

WITH OPEN ARMS

**A RESOURCE OF TEXTS AND SUPPORTING MATERIALS
TO FACILITATE DISCUSSIONS ON *KERUV*—JEWISH OUTREACH**

**SUBMITTED AS A RABBINIC THESIS
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR ORDINATION AT**

**THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
LOS ANGELES**

**BY YITZHAK JOEL MILLER
ADAR 5763 / FEBRUARY 2003**

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Rabbinic thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Morris Zuckerman z'tl, who remains my Rabbinic inspiration to this day. His simultaneously searching and committed path through Jewish life took him from progeny of a Chasidic line of Rabbis to civil engineer in Los Angeles to synagogue builder in Hawaii to Reform synagogue member, Talmud commentator, Jewish scholar, and founder of a Reconstructionist synagogue in Denver. His life serves as a continuous reminder to me that each of Judaism's streams represents but one organ of the living body that is our religion, tradition, and heritage. May I be privileged to inspire even 1/60 of the Jewish commitment he embodied and to inherit even 1/60 of his *menschlichkeit*. Through my actions may his memory be for a blessing.

This thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of these wonderful people:

- The entire staff of the UAHC's Outreach Department who serves as an inspiration to the Jewish world. A particular thank you to Dru Greenwood, director of the department for inspiring my passion for Jewish Outreach through the auspices of the Denver Outreach Program for Jewish Professionals, and to Kathy Kahn, assistant director of the department for her time and encouragement at multiple junctures during this thesis process. Thank you also to Arlene Chernow and Val Scott, whose work as Regional Outreach Directors for the UAHC have greatly influenced not only this thesis but also the course of my Rabbinate.
- Rabbi Richard Levy, Director of the Hebrew Union College Los Angeles Rabbinical School, my academic advisor, primary thesis advisor, and spiritual mentor: Richard's enthusiasm for and guidance on this project continually fueled its progress. As the only person I have met whose true *menschlik* nature rivals that of my grandfather, I am honored to call him my Rav, and to count myself among his numerous disciples.
- Rabbi Sam Joseph, Professor at Hebrew Union College Cincinnati, my secondary thesis advisor: Sam's incredible ability to meld academic and institutional knowledge, life experience, and rabbinic wisdom into a unified and inspirational whole is manifest throughout this thesis from its conception to completion.
- Rabbi Jeffrey Marx, Rabbi Steven Einstein, Rabbi Shawna Brynjegard-Bialik, and Dr. Lawrence Epstein who provided consultation on this project and who continually serve as examples of Jewish Outreach leadership.
- Rabbi Richard Litvak, Rabbi David Leib, Rabbi Alan Henkin, Rabbi Dana Magat, Rabbi Melanie Aron, and Rabbi Steven Chester, my Rabbinic mentors who have inspired and guided my path to and through Rabbinical school.
- And most certainly, my wife Shoshana, whose speedy fingers entered many of these texts electronically, but much more importantly who, together with my parents Alan and Leta, sister Rebecca, brother-in-law Danny, grandmother Beatrice, and all my extended family provide unending love and support which anchors everything I do.

IN MEMORIAM

WITH OPEN ARMS: The title for this thesis is inspired by and excerpted from the 1978 speech of Rabbi Alexander Schindler, z'l, long-standing and immediate past president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and bridge-building leader of World Jewry. It was this speech (see Appendix 3) which created the institution of Jewish Outreach as we know it today, and his vision lives within all of us every time we perform an act of *keruv*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	13
Purpose	13
The Term "Keruv"	14
Method and Process	14
Content.....	15
Structure and Organization.....	18
Translation and Typesetting Notes:.....	19
Challenges.....	19
CHAPTER 2: KERUV TO JEWS	20
Subsection i: Responsibility to Other Jews	20
All Shall Eat and be Satisfied—Deuteronomy 14:27-29	20
Correct the Sin, not the Sinner—Talmud Brachot 10a	20
The Obligation to Provide Spiritual Help—Minchat Chinuch (The Book of Mitzvah Education on Mitzvah #239, referencing Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah #80))	20
A Torah of Kindness—Talmud Sukkah 49a on Proverbs 31:26 (a woman of valor).....	21
You Shall Not Bear a Grudge—Leviticus 19:18	21
Be Disciples of Aaron—Mishnah Avot 1:12.....	21
Subsection ii: Chosenness and the Covenant	21
What Does YHVH Demand of You?—Deuteronomy 10:12-19.....	21
That You May Be a Holy People—Deuteronomy 26:18-19	21
We Are Gerim Before You, YHVH—I Chronicles 29:10-15.....	21
Subsection iii: The Continuity of the Jewish People.....	22
Not With You Alone Do I Make This Covenant—Deuteronomy 29:9-13	22
Subsection iv: Keruv to Jews vs. Keruv to Gentiles.....	22
If You Do Not Bring Those Who Are Far—Bemidbar Rabbah, Naso 8:4 on II Samuel 21:1-2 and Zephaniah 2:3	22
Raise Up Many Disciples—Avot de-Rabbi Nathan 2:9	22

CHAPTER 3: KERUV IN CONVERSION SITUATIONS.....	23
SECTION 3A: TEXTS RELATED TO CONVERSION IN GENERAL	23
Subsection i: Conversion Stories for Exploration.....	23
JETHRO'S CONVERSION.....	23
ASENATH AND JOSEPH	25
RUTH'S PATH TO JUDAISM	27
THE REDEEMED PROSTITUTE.....	28
Subsection ii: Regarding Differences Between a Convert and a Born Jew or Lack Thereof	30
TEXTS WHICH SUGGEST THAT CONVERTS ARE EQUAL TO JEWS.....	30
The Convert Is Like the Born Jew Only with respect to The Passover?—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Pisha on Exodus 12:49	30
The Religious Duties of the Torah—Sifre to Numbers 71:2 on Numbers 9:14	30
Why Is "One Law" Stated Three Times?—Don Isaac Abravanel on Numbers 15:14-16.....	30
Your Wife shall Be as a Fruitful Vine—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:3	31
How Do We Know Converts were Included?—Talmud Shavuot 39a on Deuteronomy 29:13.....	31
A Blessing for Women, Converts, and Slaves?—Sifre to Numbers 39:6 on Numbers 6:23-27.....	31
TEXTS WHICH SUGGEST THAT CONVERTS ARE SUPERIOR TO JEWS.....	31
Onkelos Divides His Father's Estate—Tosefta, Demai 6:12-13 on Mishna Demai 6:10.....	31
Blessing for the Righteous—Prayer Liturgy Weekday Amidah	32
Dear Are Converts, for the Holy One Adds to their Name—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Exodus 4:18.....	32
With Special Friendship and Excessive Benevolence—Philo of Alexandria, De Monarchia 1:7 on Exodus 22:20.....	32
The Convert will Be a Conspicuous Object—Philo of Alexandria, De Execrationibus 4 on Deuteronomy 29:14	32
As if He Did a Kindness to All Israel—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Deuteronomy 10:18.....	33
TEXTS WHICH SUGGEST THAT CONVERTS ARE INFERIOR TO JEWS.....	33
Israel Is Given Somewhat Higher Status—Talmud Kiddushin 70b on Ezekiel 37:27	33
A Priest Takes Precedence Over a Levite—Mishna Horayot 3:8.....	33
He Who Vows Not to Derive Benefit—Tosefta Nedarim 2:4	33
The Convert Brings First Fruits but Does Not Make the Declaration—Mishnah Bikkurim 1:4 ...	33
TEXTS WHICH DO NOT CLEARLY IMPLY A HIERARCHY	34
A Soul Which Has the Purpose of Inspiring Converts—Zohar, Shemot II 99a on Exodus 23:9....	34
The Four Assemblies—Sifre to Deuteronomy, Piska 247 on Deuteronomy 23:2.....	34
Why Do They Always Quarrel?—Legends of the Jews, Vol. III pp. 284-285	34
You Will Enjoy the Fruit of Your Labor—Bemidbar Rabbah, 8:9, on Psalm 128:2	34

SECTION 3B: TEXTS FOR DISCUSSING CONVERSION WITH BORN JEWS 35

Subsection i: Regarding Israel's Mission of Conversion to Judaism 35

TEXTS WHICH SUGGEST THAT PEOPLE WILL SEEK JUDAISM..... 35

- Zebulun: Agent between Israel and the Nations—Legends of the Jews, Vol. III pp. 459-460 35
- A Person from Amalek they shall not Receive—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek..... 35
- The House of YHVH will Be Established as the Highest of Mountains—Isaiah 2:2-3 35
- They Shall Cleave to the House of Jacob—Isaiah 14:1 36

TEXTS WHICH SUGGEST THAT JEWS SHOULD SEEK CONVERTS..... 36

- Emulating Abraham—Avot d'Rabbi Nathan 36
- Make Him Beloved as Did Abraham—Sifre to Deuteronomy, Piska 32 on Deuteronomy 6:5..... 36
- If You Do Not Bring Those Who Are Far—Bemidbar Rabbah, Naso 8:4 on II Samuel 21:1-2 and Zephaniah 2:3 36
- Shall We Burden the Community for the Sake of these Converts?—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:4 on II Samuel 12:2 and Joshua 10:6..... 36
- Only the Portion of His Life Spent Making Converts—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II p. 3 37
- One Must Establish Outposts of Torah—Madregat ha-Adam 37
- Be Disciples of Aaron—Mishnah Avot 1:12..... 37
- Whoever Teaches Torah to His Friend's Son—Talmud Sanhedrin 19b, 99b 37
- A Call to Judaism—Bereshit Rabbah 39:16 on Genesis 12:16..... 37
- They will Dedicate Themselves to Me—Pesikta Rabbati 35.160a on Proverbs 31:10 38
- They will be My Martyrs—Pesikta Rabbati 38

TEXTS WHICH SUGGEST THAT GOD SEEKS CONVERTS 38

- A Reminder to Esau, the Twin—Pesikta d'Rav Kahana 38
- God Attaches all Righteous People to Israel—Shir Hashirim Rabbah 6:10 on Song of Songs 6:2 38
- Exile for the Purpose of Adding Converts—Talmud P'sachim 87b 38
- They Shall Spring up as the Grass—Isaiah 44:3-5 39

Subsection ii: Regarding Israel's Mission of Conversion to Monotheism..... 40

TEXTS WHICH SUGGEST THAT PEOPLE WILL SEEK MONOTHEISM 40

- Many Peoples and Mighty Nations will Come—Zechariah 8:22 40
- It will be a Unique Day—Zechariah 14:7, 9..... 40
- A Unique Destiny—Prayer Liturgy: Aleinu..... 40

TEXTS WHICH SUGGEST THAT GOD SEEKS UNITY OF BELIEF 40

- Elijah's Mission—Legends of the Jews, Vol. IV pp. 201-202..... 40
- They Shall Say: "You are My God"—Hosea 2:25 41
- One Who Beholds Idolatry—Tosefta Berachot 6:2 on Mishna Berachot 9:1 41

TEXTS WHICH SUGGEST THAT JEWS SHOULD PROMOTE MONOTHEISM..... 41

- Abraham's Tree—Legends of the Jews, Vol. I p. 242..... 41
- Jacob and Esau—Legends of the Jews, Vol. I p. 316 41
- Abraham Converted the Men; Sarah the Women—Bereshit Rabbah 84:4 on Genesis 37:1 42
- The Responsibility to Call all People—Maimonides, Sefer Mitzvot, Positive Commandment #3 42
- You Shall Cause YHVH to be Loved—Sifre to Deuteronomy, Piska 32 on Deuteronomy 6:5..... 42
- They Could not Make One Gnat—Bereshit Rabbah 39:14 on Genesis 12:5 42

Subsection iii: Approaches to / Methods of Conversion.....	43
REACHING OUT TO POTENTIAL CONVERTS	43
A Hand of Welcome—Vayikra Rabbah 2:9 on Leviticus 1:2	43
Befriend Him and Do Not Repel Him—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Jeremiah 23:23.....	43
GENTILES WHO PERCEIVE GREATNESS IN JUDAISM	43
Onkelos and the Troops of Romans—Talmud Avodah Zarah 11a	43
The Jewish Sense of Justice—Legends of the Jews, Vol. IV pp. 110-111.....	44
Zebulun: Agent between Israel and the Nations—Legends of the Jews, Vol. III pp. 459-460	44
PROMOTING THE BENEFITS OF JUDAISM.....	45
Moses and Jethro Study Torah—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Exodus 18:7-9	45
Abraham Erects Missionary Altars—Legends of the Jews, Vol. I pp. 219.....	45
Issachar's Fruit—Bereshit Rabbah 98:12 on Genesis 49:14.....	45
Come with Us and Be Eyes for Us—Numbers 10:29-33	45
PROMOTING JUDAISM THROUGH KINDNESS	46
Abraham's Four Gates—Legends of the Jews, Vol. I p. 270.....	46
Job's Severest Affliction—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II pp. 228-230.....	46
Subsection iv: Regarding Interactions with /Feelings about Converts	48
INTERACTIONS WITH CONVERTS.....	48
Only the Portion of His Life Spent Making Converts—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II p. 3	48
Boaz' Impression of Ruth—Ruth 2:8-12.....	48
Why Are Idols Called "gods"—D'varim Rabbah 2:18 on Exodus 22:20.....	48
Rabbi Judah Praises the Romans—Talmud Shabbat 33b	48
IMPRESSIONS ABOUT CONVERTS	49
Your Children are like Olive Plants—Bemidbar Rabbah, 8:9, on Psalm 128:3.....	49
Blessing for the Righteous—Prayer Liturgy: Weekday Amidah.....	49
Dearer than Jewish Saints—Simeon ben Yohai, Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer	49
Converts Become Roots like Israel—Vayikra Rabbah on Hosea 14:8	49
Converts shall Become Essential—Vayikra Rabbah 1:2 on Hosea 14:8	49
Dear Are Converts, for the Holy One Adds to their Name—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Exodus 4:18.....	50
The Gates are Always Open—Shemot Rabbah 19:4 on Job 31:32.....	50
Where to Place the Blessing for the Converts—Tosefta Berakhot 3:25 on Psalm 29	50
HOW ONE SHOULD INTERACT WITH CONVERTS.....	50
Do Not Remind the Convert of His Pork-Eating Past—Various Midrashim based on Mishna Baba Metzia 4:10 (Cf. Tosefta Baba Metzia 3.25, Talmud Baba Metzia 59b, Sifre to Deuteronomy Piska 281, Talmud Gerim 4.1, Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, Mishnat Rabbi Shimon)	50
The Torah Was Given in Public—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Bahodesh on Exodus 19:2	51
Abraham Waited to be Circumcised—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Nezikin on Genesis 17:1ff.....	51
Love both Neighbor and Convert as Yourself—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Leviticus 19:33.....	51
48 Reminders to Love the Ger—Midrash Tanhuma, Vayikra three on Deuteronomy 10:18.....	51

The Judge Prejudiced against a Convert—Mechilta d’Rabbi Shimon.....	52
INSECURITIES ABOUT A CONVERT’S JUDAISM	52
A Convert who Changes His Name—Tosefta Gittin 6:4.....	52
Conversion in a Gentile Society—Tosefta Shabbat 8:5.....	52
Their Destiny was at Mt. Sinai—Talmud Tractate Shabbat 145b-146b on Deuteronomy 29:14..	52
INSECURITIES ABOUT ONE’S OWN JUDAISM BECAUSE OF CONVERTS	53
If the Israelites had not Witnessed the Thunders—Midrash Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 6	53
Moses’ Insecurity—Yalkut Shimoni on Deut 10:18.....	53
Subsection v: Regarding Interactions with Potential Converts.....	54
INTERACTIONS / ATTITUDES WHICH ENCOURAGE CONVERSION.....	54
Akilas, Hadrian Caesar’s Nephew—Midrash Tanhuma, Mishpatim 5	54
Why would Moses Speak Alluringly?—Rashi on Exodus 18:8 based on Mechilta.....	54
Befriend Him and do not Repel Him—Mechilta d’Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Jeremiah 23:23	54
Words Which Penetrate Their Hearts—Nathan of Nemirov’s Paper.....	55
A Compliment to Jethro—Rashi on Exodus 18:5.....	55
A Sack Full of Nuts—Shir haShirim Rabbah 6:11 on Numbers 23:10.....	55
A Hand of Welcome—Vayikra Rabbah 2:9 on Leviticus 1:2	55
Why Should You Be a Stranger?—Midrash Tanhuma, Lech l’cha 6 on Jeremiah 14:8	55
INTERACTIONS / ATTITUDES WHICH DISCOURAGE CONVERSION.....	56
Judah Stands Up before the Assembly—Tosefta Yadayim 2:17-19	56
They Ought Not to Have Repelled Timna—Talmud Sanhedrin 99b	56
We Are Commanded to Love Converts—Responsa Rambam (ed. Freimann), no. 42	56
The Man who Violates is own Teachings—Avot d’Rabbi Nathan.....	56
ASSESSING A POTENTIAL CONVERT	57
Perhaps They Will Become Converts with Pure Intent—Jerusalem Talmud Kiddushin iv:i, 65b	57
When Naomi Saw How Determined She Was—Ruth 1:14-19.....	57
The House of Amalek They Shall Not Receive—Mechilta d’Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek....	57
Repel with the Left, Draw Near with the Right—Talmud Sotah 47a	57
The Three Types of Converts—Yalkut Shimoni on Deuteronomy 10:18.....	57
SECTION 3C: TEXTS FOR DISCUSSING CONVERSION WITH PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS	59
Subsection i: Motivations to Conversion.....	59
ACCEPTABLE AND UNACCEPTABLE REASONS FOR PURSUING CONVERSION.....	59
Perhaps They Will Become Converts with Pure Intent—Jerusalem Talmud Kiddushin iv:i, 65b	59
The Three Types of Converts—Yalkut Shimoni on Deuteronomy 10:18.....	60
ASSESSING ONE’S MOTIVATION.....	62
Shall I Not Receive and Exalt Converts?—Shemot Rabbah 19:4 on Exodus 12:43	62
If the Israelites Had Not Witnessed the Thunders—Midrash Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 6	62
What Goodness Caused Jethro to Rejoice?—Mechilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Exodus 18:9.....	63

IMPLICATIONS OF ONE'S MOTIVATION.....	66
A Person's Sacred Things—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Numbers 5:5-10	66
Happy is Everyone—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:1	67
Did Jethro Convert Before or After Sinai?—Parshanut on Exodus 18:5	68
OTHER PEOPLE'S INFLUENCE ON THE CONVERSION DECISION / MOTIVATION.....	70
Turn Away Three Times—Ruth 1:8-19 (excerpted).....	70
Moses Endorses Judaism to Jethro—Exodus 18:5-12	71
Subsection ii: Emotions Associated with Conversion.....	73
IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION.....	73
A Sack Full of Nuts—Shir haShirim Rabbah 6:11 on Numbers 23:10.....	73
The Torah Was Given In Public—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Bahodesh on Exodus 19:2	73
Jethro's Descendants—Legends of the Jews, Vol. III pp. 75-76	74
Judah Stands Up before the Assembly—Tosefta Yadayim 2:17-19	76
Six Times Shammai is More Lenient—Mishnah Eduyyot 5:2	77
Boaz' Impression of Ruth—Ruth 2:8-12.....	78
Dear Are Converts, for the Holy One Adds to Their Name—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Exodus 4:18.....	80
THE CONVERSION—MAKING THE DECISION.....	81
Jethro Converts—Exodus 18:9-12 (excerpted).....	81
When Naomi Saw How Determined She Was—Ruth 1:14-19.....	81
THE CONVERSION—BEFORE AND AFTER	83
When May He Eat His Passover Offering?—Mishnah Pesahim 8:8	83
When Is He Obligated to Take Hallah?—Tosefta Hallah 1:12.....	83
A Convert Who Has Not Yet Brought Offerings—Tosefta Keritot 1:11	84
FEELINGS ABOUT AND TRANSITIONING FROM PRE-CONVERSION LIFE	86
You have not Lost Anything by Converting—Sifre to Numbers 78:1 on Numbers 10:29-33	86
A Compliment to Jethro—Rashi on Exodus 18:5.....	87
INTERACTIONS WITH PRE-CONVERSION LIFE	89
I Must Return to My Own Land—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Numbers 10:31	89
Dear Are Converts, for the Holy One Adds to Their Name—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Exodus 4:18.....	89
Onkelos and the Troops of Romans—Talmud Avodah Zarah 11a	90
INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS DURING THE CONVERSION PROCESS.....	92
They Ought Not to Have Repelled Timna—Talmud Sanhedrin 99b	92
What Is a Lamp to the Sun and the Moon?—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Numbers 10:31	93
Ruth Defies Naomi—Ruth 1:8-19 (excerpted).....	93
Do Not Remind the Convert of His Pork-Eating Past—Various Midrashim Based on Mishna Baba Metzia 4:10 (Cf. Tosefta Baba Metzia 3.25, Talmud Baba Metzia 59b, Sifre to Deuteronomy Piska 281, Talmud Gerim 4.1, Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, Mishnat Rabbi Shimon)..	95

Abraham Waited to be Circumcised—Mechilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Nezikin on Genesis 17:1 ff.....	96
Subsection iii: Regarding Converts and their Families.....	98
PERCEPTION OF FAMILY OF ORIGIN	98
Judah Stands Up Before the Assembly—Tosefta Yadayim 2:17-19	98
You Will Enjoy the Fruit of Your Labor—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:2	99
The Convert Brings First Fruits but does not Make the Declaration—Mishnah Bikkurim 1:4... ..	100
A Double Portion of Happiness—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:2.....	101
TEXTS RELATED TO FAMILY IN GENERAL, OR EXTENDED FAMILY	103
Moses Welcomes Jethro—Exodus 18:7-10.....	103
Akilas, Hadrian Caesar's Nephew—Midrash Tanhuma, Mishpatim 5.....	103
Jethro and His Grandchildren—Exodus 18:5-6.....	105
Converts Become Roots like Israel—Vayikra Rabbah on Hosea 14:8	105
TEXTS RELATED TO ONE'S CHILDREN.....	107
By Merit of your Table—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:4.....	107
No one Loved Torah like Jethro—Sifre to Numbers 78:1 on Numbers 10:29.....	108
TEXTS RELATED TO ONE'S SPOUSE.....	109
Your Wife shall be as a Fruitful Vine—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:3.....	109
Abraham's First Test—Legends of the Jews Vol. I pp. 217-218.....	109
The Man Who Violates His Own Teachings—Avot d'Rabbi Nathan	110
CHAPTER 4: KERUV IN INTERFAITH SITUATIONS	112
Subsection i: Chosenness/Distinctiveness of the Jewish People	112
Israel Must Stand Apart—Shemot Rabbah 15:7 on Numbers 23:9	112
Subsection ii: Marriage of a Jew to a Non-Jew.....	112
Joseph Inspires Asenath—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II pp. 172-174.....	112
Do Not Take a Wife from the Daughters of Canaan—Genesis 28:1-9	113
It Is Better That She Marry You, Jacob—Genesis 29:16-19	113
Subsection iii: Gentiles in Jewish Settings.....	113
They Shall Have an Inheritance with You—Ezekiel 47:21-23	113
A Mixed Multitude Went with Them—Exodus 12:37-38	113
Subsection iv: Children of Interfaith Marriages	114
The Children of Joseph and Asenath—Genesis 41:50-52, 46:19-20, 48:3,5 and 48:8-16.....	114
How Moses' Children Were Raised—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Exodus 18:2-3	114
Moses' Children, Gershom and Eliezer—Exodus 18:1-4.....	115

CHAPTER 5: KERUV TO / ATTITUDES ABOUT GENTILES 116

Subsection i: The Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue 116

Gentiles are People, too—Midrash Tanhuma, Vayakhel 8 on Leviticus 18:5 and Numbers 15:16	116
They Shall Have an Inheritance with You—Ezekiel 47:21-23	116
One Torah and One Law Code—Numbers 15:13-16	116
A House of Prayer for All—Isaiah 56:7	116
All Shall Keep the Passover—Numbers 9:14	117
What Did They Sacrifice Before the Tabernacle?—Tosefta Zebahim 13:1-2 on Mishna Zebahim 14:4	117
A Mixed Multitude Went with Them—Exodus 12:37-38	117
These Shall Not Enter the Congregation—Deuteronomy 23:3-5	117
A Ger May Not Be King—Deuteronomy 17:15	117
All shall Rejoice before YHVH—Deuteronomy 16:11	117

Subsection ii: God's Relationship with Gentiles..... 118

Beloved are the Gerim—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Nezikin on Leviticus 25:55; Isaiah 56:6; Isaiah 61:6; Isaiah 41:8; Deut 10:18; Gen 17:13; Exodus 18:38; Isaiah 56:7; Psalm 121:4; Psalm 146:9; Genesis 23:4; Psalm 119:19; I Chronicles 29:15; Psalm 29:13	118
The Stag Who Joined the Flock—Midrash on Psalms 8 on Psalm 146:9	118
In God's Image—Genesis 1:26-27	119
Who Sets Us Apart—Prayer Liturgy Havdallah, 4 th blessing	119
What does YHVH Demand of You?—Deuteronomy 10:12-19	119
All are God's Handiwork—Talmud Sanhedrin 98b	119
I Will Bring Them to My Holy Mountain—Isaiah 56:6-8	119
He Whom the King Loves—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Nezikin on Deuteronomy 10:17-18	120
I Will Bless Those Who Bless You—Genesis 12:3	120
Picking the Good out of the Bad—Pesikta d'Rab Kahana, Tractate baHodesh on Leviticus 20:26	120
Not With You Alone Do I Make This Covenant—Deuteronomy 29:9-13	120
A Very Practical Law—Nahmanides On Exodus 23:9	120
Giving the Ger Food and Clothing—Deuteronomy 10:17-19	121
Gentiles are People, too—Midrash Tanhuma, Vayakhel 8 on Leviticus 18:5 and Numbers 15:16	121
Happy is Everyone—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:1	121

Subsection iii: Jews' Relationship with Gentiles..... 122

Job's Severest Affliction—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II pp. 228-230	122
You Shall Love Your Fellow as Yourself—Leviticus 19:17-18	122
Correct the Sin, Not the Sinner—Talmud Brachot 10a	122
Treat the Ger with Humility—Sifre to Numbers 80:2 on Numbers 10:29-32	123
You were Gerim in the Land of Egypt—Exodus 22:20	123
Welcoming One's Fellow Man—Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, Tractate Amalek on Exodus 18:12	123
The Sin That Cannot be Expiated—Tosafot to Bava Kamma 10:15	123

Be Disciples of Aaron—Mishnah Avot 1:12.....	123
No Man Ever Greeted him First—Talmud Berachot 17a	123
Judaism Cares How Gentiles View Jews—Minchat Chinuch, Commentary to Sefer HaChinuch	124
Do Not Follow the Other Nations—Leviticus 20:23-24.....	124
Israel Must Stand Apart—Shemot Rabbah 15:7 on Numbers 23:9	124
Hold Your Unbridled Tongue—Philo of Alexandria, De Monarchia 1:7 on Exodus 22:20	124
Do Not Loathe an Edomite or an Egyptian—Deuteronomy 23:8-9.....	125
Admit All in a Friendly Manner—Flavius Josephus, Against Apion II:29.....	125
Repel with the Left, Draw Near with the Right—Talmud Sotah 47a	125
You Shall Not Oppress a Ger—Exodus 23:9	125
A Mixed Multitude Went with Them—Exodus 12:37-38	125
These Shall Not Enter the Congregation—Deuteronomy 23:3-5	125
What Does YHVH Demand of You?—Deuteronomy 10:12-19.....	125
I Will Scatter this People—II Baruch 1:4.....	126
Subsection iv: Jews' Responsibility to Gentiles in Secular Settings.....	127
Judge Righteously Every Man—Deuteronomy 1:16	127
Abraham and the Three Men—Genesis 18:1-5	127
Abraham Did Not Insult God—Midrash Tanchuma, Yashan on Genesis 18:1-3	127
Help Your Neighbor Lift His Burden—Exodus 23:4-5.....	127
Leave the Remnants for the Ger—Deuteronomy 24:19-21	127
The Ger Should Not Lodge in the Street—Job 31:32.....	127
You Shall Not Pervert the Judgment of the Ger—Deuteronomy 24:17.....	128
The Gentile Poor—Mishnah Gittin 5:8	128
They May Offer Greetings—Mishnah Gittin 6:9 / Shevit 4:3	128
Collect Equally from Israelites and Gentiles—Tosefta Gittin 3:13-14	128
Onkelos Divides His Father's Estate—Tosefta Demai 6:12-13 on Mishna Demai 6:10.....	128
Lending with Interest—Deuteronomy 23:20-21.....	128
Returning Lost Property—Deuteronomy 22:1-4	129
Subsection v: Jews' Responsibility to Gentiles in Jewish Settings.....	130
You shall Love him as Yourself—Leviticus 19:33-34	130
One Law for Everyone—Exodus 12:48-49	130
You must Aid the Ger—Leviticus 25:35.....	130
Job's Severest Affliction—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II pp. 228-230.....	130
Sabbath for the Ger (1) Exodus 20:8-11	131
Sabbath for the Ger (2)—Exodus 23:12	131
You and the Ger Shall Rejoice in the Harvest—Deuteronomy 26:1-11	131
Tithe to the Ger—Deuteronomy 26:12-13	132
The Ger shall Come and Eat—Deuteronomy 14:27-29.....	132
The Ger's Servant—Deuteronomy 24:14.....	132
Subsection vi: Jews' Perceptions of Gentiles	133
I Like Them for Three Things—Talmud Berachot 8b.....	133
Because you were the Humblest of All Peoples—Talmud Hullin 89a	133
There is Wisdom Among the Nations—Eicha Rabbah 2:13 on Lamentations 2:9	133

Come with us and be Eyes for us—Numbers 10:29-33	133
Our Friends and Kinsmen—Philo of Alexandria, De Poenitentia I and II on Jeremiah 14:8	134
CHAPTER 6: MODERN KERUV TEXTS	135
Raising Consciousness—As Quoted in Outreach to the Unaffiliated, p.9	135
A Role Model for the Nations—The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues p. 193 entry on “Chosen-ness”	135
Sources of Tension—Meryl Nadell, ASCW, Director of Inter marriage Outreach Service, Jewish Family Service of MetroWest	135
There is Nothing Like Judaism—What Judaism Offers You, p.18	136
We Need More Jewish Human Beings—Outreach to the Unaffiliated, p.1	136
The Torah is Everyman’s Land—As quoted by David W. Belin in the Haggadah published by the Conservative Movement	136
Converts Remind Jews of Their Iniquities—Encyclopedia Judaica (Converts)	136
Be Part of Tradition—What Judaism Offers You, p.17	136
Common Values—Putting Human Values First...Daniel Yankelovich, Telematics, Inc.	136
Bring them Closer to Our Communal Standard—Approaches to Inter marriage p. 2	137
Do Not Become Too Friendly—The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues p.136 ...	137
High Praise for Joseph—Samson Raphael Hirsch on Genesis 41:50	138
APPENDICES	139
APPENDIX 1 : DEFINITIONS OF BIBLICAL TERMS FOR STRANGER	139
CATEGORIES OF INHABITANTS OF ISRAEL	139
APPENDIX 2 : UAHC OUTREACH COMMISSION MISSION STATEMENT	147
APPENDIX 3 : OUTREACH: THE CASE FOR A MISSIONARY JUDAISM	148
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY	154
JEWISH SOURCE TEXTS	154
Biblical Period (to 200BCE):	154
Rabbinic Period (200BCE-500CE):	154
Midrashic Period (500CE-1100CE):	155
Halachic Period (1100CE-1700CE):	155
MODERN COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS	156
MODERN SECONDARY SOURCES ON TEXTS RELATED TO OUTREACH	156
REFERENCE WORKS	157
MODERN WORKS ON OUTREACH RELATED TOPICS	157

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The intention of this thesis is to begin work on and demonstrate an example chapter of a comprehensive resource of Jewish texts used to facilitate conversations on Jewish Outreach. For purposes of this work, Outreach is defined as “working to make the arms of Judaism feel as open and welcoming as possible to everyone who seeks a connection to Judaism.” (For a detailed history of Jewish Outreach see the Rabbinical Thesis of Shawna Brynjegard-Bialik, Hebrew Union College, 2002) There is a twofold purpose for using texts to facilitate these conversations. First, using texts provides a Jewish anchor to such discussions. It is fully acknowledged that often Outreach purposes are eisegetically “read into” these texts, but it is this author’s contention that interpreting texts as relevant to one’s own generation has always been part of the Jewish textual enterprise, as has been the affirmation that Jewish texts have a message for every generation. Second, using texts provides a common reference to focus attention and stimulate discussion. Again, this author claims that using texts as a “mirror to one’s soul” is a long-standing tradition in Judaism.

It is anticipated that this resource would be used by and useful to Jewish Outreach professionals and lay-leaders who wish to inspire discussions on various topics of interest to the Jewish Outreach endeavor, and who wish to ground those discussions in Jewish tradition. It is the author’s goal not only to inspire these discussions with analysis and questions provided, but perhaps more importantly to inspire further analysis and additional questions thereby activating Jewish Outreach energy latent in so much of the modern Jewish population.

Many resources are available which discuss Jewish Outreach from a sociological perspective. Many resources are also available which attempt to historically chronicle Jewish Outreach (particularly conversion) in Biblical and Rabbinic times. A significant number of these resources are identified in the bibliography. However, I was not able to find and am not aware of any resource that made texts available and accessible to the general Outreach worker. This lack of accessible text often leaves the Outreach worker to rely on hearsay, personal opinion, secular logic, or pragmatic desires to develop opinions about Outreach issues. It is this gap which the author hopes to fill with this resource. By

providing this resource, the author hopes that Jewish text and tradition can become a foundation on which to base discussions on Jewish Outreach.

The Term "Keruv"

The Hebrew word *keruv*, best translated here as "drawing near" is chosen in place of terms like "outreach" in the section titles of this thesis. This term is chosen consciously in place of terms laden with secular implications (like recruiting, missionizing, proselytizing) to inspire the reader to contemplate the purpose and method of their Jewish Outreach work. It is emblematic of this mission that from the root of this word, we also derive the Hebrew word *korban*—the sacrificial offering brought by Jews and often by Gentiles to the priests at the ancient *mishkan* (dwelling-place of YHVH) in the Wilderness of Sinai and the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. These *korbanot* were brought sometimes voluntarily and sometimes from a sense of duty to God but always for the same purpose: to *karev*—to draw near to God, and to draw God's presence nearer to us. May this work and all the work of the dedicated Jewish Outreach workers of the world inspire the same effect.

Method and Process

The search for texts for this thesis was accomplished in four different ways. First, the author undertook a text search in the following texts as defined by the Bar Ilan Responsa Project v 8.0:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • <i>Tanach</i> | • <i>Tosefot</i> |
| • <i>Parshanut on Torah</i> | • <i>Jerusalem Talmud</i> |
| • <i>Mishna</i> | • <i>Midrash Collections (both Aggadic and Halachic Midrash)</i> |
| • <i>Tosefta</i> | • <i>Zohar</i> |
| • <i>Babylonian Talmud (including minor tractates)</i> | • <i>Rambam's Mishneh Torah.</i> |

Searches were conducted on the following key Hebrew roots and terms:

- | | |
|---|--|
| • <i>'hb</i> coincident with <i>gvr</i> | • <i>tachat kanfei hashchinah</i> |
| • <i>ki gerim hayitem</i> | • <i>'l</i> coincident with <i>gvr</i> |
| • <i>gvr</i> coincident with <i>mitzrayim</i> | • <i>l'</i> coincident with <i>gvr</i> |

The results of this text search were then subjectively filtered for relevance, interest, accessibility, and usefulness to the purpose of this resource. Second, the author examined numerous comprehensive, reliable, and respected modern collections of texts (such as *Sefer haAggadah* and Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews*) which could be accessed via subject index entries on key terms like conversion, hospitality, foreigner, and stranger. Third, the author surveyed secondary sources on Outreach and related topics for references to texts on the subject, including encyclopedic articles on key terms. Lastly, the author surveyed various Jewish Outreach professionals in person for any texts they already used in Outreach contexts.

