigators exploit the naiveté of young women and try to corner them into arriving at the conclusion that they are simply trying to evade military service for no good reason.





