

**Yisrael by Choice:
Contemporary Understandings of the Psychosocial Process of
Adopting a Jewish Identity**

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SUMMARY

Using the concepts and vocabulary of modern psychology, contemporary scholars have come to understand that a significant identity change takes place during the conversion from one religion to another. However, much of the existing textual interpretations have not yet searched for evidence of an implicit psychological awareness within classical texts. This thesis therefore explores the psychosocial aspects of the conversion process, searching for evidence of an awareness of this major identity change in both classical texts as well as current conversion processes.

Chapter One looks at classical halachic texts: the Babylonian Talmud, Halachot Gedolot, Mishneh Torah, and Shulkhan Aruch. These texts are analyzed both for content as well as for evidence of a consideration of the internal, psychological processes concurrent with the prescribed conversion rituals. These texts are primarily found to be concerned with rules and order, and thus give little attention to the convert's inner world.

Chapter Two takes a similar view of classical aggadic texts: Torah, Prophets, and Writings, Babylonian Talmud and Midrashim. The aggadot offer a more personal, human look at converts and conversion, which naturally allows a deeper perspective into the life of the convert. They demonstrate an awareness of many of the challenges faced by converts, as well as the reality of allowing conversion in various political situations.

Chapter Three outlines three contemporary models of the psychosocial aspects of the conversion process, then examines what each major Jewish movement (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform) is currently providing and requiring of its prospective converts throughout the conversion process. Chapter Four culminates with an assortment of autobiographical writings from contemporary Jews-by-Choice.

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INTRODUCTION

**"Entrances to holiness are everywhere. Ascent is possible at any time."
Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, *Honey from the Rock***

I have learned to be open to opportunities for growth and knowledge whenever possible. For me, my entrance to holiness was found in Brandon, Florida, in a small congregation of which I was the student rabbi. Congregation Beth Shalom had approximately one hundred families, many of whom had left the major synagogue in Tampa for more of a "homey" feeling in a smaller community. Most of the families were young, with young children (there were over ninety children enrolled in the religious school). In existence for ten years, they had finally built their own building, and were proud to be a growing community.

My two-year experience as their spiritual leader brought with it many challenges, insights, and memorable encounters. The part I will remember forever, however, is my work with a prospective convert, Tammy. In the middle of my first year, she approached me and wanted to discuss the possibility of conversion. She had read quite a bit about Judaism already, on her own, and really felt that Judaism was her true home.

I gave her a few more recommended resources, and we began to meet regularly (based on my visits, it was usually once a month) to discuss holidays, lifecycle, observance, and all the other personal issues that arise during this process. It was quite exciting for me to learn something new at school, and then be able to share this newfound knowledge with Tammy that weekend.

While chronic health issues prevented her from traveling to an *Introduction to Judaism* class, her commitment never faltered. Her enthusiasm about Judaism was quite

apparent. Tammy quickly became an expected attendee at Shabbat services, and also attended all the adult education classes that I offered. She made many friends throughout the synagogue, and came to be a well-respected member of the community.

An exciting part of the experience was my participation in the Gerecht Family Outreach Institute, offered to third-year rabbinical students on the New York HUC-JIR campus, as well as in the Denver Outreach Internship, offered to Hebrew Union College students of all three U.S. campuses. The information gathered at these two intensive conferences shaped my months working with Tammy in a more serious way. I was able to hear from a number of Jews-by-choice, their family and friends, and other Jewish clergy regarding the conversion process as a whole. I brought home invaluable resources, including myriad texts and resources, as well a copy of *Divrei Giyur*, the new guidelines for conversion published by the CCAR.

Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I was not able to see Tammy's conversion through to fruition. Through correspondence, I have learned that she moved to a new community, and has been working with a rabbi there. I hope that, when the time is right, she will feel ready to complete the next stage of her Jewish journey, and go through the conversion ritual.

Besides my general work with her, it was one comment that she made that got the gears turning for this thesis. During a discussion of images of Jews in popular culture, she expressed to me that she did not understand what was so funny about *Seinfeld*. She knew that it was a hit television show that many people found funny, but she just didn't get it. She attributed her reaction to her southern upbringing, but I began pondering a larger question: If Judaism is a religion *and* a culture, how does one truly take on all aspects of

living Jewishly? And, per our conversation, how would one develop what might be called a “Jewish” sense of humor?

It was at this point that I realized that there is so much more to conversion than just learning rituals and rules – a total change in identity was required. An exposure to, and comfort with, *all* things Jewish (holidays, food, humor, literature, sacred texts, stories, and much more) was necessary for one to feel truly at home in Judaism. I began to wonder what the different modern Jewish movements did with regard to these psychosocial changes inherent in the conversion process. Moreover, had the tradition recognized that conversion was more than just a status change or change in group membership? And thus, this thesis was born.

As many learned topics move from theory to practice, and from impersonal to personal, so, too, this study. The examination of conversion in classical texts begins with the laws and rules of halachah, then continues with various aggadot that tell the stories of individual converts. An exploration of the manner in which modern Judaism incorporates these texts and rules takes place in the third chapter with a look at contemporary conversion processes across the denominations. Finally, first-person accounts of actual converts will be found in the fourth chapter.

Chapter One: CONVERSION IN HALACHIC TEXTS

The Babylonian Talmud

Conversion is mentioned throughout the Talmud primarily in one-sentence comments or short stories. The debates reflect the common style of the Talmudic period (3rd-7th century CE), which took place post-Mishnah in the Diaspora. However, in Yevamot, many rulings and discussions take place regarding the status of converts in the community and what constitutes a proper conversion. The first major discussion is found in Yevamot 45b. Rava declared R. Mari b. Rachel was a legitimate Israelite and thus he was eligible for appointment among the pursers of the Babylonian community. This is significant because his mother, Rachel, had been held captive earlier in life and, during her captivity, married an idolater. This marriage led to the birth of Mari. Interestingly, Issur, Mari's father, embraced Judaism during Rachel's pregnancy, and is referred to throughout the Talmud as Issur the Proselyte. Therefore, Rava felt that the child of a Jewish woman and a converted man was not only a full Jew, but also worthy of a position of power over the Jewish community.¹

This ruling about Mari then leads to a discussion of other gentiles and their status. The servant of R. Hiyya b. Ammi made a certain non-Israelite woman bathe for matrimonial purposes. R. Joseph declares that this woman could therefore be called a legitimate Jew, and her daughter could also be called legitimate. Thus, the mere act of immersing oneself, presumably in *mayim chayim*, could be enough to constitute a conversion to Judaism.

This is directly followed by two other examples that confirm R. Joseph's viewpoint:

"A certain person was once named 'son of a female heathen.' Said R. Assi, 'Did she not bathe for the purpose of her menstruation?' A certain person was named 'son of a male heathen.' Said R. Joshua b. Levi, 'Did he not bathe in connection with any emission of his?'"

It is apparent, therefore, that these sages did not feel that any other process was necessary in order to become a full member of the Jewish community.

However, a few pages later, Yevamot 46a-b contains a large debate over further ritualistic requirements. Specifically, they disagreed over whether or not both circumcision and ritual immersion were necessary components of conversion. The first case: circumcision without immersion. The *Tannaim* believed that this was valid, citing Abraham's conversion to Judaism (circumcision without immersion) as proof. In the case of immersion without circumcision, the *Tannaim* found this to be valid as well because the women in the bible were able to convert without any type of circumcision. The Sages disagree with these prior rulings, and say clearly that both immersion and circumcision are required for the conversion to be valid. However, a bit of doubt is added into the discussion from some individual rabbis, leaving the Talmud to conclude, "all agree that ritual immersion without circumcision is effective, and they differ only on circumcision without immersion."

Yevamot 47a begins an interesting section regarding perceived motives for conversion. The *Tannaim* had taught that, in the land of Israel, proof of proper conversion must be provided when a convert joins the Jewish community. From this R. Judah

¹ This discussion of Mari is interesting particularly when taken in opposition to *Avodah Zarah 59a*, where it is decided that the child of an idolater and a Jewish woman is a *mamzer*. The text above is noteworthy because it demonstrates the import of the father having converted prior to the birth of the child.

deduces that, outside of Israel, the conversion need not be proven in order to accept the convert. However, the Sages disagreed, stating that proof needed to be provided both in and out of the land of Israel. R. Judah's remark seems to stem from an assumption that converts in Israel may not be trusted with regard to motive. In Israel, a material advantage was to theoretically be gained by joining the Jewish community. Yet, outside, motives could be assumed to be pure, since there was no obvious advantage to being a Jew.

This thread about proof then adds a third component to the conversion process: the presiding presence of the *Beit-Din*. A quote from Deuteronomy 1:16 ("...judge righteously between one person and his brother, whether Israelite or *ger* [translated either as stranger or as convert]") leads the Sages to associate judging with converts. R. Judah ruled that a person who becomes a convert in the presence of a *Beit-Din* is a valid convert, but a person who does so privately is not valid.

Next, a fourth requirement is added onto immersion, circumcision, and the presence of a *Beit-Din*. This section of Yevamot 47a-b delves deeper into the study process that takes place before the actual conversion by including a *baraita* that originates in the 1st-3rd century CE. It is to become the highly copied prescribed curriculum throughout the rest of the halachic codes:

Our Rabbis taught: If at the present time a man desires to become a proselyte, he is to be addressed as follows: "What reason have you for desiring to become a proselyte; do you not know that Israel at the present time are persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions?" If he replies, "I know, and am yet unworthy," he is quickly accepted and is given instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments. He is informed of the sin of the neglect of the commandments of Gleanings, the Forgotten Sheaf, the Corner, and the Poor Man's Tithe. He is also told of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments....so is he informed of the reward granted for their fulfillment. He is told, "Know that the world to come was made only for the righteous, and that Israel at present time are unable to bear either too much

prosperity or too much suffering." He is, however, not to be either persuaded or dissuaded too much.

If he accepted, then he is circumcised immediately...As soon as he is healed arrangements are to be made for his immediate immersion, when two learned men stand by his side and acquaint him with some of the minor and some of the major commandments. When he comes up from his immersion, then he is deemed to be an Israelite in all respects.

In the case of a woman proselyte, women make her sit in water up to her neck, while two learned men stand outside and give her instruction in some of the minor and some of the major commandments.

This relatively detailed description of the prescribed conversion ritual reflects many different aspects of the world of the Sages. It can be inferred that they were skeptical of anyone who desired to become a part of the Jewish community at a time when Jews were so disliked and threatened. Therefore, asking about the person's reasons for conversion was necessary. If the person seemed to truly admire Judaism, and wish to become part of the Jewish community despite all the apparent hardship, then the convert was acceptable. The Sages also seemed quite hesitant to overwhelm, or even frighten away, the potential convert by telling him or her too much about the required *mitzvot*. While the punishments for transgression are clearly taught, the Sages are quick to mention that the rewards must be stressed as well, thus making Judaism seem all the more appealing. Once the convert has completed the requirements, he or she is quickly circumcised and/or immersed, and made a Jew without delay (due to the idea that the performance of a mitzvah is never to be delayed). Interestingly, no timeline is provided for this complete process, which could theoretically take place in a single afternoon.

This is followed by a very problematic sentence from R. Helbo. He is quoted as saying, "Proselytes are as hard for Israel to endure as a sore." He comes to this conclusion based a verse from the Bible as well as word play. He uses Isaiah 14:1, "And the *ger* shall join himself with them, and they shall cleave [*v'nis'p'chu*] to the house of

Jacob." The root of the word for cleave, S-P-Ch, is also found in the word for sore, *sapachat*. Thus, a convert is seen to cleave onto the Israelite community just like, according to R. Helbo, a detestable, leprous sore upon your skin.

Yet, R. Helbo is in the minority when it comes to condemning conversion with such strong language. Rabbi Ammi makes it clear that, in messianic times, converts will be gladly received.² R. Yose b. Chalafta and R. Simeon b. Elazar both agree that, in the messianic era, converts will come to fully acknowledge God.³ The minor tractate entitled *Gerim*, in addition to detailing procedures for circumcision, ritual immersions, and definitions of other terms, goes so far as to remind the Jews that they were to have a welcoming attitude toward conversion.

The final part of *Yevamot's* halachic discourse is found on 47b, when they bring in the popular verses from Ruth (1:16-18) and use them to interpretively glean further rules, of a qualitatively different nature, to impart to the prospective convert. The Sages teach through an imagined conversation between Naomi and Ruth.

"We are forbidden," Naomi told her, "to move beyond the Shabbat boundaries."

"Where you go, I will go," the other replied.

"We are forbidden private meeting between a man and a woman."

"Where you lodge, I will lodge."

"We have been commanded 613 commandments."

"Your people will be my people."

"We are forbidden idolatry."

"And your God, my God."

"Four modes of death [stoning, burning, strangulation, sword] were entrusted to the *Beit-Din*."

"Where you die, there I will die."

"Two graveyards were placed at the disposal of the *Beit-Din*."

"And there will I be buried."

Hence, more specific *mitzvot* are conveyed, as well as moral statements. Also, the Sages anachronistically infuse the text with a great deal of support for their role in the *Beit-Din*.

² *Avodah Zarah* 24a

What began in the Talmud with a discussion of the fundamental requirements for both study and ultimately conversion grew in the resulting literature of the law codes. The Talmud functioned primarily on a theoretical or rhetorical level, interested in intellectual discourse and logical argument. While there is some doubt expressed over the motives for conversion, they principally focus on status issues and process. They seem to be more concerned with the effects of conversion on the extant Jewish community, not on the convert him/herself. The subsequent halachic literature sought to take these sometimes vague rulings or inconsistencies and codify them into law that could be followed and enforced in various Jewish communities, while also expanding the entire discussion in many directions.

Halachot Gedolot

The Geonic period (7th-11th century CE) brought with it a desire to take the disparate source materials of the Talmud and begin a codification process. Thus, *Halachot Gedolot* was created in the 9th century by Shimon Kayara, based on the Babylonian Talmud. It comes out of the Jewish community based within the Muslim world, meaning it stems from a minority population that struggled with issues of assimilation, acculturation, and also a fear of those wanting to join into their community.

With this in mind, it is apparent that much stricter rules were necessary than those set forth in the Talmud. Boundaries and standards, applicable in the "here and now," must be set into place so as to maintain the integrity of the Jewish community. In *Hilchot Milat Gerim*, much is added to the basics. The earliest noteworthy addition is that of a blessing to the immersion ritual, making it appear to be a much more official and critical

³ *Avodah Zarah 3b* and *Berachot 57b*, respectively

part of conversion. The text then recounts the discussion from the Talmud regarding whether or not both immersion and circumcision were needed to be a valid conversion. *Halachot Gedolot* decides that these vague rules are no longer sufficient, and says clearly that both immersion and circumcision are required, as well as the presence of 3 witnesses, a *Beit-Din*. The text even goes so far as to say that a person who has done one component but not the other is "like a goy in every way." The text then asserts that a convert that is located either in the land of Israel or outside is required to bring proof that an immersion took place before three witnesses.

Interestingly, while *Halachot Gedolot* aims to be a strict code of law, it does not believe that motives are relevant to the conversion process. Four cases are listed: a man or woman who converts for a spouse, one who converts to sit at the table of kings, one who converts because of a dream, and one who converts out of fear. Despite these varied motives, all are deemed valid conversions.

Halachot Gedolot makes an addition at this point in the discussion to mention who constitutes an unacceptable convert. Specifically, a deaf mute, a mentally incompetent person, and a child are not acceptable because they are deemed unfit to affirm their beliefs on their own behalf. Thus, it is stated that anyone determined to be unfit will not be accepted for conversion.

The text then returns to the Talmud's section about the prescribed course of study. It copies it nearly verbatim, but then adds in a section about "bad" converts. For instance, if, after you tell a potential convert about how Israel is despised, etc., he wants to leave, then you are to let him leave. It also states that it is important to differentiate the demands

of Jewish law from those of Noahite law. Then it mentions R. Helbo's notorious quote about converts being reminiscent of "sores."

