

Charter of *Masorti-France*

The Seven Pillars of *Masorti* Judaism

The *Masorti*¹ movement holds a very specific vision of Judaism whose main characteristics are as follows:

1. Tradition and modernity
2. Rigor and flexibility in the practice of the Torah's commandments
3. Study of Torah and freedom of conscience
4. Tolerance and solidarity
5. Jewish identity and humanism
6. Representation of women
7. Zionism

1. Tradition and modernity

The *Masorti*² movement is one of the three main contemporary Jewish movements. World renowned Rabbis founded the movement in the 19th century and continue to promote it today.

The movement exists to **bring together adherence to Tradition and openness to modernity**, according to the biblical formula used by the Talmudists to give direction to the Law: "*Et laasot la-HaShem, heferu Toratecha*" / "*It is a time to act for the Lord, for they have violated Your Torah*" (Psalms 119:126).

It is based on the historical fact that **Judaism has never existed in an empty vacuum** and that taking into consideration the reality of the environment does not necessarily imply compromising one's Jewish identity or betraying one's values. It is on the contrary more productive and in many cases necessary.

2. Rigor and flexibility in the practice of the Torah's commandments

The *Masorti* movement considers the Halachah (judicial system of the Oral Law founded on the Talmud) and the strong discipline it requires as an essential and unavoidable component which defines the observance prescribed by the Torah of Israel.

¹ "Masorti" = "Traditionalist" in Hebrew

² *Masorti* movement ≈ *Conservative* movement in the United States and in Canada

This adherence is based on the conviction that spiritual fulfillment depends on the application of the Mitzvot (Divine commandments) both ritual and moral.

On the condition however of not ignoring the fact that it is the responsibility of the decision-makers of each generation to define how to apply the spirit rather than the letter of the Law. In this way, Judaism, still remaining true to itself, has considerably evolved over the ages taking into account new realities.

As a consequence, the *Masorti* movement believes it absolutely has to take into consideration new socio-historical contexts, finding appropriate solutions thanks to the very dynamic nature inherent in the Halachah which authorizes ever changing norms. **However, in the same way that rigor does not imply rigidity, so too should flexibility not bring about abandoning the very rules which regulate the judicial functioning of the Law by promoting overly permissive or laxist attitudes.**

3. Study of Torah and freedom of conscience

The *Masorti* movement considers Torah study as a fundamental duty. As the Talmud teaches, it is over and above all other commandments: “*Talmud Torah ke-neged kulam*” (Shabbat 127a). The primary goal is thus to wrap oneself in the values and deep convictions of the House of Israel.

That being the case, **the *Masorti* movement sees freedom of conscience and expression as a fundamental right.** Indeed, intellectual scrutiny should be upheld as one of the main duties of the Tradition. Faith can be authentic and enlightened only by seriously taking into account facts of knowledge. It accepts pluralism and brings modern and scientific means in interpretation of Traditional Texts. It encourages free examination of norms and ideas and respects freedom of opinion. It therefore opposes all forms of coercion, accepting only educational methods.

4. Tolerance and Solidarity

The *Masorti* movement aims to close the links between Jews throughout the world. **Without attempting to minimize certain differences with other movements, it maintains a sense of fraternity rising above partisan quarrels.** “*Kol Yisrael arevim zeh be-zeh*” / “*All Jews should support each other*” (Shavuot 39a). Discussion should be frank in “*a spirit of cordial and sincere dialogue*” / “*Machloket le-shem Shamayim*” (Avot 5:17).

It welcomes without discrimination Jews from diverse communities of origin, ideological or spiritual persuasion.

Furthermore, it aims to **fight anti-Semitism wherever it may appear in the world.**

5. Jewish identity and humanism

The *Masorti* movement opposes assimilation since it wants to preserve, within the conditions of the Diaspora, the human and cultural heritage of the House of Israel.

However, it insists on full civil responsibility, integration into public life and on the necessity of tolerance and humanity founded on the teachings of Rabbi Akiva that *“all human beings are to be respected since they are in the image of G-d”* (Avot 3:18).

It also combats all forms of fundamentalism, racism or exclusion. The *Masorti* movement encourages convivial dealings with non-Jews, while keeping hold of one’s own specifics. Other religious and moral convictions must be fully respected and dialogue of mutual understanding should be created with them.

Being *Masorti* is being both religious and “secular”³, listening to both our Tradition and the world around.

6. Representation of women

As traditional Judaism demands, **respect of others implies in particular that towards women.**

Women's legal status in the Halachah has evolved over the ages towards ever greater emancipation. In modern society, women have attained access to senior public positions that previous custom would have denied.

Masorti Judaism, in its respect for a dynamic Halachah, thus tends towards giving women more representation and responsibility in religious and social life, without necessarily aiming for uniform treatment. As the Midrash teaches: *“I take as witness the heavens and the earth, whether Gentile or Jew, man or woman, slave or maidservant, each according to his deeds, the Holy Spirit resides in each of them”* (Yalkut Shimoni on Judges 4:4).

7. Zionism

The *Masorti* movement underlines the central place of the land and the state of Israel in contemporary Jewish life. It has always supported the Zionist movement and the efforts to integrate new immigrants. *“Ki mi-Tziyon tetze Torah u-devar HaShem mi-Yirushalayim” / “For the Torah shall come forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem”* (Isaiah 2:3).

It therefore aims to promote the study and the practice of the Hebrew language as well as the Israeli culture.

Supporter of the Jewish state, *Masorti* Judaism is nevertheless apolitical in that it is not linked to a particular party nor takes a position on security related issues which divide the Israeli democracy.

Translated from French by Danny Freedman (August 2010)

³ Original French word = “laïc”