The texts were then organized as described in the *Content* and *Structure and Organization* sections below. In the section: "Texts for Discussing Conversion with People in the Process", three resources are provided for each text in the order they were created: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT, SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT, AND SOME QUESTIONS ON THE TEXT. These resources are provided in the order created to give some sense of the author's thought process. In all cases, the resources are titled beginning with the word "some" specifically to remind the reader that the supporting material is only one person's attempt to extract Outreach-related meaning from the text, and that the ultimate purpose is to facilitate and stimulate the creativity of the user. First, a resource titled SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT gives guidance to the author's exploration of the text. The author undertook this exploration with the specific intent of uncovering outreach issues in the text. Second, a resource titled SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT gives guidance and quick-reference to Outreach issues the author sees evident within the text. Last, a resource titled SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION enables readers to use these resources easily to facilitate discussion, or to create their own questions.

Content

These texts, and the supporting material provided with them is neither intended to be a comprehensive representation of all texts available on the subject, nor a comprehensive analysis of the texts presented. What is offered is simply a subjective judgment of relevant, interesting and discussion-inspiring material for Jewish Outreach, and an attempt to organize the material around, articulate issues of interest to, and generate discussion regarding Jewish Outreach. In some cases where a given text seemed capable of evoking discussion in multiple areas, texts or excerpts from texts are duplicated in multiple sections or subsections, though of course with different intentions and issues in each section or subsection. In the case where a given text suggested discussion on more than two subsections within a given section (such

as the first chapter of Ruth and its relevance to many subsections of conversion), that text is simply presented at the beginning of the section as a "text related to [the subject] in general".

It is important to note that material presented in this thesis is offered in various states of completion. The subsection "Texts for Discussing Conversion with People in the Process" is the *only* section in this thesis that the author considers ready for submission to the final work. Here follows a description of the content and level of completeness of each section of this thesis, and will also serve as an self-critique and assessment of additional work required:

1. *Keruv* to Jews: Most of the texts in this chapter were filtered from the research for other chapters, particularly those chapters related to conversion. A number of the texts related to conversion could also be used in this chapter, particularly those which simply use terms like "bringing people closer to Torah" or "bringing people under the wings of the *Shechinah*". Significant additional text research is required in this chapter before accurately organizing this material, and before producing supporting material on this section. This text research will likely be greatly facilitated by secondary sources produced by the *Baal T'shuvah* and Lubavitch movements of Judaism for whom *Keruv* to Jews is of central importance.
2. *Keruv* in Conversion Situations: This is the most complete chapter of this thesis. The author believes that the text research in this chapter is satisfactory to the goals of this resource. Supporting material making these texts usable by the intended audience is provided for the "Texts for Discussing Conversion with People in the Process" section, and the author considers that section ready for submission to a publisher and for evaluative use by Outreach professionals and lay-leaders.
3. *Keruv* in Interfaith Situations: Similar to item one, most of the texts in this chapter were filtered out of research for other chapters. Significant additional text research is required in this chapter before accurately organizing this material, and before producing supporting material on this chapter. This text research will likely be greatly facilitated by secondary sources on interfaith marriages (particularly *halachic responsa*) and on interfaith aspects of Bible study undertaken by academic Bible and Religious Studies scholars.
4. *Keruv* to / Attitudes about Gentiles: The text research in this section is more complete than items 1 or 3, but less complete than item 2. Many texts in this section derived from text searches on the Hebrew words such as *ger*, and subject-index searches on terms like "hospitality". Some

additional text research, particularly text searches on terms related to hospitality and terms related to "brotherhood" or "brethren" will be required in this chapter before accurately organizing this material, and before producing supporting material on this chapter.

5. **Modern *Keruv* Texts:** This chapter developed during the course of thesis research, and is drawn exclusively from secondary sources used in the process of text research. No specific attempt was made to find modern texts, though it is this author's opinion that the final work should include such texts. Including these texts would obviously require additional research, and might even warrant production of texts (such as poetry) on various subjects for inclusion in the final work.
6. **General *Keruv* Texts:** This chapter is not included in this thesis, but it is this author's opinion that a section of texts enabling discussions related to the enterprise of Jewish Outreach in general would be useful in this work's final iteration. Texts in this chapter would relate to rationale for and approaches to Jewish Outreach in general, rather than relating to specific subjects.
7. **Appendices:** Three appendices are included. First, an appendix discussing definitions of various Biblical and Rabbinic terms related to Jewish Outreach is included in this thesis, reprinted from *CONVERSION TO JUDAISM: From the Biblical Period to the Present*: chapter three, by Joseph R. Rosenbloom. Permission for subsequent use of this section is not provided here and should be obtained from the original author if reproduction is needed. Second, The Mission Statement of the Commission on Jewish Outreach as of February 2002 is presented. The Department of Outreach has since merged with the Department of Synagogue Affiliation to form the Department of Outreach and Synagogue Community. The mission statement for the new joint department is not currently available on the website as of the time of completion of this thesis (February 2003). The mission statement as of February 2002 is included here as it was foundational for the research of this thesis. Third, Rabbi Alexander Schindler's address to the UAHC in 1978 which instigated the formation of the Commission on Jewish Outreach is included for historical reference.
8. **Intended Additions:** Though not included at this time, a subject index is anticipated for the work's final iteration. Also intended are providing representative textual "sayings or quotes" for each section or subsection. The following appendices and additions should be considered for the work's final iteration based on input from Jewish Outreach professionals:
 - Outreach texts from or for each weekly Torah portion
 - Key quotes on Jewish Outreach, potentially related to each section

- Bibliography of discussion triggers such as films, documentaries, cultural references, etc.
 - Capsule biographies of converts in Jewish History
 - Curricular materials including pedagogic activities and teaching guides for facilitating *keruv* exploration in Jewish schools
 - Discussion on modern Outreach questions
 - Issues specific to the “double-ger” (e.g. someone who is both gay and a convert)
 - Poetry or other writings specifically composed for the final work
 - *Halachic* citations related to Outreach
 - Facilitators’ guide for Outreach discussions
9. Annotated Bibliography: An annotated bibliography is provided based on works consulted and works used. Though not intended to be a comprehensive listing of all works on the subject, the author hopes that this bibliography itself will be a helpful resource for Jewish Outreach workers.

Structure and Organization

It was originally envisioned that the texts in this work would be sorted based on their relevance to each of the seven specifically identified goals of the Reform Jewish Outreach Commission as articulated in the Commission’s Mission Statement (see Appendix 1). Reflecting upon the texts’ organization as work progressed, and discussing potential organizational options with numerous Jewish Outreach professionals, it became this author’s opinion that the resource would be most effective if the texts were first sorted based on the people present at a given discussion (rather than by subject), and only then according to the topic to be discussed.

This organization was chosen because it best reflected how the author expects the resource to be used—one would typically have a general idea of the composition of the group whose members wished to explore a text, and then would know or decide the issue for discussion. Organizations by source, by character in the text, chronological organization, etc., were also considered, but organization methods such as these were rejected as better suited to a work intended for academic purposes and less well suited to the practical intentions of this resource.

The different groups of people present is organized as a progression from those most predictably found engaged in Jewish organizations (born Jews) to those least predictably found engaged in Jewish organizations (Gentiles). In between lie two categories of people—interfaith couples/groups comprised of both Jews and Gentiles; and people exploring conversion who find themselves transitioning from not Jewish to being Jewish. Subsections within these divisions were then selected by the author on two bases—Outreach issues which the texts themselves seemed to suggest, and issues known to the author to be relevant in the field of Jewish Outreach.

Translation and Typesetting Notes:

1. In general, relevant source-texts are quoted when the text offered is commenting on a previous text. BIBLICAL TEXTS are cited in SMALL CAPS, while *Rabbinic texts* (such as *Mishna* for which *Tosefta* or *Gemara* are present) are cited in *italics*.
2. The author has chosen to render the 4-letter unpronounceable name of God as "YHVH" so that readers may choose how to render this term according to their own tradition.
3. The author has typically chosen to use the word *ger* throughout the text to indicate stranger, foreigner, convert, etc. Readers should use their own judgment in consultation with the original text to reach their own conclusion about how to translate words such as *ger*, *nochri*, *zar*, and other words which could legitimately be rendered as stranger, convert, or foreigner (see Appendix 1 for a description of these terms).

Challenges

Time, of course, was the most significant challenge in the development of this work. The work as submitted here is much farther from a publishable resource than initially hoped. The other significant challenge is that of imposing modern conceptions of Jewish Outreach onto texts that were certainly not written for that purpose in their original context. It is essential that the reader recognize this work in its intended context—to read into ancient texts the mission of, and then exegetically extract from ancient texts support and guidance for Jewish Outreach. It is this author's claim, however, that exactly this objective—making Jewish text relevant in each generation—has been the task of Jews for more than two millennia.

CHAPTER 2: *KERUV* TO JEWS

This chapter is intended to facilitate discussions on bringing Jews closer to Judaism. These texts might, for example, be used by membership committees or boards of directors assessing their congregations' effectiveness, by planning committees assessing programmatic needs for a congregation or organization, or as foundation for a focus group discussion with unaffiliated Jews.

Subsection i: Responsibility to Other Jews

All Shall Eat and be Satisfied—Deuteronomy 14:27-29

And the Levite who is inside your gates: you shall not forsake him; for he has no part nor inheritance with you. At the end of three years you shall bring forth all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall lay it up inside your gates; And the Levite, because he has no part nor inheritance with you, and the *ger*, and the orphan, and the widow, who are inside your gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that YHVH your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

Correct the Sin, not the Sinner—Talmud Brachot 10a

In Rabbi Meir's neighborhood there were a number of insolent sinners who continuously harassed him. Rabbi Meir prayed to YHVH that these people would die. His wife, Beruriah, asked him: "Are you doing this because it is written 'sin [*her*] will be excised from the earth' (Psalms 104:35)? [But you read the verse incorrectly:] It is written 'sins' [*hatai'm*], not 'sinners' [*hot'im*]. Also, continue to the end of the verse, where it says: 'And the wicked will be no more.' This means, once the sins of the wicked are removed, there will no longer be any evildoers on the earth. Therefore, you would do better to pray that these people repent [not that they die] and the verse 'and the wicked will be no more' will be fulfilled."

The Obligation to Provide Spiritual Help—Minchat Chinuch (The Book of Mitzvah Education on Mitzvah #239, referencing Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah #80))

YOU SHALL SURELY UNLOAD ANOTHER'S BURDEN (Exodus 23:5)—*At the root of the precept lies the purpose to teach our spirit the quality of compassion.*

Minchat Chinuch then comments: if the Jews are obligated to help other Jews in physical need, how much more so are they obligated to help Jews in spiritual need. It continues and says that if a Jew is lost spiritually to the Jewish people, both the physical and spiritual aspects of the person are lost, and, thus, the obligation to help Jews spiritually is *greater* than the obligation to help Jews physically.

A Torah of Kindness—Talmud Sukkah 49a on Proverbs 31:26 (a woman of valor)

SHE OPENS HER MOUTH WITH WISDOM; ON HER TONGUE IS A TORAH OF STEADFAST KINDNESS

"And on her tongue is a Torah of steadfast kindness." Is there such a thing as "Torah of kindness," as opposed to one that is not of kindness? [Of course not.] this [verse comes to] teach us that the Torah one teaches somebody else is considered "Torah of kindness."

You Shall Not Bear a Grudge—Leviticus 19:18

You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am YHVH.

Be Disciples of Aaron—Mishnah Avot 1:12

...Hillel said, Be...disciples of Aaron, loving peace, and pursuing peace, loving [your] brethren, and drawing them...to the [Torah].

Subsection ii: Chosenness and the Covenant

What Does YHVH Demand of You?—Deuteronomy 10:12-19

And now, O Israel, what does YHVH your God demand of you? Only this: to revere YHVH your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve YHVH your God with all your heart and soul, keeping YHVH's commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good. The heavens to their uttermost reaches belong to YHVH your God, the earth and all that is on it! Yet it was to your fathers that YHVH was drawn in His love for them, so that He chose you, their lineal descendants, from among all peoples—as is now the case. Cut away, therefore, the foreskin of your hearts and stiffen your necks no more. For YHVH your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the *ger*, providing him with food and clothing. You too must befriend the *ger*, for you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt.

That You May Be a Holy People—Deuteronomy 26:18-19

And YHVH has declared you this day to be His special people, as He has promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; and to set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, and in name, and in honor; and that you may be a holy people to YHVH your God, as He has spoken.

We Are Gerim Before You, YHVH—I Chronicles 29:10-15

And David blessed YHVH before all the congregation; and David said, Blessed be you, Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, YHVH, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the

victory, and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, YHVH, and You are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from You, and you reign over all; and in Your hand is power and might; and in Your hand it is to make great, and to give strength to all. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer so willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given You. For we are *gerim* before You, and sojourners, as were all our fathers;

Subsection iii: The Continuity of the Jewish People

Not With You Alone Do I Make This Covenant—Deuteronomy 29:9-13

You stand this day all of you before YHVH your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the *ger* who is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water: that you should enter into covenant with YHVH your God, and into his oath, which YHVH your God makes with you this day. He will establish you today for a people to himself, and that he may be to you a God, as he has said to you, and as he has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And not with you alone will I make this covenant and this oath, but with all who are here, standing with us today before YHVH, our God, and with all who are not here with us today.

Subsection iv: Keruv to Jews vs. Keruv to Gentiles

If You Do Not Bring Those Who Are Far—Bemidbar Rabbah, Naso 8:4 on II Samuel 21:1-2 and Zephaniah 2:3

II Samuel: THE LORD SAID: IT IS FOR SAUL, AND FOR HIS BLOODY HOUSE. NOW THE GIBEONITES WERE NOT OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

Zephaniah: SEEK YHVH, ALL OF THE EARTH WHO ARE HUMBLE, WHO HAVE EXECUTED HIS LAW.

The Holy one, blessed be He said to [David]: "David!...you are in the house (you are the king), and Saul is outside...because he killed the Gibeonites." What is the meaning of "executed"? [It means:] The Holy One, blessed be He, demands justice for the Gibeonites from Saul...David asked God why He had punished His people on account of these converts (the Gibeonites, who according to tradition, converted in order to work in the Temple at Nob). God's answer to him was: "If you do not bring near them that are far off, you will remove those who are near by."

Raise Up Many Disciples—Avot de-Rabbi Nathan 2:9

The Mishnah in Avot charges the sages to "raise up many disciples." The School of [Rabbi] Shammai maintains that [this instruction means] one should instruct someone who is wise, humble, of good family, and wealthy. But the School of [Rabbi] Hillel says that every man should be taught.

CHAPTER 3: KERUV IN CONVERSION SITUATIONS

Section 3a: TEXTS RELATED TO CONVERSION IN GENERAL

This section contains two subsections: First are textual stories about people in Jewish tradition who converted. They are primarily intended to highlight issues extant in the conversion process. They might be used to facilitate discussions about conversion with either Jews or with people exploring conversion. These stories are comprehensive enough that the reader should be able to find many representations of him/herself or his/her process in the texts. Second, a subsection contains texts comparing converts and born-Jews. This subsection highlights the challenge of considering someone who converts fully Jewish, while simultaneously providing for the special needs of someone who converts to Judaism.

Subsection i: Conversion Stories for Exploration

Jethro's Conversion

LEGENDS OF THE JEWS, VOL. II PP. 72-75

It had been part of God's scheme to reward Jethro for the love he bore the Torah; and for this reason did...the Holy Scriptures...devote a whole [weekly Torah] portion to...Jethro. This, however, is not the only reward for Jethro's piety, who, in his love for the Torah, excelled all converts.

A miracle occurred on the very first day of his arrival in camp, for manna in his honor descended at the noon hour, the hour of his arrival; and, moreover, in as great quantities as was wont to rain down for 120,000 Israelites. He did not have to exert himself to gather the food, for it came over his body, so all he had to do was to bring his hand to his mouth to partake of it.

Jethro, nevertheless, did not remain with Moses, but returned to his native land. Moses, of course, tried to persuade his father-in-law to stay. He said to him: "Do not think that we shall continue to move so slowly through the wilderness. Nay, we shall now move directly to the promised land." Only to urge Jethro to stay longer with them did Moses use the words "we move," so that his father-in-law might believe that Moses too would enter the promised land, for otherwise he would hardly have allowed himself to be persuaded to join the march to the Holy Land. Moses continued: "I do not want to mislead you, hence I will tell you that the land will be divided only among the twelve tribes, and that you have no claim to possession of lands; but God bade us be kind to the converts, and to you we shall be kinder than to all other converts."

Jethro, however, was not to be persuaded by his son-in-law, considering himself duty-bound to return to his native land. For the inhabitants of his city had for many years made a habit of having him store their valuables, as none possessed their confidence in such a measure as he. If he had stayed still longer with Moses, people would have declared that he had absconded with all these things and fled to Moses to share it with him, and that would have been a blot on his fair name and that of Moses. Jethro had furthermore made many debts during the year in which he came to Moses, for, owing to the hail God

had sent upon Egypt before the Exodus of Israel, a great famine had arisen in Jethro's homeland too, and he had found himself obliged to borrow money so he could support the poor. If he were not now to return to his home, people would say that he had run away in order to evade his creditors, and such talk concerning a man of piety would have been desecration of the Divine Name. So he said to Moses: "There are people who have a fatherland but no property there; there are also property-holders who have no family; but I have a fatherland, and have property there as well as a family; hence I desire to return to my fatherland, my property, and my family."

But Moses would not yield so soon, and said to his father-in-law: "If you do not accompany us as a favor, I will command you, so that the Israelites might not say you had been converted to our religion only in the expectation of receiving a share in the promised land, but had returned to your home when you discovered that converts have no claim on property in the Holy Land. Through your refusal to move with us, you will give the heathens an opportunity to say that the Jews do not accept converts, since they did not accept even their own king's father-in-law, but allowed him to return to his own land. Your refusal will injure the glory of God, for the heathens will keep away from the true faith. But if you will wander with us, I assure you that your seed shall share with us the Temple, the Torah, and the future reward of the pious. How can you, moreover, who have seen all the miracles God wrought for us during the march through the wilderness; who were a witness of the way in which even the Egyptians became fond of us—how can you now depart from us? It is a sufficient motive for you to remain with us, in order to officiate as a member of the Sanhedrin, and teach the Torah. We, on our part, want to retain you, so that in difficult cases you might enlighten our eyes; for you were the man who gave us good and fair counsel, to which God Himself could not refuse His assent."

Jethro replied: "A candle may glow in the dark, but not when the sun and the moon shed their rays. You are the sun, and Aaron the moon; of what avail would my candle-light be! I had, therefore, better return to my home city that I may make converts of its inhabitants, instruct them in the Torah, and lead them under the wings of the *Shechinah*."

Amid great marks of honor, and provided with rich gifts, Jethro returned to his home, where he converted his kinsmen and his compatriots to the belief in the true God, as he had intended.

Asenath and Joseph

LEGENDS OF THE JEWS, VOL. II PP. 172-174

Asenath desired to kiss Joseph, but he warded off the intimate greeting with the words: "It is not acceptable that a God-fearing man, who blesses the living God, and eats the blessed bread of life, who drinks of the blessed cup of immortality and incorruptibility, and anoints himself with the fragrant oil of holiness, should kiss a woman of a strange people, who blesses dead and unprofitable idols, and eats the putrid bread of idolatry, which chokes the soul of man, who drinks the libations of deceit, and anoints herself with the oil of destruction."

These words uttered by Joseph touched Asenath to tears. Out of compassion for her, he bestowed his blessing upon her, calling upon God to pour out His spirit over her and make her to become a member of His people and His inheritance, and grant her a portion in the life eternal.

The appearance and the speech of Joseph made so deep an impression upon Asenath that no sooner had she reached her apartment than she divested herself of her robes of state and took off her jewels, and put on sackcloth instead, strewed ashes upon her head, and supplicated to God amid tears to grant her pardon for her sins. In this manner she spent seven days and seven nights in her chamber. Not even her seven attendants were permitted to enter her presence during the time of her penance.

The morning of the eighth day an angel appeared to her, and bade her put away her sackcloth and ashes and array herself in state clothing. For this day she had been born anew, he said, to eat the blessed bread of life, to drink of the cup of life immortal, and anoint herself with the oil of life eternal. Asenath was about to set food and drink before her guest, when she perceived a honeycomb of wondrous form and fragrance. The angel explained to her that it had been produced by the bees of Paradise, to serve as food for the angels and the elect of God. He took a small portion of it for himself, and the rest he put into Asenath's mouth, saying: "From this day forth your body shall bloom like the eternal flowers in Paradise, your bones shall wax fat like the cedars thereof, strength inexhaustible shall be yours, your youth shall never fade, and your beauty never perish, and you shall be like a metropolis surrounded by a wall." At the request of Asenath, the angel blessed also her seven attendants, with the words, "May YHVH bless you and make you to be seven pillars in the City of Refuge."

Thereupon the angel left her, and she saw him ascend heavenward in a chariot of fire drawn by four steeds of fire. Now she knew that she had not been entertaining a human being, but an angel. The celestial messenger had scarcely departed, when a visit from Joseph was announced, and she hastened to array and adorn herself for his reception. When she washed her face, she caught sight of it in the water, and saw it to be of such beauty as never before, so great had been the transformation wrought by the angel.

When Joseph came, he did not recognize her. He asked her who she was, whereto she replied, "I am your maid-servant Asenath! I have cast away my idols, and this day a visitor came to me from heaven. He gave me to eat of the bread of life and to drink of the blessed cup, and he spoke these words to me, 'I give you to Joseph as his affianced wife, that he may be your husband forever. And furthermore he said, 'Your name shall not any more be called Asenath, but your name shall be City of Refuge, whither the nations shall flee for safety.'

Joseph confirmed all she had said, and they embraced and kissed each other in token of their betrothal, which they celebrated by a banquet with Potiphar and his wife. The wedding took place later in the presence of Pharaoh, who set a golden crown upon the head of the bridegroom and the bride, gave them his blessing, and made a seven days' feast in their honor, to which he invited the magnates and princes of Egypt and of other countries.

Ruth's Path to Judaism

RUTH 1:1-22

It came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a man of Beth-Lehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Kilion, [they were] Ephrathites of Beth-Lehem in Judah.

And they came to the country of Moab, and remained there. And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. And they took wives of the women of Moab; the name of one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth; and they dwelled there about ten years. And both Mahlon and Kilion died; and the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then [Naomi] arose with her daughters-in-law, to return from the country of Moab; for she had heard in the country of Moab that YHVH had visited his people and given them bread. So she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to her mother's house; YHVH deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband.

Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people. And Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your own way; for I am too old to have another husband. And even if I should say, I have hope, even if I should lie with a husband tonight, and should bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you, for them, refrain from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me much for your sakes that the hand of YHVH is gone out against me."

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth held fast to her. And she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law is gone back to her people, and to her gods; go back you after your sister-in-law." And Ruth said, "Do not entreat me to leave you, or to keep from following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; Where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried; YHVH do so to me, and more also, if even death parts me from you."

When [Naomi] saw that [Ruth] was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her. So the two continued until they came to Beth-Lehem. And it came to pass, when they came to Beth-Lehem, that all the city was stirred because of them, and they said, "Is this Naomi?" And she said to them, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara; for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and YHVH has brought me back empty; why then do you call me Naomi, seeing YHVH has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, with her, who returned from the country of Moab; and they came to Beth-Lehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

The Redeemed Prostitute

SIFRE ON NUMBERS 115:5 ON NUMBERS 15:37-41

YHVH SAID TO MOSES: 'SPEAK TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL AND SAY TO THEM TO MAKE FRINGES ON THE CORNERS OF THEIR GARMENTS THROUGHOUT THEIR GENERATIONS...TO LOOK UPON AND REMEMBER ALL THE COMMANDMENTS OF YHVH TO DO THEM, NOT TO FOLLOW AFTER YOUR OWN HEART AND YOUR OWN EYES, WHICH YOU ARE INCLINED TO FOLLOW AFTER WANTONLY. SO YOU SHALL REMEMBER AND DO ALL MY COMMANDMENTS AND BE HOLY TO YOUR GOD.

Rabbi Nathan says, "You must learn a lesson from the religious duty of the fringes (*tzitzit*)":

There is the case of a man who was meticulous about carrying out the religious duty of the fringes. He heard that there was a certain prostitute in one of the coastal towns, who would collect a fee of four hundred gold coins. He sent her four hundred gold coins and made an appointment with her. When his time came, he came along and took a seat at the door of her house. Her maid came and told her, "That man with whom you made a date, lo, he is sitting at the door of the house."

[The prostitute] said to her [maid], "Let him come in." When he came in, she spread out for him seven silver mattresses and one gold one, and she was on the top, and between each one were silver stools, and on the top, gold ones. When he came to do the deed, the four fringes (*tzitzit*) fell out [of his garment] and appeared to him like four witnesses. The man slapped himself in the face and immediately withdrew and took a seat on the ground.

The prostitute too withdrew and took a seat on the ground. She said to him, "By the winged god of Rome! I shall not let you go until you tell me what blemish you have found in me."

He said to her, "[I swear] on [penalty of sacrifice]! I did not find any blemish at all in you, for in the whole world there is none so beautiful as you. But YHVH, our Lord, has imposed upon me a rather small duty, but concerning [even that minor matter] he wrote, 'I am YHVH your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God. I am YHVH your God,'—[He said "I am YHVH your God] two times [meaning]:

"'I am YHVH your God': I am destined to pay a good reward."

"'I am YHVH your God': I am destined to exact punishment."

She said to him, ""[I swear] on [penalty of sacrifice]! I shall not let you go until you write me your name, the name of your town, and the name of your school in which you study Torah." So he wrote for her his name, the name of his town, and the name of his master, and the name of the school in which he had studied Torah.

She went and split up her entire wealth, a third to the government, a third to the poor, and a third she took with her and came and stood at the school house of Rabbi Hiyya. She said to him, "My lord, accept me as a convert." He said to her, "Is it possible that you have laid eyes on one of the disciples [and are converting in order to marry him]?" She took the piece of paper out that was in her hand.

He said to [the disciple who had paid the money but had not gone through with the act], "Stand up and acquire possession of what you have purchased. That which she spread out for you in violation of a prohibition she will not spread out for you now that she is in full remission of the prohibition."

Subsection ii: Regarding Differences Between a Convert and a Born Jew or Lack Thereof

Texts which Suggest that Converts are Equal to Jews

The Convert Is Like the Born Jew Only with respect to The Passover?—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Pisha on Exodus 12:49

ONE LAW SHALL BE TO HIM THAT IS HOMEBORN, AND TO THE GER WHO RESIDES AMONG YOU

"One law shall be..." Why is this said? Has it not already been said: "And he shall be as one that is born in the land" (v. 48)? What purpose then is there in saying here: "One law shall be to him that is homeborn and to the ger?" Since it says: "And when a ger shall live with you, etc." (v. 28), I might understand that the convert is like the born Jew only with respect to the Passover. How about all the other commandments of the Torah? Therefore the Torah says: "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and to the ger." This passage comes to declare the convert equal to the born Jew with respect to all the commandments of the Torah.

The Religious Duties of the Torah—Sifre to Numbers 71:2 on Numbers 9:14

IF A GER SHALL DWELL AMONG YOU... YOU SHALL HAVE ONE SET OF LAWS, BOTH FOR THE GER AND FOR THE PERSON WHO WAS BORN IN THE LAND.

How do I know that in all the religious duties of the Torah the rule is the same? the Torah states, "...you shall have one statute both for the sojourner and for the native." (Numbers 9:14) the Torah thus has come and declared equal the convert and the native in all religious duties imposed by the Torah.

Why Is "One Law" Stated Three Times?—Don Isaac Abravanel on Numbers 15:14-16

IF A GER COMES TO LIVE WITH YOU, OR WHOEVER MAY BE AMONG YOU THROUGHOUT YOUR GENERATIONS, AND WILL OFFER AN OFFERING MADE BY FIRE OF A SWEET SAVOR TO YHVH; AS YOU DO, SO HE SHALL DO. ONE ORDINANCE SHALL BE BOTH FOR YOU OF THE CONGREGATION, AND ALSO FOR THE GER WHO LIVES WITH YOU—AN ORDINANCE FOREVER THROUGHOUT YOUR GENERATIONS. AS YOU ARE, SO SHALL THE GER BE BEFORE YHVH. ONE TORAH AND ONE SET OF LAWS SHALL THERE BE FOR YOU, AND FOR THE GER WHO LIVES WITH YOU.

[Why is the same concept—that there is one law for both you and the ger stated three times in these verses? Because] there are three reasons why the Bible makes converts and born Jews completely equal in the observance of all the commandments.

Reason 1: Israel is a religious congregation, "one people in the world."...

Reason 2: Our YHVH is One and therefore it is incumbent upon those who believe in Him to form a perfect unity...

Reason 3: Our Torah sets down one pattern of life, one law; and all who obey its tenets must be regarded as equals.

Your Wife shall Be as a Fruitful Vine—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:3

HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO ARE IN AWE OF YHVH, WHO WALK IN YHVH'S WAYS... YOUR WIFE SHALL BE LIKE A FRUITFUL VINE... YOUR CHILDREN LIKE OLIVE PLANTS AROUND YOUR TABLE. (128:1-3)

Your wife shall be as a fruitful vine: Even though his wife was converted with him and is not one of the daughters of Israel, she is on a par with any of the daughters of Israel. Hence it is written, '*As a fruitful vine*'; 'vine' alluding to Israel; as it says, *you didst pluck up a vine out of Egypt* (Psalm 80:9).

How Do We Know Converts were Included?—Talmud Shavuot 39a on Deuteronomy 29:13

I MAKE THIS COVENANT, WITH ITS CONSEQUENCES, NOT WITH YOU ALONE... BUT ALSO WITH THOSE THAT ARE NOT WITH US HERE THIS DAY.

Hence we know not only those who were standing at Mount Sinai were commanded; [but what about] the coming generations, and converts who were later to be proselytized, how do we know that they were [included]? Because it is said, "...not with you alone; but both with those who are standing here with us this day before YHVH our God and also with those that are not with us here this day." (Deuteronomy 29:13-14)

A Blessing for Women, Converts, and Slaves?—Sifre to Numbers 39:6 on Numbers 6:23-27

YHVH SPOKE TO MOSES SAYING: "SPEAK TO AARON AND TO HIS SONS, SAYING, 'IN THIS WAY YOU SHALL BLESS THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL...' AND THEY SHALL PUT MY NAME UPON THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL AND I SHALL BLESS THEM."

On the basis [of verse 23] I know only that the blessing is directed to Israel. How do I know that it is directed to women, converts, and slaves? [You know this because] the Torah states [verse 27 in the plural] "...and I will bless *them*", [encompassing not only Israel, but also women, converts, and slaves].

Texts which Suggest that Converts are Superior to Jews

Onkelos Divides His Father's Estate—Tosefta, Demai 6:12-13 on Mishna Demai 6:10

A convert and a gentile who inherited [the property of] their father, [who was] a gentile— [the convert] is permitted to say to [the gentile], "You take the idols and I [will take] the utensils; "you [take] the wine and I [will take] the produce".

Onkelos the convert divided [his father's estate] with his brothers—he dealt more stringently with himself and took his portion to the Dead Sea [and threw it in]. [If the convert and the gentile] inherited a bathhouse, [the convert] is permitted to say to him, "You take [the income earned from it] on the Sabbath as your portion and I [will take the income earned] on weekdays as my portion." But an Israelite and a gentile who [jointly] purchased the [household property] of a gentile— [the Israelite] is not permitted to say to [the gentile], "You take the idols and I [will take] the utensils; you [take] the wine and I [will take] the produce." [If] they purchased a bathhouse, he [the Israelite] is not permitted to say to him, "Let [its proprietorship and profits on] the Sabbath be your portion and [on] weekdays be my portion."

Blessing for the Righteous—Prayer Liturgy Weekday Amidah

Let Your tender mercies be stirred for the righteous, the pious, and the leaders of the House of Israel, devoted scholars and faithful converts. Be merciful to us of the House of Israel. Reward all who trust in You, cast our lot with those who are faithful to You. May we never come to despair, for our trust is in You. Praised are You, Lord who sustains the righteous.

If they had not Seen the Thunder and Lightning—Midrash Tanhuma, Lech L'cha 3

Resh Lakish said: The *ger* who converts is more beloved than Israel when they stood at Mount Sinai. Why? Because, if they had not seen the thunder and lightning, the mountains trembling, and the noise of the trumpets, they would not have accepted the Torah. But this [convert], who did not see one of [these things], came, humbled himself to the Holy One, and took upon himself the Kingdom of Heaven. Is there one of you more lovable than this one?

Dear Are Converts, for the Holy One Adds to their Name—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Exodus 4:18

MOSES RETURNED TO HIS FATHER-IN-LAW JETHRO AND SAID TO HIM: "LET ME GO, I BEG YOU, AND RETURN TO MY BRETHREN WHO ARE IN EGYPT, AND SEE WHETHER THEY ARE STILL ALIVE." AND JETHRO SAID TO MOSES: "GO IN PEACE."

"Dear are converts, for the Holy One adds to their name. For so you find with Jethro. At first he was called only Jethro, but when he was converted, he was called Jethro...When one is converted, he receives a reward [in this case a new or elongated name] as if he had labored in the Torah all his years, for it is said (Numbers 10:29): 'come you with us and we will do you good.'"

With Special Friendship and Excessive Benevolence—Philo of Alexandria, De Monarchia 1:7 on Exodus 22:20

YOU SHALL NOT VEX A *GER*

The lawgiver commands that we should treat converts not only with respect, but with special friendship and excessive benevolence...those men who have left their country and their friends and their relations for the sake of virtue and holiness ought not to be left destitute of some other cities and houses and friends. But there ought to be places of refuge always ready for those who come over to religion.

The Convert will Be a Conspicuous Object—Philo of Alexandria, De Execrationibus 4 on Deuteronomy 29:14

I MAKE THIS COVENANT WITH HIM WHO STANDS HERE WITH US THIS DAY BEFORE YHVH OUR GOD AND ALSO WITH HIM WHO IS NOT HERE TODAY.

The convert who has come over, being lifted up on high by good fortune, will be a conspicuous object, being admired and pronounced happy in two particulars: in the first place because he has come over to YHVH of his own accord, and also because he has received as a most appropriate reward a firm and sure habitation in heaven.

As if He Did a Kindness to All Israel—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Deuteronomy 10:18

[GOD] LOVES THE GER.

Rabbi Eliezer says: When one comes to convert, lo, it is as if he did a kindness to all Israel.

Texts which Suggest that Converts are Inferior to Jews

Israel Is Given Somewhat Higher Status—Talmud Kiddushin 70b on Ezekiel 37:27

AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE

Rabbah bar Rabbi Huna said: Compared to converts, Israel are given somewhat higher status, for of Israel it is written, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people", whereas the Torah says of converts "Whosoever hath pledged his heart to approach to Me, says YHVH, you shall then be My people, and I will be your God" (Jeremiah 30:21-22).

A Priest Takes Precedence Over a Levite—Mishna Horayot 3:8

A Priest takes precedence over a Levite, a Levite over an Israelite, an Israelite over a *mamzer*, a *mamzer* over a *Netin*, a *Netin* over a convert, a convert over a freed slave. Under what circumstances? When they are [legalistically] equal in all other respects.

He Who Vows Not to Derive Benefit—Tosefta Nedarim 2:4

He who vows not to derive benefit from Israelites is prohibited from deriving benefit from converts. He who vows not to derive benefit from converts is permitted to derive benefit from Israelites. He who vows not to derive benefit from Israelites is prohibited from deriving benefit from priests or Levites. He who vows not to derive benefit from Priests and Levites is permitted to derive benefit from Israelites. He who vows not to derive benefit from Priests is permitted to derive benefit from Levites. He who vows not to derive benefit from Levites is permitted to derive benefit from Priests.

The Convert Brings First Fruits but Does Not Make the Declaration—Mishnah Bikkurim 1:4

...the convert may bring [first fruits] but does not make the *declaration* because he can not say, *Which the Eternal swore to our fathers to give to us*. But if his mother were an Israelite, he may bring [the first fruits] and make the *declaration*. When he prays privately, he says, *O YHVH of the ancestors of Israel*; and when he is in the Synagogue, he says, *O YHVH of your ancestors*; if his mother were an Israelite, he may say, *O YHVH of our ancestors*.