Halachot Gedolot next repeats of the Talmud's inclusion of the conversation between Ruth and Naomi, which teaches how to go about teaching a potential convert. Naomi demonstrates how exactly to go about teaching "not too much and not too little." Ruth's answers show her willingness to join the Jewish community, and thus she was immediately accepted. It concludes with a reiteration of the importance of a *Beit-Din* to the conversion proceedings.

Like Talmud, *Halachot Gedolot* does not seem interested in the internal world of the convert. As a code, it seeks to set forth law and procedure. However, the inclusion of possible motives shows a leaning toward a consideration for *what exactly brings someone to want to convert to Judaism*. While the text believes that motives are irrelevant in terms of validity, that they are mentioned at all demonstrates an awareness of different reasons one may seek out inclusion in the Jewish people.

Mishneh Torah

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, also known as Rambam or Maimonides, wrote his *Mishneh Torah* in 12th century Cairo. As the idea of codification of law had already taken hold by his lifetime, he sought to enhance the laws even further by including his philosophical and medical background. He also ties the laws back to the Torah, rather than the Talmud, using biblical quotations as proof texts.

Rambam deals with the laws surrounding conversion to Judaism in chapter 13 of the *Mishneh Torah*. The very first thing he does is include what appears to be a

procedural change – he states that three rituals must be completed for a valid conversion: circumcision, immersion, and *sacrifice*. Though it is his not his innovation to include sacrifice in general,⁴ Rambam is the first to state it clearly as a requirement. Two verses from Exodus, 19:10⁵ and 24:5⁶, serve as his proof that immersion and sacrifice were taking place in conversion situations in biblical times. Moreover, Rambam is the first codifier to see the Revelation at Sinai as a major, communal conversion to Judaism, in that it was completed through circumcision, immersion, and sacrifice. Citing Numbers 15:15⁷, he claims that converts in his time must complete the three acts as well. He even specifies that the sacrifice must consist of a burnt offering, or two turtledoves, or two doves.

Yet, in Rambam's time, there were certainly no sacrifices, since the Temple had not stood in over a millennium. He recognizes this, stating that the sacrifice requirement will have to be delayed until the days when the Temple is rebuilt. In the meantime, converts must complete both immersion and circumcision. He reiterates *Halachot Gedolot's* statement that one ritual without the other does not constitute a valid conversion. He agrees that the conversion must take place in front of three witnesses.

Rambam seemingly goes against the rules about proof inside and outside of Israel, stating that proof is necessary only *outside* of Israel, for every person living in the land is assumed to be an Israelite. However, this is only true during times when the majority of people living in Israel are Jewish, and Israel is prosperous. In those times, requiring proof

⁴ Precedent for the inclusion of sacrifice is found in the Talmud in Massechet Kriat 9a.

⁵ "The Eternal said to Moses: 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes.'"

⁶ "[Moses] sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the Eternal."

⁷ "As for the assembly, there shall be for both you and the *ger* a single statute, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you and the *ger* shall be alike before the Eternal."

outside of Israel ensures the purity for Israelite descent. In current times, proof is required of all converts due to the level of uncertainty involved with Diaspora life.

In Hilkhhot 14-17, Rambam engages in a discussion of Biblical figures with questionable behaviors. This leads to his opinions about motivations, through which he disagrees strongly with *Halachot Gedolot's* feelings toward motivation. Rambam states that converts must be "checked" in terms of what exactly led them to pursue conversion. He calls three motives "false": money, fear, or desired status. If one of these false motives is not found, then you are to stress how heavy the yoke of *mitzvot* is, and how difficult it is for gentiles to follow, and thus the potential convert is encouraged in a number of ways to change his/her mind and walk away. If she accepts what she is told, and if it is clear that she has given up her idolatrous past, then you may accept her. Despite this discussion of motive, Rambam states, in 13:6, *harei zeh ger*, the imperfect convert is still a convert.

Rambam is also not as strict when it comes to being converted before a *Beit-Din*. He states that it is indeed ideal, but a convert who completed the process in front of three ordinary witnesses has still converted. The convert's status is questioned for a short time, until his righteousness can be proven.

Continuing his discussion of false converts, he states that they are like *tzora'at* to Israel, since they converted for false reasons and then led Israel astray. This differs from *Halachot Gedolot* in that Rambam differentiates between righteous converts, whom he welcomes warmly, and false converts, whom he condemns in strong terms. He even goes so far as to say that the mixed multitude in the wilderness were responsible most of the trials of the Children of Israel before God, including the golden calf incident.

When no false motive is found, the potential convert is asked, "What inspired you to become a convert" before the convert is told that Israel is oppressed, despised, etc. This question demonstrates Rambam's consideration for the internal world – the inspiration for the act is important to him. Once the potential convert says that he is "not worthy" of Judaism, and he is accepted for the conversion process, Rambam states that the convert is to be informed of the *essences* of the religion, which are the oneness of God, and the prohibition against idolatry. Rambam not only specifies these two topics, but also implores the teacher to expound upon them greatly. Some minor and major *mitzvot* are then taught as well. But, Rambam writes, the convert should be drawn closer only with pleasing and soft words so as to not frighten him away. He is the first to show a consideration for how the convert will feel throughout the process, and encourages the teacher to be kind and gentle throughout the course of study. The teacher is even to teach relevant verses to show affection for the convert.

Rambam seems to view the conversion process through a completely different lens than the codifiers that came before him. His personality and background, especially his interest in the mind, the intellect, and the internal workings of human beings, lend themselves to the perspective on the convert's inner process throughout the conversion. He truly seems to be concerned with how the convert views the conversion procedures and rituals -- in fact, he wants the process to be enjoyable and careful.

Shulkhan Aruch

Rambam, along with the Rif and the Rosh, forms the basis for the next major code of law – the *Shulkhan Aruch*. Joseph Caro wrote this code to satisfy the needs of the

entire Jewish community, though in actuality his halachot were primarily applicable to the Sephardic community alone. Because of this limited audience, Rabbi Moses Isserles (Rama) writes a gloss to the *Shulkhan Aruch* which provides the Ashkenazic customs as well. This text goes on to become what is today called "Halachah," and no other law code has surpassed its import among the traditional Jewish community.

Caro's emendation of the previous codes does not look very different from those that came before him. His discussion of conversion is found in *Yoreh Deah* 268. He includes Rambam's idea of teaching the "essences of the religion" to the potential convert. He stresses that the process should be undertaken by the convert out of love. The three witnesses must be "kosher," which builds on Rambam's idea that a *Beit-Din* would be ideal.

Caro's primary concerns seem to revolve around how this person's status will affect others. He discusses the children of the convert, as well as what is specifically required in order to marry a daughter of Israel (the rules are strict in that all components must be in place in proper fashion). He focuses on various cases and what to do in each case.

In the *Shulkhan Aruch*, Caro eliminates one of the *Mishneh Torah's* best assets, the biblical proof texts. What results is a cold, methodical listing of rules and procedures. Little, if any, consideration of the psychological state of the convert is therefore encouraged by Caro.

Conclusion

This examination of the principal classic halachic texts regarding conversion points to a trend that is not at all surprising – the authors focused on laws, status, and how

their rulings would affect that which came after them. Each author, or group of authors, wrote within his contemporaneous environment and from his own individual viewpoint. Talmud began to gather various viewpoints on the topic, but its goal was not to codify their opinions. *Halachot Gedolot* bravely started the field of Jewish law codes, but left many components out. Maimonides brought together his fields of expertise to provide the most human code, and Caro simplified that which came before him into something simple and usable.

In terms of an awareness of psychology, Rambam stood out with regard to a consideration of what was going on *inside* the potential convert. Others saw the conversion process as a change in status and nothing more. The laws were merely that – rules that govern. Rambam infused his rules with a sense that he was creating them for individual human beings, not just a community that needs to be controlled judicially.

It is perhaps a limitation of the literature genre which causes the texts to appear disinterested in the psychological underpinnings for the soon-to-be Jew. Aggadic texts will indeed provide more insight into the various eras. Case studies and midrashim will, by nature, place a human face onto the rules, and allow the rabbis to show their creativity in a different manner.

Chapter Two: CONVERSION IN AGGADIC TEXTS

Classic halakhic texts offer insight into the common practices and beliefs surrounding the conversion of non-Jews into the Jewish community throughout the past two millennia. The central laws and considerations become apparent by studying the processes delineated in the texts. However, the codes material, by its nature, denies the reader access to the human beings and actual stories behind the codified laws. Aggadah allows a more personal view into the lives of the rabbis and students living during Talmudic and Midrashic times. Beginning with the types of stories told in the Bible itself, the subsequent tales become even richer.

Biblical Sources: Torah

The Bible text begins the process of teaching through stories. Throughout the Bible, there are many cases of non-Israelites joining the Israelite community. There is no actual ceremony or course of study preceding this event, other than circumcision for males, and the focus is on joining the community. "The term *ger* in the OT [Old Testament] designates an alien or immigrant in the process of being assimilated. In primitive Semitic society all rights were based on blood relation, but a relationship like consanguinity could be artificially contrived."¹

The matriarchs of Genesis, such as Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel, are presumed to have become part of the Israelite society solely because of their marriage into it. *Gerim*, once they have joined the group, are then responsible for following

Israelite customs and performing the required mitzvot. "Since political and religious rights were inseparable, the [*ger*] could not be admitted to full rights in the host's tribe apart from participation in the cult. Thus the immigrant would tend to become an adherent of his patron's cult."²

This is seen first in Genesis 12:5, when Abram and Sarai depart from Haran to go to the land that God had shown them. The text reads, "Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son, all their substance that they had gathered, and the *souls who they had made in Haran*, and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan..." Rashi believed that the souls they had procured in Haran were people who had converted and joined Abram's familial community. Abraham converted the men, and Sarah converted the women. Naturally, Abraham himself was not born Jewish, but became Jewish in later adulthood through his covenant with God.³

The Exodus from Egypt is the next significant occurrence of "conversion." Exodus 12:38 refers to a "mixed multitude" that left Egypt along with the fleeing Israelites. Rashi interprets this multitude as a mixture of converts made up of various peoples. The Revelation at Sinai is also viewed as a massive conversion of the wandering Israelites into actual Jews. The exodus served forever as a reminder that Israelites should love the strangers (*gerim*) in their midst, for they themselves had been strangers in the land of Egypt.⁴

¹ "Proselyte." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962. p. 921

² "Proselyte." *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962. p. 922.

³ Many commentators believe that Abraham was the first official "convert" to Judaism. While Abraham could certainly be called a Jew-by-choice, Rabbi Daniel Gropper, in his HUC-JIR rabbinical thesis entitled, *Jethro: Rabbinic Paradigm of a Male Proselyte* (1998), contends that conversion only applies when one enters into an already existing tradition.

⁴ Leviticus 19:34, Deuteronomy 10:19

Immediately following the Exodus, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, heard of the miraculous redemption that took place in Egypt. Jethro responded quite favorably to the news, as Exodus 18:9-12 demonstrates:

"And Jethro rejoiced over all the kindness that YHWH had shown Israel when God delivered them from the Egyptians. 'Blessed be YHWH,' Jethro said, 'who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that YHWH is greater than all gods, yes, by the result of their very schemes against the people. And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses' father-in-law."

Jethro is set forth as an example of a male proselyte to Judaism, who witnessed God's power and felt compelled to join the Israelite community. Rashi interprets this episode as a conversion, as he writes in his commentary to Exodus 18:1, "He was called by seven names: Reuel, Yeter, Yitro, Chovav, Chever, Keini, and Putiel. Yeter, because he added one more parashah to the Torah. Yitro, because when he converted and fulfilled the mitzvot, they added a letter [a *vav*] to his name." Modern commentator Martin Noth feels that Jethro's words and actions in verses 9-12 refer to a conversion: "The recognition of a 'polytheistic-comparative' exaltation of Yahweh over 'all gods' such as still occurs occasionally in traditional language, especially in Psalms, is here put in the mouth of a Midianite whom the divine acts have led to 'enlightenment.'"⁵ Jethro's actions illustrate a passion for YHWH, as well as a renunciation of belief in other gods. He then follows his speech with deed – he brings sacrifices to Israel's God.

Throughout the Torah, it seems quite easy to become part of the burgeoning Israelite community through assimilation. One must merely proclaim a belief in the God

⁵ Noth, Martin. *Exodus. The Old Testament Library*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962. p. 149

of Israel, and perhaps perform a small ritual act of circumcision or sacrifice. Henceforth, the new member of the community is a full-fledged part of the group.

Interestingly, psychological motivations do seem to be included in some of the examples. While the matriarchs become Israelites by marriage alone, the "mixed multitude" that joins following the Exodus could be joining for a variety of reasons. With the best of intentions, it is possible that they are now cognizant of YHWH's great power, and would like to believe in Israel's God. In terms of a possible ulterior motive, they may also see an irresistible opportunity to "jump on the bandwagon" of the next big thing. The Exodus provides this "multitude" with an excuse to leave slavery and Egypt behind in search of something new.

Jethro's motivations seem to be nothing but honorable. He describes his impression of the divine redemption from slavery, and swears allegiance thereafter to the God of Israel. He even goes so far as to offer sacrifices. One may wonder whether the fact that this was the religion of his son-in-law and grandchildren had any impact on his enthusiastic decision to "convert." It is possible to doubt his full conversion to Judaism if he instead just incorporated YHWH into his pantheon of gods, but precedent certainly exists for reading the text as a conversion.

Biblical Sources: Prophets and Writings

Pre-exilic prophets, such as Amos and First Isaiah, focused much on God being the God of the entire world, not just the God of Israel. This may have been due to the fact that many cultures lived among the Israelites. According to II Chronicles 2:17, Solomon took a census of all the *gerim* living in the land, and found the number to be 153,600, quite a significant amount. This positive regard towards foreigners as well as

universalistic message probably encouraged others to join the Israelite national community.

However, the exile changed the Jewish connection to location and nationalism.

The exile had many significant effects. It destroyed the tribal structure of the Israelites. The severing of national identity of the people made the religious elements of the people paramount. The rabbinate based on scholarship replaced the priesthood based on lineage, synagogues and academies replaced the Temple, and Torah study and prayer replaced sacrifices. The Israelites, a national people, became Jews, the followers of a religion.⁶

Post-exilic prophets like Jeremiah struggled to reframe Judaism without its nationalistic components. Since Jeremiah encouraged the exiles to pray for their welfare in the land of Babylon, this showed them that Judaism could survive outside of the land of Israel. Thus, you did not have to live in Israel in order to be Jewish and this allows more non-Jews to enter into the community. Instead, practice and ritual allow for entry into the Jewish community. Jeremiah also expressed hope that the idolators of Babylon would one day find their way to YHWH and become part of Israel (Jeremiah 3:17, 4:2, and 12:16).

Other prophets confront conversion in their time. Some books call converts *nilvim*, or those who "attach themselves" to God (Isaiah 14:1, 56:3,6; Esther 9:27, Zechariah 2:15). Ezra chose the term *nivdalim*, or those who "separated themselves" from the non-Jewish world in order to join the Jewish community. Zechariah (8:20-23), at the dedication of the second Temple, announces a program to convert people to Judaism in a concentrated manner.

⁶ Epstein, Lawrence J. *The Theory and Practice of Welcoming Converts to Judaism*. Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992. p. 59.

However, Ezra (particularly chapters 9-10) and Nehemiah (chapter 13) promoted a heavily particularistic approach to reconstituting the Jewish community after the return from Babylon, so conversion essentially stopped during their time. The books of Ruth and Jonah are commonly viewed as in opposition to the rhetoric of Ezra and Nehemiah, for they speak highly of conversion and the converts themselves.

The Maccabean victory (164 BCE) brought with it a renewal in Jewish power and sovereignty, thus once again sparking conversion, sometimes forced, efforts in the community.