Texts Which Do Not Clearly Imply a Hierarchy

A Soul Which Has the Purpose of Inspiring Converts—Zohar, Shemot II 99a on Exodus 23:9

FOR YOU KNOW THE SOUL OF THE STRANGER

Whenever a Gentile decides to embrace Judaism, YHVH selects a soul which has, as its special purpose, the inspiring of converts. He kisses it and sends it down to enter the body of the newcomer, who is thus aided to break away more easily from his previous spiritual imperfections. Ultimately, the number of righteous converts will increase greatly and the time will come when all the nations of the earth will clamor for the redemption that can be theirs only through acceptance of the YHVH and the faith of Israel.

The Four Assemblies—Sifre to Deuteronomy, Piska 247 on Deuteronomy 23:2

...INTO THE ASSEMBLY OF YHVH.

[What does "assembly of YHVH" mean?] Rabbi Judah says: There are four assemblies: the assembly of priests, the assembly of the Levites, the assembly of Israel, and the assembly of the converts. The [other] Sages say: There are only three.

Why Do They Always Quarrel?—Legends of the Jews, Vol. III pp. 284-285

Moses received directions to announce the law of sacrifices, and other precepts laid down for the life in the Holy Land...When Moses announced the laws to them, a dispute arose between the Israelites and the converts, because the former declared that they alone and not the others were to make offerings to God in His sanctuary. God thereupon called Moses, and said to him: "Why do these always quarrel one with another?" Moses replied: "You know why." God said: "Have I not said to you, 'One law and one ordinance shall be for you and for the convert who lives with you'?"

You Will Enjoy the Fruit of Your Labor—Bemidbar Rabbah, 8:9, on Psalm 128:2

HAPPY IS EVERYONE WHO STANDS IN AWE OF YHVH, WHO WALKS IN GOD'S WAYS. YOU SHALL EAT THE LABOR OF YOUR HANDS. HAPPY SHALL YOU BE. (128:1-2)

You will eat the labor of your hands is addressed to the convert who has no distinguished ancestry to rely on. [This is done] in order that he should not say, 'Woe is me, for I have no distinguished ancestry to rely on! All the good deeds that I shall store up will only yield me reward in this world!' The Torah announces to the convert that by virtue of his own merit he will enjoy the fruit of his actions both in this world and in the next. Hence it is written, '*you will eat the labor of your hands*,' meaning, the good deeds which he has painstakingly performed in this world.

Section 3b: TEXTS FOR DISCUSSING CONVERSION WITH BORN JEWS

This section is intended to help born Jews better understand the processes and issues involved when someone converts to Judaism. These texts might, for example, be used in discussions with the Jewish partner of someone who is exploring conversion, as a resource for sermons about conversion, or to help born-Jews who wish to plan and lead programs for people exploring conversion. Note that two of the subsections below seem similar at first glance—"Texts Regarding Israel's Mission of Conversion to Judaism," and "Texts Regarding Israel's Mission of Conversion to Monotheism." It is important to remember that many of the texts under consideration were written when Judaism was the only monotheistic tradition. But as that is not the reality today, and as Judaism has never claimed to be the only legitimate religion, the author has tried to separate out texts which implied conversion to Judaism, from those which simply implied conversion to Monotheism. The phrases: "Torah" and "Under the Wings of the *Shechinah*" have here always been taken to refer to Judaism. The reader may choose to interpret these differently.

Subsection i: Regarding Israel's Mission of Conversion to Judaism

Texts Which Suggest that People Will Seek Judaism

Zebulun: Agent between Israel and the Nations—Legends of the Jews, Vol. III pp. 459-460

Zebulun was the tribe that more than all the other tribes devoted itself to commerce, and in this way acted as the agent between Israel and the other nations, selling the products of Palestine to the latter, and foreign wares to the former. Hence the blessing that Moses bestowed upon them: "'Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out' on commercial enterprises; at your instance shall many nations pray upon the sacred mountain of the Temple and offer their sacrifices." For the people that came into Zebulun's realms on matters of business used to go from there to Jerusalem to look upon the sanctuary of the Jews, and many of them were converted through the grand impression that the life in the holy city made upon them.

A Person from Amalek they shall not Receive—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek

And He Said: 'The Hand Upon the Throne of YHVH, God Will Have War,' etc. Rabbi Eliezer says: God swore by the throne of His Glory that if a person of any of the nations should come desiring to be converted to Judaism, Israel shall receive him, but a person from the house of Amalek they shall not receive.

The House of YHVH will Be Established as the Highest of Mountains—Isaiah 2:2-3

It shall come to pass in the days to come that the mountain of the house of YHVH will be established as the highest of mountains, and shall be raised above the hills. And all the nations shall come and say, "Come let us go up to the mountain of YHVH, to the house of Jacob; that God may teach us His ways,

and that we may walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of YHVH from Jerusalem.

They Shall Cleave to the House of Jacob—Isaiah 14:1

For YHVH will have mercy on Jacob, and will choose Israel, and set them in their own land; and foreigners shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.

Texts Which Suggest That Jews Should Seek Converts

Emulating Abraham—Avot d'Rabbi Nathan

Every Jew should endeavor to bring people under the wings of the *Shechinah* even as Abraham did.

Make Him Beloved as Did Abraham—Sifre to Deuteronomy, Piska 32 on Deuteronomy 6:5

YOU SHALL LOVE YHVH YOUR GOD...

[This means you shall] make Him beloved to humanity, as did our father Abraham in the matter referred to in the verse, *And the souls that they had gotten in Haran* (Genesis 12:5). But is it not true that if all the peoples in the world were to convene in order to create just one gnat, and endow it with a soul, they would not be able to do so? Hence we learn that Abraham converted people, thus bringing them under the wings of the *Shechinah*.

If You Do Not Bring Those Who Are Far—Bemidbar Rabbah, Naso 8:4 on II Samuel 21:1-2 and Zephaniah 2:3

II Samuel: THE LORD SAID: IT IS FOR SAUL, AND FOR HIS BLOODY HOUSE. NOW THE GIBEONITES WERE NOT OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

Zephaniah: SEEK YHVH, ALL OF THE EARTH WHO ARE HUMBLE, WHO HAVE EXECUTED HIS LAW.

The Holy one, blessed be He said to [David]: "David!...you are in the house (meaning you are the king), and Saul is outside (meaning he is no longer the king)...because he killed the Gibeonites." What is the meaning of "executed"? The Holy One, blessed be He, demands justice for the Gibeonites from Saul...David asked God why He had punished His people on account of these converts (the Gibeonites, who according to tradition, converted in order to work in the Temple at Nob). God's answer to him was: "If you do not bring near them that are far off, you will remove those who are near by."

Shall We Burden the Community for the Sake of these Converts?—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:4 on II Samuel 12:2 and Joshua 10:6

II Samuel: THE GIBEONITES WERE NOT OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

Joshua: [THE GIBEONITES SAID TO JOSHUA]: "COME UP TO US QUICKLY, AND SAVE US"

At the time the Gibeonites said to Joshua, "Come up to us quickly, and save us and help us" (Joshua 10:6)—at that time Joshua asked himself: Shall we burden the community for the sake of these *gerim*? The Holy One said to him: Joshua, if you keep away those who have been far off, you will end up keeping away those who are near. Besides, consider your own origin—is it not from *gerim*? (Joshua is descended from Ephrayim, son of Joseph and Asenath, daughter of the Priest of On.)

Only the Portion of His Life Spent Making Converts—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II p. 3

Jacob was not exempt from the lot that falls to the share of all the pious. ...they expect to enjoy life in tranquility...Verily, few and filled with evil had been the days of the years of Jacob's pilgrimage, for the time spent outside of the Holy Land had seemed joyless to him. Only the portion of his life [which] passed in the land of his fathers, during which he was occupied with making converts, in accordance with the example set him by Abraham and Isaac, did he consider worth while having lived, and this happy time was of short duration.

One Must Establish Outposts of Torah—Madregat ha-Adam

Therefore, one who has it in his power to further the cause of Torah, must not remain inert or give priority to his own efforts to seek repose, but he must summon upon his energies to wander from place to place and establish outposts of Torah and fear of Heaven. For who will be held accountable for the lowered state of Torah and fear of YHVH if not those who possess the ability to propagate it? They are not free of their responsibility until they have brought every place under the banner of Torah.

-- Navasrdoker Rebbe as translated in To Turn the Many to Righteousness

Be Disciples of Aaron—Mishnah Avot 1:12

...Hillel said, Be...disciples of Aaron, loving peace, and pursuing peace, loving [your] fellow-creatures, and drawing them...to the [Torah].

Whoever Teaches Torah to His Friend's Son—Talmud Sanhedrin 19b, 99b

Whoever teaches Torah to his friend's son is considered as if he had given birth to him.

A Call to Judaism—Bereshit Rabbah 39:16 on Genesis 12:16

AND [ABRAHAM] CALLED TO THE NAME OF YHVH:

[The simple meaning is that he CALLED TO YHVH] with prayer. [But] another interpretation of AND CALLED [is]: he began to make converts (i.e. he called people to YHVH).

They will Dedicate Themselves to Me—Pesikta Rabbati 35.160a on Proverbs 31:10

A WOMAN OF VALOR WHO CAN FIND?

The Torah refers here to Israel. When Israel were settled in their land, they clave to idols. How much more now, when you have exiled them among the peoples! What did the Holy One answer them? "I rely on My children that they will not leave Me and cleave to idols, but will dedicate (*moserim*) themselves for My sake every hour. Nor will it suffice for them to dedicate themselves to Me, but they will draw others near beneath My wings."

They will be My Martyrs—Pesikta Rabbati

At the time the children of Israel were exiled, the ministering angels protested to God: "Master of the Universe, when the children of Israel dwelt in their own land, they attached themselves to idols of gold and silver. And now that You disperse them among the nations they will abandon You altogether." But God answered them: "I know that My children will not abandon Me; they will be My martyrs. They will offer their very lives to bring others under My wings."

Texts Which Suggest that God Seeks Converts

A Reminder to Esau, the Twin—Pesikta d'Rav Kahana

[Why was the Torah given in the month of Sivan?] It was given in the third month, in Sivan, under the constellation of Gemini (Twins) as a reminder to the children of Esau, Jacob's twin brother, that they were welcome to repent and to become Jews.

God Attaches all Righteous People to Israel—Shir Hashirim Rabbah 6:10 on Song of Songs 6:2

MY BELOVED HAS GONE DOWN TO HIS GARDEN, TO THE BED OF SPICES TO FEED IN THE GARDENS, AND TO GATHER LILIES.

Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman said: "the lilies," they are the righteous whom [God] takes for Himself. This is like to a king who had a dearly beloved son. In his great love for [his son], he planted a beautiful orchard and bestowed it upon him. When the son obeyed his father, the latter traversed the breadth of the earth to find lovely trees and transplant them into his son's orchard. But when the son was disobedient the father would cut down the trees of the orchard. So, too, when Israel does the will of the Holy One of Blessing, God traverses the earth, and wherever God finds a righteous man, God attaches him to Israel, as God did with [the two famous Biblical converts] Jethro and Rahab. But, when the children of Israel provoke God, the Holy One removes the righteous from their midst.

Exile for the Purpose of Adding Converts—Talmud P'sachim 87b

Rabbi Eleazar said: The Holy One exiled Israel among the peoples only in order that converts might be multiplied, as is said, "I will sow her to Me in the Land" (Hosea 2:25). Does not a man sow a *seah* [seed] in the ground only so that it may bring in many *kor* [of harvest]?

They Shall Spring up as the Grass—Isaiah 44:3-5

For I will pour water upon the thirsty land, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your offspring; And they shall spring up as the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am YHVH's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall write on his hand The Lord's, and surname himself by the name of Israel.

Subsection ii: Regarding Israel's Mission of Conversion to Monotheism

Texts Which Suggest that People Will Seek Monotheism

Many Peoples and Mighty Nations will Come—Zechariah 8:22

Many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek out YHVH, Master of Legions, in Jerusalem, and to supplicate before YHVH.

It will be a Unique Day—Zechariah 14:7, 9

It will be a unique day; it will be known as YHVH's [day], neither day nor night...YHVH will be the King over all the land; on that day YHVH will be One and His name will be One.

A Unique Destiny—Prayer Liturgy: Aleinu

We rise to our duty to praise YHVH of all, to acclaim the Creator. He made our lot unlike that of other people, assigning to us a unique destiny...all who live will know that to You every knee must bend, every tongue pledge loyalty. To You, Lord, may all bow in worship, may they give honor to Your glory. May everyone accept the rule of Your kingship. Reign over all, soon and for all time. Sovereignty is Yours in glory, now and forever.

Texts Which Suggest that God Seeks Unity of Belief

Elijah's Mission—Legends of the Jews, Vol. IV pp. 201-202

Elijah's miraculous deeds will be better understood if we remember that he had been an angel from the very first, even before the end of his earthly career. When God was about to create man, Elijah said to Him: "Master of the world! If it be pleasing in Your eyes, I will descend to earth, and make myself serviceable to the sons of men." Then God changed his angel name, and later, under Ahab, He permitted him to abide among men on earth, that he might convert the world to the belief that "YHVH is God." His mission fulfilled, God took him again into heaven, and said to him: "Be you the guardian spirit of My children forever, and spread the belief in Me abroad in the whole world." His angel name is Sandalphon, one of the greatest and mightiest of the fiery angel hosts. As such it is his duty to wreath garlands for God out of the prayers sent aloft by Israel.

They Shall Say: "You are My God"—Hosea 2:25

And I will sow her to me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her who had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them who were not my people, "You are my people"; and they shall say, "You are my God".

One Who Beholds Idolatry—Tosefta Berachot 6:2 on Mishna Berachot 9:1

One who beholds idolatry says, "Praised [be You, YHVH...] who is slow to anger." [One who beholds] a place from which idolatry was uprooted says, "Praised [be You, YHVH...] who uprooted idolatry from our land.

Regarding the statement: "May it be Your will, Lord our God, that idolatry be uprooted from every place in Israel, and turn the hearts of Your servants to serve You." ...outside the Land one need not recite this, for the majority of the inhabitants are gentile.

But Rabbi Simeon (says), "Even outside the Land one must recite this, for they are destined to convert, "as it says, *at that time I will change the speech of the people to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of YHVH and serve him with one accord* (Zephaniah 3:9)."]

Texts which Suggest that Jews Should Promote Monotheism

Abraham's Tree—Legends of the Jews, Vol. I p. 242

Abraham did not depend on his own judgment in reading the character of his guests. He planted a tree which spread its branches out over all who believed in God, and afforded them shade. But if idolaters went under the tree, the branches turned upward, and cast no shade upon the ground. Whenever Abraham saw this sign, he would at once set about the task of converting the worshippers of the false gods.

Jacob and Esau—Legends of the Jews, Vol. I p. 316

In their childhood, both brothers went to school, but when they reached their thirteenth year, and came of age, their ways parted. ... Both [Jacob and Esau] were hunters of men, Esau tried to capture them in order to turn them away from God, and Jacob, to turn them toward God. In spite of his impious deeds, Esau possessed the art of winning his father's love. His hypocritical conduct made Isaac believe that his first-born son was extremely pious. "Father," he would ask Isaac, "what is the tithe on straw and salt?" The question made him appear God-fearing in the eyes of his father, because these two products are the very ones that are exempt from tithing. Isaac failed to notice, too, that his older son gave him forbidden food to eat. What he took for the flesh of young goats was dog's meat. Rebekah was more clear-sighted. She knew her sons as they really were, and therefore her love for Jacob was exceeding great. The more often she heard his voice, the deeper grew her affection for him.

Abraham Converted the Men; Sarah the Women—Bereshit Rabbah 84:4 on Genesis 37:1

AND JACOB DWELT IN THE LAND OF HIS FATHER'S SOJOURNINGS (MEGURE)

Abraham made converts, for it is written, *And Abraham took Sarai his wife...and the souls that they had made in Haran (Genesis 12:5).* Rabbi Eleazar observed in the name of Rabbi Jose ben Zimra: *If all the nations assembled to create one insect, they could not endow it with life, yet you say, "And the souls that they had made in Haran!"* It refers, however, to the converts. The let it say, 'That they had converted': why, 'Which they had made'? That is to teach you that if one brings a convert near [to YHVH] it is as though he created him.

But shouldn't it say, 'That **he** had made'; why does it say 'That **they** had made'? Said Rabbi Hunia: Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women. Jacob too made converts: *Then Jacob said to his household, and to all that were with him: Put away the strange gods that are among you...And they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods (ibid. 35:2ff).*

But we are not told of this in the case of Isaac. [If Abraham and Jacob made converts] where do we find it written of Isaac? As Rabbi Hoshaya taught in the name of Rabbi Judah ben Rabbi Simon: It says here, AND JACOB DWELT IN THE LAND OF MEGURE ABIV (his father's (Isaac's) sojournings), but we can also read this as *meguray abiv* (which means his father's proselytising).

The Responsibility to Call all People—Maimonides, Sefer Mitzvot, Positive Commandment #3

You shall love YHVH your God.

Rambam: It has been previously explained that the mitzvah of loving YHVH includes in it the responsibility to call all human beings to serve Him and to believe in Him. When one person loves another, it is his desire that all others love him as well.

You Shall Cause YHVH to be Loved—Sifre to Deuteronomy, Piska 32 on Deuteronomy 6:5

AND YOU SHALL LOVE YHVH

You shall cause Him to be loved, just as our father Abraham did, as it is written "Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all of their belongings as well as the souls they had made in Haran."

They Could not Make One Gnat—Bereshit Rabbah 39:14 on Genesis 12:5

AND ABRAM TOOK SARAI HIS WIFE, AND LOT THEIR BROTHER'S SON, AND ALL THEIR BELONGINGS WHICH THEY HAD GATHERED, AND THE SOULS THAT THEY HAD MADE IN HARAN.

Rabbi Eleazar observed in the name of Rabbi Jose ben Zimra: If all the nations assembled to create one gnat they could not endow it with life, yet you say, AND THE SOULS THAT THEY HAD MADE! [How could they possibly have made souls!] It refers to the converts [which they had made]. We must read it as if it said, 'That they had converted': that he who brings a Gentile near [to YHVH] is as though he created him. Also shouldn't it say, 'That **he** had made'; why [does it say] *That they had made*? Said Rabbi Huna: Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women.

Subsection iii: Approaches to / Methods of Conversion

Reaching Out to Potential Converts

A Hand of Welcome—Vayikra Rabbah 2:9 on Leviticus 1:2

WHEN ANY PERSON...BRINGS AN OFFERING...

Why does it say "any person"? This is to include converts...The sages have taught thus: If [any man, including] a heathen seeks to become a convert, a hand of welcome should be held out to bring him under the wings of the *Shechinah*. Thereafter, the converts in each succeeding generation are there to [reach out to] their heathen brethren."

Befriend Him and Do Not Repel Him—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Jeremiah 23:23

BEHOLD I AM A GOD THAT BRINGS NEAR, SAYS YHVH, AND NOT A GOD THAT REPELS

This God said to Moses: "I am One who welcomes, not One who repels." As it is said: "Behold I am a God that brings near, says YHVH, and not a God that repels" (Jeremiah 23:23). "I am He who brought Jethro near, not keeping him at a distance. So also you, when a man comes to you wishing to become a convert to Judaism, as long as he comes in the name of God for the sake of heaven, do you, likewise: befriend him and do not repel him."

Gentiles who Perceive Greatness in Judaism

Onkelos and the Troops of Romans—Talmud Avodah Zarah 11a

When Onkelos son of Kalonymos became a convert, Caesar sent a troop of Romans to arrest him. But he won them over by citing verses from the Torah, and they too became converts. Caesar then sent another troop of Romans and instructed them: Say nothing at all to Onkelos.

After they seized him and went off [with him], he said to them: May I speak to you about a matter that is not the Torah? A torchbearer carries a torch before a litter carrier, a litter carrier before a commander, a commander before a general, a general before the emperor. But does an emperor bear a torch before other people? They replied: No. Then he said: But the Holy One carries a torch before Israel, as is said, "And YHVH went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light" (Exodus 13:21). At that, all of them too became converts.

Then Caesar sent still another troop and enjoined them: Do not engage in any conversation whatsoever with Onkelos. As they seized him and went off with him, they saw a mezuzah affixed to the doorway, and when he put his hand on it and smiled, they asked him: Why are you smiling? He replied: It is the way of the world that a king is seated inside while his servants stand guard outside. But the Holy One—His servants are inside, while He stands guard outside, as is said, "The Lord shall guard your going out

and your coming in," etc. (Psalm 121:8). At this, they too became converts. Caesar did not send soldiers for him again.

The Jewish Sense of Justice—Legends of the Jews, Vol. IV pp. 110-111

To satisfy their vengeful feelings [Jewish tradition holds that Saul killed the Gibeonites], the Gibeonites demanded the life of seven members of Saul's family. David sought to mollify them, representing to them that they would derive no benefit from the death of their victims, and offering them silver and gold instead. Though David treated with each one of them individually, the Gibeonites were relentless... But God punished Saul through his children.

The cruel fate that befell the descendants of Saul had a wholesome effect. All the heathens who saw and heard about the punishment exclaimed: "There is no God like to the God of Israel, there is no nation like to the nation of Israel; the wrong inflicted upon wretched converts has been expiated by the sons of kings." So great was the enthusiasm among the heathens over this manifestation of the Jewish sense of justice that one hundred and fifty thousand of them were converted to Judaism.

Zebulun: Agent between Israel and the Nations—Legends of the Jews, Vol. III pp. 459-460

Zebulun was the tribe that more than all the other tribes devoted itself to commerce, and in this way acted as the agent between Israel and the other nations, selling the products of Palestine to the latter, and foreign wares to the former. Hence the blessing that Moses bestowed upon them: "Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out' on commercial enterprises; at your instance shall many nations pray upon the sacred mountain of the Temple and offer their sacrifices." For the people that came into Zebulun's realms on matters of business used to go from there to Jerusalem to look upon the sanctuary of the Jews, and many of them were converted through the grand impression that the life in the holy city made upon them.

Promoting the Benefits of Judaism

Moses and Jethro Study Torah—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Exodus 18:7-9

MOSES WENT OUT TO MEET HIS FATHER-IN-LAW; HE BOWED LOW AND KISSED HIM; EACH ASKED AFTER THE OTHER'S WELFARE, AND THEY CAME INTO THE TENT. MOSES THEN TOLD HIS FATHER-IN-LAW ALL THAT YHVH HAD DONE TO PHAROAH AND THE EGYPTIANS FOR ISRAEL'S SAKE, ALL THE TRAVAIL THAT HAD come upon them on the way, and how YHVH delivered them. And Jethro rejoiced...

The verse is explained as follows:

And They Came into the Tent. Meaning the house of study.

And Moses Told His Father-in-Law. In order to attract him and bring him near to the Torah.

All that YHVH Had Done, etc. That He had given the Torah to His people Israel.

All the Travail, while in Egypt

that Had Come upon Them, at the Red Sea

on the Way, that is, the war with Amalek

and How YHVH Delivered Them, from all these, God had delivered them.

And Jethro Rejoiced.

Abraham Erects Missionary Altars—Legends of the Jews, Vol. I pp. 219

...Abraham erected an altar to YHVH to give thanks to Him for the promise, and then he journeyed on, southward, in the direction of the spot whereon the Temple was...to stand. In Hebron he again erected an altar... And likewise he raised an altar in Ai...

Each altar raised by him was a center for his activities as a missionary. As soon as he came to a place in which he desired to live, he would stretch a tent first for Sarah, and next for himself, and then he would proceed at once to make converts and bring them under the wings of the *Shechinah*. Thus he accomplished his purpose of inducing all men to proclaim the Name of God.

Issachar's Fruit—Bereshit Rabbah 98:12 on Genesis 49:14

ISSACHAR IS A LARGE-BONED DONKEY

Another interpretation of ISSACHAR IS A LARGE-BONED DONKEY: this implies that Issachar's produce was of very large size. The tribe of Zebulun used to take their fruit when setting out on their sea-journeys. When the other nations saw them, they were filled with astonishment, at which the Israelites would say to them: 'Do you wonder at these? If you saw the producers of these engaged in the study of the Torah, you would be astonished at *them*'; whereupon many came and were converted. Rabbi Judah ben Rabbi Simon commented in Rabbi Aha's name: ISSACHAR IS A LARGE-BONED (GAREM) DONKEY. Do not read *gerem*, rather read *gerim*, [meaning] Issachar is a donkey for converts (i.e. Issachar transports converts to Judaism as a donkey brings his load to its destination).

Come with Us and Be Eyes for Us—Numbers 10:29-33

And Moses said to Hobab (known in other places as Jethro), the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are journeying to the place about which YHVH said, I will give it you; come with us,

and we will do you good; for YHVH has spoken good concerning Israel." And he said to him, "I will not go; but I will depart to my own land, and to my kindred." And he said, "Leave us not, I pray you; for you know how we are to camp in the wilderness, and you may be eyes for us. And it shall be, if you go with us, it shall be, that whatever goodness YHVH shall do to us, the same will we do to you." And they departed from the mount of YHVH three days' journey; and the ark of the covenant of YHVH went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them.

Promoting Judaism through Kindness

Abraham's Four Gates—Legends of the Jews, Vol. I p. 270

...Abraham dwelt many years, and thence he endeavored to spread the law of God. He planted a grove there, and he made four gates for it, facing the four sides of the earth, east: west, north, and south; and he planted a vineyard therein. If a traveler came that way, he entered by the gate that faced him, and he sat in the grove, and ate, and drank, until he was satisfied, and then he departed. For the house of Abraham was always open for all passers-by, and they came daily to eat and drink there. If one was hungry, and he came to Abraham, he would give him what he needed, so that he might eat and drink and be satisfied; and if one was naked, and he came to Abraham, he would clothe him with the garments of the poor man's choice, and give him silver and gold, and make known to him YHVH, who had created him and set him on earth.

After the wayfarers had eaten, they were in the habit of thanking Abraham for his kind entertainment of them, whereto he would reply: "What, you give thanks to me! Rather return thanks to your host, He who alone provides food and drink for all creatures." Then the people would ask, "Where is He?" and Abraham would answer them, and say: "He is the Ruler of heaven and earth. He wounds and He heals, He forms the embryo in the womb of the mother and brings it forth into the world, He causes the plants and the trees to grow, He kills and He makes alive, He brings down to Sheol and brings up."

When the people heard such words, they would ask, "How shall we return thanks to God and manifest our gratitude to Him?" And Abraham would instruct them in these words: "Say, Blessed be YHVH who is blessed! Blessed be He that gives bread and food to all flesh!" In this manner did Abraham teach those who had enjoyed his hospitality how to praise and thank God. Abraham's house thus became not only a lodging-place for the hungry and thirsty, but also a place of instruction where the knowledge of God and His law were taught.

Job's Severest Affliction—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II pp. 228-230

Job was asked once what he considered the severest affliction that could strike him, and he replied, "My enemies' joy in my misfortune," and when God demanded to know of him what he preferred, poverty or physical suffering, he chose pain, saying, "YHVH of the whole world, chastise my body with suffering of all kinds, only preserve me from poverty." Poverty seemed the greater scourge, because before his trials he had occupied a brilliant position on account of his vast wealth...no sooner were the seeds strewn in the furrows, than they sprouted and grew and ripened into produce. He was equally

successful with his cattle. Of sheep he had no less than one hundred and thirty thousand... Besides, his herds consisted of three hundred and forty thousand donkeys and thirty-five hundred pairs of oxen.

All these possessions were not used for self-indulgent pleasures, but for the good of the poor and the needy, whom he clothed, and fed, and provided with all things necessary... His house was furnished with doors on all its four sides, that the poor and the wayfarer might enter, no matter from what direction they approached. At all times there were thirty tables laden with viands ready in his house, and twelve besides for widows only, so that all who came found what they desired. Job's consideration for the poor was so delicate that he kept servants to wait upon them constantly.

His guests, enraptured by his charitableness, frequently offered themselves as attendants to minister to the poor in his house, but Job always insisted upon paying them for their services. If he was asked for a loan of money, to be used for business purposes, and the borrower promised to give a part of his profits to the poor, he would demand no security beyond a mere signature. And if it happened that by some mischance or other the debtor was not able to discharge his obligation, Job would return the note to him, or tear it into bits in his presence.

He did not rest satisfied at supplying the material needs of those who applied to him. He strove also to convey the knowledge of God to them. After a meal he was in the habit of having music played upon instruments, and then he would invite those present to join him in songs of praise to God. On such occasions he did not consider himself above playing his instrument while the musicians rested.

Abraham Would Befriend Them Then Convert Them—Sefer Ha'Agadah 33:15 (Cf. Sifre Devarim §32: Bereshit Rabbah 29:14; Pesikta Rabbati 43:6) on Genesis 12:5

THE SOULS THAT THEY HAD MADE IN HARAN

The verse implies: Our father Abraham would bring people into his home, give them food and drink, befriend them, attract them, and then convert them and bring them under the wings of the *Shechinah*. [This accomplishment] is accounted as if he had created, shaped them, and articulated their parts. Abraham converted the men, Sarah converted the women.

Subsection iv: Regarding Interactions with /Feelings about Converts

Interactions with Converts

Only the Portion of His Life Spent Making Converts—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II p. 3

Jacob was not exempt from the lot that falls to the share of all the pious. ...they expect to enjoy life in tranquility...Verily, few and filled with evil had been the days of the years of Jacob's pilgrimage, for the time spent outside of the Holy Land had seemed joyless to him. Only the portion of his life [which] passed in the land of his fathers, during which he was occupied with making converts, in accordance with the example set him by Abraham and Isaac, did he consider worthwhile having lived, and this happy time was of short duration.

Boaz' Impression of Ruth—Ruth 2:8-12

Then said Boaz to Ruth, "why don't you listen, my daughter? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go away from here, but stay here close to my maidens. Let your eyes be on the field that they reap, and follow after them; I have charged the young men that they shall not touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn." Then [Ruth] fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, seeing that I am a *ger*?" And Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully told to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband; and how you have left your father and your mother, and the land of your birth, and have come to a people which you did not know before. The Lord will recompense your work, and a full reward shall be given to you by YHVH God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

Why Are Idols Called "gods"—D'varim Rabbah 2:18 on Exodus 22:20

YOU SHALL NOT VEX A *GER*

If there is no reality to idols, why does [the Torah] call them 'gods'?" Rabbi Phineas ben Hama replied, "In order to reward all those who forsake [idolatry]. Said the Holy One: 'Though there was no reality in it, once a man forsakes it, I account it to him as if he had been worshipping something real, but then had come to Me.'"

Rabbi Judah Praises the Romans—Talmud Shabbat 33b

[It happened that while] Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Yose, and Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai were sitting together, [a man named] Judah [who was] the son of converts happened to join them. Rabbi Judah began the discussion by observing, "How noble are the works of this [Roman] nation! They laid out streets, they built bridges, they erected bathhouses." Rabbi Yose remained silent, but Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai spoke up and said, "All that they made, they made to serve themselves: they laid out streets to settle harlots in, baths to pamper themselves in, bridges to levy tolls on." Judah the son of converts went off

and retold the sages' words, until they were heard by the Roman government, which decreed: [Rabbi] Judah, who acclaimed [Rome], shall be acclaimed [as spokesman for the Jews]; [Rabbi] Yose, who remained silent, shall be exiled to Sepphoris; [Rabbi] Simeon, who vilified [Rome], shall be put to death.

Impressions about Converts

Your Children are like Olive Plants—Bemidbar Rabbah, 8:9, on Psalm 128:3

HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO ARE IN AWE OF YHVH, WHO WALK IN YHVH'S WAYS...YOUR WIFE SHALL BE LIKE A FRUITFUL VINE...YOUR CHILDREN LIKE OLIVE PLANTS AROUND YOUR TABLE (128:1-3).

...it is written, *Your children are like olive plants*. [What does this mean? It means] as the olive tree yields olives for food, olives for drying, and olives for oil, while the oil it yields burns brighter than all other oils, and its leaves do not fall off either in the summer season or in the rainy season, so do the sons of the converts turn out: some of them as masters of the Torah, some as masters of Mishnah, some as business men, some as sages, some as men of understanding, and some having a knowledge of the right time for a thing. Moreover, they will possess seed that shall endure forever.

Blessing for the Righteous—Prayer Liturgy: Weekday Amidah

Let Your tender mercies be stirred for the righteous, the pious, and the leaders of the House of Israel, devoted scholars and faithful converts. Be merciful to us of the House of Israel. Reward all who trust in You. Cast our lot with those who are faithful to You. May we never come to despair, for our trust is in You. Praised are You, Lord who sustains the righteous.

Dearer than Jewish Saints—Simeon ben Yohai, Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer

Converts are dearer to YHVH than Jewish saints.

Converts Become Roots like Israel—Vayikra Rabbah on Hosea 14:8

THEY SHALL RETURN, DWELLING IN HIS SHADOW

Rabbi Abbahu said: The converts who rest in the shadow of YHVH become roots like Israel.

Converts shall Become Essential—Vayikra Rabbah 1:2 on Hosea 14:8

THEY SHALL RETURN, DWELLING IN HIS SHADOW; THEY SHALL GROW LIKE CORN AND FLOURISH LIKE THE VINE; THEIR FRAGRANCE SHALL BE LIKE THE WINE OF LEBANON.

Rabbi Abbahu began a discourse by citing 'They shall return, dwelling in His shadow.' [The text was understood to mean]: These are the converts who come and take refuge in the shade of the Holy One. 'They shall grow like corn' [is understood to mean] they shall become essential like Israel...and

flourish like the vine' [to understand this] you may cite (Psalm 80.9) 'You didst pluck up a vine out of Egypt.' Another explanation of 'They shall grow like corn and flourish like the vine': His remembrance is as the wine of Lebanon. Said the Holy One: the names of converts are as dear to Me as the libation-wine that is offered before Me on the altar.

Dear Are Converts, for the Holy One Adds to their Name—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Exodus 4:18

MOSES RETURNED TO HIS FATHER-IN-LAW JETHRO AND SAID TO HIM: "LET ME GO, I BEG YOU, AND RETURN TO MY BRETHREN WHO ARE IN EGYPT, AND SEE WHETHER THEY ARE STILL ALIVE." AND JETHRO SAID TO MOSES: "GO IN PEACE."

Dear are converts, for the Holy One adds to their name. For so you find with Jethro. At first he was called only Jethro, but when he was converted, he was called Jethro...When one is converted, he receives a reward as if he had labored in the Torah all his years, for it is said (Numbers 10:29) 'come you with us and we will do you good.'

The Gates are Always Open—Shemot Rabbah 19:4 on Job 31:32

THE GER SHALL LODGE OUTSIDE

The Holy One does not disqualify a creature, but receives all. The gates are open at every hour, and anyone who wants to enter may enter....Said Rabbi Berekiah: "To whom does this verse apply? (It applies to converts and means) that the converts are destined to be priests serving the Temple..., and they are destined to eat of the sacred offering-bread because their daughters will marry into the priesthood."

Where to Place the Blessing for the Converts—Tosefta Berakhot 3:25 on Psalm 29

The Eighteen Benedictions which sages ordained correspond to the eighteen [times God's name YHVH is] invoked in [the psalm which begins]: *Ascribe to YHVH...* [Psalm 29; Cf. Mishna Berachot 4:3]. One inserts [a curse] for the heretics in [the blessing] for sectarians, and [the blessing] for the converts in [the blessing] for the elders

How One Should Interact with Converts

Do Not Remind the Convert of His Pork-Eating Past—Various Midrashim based on Mishna Baba Metzia 4:10 (Cf. Tosefta Baba Metzia 3.25, Talmud Baba Metzia 59b, Sifre to Deuteronomy Piska 281, Talmud Gerim 4.1, Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, Mishnat Rabbi Shimon)

Just as there is exaggeration in buying and selling, so too there is wrong done by words. [Thus] one must not ask his fellow: "What is the price of this article?" if he has no intention of buying it. If a man was a converted [heathen], one must not say to him: "Remember your former [sinful] deeds." If the man was the son of a convert, one must not taunt him: "Remember the deeds of your ancestors." [One must do this] because it is written: "You shall neither vex a ger nor oppress him" (Exodus 22:20)

You must not remind the convert of his pork-eating, idol-worshipping past. If he comes to study the Torah you must not say to him, "Shall the lips that gobbled forbidden foods and creeping abominations mouth the words of God?" Such verbal mockery is worse than dishonesty in business. It is comparable to the worship of idols. Wounding the feelings of a convert or oppressing him involves transgression of three negative injunctions. If you ridicule him he has every right to retort with, "You, too, were a *ger* in the land of Egypt." Reproach not your fellow with your own fault. The older convert is especially enjoined to treat the newcomer kindly inasmuch as he knows the soul of the *ger*. Should a convert be in financial difficulties the Jew is required to help him, even to anticipate his difficulties.