In Palestine itself the military and political successes of the Maccabees revived Jewish nationalist pride and may have enhanced somewhat Jewish prestige in the Diaspora. John Hyrcanus and his successors attempted to create a new Jewish empire. John conquered the Edomites and forced Judaism on them...Alexander Janneus massacred the Moabites of Pella who refused to convert to Judaism...This policy of forced conversion was motivated more by political considerations than by religious or missionary zeal. The concern was for cultural uniformity in the interest of political conformity...⁷

In these situations, the psychology of conversion was irrelevant – conversion to Judaism was forced, and took place in an atmosphere of fear. There was no concern for proper observance, it is not even clear what exactly took place in these conversions (in terms of circumcision, immersion, etc.). What is clear is that conversion at this time was not a religious event, but merely a political strategy.

Hence, it is difficult to say whether the Prophets and the Writings feel one way or the other regarding conversion and assimilation. As time progressed, and societal situations shifted, reality seemed to require a changed attitude toward the willingness to welcome converts into the community. The enthusiasm we see in the Torah and books like Ruth and Jonah are countered by the trepidation exhibited in Ezra and Nehemiah.

Later Jewish texts will attempt to confront and interpret the various opinions expressed in the Tanach.

Conversion in the Talmud

Most of the mentions of conversion in the Talmud are Halakhic in nature.

However, there are scattered mentions with more of an aggadic approach to the topic. In Pesachim 87b, Rabbi Yochanan states that God exiled the Jews from Israel for only one reason: to increase the number of converts to Judaism.

Menakhot 44a contains a fascinating tale of a sinful act that leads to conversion.

A certain man, who scrupulously observed the law of *tzitzit*, heard of a prostitute in a far-off land who demanded four hundred gold coins as her price. He sent her four hundred gold coins, and set a date to meet her. When the day arrived, he waited by the prostitute's door. Her maid came and told her, "The man who sent you four hundred gold coins is waiting at the door." The woman replied, "Let him come in." When he entered, ...the prostitute went to her bed and lay down upon it naked. He too started toward her bed when, all of a sudden, the four ritual fringes on his garment flew up and struck him across the face; at that point, he moved away from her and sat down on the ground.

The prostitute stepped down from her bed and sat down on the ground, opposite him. "By the head of the Roman Emperor," she swore, "I will not leave you alone until you tell me what blemish you saw in me [that caused you to leave my bed]. He replied, "Never have I seen a woman as beautiful as you are, but there is a commandment which the Lord our God has commanded us. It is called *tzitzit*." [He goes on to explain the relevant laws.] "Now the four fringes of the *tzitzit* appeared to me as four witnesses [testifying before God about the sin I was about to commit with you].

The prostitute said, "I will not let you leave here until you tell me your name, the name of your town, the name of your teacher, and the name of the school in which you study Torah." He wrote all this down and put it in her hand. Thereupon [the man departed for home] and the woman divided her estate into three parts, one third to the Roman government, one third to be distributed among the poor, and the final third she took with her. The linens on her bed, however, she kept. She then traveled to

⁷ "Proselyte." *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962. p. 924.

the yeshiva headed by Rabbi Hiyya, and said to him, "Master, instruct the rabbis to convert me to Judaism."

"My daughter," he replied, "perhaps you have set your eyes on one of my students?"

She took out the paper the young man had given her, and handed it to Rabbi Hiyya. "Go," said he, "and enjoy your acquisition." [The woman was quickly converted, and immediately married the young man. And so, the Talmud concludes:] The very linens she had spread for him for an illicit purpose, she now spread out for him lawfully.⁸

This lengthy story, while certainly an exceptional case, allows for much interpretation. It presents what could be considered an ulterior motive: the prostitute "set her eyes" on a Jewish male she wished to marry. The sages typically saw conversion for the sake of marriage not to be a valid reason. One therefore wonders what made this case different. Perhaps it was the conviction with which she pursued conversion. She disposed of two-thirds of her belongings, thus giving up her home, career, and income. Something significant had apparently compelled her to act in this manner, and then travel to become converted.

Delving deeper into the story, the prostitute most likely led a life without either stability or conviction. Her income was derived from submitting her body to abuse by anonymous strangers. Yet, one day, a man walks into her bedroom with the intention of being a customer of her "services," yet he experiences, before her eyes, a spiritual reawakening. Following the fringe incident, he is able to tell her about forces more powerful than either of them. The incident proves that there is goodness and Divinity in the world. One can believe in God, righteousness, and justice. Thoughts like this may have influenced her, and literally changed the course of her life. Judaism, with its

⁸ Translation courtesy of Rabbi Joseph Telushkin. *Jewish Wisdom*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994. pp. 380-381.

emphasis on choosing life and good, must have been incredibly appealing to her. The rabbis saw *this* – not that she was converting for marriage, but that she was pulled towards Judaism, the religion. Becoming Jewish would allow her to love, and thus she could subsequently marry the man who changed her life.

There are two tales of righteous gentiles in the Talmud who arguably convert to Judaism. Avodah Zarah 10b discusses the first story, that of Ketiah bar Shallum, a Roman minister.

What was the story of Ketiah bar Shallum? There was a certain Caesar who hated the Jews. He asked the dignitaries in his kingdom: "If dead flesh develops on someone's foot, should he cut it off and be healed, or should he leave it and suffer?" They responded to him: "He should cut it off and be healed." But Ketiah bar Shallum advised them against doing so, for two reasons: "First, you will not be able to overcome them all, because they are scattered around the world."... The second reason given by Ketiah bar Shallum to the Caesar: "Furthermore, if you eliminate the Jews that are under your authority, you will be called the ruler of a severed kingdom, because part of its population has been eliminated.

The Caesar said to Ketiah: "You have indeed spoken well. However, the law dictates that whoever prevails against the king is cast into the round chamber [a death sentence]." As the Caesar's men were taking him and going to the chamber, a certain matron called out to Ketiah: "Woe to the ship that goes without having paid its taxes." So Ketiah fell on the top of his foreskin and cut it off. He said: "I have paid my tax. I shall leave this world and pass into the World to Come." As they were throwing him into the chamber, he said: "All my possessions should go to Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues."

Thus, it seems that Ketiah began with an intellectual reason for defending the presence of Jews in the Roman Empire, but ended by desiring to become a member of the Jewish community, even if only in his final moments of life. Ketiah was obviously a highly placed member of the Caesar's court, which makes his actions all the more compelling. What could he have seen in Judaism that drove him to convert before death? The matron is also a questionable character. It almost seems as if she is a messenger from God, suggesting that Ketiah fulfill his dedication to the Jews by becoming one of them.

Just as "paying taxes" has rewards in this life, becoming Jewish before death would have rewards in the world-to-come.

It is possible that he began to react when seeing the callousness with which the Caesar was willing to eliminate the Jews of his kingdom. He may have known that Judaism celebrated life and heartily followed the commandment, "Thou shalt not murder." Ketiah may have merely desired to protect a threatened people, but then why convert? One must wonder what the "back-story" is here, in terms of his prior encounters or studies with Jews. In the end, we cannot know exactly what led him to this decision, but his actions reveal the depth of his feelings.

The second story about a righteous gentile is the story of Onkelos the Ger, found in Avodah Zarah 11a.

Onkelos the son of Kelonimus converted to Judaism. The Caesar sent a troop of Romans after him. But Onkelos enticed them by citing verses of the Torah, and they too converted. The Caesar then sent another troop of Romans after him. He told them: "Do not say anything to him." But as they were taking [Onkelos] along with them, he said to them: "Let me tell you something trivial. The *nifyora* holds the torch in front of the *pifyora*, the *pifyora* in front of the *duksa*, the *duksa* in front of the *hegmona*, and the *hegmona* in front of the king.⁹ Now, would the king hold the torch before ordinary people?" They answered him, "No!" Onkelos told them: "But the Holy One, Blessed be He, holds a torch before the Jews, as it is written: *God went up before them by day in a pillar of cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.* [Exodus 13:21]" They all converted to Judaism.

The Caesar then sent another troop after him, and instructed them: "Do not discuss anything with him." As they were taking [Onkelos] along with them, he saw a mezuzah that was fixed on a doorway. He put his hand on it and asked them: "What is this?" They answered him: "You tell us." Onkelos explained to them:

⁹ According to Rashi, these are titles of Roman dignitaries in ascending order of rank. Those of lower status carry a torch for those above them.

"The way of the world is that a king of flesh and blood sits inside his palace and his servants guard him from the outside. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, His servants are inside while He guards them from the outside, as it is stated: *God will guard your departure and your arrival, from this time and forever.* [Psalms 121:8]" They too converted to Judaism.

The Caesar did not send after him again.

As a well-known Roman who converted to Judaism, Onkelos¹⁰ posed a threat to Caesar and the Roman government. It makes sense that Caesar would have sent a number of troops to arrest, detain, or even kill this controversial member of the Empire. Again, in this tale, we see a leaning toward the intellectual – Onkelos is able to convert Caesar's troops with his wit, charisma and intelligence.

Delving deeper into the story, his chosen verses are, in fact, quite an appeal toward the emotions of the visiting troops. His verses demonstrate the power and compassion of Israel's God as opposed to the hierarchical imperial reign found in the Roman Empire. God cares and protects the people, not the other way around. By highlighting the unhappiness inherent in many aspects of the Roman culture, Onkelos' verses show that a Jewish life is much more pleasant, warm and happy, and this appealing fact is what ultimately converts the troops.

In contrast to these positive comments and stories about converts, the infamous quote from Yevamot 109b stands out: "Rabbi Helbo says that converts are as troublesome as a sore." Later Talmudic commentators wrestle with this quite a bit, but it is important to take it as a statement of political fact. It was dangerous at Helbo's time to accept converts into the community.

Opposition to proselytes and to proselytizing, which finds expression in the Talmud, is probably to be attributed to the intensified antforeign feelings generated during the rebellions against Rome, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the rise of Christianity. The sayings of the Tannaim and Amoraim date from the second-fourth centuries, but they reflect conditions and attitudes that obtained already in the first century.¹¹

Rambam, perhaps in an attempt to soften Rabbi Helbo's statement, interprets the comment as a reference only to converts with ulterior motives, which are not the great majority of what he calls righteous converts.¹²

From a psychological point of view, Shabbat 88a includes an intriguing aggadah regarding the circumstances under which the Israelites accepted Torah. The Gemara begins by quoting from the Torah: "They stood at the foot of the mountain."¹³ Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasa said: This teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, covered them with the mountain like a vat. And God said to them, "If you accept Torah, fine. But if not, your burial will be there!" This story seems to retell the mass conversion of the Israelites into *Jews*, for they were now taking on religious obligations that went beyond cultural or societal norms. This aggadah implies that the Jews were coerced, even threatened with death, before receiving Torah. It is easy to wonder what this means about the proper manner in which one becomes Jewish. Tosafot explains that this may have been necessary to counteract the terror the Jews would have felt upon viewing the great fire that accompanied revelation. Tanchuma later states that *na-aseh v'nishma*, "We will do and we will hear" only referred to Written Law, and God needed to coerce the Jews into following Oral Law (which is much more stringent) as well.

¹⁰ Incidentally, this is the same Onkelos who is believed to have authored the Aramaic Targum to the Torah.

¹¹ "Proselyte." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962. p. 931.

¹² Mishneh Torah V,i chapter 13, no. 8.

¹³ Exodus 19:17

Thus, when consulting the Talmud for an aggadic stance explicating the Sages' stance on Conversion, it is difficult to come up with one solid point of view. Overall, they seem to be quite positive when discussing conversion. However, they also admit that reality and society make certain precautions and hesitancy necessary when considering how to welcome a convert into the Jewish people. Conversely, they include stories of righteous converts who risk, or even lose, their lives in order to remain Jewish. These stories seem to temper the warnings found in the Halakhic literature.

Conversion in Midrash

The vast material contained within centuries of midrashic writings offers many different sides to the conversion subject, usually in conversation with the biblical text. Genesis Rabbah 39:21 discusses a belief that Abraham was a missionary who entered the land of Canaan attempting to alter Pagan beliefs to a monotheistic belief in one God. Genesis Rabbah 49:2 explains that, upon receiving Torah, Moses translated it into 70 languages, so that all would understand. This seems to counter the Tower of Babel story by saying that, in theory, all cultures and peoples can reunite under the words of Torah. An assumption behind this midrash may be that all non-Jews are merely waiting for the light of Judaism to be made available to them. The Rabbis assume that Judaism is so superior that merely translating it for all to hear will bring about a great number of converts, and perhaps even, the Messianic age.

Tanhuma B, Lech Lecha 6 contains a statement by Resh Lakish: "The proselyte who converts is dearer than Israel when they stood before Mount Sinai. Why? Because had they not seen the thunders and the lightning and the mountains quaking and the sound of the horns, they would not have accepted Torah. But this one, who saw none of

these things, came, surrendered himself to the Holy One, and accepted upon himself the Kingdom of Heaven. Could any be dearer than he?"

Numbers Rabbah 8:2 offers a beautiful interpretation of what the convert must go through in order to convert:

The Holy One, blessed be He, loves converts greatly. To what may this be compared? To a king who had a flock which went out to the fields every morning, and came in again in the evening. One day, a stag came in with the flock. He went along with the goats and grazed with them, and the king was told, "A stag has joined the flock and is grazing with them every day..." The king felt great affection for the stag, and when he saw him going out to the fields, he gave orders, "Let the stag graze in whatever pasture he likes: let no man beat him, and let everyone treat him with great care." When the stag returned from the fields with the flock, the king would order, "Give him water to drink."

The king's servants said to him, "My Lord, although you possess so many rams, sheep, and goats, you give us no special instructions about them. Yet when it comes to this stag, every day you give us special commands. Why?"

The king answered: "It is natural for the flock to graze in the field all day and to sleep in the yard at night. But stags sleep in the wilderness; it is not their nature to enter the places cultivated by men. Shall we not be pleased with this stag who has left behind the broad, vast wilderness...and has come to stay in this yard?"

In the same way, should we not be grateful to the convert who has left behind his family, his nation, and all the other peoples of this world, and has chosen to come to us? Therefore, God has given him special protection."¹⁴

This midrash clearly shows an awareness for all that a convert must lose in order to gain entrance into Judaism. Here is an example of definite knowledge of the internal difficulties associated with conversion to Judaism. Moreover, it acknowledges that it can often be a strange, if not entirely unnatural, life change. The convert must, in some senses at least, leave family, culture, and a familiar land before truly becoming a Jew. This midrash shows surprising sensitivity to the struggles of a convert, but also teaches that the incredible reward for the hardship is special protection and consideration from God.

Ruth

¹⁴ Translation courtesy of Rabbi Joseph Telushkin. *Jewish Wisdom*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc. 1994. pp. 378-379.

Ruth Rabbah contains, perhaps, the most extensive discussion of converts and conversion. One Midrash for Ruth 1:16-17¹⁵ is quite familiar:

I am fully resolved to become converted under any circumstances, but it is better that it should be at your hands than at those of another. When Naomi heard this, she began to unfold to her the laws of conversion, saying: "My daughter, it is not the custom of daughters of Israel to frequent Gentile theatres and circuses," to which she replied, "*Wherever you go, I will go.*" She continued: "My daughter, it is not the custom of daughters of Israel to dwell in a house which has no *mezuzah*," to which she replied, "*Wherever you lodge, I will lodge.*" *Your people shall be my people* refers to the penalties and admonitions of the Torah, *and your God, my God* to the other commandments of the Bible.¹⁶

In this imagined conversation between Ruth and Naomi, Ruth's words from the original Biblical text are viewed as positive responses to Naomi's teachings about Judaism. While Ruth says that she is determined to convert under any circumstances, she then clearly states that Naomi is her preferred teacher of Judaism. This would seem to imply that Judaism is most likely tied to Ruth's relationship with Naomi. "Even Ruth, the Jew-by Choice par excellence, may have made her decision as much out of devotion for Naomi as out of love for God, Torah, and Israel."¹⁷ Perhaps Ruth preferred the kind of Judaism that Naomi practiced, and wished to learn more about this type of observance.