The Torah Was Given in Public—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Bahodesh on Exodus 19:2

THEY ENCAMPED IN THE WILDERNESS.

The Torah was given in public, openly in a free place. For had the Torah been given in the land of Israel, the Israelites could have said to the nations of the world: "You have no share in it." But now that it was given in the wilderness publicly and openly in a place that is free for all, everyone wishing to accept it could come and accept it. One [might want to] claim that it was given at night, but the Torah says: "And it came to pass on the third day when it was morning" (Exodus 19:16). One [might want to] claim that it was given in silence, but the Torah says: "When there were thunders and lightning" (ibid.). One might [want to claim] that they could not hear the voice, but the Torah says: "The voice of YHVH is powerful, the voice of YHVH is full of majesty," etc. (Psalm 29:4) Rabbi Jose says: Behold it says: "I have not spoken in secret," etc. (Isaiah 45:19). When I gave the Torah from the very start, I gave it not in the place of a land of darkness, not in a secret place, not in an obscure place.

Abraham Waited to be Circumcised—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Nezikin on Genesis 17:1ff

AND WHEN AVRAM WAS 99 YEARS OLD YHVH APPEARED TO AVRAM AND SAID TO HIM: "...I WILL MAKE MY COVENANT BETWEEN ME AND YOU...EVERY MALE AMONG YOU SHALL BE CIRCUMCIZED...AND AVRAM...CIRCUMCIZED THE FLESH OF [HIS] FORESKIN THAT VERY DAY."

Beloved are the *gerim*. It was for their sake that our father Abraham was not circumcised until he was ninety-nine years old. Had he been circumcised at twenty or at thirty years of age, only those under the age of thirty could have become converts to Judaism. Therefore, YHVH bore with Abraham until he reached ninety-nine years of age, so as not to close the door to future converts.

Love both Neighbor and Convert as Yourself—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Leviticus 19:33

YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.

"Just as 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself' is said of Israel, so of the convert is said 'you shall love him as yourself.'"

48 Reminders to Love the Ger—Midrash Tanhuma, Vayikra three on Deuteronomy 10:18

[GOD] LOVES THE GER

Said Rabbi Judah ben Rabbi Shalom: You find that the Torah warns us forty-eight times against (mistreating) converts, and warns us the same number of times against idolatry. Said the Holy One: It

is enough for him that he has left his idolatry to come to Me; therefore I admonish you concerning him, for I love him, as it is said (Deuteronomy 10:18) 'and He loves the *ger*.'

The Judge Prejudiced against a Convert—Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon

Rabbi Simon ben Lakish, a third century Palestinian Amora warns a judge who may be prejudiced against converts. He declares, "He who perverts justice against a convert is deemed as though he had turned against God himself."

Insecurities About a Convert's Judaism

A Convert who Changes His Name—Tosefta Gittin 6:4

A male convert who changes his [Israelite] name to a gentile name—[his conversion remains] valid.

Conversion in a Gentile Society—Tosefta Shabbat 8:5

A convert who converted while living among gentiles and who performed a prohibited act of labor on the Sabbath: Rabbi Akiba declares him guilty, but Monobases declares him innocent. [Monobases argues] reason suggests that he is innocent since one who performs a sin inadvertently must bring a sin-offering, but one who does so deliberately should be excommunicated. Now just as one who performs a prohibited action deliberately is guilty only when he does so informedly, so one who does an act inadvertently should be guilty only when he does so informedly, [and one who is living among the gentiles has not violated the Sabbath informedly].

Their Destiny was at Mt. Sinai—Talmud Tractate Shabbat 145b-146b on Deuteronomy 29:14

NOT WITH YOU ALONE DO I MAKE THIS COVENANT, BUT ALSO WITH THOSE WHO ARE NOT HERE WITH US THIS DAY.

"When Israel stood at Mount Sinai, their abominations ceased; but as the idolaters did not stand at Mount Sinai, their abominations did not cease." Hearing this, Rabbi Aha ben Raba asked Rabbi Ashi: What about converts? The latter replied: "Though they were not there (at Sinai), their destiny (*mazzal*) was there, as it is written 'with him that stands here with us this day before YHVH our YHVH and also with him that is not here with us this day.'"

Insecurities About One's Own Judaism Because of Converts

If the Israelites had not Witnessed the Thunders—Midrash Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 6

Dearer to YHVH is the convert who has come of his own accord than all the crowds of Israelites who stood before Mount Sinai. For had the Israelites not witnessed the thunders, the lightnings, the quaking mountain and the sounding trumpets (*shofar*), they would not have accepted the Torah. But [the convert], who witnessed 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?

Moses' Insecurity—Yalkut Shimoni on Deut 10:18

[GOD] LOVES THE GER

Said Moses before the Holy One: Master of the World! Does this convert mean as much to You as [my tribe] the Levites? [God] replied: [The convert] is important to Me because he converted for My sake."

Subsection v: Regarding Interactions with Potential Converts

Interactions / Attitudes which Encourage Conversion

Akilas, Hadrian Caesar's Nephew—Midrash Tanhuma, Mishpatim 5

Akilas, who was Hadrian [Caesar]'s nephew, wished to become a convert but was afraid of his uncle Hadrian. So he said to him: I want to go into business. Hadrian: Does that mean you are in need of silver or gold? My treasures are open before you. Akilas: I still want to go into business, to get outside, to learn what people think. And I seek your counsel on how to go about it. Hadrian: Any merchandise whose price is depressed, all but sunk in the ground—go and deal in it, for in the end its price will rise and you will realize a profit. So Akilas went to the Land of Israel and studied Torah.

After a while Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua came upon him, and, noticing a change in his countenance, they said to each other: Akilas is apparently studying Torah. When he came into their presence, he proceeded to put many questions to them, which they answered. Then he went up to his uncle Hadrian, who asked him: Why is your countenance changed? I suspect that either your merchandise sold at a loss, or can it be that someone has distressed you? Akilas: No. You are my kinsman—would any man dare distress me?

Hadrian: Then why is your countenance changed? Akilas: Because I have studied Torah. What is more, I have had myself circumcised. Hadrian: Who told you to do so? Akilas: It was you I consulted. Hadrian: When? Akilas: When I told you that I wanted to go into business, and you said to me, "Any merchandise whose price is depressed, all but sunk in the ground—go and deal in it, for in the end it will rise in value." I then went around among all nations and found none held in lower esteem and deemed to be more deeply sunk in the ground than Israel. But in the end they will be exalted, as Isaiah said, "Thus says YHVH, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to him who is despised of men, to him who is abhorred of nations, to a servant of rulers: Kings shall see him and rise, princes, they shall prostrate themselves" (Isaiah 49:7).

Why would Moses Speak Alluringly?—Rashi on Exodus 18:8 based on Mechilta

MOSES TOLD HIS FATHER-IN-LAW EVERYTHING THAT YHVH HAD DONE TO PHARAOH AND EGYPT FOR ISRAEL'S SAKE—ALL THE TROUBLE THAT HAD BEFALLEN THEM ON THE WAY—AND THAT YHVH HAD RESCUED THEM.

[Why would Moses need to tell Jethro all that YHVH had done? Does it not already say seven verses earlier in 18:1: "Jethro...heard all that God did for Moses and for Israel..."? Therefore Moses must be repeating the story for a reason. What is this reason?] Moses [repeated the story] to draw [Jethro's] interest, to attract Jethro to the Torah.

Befriend Him and do not Repel Him—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Jeremiah 23:23

BEHOLD I AM A GOD THAT BRINGS NEAR, SAYS YHVH, AND NOT A GOD THAT REPELS

This God said to Moses: "I am One who welcomes, not One who repels." As it is said: "Behold I am a God that brings near, says YHVH, and not a God that repels" (Jeremiah 23:23). "I am He who brought Jethro near, not keeping him at a distance. So also you, when a man comes to you wishing to become a convert to Judaism, as long as he comes in the name of God for the sake of heaven, do you, likewise: befriend him and do not repel him."

Words Which Penetrate Their Hearts—Nathan of Nemirov's Paper

Help me to speak to these people words which penetrate their hearts, words of truth, words of holiness. May their hearts be truthfully awakened...

A Compliment to Jethro—Rashi on Exodus 18:5

JETHRO, MOSES' FATHER-IN-LAW CAME WITH HIS SONS AND HIS WIFE TO MOSES INTO THE WILDERNESS. ...into the wilderness. The words are superfluous as we know that the Israelites were in the wilderness! But the fact is repeated as a compliment to Jethro that he left the comfort of his home for the hardships of the wilderness to learn the Torah.

A Sack Full of Nuts—Shir haShirim Rabbah 6:11 on Numbers 23:10

WHO CAN COUNT THE DUST-GRAINS OF JACOB, EVEN ONE QUARTER OF ISRAEL?
Just as a sack full of nuts that is in your hand can still receive many sesame grains and mustard seeds, and can hold them all—so many converts have come and been added to Israel.

A Hand of Welcome—Vayikra Rabbah 2:9 on Leviticus 1:2

WHEN ANY PERSON...BRINGS AN OFFERING...
Why does it say "any person"? This is to include converts...The sages have taught thus: If [any man, including] a heathen seeks to become a convert, a hand of welcome should be held out to bring him under the wings of the *Shechinah*. Thereafter, the converts in each succeeding generation are there to [reach out to] their heathen brethren.

Why Should You Be a Stranger?—Midrash Tanhuma, Lech l'cha 6 on Jeremiah 14:8

"Our Rabbis say: Dear is the convert, for the Holy One had written of Himself 'Why should You be as a ger in the land?' Said the Holy One: Thus do I cherish the convert."

Interactions / Attitudes which Discourage Conversion

Judah Stands Up before the Assembly—Tosefta Yadayim 2:17-19

Judah, an Ammonite convert stood up before them in the [place of assembly]. He said to them, "Am I allowed to enter the congregation (be converted)?"

Rabban Gamaliel said to him, "You are prohibited."

Rabbi Joshua said to him, "You are permitted."

Rabban Gamaliel said to him, "Lo, it is written, 'An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of YHVH [even to the tenth generation]' [Deuteronomy 23:3]."

Rabbi Joshua said to him, "and are Ammon and Moab still living in their land? Already Sennacherib, king of Assyria, has come up and mixed up all the nations..."

Judah the Ammonite convert said to them, "What shall I do?"

They said to him, "You have already heard the ruling of the elder. Lo, you are permitted to enter the congregation."

Rabban Gamaliel said to them, "Also an Egyptian convert is in the same status as this one..."

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said to them, "The preciousness of Torah redresses their uncleanness."

They Ought Not to Have Repelled Timna—Talmud Sanhedrin 99b

Timna was a princess (Genesis 36:10, 12, 29), for her brother was a prince (Lotan). She wanted to become a convert, and she went to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and they would not receive her. So then she became a concubine of Eliphaz, the son of Esau, for she said, "Better to become a handmaid of this nation than a princess of any other." Her son was Amalek, who wrought great trouble in Israel. Why? Because they ought not to have repelled her.

We Are Commanded to Love Converts—Responsa Rambam (ed. Freimann), no. 42

Concerning the vexations and humiliating words violently addressed to this convert by certain Jews, Maimonides writes to him: Toward father and mother we are commanded honor and reverence, toward the prophets to obey them, but toward the converts, we are commanded to have great love in our inmost hearts.... YHVH, in His glory, loves converts.... A man who left his father and birthplace and the realm of his people at a time when they are powerful, who understood with his insight, and who attached himself to this nation which today is a despised people, the slave of rulers, and recognized and knew that their religion is true and righteous...and pursued YHVH...and entered beneath the wings of the *Shechinah*...YHVH does not call you fool [Hebrew *kesil*], but intelligent [*maskil*] and understanding, wise and walking correctly, a pupil of Abraham our father...

The Man who Violates is own Teachings—Avot d'Rabbi Nathan

Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar said: I will offer you a parable. To what might Adam be compared? To a man who married a convert and used to give her instruction, saying, "My dear, do not eat bread when your hands are defiled, do not eat untithed produce, do not profane the Sabbath, do not make vows rashly, and do not associate with another man. If you break one of these rules, you will die." Now what

did the man do? He arose and ate in her presence bread although his hands were defiled, he ate in front of her untithed produce – he profaned the Sabbath and made vows rashly – and also offered her some (of the food). What could that convert have thought to herself? All that my husband forbade me in the beginning was without foundation. She thereupon went and transgressed them all.

Assessing a Potential Convert

Perhaps They Will Become Converts with Pure Intent—Jerusalem Talmud Kiddushin iv:i, 65b

Those who seek to become converts because of their love for a Jew are not received. Neither are those who seek to become Jewish out of fear or because of some advantage. But Rav said: They are to be received. This is the law: They are to be welcomed immediately. They are not to be repelled at the beginning; and they must be treated kindly for perhaps they will become converts with pure intent.

When Naomi Saw How Determined She Was—Ruth 1:14-19

They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law.' 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. Thus and more may YHVH do to me if anything but death parts me from you.' When Naomi saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her, and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem.

The House of Amalek They Shall Not Receive—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek

And He Said: 'The Hand Upon the Throne of YHVH, YHVH Will Have War,' etc. Rabbi Eliezer says: God swore by the throne of His Glory that if a person of any of the nations should come desiring to be converted to Judaism, Israel shall receive him, but a person from the house of Amalek they shall not receive.

Repel with the Left, Draw Near with the Right—Talmud Sotah 47a

Always, while the left arm is pushing away the right must be used to draw near.

The Three Types of Converts—Yalkut Shimoni on Deuteronomy 10:18

[YHVH] CARRIES OUT THE JUDGMENT OF ORPHAN AND WIDOW, AND LOVES THE GER GIVING HIM FOOD AND CLOTHING

"Rabbi Hiyya said:... "There are three sorts of converts. There is one who converts for the sake of food. To him the Holy one says: You converted for the sake of a carcass; lo, [conversion] is granted to you, as

it is said (Deuteronomy 14:21) 'to the *ger* that is in your gates shall you give it.' The second convert (comes) in order to be supported like a poor man—[conversion] is [also] granted to him, as it is said (Leviticus 23:22) 'and when you harvest the harvest of your land, you shall not fully reap the corners of your field, etc., you shall leave them to the poor and the *ger*.' The third convert is he who converts for the sake of the Holy One. Of him the Holy One says: He is as important to Me as one of them (Israel), as it is said (Numbers 15:15) 'In the congregation there shall be one statute for you and for the *ger*,' etc. And further, he is as important to me as the Levite, for it is said, 'and the Levite shall come,' etc. (Deuteronomy 14:29, i.e., in the same chapter which provides food for the convert.) Said Moses before the Holy One: Master of the World! Does this convert [really] mean as much to You as the Levite? [God] replied: He is important to Me because he converted for My sake."

Section 3c: TEXTS FOR DISCUSSING CONVERSION WITH PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS

This section contains texts intended for discussion with people who are themselves exploring conversion or who have converted. These texts are divided by various issues which are often present in the conversion process, and it is the author's hope that they will provide vehicles for people to explore their own feelings, emotions, and paths. These texts might, for example, be used for individual discussions with people exploring conversion, or in identity exploration and development groups such as the Reform Movement's "New Beginnings" program for conversion exploration. These texts might also be effective for Rabbis to facilitate discussions with people whom they are guiding through the conversion process.

Subsection i: Motivations to Conversion

Acceptable and Unacceptable Reasons for Pursuing Conversion

Perhaps They Will Become Converts with Pure Intent—Jerusalem Talmud Kiddushin iv:i, 65b

Those who seek to become converts because of their love for a Jew are not received. Neither are those who seek to become Jewish out of fear or because of some advantage. But Rav said: They are to be received. And this is the law: They are to be welcomed immediately. They are not to be repelled at the beginning; and they must be treated kindly for perhaps they will become converts with pure intent.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The gemara here explains that the Tannaitic law (the first sentence) has been changed by the time of Rav (a later source)
- The two viewpoints differ on their focus—the Tannaitic source focuses on the potential convert as he/she stands in the moment, while Rav's law focuses on the person's potential for the future.
- What happens in Rav's scenario if the person does not become a convert with pure intent? It seems that that would be an acceptable risk to Rav, and that the goal is not that every convert will have pure intent, but merely to ensure that every convert who could have pure intent is given the opportunity to do so (kind of like the American legal theory that it is better to free 100 guilty people than imprison one innocent person).

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Assessing the motivation of potential converts
- Fundamental philosophies of conversion
- Whether potential converts need to have pure intent, or only the possibility of pure intent
- What a potential convert needs to demonstrate in order to be accepted
- Differing standards of conversion between different Rabbis or different communities
- Changing motivations for people exploring conversion and people who have converted

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How would you restate the three categories of converts described in the text so that they apply to modern-day converts?
2. Are there additional categories of motivation which you think might make someone unfit for conversion?
3. The Tannaitic source (first sentence) focuses on a potential convert's motivation at the time of conversion. Rav focuses on the convert's potential for the future. In what ways do you think these two factors should influence a person's exploration? In what ways should it affect a sponsoring Rabbi's guidance? the Rabbi's decision? the *beit din*'s decision?
4. The Talmud shows that the law about accepting converts changed significantly in quite a short period of time (about 200 years between the two statements in this text). How consistent do you think Jewish law should be from generation to generation regarding acceptable converts? What are the implications if the law is too rigid? What are the implications if it is too pliable?
5. The Tannaitic source seems to want assurance that each convert has appropriate motivation for converting. Rav seems willing to accept converts who might never have appropriate motivation in order to allow some to convert who might ultimately gain that motivation. What do you see as the implications of each viewpoint?
6. How have your motivations toward conversion changed during your process?
7. In what ways do you hope your motivations will change in the future? How can you achieve these goals?

The Three Types of Converts—Yalkut Shimoni on Deuteronomy 10:18

[YHVH] CARRIES OUT THE JUDGMENT OF ORPHAN AND WIDOW, AND LOVES THE *GER* GIVING HIM FOOD AND CLOTHING

"Rabbi Hiyya said:..."There are three sorts of converts. There is one who converts for the sake of food. To him the Holy one says: You converted for the sake of a carcass; lo, [conversion] is granted to you, as it is said (Deuteronomy 14:21) 'to the *ger* that is in your gates shall you give it.' The second convert (comes) in order to be supported like a poor man—[conversion] is [also] granted to him, as it is said (Leviticus 23:22) 'and when you harvest the harvest of your land, you shall not fully reap the corners of your field, etc., you shall leave them to the poor and the *ger*.' The third convert is he who converts for the sake of the Holy One. Of him the Holy One says: He is as important to Me as one of them (Israel), as it is said (Numbers 15:15) 'In the congregation there shall be one statute for you and for the *ger*,' etc. And further, he is as important to me as the Levite, for it is said, 'and the Levite shall come,' etc. (Deuteronomy 14:29, i.e., in the same chapter which provides food for the convert.)

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Rabbi Hiyya accepts all three of these types of converts as converts, even though some of their motivations might seem to us rather questionable.
- The distinction between the one who converts for food and the one who converts in order to be supported like a poor man are not so clear. They seem like similar motivations.
- No particular justification seems to be given for why Rabbi Hiyya picked these three motivations or these three Torah verses rather than the multiple other times the Torah mentions *ger*.
- It is not clear whether Rabbi Hiyya picked the Torah verses or the types of converts first.

- It is not clear whether “ger” in this text means “stranger” or “convert”, particularly in the prooftexts. There are significant implications of choosing to translate the word one way or the other.
- There is a lot more explanation and two prooftexts given for the third type of convert, compared to the first two types.
- There seems to be a distinction between conversions for personal benefit (the first two) and for spiritual reasons (the third one).

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Assessing motivations of potential convert
- Differences between converts and the implication for their acceptance
- Human and Divine influences on conversion

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How would you restate Rabbi Hiyya’s three categories of converts as general categories encompassing modern-day converts?
2. What motivations influence you which fit into each of the categories?
3. What do you think are acceptable reasons for converting to Judaism?
4. What do you think are unacceptable reasons for converting to Judaism?
5. Who decides motivation and how?
6. The text seems to imply that Rabbi Hiyya accepts all three types of converts, but God only mentions acceptance of the third. What do you make of this?
7. What does it mean to “convert for the sake of God”?

Assessing One's Motivation

Shall I Not Receive and Exalt Converts?—Shemot Rabbah 19:4 on Exodus 12:43

THIS IS THE ORDINANCE OF THE PASSOVER: NO GER SHALL EAT OF IT

Said the Holy One to the converts: Do you fear that I disqualify you [because of what is] said concerning the paschal sacrifice: "no ger eat thereof?"—You must recall the Gibeonites, and what goodness I did for them (according to tradition, the Gibeonites converted so that they could work in the Temple). If I did this for the Gibeonites who were Amorites, and who came out of fear, and who acted with guile toward Israel—yet I received them and did them good and exacted justice on their behalf from My children (according to tradition, Saul's sons were killed because Saul killed the Gibeonites unjustly)—shall I not receive and exalt converts who come out of love and serve My name?

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The text implies that all converts can be accepted no matter what their motivation.
- The phrase "exacted justice on their behalf" seems unusual. The text seems to imply that this was the reason for the Gibeonites' acceptance.
- There is no claim made that the Gibeonites were "exalted"—the text only says they were "received".
- There seems to be a claim that different motivations for conversion have different rewards.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Being comfortable with one's motivation
- Getting out of the conversion process what one puts in

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you "fear" might "disqualify you" during your conversion process?
2. What is the "Gibeonite" motivation within you? In what ways have you "acted with guile toward Israel"? What "justice" has been "exacted on your behalf"?
3. The text states that the "Gibeonites, who came out of fear," were "received", but the "converts who came out of love and service" were "exalted":
 - How is what you bring to your conversion process related to your "reward"?
 - In what ways do you feel "received"?
 - In what ways do you feel "exalted"?

If the Israelites Had Not Witnessed the Thunders—Midrash Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 6

Dearer to YHVH is the convert who has come of his own accord than all the crowds of Israelites who stood before Mount Sinai. For had the Israelites not witnessed the thunders, the lightnings, the quaking mountain and the sounding trumpets (*shofar*), they would not have accepted the Torah. But [the

convert], who witnessed 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?

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The Midrash establishes a clear hierarchy of motivation.
- The Midrash describes many different externally-inspiring motivations for the Israelites' original acceptance of Torah.
- In comparing converts and Jews, the text uses the acceptance of the Torah (perhaps the symbol of the religious component of Judaism), but does not use the Exodus (perhaps the symbol of the cultural or "peoplehood" component of Judaism)

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Free will vs. externally-inspired motivations for conversion
- Strength of motivations
- Religious vs. cultural attachment to Judaism

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The Midrash certainly seems to imply that internal motivation for accepting Torah is better than external motivation. What are the benefits and challenges with each?
2. Judaism does not presently use such "pyrotechnics" to inspire conversion. How is your conversion process affected by this absence? How would it be different if Judaism used "pyrotechnics" or other fanciful means to inspire conversion?
3. In what ways is your motivation internal? In what ways is it external? How do you feel about your personal balance?
4. The Midrash describes Torah (the ultimate symbol of religious Judaism) as the motivation for Judaism, but doesn't mention the Exodus (the ultimate symbol of cultural Judaism). Why do you think this would be? What are the religious and what are the cultural motivations present in your process?

What Goodness Caused Jethro to Rejoice?—Mechilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Exodus 18:9

AND JETHRO REJOICED OVER ALL THE GOODNESS THAT YHVH HAD DONE FOR ISRAEL

Rabbi Joshua says: [The goodness] of which the Torah speaks is the goodness of the manna. Moses said to Jethro: "In this manna which YHVH has given to us, we can taste the taste of all the delicacies in the world." For, instead of saying merely "goodness," or "the goodness," or "all the goodness," it says: "Over all the goodness."

Rabbi Eleazar of Modi'im says: [The goodness] of which the Torah speaks is the goodness of the well [of water in the wilderness]. Moses said to Jethro: "In the waters of this well which YHVH has given us we can taste the taste of old wine, the taste of new wine, the taste of milk, the taste of honey, and the taste of all the sweet drinks in the world." For instead of saying merely "goodness," or "all the goodness," it says: "Over all the goodness."

Rabbi Eliezer says: [The goodness] of which the Torah speaks is the goodness of the land of Israel. Moses said to Jethro: "YHVH is going to give us six good portions: the land of Israel, the future of the world, the new world, the kingdom of David, and the institutions of the priests and of the Levites." Therefore, instead of merely "goodness," or "the goodness," or "all the goodness," it says: "Over all the goodness."

Immediately Jethro said: "Blessed be YHVH."

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The three explanations of goodness are essentially food, water, and land.
- Each basic thing (food, water, land) is described as the foundation for all sorts of varieties of things (i.e. manna is transformed into all the delicacies of the world, water into wine, milk, honey, etc., the land into the 6 forms of goodness).
- It is not clear whether the implication is that Jethro rejoices over each of these things, or only over the amalgamation of these three things.
- The manna and well were temporal blessings—the manna stopped when the Israelites left the wilderness, the well stopped when Miriam died. One could argue that the land stopped (at either one of the two exiles) or that it didn't. It is also worth noting that none of the three had stopped at the time Jethro encounters them.
- The manna and well are clearly portrayed as miracles. Again, the question is debatable about the land.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Comprehending the fundamentals of Judaism
- Transforming the fundamentals into one's own personal Judaism
- Finding the beauty in Judaism
- Evaluating all the different benefits Judaism offers and their relevance in one's life
- The influence of signs and miracles

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In the text, what is fundamentally described as "goodness" are three very simple things—food, water, land. Those things are then transformed into categories with great variety.
 - Do you think Jethro rejoices over the simple concepts or the variety of delicacies?
 - What fundamental concepts in the world do you find Judaism inspires you to celebrate?
 - What details in the world do you find Judaism inspires you to celebrate?
 - What fundamentals of Judaism cause you to rejoice?
 - What details of Judaism cause you to rejoice?
2. The text only says that Jethro blessed YHVH at the conclusion of the three descriptions of "goodness".
 - Do you think Jethro was inspired to rejoice over each of the three "goodnesses" described, or did it take all three together?
 - What things in Judaism would be, by themselves, enough to inspire your conversion exploration?
 - What various fundamental concepts make up your comprehensive view of Judaism?

3. What fundamental concepts in Judaism do you think you need to comprehend before you can "Bless YHVH"?
4. The text cites manna, wells discovered in the midst of the wilderness, and the land of Israel as motivations to Jethro. At least the first two of these things, if not all three, are portrayed in the Torah as both temporal and miraculous:
 - What role do signs and miracles play in your conversion decision?
 - How much and in what ways are you influenced by more temporal realities in Judaism, and by more eternal realities?
 - How much and in what ways are you influenced by more temporal realities in your life, and by more eternal realities?

Implications of One's Motivation

A Person's Sacred Things—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Numbers 5:5-10

(excerpted) ANYONE WHO COMMITS ANY HUMAN SIN SHALL...MAKE RESTITUTION...OF THE AMOUNT PLUS 1/5, GIVING IT TO THE PERSON TO WHOM HE IS INDEBTED. IF THE PERSON HAS NO KINSMAN TO WHOM THE DEBT CAN BE PAID (I.E. THE PERSON HAS NO JEWISH KIN—IS A CONVERT), THE DEBT IS GIVEN TO THE PRIEST... EVERY PORTION FROM ANY OF THE SACRED THINGS THAT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL BRING TO THE PRIEST SHALL BE THEIRS. A PERSON'S SACRED THINGS SHALL BE THEIRS, AND WHAT A PERSON GIVES TO THE PRIEST SHALL BE THEIRS.

[What is the meaning of the seemingly extraneous phrase which] is written, "A PERSON'S SACRED THINGS SHALL BE THEIRS?" The text speaks of none but the true converts; hence it says, AND SEE YOUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN. PEACE BE UPON ISRAEL (Psalms 128:5). This is to tell you that a convert whose conversion is due to pure motives is privileged and his children [are privileged].... To [him]...all sacred things will belong. In confirmation of this it says, AND YHVH LOVES THE CONVERT, IN GIVING HIM FOOD AND CLOTHING (Deuteronomy 10:18). Akila, the convert, once went in to Rabbi Eliezer and said to him: '[Do you really mean to say that] all the glory of the convert consists of HE LOVES THE CONVERT, BY GIVING HIM FOOD AND CLOTHING?' Said [Rabbi Eliezer] to him: 'Is this such a trifling matter in your eyes? It is a thing for which our ancestor Jacob [had to] prostrate himself in prayer, saying, AND PLEASE GIVE ME BREAD TO EAT, AND CLOTHING TO PUT ON (Genesis 28:20), and now comes this man and [God] offers it to him on a tray!'

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Akila the convert seems to feel things came very hard to him, while Rabbi Eliezer seems to think they came very easily.
- Akila seems to think what is given is trivial, while Rabbi Eliezer thinks that the gift is enormous.
- The motivation of a convert affects not only him but his progeny as well, and the convert bears that responsibility.
- "See your children's children" seems to give the implication that the convert is judged not only by his own actions, but by those of his children.
- What is the meaning of "privileged"? How "privileged"?
- What is the meaning of "food and clothing"? Is it "everything"? Does it have implications of "start with the basics"? Does it have implications of "God provides everything even down to the smallest details"?
- It is not clear from Rabbi Eliezer's statement whether the ease with which the convert receives "food and clothing" compared to Jacob is a good thing or a bad thing.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Feeling like you've come a long way but not receiving credit for how far you've come
- Taking the responsibility not only for your own conversion, but for the implications for your future generations
- Making comparisons to born Jews
- Dealing with the judgments, emotions, and insecurities of born Jews
- Rewards of the conversion process

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the implications of your conversion process on your children/family?
2. What parts of Judaism do you feel have been offered to you on a tray, and for what parts do you feel you've needed to "prostrate yourself"?
3. What "privileges" has Judaism brought to your life?
4. Rabbi Eliezer helps Akila see the value in small things, a very fundamental Jewish teaching. In what ways has Judaism changed your view of the world?
5. Have you ever had a discussion with someone who failed to recognize the struggles of your process the way Rabbi Eliezer thinks everything came easily to the convert in his story?
6. What possible meanings do you see in the phrase "food and clothing"? What could it represent in a conversion process? in your conversion process?
7. When the text says that a convert whose motivation is pure will be "privileged", what does that mean to you? how privileged? privileged compared to whom?
8. What do you think Rabbi Eliezer views as the "privilege"—the food and clothing, or the ease with which the convert receives it? Or perhaps something else? What are the implications of this in your conversion process?
9. In what ways is it beneficial to receive something easily, and in what ways is it problematic? How does this apply to your conversion process?

Happy is Everyone—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:1

HAPPY IS EVERY ONE WHO REVERES YHVH, WHO WALKS IN HIS WAYS

Consider the verse, HAPPY IS EVERY ONE WHO REVERES YHVH, WHO WALKS IN HIS WAYS (Psalm 128:1). It does not say, 'Happy is Israel,' or 'Happy are the priests' or 'Happy are the Levites', but HAPPY IS EVERY ONE WHO REVERES YHVH. This assures the convert who reveres YHVH that they come under the designation of 'happy'. [This is proven because both Israelites and converts are described as happy; for] it says of Israel, HAPPY ARE YOU, O ISRAEL (Deuteronomy 33:29), and it says of [converts], HAPPY IS EVERY ONE WHO REVERES YHVH. [Does the phrase "one who reveres YHVH" refer to all converts? If not,] to which kind of convert does the term 'happy' apply? [It applies] to one who is a true and sincere convert, and not to those of whom it is written, THEY REVERED YHVH, AND SERVED THEIR OWN GODS (II Kings 17:33). It only applies to a convert who reveres the Holy One, blessed by He, AND walks in His ways. Hence [the seemingly extraneous phrase] WHO WALKS IN HIS WAYS [is added to the initial verse].

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Twice in six verses Psalm 128 uses the phrase “y’rei YHVH (to stand in awe of YHVH)” —a phrase which often is a euphemism for conversion—hence everything in the psalm is taken to refer to converts.
- Happiness is a goal and a result of being Jewish.
- It seems there are distinctions made even between people who have already converted, based on their motivation for being part of Judaism.
- There is description here of people who declared that they “revered YHVH”, but then later returned to their “gods”.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- What a person must leave in the past when converting.
- The joy of Judaism.
- The joy of the conversion process.
- Acting Jewish.
- Being judged and examined about one’s commitment to Judaism even after converting.
- Trying to appear strongly Jewish / hiding things about one’s past.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What about Judaism makes you “happy”?
2. What about the conversion process makes you “happy”?
3. Are there times you appear happy about the conversion process and aren’t? Are there times you feel happy and don’t think you should?
4. What do you make of the reality that the text seems to retain suspicion of converts, even after their conversion? How would you apply that to modernity? To your conversion process?
5. How many different ways related to the conversion process can you interpret the phrase “revere YHVH, and serve their own gods”? When and how have these interpretations come to play in your conversion process?
6. Which of “your own gods”(loosely interpreted) would you want to continue “serving”? Are there any you feel you would need to keep hidden? How will you handle that challenge?
7. What things do you do to visibly demonstrate your Judaism? In what ways do you do these for yourself? For others?
8. What do you see as the difference between “revering the Holy One” and “walking in God’s ways”?
9. What things do you do to “revere the Holy One”? What things do you do to “walk in God’s ways”?

Did Jethro Convert Before or After Sinai?—Parshanut on Exodus 18:5

AND JETHRO, MOSES’ FATHER-IN-LAW, CAME WITH HIS SONS AND HIS WIFE TO MOSES IN THE WILDERNESS WHERE HE WAS ENCAMPED AT THE MOUNTAIN OF GOD

Ramban and Ibn Ezra, two of the most respected Torah commentators in history, debate whether Jethro’s arrival occurs before or after the giving of the Torah. Their debate is anchored in the same

debate held by Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Eleazar of Modi'im as described in Talmud Zevachim 116a and recounted in the Mechilta. The full quote is too lengthy to bring here. It may be summarized as follows:

Ramban suggests that Jethro arrives before the giving of the Torah. His primary proof for this is twofold:

- First, that Jethro's appearance occurs before the giving of Torah in the sequence of the Torah.
- Second, two proofs of omission:
 1. In both Exodus 18:1 and 8-9, Moses describes "what YHVH has done for the Israelites". He does not mention the Torah, and given how important the Torah is, he certainly would have mentioned it if it had already been given
 2. In Exodus 18:10-11 Jethro cites his reason for declaring YHVH superior to other gods, and again there is no mention of the Torah.

Ibn Ezra suggests that Jethro arrives after the giving of the Torah, but the passage is placed in its present location in the Torah (immediately after the battle with Amalek) to contrast the best and the worst of the non-Jewish world. His prooftexts are predominantly based on the following:

- It does not say that Jethro built an altar for his offerings in Exodus 18:12, so this event must have occurred after the tabernacle was built when a permanent altar existed.
- In Exodus 18:16, Moses uses the phrase "God's decrees and laws", indicating that the Torah had already been given.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- The role of theology and of learning in the motivation toward conversion
- The role of "events" in the motivation toward conversion
- The role of Revelation and the role of Redemption in the motivation toward conversion
- The function of the intellect in the conversion decision

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the implications of Jethro choosing to convert before or after the Torah was given?
2. What does Torah symbolize to you in your conversion decision?
3. What role does study play in your conversion decision?
4. What amount of Torah must one accept to be a good convert?
5. The event at Sinai has many implications. Two of the most critical are the coming together of the Israelite people into a religious community, and the guidance the Torah provides for their lives:
 - In what ways do you think it is the act of the giving of the Torah which would have been influential to Jethro, and in what ways the contents of the Torah?
 - In what ways is each influential to you?
 - Do you feel personally more connected to community or religion at this time?
 - How can you connect more strongly to each?
6. The event at Sinai also points toward two major concepts in Judaism—Revelation (exemplified by the giving of Torah), and Redemption (exemplified by the contents of Torah). In what ways is each influential to you?

Other People's Influence on the Conversion Decision / Motivation

Turn Away Three Times—Ruth 1:8-19 (excerpted)

Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to her mother's house...And they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people. And Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me?...And they lifted up their voice, and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth held fast to her. And she said, Behold, your sister-in-law is gone back to her people, and to her gods; go back you after your sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Do not entreat me to leave you, or to keep me from following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; Where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried. When Naomi saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her, and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- These verses are the source text for the expectation that potential converts will be turned away three times.
- Orpah does not heed the first time Naomi asks her to return to her home, but she does heed the second time.
- Naomi uses three different methods to try to convince the women. First she gives a simple dictatorial instruction. Second she tries reason. Third, she implicitly demands that Ruth make a choice between what she came from (her people, her gods) and what she would be going to.
- In the first interaction, the sisters-in-law seem to be united as they answer together.
- It is interesting that the text says Ruth "clung to [Naomi]"

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- The three-fold rejection
- Interacting with and potentially being influenced by other people exploring conversion
- Different methods of turning people away and different ways of asking people to assess their motivation
- Choosing not to convert
- Internal versus external influences on the conversion decision

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Naomi's interactions with her daughters-in-law are the basis for Judaism's expectation that a potential convert should be "turned away" three times before acceptance:
 - Why do you think Judaism would develop this expectation?
 - In what ways do you appreciate this expectation?
 - In what ways are you challenged/frustrated by this expectation?
2. Why do you think Orpah heeds Naomi's request the second time, but not the first time? What differences do you see between the requests? How have you experienced these types of requests during your conversion process?

3. What could someone say to you that would convince you not to convert?
4. Although Ruth rejects Naomi's request, the statement "Do not entreat me to leave you" seems to imply Ruth is greatly influenced by Naomi's opinion. Who in your process has challenged your decision? How have you reacted to it?
5. Naomi not only requests three different times that the women return, but does so three different ways.
 - What do you see as the differences?
 - What is the effect of these different methods?
 - What different ways have you considered not converting?
 - What methods are most and least convincing for you?
6. What do you make of the fact that the sisters-in-law answer Naomi together the first time? What other people who are themselves considering conversion have influenced your process and/or decision? How so?
7. Ruth, in her statement: "Do not keep me from following you" seems to indicate that she will proceed with or without Naomi's permission. What do you make of this? In what ways can you identify with Ruth's statement?
8. How do you read the phrase "but Ruth clung to [Naomi]"? Do you think it is healthy that Ruth is "clinging" to someone as part of her process? How has this reality been manifest in your process?

Moses Endorses Judaism to Jethro—Exodus 18:5-12

Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he prostrated himself and kissed him, and each inquired about the other's well-being; then they came to the tent. Moses told his father-in-law everything that YHVH had done to Pharaoh and Egypt for Israel's sake—all the travail that had befallen them on the way—and that YHVH had rescued them. Jethro rejoiced over all the good that YHVH had done for Israel, that He had rescued it from the land of Egypt.

Jethro said, "Blessed is YHVH, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, Who has rescued the people from under the hand of Egypt. Now I know that YHVH is greater than all the gods, for in the very matter in which [the Egyptians] had conspired against them..."

Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, took a burnt-offering and feast-offerings for YHVH; and Aaron and all the elders of Israel came to eat bread with the father-in-law of Moses before YHVH.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The connection of verses seems to imply that it is YHVH's actions, and particularly Moses' description of them, which inspires Jethro to convert.
- Moses establishes a rapport with Jethro before discussing things related to conversion.
- Based on the use of the phrase "rescued you," Jethro seems to feel that YHVH's actions in Egypt were directed towards the Jews, and that he personally had no involvement in those actions.
- Jethro compares YHVH to other gods, and this hierarchical comparison seems to be the basis for his decision to convert.
- Aaron and all the elders of the community celebrate with Jethro.
- The text conspicuously omits Moses from the description of the feast.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Role of individuals in a person's conversion decision
- Perception of religion as represented by the kindness shown by Jews
- Comparison of religions
- Welcoming a convert into the community
- People who are part of the convert's process
- People who aren't part of the convert's process but should be
- Feeling part of a community's history

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What people most influence you in your conversion decision?
 - What things does Moses do which influence Jethro's impression of Judaism? What actions do you see Jews take which influence your conversion decision?
 - What things does Moses say which you think influence Jethro's impression of Judaism? What things do Jews say which influence your conversion decision?
2. What does Jethro identify as his motivation to conversion? What would you list as your primary motivations to conversion?
3. Why do you think Jethro offers or needs to offer a hierarchical comparison of "gods"? Can you go through a conversion process without disparaging your previous traditions?
4. What is your impression of how Jethro is welcomed into the community? How would you want to be welcomed into the community?
5. Jethro describes YHVH's actions using the phrase "rescued you," indicating that he does not personally feel part of the Exodus and its redemption. In what ways do you feel connected to Israel's history? In what ways do you feel separate from it?
6. Moses' name is conspicuously absent from the description of the celebration. Do you think Moses was already there? Was he absent? If he was absent, why do you think he was absent and is it appropriate that he is absent?
 - Who is conspicuously absent from your conversion process? Do you wish they were there? Why/Why not?
 - Who has "come and gone" as part of your conversion process? What did they contribute to your process?
 - Whom do you want to remain part of your process? What have they contributed to your process? What do you hope they will contribute to your process?

Subsection ii: Emotions Associated with Conversion

Identity Development and Transformation

A Sack Full of Nuts—Shir haShirim Rabbah 6:11 on Numbers 23:10

Just as a sack full of nuts that is in your hand can still receive many sesame grains and mustard seeds, and can hold them all—so many converts have come and been added to Israel.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The imagery of nuts, sesame grains, and mustard seeds is particularly vivid.
- The text talks about converts “having come and been added to Israel”. There is no claim made by the text whether the sack is now also full of sesame grains and mustard seeds.
- The text claims that there is room for at least two different things to be added to the sack—sesame grains and mustard seeds.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Feeling included
- Feeling welcome
- Finding one’s own place in Judaism

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think the text chooses the image of nuts, sesame grains, and mustard seeds? What does each represent to you? How does your answer reflect your conversion process?
2. If you controlled the “sack”, what would you let in? What do you think is missing from Judaism’s sack?
3. Do you think the text means to imply that the “sack” is now full with sesame grains and mustard seeds, or is there still room? Who during your conversion process has claimed “the sack is full”? Who has demonstrated that the “sack can hold them all”?
4. What kind of “nut or seed or grain” are you in the “sack” of Judaism? Whom in the community of Judaism do you resemble? Who are you different from?

The Torah Was Given In Public—Mechilta d’Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Bahodesh on Exodus 19:2

THEY ENCAMPED IN THE WILDERNESS.

The Torah was given in public, openly in a free place. For had the Torah been given in the land of Israel, the Israelites could have said to the nations of the world: “You have no share in it.” But it was given in the wilderness publicly and openly in a place that is free for all, so that everyone wishing to accept it could come and accept it. One might claim that it was given at night, but the Torah says: “And it came to pass on the third day when it was morning” (v. 16). One might claim that it was given in silence, but the Torah says: “When there were thunders and lightning” (ibid.). One might claim that

they could not hear the voice, but the Torah says: "The voice of YHVH is powerful, the voice of YHVH is full of majesty," etc. (Psalm 29:4) Rabbi Jose says: Behold it says: "I have not spoken in secret," etc. (Isaiah 45:19). When I gave the Torah from the very start, I gave it not in the place of a land of darkness, not in a secret place, not in an obscure place.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The text lists three different ways (in public, openly, and in a free place) that the Torah is accessible to all people.
- The text articulates the impression that the Israelites might be inclined to "hoard" the Torah.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Finding the way to Judaism
- Feeling a part of Judaism

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think the text offers three different ways (public, open, and free) that the Torah is available to everyone? How is this portion of the text relevant to your conversion process?
2. How do you interpret the text's claim that the Israelites might have "said to the nations of the world that they have no share in Torah"? How is your answer applicable to your conversion process?
3. What is the wilderness in which you found Torah?
4. What have you found to be your "share of [Torah]"?
5. What are the dark places, the secret or silent places, the obscured places in your conversion process?
6. What are the public places, the open places, the free places in your conversion process?

Jethro's Descendants—Legends of the Jews, Vol. III pp. 75-76

Jethro...converted his kinsmen and his compatriots to the belief in the true God....Jethro's descendants inherited his devotion to the Torah, like him dedicating their lives entirely to its study. So long as Joshua lived, they sat at this master's feet, but when he died, they said: "We left our fatherland and came here only for the sake of studying the Torah; if we were now to spend our time in cultivating the soil, when should we study the Torah?" They therefore gave up their dwelling-place in Jericho and moved to the cold and barren wilderness, to Jabez, who there had his house of instruction. But when they there beheld the priests, the Levites, and the noblest of the Jews, they said, "How can we, converts, presume to sit beside these?" Instead of sitting within the house of instruction, they remained at the entrance of it, where they listened to the lectures, and in this manner made further progress in the study of the Torah. They were rewarded for their piety, their prayer was heard by God, and their good deeds served as a protection to Israel; and on account of their pious actions they were called [by] names designating their piety and devotion to the Torah.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The text initially implies that the love for Torah which Jethro passed on to his descendants was strong, but also that there were deficiencies in what Jethro passed on (lack of willingness to participate in cultivating the soil). But the end of the text implies that Jethro's descendants are rewarded for their commitment to Torah and even are deemed to be a source of protection for Israel.
- The converts do not feel worthy of entering the study house with the Levites (priests), but find a way to study Torah anyway.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Changing attachments to Judaism
- The Land of Israel
- Encountering the expectations of others
- Gaining acceptance from the community
- Feeling comfortable entering / interacting with the community

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Initially the text seems to imply that the converts are lacking a willingness to do anything but study Torah, but ultimately the text affirms their dedication to Torah as a virtue:
 - What do you think changed as the converts left Jericho and went to study with Jabez?
 - How do you interpret the converts' "devotion to Torah" and lack of "participation in cultivating the soil"?
 - What is your "devotion to Torah"?
 - What is the "soil you don't want to cultivate"?
2. Why do you think the converts felt uncomfortable entering the "house of instruction"? How does your answer reflect your conversion process?
3. How do you interpret the choice the converts made to "remain at the entrance and listen to the lectures"? What process have you used to slowly "make your way into the house of instruction"?
4. What "lectures" have you "listened to"? How have they affected you?
5. How have Jews asked you to "cultivate the soil" (something you didn't expect or didn't want to find in Judaism)? What have you felt you'd have to give up to meet that request? How have you handled the interaction?
6. What kind of attachment do you currently feel to the actual Land of Israel? What do you do to cultivate that Land? What do you think/hope you can/should do to cultivate that Land?
7. What was your motivation to "leave your fatherland"? Is that motivation still applicable for you? What new motivations have you discovered? considered? embraced?
8. What "prayer" do you hope is "heard by God"? What "good deeds" of yours will "serve as a protection to Israel"? What "name" will "designate your piety and devotion to Torah"?

Judah Stands Up before the Assembly—Tosefta Yadayim 2:17-19

Judah, an Ammonite convert stood up before them in the [place of assembly]. He said to them, "Am I allowed to enter the congregation (be converted)?"

Rabban Gamaliel said to him, "You are prohibited."

Rabbi Joshua said to him, "You are permitted."

Rabban Gamaliel said to him, "Lo, it is written, 'An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of YHVH [even to the tenth generation]' [Deuteronomy 23:3]."

Rabbi Joshua said to him, "and are Ammon and Moab still living in their land? Already Sennacherib, king of Assyria, has come up and mixed up all the nations..."

Judah the Ammonite convert said to them, "What shall I do?"

They said to him, "You have already heard the ruling of the elder. Lo, you are permitted to enter the congregation."

Rabban Gamaliel said to them, "Also an Egyptian convert is in the same status as this one..."

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai said to them, "The preciousness of Torah redresses their uncleanness."

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Judah waits for permission to "enter the congregation".
- Judah gets different and opposing reactions from two important Jews.
- Rabban Gamliel cites the Torah while Rabbi Joshua cites Talmudic interpretation based on historical reality (the Talmud claims that because Sennacherib, king of Assyria in the early 8th century BCE "mixed up all the nations", the Biblical commandment that the Israelites must "destroy the nations of Canaan" (see Numbers 33) is no longer valid).
- Judah seems frustrated / confused by the arguing Rabbis.
- Some ancestries seem to be more acceptable than others.
- Rambam explains Rabban Gamaliel's last statement as reinforcement of the ruling which precedes it—since the nations got mixed up, they even got mixed up with the Egyptians, so even the most abhorrent of peoples from ancient Israelite days are now welcome into the community.
- Yochanan's statement may relate to touching the scroll itself, or to engagement with Torah's concepts.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Modern day relations between Jews and Gentiles compared to Biblical / Talmudic times
- Different responses from different Rabbis
- Seeking acceptance from the community
- Feeling uncomfortable in Jewish settings
- The Rabbi's role in determining the time to formalize the conversion
- The Beit Din
- The power of Torah

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways are you asked to "stand up before [the congregation]"? How do these situations make you feel?

2. In what ways do you feel accepted by the community? In what ways do you feel rejected?
3. What emotions does the Beit Din process engender in you?
4. How do you feel about the widely varying standards and expectations for conversion represented in the American and World Rabbinate? How has that reality impacted your process?
5. What do you think should be the respective roles of Biblical law and more modern interpretation in acceptance of converts? in acceptance of you as a convert?
6. Have you ever been compared to, or affected by, a Jew's interactions with another convert (as Rabban Gamaliel does)? How did you feel about that interaction? Did it have any effect on your process?
7. How do you interpret Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai's claim that even the most "unclean" person (an Egyptian) can be "cleansed" by Torah? What "uncleanlinesses" do you feel you need to clean? How does Torah make you feel "cleansed"?

Six Times Shammai is More Lenient—Mishnah Eduyyot 5:2

Rabbi Yose says, "On only six decisions is the House of Shammai more lenient, and the House of Hillel more stringent":

1. "Fowl may be served up on the table together with cheese, but it may not be eaten with it," according to the House of Shammai. And the House of Hillel say, "It may neither be served up with it nor eaten with it."
2. "An offering which requires olives may be given with olives or olive oil; one which requires grapes from grapes or wine," in accord with the words of the House of Shammai. And the House of Hillel say, "The offering [must be] given by each product [individually]."
3. He who sows seed within a space of four cubits [from the vines] of a vineyard—The House of Shammai say, "He renders forfeit one row [to ensure he does not violate the prohibition of mixing seeds]." And the House of Hillel say, "He renders forfeit two rows."
4. Flour paste—The House of Shammai declare exempt [from dough offering]. And the House of Hillel declare it liable.
5. "Mikveh immersion may be done in a rain stream," according to the House of Shammai. And the House of Hillel say, "Immersion [in a rain stream is invalid]."
6. A man who became a convert on the day before Passover—The House of Shammai say, "He consumes his Passover offering [that very] evening." And the House of Hillel say, "[He must wait one week before he is obligated to the Passover offering]."

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Two of the six decisions where Shammai is more lenient could have conversion implications. The other four have to do with food (though one more indirectly, since it has to do with planting of the seeds). One of the conversion decisions also has to do with food.
- To view Shammai's decision in the case of the Passover offering as more lenient, one must presume the Rabbinic framework that taking on an obligation is a benefit to the person. In a modern context, we might interpret Shammai's ruling as more strict.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- The importance of the conversion process in Judaism's eyes

- The benefits and challenges of strict or lenient guidelines for the conversion process
- Personal reactions to rules and guidelines
- The role of Jewish law in the conversion process and the Jew's life

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think Shammai, known for being strict, would be lenient in these six situations?
2. What relationship(s) do you see between the six items where Shammai is more lenient?
3. Noting that five of the six have to do with food (one way or another), and two have implications for conversion, what does it bring to mind when you try to make a link between food and conversion?
4. What benefits and what challenges would you find in a more strictly guided conversion process? A more leniently guided conversion process?
5. Shammai's ruling is more lenient within the Jewish legal context that undertaking a Jewish obligation is a benefit to the person (therefore they would want to take on this obligation as soon as possible). But in our modern context, undertaking obligations is typically viewed as a burden, not a privilege. How do you interpret the text? How do you see that interpretation played out in your conversion process? In your Jewish life?
6. What Jewish things do you want to take on immediately? What do you want to take on more slowly? Is your answer different for things in your conversion process than things in your personal Jewish life?
7. Are there Jewish traditions/responsibilities you don't want to take on at all? What if Jewish law or tradition implies that you should do them? Is your answer different for things in your conversion process than things in your personal Jewish life?

Boaz' Impression of Ruth—Ruth 2:8-12

Then said Boaz to Ruth, "Do you not hear, my daughter? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go away from here, but stay here close to my maidens; let your eyes be on the field that they reap, and follow after them; have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch you? When you are thirsty, go to the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn."

Then [Ruth] fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, seeing that I am a *ger*?"

And Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully told to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband; and how you have left your father and your mother, and the land of your birth, and have come to a people which you did not know before. The Lord will recompense your work, and a full reward shall be given to you by YHVH God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Boaz bases his treatment of Ruth on her commitment to Judaism and to Jews, and his view of the struggle she has been through.
- Boaz lists a number of things Ruth has done and given up as part of her conversion.
- Boaz wishes to offer Ruth a reward.
- Boaz is concerned other people "of his land" may hurt Ruth, and wishes to offer her protection.

- The same “young men” that Boaz fears may hurt/take advantage of Ruth seem to be the ones who provide her water.
- Ruth is surprised by Boaz noticing her.
- Boaz expects that Ruth will also find reward from God for her actions.
- Although this passage is after Ruth’s “conversion”, she still identifies herself as a “ger”.
- Ruth seems very concerned what Boaz thinks of her.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Helpful and hurtful things Jews might do/say to a Jew-by-choice
- What Jews think of the conversion process
- When Jews-by-choice “feel Jewish”
- Benefits of conversion
- Self-consciousness of Jews-by-choice
- That which is added and that which is given up as part of the conversion process

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Boaz is concerned that the “young men” may hurt Ruth, but articulates that these same “young men” also provide her with water. What helpful and hurtful things have you encountered from Jews during your conversion process? What things do you expect to encounter? Hope to encounter? Fear encountering?
2. Boaz seems to know a lot about Ruth’s conversion process:
 - How does various people’s knowledge of your conversion process affect their perception of and interactions with you?
 - Who do you wish knew more about your process? Whom do you wish knew less?
 - What do you wish people knew? What do you wish they didn’t?
 - How can you affect these realities?
3. The above passage in the book of Ruth appears after Ruth has already “converted”:
 - Why do you think she still identifies herself as a “ger”?
 - What are some times you particularly feel like a “ger”? How can you help those situations?
 - Feeling like a “ger” is a common emotion for Jews-by-choice, even once the conversion has occurred. Do you think Jews-by-choice ever stop feeling like “strangers”?
 - Can you identify some situations where born-Jews would feel like strangers in a Jewish context? How might your experiences help them in those situations?
4. Boaz wishes to “reward” Ruth for her dedication, and also states that God will reward her. In what ways do you feel “rewarded” by the Jewish people for your conversion process? In what ways do you feel rewarded by God?
5. What place does reward have in your conversion process? What place do you think it should have?
6. Why do you think Ruth feels so uncomfortable being noticed and being rewarded? How does this concept play out in your conversion process?
7. Boaz lists four major things Ruth has done as part of her conversion process—some things she added, some things she gave up. What have you added? What have you given up?

Dear Are Converts, for the Holy One Adds to Their Name—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Exodus 4:18

MOSES RETURNED TO HIS FATHER-IN-LAW JETHER AND SAID TO HIM: "LET ME GO, I BEG YOU, AND RETURN TO MY BRETHREN WHO ARE IN EGYPT, AND SEE WHETHER THEY ARE STILL ALIVE." AND JETHRO SAID TO MOSES: "GO IN PEACE."

Dear are converts, for the Holy One adds to their name. For so you find with Jethro. At first he was called only Jether, but when he was converted, he was called Jethro...When one is converted, he receives a reward as if he had labored in the Torah all his years, for it is said (Numbers 10:29) 'come you with us and we will do you good.'

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The text seems to equate the process of conversion with laboring in the Torah all one's life. This seems very respectful of the effort with and magnitude of development and change involved in the conversion process.
- Changing Jethro's name creates an outward sign of having completed the conversion ceremony.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Outward manifestations of the conversion process
- Creating a new identity
- Choosing a Hebrew name
- Acceptance into Judaism
- The immense effort of the conversion process.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What was/will be "added to your name" at the time of your conversion?
2. What are the implications to you of taking on a Hebrew name?
3. On what basis did you / will you choose a Hebrew name?
4. What aspects of your pre-conversion identity do/will you keep with you?
5. What does it mean to you that God "adds" to a convert's name rather than "changing" a convert's name?
6. The passage equates the conversion process with "laboring in Torah" all one's life. Do you think this is an accurate assessment?
7. How important are the "rewards" of conversion to you in how accepted you feel into the Jewish community?

The Conversion—Making the Decision

Jethro Converts—Exodus 18:9-12 (excerpted)

Jethro rejoiced over all the good that YHVH had done for Israel, that He had rescued it from the land of Egypt. Jethro said, "Blessed is YHVH, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, Who has rescued the people from under the hand of Egypt. Now I know that YHVH is greater than all the gods..." Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, took a burnt-offering and feast-offerings for YHVH.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Initially Jethro seems to feel distanced from the Exodus, speaking of the Israelites' rescue in the second and third person, but then he makes his own offerings to YHVH.
- In Jethro's mind, there seems to be a hierarchy of gods.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- The transition from standing outside Judaism to standing within Judaism
- Comparing Judaism to one's other religious experiences
- Feeling a part of Jewish life

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you think changed for Jethro between the time he says that YHVH rescued "you" from the hand of Egypt and the time he brings his own offering to YHVH? In what ways have you found yourself engaged in the same transition?
2. Does Jethro have a right to feel that he, himself, was "rescued from under the hand of Egypt?" What part do you have in the Exodus?
3. Why do you think Jethro compares YHVH to "other gods"? How do his actions and your answer reflect your conversion process?
4. Are there gods from your past that you feel you are beginning to disparage as part of your conversion process?
5. How did/will you decide when you are ready for your declaration? What did/will you declare?
6. What is "burnt" on your "altar"?
7. What do you bring for your Jewish community to "feast" upon?

When Naomi Saw How Determined She Was—Ruth 1:14-19

They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law.' 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. Thus and more may YHVH do to me if anything but death parts me from you.'

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- A much greater-than-average amount of detail is given about the emotional reactions of the people involved to this situation.
- This particular moment seems to be one of significant transition as Ruth and Orpah each make their decision about conversion.
- Ruth's affirmation is extensive and describes many different aspects of Jewish life.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- The moment of decision
- The conversion affirmation

SOME SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Two significant moments of decision are described in this passage:
 - Why do you think Orpah chose not to convert?
 - Why do you think Ruth chose to convert?
 - What of Orpah and Ruth's emotions and influences have been present in your process?
 - How conclusive and final are Orpah and Ruth's decisions? How about the decisions you make during this process?
 - Why do you think so much detail is given about each woman's emotion-based actions?
2. Ruth's conversion affirmation ("wherever you will go...") is very extensive:
 - How does each statement Ruth makes differ from the others? What new information does each one bring?
 - What different categories of affirmation do you feel must be present in your decision?
 - What effect do you see of God on Ruth's decision, and what effect does Naomi have? How about in your decision?
 - How would you articulate your conversion affirmation? How would/has your answer to that question changed over time?

The Conversion—Before and After

When May He Eat His Passover Offering?—Mishnah Pesachim 8:8

[Regarding] a convert who converted on the eve of Passover: The School of Shammai says, "He [takes on the obligation to] eat his Passover offering [that very] evening." But the House of Hillel says, "[He must wait] one week [before he is obligated to the Passover offering.]"

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Shammai assumes more readiness to take responsibility for a Jewish practice at the time of conversion than Hillel does.
- Hillel seems to imply a more gradual process than Shammai.
- To Shammai, the conversion itself seems to have greater implication than to Hillel.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- The conversion process after conversion
- The implications of the ceremony itself
- Assessing readiness for the conversion ceremony

SOME SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think Hillel wants to give the convert a week before making him responsible for his Passover obligations? Why do you think Shammai wants the responsibility to be immediate?
2. How "ready to accept obligations" do you feel you need to be in order to proceed with your conversion ceremony?
3. Given Hillel and Shammai's views about post-conversion responsibility, how do you think they would structure the conversion process for their conversion candidates?
4. On what basis do you assess your own readiness?
5. What is your view about post-conversion responsibility? How does it impact your vision for your process?
6. In what ways have you or do you expect to grow Jewishly following your formal conversion?
7. To you, what are the implications of the conversion itself?
8. What do you think are the implications of each of the parts of the actual conversion—Beit Din? Mikveh? Affirmation? Circumcision? Hatafat Dam Brit? Public ceremony? Other parts?

When Is He Obligated to Take Hallah?—Tosefta Hallah 1:12

A convert who converted [to Judaism] and possessed prepared dough [at the time of his conversion] [Mishna Hallah 3:6]—"[If he converted] before the crust formed on it [i.e., the dough, in the oven], it is subject [to dough-offering]; [if he converted] after the crust formed on it, it is exempt [from dough-offering]," the words of Rabbi Aqiba. [But] Rabbi Yohanan ben Nuri says, "[If the person converts] before she rolls [the dough] out, in the case of [dough made from] wheat, or forms [it] into a solid mass, in the case of [dough made from] barley, [the dough] is subject [to dough-offering]. "[If she converted

after] she rolled [the dough] out, in the case of [dough made from] wheat, or formed [it] into a solid mass, in the case of [dough made from] barley, [the dough] is exempt [from dough-offering]." In the name of Rabbi Judah ben Betera they said, "[the dough becomes subject to dough-offering only] once she makes it into separate portions [e.g., loaves or rolls]."

- Note: To make bread eligible to be called "*challah*" it is necessary to extract a piece from it which is burnt in memory of the Temple sacrifices. It is this burnt piece which is actually called "*challah*".

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The Rabbis disagree about what stage of the bread-making process must be complete at the time one converts in order for one to be obligated to the "dough-offering" (until one converts, one would not be obligated to the "dough-offering").

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Level of preparation required for conversion

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Examine each of the cases given:
 - How would you interpret each as a metaphor for steps or issues in the conversion process? in your conversion process?
 - Which do you feel should be/should have been completed before going through your conversion?
 - What post-conversion obligations are created by each?
2. How are you affected by the reality that Rabbis disagree about requirements for conversion?

A Convert Who Has Not Yet Brought Offerings—Tosefta Keritot 1:11

Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob says, "A convert [who has not yet brought his offerings] has not fulfilled the atonement [process] through the eating of animal-sacrifices" [Mishna Keritot 2:1D].

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Rabbi Eliezer's comment seems to imply that a convert is in default of a positive commandment immediately from the time of conversion until he/she fulfills the commandment to bring atonement-offerings, which would seem to defy the concept that when one converts it is as if they were newly born. There seems to be a strong implication here that the person needs to atone for actions pre-conversion.
- Rabbi Eliezer does articulate that there are actions converts must take to continue to "grow Jewishly" post-conversion.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Post-conversion identity development

- Self-perception of pre-Judaism life
- Things one can't do until after the conversion is complete.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Rabbi Eliezer implies that someone who converts is immediately liable to bring an atonement offering. Noting that this offering would be obligatory for all Jews each year, what do you think is the convert's "guilt" for which (s)he needs atonement? Is Rabbi Eliezer simply declaring that they are just like every other Jew—liable for the offering until they bring it—or is he implying something specifically about the convert?
2. What are some "Jewish things" you feel/felt obligated to do as soon as possible following your conversion?
3. Rabbi Eliezer notes that this person can't bring the offering until after the conversion has taken place. What are some things you think should wait until after conversion?
4. Rabbi Eliezer's statement leaves open the interpretation that the convert needs to atone for actions during his/her life before conversion. What emotions do you feel about your "pre-conversion life"? Is there anything for which you feel "guilty"? Why?

Feelings about and Transitioning from Pre-conversion Life

Abraham's First Test—Legends of the Jews, Vol. I pp. 217-218

With the ten temptations Abraham was tempted, and he withstood them all, showing how great was the love of Abraham. The first test to which he was subjected was the departure from his native land. ...and he was loathe to leave his home. He spoke to God, and said, "Will not the people talk about me, and say, 'He is endeavoring to bring the nations under the wings of the *Shechinah*, yet he leaves his old father in Haran, and he goes away.'" But God answered him, and said: "Dismiss all care concerning your father and your kinsmen from your thoughts."

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The concept that leaving one's home is a test of faith is anchored in Rabbinic Judaism's concept that Judaism is inherently superior to other religious traditions. That concept may not ring true in a modern context.
- The midrash considers leaving behind one's past to be a test of faith.
- In this midrash, God tells Abraham not to think about his past.
- Abraham seems to feel torn between his past and his sense of mission and purpose.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Feelings of loss
- Tension between past, present, and future
- The role of faith in the conversion process

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways is your conversion process a "test" against "temptation"?
2. What are some of your 10 tests?
3. What tensions do you feel between your past and your vision of your own future?
4. Do you agree with God's advice to Abraham that he "dismiss all care concerning [his past]"? How does your answer apply to your conversion process?
5. Abraham seems confident in his purpose. What role do faith and purpose play in your conversion process?
6. What "cares" have you had / do you have about "your father and your kinsmen" during your conversion process?

You have not Lost Anything by Converting—Sifre to Numbers 78:1 on Numbers 10:29-33

AND MOSES SAID TO HOBAB, THE SON OF RAGUEL THE MIDIANITE, MOSES' FATHER-IN-LAW, WE ARE JOURNEYING TO THE PLACE ABOUT WHICH YHVH SAID, I WILL GIVE IT YOU; COME WITH US, AND WE WILL DO YOU GOOD; FOR YHVH HAS SPOKEN GOOD CONCERNING ISRAEL. AND [JETHRO/HOBAB] SAID TO [MOSES], I WILL NOT GO; BUT I WILL DEPART TO MY OWN LAND, AND TO MY KINDRED. AND HE SAID, LEAVE US NOT, I PRAY YOU; FOR YOU KNOW HOW WE ARE TO CAMP IN THE WILDERNESS, AND YOU MAY BE EYES FOR US. AND IT SHALL BE, IF YOU GO WITH US, IT SHALL BE, THAT WHATEVER GOODNESS YHVH

SHALL DO TO US, THE SAME WILL WE DO TO YOU. AND THEY DEPARTED FROM THE MOUNT OF YHVH THREE DAYS' JOURNEY; AND THE ARK OF THE COVENANT OF YHVH WENT BEFORE THEM IN THE THREE DAYS' JOURNEY, TO SEARCH OUT A RESTING PLACE FOR THEM.

Because they brought themselves near, YHVH brought them nearer still. If an Israelite carries forth the Torah, all the more so. For what did [Ruth] say to her mother-in-law? 'Your people will be my people, and your YHVH, my YHVH, where you die, there shall I die.' (Ruth 1:15-17) "The Omnipresent said to her, 'You have not lost [anything by converting]. Sovereignty will be yours in this world, and sovereignty will be yours in the world to come...'"

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The midrash perceives the sense of loss one is likely to feel.
- The midrash claims that Judaism will be the replacement for Ruth's feelings of loss at leaving her people, her god, and her place of death.
- The midrash declares Ruth's reward to be sovereignty.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Sense of loss related to conversion

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you make of the reality that even a 1500 year old midrash acknowledges the feelings of loss associated with conversion? What feelings of loss do you / have you experienced? How do you identify, acknowledge, and process those feelings?
2. The midrash claims that the rewards Ruth finds in Judaism will make up for her sense of loss.
 - How do you feel about this claim?
 - How does it relate to your process?
3. The midrash declares Ruth's reward to be sovereignty, likely an allusion to King David (who the Book of Ruth indicates is one of her descendants):
 - What "sovereignty" do you find in Judaism?
 - What kind of "sovereignty" would make up for your feelings of loss?
 - What rewards do you hope to receive for your conversion in this world, and what rewards do you hope for in the world to come?

A Compliment to Jethro—Rashi on Exodus 18:5

JETHRO...CAME...TO MOSES IN THE WILDERNESS

...in the wilderness. The words are superfluous as we know that the Israelites were in the wilderness! But the fact is repeated as a compliment to Jethro that he left the comfort of his home for the hardships of the wilderness to learn the Torah.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Leaving home (converting) is equated with going into the wilderness.
- Going into the wilderness is deemed worthy of a compliment.
- Jethro's "home" is described as "comfortable".

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Feelings of abandoning past identity / feelings of loss
- Feelings of risk associated with the conversion process
- The challenges of change

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What about the conversion process feels to you like "going into the wilderness"?
2. What are the "comforts of home" that you are leaving?
3. What "compliment" are you anticipating as a result of your "journey"?
4. This desert/wilderness is specifically a place which lacks water. What is "lacking" in your wilderness?
5. What is the "Torah" for which you are willing to leave the "comforts of home"?

Interactions with Pre-conversion Life

I Must Return to My Own Land—Mehilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Numbers 10:31

AND MOSES LET HIS FATHER-IN-LAW DEPART.

Moses said to Jethro: You have given us good advice, fair advice. And God agreed with your words. "Leave us not, I pray you." (Numbers 10:31) But Jethro said to him: "...I shall go to my land and tell everybody and convert all the people of my country, leading them to the study of the Torah and bringing them under the wings of the *Shechinah*." ...[as] the Torah says: "And the children of Moses' father-in-law went up with the children of Judah and they dwelt with the people" (Judges 1:16).

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Jethro feels a connection both with Judaism and with "the people of [his] country".
- Though the midrash clearly understands the Judges text to mean that Jethro's relatives converted, the text only says that they "dwelt" together.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Feelings of connection to "country" of origin
- Things one brings to Judaism from one's "country" of origin
- Keeping connections with pre-conversion life

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What would motivate you to "go to your land" for a "return visit"?
2. What "advice" can you or do you bring to "Moses' people"?
3. What special connections do you have with your "country" and its "people"? What connections do you feel with "Moses' people"?
4. How do you interpret the Judges text in relation to this midrash? How do you interpret it in relation to your conversion process?

Dear Are Converts, for the Holy One Adds to Their Name—Mishnat Rabbi Eleazar on Exodus 4:18

MOSES RETURNED TO HIS FATHER-IN-LAW JETHER AND SAID TO HIM: "LET ME GO, I BEG YOU, AND RETURN TO MY BRETHREN WHO ARE IN EGYPT, AND SEE WHETHER THEY ARE STILL ALIVE." AND JETHRO SAID TO MOSES: "GO IN PEACE."

Dear are converts, for the Holy One adds to their name. For so you find with Jethro. At first he was called only Jether, but when he was converted, he was called Jethro.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- It is interesting that the reward is described as an "addition", rather than—for example—a substitution, improvement, or replacement.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Recognizing the value of one's pre-conversion life

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Rather than "changing" Jether's name, God "adds to it":
 - In what ways do you consider this action respectful of Jether's pre-conversion life, and in what ways is it disrespectful?
 - What do you want "added to your name"? How you will achieve those goals?
 - What do you want to remain the same? How will you achieve those goals?
2. Why do you think God changes Jether's name? Did Jether have any involvement in changing his name? How do your answers to these two questions reflect on your conversion process?