Naomi teaches Ruth about proper behavior for an Israelite woman, as well as commandments and punishments. It is notable that Naomi mentions practices that are noticeable by others: Ruth must refrain from attending gentile events (for fear of being seen there, or influenced by what she herself witnessed there), and then must also affix

¹⁵ "But Ruth replied, 'Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.'"

¹⁶ Ruth Rabbah II:22

¹⁷ Washofsky, Mark. "Conversion to Judaism: The Question of Motivation." *Introduction to Judaism: Instructor's Guide and Curriculum*. New York: UAHC Press, 1999. p. 97.

the mezuzah to her doorpost, an external declaration of her Jewishness for all to see.

Thus, Naomi seems to be emphasizing that those around her will notice Ruth's conversion to Judaism, and she must be willing to accept the reactions of others. This is indeed true for converts of all eras – the fear of the reaction of family and friends can be quite frightening.

An alternative version of this conversation seems to focus more on ritual acts, but contains one striking response.

Another interpretation: *Wherever you go, I will go: to the tent of testimony, to Gilgal, Shiloh, Nob, Gibeon, and the Permanent Temple.*¹⁸ *And wherever you lodge, I will lodge: I shall lodge overnight with the sacrifices.*¹⁹ *Your people shall be my people, in that I will destroy all idolatry within me, and then your God, my God, to pay me the reward of my labor.*²⁰

What could it mean for Ruth to destroy the idolatry *within* her? In the context of other ritual acts, it is easy to dismiss it as a reference to a change in religious action. However, it distinctly refers to a change that must take place internally – a simple change of belief, perhaps, but it may include much more. Taking these two midrashim together, it is interesting to note that the first midrash focuses primarily on what external changes must take place, while this midrash emphasizes an internal change in belief and practice. A change must take place within – not just a change in status, label, or external action. Destroying the idolatry within her could intimate a shift from one idea of self to another. Ruth may be acknowledging that a change in religious practice requires a change in self-image and self-identification as well. Additionally, Ruth may no longer feel satisfied by

¹⁸ These names refer to the different places where the Sanctuary stood until permanently settled in Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Deuteronomy 16:7 was interpreted to mean that one was to lodge overnight in Jerusalem on the first night of the Festivals, following the offering of the sacrifices.

²⁰ Ruth Rabbah II:23

the idolatrous Moabite tradition, and may associate the Naomi's welcoming nature with her positive perception of the Israelite religion.

Ruth's pledge in the original text is quite significant, for it involves a verbal agreement, not just a change in ritual practices. The midrashim reflect this importance by placing her pledge into an actual educational context. Jewish tradition views her conversion quite positively, as is especially clear when considering that King David is one of her direct descendants, and, through him, the Messiah as well.

Jethro

While Ruth provides a strong female model of conversion, Jethro is her male counterpart. Mekhilta D'Rabbi Ishmael²¹ begins by explaining that Jethro leaves his comfortable realm of material wealth in order to wander the wilderness with the Israelites whom he has now joined. This is to perhaps emphasize his honorability as a convert. When discussing a conversation between Jethro and Moses, R. Eliezer, in God's voice, says, "when one comes to you to convert, and he comes in the name of heaven, you should draw him close and do not repel him." R. Eliezer's comment refers to both a willingness to accept potential converts, and a concern over proper, pure motivations.

Once Jethro officially joined the Israelite community, Mekhilta explains that he was greeted by Aaron, Nadav, Avihu, the 70 elders of Israel, and the *Shekhinah*. This serves as a model for properly welcoming a convert into the Jewish community: friends, family, the entire congregation, and God gather to greet the new Jew.

²¹ Horowitz-Rabin edition, pp. 192-195.

Tanhuma²² uses a teaching, "There are those who hearken and lose their reward and there are those who hearken and are rewarded" to shed light on what the Rabbis believe about Jethro. Jethro is an example of one who hearkened and was rewarded: he heard the news of Israel's redemption, swore loyalty to Israel, and was rewarded by having a *parashah* named after him. The Rabbis make Jethro into the male paradigm for a convert, pointing out that he loved Torah study and promoted the fear of God.

Conclusion

Aggadah allows us to delve deeper into the personal motivations and stories behind the converts of Biblical and Rabbinic times. We hear the actual words spoken by characters like Ruth or Jethro, and also witness the brave actions of Ketiah bar Shallum and Onkelos. The human faces of these stories demonstrate a sensitivity in our predecessors to recognize that conversion was not just a status change. Otherwise, Halakhic rules would have remained the only mention of conversion, as this keeps the rules intact and impersonal.

Instead, the inclusion of these stories implies an acknowledgment that the individual's journey to Judaism was significant not only in his/her own life, but also in later generations (as is the case with Ruth and the Davidic dynasty). Hesitancy on the part of the Sages to welcome all converts is excusable – it was a very real fear in their lives that converts would either infiltrate the Jewish community or convert for insincere reasons, thus potentially spoiling the whole community's experience.

The stories are complex and not without differences in interpretation. However, it is easy to glean a lesson about the righteous of those who come to Judaism for true,

²² Vayishma Yitro: Piska 2 (Buber, p. 310)

correct reasons, and this tradition of welcoming personal stories exists even to this day.

Next, an examination of what each major Jewish movement is doing with regards to accepting and preparing individuals for conversion to Judaism.

Chapter Three: CONTEMPORARY CONVERSION

Following an assessment of the rich history of conversion in both halachic and aggadic works, an examination of the current views surrounding conversion becomes the compelling next step. Each of Judaism's three major modern movements (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox) approaches the topic of conversion from different standpoints. The movements each have differing philosophical and theological perspectives that influence the ways in which they incorporate, dismiss, or amend the classical understanding of conversion. This, in turn, affects how they then welcome the potential convert, carry him/her through the process of conversion, and then finally convert the new Jew-by-choice. After a discussion of three different understandings of the psychosocial conversion process, a look at each individual movement will follow, with an eye toward the consideration of the potential convert's internal, mental state at any time during the process.

Three Models of the Conversion Process

While the study of the psychosocial aspects of conversion remains a relatively new pursuit, three theorists have proposed different lists of stages that the convert must go through for a successful conversion. Every human being goes through similar changes and transitions throughout their lives, and the conversion process follows stages that could be seen as markers of any major life change. As William Bridges points out, there

is a "theory of personal development that views transition as the natural process of disorientation and reorientation that marks the turning points of the path of growth."¹

These stages go from the first inclination that one's religion must change through complete identification with the new religion. James Fowler, Diane Centolella, and Sherri Alper provide models through which greater understanding of the internal conversion process can be found.

James Fowler is famous for his work, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Development and the Quest for Meaning* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), in which he explicates the six stages of human faith development.² Later, Fowler combined theology and psychology in an examination of conversion. Stephen J. Einstein, et al.,³ explain that, in Fowler's work, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Abingdon Press, 1996), conversion to a new religion follows a common pattern:

- 1) A precipitating event or realization
- 2) Disidentification with the birth religion
- 3) A period of disorientation
- 4) Reintegration with the new religion⁴

¹ Bridges, William. *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Perseus Books, 1980. p. 5.

² His six stages are as follows: Intuitive/Projective Faith (ages 2-6, involves the growth of faith and the rise of imagination); Mystic/Literal Faith (ages 6-12, with use of narrative, child evaluates imaginative faith of younger years); Synthetic/Conventional Faith (age 12-adulthood, corresponds with Piaget's formal operational thinking, involves bringing ideas together, creating interpersonal relationship with God); Individuative/Projective Faith (For those who reach this adult stage, focus on concerns about boundaries between self and others, between self and God); Conjunctive Faith (Around ages 35-40, person becomes aware of unconscious, of mystery, of unknown in self and in God. Aware of "paradoxical tension" in self and world); Universalizing Faith (For those few who reach this stage, self is no longer center of universe. Center is "participation in God or ultimate reality.") [Straughn, Harold. "My Interview with James W. Fowler on the Stages of Faith." Accessed January 4, 2004. <<http://www.lifespirls.com/TheMindSpiral/Fowler/fowler.html>>]

³ In an article entitled, "The Psycho-Social Component of Introduction to Judaism." Einstein, Stephen J., et al, eds. *Introduction to Judaism Instructor's Guide and Curriculum*. New York: UAH Press, 1999. p. 30.

⁴ This list is very similar to the transition process outlined by William Bridges, in which he points out that major life changes follow these stages: "(1) An ending, followed by (2) a period of confusion and distress, leading to (3) a new beginning..." [Bridges, William. *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Perseus Books, 1980. P. 9.]

Thus, some type of event must take place in someone's life, or at least an "epiphany" of sorts, that causes them to reevaluate their religious ties. This leads to a break from the birth religion. Einstein, et al., calling the third stage the "*midbar* stage of the journey," point out that this stage is the most difficult in that the potential convert has let go of a previously secure foundation, mourns that loss, but has not yet established a new identity. Finally, the person finds a home in the new religion, and is reintegrated into it.

In her doctoral dissertation, Diane Centolella presents the stages that she identified based on her doctoral research.⁵ She examined the experience of converting to Judaism, studied how exactly it took place, and then sought to identify a primary pattern of experiences or stages that take place during the conversion process. Following her research, she found the following stages to be common to all those who had converted to Judaism:

- 1) Lack of Connection with Childhood Religion
- 2) Questioning of Beliefs
- 3) Exploration and "Discovery" of Judaism
- 4) Commitment (actual conversion ceremony)
- 5) Adjustment to Jewish Life
- 6) Jewish Identity

The potential convert, therefore, already feels disconnected from the childhood religion, but at some point, finally feels comfortable questioning his/her beliefs. This questioning leads to an examination of other religions, culminating in the discovery of Judaism. Study and further exploration leads to a firm commitment to Judaism, yet it takes time to adjust to Jewish life, i.e. what it means to *be* and *do* Jewish. Finally, there is a new Jewish identity.

⁵ Centolella, Diane M. *Souls in Transition: The Psychosocial Process of Conversion to Judaism*. Dissertation. Ohio State University, 2001.

Centolella expounds on the conversion process more intensely than Fowler.

Centolella's stages (1) and (2) could be viewed as similar to Fowler's first two stages.

Yet she more thoroughly delineates the three stages that follow, all of which could be included in the *midbar* stage of the journey. Finally, they both conclude with total identification with the new religion.

Sherri Alper offers a developmental model for becoming Jewish. While her list applies to converts, she explains, "it can also be considered descriptive for mature religious development in general."⁶ Alper points out that they are not a rigid sequence of events, rather a continuum within which people may move forward and backward. Her sequence is as follows:

- 1) Symbiosis: Excitement of discovery and intense bonding between individual and community.
- 2) Differentiation: The Jew-by-Choice begins to define his/her own boundaries and typically asks hard questions at this point.
- 3) Practicing: Jew-by-Choice starts to make decisions as a Jew with more self-confidence. There is typically a deepening of emotional attachment to Judaism in this stage.
- 4) Rapprochement: Jewish self is now defined, thus it is now safe to make conscious connections between the "doing" of Judaism and the emotions involved. More clarity involving "me" and "we."
- 5) Mutuality: This final stage is characterized by "constancy and interdependence, in which the ideal is reconciled with the real." The foundation is one of continued growth, rather than one of need.⁷

In contrast to Fowler and Centolella, Alper seems to focus primarily on the process that occurs once the individual has decided to pursue conversion, and has already presumably questioned his/her beliefs and discovered Judaism. Written primarily for the person converting in the context of a new or upcoming marriage, she outlines what may take

⁶ Alper, Sherri. "Becoming Jewish: A Developmental Model." *Introduction to Judaism Instructor's Guide and Curriculum*. New York: UAHC Press, 1999. p. 115.

⁷ Alper, Sherri. "Becoming Jewish: A Developmental Model." *Introduction to Judaism Instructor's Guide and Curriculum*. New York: UAHC Press, 1999., p. 116.

place for an individual as he/she becomes ready to build a new Jewish life. It is not clear when exactly the ceremonial conversion to Judaism may take place within her framework. The spotlight is instead on the self within a new community, with interdependency and self-confidence the ultimate goals.

Alper's stages differ from the other two lists in that Fowler and Centolella approach the entire conversion timeline, from the dissatisfaction with the previous religion through integration of the new religion. Fowler's list stops at the point of accepting the new religion, while Centolella's continues past the actual conversion ceremony until a feeling of true Jewish identity is developed. Alper's stages were also written at a time when conversion were performed mostly for the sake of marriage, whereas Centolella's subjects converted on their own accord or much later in a marriage.

These rubrics can be utilized to analyze accounts of conversion both from biblical times through today's Jews-by-Choice. They can also be applied critically to the current conversion processes of each modern movement, with an eye towards each program's approach or recognition of the different stages involved in the joining of a new religion.

Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism adheres to the halachic rules set forth first in (what they view as) the Divine revelation of Torah at Sinai, and its subsequent transmission and interpretation by Mishnah, Talmud and the Codes (also known as Oral Torah). According to Orthodox beliefs, these later texts are equally divine in origin. Therefore, they believe that following the commandments and fulfilling mitzvot is, in fact, not a choice, but rather doing God's will.

Orthodox⁸ Judaism is similar to the other movements in that it is always difficult to say, definitively, what the movement as a whole believes or practices. It differs from the other movements in that it is significantly less centralized or unified. There are many different groups and organizations that fall under the category "Orthodox Judaism," but "Modern Orthodoxy," which is predominately an American group, will be the primary focus of this section.

Modern Orthodoxy⁹ is active in such institutions as Yeshiva University. Many Modern Orthodox Jews were inspired by the 20th century example of Rabbi Joseph D. Soloveitchik. Rabbi Soloveitchik, and the movement in general, has sought to bring together "Torah u'Madah" – religious studies and secular studies. Halachah and theological concerns remain at the center of what they believe, but, as opposed to the Haredi movement, which believes in maximum separateness from modernity, Modern Orthodoxy aims to recognize the benefits of incorporating modernity and secularism into Jewish lives.¹⁰ This can indeed be a struggle:

The Modern Orthodox experiment begins with the assumption that Orthodoxy can preserve its integrity and passion, and even be enriched, by its intersection with modernity, and that the interaction will allow Orthodoxy to bring to the broader world a clearer vision of the grandeur of Torah. On the other hand, this approach does not deny that there are areas of powerful inconsistency and conflict between Torah and modern culture that need to be filtered out in order to preserve the integrity of halakha.¹¹

⁸ An invaluable guide to the many arms of Orthodox Judaism (including Chasidism, Mitnagdim, Religious Zionism, etc.) can be found at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/363_Transp/08_Orthodoxy.html>.

⁹ "American 'Centrist' Orthodoxy." Accessed January 11, 2004 from <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/363_Transp/Orthodoxy/Centrist.html>.

¹⁰ Berman, Rabbi Saul J. "The Ideology of Modern Orthodoxy." Accessed January 14, 2004 from <<http://www.shma.com/feb01/berman.htm>>.

¹¹ Ibid.

The movement is represented by the Union of Jewish Orthodox Congregations (started in 1898), commonly referred to as the Orthodox Union, or the "OU." The rabbinical body is known as the Rabbinical Council of America.

A sampling of nineteenth century Orthodox responsa¹² shed some light onto the issues facing the Orthodox community, and the variety of their reactions. Rabbi Jakob Ettlinger (1798-1871), in his *Binyan Tzion* 149, wrote a responsum in which he declared his discomfort with rabbis who were more lenient with converts, and who allowed people to convert for marriage alone. He stated that some rabbis based their leniency upon the Beit Yosef of Yoreh Deah 268:12, in which it is written that the proselyte will in the end come to convert for a selfless purpose, even if it appears to be an ulterior motive at the present. Despite this, Rabbi Ettlinger did not want to consider the possible motivations or reasons behind someone's conversion outside of whether the motives were pure or ulterior.

In contrast, Rabbi Elijah Guttmacher (in *Aderet Eliyahu*, *Yoreh Deah*, #87), in 1858, examined a case in which man wanted to convert so that he could marry a young Jewish woman. The man had already studied quite a bit about Judaism, and the inquiring rabbi was ready to perform the conversion, with Rabbi Guttmacher's approval. Citing the story of Timna in Sanhedrin 99a, in which Timna asked the forefathers to convert her, only to be turned down by all three. Timna then left and became the concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son. Amalek, Israel's ultimate foe, is said to have descended from her. From this, Rabbi Guttmacher concluded that it is a greater sin to reject converts than to accept them, even if the accepted convert is not ideal.

¹² The following responsa were found in Rabbi David Ellenson's collection, entitled "Modern Orthodox Responsa on Conversion."

Reacting to contemporaneous trends in the more liberal Jewish communities of his time, Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman (1843-1921) in his *Melammed l'ho'il Yoreh Deah* #85, deals with the question of converting someone who wants to marry a Jew. Because of the rise in civil marriages, as well as Reform and Conservative conversions (which "apply lenient standards or fail to apply any traditional standards in matters of conversion"), he instructs the inquiring rabbi to convert these cases as well, so as to ensure a proper, halachic conversion.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, formerly a professor at Yeshiva University and now Chief Rabbi of Efrat, Israel, was ordained by Rabbi Soloveitchik. While still in the United States, Riskin wrote an extensive article on conversion in Jewish law and within Modern Orthodoxy.¹³ He mentions some of the more troubling cases of potential converts that are typical in Israel:

The secularists agonizingly cry: Is the Russian émigré married to a Christian, who has risked life and limb to leave the "Communist paradise" and re-establish historical ties in Israel, to be told that his children are not Jews and cannot be married in a religious ceremony? Is the Israeli kibbutznik who was born to Christian parents but who has placed her destiny with Israel's future and who has worked and fought for Israel's development to be denied the status of a Jew merely because she did not perform some *pro forma* rite of acceptance?¹⁴

These dramatic, emotion-laden cases would seem, at least to the secularists to which he refers, to demand that exceptions be made to the halachah. However, Riskin immediately follows these cases with a strongly worded statement that summarizes his approach to would-be converts: "We must maintain the sanctity of Israel! Our faith commitment is based upon a precise legal system which has been responsible for the preservation of our people these three thousand years. We dare not compromise our halakhic standards."

¹³ Riskin, Steven. (1974) "Conversion in Jewish Law." *Tradition*, 14. (6) 29-42.

He explains, however, that there is still confusion and disagreement within Orthodoxy as to what constitutes, "conversion in accordance with Jewish law." He presents some authorities who require that the conversion candidate will become a God-fearing Jew and will scrupulously observe the mitzvot. Yet other authorities do not require assurance that these two requirements be met.

Riskin begins his examination of halachah by going back to the Talmud's simple requirements that the male be circumcised and the male and female ritually immerse. He reviews Rambam's statement in the *Mishneh Torah*¹⁵ that, "A proselyte, after whom the Beit Din did not investigate or to whom they did not inform the particulars of the commandments and their punishments, but who was circumcised and ritually immersed before three common judges, is considered a convert." According to this statement, one may assume that following the commandments is not necessary for conversion, but Riskin sets out to prove this assumption incorrect. He believes that, in general, following the mitzvot is the "very definition of conversion, the statement of purpose, the matrix from which circumcision and ritual immersion must follow... Similarly circumcision and ritual immersion without the concomitant acceptance of commandments become meaningless mechanical performances and are to no avail as far as conversion is concerned."¹⁶

Rabbi Riskin believes that the proper question when it comes to conversion is not, "who is a Jew?" but "what is a Jew?"¹⁷ Psychologically speaking, he feels that, in the "Age of Anxiety," it is common to go through identity crises, and he bemoans the fact

¹⁴ Riskin, Steven. (1974) "Conversion in Jewish Law." *Tradition*, 14. (6) p. 29.

¹⁵ *Mishneh Torah*. Issurei Biah, 13:14-15.

¹⁶ Riskin, Steven. (1974) "Conversion in Jewish Law." *Tradition*, 14. (6) p. 34.

¹⁷ Riskin, Steven. (1974) "Conversion in Jewish Law." *Tradition*, 14. (6) p. 36.

that Judaism is often involved with these crises. "With this backdrop, it is no wonder that ten lectures devoted to Jewish History and Culture with a signed certificate and name-giving ceremony can make any WASP into a HASP (Hebrew Anglo-Saxon Protestant) within a few short months."¹⁸ With this comment, it becomes clear that Riskin is responding to more than mere halachic issues. Rather, he seems to be reacting to what he sees as conversion trends in the other movements, which he essentially condemns. Most likely, he is responding to the fact that the other movements, in his opinion, are producing "less-than" Jews, in that they are not properly educated about laws and mitzvot, and thus these converts are not meeting halachic standards.

Riskin concludes his article by suggesting a regulated course of study, held under the auspices of the Rabbinical Council of America, which would provide "a proper course of study as well as practical guidance in the observance of commandments for the would-be convert."¹⁹ The course would thus ensure a focus on *kabbalah mitzvot*, the accepting and receiving of the obligation to fulfill the commandments.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin is just one rabbi (albeit a well-known one) among the countless Modern Orthodox rabbis. Yet, his article is featured as the definitive article discussing conversion in Modern Orthodoxy on the *Edah* website. *Edah*, which states that, "The mission of Edah is to give voice to the ideology and values of modern Orthodoxy and to educate and empower the community to address its concerns,"²⁰ must therefore see Rabbi Riskin as representative of the movement as a whole. Thus, it is possible to take his comments as such.

¹⁸ Riskin, Steven. (1974) "Conversion in Jewish Law." *Tradition*, 14. (6), p. 36.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁰ "Edah." Accessed December 23, 2003 from <www.edah.org>.

The Orthodox movement, by virtue of being a strictly halachic movement, does not allow flexibility when it comes to the rules of conversion. Conversion is a stringent, mitzvot-based process, culminating in circumcision and immersion. One may wonder where the psychology of the individual enters into the picture. Since the rabbis and leaders are focused on the importance of proper observance and fulfillment of the mitzvot, there is not much opportunity to focus deeper on a psychosocial level.

Perhaps the only entrance of "self" into the discussion is the traditional questioning of the potential convert that is found in Yevamot 47a: "What reason have you for desiring to become a proselyte; do you not know that Israel at the present time are persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions?" According to the text, when the convert answers that he knows all this, yet is still unworthy of becoming Jewish, he is quickly accepted. This humility in approach to the study of Judaism may be the only indication of the consideration of the internal process for current Orthodox conversion. In contrast, perhaps it is presumed that the potential convert has already completed the "soul-searching" involved in conversion prior to seeking out a rabbi and beginning the conversion process.

There are many positive aspects to pursuing conversion in an Orthodox context. One can be sure that all Jewish communities will accept his/her conversion, all over the world. For those who crave structure or clarity, it is much easier to embark on a process that plainly tells you what is expected of you, what to do, and when to do it. Rules and strictures can be comforting when other areas of life feel out of control or chaotic. Others may be drawn to the depth of faith and conviction often found in Orthodoxy. Answers to the unknown, when life presents challenges or even tragedy, can help to rebuild a foundation of assurance and confidence in the world.

Conservative Judaism

Conservative Judaism originated in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century in response to what were viewed as excesses in the Reform Jewish community. Zecharias Frankel, one of the early primary figures of the movement, seceded from the rabbinical conference active in Frankfort, Germany, over a disagreement concerning Hebrew in the prayer service – he felt it was a required part of the service, and the other rabbis found Hebrew unnecessary.²¹ The founders of the Conservative movement sought to find a compromise between modernity and tradition. “They knew that a living organism cannot remain static, and that change, leading to growth or decay, is inevitable. Hence, they sought to guide Jewish life in a manner that would allow for necessary changes without destroying or impairing the essential tradition and the historical continuity of Judaism.”²²

The primary bodies of the Conservative movement are the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (originally United Synagogue of America), founded in 1913, and the Rabbinical Assembly. The Jewish Theological Seminary is the primary decision making body of the movement. The USCJ web-site provides a number of resources regarding conversion which address such issues as “Should I convert to Judaism?” “How to discuss conversion to Judaism,” “Considering Conversion,” and more. USCJ’s resources are created by Dr. Lawrence J. Epstein, a member of the Joint Commission on Inter-marriage of the Rabbinical Assembly. Dr. Epstein also participates in the maintenance of a website called www.convert.org, which provides a number of other conversion resources from the Conservative movement.

²¹ “Zecharias Frankel” Accessed January 14, 2004 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zecharias_Frankel>.

²² “USCJ FAQ.” Accessed January 11, 2004 from <www.uscj.org/USCJ_FAQ201.html>.

On web-pages entitled, "Should I Convert to Judaism?"²³ and "Considering Conversion to Judaism,"²⁴ the USCJ addresses some of the possible motivations and reasons that one might convert to Judaism. Examples vary from "Belief that Judaism is an attractive religion," "Liking Jewish worship," and "Feeling that Jewish beliefs make sense," to "Desire for a Jewish wedding," and "Desire to share faith and practice with partner." The potential convert is advised to ponder what his/her motivations might be, and then begin the journey of making a "profound religious decision." Creating a unified Jewish home seems to be the primary reason that the USCJ encourages conversion of the non-Jewish partner in a relationship or marriage.

The USCJ website also provides a sample conversion curriculum.²⁵ The curriculum consists of six primary areas: weekly class attendance, required readings in Tanach and other resources, attendance at two Shabbat services a month, basic Hebrew reading, bimonthly appointments with the rabbi, and implementation of learned rituals. Perhaps psychosocial issues would be discussed in the private sessions with the rabbi, but they are not set forth as a topic for class time.

While these resources seem rather conventional in nature, Conservative institutions in both Los Angeles and New York are currently creating programs that are much more progressive. The University of Judaism currently offers the Miller Introduction to Judaism Program. Instruction covers all of the integral areas of study (such as holidays, lifecycle, texts, anti-Semitism, etc.), yet also provides individual

²³ Epstein, Dr. Lawrence J. "Should I Convert to Judaism." Accessed June 18, 2003 from www.uscj.org/intmar/shouldi.html.

²⁴ "Considering Conversion to Judaism." Accessed June 18, 2003 from www.uscj.org/intmar/consider.html.

²⁵ Englander, Rabbi David. "Bnai Torah Conversion Program." Accessed June 18, 2003 from www.uscj.org/soeast/bocabt/conversion.html.

guidance and counseling, support groups, and weekend Shabbat retreats. This eighteen-weeklong intensive course does not explicitly require halachic observance, but does expect some level of commitment to the mitzvot.

One Conservative rabbi, Ed Feinstein, spoke very highly of people who choose to convert to Judaism. Rabbi Feinstein, at Valley Beth Shalom in Los Angeles, is quite active in outreach on a national level. He currently organizes a mentoring system which encourages congregants to mentor and invite conversion for the non-Jews in intermarriages. He wrote:

Personally, I believe that conversion is a remarkable act of personal courage and commitment. I believe that the Jew-by-Choice is a hero to us all. I hold with Maimonides in regarding the Jew-by-Choice as a living symbol of Abraham/Sarah's struggle for faith and truth.²⁶

Rabbi Feinstein then artfully discussed what he felt concerning those who are not as warmly welcoming of potential converts:

I resent all the barriers and obstacles our communities put up in the path of the one who comes to us out of spiritual searching wishing to join us. And I believe that, absent those barriers, there would be many thousands who would find their way into Judaism. The barriers are themselves remnant of the traumas of the past ages of Jewish history. We need, as a community to heal those wounds. Once healed, we will discover a treasure of spirit and energy in those who would join us.²⁷

It is difficult to ascertain whether Rabbi Feinstein is reacting to the traditional Orthodox "barriers" to conversion, such as strict rules, sending the person away 3 times, questions of motivations, etc., or whether he refers, instead, to the Conservative movement's previous attitudes towards conversion. It is most likely the latter – before Rabbi Feinstein's active role in outreach, the only other major figure in the Conservative

²⁶ Feinstein, Rabbi Ed. Email to Author. December 23, 2003.

²⁷ Feinstein, Rabbi Ed. Email to Author. December 23, 2003.

movement was Rabbi Harold Schulweis,²⁸ also at Valley Beth Shalom in L.A. The Conservative movement has otherwise been relatively quiet with regards to conversion and intermarriage, perhaps hoping that, if no attention is paid to it, it will go away as an issue or concern.

Rabbi Feinstein represents the next era in Conservative Judaism with regards to conversion. His enthusiasm, as well as the existence of programs such as the Miller Introduction to Judaism Program, allow potential converts to learn in warm, encouraging atmospheres that acknowledge the internal as well as external changes that will take place. Candid discussions with a rabbi, as well as support group opportunities, seem to provide the best possible outcomes in terms of the integration of a new, Jewish identity.

Reform Judaism

The movement of Reform Judaism has taken a number of measures to ensure the warm welcome of converts into the Jewish community. The movement, represented both by the national umbrella organization, Union for Reform Judaism (formerly the Union of American Hebrew Congregations), as well as the rabbinic body, Central Conference of American Rabbis, have taken steps towards a comprehensive approach to the inquiring potential convert that continues through the complete acceptance of the Jew-by-Choice into the community.²⁹

The movement's stance is first apparent in two important programs conducted at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Reform movement's

²⁸ Rabbi Schulweis is quite prolific in the area of Outreach. Samples of his sermons, many regarding intermarriage, halachah, and conversion, are available at <<http://www.vbs.org/rabbi/hschulw/>>.

²⁹ Including the June, 2001, CCAR "Resolution on Rabbinic Commitment to Keiruv," in which the CCAR reaffirms its commitment to converts, intermarried couples, and all those seeking a spiritual home in Judaism.

seminary. Student rabbis at HUC-JIR are encouraged more and more to meet the challenges of contemporary Jewry by attending the requisite third-year retreat, the Gerecht Family Outreach Institute. This Institute is an intensive weekend, in which the study of texts, practicalities, and issues surrounding conversion, with many guest clergy and converts adding personal stories throughout, offers a unique, in-depth education in conversion and outreach. Students also have the option of taking part in the Denver Outreach Internship, a five day long program offered by Rabbi Stephen J. Foster, a leading force in conversion and interfaith programming in the movement. In Denver, numerous panels and text-studies provide an extensive look at all sides (parents, children, spouse, clergy) of the conversion process.

Perhaps the two most central resources provided for clergy and congregations by the Reform movement are the Union's requisite Introduction to Judaism class and the CCAR publication entitled *Divrei Giyur: Guidelines for Rabbis Working with Prospective Gerim*. Both clearly exemplify the movement's attitude toward converts, conversion, and the reactions expected from the Jewish community. Both pay close attention to the psychosocial issues and implications of conversion throughout the process.

On December 2, 1978, Rabbi Alexander Schindler³⁰, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from 1973-1996, brought outreach to interfaith families and potential converts to the forefront of Reform Jewish concerns. He implored the Board and members of the UAHC to remove the "Not Wanted signs from our hearts."³¹ His

³⁰ The Union for Reform Judaism provides a site dedicated to Rabbi Schindler's biography, speeches, legacy, etc. It can be accessed at <http://www.uahc.org/schindler>.

³¹ Text of Rabbi Schindler's speech is available at <http://uahc.org/outreach/schindler.shtml>.

initiative created the Department of Outreach, which in turn led to a new motivation to provide outreach resources to the congregations and leaders of the movement.