Onkelos and the Troops of Romans—Talmud Avodah Zarah 11a

When Onkelos son of Kalonymos became a convert, Caesar sent a troop of Romans to arrest him. But he won them over by citing verses from the Torah, and they too became converts. Caesar then sent another troop of Romans and instructed them: Say nothing at all to Onkelos. After they seized him and went off [with him], he said to them: May I speak to you about a matter that is not the Torah? A torchbearer carries a torch before a litter carrier, a litter carrier before a commander, a commander before a general, a general before the emperor. But does an emperor bear a torch before other people? They replied: No. Then he said: But the Holy One carries a torch before Israel, as is said, "And YHVH went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light" (Exodus 13:21). At that, all of them, too, became converts. Then Caesar sent still another troop and enjoined them: Do not engage in any conversation whatsoever with Onkelos. As they seized him and went off with him, they saw a mezuzah affixed to the doorway, and when he put his hand on it and smiled, they asked him: Why are you smiling? He replied: It is the way of the world that a king is seated inside while his servants stand guard outside. But the Holy One—His servants are inside, while He stands guard outside, as is said, "The Lord shall guard your going out and your coming in," etc. (Psalm 121:8). At this, they too became converts. Caesar did not send soldiers for him again.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Caesar seems very concerned about Onkelos' conversion.
- Onkelos seems to know how to speak to the Romans very effectively.
- There seems to be an interesting progression of Onkelos' Judaic abilities, as he moves from simply quoting scripture, to being able to conceptualize God through analogies.
- The second and third interactions seem very similar in their content, except for Onkelos' use of a Jewish physical symbol in the third example.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Demonstrating to others the seriousness of your process
- The special relationship one who converts has with the culture/religion from which they converted
- The importance of both inward knowledge and outward symbols

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who from your pre-conversion life has tried to "arrest" your process?
2. The physical symbol of the *mezuzah* is very important in this story:
 - What physical symbols of Judaism are important in your life and process?
 - Why do you think they are so important to you?
 - How do you think your status as someone engaged in a conversion process affects your need/desire for physical and visible symbols of Judaism?
3. After three tries, Caesar gives up his quest to bring Onkelos back:
 - Why do you think he gives up then?
 - With whom in your process will you have to work this hard to convince that you are truly motivated?
 - How will you do it?
4. What differences do you see between Onkelos' three interactions with the troops? How do these interactions represent aspects of your conversion process?
5. Onkelos, with his Roman background, seems to be very effective at communicating with the Romans. What from your pre-conversion life will be an asset to Judaism? How will you use it?
6. Do you see any progression in Onkelos' identity development through his three interactions with the Roman troops? If so, what is it, and how does it reflect your conversion process?

Interactions with Others During the Conversion Process

They Ought Not to Have Repelled Timna—Talmud Sanhedrin 99b

Timna was a princess (Genesis 36:10, 12, 29), for her brother was a prince (Lotan). She wanted to become a convert, and she went to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and they would not receive her. So instead she became a concubine of Eliphaz, the son of Esau, for she said, "Better to become a handmaid of this nation [who will accept me] than a princess of [one that does not want me]." Her son was Amalek, who wrought great trouble in Israel. Why [did this happen]? Because they ought not to have repelled her.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The text claims that Timna approached three generations of Israelites.
- Esau's "nation" only accepts her as a concubine, not as a whole person and certainly not as a princess.
- The text focuses on the negative ramifications for Israel caused by "repelling" a potential convert, but the text makes no direct mention of the emotional effect on Timna.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Feeling rejected
- Searching for acceptance
- Internalizing the comments Jews make

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The text states that Timna approached not only Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, but all three:
 - How do you interpret the statement that she approached three different generations of Israelite ancestors?
 - Whose approval have you sought so strongly that it feels like you would even approach their children or grandchildren?
 - Who are the "patriarchs / matriarchs" of your conversion process?
2. What emotions do you read into the statement that Timna agreed to be a "concubine to Esau's family" once she was rejected by Abraham's family? When have you felt strong rejection from Jews or the Jewish community? How have you reacted?
3. According to the text, the result of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's actions is that Timna becomes a concubine and Israel is eternally wrought with trouble from Amalek's people:
 - How would you re-interpret these negative results into a modern context?
 - How could Timna have handled the situation better?
 - How could Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have handled the situation better?
 - How do your interpretations reflect your conversion process?

What Is a Lamp to the Sun and the Moon?—Mehilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Numbers 10:31

AND MOSES LET HIS FATHER-IN-LAW DEPART.

Moses said to Jethro: You have given us good advice, fair advice. And God agreed with your words. "Leave us not, I pray you." (Numbers 10:31) But Jethro said to him: Is a lamp of any use except in a dark place? Of what use could a lamp be with the sun and the moon? You are the sun and Aaron is the moon. What should a lamp be doing where there are the sun and the moon? No! I shall go to my land and tell everybody and convert all the people of my country, leading them to the study of the Torah and bringing them under the wings of the *Shechinah*." ...[as] the Torah says: "And the children of Moses' father-in-law went up with the children of Judah and they dwelt with the people" (Judges 1:16).

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Jethro manifests a very humble persona in describing himself as a lamp compared to Moses and Aaron, the sun and moon.
- Moses wants Jethro to stay, but "lets" Jethro depart.
- Jethro and Moses disagree about Jethro's mission as a Jew.
- Jethro clearly seems excited about his Judaism and wants to share it with others.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Interactions with Jewish relatives
- Things someone who converts can teach Jews and Gentiles
- Interactions with non-Jewish relatives
- The excited convert

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think Jethro views himself as a "lamp" compared to Moses and Aaron as the "sun and moon"? How does your answer reflect your conversion process?
2. Who in your Jewish community appreciates your presence enough that they would "pray that you don't leave"?
3. What "good advice" and what "fair advice" have you given?
4. What post-conversion goals have you found that Jews have for you? What post-conversion goals do you have for yourself?
5. What goals, responsibilities, or obligations do you feel towards "the people of your country"?
6. With whom are you excited to share your Judaism?
7. How have people reacted to your excitement about Judaism?

Ruth Defies Naomi—Ruth 1:8-19 (excerpted)

Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to her mother's house... And they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people. And Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me?... And they lifted up their voice, and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth held fast to her. And she said, Behold, your sister-in-law is gone back to her people, and to her gods; go back you after your sister-in-law. And Ruth said, Do not entreat me to leave you, or to keep

me from following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; Where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried. When Naomi saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her, and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Ruth asks Naomi not to make this request of her any more. Although Ruth doesn't heed Naomi's request, it clearly seems to affect her.
- There seems to be an implication in the final interaction that Ruth would even follow Naomi if Naomi walked away from her. Naomi ultimately acquiesces, though the conversation between the two markedly ceases at this point until the next chapter when the two reach Bethlehem.
- The tone of the conversation definitely seems to escalate as the three interchanges progress.
- In the first interaction, the sisters-in-law seem to be united as they answer together.
- It is interesting that the text says Ruth "clung to [Naomi]"

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- How one's conversion process affects others.
- Handling nay-sayers in the process of exploring conversion
- Other people adjusting to one's conversion decision
- Wanting other's approval for the decision

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Although Ruth rejects Naomi's request, the statement "Do not entreat me to leave you" seems to imply that Ruth is greatly influenced by Naomi's opinion:
 - Why do you think Ruth cares so much about Naomi's opinion?
 - Are there people in your life whose opinion affects you that deeply?
 - How will you strike an appropriate balance between their opinion and yours if those opinions differ?
 - How important is it to you that you have these people's approval?
 - How important is it to them that they have yours?
 - How much do you think you should allow your decision's effect on other people's lives to affect your decision?
 - Are there people in your life as persistent as Naomi?
2. The tone of the conversation between Naomi and Ruth seems to escalate as the requests progress:
 - Why do you think this is?
 - Why do you think Naomi has such strong opinions and emotions about Ruth's conversion process?
 - Are there people in your life who have expressed strong opinions or emotions about your process? How have these influenced you?
 - What emotions does each woman's response indicate?
 - Which of these emotions have you felt during the process of making and evaluating your decision?

3. What do you make of the fact that the sisters-in-law answer Naomi together the first time?
4. What other people who are themselves considering conversion have you influenced? In what ways?
5. What responsibility do you feel you owe to others involved in the conversion process? What help can you bring them? What help can they bring you?
6. Ruth, in her statement: "Do not keep me from following you" seems to indicate that she will proceed with or without Naomi's permission. What do you make of this? In what ways can you identify with Ruth's statement?
7. Ultimately Naomi seems to accept Ruth's choice, though the text does not indicate that the two spoke again until they reached Bethlehem:
 - What do you think changed Naomi's mind?
 - Why do you think they stopped speaking?
 - Who in your life is struggling with your process or decision?
 - How do you express your process to those who doubt or question you?
 - How would it affect you if someone in your life stopped speaking to you because of your decision?
8. How do you read the phrase "but Ruth clung to [Naomi]"? Do you think it is healthy that Ruth is "clinging" to someone as part of her process? How has this reality been manifest in your process?

Do Not Remind the Convert of His Pork-Eating Past—Various Midrashim Based on Mishna Baba Metzia 4:10 (Cf. Tosefta Baba Metzia 3.25, Talmud Baba Metzia 59b, Sifre to Deuteronomy Piska 281, Talmud Gerim 4.1, Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, Mishnat Rabbi Shimon)

Just as there is exaggeration in buying and selling, so too there is wrong done by words. [Thus] one must not ask his fellow: "What is the price of this article?" if he has no intention of buying it. If a man was a converted [heathen], one must not say to him: "Remember your former [sinful] deeds." If the man was the son of a convert, one must not taunt him: "Remember the deeds of your ancestors." [One must do this] because it is written: "You shall neither vex a ger nor oppress him" (Exodus 22:20)

You must not remind the convert of his pork-eating, idol-worshipping past. If he comes to study the Torah you must not say to him, "Shall the lips that gobbled forbidden foods and creeping abominations mouth the words of God?" Such verbal mockery is worse than dishonesty in business. It is comparable to the worship of idols. Wounding the feelings of a convert or oppressing him [is so serious that it] involves transgression of [not just one but] three commandments. If you ridicule him he has every right to respond with, "You, too, were a *ger* in the land of Egypt," [i.e.] do not reproach your fellow with your own fault. The older convert is especially enjoined to treat the newcomer kindly inasmuch as he knows the soul of the *ger*. Should a convert be in financial difficulties the Jew is required to help him, even to anticipate his difficulties.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The text uses very strong language to describe the convert's past.
- The text uses very strong language to admonish the born-Jew concerning wounding the feelings of a convert.
- The critical message of the text seems to be the reminder that all Jews were once *gerim*, but the text also mentions that "the older convert...knows the soul of the *ger*."

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Insecurity of born Jews when interacting with those who have converted or are converting
- Insecurity of those pursuing conversion when interacting with born Jews
- The roles of those born Jewish and of those who previously converted in guiding people through the conversion process.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Regarding your past:
 - In what ways have people reminded you of "your past"? How have you reacted?
 - In what ways do you remind yourself of "your past"? How have you reacted?
 - What are the "forbidden foods and creeping abominations" of your past? What do you / will you do with them as part of your current state of being?
 - How accepting are you of "your past"? How accepting do you think you should be?
2. Why do you think so many people who are born Jewish have strong reactions to those who have converted or are converting? What of these reactions have you encountered?
3. What "faults" do you find in born Jews which they project upon those who are exploring conversion or those who have converted?
4. What do you make of the reproach to born-Jews (that wounding the feelings of a convert or oppressing him is worse than dishonesty in business, is comparable to worshipping idols, and involves transgressing not one but three commandments)? To whom would you like to give this reproach?
5. What do you think are the implications of reminding someone Jewish that they, too, were "once *gerim* in the land of Egypt"? When would this message be applicable in your life and in your conversion process? When would it be directed at you and when at someone else?
6. What responsibilities do you have to people going through the conversion process after you?
7. In what ways do you think it is possible for someone who is born Jewish to "anticipate the difficulties" of someone going through the conversion process? In what ways is it impossible?
8. In what ways do your responses to this question apply to the Rabbi who guided/is guiding you through this process? In what ways do you think Rabbis who themselves converted to Judaism would see the process differently?

Abraham Waited to be Circumcised—Mechilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Nezikin on Genesis 17:1ff

AND WHEN AVRAM WAS 99 YEARS OLD YHVH APPEARED TO AVRAM AND SAID TO HIM: "...I WILL MAKE MY COVENANT BETWEEN ME AND YOU...EVERY MALE AMONG YOU SHALL BE CIRCUMCIZED...AND AVRAM...CIRCUMCIZED THE FLESH OF [HIS] FORESKIN THAT VERY DAY."

Beloved are the *gerim*. It was for their sake that our father Abraham was not circumcised until he was ninety-nine years old. Had he been circumcised at twenty or at thirty years of age, only those under the age of thirty could have become converts to Judaism. Therefore, YHVH bore with Abraham until he reached ninety-nine years of age, so as not to close the door to future converts.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- According to the midrash, Abraham wants to make sure that converts always feel welcome.
- There is an indication that age is a factor in conversion.
- The phrase “YHVH bore with Abraham” makes it unclear whether God wanted Abraham to wait, or whether it was Abraham’s initiative to wait.
- Abraham is portrayed as an example to all other converts, and the presumption is that his actions would affect their actions.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Feeling welcomed into Judaism
- Issues of age in conversion
- Precedent set by other converts

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What actions have you seen Jews take to make converts feel welcome?
2. How do you interpret the phrase “YHVH bore with Abraham”? How does your answer reflect your conversion process?
3. How does your age influence your conversion process in your eyes? In others’ eyes?
4. What other converts who preceded you have influenced your process? How so?

Subsection iii: Regarding Converts and their Families

Perception of Family of Origin

Judah Stands Up Before the Assembly—Tosefta Yadayim 2:17-19

Judah, an Ammonite convert, stood up before them in the [place of assembly]. He said to them, "Am I allowed to enter the congregation (be converted)?"

Rabban Gamaliel said to him, "You are prohibited."

Rabbi Joshua said to him, "You are permitted."

Rabban Gamaliel said to him, "Lo, it is written, 'An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of YHVH [even to the tenth generation]' [Deuteronomy 23:3]."

Rabbi Joshua said to him, "and are Ammon and Moab still living in their land? Already Sennacherib, king of Assyria, has come up and mixed up all the nations..."

Judah the Ammonite convert said to them, "What shall I do?"

They said to him, "You have already heard the ruling of the elder. Lo, you are permitted to enter the congregation."

Rabban Gamaliel said to them, "Also an Egyptian convert is in the same status as this one..."

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said to them, "The preciousness of Torah redresses their uncleanness."

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Judah gets two different reactions from two important Jews.
- Rabban Gamliel cites the Torah while Rabbi Joshua cites Talmudic interpretation based on historical reality (the Talmud claims that because Sennacherib, king of Assyria in the early 8th century BCE "mixed up all the nations", the Biblical commandment that the Israelites must "destroy the nations of Canaan" (see Numbers 33) is no longer valid).
- Rambam explains Rabban Gamaliel's last statement as reinforcement of the ruling which precedes it—since the nations got mixed up, they even got mixed up with the Egyptians, so even the most abhorrent of peoples from ancient Israelite days are now welcome into the community.
- Yochanan ben Zakkai's statement implies that the convert is judged by their actions and commitment rather than by their family of origin.
- Different ancestries seem to be more acceptable than others.
- Yochanan's statement may relate to touching the scroll itself, or to engagement with Torah's concepts.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Modern day relations between Jews and Gentiles compared to Biblical / Talmudic times
- Assessing the influence and impact of family of origin
- Balancing the influence of pre-conversion life and present action
- Rituals and Values

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What different messages have you received from Jews about your family of origin?
2. Rabban Gamaliel cites Biblical precedent for not accepting Judah (that Ammonites and Moabites shall not be admitted into the Israelite congregation for 10 generations, and Egyptians never). Rabbi Joshua cites a Talmudic claim that historical developments (Sennacherib's mixing up of the nations) obfuscates the Biblical precedent, in order to accept Judah:
 - How applicable do you think each basis is in reality for Jews making conversion decisions?
 - How applicable do you think each should be?
 - What are the historical realities that are applicable today?
 - Who are today's Ammonites? Moabites? Egyptians?
 - What characteristics does your ancestry bear which could impact your conversion decision or process?
3. What do you make of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's statement that the preciousness of Torah mitigates any problems even Egyptians might bring with them? How is his statement applicable in your process?
4. Rabban Yochanan's statement could be referring to the ancient concept that the Torah scroll itself was imbued with extreme sanctity (the simple act of touching it, for example, meant someone needed to go to the ritual bath for purification), or he could be referring to the values contained in the Torah:
 - How do rituals and traditions from your family of origin influence your life? your conversion process?
 - What about Jewish traditions?
 - How do values from your family of origin influence your life? your conversion process?
 - What about Jewish values?
5. Are there ancestries or characteristics of ancestries which you think would present challenges for someone's conversion or even inherently make someone unfit for conversion today?

You Will Enjoy the Fruit of Your Labor—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:2

HAPPY IS EVERYONE WHO STANDS IN AWE OF YHVH, WHO WALKS IN GOD'S WAYS. YOU SHALL EAT THE LABOR OF YOUR HANDS. HAPPY SHALL YOU BE (128:1-2)

You will eat the labor of your hands is addressed to the convert who has no distinguished ancestry to rely on. In order that he should not say, 'Woe is me, for I have no distinguished ancestry to rely on! All the good deeds that I shall store up will only yield me reward in this world!' the Torah announces to the convert that by virtue of his own merit he will enjoy the fruit of his actions both in this world and in the next. Hence it is written, '*you will eat the labor of your hands*,' meaning, the good deeds which he has painstakingly performed in this world.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Twice in six verses Psalm 128 uses the phrase "y'rei YHVH (to stand in awe of YHVH)"—a phrase which often is a euphemism for conversion—hence everything in the psalm is taken to refer to converts.
- Though the text likely reflects the view that converts have no distinguished ancestry, the text could also be read to imply that some converts have distinguished ancestry to rely on and others

don't, and that those who do may rely on that ancestry for reward in the world to come. It could also be argued that becoming "ben/bat Avraham v'Sarah" (the ancestral name given to one who converts) is representative of exceptional ancestry.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Feelings about family of origin
- What part the family of origin will play in the present and future life of someone exploring conversion

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Judaism traditionally views a convert as separated from his/her genealogical ancestry, and gives that person the Jewish ancestry of Abraham and Sarah. How do you interpret and react to Judaism's claim about a convert's ancestry?
2. How do you feel about your "ancestry"?
3. What "merit" have you "stored up" from your "ancestry"?
4. What "merit" have you "stored up" from your "good deeds"?
5. What "labor of [your] hands" are you most proud of?

The Convert Brings First Fruits but does not Make the Declaration—Mishnah Bikkurim 1:4

...the convert may bring [first fruits] but does not make the declaration because he can not say, "[I have come into the land which YHVH gave {me} for an inheritance, that I have come to the land] which the Eternal swore to our fathers to give to us". But if his mother were an Israelite, he may bring and make the declaration. And when he prays privately, he says, "O YHVH of the ancestors of Israel"; and when he is in the Synagogue, he says, "O YHVH of your ancestors"; and if his mother were an Israelite, he may say, "O YHVH of our ancestors".

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The text observes that Deuteronomy 26:11 requires the *ger* to "rejoice in everything that YHVH has given [them along with Israel]" and to bring the first fruits, but also realizes that the *ger*, according to the Torah, was not given a share of the land of Israel. Therefore the *ger* would be lying to swear to God that he has come into the land that God gave to him or his ancestors as an inheritance. Therefore the Mishna tries to resolve the potential conflict for the *ger* by clarifying that he can bring the fruits, but does not make the declaration.
- The text also helps clarify what the *ger* should say in the Avot prayer, which is a prayer for the ancestors of Israel.
- The text makes a distinction between prayers said in public and prayers said in private. Commentary on this Mishna explains "private" to mean praying quietly, and "public" to mean when the *ger* is the person leading the service.
- The text describes a person who converted whose mother is an Israelite—but if one's mother were an Israelite, the person shouldn't legally need to convert. However, this Mishna originates in a time when matrilineal descent was not conclusively Jewish law. The commentary on this

Mishna details a debate about exactly this issue, and by the time of Maimonides, the code of Jewish law details that the *ger* both brings the fruits and makes the declaration, and that the *ger* should say "Our God and God of our ancestors" whenever (s)he prays.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Level of openness about having converted
- Public vs. private conversion issues
- Seeking Judaism in a convert's ancestry
- Changing attitudes about conversion

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Finding and/or searching for traces of Judaism in one's ancestry is a very common action taken by people converting. Why do you think this is? How is it applicable in your process?
2. About what aspects of your conversion process do you "declare publicly"? What aspects do you "pray privately"?
3. Why do you think the Mishna allows the convert to do the action of bringing the first fruits, but does not allow the convert to make the accompanying declaration? How is your answer reflective of your conversion process?
4. How do you react to the reality that Jewish law has changed over time both about a convert's right to feel that they have Jewish ancestry, and regarding the fundamental question of who is a Jew? How do you see this reality manifest in your conversion process?

A Double Portion of Happiness—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:2

HAPPY IS EVERYONE WHO STANDS IN AWE OF YHVH, WHO WALKS IN GOD'S WAYS. YOU SHALL EAT THE LABOR OF YOUR HANDS. HAPPY SHALL YOU BE.

"When you consume the labor of your hands, happy shall you be and it shall be well with you."—This refers to the convert who does not have 'the merit of the fathers.' He should not say: "Woe is me; I have not the merit of the fathers. All the good deeds that heap up will bring me reward only in this world." Therefore the Torah informs the convert that by his own merit he will enjoy both this world and the next.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Twice in six verses Psalm 128 uses the phrase "*y'rei YHVH* (to stand in awe of YHVH)"—a phrase which often is a euphemism for conversion—hence everything in the psalm is taken to refer to converts.
- The text uses two seemingly redundant phrases—"happy shall you be" and "it shall be well with you". The midrash is reading these two phrases to mean rewards in this world and rewards in the world to come.
- The phrases "consume the labor of your hands" and "good deeds that heap up" evoke a multitude of images when related to the conversion process.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Happiness with Judaism
- Feeling a sense of reward
- Insecurities about the validity of one's Jewishness

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The text uses two seemingly redundant phrases—"happy shall you be" and "it shall be well with you", but in Rabbinic interpretation a repeated phrase is not just for emphasis, but must necessarily imply two distinct meanings or circumstances. This midrash interprets the two occurrences to mean "this world" and "the world to come":
 - What pairs of situations can you think of where these phrases could apply?
 - What about the conversion process or Judaism makes you "happy"? What makes things "well with you?"
 - What do you expect out of "this world"? What do you expect out of "the world to come"?
2. What "labor of your hands" do you "consume"? Does it make you "happy"? Does it make things "well with you"?
3. What "good deeds" of yours do you feel are "heaping up"? What reward do you hope they will bring you?
4. What is the "merit" of your "fathers"?
5. What "merit" do you feel that you are acquiring as you "take on a Jewish ancestry"?

Texts Related to Family in General, or Extended Family

Moses Welcomes Jethro—Exodus 18:7-10

Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he prostrated himself and kissed him, and each inquired about the other's well-being; then they came to the tent. Moses told his father-in-law everything that YHVH had done to Pharaoh and Egypt for Israel's sake, all the travail that had befallen [the Israelites] on the way—and that YHVH had rescued them. Jethro rejoiced over all the good that YHVH had done for Israel, that He had rescued it from the land of Egypt. Jethro said, "Blessed is YHVH, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, Who has rescued the people from under the hand of Egypt."

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Moses actively goes out to greet Jethro, and actively welcomes him.
- Jethro's statement, "rescued you" seems to indicate Jethro doesn't yet feel part of the Jewish people, but he feels genuinely happy for their good fortune.
- Moses greets Jethro outside the tent, and then they come into the tent together.
- Moses seems anxious to share his Judaism with Jethro.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Interacting with Jewish relatives

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are there Jewish relatives (including relatives by marriage) who have actively "gone out to meet you"? In what ways have they done so? How have you reacted?
2. Moses clearly wants to tell Jethro about his Israelite experiences with God, and Jethro is happy about it. In what ways do people in your life want to share their Judaism with you? In what ways do you "rejoice"? In what ways do you not?
3. How do you interpret the statement that Moses greets Jethro "outside the tent"? How does your answer reflect your conversion process?
4. Who in your life has "prostrated themselves" before you? How so? How have you reacted?
5. What "blessing(s)" would/do you offer to your Jewish relatives?

Akilas, Hadrian Caesar's Nephew—Midrash Tanhuma, Mishpatim 5

Akilas, who was Hadrian [Caesar]'s nephew, wished to become a convert but was afraid of his uncle Hadrian. So he said to him: I want to go into business. Hadrian: Does that mean you are in need of silver or gold? My treasures are open before you. Akilas: I still want to go into business, to get outside, to learn what people think. I seek your counsel on how to go about it. Hadrian: Any merchandise whose price is depressed, all but sunk in the ground—go and deal in it, for in the end its price will rise and you will realize a profit. So Akilas went to the Land of Israel and studied Torah. After a while Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua came upon him, and, noticing a change in his countenance, they said to

each other: Akilas is apparently studying Torah. When he came into their presence, he proceeded to put many questions to them, which they answered. Then he went up to his uncle Hadrian, who asked him: Why is your countenance changed? I suspect that either your merchandise sold at a loss, or can it be that someone has distressed you? Akilas: No. You are my kinsman—would any man dare distress me? Hadrian: Then why is your countenance changed? Akilas: Because I have studied Torah. What is more, I have had myself circumcised. Hadrian: Who told you to do so? Akilas: It was you I consulted. Hadrian: When? Akilas: When I told you that I wanted to go into business, and you said to me, “Any merchandise whose price is depressed, all but sunk in the ground—go and deal in it, for in the end it will rise in value.” I then went around among all nations and found none held in lower esteem and deemed to be more deeply sunk in the ground than Israel. But in the end they will be exalted, as Isaiah said, “Thus says YHVH, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to him who is despised of men, to him who is abhorred of nations, to a servant of rulers. Kings shall see him and rise, princes, they shall prostrate themselves” (Isaiah 49:7).

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Akilas’ fear of his uncle is applicable in many conversion situations.
- No mention is made of Akilas’ parents’ feelings about his conversion. It seems that it is his uncle’s position as Caesar which is the critical factor.
- Akilas describes the nation of Israel in rather depressed terms, but still wishes to convert.
- Both the two Rabbis and Akilas’ uncle notice the marked change in his countenance. Both interpret the change from their own point of view.
- No indication is given whether Akilas’ countenance improves or declines—simply that it changed.
- No indication is given regarding Hadrian’s ultimate reaction.
- Akilas waits until after he is circumcised to tell his uncle.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Extended family who may never understand or accept one’s conversion
- People’s motivations for their feelings about a person’s conversion
- Visible changes during the conversion process
- When to tell family members about one’s conversion
- Changing perceptions of Judaism

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. When Akilas’ “countenance changed”, do you interpret that it improved or declined? Why? How has your “countenance” changed as you “came to the Land of Israel and studied Torah”?
2. Why do you think Akilas is so concerned about his uncle’s opinion, and Akilas’ parents or other close relatives aren’t even mentioned? How is your answer applicable to your conversion process?
3. Are there people in your family whose opinion you “fear”? How do you handle the situation?
4. Akilas waits until after he is circumcised (converted) to tell his uncle. Do you agree with his decision? How is this timing applicable to your conversion process?
5. No indication is given of Hadrian’s reaction to Akilas’ final statement. How do you think he took the news? How does your response reflect your conversion process?

6. In what ways have you viewed Judaism as “merchandise whose price is depressed”? What is your current perception?

Jethro and His Grandchildren—Exodus 18:5-6

Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, came to Moses with his sons and wife, to the Wilderness where he was encamped, by the Mountain of YHVH. He said to Moses, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, have come to you, with your wife and her two sons with her.”

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Although in this case it is Jethro who is the one converting, the text still has much to say about the relationship between those who are converting and their in-laws, grandparents, children, and grandchildren.
- Jethro describes Moses’ children as “her two sons”.
- Jethro comes to Moses, not vice-versa.
- Jethro’s relationship to Moses is described twice.
- Jethro describes Zipporah as Moses’ wife, rather than as his daughter.
- It is metaphorically interesting that Jethro actively approaches while Moses is (passively or even stubbornly) “encamped by the Mountain of YHVH”.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- The in-laws
- Religion as a source of tension within multi-religion families
- Grandparents and conversion
- Jews who don’t strive to meet the needs of one who is exploring conversion or who has converted

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How will you handle the relationship with your parents / grandparents in your process?
2. How will you handle your children’s relationship with their grandparents?
3. Why do you think Jethro refers to his own daughter and grandchildren as “your wife and her two sons with her”? How is this discussion applicable to your conversion process?
4. Who have you encountered during your process who is “encamped”?
5. In what ways is your process a source of tension in your extended family?
6. Whom do you need to “come to” as part of your conversion process? When and how will you do it?

Converts Become Roots like Israel—Vayikra Rabbah on Hosea 14:8

THEY SHALL RETURN, DWELLING IN HIS SHADOW

Rabbi Abbahu said: The converts who rest in the shadow of YHVH become roots like Israel.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The phrases “to rest”, “the shadow of YHVH”, and “roots” are all striking metaphors for a convert, crying out for interpretation.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- The impact of a convert’s actions on those around them
- The impact of a convert’s actions and process on their family

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean to “be in the shadow of YHVH”? How is this applicable to your process?
2. Why do you think the convert is described as “resting” in that shadow? How is that phrase applicable to your process?
3. What does it mean to be a “root”? In what ways is that metaphor applicable to your process?
4. In what ways do you think converts are “roots like Israel” and in what ways do you think converts are “roots” NOT “like Israel”?

Texts Related to One's Children

By Merit of your Table—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:4

HAPPY IS EVERYONE WHO STANDS IN AWE OF YHVH, WHO WALKS IN GOD'S WAYS. YOU SHALL EAT THE LABOR OF YOUR HANDS. HAPPY SHALL YOU BE AND IT SHALL BE WELL WITH YOU. YOUR WIFE SHALL BE LIKE A FRUITFUL VINE, YOUR CHILDREN SHALL BE LIKE OLIVE TREES AROUND YOUR TABLE. BEHOLD, SURELY THUS SHALL THE MAN BE BLESSED WHO STANDS IN AWE OF YHVH.

Your merit will stand your sons in good stead, for by reason of your table your children will be privileged to attain to high virtues, as it is written: BEHOLD, SURELY THUS SHALL THE MAN BE BLESSED WHO STANDS IN AWE OF YHVH. This, in fact, we find to have been the case with Abraham and Sarah, who were converts. Abraham, having been a God-fearing man, was blessed in this manner, and so will all converts be blessed who practice what these practiced.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Twice in six verses Psalm 128 uses the phrase "y'rei YHVH (to stand in awe of YHVH)"—a phrase which often is a euphemism for conversion—hence everything in the psalm is taken to refer to converts.
- The convert's actions have an effect not only on the convert, but on the convert's family.
- The first sentence of the midrash is unclear whether the children will perhaps achieve even higher virtue than the parent—it seems like the first sentence goes out of its way not to say that the person themselves will attain high virtues.
- The text focuses on the table as the key to blessing—a table is often used as emblematic of a Jewish home.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- The effect of the convert's commitment and actions on his/her family
- Impact on a child of having (a) converted parent(s)
- Impact of a child's home environment on their Jewish identity

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who in your family is affected by your conversion process? How are they affected?
2. How does/will your conversion process affect your children?
3. What "merit" of yours will "stand your children in good stead"?
4. What "higher virtues" will your children "attain" as a result of your conversion?
5. What is the condition of your "table"? In what ways will it "bless your children"?

No one Loved Torah like Jethro—Sifre to Numbers 78:1 on Numbers 10:29

AND MOSES SAID TO HOBAB, THE SON OF RAGUEL THE MIDIANITE, MOSES' FATHER-IN-LAW [Jethro] was [also] called Hobab because he loved the Torah. For we find in no other convert that someone cherished the Torah more than did Jethro. And just as Jethro loved the Torah, so we find that his descendants loved the Torah.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- The Hebrew root HBB means "cherished" or "beloved", which is the source of this midrash's explanation of the text.
- "Loving Torah" can be taken as a synonym for conversion.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Influence of converted parents on children

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does your love of Torah compare to Jethro's?
2. How will your conversion process influence your children?

Texts Related to One's Spouse

Your Wife shall be as a Fruitful Vine—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:3

HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO ARE IN AWE OF YHVH, WHO WALK IN YHVH'S WAYS...YOUR WIFE SHALL BE LIKE A FRUITFUL VINE...YOUR CHILDREN LIKE OLIVE PLANTS AROUND YOUR TABLE. (128:1-3)

Your wife shall be as a fruitful vine: Even though his wife was converted with him and is not one of the daughters of Israel, she is on a par with any of the daughters of Israel. Hence it is written, '*As a fruitful vine*'; 'vine' alluding to Israel; as it says, *you didst pluck up a vine out of Egypt* (ibid. 80:9).

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Twice in six verses Psalm 128 uses the phrase "y'rei YHVH (to stand in awe of YHVH)"—a phrase which often is a euphemism for conversion—hence everything in the psalm is taken to refer to converts.
- The text seems to discuss situations where both husband and wife converted.
- The text does not explain the word "fruitful".
- The word "vine" is an interesting description of both Israel and the woman who converted.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How converting or not converting affects one's spouse
- Double-conversion situations

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does your spouse feel about your conversion process?
2. How do you think your choice about converting affects your spouse? How much should this influence your decision?
3. How does the term "vine" describe you and your process?
4. How does the term "fruitful" describe you and your process?
5. What does the implication that the spouse who does not convert is "still in Egypt" mean to you?
6. What differences exist in the conversion process for someone who converts:
 - whose spouse also converted?
 - whose spouse is not Jewish?
 - who is single?

Abraham's First Test—Legends of the Jews Vol. I pp. 217-218

With the ten temptations Abraham was tempted, and he withstood them all, showing how great was the love of Abraham. The first test to which he was subjected was the departure from his native land. ...and he was loath to leave his home. He spoke to God, and said, "Will not the people talk about me, and say, 'He is endeavoring to bring the nations under the wings of the *Shechinah*, yet he leaves his old father in Haran, and he goes away.'" But God answered him, and said: "Dismiss all care concerning

your father and your kinsmen from your thoughts. Though they speak words of kindness to you, yet are they all of one mind, to ruin you."

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Abraham is not just concerned with leaving home, but leaving his family, and how people will interpret that action.
- The "kinsmen" are described as deceptively "speak[ing] words of kindness".
- The suggestion that one should "dismiss all care concerning [one's] family of origin may not ring true in a modern context.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- Parents' feelings of abandonment
- Those who try to dissuade a person from converting
- In-process and post-conversion interactions with parents

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can you conceive of a test to be drawn from this situation which would have been more appropriate than "leaving his old father in Haran"?
2. Why do you think Abraham wasn't instructed to bring his old father "under the wings of the Shechinah"?
3. How do you/will you handle future interactions with your parents and family?
4. What "words of kindness" do your "kinsman" speak to you? Do you believe they are "of mind to ruin you"? If not, what are their motivations?
5. To what extent do your parents feel "left in Haran"? In what ways can your "kinsmen" join you on your journey?

The Man Who Violates His Own Teachings—Avot d'Rabbi Nathan

Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar said:...a parable: To what might Adam be compared? To a man who married a convert and used to give her instruction, saying, "My dear, do not eat bread when your hands are defiled, do not eat untithed produce, do not profane the Sabbath, do not make vows rashly, and do not associate with another man. [According to Jewish law,] if you break one of these rules, you will [be sentenced to] die." Now what did the man do? He arose and ate in her presence bread although his hands were defiled, he ate before her untithed produce – he profaned the Sabbath and made vows rashly – and also offered her some (of the food). What could that convert have thought to herself? All that my husband forbade me in the beginning was without foundation. She thereupon went and transgressed them all.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT

- Eve's transgressions are portrayed as Adam's responsibility.
- The midrash describes that Adam "offers Eve" the "forbidden fruit". This is exactly the opposite of the Biblical story.

- Eve is described as “a convert”, indicating that she has already converted and therefore would bear responsibility in Jewish law for her own transgressions.
- Adam is portrayed as knowing the law, but choosing to transgress it.
- The phrase “and also offered her some” indicates an active rather than a passive responsibility on Adam’s part.