Introduction to Judaism

One of the major advances to come of his charge was the Introduction to Judaism class³². An official textbook of resources was created in 1983, with a second edition published in 1999. Prior to the publication of this book,

It was felt then that previous UAHC Introduction to Judaism courses were almost entirely cognitive in nature. Students heard lectures about theology, philosophy, holidays, and history. When students completed the course, they often lacked practical skills and did not know how to begin their own personal Jewish lives.³³

According to the "Goals and Methodology of the Introduction to Judaism Program,"³⁴ the course seeks to recognize both the cognitive and affective aspects of taking a class of this nature. In the cognitive domain, students gain both intellectual and practical knowledge of Judaism. In the affective domain, students are encouraged to confront their feelings both about *being* Jewish and *doing* Jewish. Both these areas are approached through the study of the Jewish holidays and lifecycle.

Integral to the Introduction to Judaism class are a minimum of 2-3 "Psychosocial Sessions." These sessions are held throughout the course, allowing the participants time to personally relate to the issues presented in class. There are multiple goals to these sessions, such as affirming the fact that choosing Judaism is possible, highlighting

³² It is important to note that the Introduction to Judaism class is not merely a "conversion class." The Jewish partners of potential converts are encouraged to attend, as well as Jews who would like a "refresher course" in Judaism, and those who are seeking more knowledge about Judaism in general. The course is designed to address all of these populations. (*Introduction to Judaism: Instructor's Guide and Curriculum*. New York: UAHC Press, 1999. pp. 15-16)

³³ *Introduction to Judaism: Instructor's Guide and Curriculum*. New York: UAHC Press, 1999. p. 11.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 13.

common issues or concerns of the conversion process, building a sense of community in the class, and more.³⁵ The sessions aim to address both internal issues (such as “trying on” Judaism) and external issues (what will my partner’s/my own parents think?).³⁶

The inclusion of psychosocial sessions in the course of this class is significant. Although the potential convert is theoretically meeting regularly with a sponsoring rabbi, the course provides an outlet in which the potential convert can discuss concerns with others in a similar position. In fact, in situations where a majority of class members are potential converts, some facilitators recommend holding separate “support group” style meetings before or after class, where these issues can be discussed more deeply.³⁷

All of these actions by the movement and the individual teachers deliver a message of inclusion and understanding to the potential convert. The needs and concerns of each person are thus recognized, acknowledged, and addressed in some way. The course identifies that conversion is not just a label change or the taking on of new actions, but rather a complex change in identity and self-image.

Divrei Giyur: Guidelines for Rabbis Working with Prospective Gerim

In early 2001, the Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted a new set of guidelines that would delineate the ideal conversion process to be undertaken by Reform Rabbis. The creation process began in 1996, when the Committee on Conversion decided to develop guidelines to assist Rabbis with the *giyur* process. The final product looks almost like a page of Talmud – the central section contains the primary guidelines, yet it is surrounded on all sides by commentary, discussion, and alternatives.

³⁵ *Introduction to Judaism: Instructor's Guide and Curriculum*. New York: UAHC Press, 1999. pp. 31-32.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 33-36.

The text comprehensively guides Rabbis through each stage of the process: Initial Contact, Preparation (including Academic, Spiritual, and Communal), Concluding Rituals and Ceremonies, Follow-up, and Recognition (of other CCAR Rabbis' *gerim*). Many considerations are made regarding the psychosocial aspects of the entire process. Even from the initial contact, rabbis are encouraged to, "share with the prospective *ger/gyoret* our joy at and encouragement of a decision to pursue the possibility of *gerut*."³⁸ This simple sentence reflects the general attitude of inclusion and compassion for the entire process – the Reform rabbis warmly welcome the potential convert, acknowledging the *possibility* of conversion in the future. Nothing is set in stone at this initial meeting, nor is anything permanent until the final ceremony. This allows the potential convert to feel comfortable pursuing this new life path.

In the section entitled, "Preparation: Spiritual," the rabbi is encouraged to hold group meetings with all current prospective converts.

The purpose of these meetings is to explore those issues that virtually all prospective *gerim* have in common, such as the reaction of their family, the support of and acceptance by their partner and their partner's family (if applicable), acceptance by the Jewish community, the psychodynamics of a change in identity (including possible feelings of inadequacy), identification with the State of Israel, and the like.³⁹

Here, echoes of the *Introduction to Judaism* guide are heard, such that rabbis are called to acknowledge the importance of exposing the potential converts to each other, and to allow them to share their common experiences. Individual tutorial meetings with

³⁷ *Introduction to Judaism: Instructor's Guide and Curriculum*. New York: UAHC Press, 1999.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 3.

³⁹ *Divrei Gilyur: Guidelines for Rabbi Working with Prospective Gerim*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2001. P. 6.

the rabbi are a classic part of the conversion process, but these group meetings, while untraditional, are seen as equally important to a successful conversion.

The private sessions with the rabbi are opportunities for the prospective convert to ask more personal questions, raise other issues, and otherwise continue the course of study. The relationship with the rabbi is an entrée into other types of participation in synagogue life.

With regards to readiness, a list of 13 commitments⁴⁰ is included, which the rabbi is told to use as a means for discussion and exploration, then as an evaluation of readiness. This list is an expansion and modern version of what the halachah had put forth centuries before:

- a. An acknowledgment that the prospective *ger/gyoret* is freely choosing to enter into the eternal covenant between God and the Jewish people.
- b. An acceptance of Judaism to the exclusion of all other faiths and practices in his/her life.
- c. *K'lal Yisrael*: sharing in the fate and faith of the Jewish people.
- d. Home and synagogue observance of Shabbat, *chagim*, and *yamim noraim*.
- e. Creation and maintenance of a Jewish home.
- f. *Tikkun Olam*, *tzedakah*, and *gimilut chasadim*.
- g. Some element of Jewish dietary discipline.
- h. Personal and communal *tefillah* on a regular basis.
- i. Continued *talmud Torah*.
- j. Affiliation with a synagogue.
- k. Marriage to a Jew (if not currently married).
- l. Raising future children as Jews.
- m. *Medinat Yisrael*.⁴¹

The exact nature of these commitments varies according to the individual convert and rabbi. For example, "dietary discipline" can mean anything along the *kashrut*

⁴⁰ *Divrei Giyur: Guidelines for Rabbi Working with Prospective Gerim*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2001, p. 8.

⁴¹ Arnold Gluck adapted a list originated by Stephen E. Foster which contains ten commitments. This alternate list consisted of: Yom Kippur Observance; Mezuzah; Kindle Shabbat Candles; Tzedakah; Worship; Dietary Laws; Affiliation; Education; Love of Israel; Raise Children as Jews. (from *Introduction to Judaism: A Sourcebook*, edited by Stephen J. Einstein, et al. New York: UAHC Press, 1999, p. 74)

spectrum, from matzah on Pesach and fasting on Yom Kippur all the way through complete, strict *kashrut*. Creating a Jewish home refers to displaying Jewish art and ritual objects, as well as practicing home rituals, such as the bedtime *sh'ma*.

Interestingly, these commitments refer primarily to faith, action, and ritual. There is nothing in these thirteen commitments related to psychological readiness. Perhaps it is assumed that the rabbi would have an internal sense of when the potential convert is truly ready. According to the commentary on page 7, "Some colleagues wait for a candidate to begin using 'we' instead of 'they' when referring to Jews." This change in word choice would seem to imply an identity change – the person now feels like part of the Jewish community, inside and out.

Regarding the text itself, it is important to note, that, consistent with the movement's flexible ideology, this resource is called *guidelines* and not *rules* or *law*. The Committee states, on page 2, "Our goal is not to force requirements upon individual Reform rabbis, but rather to be able to speak as a community with a unified voice on matters so crucial to our self-definition. The document is intended to be used by rabbis with intelligence and understanding: following the approaches delineated herein wherever possible and desirable; altering and adapting them in those circumstances where it is necessary." The Committee recognizes the individual autonomy of Reform rabbis, and that some will require even more from their potential converts, and others, much less.

Using these two resources as representative of the Reform movement's attitudes toward conversion and converts, a large amount of attention is paid to the psychosocial aspects involved in the process. Much sensitivity, on the part of teachers and rabbis, is

encouraged by both the Union for Reform Judaism and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. The Reform movement seems to be at the forefront of an integrated curriculum – one that academically and ritually prepares the person, while still recognizing and addressing the myriad changes that must take place within.

Discussion

As presented above, current research allows us greater insight into the conversion process for the individual choosing a new religion. The three lists have much in common. They all recognize that many changes must take place throughout. These changes are different for each individual, but they occur to some extent in each case. Importantly, each list emphasizes the fact that conversion is not just an academic process, or a name change, or a status change. Instead, grand shifts in identity and self-image take place as the individual finds a new home, a new foundation, and a new community.

Additionally, conversion does not end with the ceremony. Instead, the conversion ceremony ritual is just one step along the continuum of conversion, which had stemmed from the start of the questioning and unrest with the birth religion, all the way through truly feeling *Jewish*. Being able to say that “I am a Jew” with confidence and dignity does not come easily for many reasons, such as a feeling of academic inferiority, a lack of childhood memories of Judaism, or feelings of guilt towards the biological family. Accomplishing the ability to identify as Jewish must be a source of pride for all those who choose Judaism (including those born as such!).

The Reform movement’s attitudes towards conversion, and the suggested course of study as outlined in both *Introduction to Judaism* and *Divrei Giyur*, are the only ones to reflect the research. In fact, the stages outlined in *Divrei Giyur* appear to directly

correspond to the stages of conversion. More specifically, the Initial Contact can be seen as the end of the "questioning stage," just as one has come to find out more about Judaism. The Preparation of a potential convert covers Alper's "Symbiosis" and "Differentiation" stages, Centolella's exploration and discovery of Judaism, and Fowler's disorientation phase. Readiness and the Concluding Rituals/Ceremonies can be seen as relating to Alper's stages of "Practicing" and "Rapprochement," and Centolella's "Commitment." Finally, it is significant that *Divrei Giyur* includes "Follow-up" as a key component of the process, acknowledging that the conversion does not end with the ceremony alone. Follow-up recognizes Centolella's stages of "Adjustment to Jewish Life" and finally "Jewish Identity." Alper's "Mutuality" and Fowler's "Reintegration" also seem to be represented here.

The Conservative movement's Miller Introduction to Judaism Program seems to also be moving in the direction of a comprehensive (cognitive + ritual + affective) conversion process, but it is difficult to say, otherwise, whether or not the movement incorporates an awareness of the entire psychosocial process. The conversion resources available on USCJ's website certainly acknowledge that questioning and seeking take place at the start of the process, but the sample curriculum appears to be primarily academic and practice-oriented in nature.

Psychosocial components of the process do not appear to be relevant to the Orthodox movement. Motivations for conversion are important, as it was in the halachic texts. However, once the process commences, it follows the halachah through conversion.

An interesting complication to this discussion is the continuing "Who is a Jew" debate in Israel. This debate, over who is eligible for Israel's Law of Return, has resulted

in greater stratification between those who convert in the Orthodox community and those who convert either in Reform or Conservative contexts. The battle rages on, and is too lengthy for exposition here, but it has tremendous impact on North American Jews-by-Choice. Reform and Conservative rabbis find it essential to inform potential converts that their conversion, if completed in either of these two movements, may not be recognized in either Orthodox or Israeli contexts. Most Jews-by-Choice who convert in Reform or Conservative communities find the stratification unimportant, but it must create concern for others. When someone already feels marginalized due to their conversion status, the "Who is a Jew" situation could possibly exacerbate these feelings.

What may ultimately prove incredibly influential is the proliferation of books written by Jews-by-Choice. These books provide detailed autobiographical experiences through prose, letters, and poetry. Greater awareness of what the conversion like for the Jew-by-Choice can only enhance the process for all involved in the present and the future. The next chapter will provide examples of a variety of these writings, all of which are insightful accounts of many steps of the journey.

Chapter Four: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXTS

The texts of the preceding chapters only truly come to life when grouped with the texts of people's lives. Rules and laws only go so far; they must be then put into practice. This alone shows the value and worth of the rules. Hearing the reactions and impressions of the Jews-by-Choice teaches us much about the efficacy and meaning of the conversion process. Though poetry, epistle, and essay, we learn what the experience is truly like for those who go through it.

The Poetry of Barbara Jackson

A Jew-by-Choice who documented much of the process through poetry, Barbara Jackson is one of the voices that stands out from the crowd. We learn much about her inner experience in her poetic words. The following selection will illumine a few of the key aspects of the conversion process. Two of her poems seem to capture what it must feel like to be lost in the *midbar*, wandering between birth religion and chosen Judaism.

An Unbroken Thread¹

Someday I'm going to walk under the sun
With the wind at my back and a Star of David at my front
It won't seem strange to the flowers
And it won't seem strange to me

I'll walk into the synagogue
With my old trembling vanished like a childhood fear
Speak a tongue no longer foreign. Who needs to understand
The words, when feelings are so clear?

I'll leave at the end and the same birds will be singing
Under the same sun. My metamorphic needs will all be gone
Finally, through and through, as natural as blowing wind
Or singing bird – to be a Jew.

¹ All of Barbara Jackson's poetry is courtesy of Dru Greenwood.

Here, Jackson speaks of nature as a goal – she wishes that her Jewishness will feel as natural as the wind on her back. She looks forward to a time when the Hebrew spoken during services will be familiar to both her mouth and her ears. Yet, she also recognizes that there are plenty of things in nature that will remain the same (like the bird, the sun, the wind) though she herself will have changed so significantly. She seems to find comfort in nature's constancy as she continues to embark on her life change

Untitled

My fear is not by day
It comes at night
In dreams of Jewish objects
And Catholic stained glass

In dreams I am a half-life
Part me, part Jew
My parents own these objects
And are impassive.

What? What? What meaning here?
These dreamy fingers sifting through my hair
A gesture so kind, but with those hands, so cold
If I go on, will this black memory shear my life?

God – I'll be there again, You know that
We'll fight some more, until you flee with light
Then my lame mind will try to fit the pieces
As it limps down the road.

This poem speaks to her fearful conflict between past and present. She must wrestle with what the future place of Christianity and its symbols will have in her life. She also must go through the difficult process of reconciling her new identity with her family. The "part me, part Jew" phrase seems to point to the fact that she does not yet feel complete in any way – neither the "old" Barbara, nor the "new" Jew. She finds herself rather in the middle, as her parents stand impassively.

Yet, Jackson eventually nears readiness for conversion. The following shows less fear, and much more comfort in Judaism.

Untitled

I stand on the brink of a heady birth
Almost I am a Jew
To Israel may I be of worth
For I have chosen you!

You gave me your hand that I might not fall
A foreigner in your land
Now you are seeing me straight and tall
You who have helped me stand.

The best I am I bring to you
Who give so much to me
The joy of living as a Jew
The gift which makes me free.

This poem, nearly a love song, demonstrates her devotion to Israel, the people, land, and tradition. She speaks of receiving much strength and support from Judaism, and presumably from its leaders as well, and she now hopes to be able to return that which she received.

We next hear from Jackson as she waits for the Beit Din to decide her fate. Two poems share much about what she felt as she awaited their words of welcome or rejection.

Untitled

Now the rabbis talk without me,
Deciding my fate, alone.
I want to shout, "I am no mere chimera!
I'm a Jew!" But listening time is done.

How can one weigh a human mind?
A human life – I'm only sure
Because I'm here. No one outside
Knows certainly.

I should be feeling, "What can I give this people,
This community?" But the tangential is a bore.
I am impelled, not by potential, but by feelings
I am too Jewish now to walk away.

What do you say?
Schooled in the humans soul
What light is in my eyes?
And will you bid me enter?

This poem beautifully shares the way in which she views the rabbis as gatekeepers to the faith, and the pleadings she wishes she could tell them. The stream of conscious style shows the variety of thoughts that she is experiencing as she waits. Yet, she herself states, she is too Jewish to turn away, to give up on this process. This theme is also present in another poem from this moment.

Untitled

My destiny, a dreidel spinning
In a once known, but now an alien hand
You see my feelings? Do you understand?
Why is my patience thinning?

I stand and knock: who answers at the door
To say that I should enter or should go?
Please say "come in," for I would have it so.
Else what was all this transformation for?

How could you cast me from so near to you?
When all our dreams are finally realized.
Waiting can't hurt, for finally I've surmised
Whatever your decision, I'm a Jew.

More frustration and anger comes through this poem. One realizes that she must have been made to wait for a long while. This offers insight into how the convert feels as the Beit Din convenes privately to discuss the imminent conversion. While it appears to be a difficult period of time for her, it also seems to allow her to clarify ever further her

feelings about Judaism. She assuredly states that she is Jewish no matter what the rabbis decide, and maybe only her waiting would have allowed her this clarity.

Finally, the conversion is successful and complete. She dutifully writes her thoughts surrounding this momentous occasion.

I wanted to record the last sigh, the final passage
To make these poems a journey now complete.
My goal, still resting out beyond my hands
Prevents the final chord from being struck.

This poem must be as open as the first,
As tinged with doubt, but with more fervent hope
For goodness and for peace, but, like my life,
Unfinished, transient, non-absolute.

Jackson seems to be acknowledging that the conversion process does not end with simple ritual. Rather, it continues as she grows more and more comfortable with her new identity as Jew. As Centolella and Alper explain in their models of the psychosocial conversion process (see pages 40, 41), conversion does not end with the ritual. True Jewish identity and mutuality comes later, at a different point for each individual.

Letters to the Family

Conversion does not take place in a vacuum; many other people are affected by the convert's decision to become Jewish. Communication can be quite challenging at times, particularly when the non-Jewish family is having difficulty accepting this life choice. Many Jews-by-Choice have elected to share their feelings with either the non-Jewish family or the Jewish family through letters. This allows them to compose their

thoughts in a more organized fashion, and may take some of the fear out of the confrontation.

A Letter to My Non-Jewish Parents

Dear Mom and Dad,

I know how surprised you were when I told you of my decision to convert to Judaism. I am writing this letter to you because I am not sure how much our conversation resolved in your own minds. I want you to know that I love you both very much. You are my parents and I'm proud of the way you are. You have loved me all my life, have been there for me when I've needed you, and have given me everything I have ever needed, whether it was an advance in my allowance or a shoulder to cry on. You have shown patience, insight, and concern. And you have been my teachers. You have encouraged me to be everything I could be, and have provided me with every opportunity. You have helped to make me who I am. For all this and more that can never be spoken or written, I love you.

Now I come to you to tell you about a path which I have chosen and to ask for your support again. The choice I have made is very important and one which I believe will enrich my life.

Being a religious person is central to my life. You taught me that through your example. I will always treasure my childhood memories. Nothing can or ever will change that, for those memories are too precious to me. The path I am on still confuses me because it is a little unfamiliar. But it is a way that I have chosen after much study and soul searching. It is not a path that leads me away from you. Please know that. You must never see it as such. Even though I have made a different choice, I will always be me, your child. We have so much to share! Now I ask for your understanding and love. I know that this may be difficult for you to accept right now, but I know that there is enough love among us. Our love will take us a long way. I also know that we can communicate and understand one another, just as we have always done, because we are a very special family. May God bless you both.

Your loving daughter,
Amy²

² Kukoff, Lydia. *Choosing Judaism*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981. Pp. 41-42.

Amy begins this letter stating to her parents what she most likely wants to hear from them. She tells them that this process will not change how she feels about them, that they are always her parents, and that she loves them no matter what. She probably wishes to hear these sentiments spoken to and about her. Then she reminds them about the seriousness with which she has embarked on this path, as well as the importance of religion in her life. She ends by telling them again how special they are, and how wonderful it is to be a part of that family. This positive reinforcement hopefully had a positive effect on her parents, and eventually allowed them to fully accept her decision to become Jewish.

The following letter was written by a couple, both of whom were choosing to become Jewish. They wrote a lengthy letter to both sets of parents, excerpted below.

Dear Family:

As you may have surmised, Susan and I have nurtured an interest in Judaism since our marriage. We had initially doubted that we could ever adopt the tradition as our own in any meaningful way. Those were the sentiments expressed in the letter to you announcing our engagement. Since that time though, our judgment changed and we decided to affiliate ourselves through conversion with a Reform congregation. We sing weekly in a small choir during services on Friday evenings and have both taken introductory Hebrew lessons. We have also, fortunately, made several friends and are feeling increasingly comfortable as time passes.

Our decision was not a hasty one, nor was it one which received significant encouragement from friends or foes of any persuasion. It was of our own choosing and was predicated by both our needs to act responsibly and concretely in demonstrating and proclaiming our religious selves. We were thinking as well of the importance of offering to our children a tradition of religious practice and faith with which we both feel comfortable. Such would not have been possible for either of us had we remained in the fold of Christianity....

The question of the holidays is a difficult one which will be addressed throughout the remainder of our lives. It is not an

enviable task to be a person of religious concerns in our society – much less one of a minority religion. Thus, in the future when we decline wholehearted participation in Christmas or Easter celebrations in favor of more ecumenical holidays like Thanksgiving or birthdays, it is not a rejection of you but rather an affirmation of our own religious yearnings as observant Jews. ... I would anticipate that with the passage of years and the mutual gaining of confidence in our intentions that religious holiday sharing, whether Passover and Chanukah or Easter and Christmas, will not seem as awkward a possibility. Such will come, though I am sure not without some tears and anxiety on all our parts. It is your choice as much as ours. ...

At a clergy institute during the spring, which was aimed at fostering understanding between Christian and Jew, a benediction was spoken embodying a spirit of dialogue which Susan and I also intend with this letter. It included the following words:

With malice toward none, with charity for all,
With firmness in the right, as God give us to
See the right.

...So spoke Lincoln in 1865, so spoke our rabbi last spring, so speak the two of us today.... With gratitude for the life and love which you have given us, we remain devotedly husband and wife, your children.

Shalom,
Eric/Susan³

This eloquent letter broaches many of the difficult topics of conversation brought about by conversion. Eric and Susan discuss, most notably, the holiday dilemma, which presents enormous difficulties for many Jews-by-choice. Not only is it difficult for some to reconcile that their children will not have Christmas trees or Easter eggs, but they also must then tell their families that they are no longer interested in participating in observances of those holidays. The convert must also affirm the sanity and clarity that went into the decision to convert, for it must be easy for the birth family to imagine otherwise.

³ Kukoff, Lydia. *Choosing Judaism*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981. Pp. 42-45.

Letters are one-sided, and deny us the reaction of the other party. However, in challenging conversations like these, writing a letter allows the most information to be shared, in the most rational manner, before responses cloud the situation. The above letter-writers are to be commended for their bravery and perseverance as they continue to ask their parents to love them nevertheless.

Small Gems

Many of the recent compilations of writings by converts contain small anecdotes or thoughts. These words show the wide variety of experiences and emotions that the Jew-by-choice must endure before, during, and after the actual conversion. A selection of these are presented below.

The conversion process is laborious and long. That's good. It gives you a good chance to truly know what you're getting into.

Leba Zahava⁴

I spent a lot of time reading about Jewish holidays and rituals. There was so much, I didn't know where to begin, so I became paralyzed. I didn't do anything. But then, one day, I spent two hours memorizing the Shabbat blessing over the candles. I spent two hours the next day memorizing the blessing over the wine and two hours on the third day memorizing the blessing over the challah. Then, on Friday night, I said them! That was the beginning. From then on, I knew I could do it.

Harvey⁵

In the middle of my son's bar mitzvah service, we were marching around with the Torahs and my whole family was sitting together. As we marched around, my uncle took my arm, pulled me aside to him, looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, "I am so proud of you." And I was delighted and stunned and amazed because it was the first time that I really felt that he accepted me on my own

⁴ Berkowitz, Rabbi Allan L. and Patti Moskovitz. *Embracing the Covenant: Converts to Judaism Talk about Why and How*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996. p. 92.

⁵ Kukoff, Lydia. *Choosing Judaism*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981. p. 26.

terms. That bar mitzvah really marked my own rite of passage and coming of age.

Lois⁶

The first Christmas after my conversion, my husband and I arrived at my parents' house early on Christmas morning. I knew that everyone would be anxious, and that impression was confirmed as soon as we walked in the house. My parents greeted us at the door, ushered us into the living room, sat us down around the Christmas tree, and promptly burst into tears. My husband was embarrassed and I wished I had never dragged him into this.

Carol⁷

I gave up trying to communicate with my mother and father. I knew that they would never accept my conversion. I thought it might be easier to communicate with my siblings, so my husband and I made a special trip to see them and tried to get to know one another better. We spent a marvelous weekend together, and I was thrilled. Needless to say, it was a bitter disappointment when, four days later, we received a packet of 'salvation' materials in the mail from them, expressing the hope that we might see the light and be saved.

Theresa⁸

I remember my first experience at a High Holy Day service. I had just finished my conversion classes, and about all I really knew was the Shehecheyanu prayer. My wife and I walked into the service and suddenly realized that we had forgotten to bring our prayer books. I was very embarrassed and felt totally out of place. What was I doing here! But suddenly I heard the cantor singing the Shehecheyanu. I knew that! I turned and looked at my wife. She was smiling. I started to smile, too, because once I heard the Shehecheyanu I knew everything would be all right. A few minutes later, one of the members of the temple gave me a prayer book. From there it was all smooth sailing. I was officially a Jew.

Al⁹

My friends and family have all been very excited about my conversion to Judaism, as a spiritual home was really the missing link in my 'personhood.' The decision to convert is one of the best decisions I ever made. I am at peace with my feelings about God, life, knowledge, love, and death. I also feel more at ease with what

⁶ Kukoff, Lydia. *Choosing Judaism*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981, p. 37.

⁷ Ibid, p. 38.

⁸ Ibid, p. 40.

⁹ Ibid, p. 65.

is expected of me in this world. Being a Jew has completed my life and brought with it so many beautiful and awesome things. It is something no one can ever take from me.

Hadassah¹⁰

Long before I became a Jew, I attended a *seder* at which a woman who was present told of her survival at Auschwitz. She had a profound effect upon me: I will never forget her.

This was the *seder* before I went to Eastern Europe, where I found myself in Prague. In a small museum, there were Torah mantles; pieces of wood and fabric from synagogues; old books and printing presses. And upstairs, there was artwork done by the children who perished in Terezin, the Nazi concentration camp in Czechoslovakia where 15,000 children perished between 1942 and 1944. Each picture was labeled with the child's name. I was there for hours, crying. It broke my heart.

That night, after I wrote a brief summary of the day in my little notebook, I added this entry: "What a strong connection I feel to Judaism. I have to consider making my decision about conversion." It was the first time I had put my feelings into words.

My conversion took place two years later.

P'nina¹¹

The above words are but a brief look into the lives of the convert as they continue along their process of becoming Jewish. Some are words of hope and devotion, others are filled with pain and struggle. Some relate to family and friends, others to the inner workings of the individual Jew-by-choice. Feelings of fluency and comfort are crucial for some to be able to truly take on the life of a Jew, others find their Jewish home through brief moments of revelation or clarity.

¹⁰ Berkowitz, Rabbi Allan L. and Patti Moskovitz. *Embracing the Covenant: Converts to Judaism Talk about Why and How*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996. p. 29

¹¹ Berkowitz, Rabbi Allan L. and Patti Moskovitz. *Embracing the Covenant: Converts to Judaism Talk about Why and How*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996. p. 81.

In the end, the converts' words reflect the profound, complex process known as *gerut*, the conversion to Judaism. This simple word does not adequately represent the variety of rules, laws, lessons, trials, and more that comprise a religious conversion for a human being. Parents, children, spouses, friends, and the wider community are all affected when one individual decides to pursue conversion. Yet a continued awareness of the entirety of the process will further allow the individual to smoothly and happily take on a new life as a Jew. Listening to the myriad tales of conversion now being published allows rabbis of the present and future to gain deeper insight into the experience of *gerut*, not merely view it as *giyur*. We will continue to learn, search, and grow as Jews as we watch these new Jews show us what it truly means to be Jewish.

**Primary
Textual
Resources**

18 YITRO

Jethro priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out from Egypt. ²So Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after she had been sent home, ³and her two sons—of whom one was named Gershom, that is to say, "I have been a stranger" in a foreign land"; ⁴and the other was named Eliezer, meaning, "The God of my father was my help, and He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." ⁵Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' sons and wife to him in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God. ⁶He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons." ⁷Moses went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent.

⁸Moses then recounted to his father-in-law everything that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the

hardships that had befallen them on the way, and how the LORD had delivered them. ⁹And Jethro rejoiced over all the kindness that the LORD had shown Israel when He delivered them from the Egyptians. ¹⁰"Blessed be the LORD," Jethro said, "who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, yes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people]."¹² And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses' father-in-law.

יח יתרו

וישמע יתרו כהן מדין חתן משה את כל אשר עשה אלהים למשה ולישראל עמו כי הוציא יהוה את ישראל ממצרים: ² ויקח יתרו חתן משה את-צפרה אשת משה אחר שלחיה: ³ ואת שני בניה אשר שם האחד גרשם כי אמר גר הייתי בארץ נכריה: ⁴ ושם האחד אליעזר כי-אלהי אבי בעזרי ניצלני מחרב פרעה: ⁵ ויבא יתרו חתן משה ובניו ואשתו אל-משה אל-המדבר אשר-הוא חנה שם הר האלהים: ⁶ ויאמר אל-משה אני חתנך יתרו בא אליך ואשהך ושני בניה עמה: ⁷ ויצא משה לקראת חתנו וישתחו וישק-לו וישאלו איש-לרעהו לשלום ויבאו האלה:

⁸ ויספר משה לחתנו את כל אשר עשה יהוה לפרעה ולמצרים על אודת ישראל את כל-התלאה אשר מצאתם בדרך

ניצלם יהוה: ⁹ ויחד יתרו על כל-הטובה אשר-עשה יהוה לישראל אשר הצילו מיד מצרים: ¹⁰ ויאמר יתרו ברוך יהוה אשר הציל אתכם מיד מצרים ומיד פרעה אשר הציל את-העם מתחת יד-מצרים: ¹¹ עתה ידעתי כי-גדול יהוה מכל-האלהים כי בדבר אשר ודו עליהם: ¹² ויקח יתרו חתן משה עלה חבחים לאלהים ויבא אהרן וכל וקני ישראל לאכל-לחם עם-חתן משה לפני האלהים:

¹³ ויהי ממחרת וישב משה לשפט את-

integrity

²⁰Thus said the LORD of Hosts: Peoples and the inhabitants of many cities shall yet come—

²¹the inhabitants of one shall go to the other and say, "Let us go and entreat the favor of the LORD, let us seek the LORD of Hosts; I will go, too."

²²The many peoples and the multitude of nations shall come to seek the LORD of Hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.

²³Thus said the LORD of Hosts: In those days, ten men from nations of every tongue will take hold—they will take hold of every Jew by a corner of his cloak and say, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

Jonah 1:11-16

told them—¹¹they said to him, "What must we do to you to make the sea calm around us?" For the sea was growing more and more stormy.

¹²He answered, "Heave me overboard, and the sea will calm down for you; for I know that this terrible storm came upon you on my account."

¹³Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to regain the shore, but they could not, for the sea was growing more and more stormy about them.

¹⁴Then they cried out to the LORD: "Oh, please, LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not hold us guilty of killing an innocent person! For You, O LORD, by Your will, have brought this about." ¹⁵And they heaved Jonah overboard, and the sea stopped raging.

¹⁶The men feared the LORD greatly; they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and they made vows.