SOME ISSUES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT

- The ambivalent Jewish spouse
- Identity development and education by example and cultural surroundings vs. education
- Discomfort of Jewish family members with converts’ knowledge and level of religious practice

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What Jewish influences in your process “say one thing but do another”?
2. To what level do you think Adam bears responsibility for Eve’s transgressions? How does your answer reflect your own process?
3. In this midrash, it is Adam who gives Eve the “forbidden fruit”, whereas in the Biblical story the initiative is in the other direction.
 - Why do you think the writer reverses the story here?
 - Where in your process is the Biblical model applicable?
 - Where in your process is the midrashic model applicable?
4. Eve is portrayed as already having converted, but still developing her identity and religious practice:
 - In what ways can you view Eve as a convert?
 - Why do you think Adam is assigned responsibility for her transgressions?
 - Who affects/will affect your conversion process once you have converted?
5. How do you react to Jews who knowingly violate Jewish laws and traditions?
6. Adam “offering her some (of the forbidden food)” indicates that Adam wanted Eve to join him in his transgressions. Who in your life is threatened by your level of religious practice? How so?

CHAPTER 4: KERUV IN INTERFAITH SITUATIONS

Texts in this chapter are intended to help Jews and Gentiles discuss issues that arise as they attempt to coexist, particularly in Jewish settings. The primary context for these discussions is interfaith marriage situations, but need not be limited to that context.

Subsection i: Chosenness/Distinctiveness of the Jewish People

Israel Must Stand Apart—Shemot Rabbah 15:7 on Numbers 23:9

FROM THE TOP OF THE ROCKS DO I SEE [THEM (*HEN*)], AND FROM THE HILLS I BEHOLD [THEM (*HEN*)]: A PEOPLE THAT DWELLS APART, WHO WILL NOT BE SETTLED AMONG THE NATIONS

In the beginning, the world was full of water and God wished to establish the world, but the wicked would not allow God to do so...The waters arose and washed them away...Hence the Torah says: "From the top of the rocks do I see them, from the hills I behold them."

What is implied by the word *hen*? Israel's uniqueness, which is intimated by the numerical values of the letters [*hey* and *nun* which spell] *hen*—the epithet given to Israel in this verse. When you examine all the letters in the alphabet [in their numerical equivalents], you will find that each of them has a mate [with which the number 10 or 100 may be formed; the exceptions are the letters *he* and *nun* in *hn*, the epithet for Israel—these two letters have no such mates]. Thus the letter *alef* (1) together with *tet* (9) adds up to 10. The letter *bet* (2) together with *het* (8) also adds up to 10. And just as *alef* (1) + *tet* (9) and *bet* (2) + *het* (8) add up to 10, so *gimmel* (3) + *zayin* (7) and *dalet* (4) + *vav* (6) add up to 10. But the *hey* (5) cannot be mated in this way [since it has no mate except itself to make 10]. Nor has the *nun* (50) a mate [except itself to make 100]. Likewise, in another series of combinations, the letters *yod* (10) + *tzade* (90) and *kaf* (20) + *peh* (80) and *lamed* (30) + *ayin* (70) and *mem* (40) + *samekh* (60)—each adds up to 100. But the *nun* (50) cannot be mated in this way.

The Holy One said: Even as the letters *he* and *nun* cannot be mated with other letters except themselves to form either ten or one hundred, so Israel cannot be joined with other peoples, but must stand apart. Even if a king decrees that they violate the Sabbath, abolish circumcision, or worship idols, they let themselves be put to death rather than commingle with the nations.

Subsection ii: Marriage of a Jew to a Non-Jew

Joseph Inspires Asenath—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II pp. 172-174

Asenath desired to kiss Joseph, but he warded off the intimate greeting with the words: "It is not acceptable that a God-fearing man, who blesses the living God, and eats the blessed bread of life, who drinks of the blessed cup of immortality and incorruptibility, and anoints himself with the fragrant oil of holiness, should kiss a woman of a strange people, who blesses dead and unprofitable idols, and eats the putrid bread of idolatry, which chokes the soul of man, who drinks the libations of deceit, and anoints herself with the oil of destruction."

These words uttered by Joseph touched Asenath to tears. Out of compassion with her, he bestowed his blessing upon her, calling upon God to pour out His spirit over her and make her to become a member of His people and His inheritance, and grant her a portion in the life eternal.

Do Not Take a Wife from the Daughters of Canaan—Genesis 28:1-9

So Isaac summoned Jacob and blessed him; he instructed him, and said to him, "Do not take a wife from the Canaanite women. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take a wife from there from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother....When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him off to Paddan-aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he commanded him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from among the daughters of Canaan", and that Jacob obeyed his father and mother and went to Paddan-aram; then Esau perceived that the daughters of Canaan were evil in the eyes of Isaac, his father. So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, sister of Nebaioth, in addition to his wives, as a wife for himself.

It Is Better That She Marry You, Jacob—Genesis 29:16-19

And Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes; but Rachel was beautiful and well favored. And Jacob loved Rachel; and said [to Laban], I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter. And Laban said, It is better that I give her to you, than that I should give her to another man; stay with me.

Subsection iii: Gentiles in Jewish Settings

They Shall Have an Inheritance with You—Ezekiel 47:21-23

And you shall divide this land for yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that you shall divide it by drawing lots for an inheritance to you, and to the *ger* who lives among you, who shall father children among you. They shall be to you as those born in the country among the people of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in whatever tribe the foreigner sojourns, there shall you give him his inheritance, says YHVH God.

A Mixed Multitude Went with Them—Exodus 12:37-38

And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot, who were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, and very many cattle.

Subsection iv: Children of Interfaith Marriages

The Children of Joseph and Asenath—Genesis 41:50-52, 46:19-20, 48:3,5 and 48:8-16

Now to Joseph were born two sons—when the year of famine had not yet set in—whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phera, Chief of On, bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Menasseh for, “YHVH has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s household.” And the name of the second son he called Ephraim for, “YHVH has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.” (41:50-52)

The sons of Jacob’s wife Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. To Joseph were born in the land of Egypt Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phera priest of On bore to him. (46:19-20)

Jacob said to Joseph, “El Shaddai had appeared to me in Luz in the land of Canaan and He blessed me....And now, your two sons who were born to you in Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt shall be mine; Ephraim and Menasseh shall be mine like Reuben and Simeon (Jacob’s older sons) [are mine]. (48:3,5)

Taking notice of Joseph’s sons, Israel (Jacob) asked, “Whose are these?” And Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons, whom God has given me here.” “Bring them to me,” he said, “that I may bless them.” Now Israel’s eyes were dim with age; he could not see. So [Joseph] brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see you again, and here God has let me see your children as well.”

Joseph then removed them from his knees, and bowed low with his face to the ground. Joseph took the two of them, Ephraim with his right hand—to Israel’s left—and Manasseh with his left hand—to Israel’s right—and brought them close to him. But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, though he was the younger and his left hand on Manasseh’s head—thus crossing his hands—although Manasseh was first-born. And he blessed Joseph, saying, “the God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, / the God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day— / The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm— / Bless the lads. / In them may my name be recalled, / and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, / And may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth.” ... So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you shall Israel invoke blessings, saying: God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.” (48:8-16)

How Moses’ Children Were Raised—Mechilta d’Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek on Exodus 18:2-3

SO JETHRO, MOSES’ FATHER-IN-LAW, TOOK ZIPPORAH, MOSES’ WIFE, AFTER SHE HAD BEEN SENT HOME, AND HER TWO SONS—ONE OF WHOM WAS NAMED GERSHOM, MEANING “I WAS A GER THERE IN A FOREIGN LAND”

Rabbi Eleazar of Modi’im says: “In a foreign land”—where God was like a *ger*. Moses said: Since the whole world is worshiping idols, whom shall I worship? For at the time when Moses said to Jethro: “Give me your daughter Zipporah to wife,” Jethro said to him: “Accept one condition which I will state to you and I will give her to you for a wife.” “What is it?” asked Moses. He then said to him: “The first son that you will have shall belong to the idol and the following may belong to God.” Moses accepted.

Moses' Children, Gershom and Eliezer—Exodus 18:1-4

Jethro, the minister of Midian, the father-in-law of Moses, heard everything that YHVH did to Moses and to Israel, His people—that YHVH had taken Israel out of Egypt. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, took Zipporah, the wife of Moses, after she had been sent away; and her two sons: of whom the name of one was Gershom, for he had said, "I was a sojourner in a strange land"; and the name of the other was Eliezer, for "the YHVH of my father came to my aid, and He saved me from the sword of Pharaoh."

CHAPTER 5: KERUV TO / ATTITUDES ABOUT GENTILES

Texts in this chapter are intended to help Jews process their attitude toward Gentiles, or to facilitate discussions with Gentiles in Jewish settings. The two primary contexts for these texts are discussing boundary issues related to Gentiles in a Jewish environment such as a synagogue, and exploring the Jews' role in the Gentile world. The author conceives that these texts might also be helpful in interfaith settings such as clergy associations or interfaith discussion groups.

Subsection i: The Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue

Gentiles are People, too—Midrash Tanhuma, Vayakhel 8 on Leviticus 18:5 and Numbers 15:16

Leviticus: IF A MAN FOLLOWS [MY LAWS], HE SHALL LIVE

Numbers: ONE LAW SHALL THERE BE FOR BOTH YOU AND FOR THE GER

Even *gerim*, when they occupy themselves with the Torah, are accounted as equal to the High Priest, for it is said (Leviticus 18:5) 'You shall therefore keep My statutes and Mine ordinances, which, if a man do, he shall live by them.'—Priest, Levite, or Israelite are not mentioned here, but *man*. Therefore (Numbers 15:16) 'one law and one ordinance shall be both for you and for the *ger* that lives with you.'

They Shall Have an Inheritance with You—Ezekiel 47:21-23

And you shall divide this land for yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that you shall divide it by drawing lots for an inheritance to you, and to the *ger* who lives among you, who shall father children among you. They shall be to you as those born in the country among the people of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in whatever tribe the foreigner sojourns, there shall you give him his inheritance, says YHVH God.

One Torah and One Law Code—Numbers 15:13-16

All who are native born shall do these things after this ordinance, in offering an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor to YHVH. And if a *ger* sojourns with you, or whoever is among you in your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor to YHVH; as you do, so he shall do. One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the *ger* who sojourns with you, an ordinance forever in your generations; as you are, so shall the *ger* be before YHVH. One Torah and one law code shall be for you, and for the *ger* who sojourns with you.

A House of Prayer for All—Isaiah 56:7

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.

All Shall Keep the Passover—Numbers 9:14

And if a *ger* lives among you, and will keep the Passover to YHVH; according to the ordinance of the Passover, and according to its prescribed ordinance, so shall he do; you shall have one ordinance, for the *ger*, and for him who was born in the land.

What Did They Sacrifice Before the Tabernacle?—Tosefta Zebahim 13:1-2 on Mishna Zebahim 14:4

Before the tabernacle was set up, the high places were used and the [sacrificial] service was done by first-born sons. When the tabernacle was set up, the high places were prohibited, and the [sacrificial] service was valid only [when done] by priests.

Before the tabernacle was set up: What [animals] did they sacrifice [at that time]? Cattle, beasts, and fowl, large and small, male and female, unblemished and blemished, clean, but not unclean. Everything was offered as a burnt-offering and required flaying and chopping up. The gentile at this time are permitted to do so.

A Mixed Multitude Went with Them—Exodus 12:37-38

And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot, who were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, and very many cattle.

These Shall Not Enter the Congregation—Deuteronomy 23:3-5

A *mamzer* (child born of a Biblically-forbidden union) shall not enter into the congregation of YHVH; to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of YHVH. An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of YHVH; to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of YHVH forever; Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when you came out of Egypt; and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

A Ger May Not Be King—Deuteronomy 17:15

You shall set him king over you, whom YHVH your God shall choose; one from among your brothers shall you set king over you; you may not set a *ger* over you, who is not your brother.

All shall Rejoice before YHVH—Deuteronomy 16:11

And you shall rejoice before YHVH your God, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite who is inside your gates, and the *ger*, and the orphan, and the widow, who are among you, in the place which YHVH your God has chosen to place his name.

Subsection ii: God's Relationship with Gentiles

Beloved are the Gerim—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Nezikin on Leviticus 25:55; Isaiah 56:6; Isaiah 61:6; Isaiah 41:8; Deut 10:18; Gen 17:13; Exodus 18:38; Isaiah 56:7; Psalm 121:4; Psalm 146:9; Genesis 23:4; Psalm 119:19; I Chronicles 29:15; Psalm 29:13

Beloved are the *gerim*. For in ever so many passages the Torah applies to them the same designations as it does to the Israelites. The Israelites are called "servants," as it is said: "For to Me the children of Israel are servants" (Leviticus 25.55). And so also the *gerim* are called "servants," as it is said: "And to love the name of YHVH (a euphemism for conversion), to be His servants" (Isaiah 56.6). The Israelites are referred to as "ministers," as it is said: "But you shall be named the priests of YHVH, men shall call you the ministers of our YHVH" (ibid 61.6). And so also the *gerim* are referred to as "ministers," as it is said: "Also the *gerim*, that join themselves to YHVH, to minister to Him" (ibid. 56.6). The Israelites are referred to as "friends," as it is said: "But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend" (ibid. 41.8). And the *gerim* are also referred to as "friend," as it is said: "And [YHVH] loves the *ger*" (Deuteronomy 10.18). A "covenant" is mentioned in connection with the Israelites, as it is said: "And My covenant shall be in your flesh" (Genesis 17.13). And a "covenant" is also mentioned in connection with the *gerim*, as it is said: "And holds fast by My covenant" (Isaiah 56.6). "Acceptance" is mentioned in regard to the Israelites, as it is said: "That they may be accepted before YHVH" (Exodus 28.38). And "acceptance" is also mentioned in regard to the *gerim*, as it is said: "Their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be acceptable upon My altar" (Isaiah 56.7). "Guarding" is mentioned in regard to the Israelites, as it is said: "Behold, He that guards Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps" (Psalm 121.4). And "guarding" is also mentioned in regard to the *gerim*, as it is said: "The Lord guards the *gerim*" (ibid. 146.9). Abraham called himself a "*ger*," as it is said: "I am a *ger* and a sojourner with you" (Genesis 23.4). David called himself a "*ger*," as it is said: "I am a *ger* in the earth" (Psalm 119.19). And he also says: "For we are *gerim* before You, and sojourners on the earth are as a shadow, and there is no abiding" (I Chronicles 29.5). And is also says: "For I am a *ger* with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were" (Psalm 39.13).

The Stag Who Joined the Flock—Midrash on Psalms 8 on Psalm 146:9

YHVH PRESERVES THE GERIM.

The Holy One, blessed be He, greatly loves *gerim*. What parable fits here? That of a king who had a flock. Every day it used to go out and feed in the pasture and come back in the evening. One time a stag joined the flock, walking along with the goats and the ewes and feeding with them. He would come back with the flock, and when it would go out to feed, he would go with it. The king was told, "A stag goes with the flock and feeds with it, every day going out and coming back with it." And the king came to love the stag exceedingly. When the stag went out into the pasture, the king would command the shepherd, saying to him: "Take special care of this stag! Let no one strike him." And when the stag came back with the flock, the king would command his friend concerning him: "Give him to eat and to drink." And the king loved the stag more and more. The shepherd said to the king: "My lord king, many are the he-goats, many the she-goats, many the ewes, and many the lambs you have, but you do not command me to take special care of them. But the stag—every day you give me commands about him." The king replied: "As for the flock, it feeds in its usual way. But stags, they live in the wilderness. It is not their way to come into inhabited land, among men. This stag did come in, however, and found a place among us. Shall we not show our appreciation of him for having left the

great wide wilderness, the place where stags and hinds feed, for having abandoned them and coming among us? We must show our appreciation of him." Even so does the Holy One, blessed be He, say: "I must show My great appreciation of the *ger* who has left his family and his father's house and has come to Me. Therefore, I command concerning him: *Love you therefore the ger* (Deuteronomy 10:19); *And a ger shall you not wrong* (Exodus 22:20)." Hence it is said *The Lord preserves the gerim*.

In God's Image—Genesis 1:26-27

And YHVH said, "Let us make [Humanity] in Our image, after Our likeness..." So YHVH created Man in his image, in the image of YHVH He created him...

Who Sets Us Apart—Prayer Liturgy Havdallah, 4th blessing

Praised are You, Lord our YHVH, Ruler of the Universe who has endowed all creation with distinctive qualities, distinguishing between sacred and secular time, between light and darkness, between the people of Israel and other people, between the seventh day and the six working days of the week.

What does YHVH Demand of You?—Deuteronomy 10:12-19

And now, O Israel, what does YHVH your God demand of you? Only this: to revere YHVH your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve YHVH your God with all your heart and soul, keeping YHVH's commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good. The heavens to their uttermost reaches belong to YHVH your God, the earth and all that is on it! Yet it was to your fathers that YHVH was drawn in His love for them, so that He chose you, their lineal descendants, from among all peoples—as is now the case. Cut away, therefore, the foreskin of your hearts and stiffen your necks no more. For YHVH your God is god supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the *ger*, providing him with food and clothing. You too must befriend the *ger*, for you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt.

All are God's Handiwork—Talmud Sanhedrin 98b

...the Holy One says, "These [the Gentiles] are My handiwork, and those [Israel] are My handiwork..."

I Will Bring Them to My Holy Mountain—Isaiah 56:6-8

Also the sons of the *ger*, who join themselves to YHVH, to serve him, and to love the name of YHVH, to be his servants, every one who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and all who hold fast to my covenant. Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The Lord God who gathers the outcasts of Israel says, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those who are already gathered.

He Whom the King Loves—Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Nezikin on Deuteronomy 10:17-18

YHVH YOUR GOD IS GOD SUPREME AND LORD SUPREME—THE GREAT, MIGHTY, AND AWESOME GOD WHO SHOWS NO FAVOR AND TAKES NO BRIBE, BUT UPHOLDS THE LAW OF THE ORPHAN AND THE WIDOW, AND LOVES THE STRANGER...

Now, who is the greater, he who loves the king or he whom the king loves? You must say: It is he whom the king loves. And it is written: "And loves the *ger*," etc.

I Will Bless Those Who Bless You—Genesis 12:3

And I will bless those who bless you (Abraham), and curse him who curses you; and through you shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Picking the Good out of the Bad—Pesikta d'Rab Kahana, Tractate baHodesh on Leviticus 20:26

I HAVE SET YOU APART FROM THE PEOPLES.

Rabbi Judan in the name of Rabbi Hama ben Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Berekiah in the name of Rabbi Abbahu said: If he had said: "I have set the peoples apart from you," there would have been no salvation (*tekumah*) for the peoples of the world. But "I have set you apart from the peoples"—as one who picks the good out of the bad and repeatedly picks over it; but when he picks the bad out of the good, he does not pick over it again.

Not With You Alone Do I Make This Covenant—Deuteronomy 29:9-13

You stand this day all of you before YHVH your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the *ger* who is in your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water: that you should enter into covenant with YHVH your God, and into his oath, which YHVH your God makes with you this day, that he may establish you today for a people to himself, and that he may be to you a God, as he has said to you, and as he has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And not with you alone will I make this covenant and this oath, but with whoever is here, standing with us today before YHVH, our God, and with whoever is not here with us today.

A Very Practical Law—Nahmanides On Exodus 23:9

DO NOT WRONG A *GER* OR OPPRESS HIM, FOR YOU KNOW THE HEART OF A *GER*, AS YOU WERE *GERIM* IN THE LAND OF EGYPT

"Do not wrong a *ger* or oppress him [is a very practical law. Do not] think none can deliver him out of your hand; [on the contrary,] you know that when you were *gerim* in Egypt, I saw how the Egyptians oppressed you, and brought vengeance down upon them because I—YHVH—heard the cry of the oppressed in Egypt.

Giving the Ger Food and Clothing—Deuteronomy 10:17-19

For YHVH your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, mighty and awesome, Who favors no person, nor takes bribes; He executes the judgment of the orphan and widow, and loves the *ger*, giving him food and clothing. Love you therefore the *ger*; for you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt.

Gentiles are People, too—Midrash Tanhuma, Vayakhel 8 on Leviticus 18:5 and Numbers 15:16

Leviticus: IF A MAN FOLLOWS [MY LAWS], HE SHALL LIVE

Numbers: ONE LAW SHALL THERE BE FOR BOTH YOU AND FOR THE *GER*

Even *gerim*, when they occupy themselves with the Torah, are accounted as equal to the High Priest, for it is said (Leviticus 18.5) 'You shall therefore keep My statutes and Mine ordinances, which, if a man do, he shall live by them.'—Priest, Levite, or Israelite are not mentioned here, but man. Therefore (Numbers 15.16) 'one law and one ordinance shall be both for you and for the *ger* that lives with you.'

Happy is Everyone—Bemidbar Rabbah 8:9 on Psalm 128:1

HAPPY IS EVERY ONE WHO IS IN AWE OF YHVH, WHO WALKS IN HIS WAYS

Consider the verse, *Happy is every who is in awe of YHVH, who walks in His ways*. It does not say, 'Happy is Israel,' or 'Happy are the priests' or 'Happy are the Levites', but '*Happy is every one that is in awe of YHVH*'. This is an indication to the *gerim* who fear YHVH that they come under the designation of '*happy*'.

Subsection iii: Jews' Relationship with Gentiles

Job's Severest Affliction—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II pp. 228-230

Job was asked once what he considered the severest affliction that could strike him, and he replied, "My enemies' joy in my misfortune," and when God demanded to know of him what he preferred, poverty or physical suffering, he chose pain, saying, "YHVH of the whole world, chastise my body with suffering of all kinds, only preserve me from poverty." Poverty seemed the greater scourge, because before his trials he had occupied a brilliant position on account of his vast wealth...no sooner were the seeds strewn in the furrows, than they sprouted and grew and ripened into produce. He was equally successful with his cattle. Of sheep he had no less than one hundred and thirty thousand...Besides, his herds consisted of three hundred and forty thousand donkeys and thirty-five hundred pairs of oxen.

All these possessions were not used for self-indulgent pleasures, but for the good of the poor and the needy, whom he clothed, and fed, and provided with all things necessary...His house was furnished with doors on all its four sides, that the poor and the wayfarer might enter, no matter from what direction they approached. At all times there were thirty tables laden with viands ready in his house, and twelve besides for widows only, so that all who came found what they desired. Job's consideration for the poor was so delicate that he kept servants to wait upon them constantly.

His guests, enraptured by his charitableness, frequently offered themselves as attendants to minister to the poor in his house, but Job always insisted upon paying them for their services. If he was asked for a loan of money, to be used for business purposes, and the borrower promised to give a part of his profits to the poor, he would demand no security beyond a mere signature. And if it happened that by some mischance or other the debtor was not able to discharge his obligation, Job would return the note to him, or tear it into bits in his presence.

He did not rest satisfied at supplying the material needs of those who applied to him. He strove also to convey the knowledge of God to them. After a meal he was in the habit of having music played upon instruments, and then he would invite those present to join him in songs of praise to God. On such occasions he did not consider himself above playing his instrument while the musicians rested.

You Shall Love Your Fellow as Yourself—Leviticus 19:17-18

You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall reprove your fellow and do not bear a sin because of him. You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself—I am YHVH.

Correct the Sin, Not the Sinner—Talmud Brachot 10a

In Rabbi Meir's neighborhood there were a number of insolent sinners who continuously harassed him. Rabbi Meir prayed to YHVH that these people would die. His wife, Beruriah, asked him: "Are you doing this because it is written 'sin [*het*] will be excised from the earth' (Psalms 104:35)? [But you read the verse incorrectly:] It is written 'sins' [*hatai'm*], not 'sinners' [*hot'im*]. Also, continue to the end of the verse, where it says: 'And the wicked will be no more.' This means, once the sins of the wicked are

removed, there will no longer be any evildoers on the earth. Therefore, you would do better to pray that these people repent [not that they die] and the verse 'and the wicked will be no more' will be fulfilled."

Treat the Ger with Humility—Sifre to Numbers 80:2 on Numbers 10:29-32

MOSES SAID TO [HIS] FATHER-IN-LAW...COME WITH US AND WE WILL DO YOU GOOD...DO NOT LEAVE US, I PRAY YOU, SINCE YOU KNOW HOW WE ARE TO ENCAMP IN THE WILDERNESS, AND YOU MAY BE EYES FOR US...IF YOU GO WITH US, THAT GOOD WHICH YHVH SHALL DO FOR US, THE SAME WE WILL DO FOR YOU.

...the Omnipresent entrusted the commandment to Israel to do good to *gerim* and to treat them with humility. "...for you know how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us:" [means] You will be as beloved to us as the orb of the eye, as it is said, 'You will love the *ger*' (Deuteronomy 10:19). 'You will not oppress the *ger*' (Exodus 23:9). 'You will not trouble or oppress a *ger*' (Exodus 22:20).

You were Gerim in the Land of Egypt—Exodus 22:20

You will neither vex a *ger*, nor oppress him, for you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt.

Welcoming One's Fellow Man—Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, Tractate Amalek on Exodus 18:12

...AARON CAME, AND ALL THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL, TO EAT BREAD WITH MOSES' FATHER-IN-LAW BEFORE YHVH.

Why does it say: "Before YHVH?" It is to teach that when one welcomes his fellow man, it is considered as if he had welcomed the *Shechinah*.

The Sin That Cannot be Expiated—Tosafot to Bava Kamma 10:15

When a man [deceives] a [gentile]...and the [gentile] dies before restitution is made, that man's sin cannot be expiated, since [by besmirching Israel's name] he is guilty of profaning God's name.

Be Disciples of Aaron—Mishnah Avot 1:12

...Hillel said, Be...disciples of Aaron, loving peace, and pursuing peace, loving [your] fellow-creatures, and drawing them...to the [Torah].

No Man Ever Greeted him First—Talmud Berachot 17a

It is said of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai that no man ever greeted him first, not even a Gentile in the marketplace.

Judaism Cares How Gentiles View Jews—Minchat Chinuch, Commentary to Sefer HaChinuch

...the task of the Jewish people in their relationship to Gentiles has not been completed. There are millions of Jews today who do not exemplify the Jewish ideal, and, though the influence of the Jewish people upon the world has been great, the Jewish people must continue to perfect themselves before they can expect Gentiles to emulate them. It is for these reasons that Judaism cares very much how Gentiles view Judaism and Jews.

Do Not Follow the Other Nations—Leviticus 20:23-24

Do not follow the traditions of the nations that I expel from before you, for they did all of these [abhorrent things] and I was disgusted with them. So I said to you: You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to inherit it, a land flowing with milk and honey—I am YHVH, your God, Who has separated you from the peoples.

Israel Must Stand Apart—Shemot Rabbah 15:7 on Numbers 23:9

FROM THE TOP OF THE ROCKS DO I SEE [THEM (HEN)], AND FROM THE HILLS I BEHOLD [THEM (HEN)]: A PEOPLE THAT DWELLS APART, WHO WILL NOT BE SETTLED AMONG THE NATIONS

In the beginning, the world was full of water and God wished to establish the world, but the wicked would not allow God to do so...The waters arose and washed them away...Hence the Torah says: "From the top of the rocks do I see them, from the hills I behold them."

What is implied by the word *hen*? Israel's uniqueness, which is intimated by the numerical values of the letters [*hey* and *nun* which spell] *hen*—the epithet given to Israel in this verse. When you examine all the letters in the alphabet [in their numerical equivalents], you will find that each of them has a mate [with which the number 10 or 100 may be formed; the exceptions are the letters *he* and *nun* in *hn*, the epithet for Israel—these two letters have no such mates]. Thus the letter *alef* (1) together with *tet* (9) adds up to 10. The letter *bet* (2) together with *het* (8) also adds up to 10. And just as *alef* (1) + *tet* (9) and *bet* (2) + *het* (8) add up to 10, so *gimmel* (3) + *zayin* (7) and *dalet* (4) + *vav* (6) add up to 10. But the *hey* (5) cannot be mated in this way [since it has no mate except itself to make 10]. Nor has the *nun* (50) a mate [except itself to make 100]. Likewise, in another series of combinations, the letters *yod* (10) + *tzade* (90) and *kaf* (20) + *peh* (80) and *lamed* (30) + *ayin* (70) and *mem* (40) + *samekh* (60)—each adds up to 100. But the *nun* (50) cannot be mated in this way.

The Holy One said: Even as the letters *he* and *nun* cannot be mated with other letters except themselves to form either ten or one hundred, so Israel cannot be joined with other peoples, but must stand apart. Even if a king decrees that they violate the Sabbath, abolish circumcision, or worship idols, they let themselves be put to death rather than commingle with the nations.

Hold Your Unbridled Tongue—Philo of Alexandria, De Monarchia 1:7 on Exodus 22:20

YOU SHALL NOT VEX A GER

...Jews must not give license to their jealous language and unbridled tongues, blaspheming those beings whom the other body looks upon as gods, lest the *ger* should be exasperated at such treatment, and in return utter impious language against the true and holy God.

Do Not Loathe an Edomite or an Egyptian—Deuteronomy 23:8-9

You shall not loathe an Edomite; for he is your brother; you shall not loathe an Egyptian; because you were a *ger* in his land. The children who are fathered by them shall enter into the congregation of YHVH in their third generation.

Admit All in a Friendly Manner—Flavius Josephus, Against Apion II:29

...we should not dissolve our own constitution, nor show any envious mind towards those that would cultivate a friendship with us. Accordingly, our legislator [Moses] admits all those that have a mind to observe our laws so to do; and does this in a friendly manner, as esteeming that a true union which not only extends to our own stock, but to those that would live after the same manner with us...

Repel with the Left, Draw Near with the Right—Talmud Sotah 47a

Always, while the left arm is pushing away the right must be used to draw near.

You Shall Not Oppress a Ger—Exodus 23:9

You shall not oppress a *ger*; for you know the heart of a *ger*, since you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt.

A Mixed Multitude Went with Them—Exodus 12:37-38

And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot, who were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, and very many cattle.

These Shall Not Enter the Congregation—Deuteronomy 23:3-5

A *mamzer* (child born of a Biblically-forbidden union) shall not enter into the congregation of YHVH; to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of YHVH. An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of YHVH; to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of YHVH forever; Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when you came out of Egypt; and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

What Does YHVH Demand of You?—Deuteronomy 10:12-19

And now, O Israel, what does YHVH your God demand of you? Only this: to revere YHVH your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve YHVH your God with all your heart and soul, keeping YHVH's commandments and laws, which I enjoin upon you today, for your good. The heavens to their uttermost reaches belong to YHVH your God, the earth and all that is on it! Yet it was to your fathers that YHVH was drawn in His love for them, so that He chose you, their lineal descendants, from among all peoples—as is now the case. Cut away, therefore, the foreskin of your hearts and stiffen your

necks no more. For YHVH your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the *ger*, providing him with food and clothing. You too must befriend the *ger*, for you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt.

I Will Scatter this People—II Baruch 1:4

"I will scatter this people among the Gentiles that they may do good to the Gentiles."

Subsection iv: Jews' Responsibility to Gentiles in Secular Settings

Judge Righteously Every Man—Deuteronomy 1:16

And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brothers, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the *ger* who is with him.

Abraham and the Three Men—Genesis 18:1-5

YHVH appeared to him in the plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes and saw: And behold! three men were standing over him. He saw them, so he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and bowed toward the ground. And he said, "My Lord, if I find favor in your eyes, please pass not away from Your servant." Let some water be brought and wash your feet, and recline beneath the tree. I will fetch a morsel of bread that you may sustain yourselves, then go on—inasmuch as you have passed your servant's way.

Abraham Did Not Insult God—Midrash Tanchuma, Yashan on Genesis 18:1-3

YHVH APPEARED TO [ABRAHAM]...AS HE SAT IN THE TENT DOOR IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY. AND [ABRAHAM] LOOKED UP AND BEHOLD! THREE MEN STOOD NEAR. AND WHEN HE SAW THEM HE RAN TO MEET THEM.

Abraham's departure from YHVH was not disrespectful, however, because he knew that by hurrying to serve YHVH's creatures, he was serving YHVH Himself.

Help Your Neighbor Lift His Burden—Exodus 23:4-5

If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, you not leave him with it, you shall help him to lift it up.

Leave the Remnants for the Ger—Deuteronomy 24:19-21

When you cut down your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go again to fetch it; it shall be for the *ger*, for the orphan, and for the widow; that YHVH your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the *ger*, for the orphan, and for the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the *ger*, for the orphan, and for the widow.

The Ger Should Not Lodge in the Street—Job 31:32

The *ger* should not lodge in the street.

You Shall Not Pervert the Judgment of the Ger—Deuteronomy 24:17

You shall not pervert the judgment of the *ger*, nor of the orphan; nor take a widow's garment as a pledge.

The Gentile Poor—Mishnah Gittin 5:8

They must not prevent the poor among the Gentiles from gathering *gleanings*, the *forgotten sheaf*, and the *field-corner*—for the sake of peace.

They May Offer Greetings—Mishnah Gittin 6:9 / Shevit 4:3

...they may...offer [Gentiles] greetings for the sake of peace.

Collect Equally from Israelites and Gentiles—Tosefta Gittin 3:13-14

In a city in which Israelites and gentiles live—the collectors of funds for the support of the poor collect equally from Israelites and from gentiles, for the sake of peace. They provide support for the poor of the gentiles along with the poor of Israel, for the sake of peace. They make a lament for, and bury gentile dead, for the sake of peace. They express condolences to gentile mourners, for the sake of peace.

Onkelos Divides His Father's Estate—Tosefta Demai 6:12-13 on Mishna Demai 6:10

A convert and a gentile who inherited [the property of] their father, [who was] a gentile—[the convert] is permitted to say to [the gentile], "You take the idols and I [will take] the utensils; you [take] the wine and I [will take] the produce".

Onkelos the convert divided [his father's estate] with his brothers—he dealt more stringently with himself and took his portion to the Dead Sea [and threw it in]. [If the convert and the gentile] inherited a bathhouse, [the convert] is permitted to say to him, "You take [the income earned from it] on the Sabbath as your portion and I [will take the income earned] on weekdays as my portion." But an Israelite and a gentile who [jointly] purchased the [household property] of a gentile—[the Israelite] is not permitted to say to [the gentile], "You take the idols and I [will take] the utensils; you [take] the wine and I [will take] the produce." [If] they purchased a bathhouse, he [the Israelite] is not permitted to say to him, "Let [its proprietorship and profits on] the Sabbath be your portion and [on] weekdays be my portion."

Lending with Interest—Deuteronomy 23:20-21

You shall not lend upon interest to your brother; interest of money, interest of foodstuff, interest of any thing that is lent upon interest; To a *ger* you may lend with interest; but to your brother you shall not lend with interest; that YHVH your God may bless you in all that you set your hand to in the land where you are entering to possess.

Returning Lost Property—Deuteronomy 22:1-4

You shall not watch your brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall in any case return them to your brother. And if your brother is not near you, or if you know him not, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall be with you until your brother seeks after it, and you shall restore back to him. In like manner shall you do with his donkey; and so shall you do with his garment; and with every lost thing of your brother's, which he has lost, and you have found, shall you do likewise; you may not hide yourself. You shall not watch your brother's donkey or his ox fall down by the way, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him to lift them up again.

Subsection v: Jews' Responsibility to Gentiles in Jewish Settings

You shall Love him as Yourself—Leviticus 19:33-34

And if a *ger* sojourns with you in your land, you shall not wrong him: the *ger* who dwells with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt; I am YHVH your God.

One Law for Everyone—Exodus 12:48-49

And when a *ger* lives with you, and will keep the Passover to YHVH, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one who is born in the land; for no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. One law shall be for him who is native born, and for the *ger* who sojourns among you.

You must Aid the Ger—Leviticus 25:35

And if your brother has become poor, and his means fail while he is with you; then you shall aid him; though he may be a *ger*, or a sojourner; that he may live with you.

Job's Severest Affliction—Legends of the Jews, Vol. II pp. 228-230

Job was asked once what he considered the severest affliction that could strike him, and he replied, "My enemies' joy in my misfortune," and when God demanded to know of him what he preferred, poverty or physical suffering, he chose pain, saying, "YHVH of the whole world, chastise my body with suffering of all kinds, only preserve me from poverty." Poverty seemed the greater scourge, because before his trials he had occupied a brilliant position on account of his vast wealth...no sooner were the seeds strewn in the furrows, than they sprouted and grew and ripened produce. He was equally successful with his cattle. Of sheep he had no less than one hundred and thirty thousand...Besides, his herds consisted of three hundred and forty thousand donkeys and thirty-five hundred pairs of oxen.