²⁰ כה אמר יהוה צבאות עד אשר יבאו
עמים ושבי ערים רבות: ²¹ והלכו יושבי
אחת אל-אחת לאמר גלכה הלך
לחלות את-פני יהוה ולבקש את-יהוה
צבאות אלקה גם-אני: ²² וקאו עמים
רבים וגוים עצומים לבקש את-יהוה
צבאות בירושלם ולחלות את-פני
יהוה: ²³ כה אמר יהוה צבאות
במים ההמה אשר יחזיקו עשרה
אנשים מכל לשנות הגוים והחזיקו בכנף
איש יהודי לאמר גלכה עמכם כי שמענו
אלהים עמכם: ^ס

¹¹ ויאמרו אליו מה-נעשה לך וישתק
הים מעלינו כי הים הולך וסער:
¹² ויאמר אליהם שאוני והטילני אל-הים
וישתק הים מעליכם כי ידע אני כי
בשלי הסער הגדול הזה עליכם:
¹³ ויחתרו האנשים להשיב אל-היבשה
ולא יכלו כי הים הולך וסער עליהם:
¹⁴ ויקראו אל-יהוה ויאמרו אנה יהוה
אל-נא נאבדה בנפש האיש הזה ואל-
תתן עלינו דם נקיא כי-אתה יהוה
כאשר חפצת עשית: ¹⁵ וישאו את-יונה
ויטלדו אל-הים ויעמד הים מועפו:

¹⁶ וייראו האנשים יראה גדולה את-
יהוה ויפחדו ויבחו ליהוה ויררו נדרים:

3Let not the foreigner say,
 Who has attached himself to the LORD,
 "The LORD will keep me apart from His people";
 And let not the eunuch say,
 "I am a withered tree."
 4For thus said the LORD:
 "As for the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths,
 Who have chosen what I desire
 And hold fast to My covenant—
 5I will give them, in My House
 And within My walls,
 A monument and a name
 Better than sons or daughters.
 I will give them an everlasting name
 Which shall not perish.
 6As for the foreigners
 Who attach themselves to the LORD,
 To minister to Him,
 And to love the name of the LORD,
 To be His servants—
 All who keep the sabbath and do not profane
 it,
 And who hold fast to My covenant—
 7I will bring them to My sacred mount
 And let them rejoice in My house of prayer.
 Their burnt offerings and sacrifices
 Shall be welcome on My altar;
 For My House shall be called
 A house of prayer for all peoples."

3 ואל-יאמר בן-הנכר
 הנלך אל-יהוה לאמר
 הבדל יבדילני יהוה מעל עמו
 ואל-יאמר הסרס
 הן אני עץ יבש: 4
 כי כה אמר יהוה
 לסרסים אשר ישמרו את-שבתותי
 וכחרו באשר חפצתי
 ומחויקים בבריתי:
 5 ונתתי להם כביתי
 ובחומתי
 יד ושם
 טוב מקנים ומבנות
 שם עולם אתן-לו
 אשר לא יפרת: 6
 ובני הנכר
 הנלזים על-יהוה
 לשרתו
 ולאהבה את-שם יהוה
 להיות לו לעבדים
 כל-שמר שבת מחללו
 ומחויקים בבריתי:
 7 והביאותים אליה קדשי
 ושמחתים בבית תפילתי
 עולתיהם וחביתיהם
 לרצון על-מזבחי
 כי ביתי בית-תפלה יקרא
 לכל-העמים:
 8 נאם אדני יהוה

the hand of the LORD has struck out against me."

¹⁴They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law." ¹⁶But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. ¹⁸Thus and more may the LORD do to me—¹⁹if anything but death parts me from you." ²⁰When [Naomi] saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her; ²¹and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem.

¹⁴ ונתשנה קולן נתבכינה עד ותשק
צרפה לחמותה ורות דבקה בה:
¹⁵ ונתאמר הנה שבה יבמתך אל-עמה
ואל-אלהיה שובי אחרי יבמתך:
¹⁶ ונתאמר רות אל-תפגעי-כי לעזוב
לשוב מאחריך כי אל-אשר תלכי אלך
ובאשר תליני אלן עמך עמי ואלהיך
אלהי: ¹⁷ באשר תמותי אמות ושם
אקבר בה יעשה יהוה לי וכה יסוף כי
המות יפרד ביני ובינך: ¹⁸ ותרא כי
מתאמצת היא ללכת אתה ותחדל
לדבר אליה: ¹⁹ ותלכנה שתיהם עד
באנה בית לחם
ניחי בבאנה בית לחם ותהם כל-העיר
עליהן נתאמרנה הזאת נעמי: ²⁰ ונתאמר

Esther 8:15-17

¹⁵Mordecai left the king's presence in royal robes of blue and white, with a magnificent crown of gold and a mantle of fine linen and purple wool. And the city of Shushan rang with joyous cries. ¹⁶The Jews enjoyed light and gladness, happiness and honor. ¹⁷And in every province and in every city, when the king's command and decree arrived, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many of the people of the land professed to be Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

¹⁵ ומרדכי יצא מלפני המלך בלבוש
מלכות תכלת נחור ועטרת זהב גדולה
וסכריך בוי וארגמן והעיר שושן צהלה
ושמחה: ¹⁶ ליהודים היתה אורה
ושמחה וששן ויקר: ¹⁷ ובכל-מדינה
ומדינה ובכל-עיר ועיר מקום אשר דבר
המלך ודחו מגיע שמחה וששון
ליהודים משתה יום טוב ורבים מעמי
הארץ מתיהדים כי-נפל פחד-היהודים
עליהם:

החולץ ליבמתו

פרק רביעי

יבמות

10

עין שמואל
בן יצחק

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קל: א"י יד חג'
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 א"י יד חג'

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[ה'תשנ"א]

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**הנה מוקדמות עליכם
מבין כי דלת ספרים
ומתוך כלל ספריה וכן
כל יורה קול לא מלי**

מסביר וזה מיר. המאמץ ששכלה קודם שכלה והוא
 לך גר עד שכל והוא והוא המאמץ (לך)
 המאמץ ששכלה שכל לך שכל והוא המאמץ
 המאמץ שכל לך שכל והוא המאמץ
 המאמץ שכל לך שכל והוא המאמץ

לא רחב מנחת ולא רחב
עליו חוץ מפרקין על
נשיהו ב' ציצ' והסע
ומלך אחד שמים נח
ושני רח שמים
מקט מצח קלות חמ
מכל תלה חרי חמ
אשה נשים משיבוח
ושני רח שמים לה
מקט מצח קלות חמ
יחד נ' חמד עבר
מכלת שם נ' תכר
דבר שחזק בפני
משוחד ובנה אסר
אמיים לו מה חמ
הודיעים אחד מקט
מצח מצוה מלח חמ
ואלו "קשים גימ' לי

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וְקִדְשׁוֹ קִדְשׁוֹ: אִדּוּ לִי וְהָיָה עִבְרִי מְשֻׁדָּד:
עֵלִי עַל מַצֵּחַ הַמִּטְעָה בְּמַה דְּרָבִים אֲמִידִים בְּרִי
עֵדֶךָ לִקְבֹּל אִמֶּר רַב שְׁמַח לֹא קִשְׁיָא וְהָרִישׁ בִּי
וְיִבְרַח אֶת אֲבִיהֶנּוּ אִמֶּה וְרַב כִּרְיָא שְׁלֵא קִבְלָהּ עַל
מַצְבִּילָהּ *אִסְדֹּר בִּהּ מִדִּי רִישׁ בִּי אֶלְעֵד אִמֶּר אֶת
כִּסֵּה וּמַצְבִּילָהּ לִשְׁמֵי שְׁמַח וְהָיָה וּמַצְבִּילָהּ לִשְׁמֵי

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פדעקען זאגן מיין
 קיבל מלין אויף פד
 בן אהרעלע חרדי
 נאמט אפצולין אויף פד
 געזאגטען אויף
 געזען פערע חרדי
 יישראל לכל רבין
 וזה כיום עד זמנה
 נאכער פדעקען אויף
 געזען פערע חרדי
 שוידר זיבן פערע חרדי
 מערער פדעקען וכל
 ה' חזק בגר ובעבד
 ד' ר' שמואל לחרדי
 ה' שמואל לחרדי
 פערע קלוג ופערע
 ר' פיש געזען אויף
 ואל כפחה דערב

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קבלא רעד קבל
ל בעד מיוחד אן
לע ורנ וחצי
יה אבל קבלה עליה
פ שלא קבלה עליה
ש שודו ומשודה
וחור
יח טבך ואמר ועד תצרי
מכסני על פרוץ סוף : ותגדרלי . ותכלילי לעס שאר עמי :
ואמר

1. *What is the purpose of the study?*
 2. *What are the research objectives?*
 3. *What is the research methodology?*
 4. *What are the results of the study?*
 5. *What are the conclusions of the study?*
 6. *What are the limitations of the study?*
 7. *What are the implications of the study?*
 8. *What are the future research directions?*
 9. *What are the contributions of the study?*
 10. *What are the key findings of the study?*

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(8) רחמי ורחמי ורחמי
לחיים ושלום ושלום
על כל ישראל: (ג) ושלום
ועל כל ישראל ושלום

(1) חזקת חטא לא
 חזקת צדקה
 חזקת צדקה

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय
 श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता
 श्रीकृष्णार्जुनसंवाहः

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שליש עבודת סמבול. ואין העבר טובל אלא בפני
שלישה וימים כגד שסמקת ניותו הוא: 'ב' כשישתחרר
העבד צריך סבילה אחרת בפני שלישה ימים שבו
יגמר ניותו יהיה כישראל. ואין צריך לקבל עליו
מאות ולתורעו עיקרי הדת שכבר הוריעהו כשסבל
לשם עבודתו: 'ג' ובמקרה הכשר למכילת נדה שם
סמבלין את הגרים ואת העברים ואת המשוחררים וכל
דבר שהוצא בגולה הוצא בגרים ובעבדים ובמשוחררים:
די' אלו יעלה על דעתך שסמבול הכושע את ישראל
א' שלמה מלך ישראל שנקרא דידי' י' נשא נשים נכריות
בניותן. אלא סוד הדבר כך הוא. שהבצחה הנכונה

[illegible]

בְּסִיבָא דְגַר אִי הַיְוֵרִי, לְהַתְיִיר בְּדִקְוֹן אֲדִירֹי שְׂמֵא
בְּגִלל סָטָן שְׂיֻמְלֵא אִי בְּשִׁבְלִי שְׂרָרָה שְׂרִיכָה לֵה אִי סָטָן
וְשִׁתְּדֵא בְּהַלְבֵּס לֵדֵי. אִם אִם הִיא בְּדִקְוֹן אֲדִירֹי
שְׂמֵא עֵינֵי נָתַן בְּמֵשֶׁלֶת הַיְדִידִית, אִם אִשָּׁה הִיא בְּדִקְוֹן
שְׂמֵא עֵינֵיהָ נָתַנָּה בְּכַחַד עַבְדִּירֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. אִם לֹא נִמְצָא
לָהּ עֵילָה יִשְׁדִּירֵינָּה אֲתוֹן כּוֹכֵר עוֹל הַתְּהוֹרָה וְסוֹרֶחַ שִׁישׁ
בְּעִשְׂיֵיתָה עַל עַמִּי הָאֲדֻמֹּת כִּדִּי שְׂפִירֹשׁ, אִם קָבֵל וְלֹא
יִשְׁרָשׁ, וְהָאֲתוֹן שְׂחָדוֹ סִאֲהֵרָה סִקְבִּילֵא אֲתוֹן שְׂמֵא
וְהָאֲתוֹן שְׂמֵא אֲתוֹן שְׂמֵא הִיא לִכְתֹּב אֲתָה וְתַחֲדָל אֲלֵיהָ:
כִּי לִפְיֵכָל לֹא קָבֵל בֵּית דִּין גֵּרִים כִּי לֹא דִּבְרֵי שְׂמֵא
בְּיָד דוּד שְׂמֵא כֵן תַּחֲדוּ חוּד, וְכִימִי שְׂמֵא שְׂמֵא
בְּשִׁבְלִי הַסְּלִכּוֹת וְהָאֲבָה וְהַחֲדָלָה שְׂחָדוֹ בֵּה יִשְׂרָאֵל

עם לא נחום לרשע וכו'. נצחק הענין
מקור:
לשחק לא קבלו ביום דין וכו'. נצחק הענין
(הק"מ) לא קבלו גרים בעד זה
ובזה וכו' (הק"מ) לחזו במקום הזה
במקום זה נחשבו מלפני ק"מ אלף גרים
והוא כ' גמול רבוע נצ"ל בדמות זה
מקור: למה נחשבו מלפני גרים וכו' מן
המקור: וכו'.

חורו. שכל הענין כן העברו בשביל דבר מהבלי
העולם אינו כענין הדקדק. ואעפ"כ היו גרים הרבה
מתגיידים בימי דוד ושלמה כפני הדיוטות. והיו ב"ד
הגדול חוששין להם לא דוחק אותן אחר שמבלי מכם
ולא מכדין אותן עד שיתראה אדריגם : [מן] וילפי שגיר שלמה נשים ונשאן. וכן שמעון
יידר תשא. והדבר ידוע שלא חזרו אלא בשביל דבר. ולא על פי ב"ד נידוים חשבו
הכתוב כאילו הן עכרם ובאסורן עומדין. ועוד שהיכית סופן על תחלתן שהן עוברות
ביום שלהן ובנו להן כמות והעלה עליהן הכתוב כאילו הוא כגון שנאמר או יבנה שלמה
במה : [א] ל' שלא בדק אדריג או שלא היריעוהו המצות ועונשין וכל ופכל כפני ג' הדיוטות
היו נר. ואילו נדע שבשביל דבר הוא מתגייד והואיל וכל ומכל יא מכלל העברים חוששין
לו עד שיתבאר דקדוהו. ואפילו חזר ועבר ביום הרי הוא כישראל סמוך שקדוהו
קדוהו. ומצוה להתחזיר אבדיתו מאחר שמכל נעשה כישראל. ולפיכך קיימו שמעון ושלמה
שחיתין ואעפ"כ שנגלה סודן : [א] ומפני זה אמרו הכתובים יקשים להם גרים לישראל כגנב
נדעת שרובן חזרין בשביל דבר ומפנין את ישראל. וקשה הדבר לפרש מהם אחר
מתגיידיו. צא ולמד מה אידע במדבר כמעשה הענין ובקבוצת התורה וכן רוב הגמיונות
האסמסוף היו בזה תחלה :

[illegible][illegible]

פרק ארבעה עשר

א. יצד מקבלין נדרי העדק כשיבוא יאחד להתנייר. אי אתה יודע להתנייר מן העדקם יזבדק אחריי ולא ימצא עילה. ואמרים לו מה ראית שישראל בזבן הזה דוויים ודחופים ומסמחין ומסמחין יסמחין באין עליהן.

א נט וט זע : ב אה ס'בן עס געבט : ג פאר עס טיף רעכט גוט זע : ד פאר עס גוט זע : ה קרוינען די ש נייע די י : ו פאר עס גוט זע :

להם משנה

הוא הלא לא קיבל גרים ביה חזד ובלשם דזה קדוש הוא א כל א הכהה פתוח וכו' ודכס פריך מה לא קיבל ולשם גרים איב לא פריך ביה החסון וכו' פתוח' נבי חסון' (כ' דשורש' ובלשם דזה' פ' לא לומר כ' לפי' דגרי' גרים זיל דכס' סוכר' בלשם' דא' חסון' וכו')

בבית קו

[illegible]

[illegible]

1. The first of the two main parts of the report is a general survey of the situation in the country. This part is divided into two sections: the first section deals with the political situation, and the second section deals with the economic situation.

1

CON. 1544

[illegible]

॥ श्रीगणेशाय नमः ॥

[illegible]

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[illegible]

At the

הוא נשאל: "האם אתה יכול להסביר לי את זה?"
הוא ענה: "כן, כמובן. זהו תהליך של התפתחות."
הוא נשאל: "אולי אתה יכול להסביר לי את זה?"
הוא ענה: "כן, כמובן. זהו תהליך של התפתחות."
הוא נשאל: "אולי אתה יכול להסביר לי את זה?"
הוא ענה: "כן, כמובן. זהו תהליך של התפתחות."

1944

[illegible]

[illegible]

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