All these possessions were not used for self-indulgent pleasures, but for the good of the poor and the needy, whom he clothed, and fed, and provided with all things necessary...His house was furnished with doors on all its four sides, that the poor and the wayfarer might enter, no matter from what direction they approached. At all times there were thirty tables laden with viands ready in his house, and twelve besides for widows only, so that all who came found what they desired. Job's consideration for the poor was so delicate that he kept servants to wait upon them constantly.

His guests, enraptured by his charitableness, frequently offered themselves as attendants to minister to the poor in his house, but Job always insisted upon paying them for their services. If he was asked for a loan of money, to be used for business purposes, and the borrower promised to give a part of his profits to the poor, he would demand no security beyond a mere signature. And if it happened that by some

mischance or other the debtor was not able to discharge his obligation, Job would return the note to him, or tear it into bits in his presence.

He did not rest satisfied at supplying the material needs of those who applied to him. He strove also to convey the knowledge of God to them. After a meal he was in the habit of having music played upon instruments, and then he would invite those present to join him in songs of praise to God. On such occasions he did not consider himself above playing his instrument while the musicians rested.

Sabbath for the Ger (1) Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work; But the seventh day is the Sabbath of YHVH your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor the *ger* that is within your gates; For in six days YHVH made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore YHVH blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy.

Sabbath for the Ger (2)—Exodus 23:12

Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your maidservant, and the *ger*, may be refreshed.

You and the Ger Shall Rejoice in the Harvest—Deuteronomy 26:1-11

And it shall be, when you come in to the land which YHVH your God gives you for an inheritance, and possess it, and live in it; That you shall take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which you shall bring of your land that YHVH your God gives you, and shall put it in a basket, and shall go to the place which YHVH your God shall choose to place his name. And you shall go to the priest who shall be in those days, and say to him, I declare this day to YHVH your God, that I have come to the country which YHVH swore to our fathers to give us. And the priest shall take the basket from your hand, and set it down before the altar of YHVH your God. And you shall speak and say before YHVH your God, A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous; And the Egyptians dealt ill with us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard slavery; And when we cried to YHVH God of our fathers, YHVH heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression; And YHVH brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great awesomeness, and with signs, and with wonders; And he has brought us to this place, and has given us this land, a land that flows with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first fruits of the land, which you, YHVH, have given me. And you shall set it before YHVH your God, and worship before YHVH your God; and you shall rejoice in every good thing which YHVH your God has given to you, and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the *ger* who is among you.

Tithe to the Ger—Deuteronomy 26:12-13

When you have finished tithing all the tithes of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, and have given it to the Levite, the *ger*, the orphan, and the widow, that they may eat inside your gates, and be filled, then you shall say before YHVH your God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of my house, and also have given them to the Levite, and to the *ger*, to the orphan, and to the widow, according to all your commandments which you have commanded me; I have not transgressed your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.

The Ger shall Come and Eat—Deuteronomy 14:27-29

And the Levite who is inside your gates; you shall not forsake him; for he has no part nor inheritance with you. At the end of three years you shall bring forth all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall lay it up inside your gates; And the Levite, because he has no part nor inheritance with you, and the *ger*, and the orphan, and the widow, who are inside your gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that YHVH your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

The Ger's Servant—Deuteronomy 24:14

You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is of your brothers, or of your *gerim* who are in your land inside your gates.

Subsection vi: Jews' Perceptions of Gentiles

I Like Them for Three Things—Talmud Berachot 8b

Rabbi Akiva said: I like the Medes for three things: when they cut meat, they cut it only on the table; when they kiss, they kiss only the back of the hand; when they hold [court], they hold counsel only in the field [to keep matters of judgment private].

Rabban Gamaliel said: I like the Persians for three things: they are temperate in their eating, modest in the privy, and restrained in sexual matters.

Because you were the Humblest of All Peoples—Talmud Hullin 89a

[Thus Rabbi Yose said: The verse] "It was not because you were greater than any people that YHVH set His love upon you and chose you, but because you were the humblest of all peoples" (Deuteronomy 7:7). This means that the Holy One said to Israel: I love you because even when I shower greatness upon you, you humble yourselves before Me. I bestowed greatness upon Abraham, yet he said to Me, "I am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27); upon Moses and Aaron, yet they said, "And we are nothing" (Exodus 16:8); upon David, yet he said, "But I am a worm and no man" (Psalm 22:7). But the nations of the world do not act thus. When I bestowed greatness upon Nimrod, he said, "Come, let us build us a city," etc. (Genesis 11:4); upon Pharaoh, he said, "Who is YHVH?" (Exodus 5:2); upon Sennacherib, he said, "Who are they among all the gods of the countries?" etc. (2 Kings 18:35); upon Nebuchadnezzar, he said, "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds" (Isaiah 14:14); upon Hiram king of Tyre, he said, "I sit in the seat of God, in the heart of the seas" (Ezekiel 28:2).

There is Wisdom Among the Nations—Eicha Rabbah 2:13 on Lamentations 2:9

[JERUSALEM'S] GATES ARE SUNK INTO THE GROUND...HER KING AND HER PRINCES ARE AMONG THE NATIONS WHERE TORAH IS NO MORE.

Should a person tell you that there is wisdom among the nations, believe it... [but if he tells you] that there is Torah among the nations—do not believe it...

Come with us and be Eyes for us—Numbers 10:29-33

And Moses said to Hobab (known other places as Jethro), the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are journeying to the place about which YHVH said, I will give it you; come with us, and we will do you good; for YHVH has spoken good concerning Israel." And he said to him, "I will not go; but I will depart to my own land, and to my kindred." And he said, "Leave us not, I pray you; for you know how we are to camp in the wilderness, and you may be eyes for us. And it shall be, if you go with us, it shall be, that whatever goodness YHVH shall do to us, the same will we do to you." And they departed from the mount of YHVH three days' journey; and the ark of the covenant of YHVH went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them.

Our Friends and Kinsmen—Philo of Alexandria, De Poenitentia I and II on Jeremiah 14:8

WHY SHOULD YOU BE LIKE A GER IN THE LAND?

We must look upon (*gerim*) as our friends and kinsmen, since they display the greatest of bonds to cement friendship, namely a pious and god-loving disposition, and we ought to sympathize in joy with and to congratulate them. Moreover, those who come over to this worship become at once prudent and temperate and modest and gentle and merciful and humane and venerable and just and magnanimous and lovers of truth and superior to all considerations of money and pleasure.

CHAPTER 6: MODERN KERUV TEXTS

Texts in this section seemed interesting and potentially relevant to the author during research. They are primarily included here for future use as supporting or contrasting material to traditional texts. They are offered for the reader's use in any Outreach situation.

Raising Consciousness—As Quoted in Outreach to the Unaffiliated, p.9

"... the goal of [the Lincoln Square Synagogue] outreach program [is]: raising consciousness among those currently uninterested in being Jewish."

A Role Model for the Nations—The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues p. 193 entry on "Chosen-ness"

YHVH then decided that the way to achieve maximized spirituality among all human beings would be by selecting one individual and developing his spirituality alone. Then, YHVH would instill the ideas and moral behavior only in this person's family, which would then grow into a nation. After that nation had achieved spirituality, then entire world would "take notice" and gradually develop the maximal spirituality intended at creation.

YHVH, of course, chose Abraham as the man to develop the spirituality and moral code of behavior. The Jewish people, Abraham's "family" and descendants, have been charged with continuing the legacy and morality of Abraham, by observing the Torah, until they, as a nation, have maximized their moral development. They are to be a "role model" for the rest of the nations of the world to copy and adopt for themselves. At the time of Messiah, the Gentiles of the world will, out of their own volition, acknowledge the Jewish God and adopt the ways of Judaism (Maimonides, *Hilchot Melachim* 11:4). This was the divine plan and the concept of chosenness of the Jewish people by YHVH.

Sources of Tension—Meryl Nadell, ASCW, Director of Inter marriage Outreach Service, Jewish Family Service of MetroWest

Throughout the entire family life cycle, there are nodal points where families are likely to experience problems:

- During the dating and engagement phases
- The wedding ceremony
- The birth of a child
- The decision about religious training for the child
- The child's adolescent years
- Holiday celebrations
- On-going relationships with extended family members
- The death of a parent or spouse

There is Nothing Like Judaism—What Judaism Offers You, p.18

Many Jews believe that if there were a visitor from another planet who was seeking the kind of religious identification that would make the most sense from a rational standpoint and would have the most positive impact on civilization, she or he would find that Judaism would be the most appealing. If you were to add to this the emotional satisfaction, warmth, and support that come from being a part of the Jewish family—the Jewish community—with its religious traditions, culture, and history unique among all peoples of the earth—there is little doubt among most Jews who have experienced these feelings that Judaism is very special and there is nothing else like it in our world.

We Need More Jewish Human Beings—Outreach to the Unaffiliated, p.1

Books are not the order of the day...what we need more than ever...are human beings – Jewish human beings.

The Torah is Everyman's Land—As quoted by David W. Belin in the Haggadah published by the Conservative Movement

"Why did the revelation take place in the wilderness?" asks a commentary on the Hallel prayer. "Perhaps to indicate that the Torah was potentially everyman's land, that all were welcome to dwell within its all-embracing borders and to drink of its living words. In the darkest of ages, Israel never relinquished its dream of the time when all roads would lead to Zion and the YHVH of the universe would be universally acknowledged and acclaimed."

Converts Remind Jews of Their Iniquities—Encyclopedia Judaica (Converts)

...at the time of Jacob Tam who originated in Hungary and was living in northern France or Germany. The father, Abraham the convert, interpreted the rabbinic dictum "Converts are as hard for Israel [to endure] as a sore" (Yevamot 47b) in favor of converts: [Jacob Tam said]: because they are meticulous in observing the precepts they are hard for the Jews since they recall their iniquities.

Be Part of Tradition—What Judaism Offers You, p.17

Judaism offers to everyone the unique opportunity to be an integral part of building upon and continuing a tradition that goes back to the days of Abraham and Sarah—a tradition unparalleled in the history of the world. That tradition is open to all—not just born Jews. The biblical prophet, Isaiah, fervently believed in Israel's mission as a universal faith. He looked to the day when the House of YHVH would be called "a house of prayer for all peoples."

Common Values—Putting Human Values First...Daniel Yankelovich, Telematics, Inc.

...a common core of values that most Americans share:

- 1) Individualism – in the sense of respecting the rights of persons to develop, express and be themselves, and to be accepted "as good as anyone else."

- 2) Freedom – in the sense of political liberty and the rights enshrined by the Bill of Rights; as well as freedom from the excessive claims of conforming to one's own ethnic, religious, or social class norms.
- 3) Equality of Opportunity – the practical expression of freedom and individualism in the market place, which help to resolve the tensions between freedom and equality.
- 4) Fairness – in the sense of people getting what they deserve, based on the results of their own individual efforts.
- 5) Reward – a belief in the efficacy of an individual effort: the view that education and hard work pays off.
- 6) Patriotism – loyalty to the United States, and admiration for the way of life it represents.
- 7) Democracy – a belief that the considered judgment of the majority should form the basis of governance.
- 8) American Exceptionalism – a belief in the special moral status mission of America.
- 9) Caring – a concern for others less fortunate than one's self, neighborliness, caring for the community.
- 10) Religion – a reverence for some transcendental meaning extending beyond the realm of the secular and practical.
- 11) Morality – a belief that common sense does dictate a sense of what is right and that every individual can and ought to do "the right thing."
- 12) Luck – a belief that one's fortunes and circumstances are not permanent, and that good fortune can happen to anyone at any time.

Bring them Closer to Our Communal Standard—Approaches to Intermarriage p. 2

Rabbi Alan Silverstein has suggested that we reconsider our terminology to reflect what we are really trying to bring about: "In contrast to the notion of 'outreach' in which we change our self-definition in order to count the mixed-married among our numbers, *keruv* connotes the attempt to bring Jews and their non-Jewish spouses closer to us and to our established communal standards."

Do Not Become Too Friendly—The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues p.136

Strong arguments can be made that being friendly with the surrounding non-Jewish community is something positive and often necessary. But caution must be used because becoming *too* friendly can easily lead to assimilation. So there is good reason to keep one's distance and remain separate from the non-Jewish community. But the danger of segregating too much is that it can easily lead to anti-Semitism. The ideal path probably lies somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. Both of these dangers are alluded to in explaining a [seemingly] extraneous phrase in the Torah verse in Genesis (Genesis 32:12). Jacob prays to YHVH to save him from the threat of his brother Esau. In the verse, Jacob says "save me from my brother, from Esau." Since Jacob had only one brother and since no word or phrase is "extra" in the Torah, why was the double expression "from my brother" and "from Esau" used? They are one and the same. One commentary explains that Jacob was asking YHVH for protection from two types of threats—one when Esau, the personification of the non-Jew in the Bible, acts like Esau, the anti-Semite, and another threat, when Esau, the non-Jew, acts like a brother, when the threat comes from assimilation. Thus, Jacob, the symbol of the Jewish people, was afraid of both

possibilities when dealing with Gentiles, both the threat of anti-Semitism when the non-Jew acted as the anti-Semite and the threat of assimilation when the non-Jew acted as a brother.

High Praise for Joseph—Samson Raphael Hirsch on Genesis 41:50

NOW TO JOSEPH WERE BORN TWO SONS...WHOM ASENATH DAUGHTER OF POTI-PHERA, HIGH PRIEST OF ON, BORE TO HIM.

To be the only Jew in Egypt, and to be married to the daughter of an idolatrous priest, yet to raise children who remain the model after whom Jewish parents bless their children [at the Sabbath table by saying:] '*may YHVH make you like Ephraim and Manasseh* (Joseph's sons)'—is no small privilege.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: DEFINITIONS OF BIBLICAL TERMS FOR STRANGER

Categories of Inhabitants of Israel

Reproduced from: *CONVERSION TO JUDAISM: From the Biblical Period to the Present*: chapter 3
by Joseph R. Rosenbloom, Hebrew Union College Press, 1978
Contact Copyright Holder for Reproduction Rights

While there is little likelihood that the period of the conquest and settlement of Canaan can ever be reconstructed with any accuracy, it is clear that there was a great intermingling of the Israelites with the peoples living in the territory they conquered and those constantly traversing the new nation. The flow of peoples from one place to another was constant in the Middle East. They migrated because their home conditions became intolerable: famine or other natural disasters forced them out; reports of great opportunities led many to try another locale; mercenaries were required by a newly emerging dynasty promising outstanding rewards; semi-nomadic peoples took the occasion of the establishment of a new state to settle down. Evidence of each of these kinds of movements into the new nation of Israel is apparent in the Bible. This was shown in the preceding chapters and will now be further verified by descriptions of the various classes of inhabitants in Israel. Once again, while it is impossible to be absolutely certain of the date of given developments or to accurately describe a given class, it is obvious that these classes existed and were taken into account when the legal codes were structured. The various codes span many centuries and are intermingled in the biblical text.

In order to delineate the limits of citizenship in the Israelite community, and before considering the gradations within these limits, the status situation of the full Israelite citizen and of the complete alien should be described. The term *ezrach* is exclusively utilized in the Bible to denote the homeborn Israelite—the indigenous native Israelite. “You shall have one statute, both for the stranger, and for him that is born in the land [*ezrach*]” (Numbers 9:14; cf. Exodus 12:38, Numbers 15:13, Ezekiel 47:22). This was understood by the translators of the Septuagint when they rendered *ezrachi* (Psalms 88:1, 89:1) as Israelite. The same word is used to denote an indigenous tree (Psalms 37:35)

Contrasted with the *ezrach*, the native Israelite, is the foreigner or alien. Here, two terms are used in the Bible: *zar* and *nochri*. The first is more general and may not have been a legal term, but the second does seem to have a place in the legal codes. *Zar*, usually translated as “stranger,” actually denotes foreignness with the added quality of inferiority of status. In a more general sense, it seems to indicate an individual who, for some reason, is different from the usual. An Israelite may be called a *zar* (Hosea 5:7). So may a prostitute mentioned in relationship to a non-prostitute (Proverbs 2:16). Often non-Israelites are so designated (Exodus 29:33, 30:33; Isaiah 1:7). In one passage *zar* simply means anyone, Israelite or not, other than the two women who came before Solomon each protesting that the child was hers (1 Kings 3:18). While *zar* and *nochri* are often used synonymously, *zar* has no specialized meaning, denotes no particular class within biblical society, and is to be seen as a general

term which may be used to characterize anything outside the norm (cf. Exodus 30:9, Numbers 3:4, Proverbs 5:3, 7:5, 11:15; 14:10, 23:33).

The *nochri* is more clearly and particularly a stranger or foreigner who is a member of a class alien to Israelite society. "Then said the king [David] to Ittai the Gittite: 'Wherefore goest thou also with us? Return, and abide with the king; for thou art a *foreigner*, and also an exile; return to thine own place'" (II Samuel 15:19). The holder of this special status has fewer rights. For instance, to prevent a foreigner from ruling over an Israelite, a *nochri* may not become king over Israel (Deuteronomy 17:15).

Just who the *nochri* is, is made absolutely clear: "Moreover concerning the *nochri* that is not of thy people Israel" (I Kings 8:41; cf. Ezra 10:2). Further, interest could be exacted of the *nochri* but not of a fellow Israelite (Deuteronomy 23:20). While debts owed by Israelites were cancelled in the seventh, or *shemitta*, year, debts owed by a *nochri* were maintained (Deuteronomy 15:3).

A *nochri* who indicated that he wanted to join the Israelites was granted a different status and given a different label, that of *ger*. The latter, having indicated his intention to join the people of Israel, would be brought to God's holy-mountain and his sacrifices would be accepted (Isaiah 56:3, 6ff.). On the other hand, those who remained outside the "holy" community were to be cleared out (Nehemiah 13:30).

The differences between the *nochri* and the Israelite were not racial, since foreigners were accepted into the holy community. For this to take place a new allegiance had to be formalized. The Israelites saw themselves as a holy people (Deuteronomy 7:6) whose land was not to be defiled (Deuteronomy 21:33) but to be cleansed of foreign elements (Nehemiah 13:30). The instruction to kill and cast out the peoples of Canaan and not to marry with them was intended to prevent idolatry and religious syncretism (Deuteronomy 7:1-5, 20:16-18). This would be particularly crucial for the Israelites, with their developing religiously oriented culture and society, which was so prone to the influences of more developed systems. The sources of such influences were the various peoples of Canaan, the many *nachrim* (foreigners) who were constantly passing through Israel while engaged in commerce, those attached to the royal court, and those who simply settled in the land.

The *nochri* was seen by the law as an alien who was still attached to his homeland even though he lived in Israel. He did not plan to assimilate into the Israelite system, which was one in which the religious element was central, at least in the post-exilic period. While Israelite law was both civil and religious, the fact that the laws were finally cast and recorded by religionists gives them a predominantly religious flavor and motivation. This was, no doubt, seen as justified by the great number of idolatrous practices introduced, of necessity, in compliance with the terms of foreign treaties following military defeats and through intermarriages made in the national interest, the outstanding of these being Ahab's marriage to Jezebel (I Kings 16:31).

In any event, since the *nochri* had not severed his connection with his homeland, and presumably with his native cult, he was not bound by all the laws of the host country, though discriminatory laws were directed toward him. Yet he was protected by general convention and by the traditions of the society of which he had become a part. He may best be contrasted with the *ezrach*, the native homeborn, and the *ger*, or sojourner, who, while originally a *nochri*, a foreigner within Israelite society, eventually

achieved the status of *eizrach* by severing his ties with his native group and assimilating into Israelite society.

A general definition of *ger* is a foreigner who has put himself under the protection of the people among whom he is living. The usual English equivalent for *ger* is "sojourner." However, when the context seems to call for it, "stranger" is also used (e.g. Genesis 15:13: "And He said to Abram: 'Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs...'"; Exodus 2:22: "And she [Zipporah] bore a son, and he called him Gershom; for he said, 'I have been a stranger in a strange land'"). *Ger* was used in these instances to denote Hebrews, that is, Israelites, while they were yet unsettled. Subsequent to the time they settled in Canaan and formed their own polity, the term *ger* applied to non-Israelites living among them who were neither *nachrim* nor foreigners still attached to their native lands.

The definition of *ger* changed as the nature of the Israelite state changed, with the passing of time and in response to the events which took place. The biblical account seems to allow for a three-stage development. The first is where the *ger*, an immigrant, contrasted to the homeborn, does not enjoy full privileges of membership in the tribe. While dependent, he is not in absolute servitude. This use of *ger* is usually found in the oldest stratum of the Pentateuch. Classical equivalents would be the *advena* and the *metic*, "an alien resident in Athens who had civil privileges. As indicated above, in the period before the establishment of Israel, *ger* usually referred to Hebrews who were still not settled. Even after the beginning stages of the settlement, when the term increasingly referred to non-Israelites, Israelites were still called *gerim*. This was particularly true of Levites who wandered about seeking a place for themselves (Deuteronomy 18:6, Judges 17:7-13). This has led at least one scholar to associate landlessness with the status of the *ger*.

The next stage in the development of the term *ger* took place when a good part of the land of Israel was settled and some fixed status was necessary, not only for those who had been attached to a distant people but also for the conquered peoples of the land of Canaan. T.J. Meek finds a concern for these people in the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22-23:19) and in the work of the Deuteronomist. Generally, these "resident aliens" were treated as subordinated natives who performed such tasks as wood-gathering and water-drawing (Deuteronomy 29:10). These were the tasks assigned to the Gibeonites, an indigenous people who became associated with the Israelites. During this time the *gerim* were seen to be the responsibility of Israelites no less than were orphans, widows, and slaves (Exodus 20:10, 22:20-23:9; Deuteronomy 5:14, 10:18, etc.). While the *gerim* were a more integral part of the Israelite community than the *nachrim*, certain ritually oriented practices did not apply to them. An animal which died naturally and therefore could not be eaten by an Israelite could be eaten by a *ger* or sold to a *nochri* (Deuteronomy 14:21); yet at a later time, that of the Priestly edition of the Pentateuch, when the status of the *ger* changed once again, this was prohibited to the *ger* as well as the *eizrach* (Leviticus 17:15).

The final development in the definition of *ger* is seen in the document known as the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-25). The material in this document is attributed to the Priestly school of the mid-sixth century B.C.E. It is during this period, according to Meek, that the Hebrew became so thoroughly identified with the land of Israel that he was called native-born and the term *eizrach* came into use. *Ger* came to mean a naturalized alien and was placed on virtually the same footing with *eizrach* in both

privileges and rights. This last stage was motivated by the Priestly school's realistic appraisal of the historical situation.

During the exilic period it was necessary to keep the people together both for survival in exile and for an eventual return to Israel. According to Max Weber, the leaders of the exile utilized the religion of the people, carrying it a step further and making the Jews a ritually segregated group. Additionally, while non-Israelites were still encouraged to associate themselves with the Israelites, they could no longer do so in the informal way of earlier times as *gerim* or "guest peoples" tied to a particular tribe or clan. As a result, while they would still be *gerim*, the term came to have new content. They would enter into the holy community through the act of circumcision and become a part of the ritually segregated community, or pariah people. Their center was in Jerusalem, with associated congregations elsewhere. This tendency can be seen as beginning in the late pre-exilic period.

After the exile there was a dramatic failure to establish a new Israelite state with a political orientation. This is reflected in the outcome of the revolutions and insurrections led by Haggai and Zechariah early in the reign of Darius I (Haggai 2:23, Zechariah 6:11). With the realization of the (at least temporary) hopelessness of a renewed kingdom, the leaders of the Jewish community accepted the status quo and turned their efforts to the development of a "church" within an empire. Survival was seen to rest upon religion. The *gerim*, whose ties to the Israelite state could in earlier times be based on both the state and the cult, would now have to be dependent on religion. Survival as a religious group would, further, have to be based on resistance to the assimilation of foreign practices.

The new Israelite group, then, had to deal with the *gerim* in its midst and with those who might join it in the future. Since the basis for affiliation could no longer be national, it became exclusively religious and cultic. With the increased importance of the cult and the priesthood, there arose another motivation for the full integration of guest peoples. When they were outside the "holy congregation," *gerim* would lend it no material support. Once "converted" to the system, they became obligated to share in the various tributes to the Temple and the priesthood; in thanksgiving offerings, especially for first fruits, firstborn, and other special occasions, in addition to the regular taxes and tribute. Also affected were those classes of Israelite society with whom the *gerim* were in direct competition. Now the *gerim*, too, would have to observe the Sabbath and other restrictions of which nonobservance had given them some advantage over the *eZRACH*.

Thus came into being the phenomenon of conversion although there was no formal term for the act. Further confusion of the "conversion" process resulted from the use of the same term, *ger*, for different statuses within the Israelite community. The explanation for this rests in the fact that the same terminology is used to describe very different phenomena in different periods. The *ger* went from being a simple immigrant to a resident alien to a convert to Judaism and one as loved as the *eZRACH*. In this last stage he would eventually lose any stigma of ever having been a *ger* or convert.

That this sequence took place not in a revolutionary way but in response to changing historical circumstances was recognized by the translators who produced the Septuagint. Though they knew nothing of the documentary theory, (the generally-accepted theory that there are four separate authors represented in the Torah) their use of different words to translate *ger* in a way fairly consistent with the explanation presented here indicates the value of contextual interpretation. For the late material, where the *ger* is treated as the *eZRACH*, the Septuagint has the word *proselyte*, or one who has attached himself

to or united or identified oneself with an alien group (Leviticus 20:2). This word is not used in the Septuagint for *ger* in earlier material covering the first two stages. "Sojourning," is used instead. When found in material of the late state, that attributed to the Priestly school, it refers to the patriarchs in Canaan (Genesis 17:8, 35:27, 47:9; Exodus 6:4). The regular Greek term for *ger* in the early material is never used for *ger* in the Priestly material except for *toshav*, "serf," which word has a meaning akin to that of *ger* in the early period (Exodus 12:45; Leviticus 22:10, 25:6, 23, 35, 40, 45, 47; Numbers 35:15).

During this latter period there was no question about the *ger*'s status: "One law shall be to him that is homeborn [*ezrach*] and unto the stranger [*ger*] that sojourneth among you" (Exodus 12:49). The condition sine qua non for such full equality was circumcision, the visible sign of unity with other Israelites in their covenant with God (Exodus 12:48). This equality is seen in the administration of justice (Deuteronomy 1:16ff.) and the availability of cities of refuge (Numbers 35:15), and moral and cultic obligations (Leviticus 17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16:29, 22:18; Numbers 9:14, 15:15, 16, 29). The possibilities for the *ger* now were great: "The stranger that is in the midst of thee shall mount up above thee higher and higher; and thou shalt come down lower and lower" (Deuteronomy 28:43). Furthermore, upon the restoration to the land of Israel, "they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord God" (Ezekiel 47:22ff.).

That the status of the *ger* was generally low may be deduced from the fact that an Israelite who becomes poor and serves as a hired servant is considered to be a *ger* (Leviticus 25:39-41). It is also clear that other aliens, those who were not circumcised, did not have the status of the *ger* (Ezekiel 44:9). A control distinguishing the *ger* (proselyte) from the *sachir*, *toshav*, and *nochri* was circumcision, which allowed him to partake of the ritual par excellence, the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 12:48, Numbers 9:14). In all the passages where the *ger* is seen as equal with the *ezrach*, it is inaccurate to translate the word as "sojourner" or "stranger." The only appropriate translation is "proselyte" or "convert." In this way the *ger* in these circumstances is seen for what he is, an equal participant in the Jewish polity and religion who for the time being is recognized as one who joined himself and/or his family to the Jewish group.

Seen in this light, the prohibitions relating to intermarriage found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were directed not at *gerim* but at those women who had been married by Jewish men but did not convert and therefore were not assimilated into the Jewish group. The threat to both the cult and the carriers of the cult was real and bad to be combated. With this in mind, the message of Ruth is not meant to contradict Ezra and Nehemiah but merely to spell out the implications of the actions of these two men: those women who marry Jews and accept the Jewish community and its God are themselves accepted: "thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:15).

That there was abundant intermarriage is clear (II Chronicles 30:1-12, 25). Some scholars believe that this material, placed in the time of Hezekiah (715-687) in the Bible, really applies to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Louis Finkelstein notes that the "plebeians" among the Jews, both in Babylonia and, later, in Judea, particularly favored accepting anyone who wished to join them. They saw themselves as distinct, not for racial or national reasons, but through religion and culture. Finkelstein feels that, the plebeians were generally more liberal than the other classes of the Jewish community, "favoring social justice and human equality." This ideology is seen as leading to proselytizing even to the extent

of converting Philistines, an indication of their great zeal (Zechariah 9:7). The plebeians also took a liberal view on conversion because of the difficulty they had in getting suitable wives among their fellow Jews. Being too poor to compete with middle-class Jews for Jewish women, they followed the practice of the upper class by marrying non-Jews. They married women they could afford, from among the nomadic tribes living in the grazing lands south of Judea. These were the Calebites, Jerahmeelites, and Kenites who earlier had provided male *gerim*. This very widespread practice was frightening to Ezra and was met with both the example of Ruth, who converted, and the call for putting aside those who would not join the people of Israel and their God.

It is clear that non-Israelites lived in the Jewish state, and while many of them joined themselves to the Israelites, others did not. Several problems still remain unresolved in this regard. The Rechabites (Jeremiah 35), while not within the Israelite genealogy, are portrayed as not only full Jews but ideal Jews. They seem to serve as the idealization of an ancient, non-Canaanite past. The Gibeonites won an alliance with Joshua's invading forces and through stealth were joined to Israel, but in the subordinate roles of drawers of water and bearers of wood (Joshua 9). If they were associated with the Temple, as seems likely, then perhaps they are related to the Levites (Numbers 3:9, 8:19) and the Nithinim who returned from the exile (Ezra 2:43-54, Nehemiah 7:46-56). They are so identified (Gibeonites and Nithinim) in a talmudic aggadic passage (*Kiddushin* 70b).

The Samaritans are another problematic group. The hostility toward them is well known from Ezra and Nehemiah, and appears to have been a reaction to an attempt by the Samaritans to establish an alternate center for the Jews under the control of a group other than that represented by Ezra and Nehemiah. The Samaritans saw themselves as a remnant of the Israelites who were taken into exile when Samaria was destroyed in 722 B.C.E., augmented by some repatriated brethren fifty-five years later. They further felt that the Temple should be located on Mount Gerizim (Deuteronomy 27:12) and that Ezra falsified the Law. The general Jewish view of the Samaritans (based on II Kings 17:24ff.) is that they were descended from colonists brought by Shalmaneser from Cutha in Babylonia and Hamath after the conquest of Samaria in 722. This community was later augmented by other immigrants. It was felt that they were only partially converted, and then only through fear, but remained basically pagan.

Two possible explanations suggest themselves. First, the Samaritans represented the continuation of the old struggle between Israel and Judah. Second, the Samaritans of the mid-fifth century B.C.E. were settlers brought in from the east who sought to be independent of Jerusalem and its leadership, and to take over the leadership of Judah itself in the hope of eventually establishing their own political entity.

Solomon Zeitlin returns to the struggle between the Samaritans and Nehemiah to explain the Mishnah in *Kiddushin* 3:12 which states that the offspring of a union between a Jew and a non-Jewess is not Jewish. He states that the prohibition relates to the specific historical situation confronted by Nehemiah and the Jews of the restoration in the face of the threat of the Samaritans under Sanballat to build a temple on Mount Gerizim. Since this had Pentateuchal authority (Deuteronomy 27; cf. Joshua 8:33), and the Temple in Jerusalem only historical support, it was considered essential to maintain the centrality of Jerusalem and the Jews over the Samaritans. The canonizing of the books of the Bible strengthened Jerusalem's claim to the Temple, which was based on the account in I Kings, stating that God chose Jerusalem for His house. In addition, this thwarted Sanballat, who sought priests for his temple by getting one of the Zadokite family to marry his daughter, thereby establishing a rival priestly dynasty (Sanballat's daughter was to marry Menassah, grandson of the high priest Eliashib; Nehemiah

13:28; Josephus, *Antiquities* 2:302ff.). Since Sanballat's daughter was a Horonite, this danger was removed by the promulgation of a law that children of a non-Jewess are not Jewish. In any event, the Samaritans remained an unassimilated group among the Jews. A few of them survive even today.

Although there seems to be no formal term for the process of conversion, several terms which are highly suggestive of such an act are found in the Bible. Because it has been supposed that conversion did not occur during the period covered by the Bible, any term which suggested conversion was explained by commentators and scholars as meaning something else. In fact, conversion did take place during the biblical period, and a number of words were used to describe it. The first is *hityahed* (Esther 8:17), used to describe the Persians who are said to have converted to Judaism from fear of the Jews, following the wondrous salvation of the Jews from Haman. Whether or not the Persians were feigning to be Jews, as some conclude, the word clearly includes the idea of converting. Another term is *amilam* (Psalms 118:10-12), which is usually translated "I will cut them off." However, the root *mv* in the Bible only occurs in references to circumcision. A more likely translation would, therefore, be "All nations compassed me about: in the name of the Lord I will cause them to be circumcised." In this way, through their being circumcised, God could remove the threat they posed, and thus all would join together in unity. Some relate the passages in Esther and the Psalms to the forced conversion of the Idumeans and Itureans by the Hasmoneans. A final term is *nilvah* (Isaiah 56:3, 6; Zechariah 2:11; Jeremiah 50:5; Esther 9:27). Here again the idea of conversion is clear: "Neither let the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, 'The Lord will surely separate me from His people'" (Isaiah 56:3).

There remain three categories of inhabitants in Israel which also illustrate the character of the society: the *sachir*, the *toshav*, and the *eved*. The term *sachir* seems to refer to a hired servant, whether an Israelite or a foreigner (Leviticus 19:13, Deuteronomy 24:14). In what appears to be from a later, post-exilic code, the *sachir* is noted as being neither Israelite nor proselyte (Exodus 12:43ff.). Here the Passover offering may be eaten by the Israelite and the circumcised servant but not the hired servant, or *sachir*. Another passage, usually dated late as well, places the poor Israelite who sells himself into bondage in the category of a hired servant who is to serve until the year of jubilee (Leviticus 25:39ff.). He is not, however, actually called a *sachir* but simply serves "as" a *sachir*. While it is not possible to clearly delineate the nature of the *sachir*, it does seem that his status changed with the passing of time.

Even greater confusion exists with the term *toshav*. Part of the reason for this is its frequent use with the term *ger*. Abraham saw himself as a *ger* and *toshav*, that is, a migrant, while in Hebron seeking a burial site for Sarah (Genesis 23:4). Similarly, in two other late passages these terms are used together as referring to Israelites (Psalms 39:12, 1 Chronicles 29:15). In another section, also usually attributed to the Holiness Code, *ger* and *toshav* are used synonymously and for both Israelites and aliens (Leviticus 25:6, 23, 35, 40). In one passage *ger* is used in its verbal form for the subject *toshav* (Leviticus 25:6). Yet in still another passage the Israelite, *ger*, and *toshav* are each listed separately and appear to be distinct units (Numbers 35:15). It would seem, then, that *toshav* was an alternate term for *ger*, at least during the intermediate period, when the *ger* was a protected resident alien. The precise meaning was probably lost in time, though it remained in the literature.

There are biblical traditions of rather large numbers of slaves both immediately following the conquest and in the time of David and Solomon. Although the enslavement of conquered peoples eventually became prevalent as a result of the Roman and Arabic conquests, the type of society which developed

earlier in Israel does not seem to have been conducive to the practice (Judges 1:28, 30, 33, 35; II Chronicles 2:17ff.). What seems to be more likely is that aside from the relatively few slaves owned by individuals, the conquered peoples served the general Israelite society, which was less advanced commercially and technologically than the society it conquered. The Gibeonites in some ways may have served a similar role, as well as groups such as the Philistines who had metallurgical skills unknown to the Israelites. Gradually, it may be assumed, these groups became fully identified with the Israelites as *gerim* or proselytes.

Allowance was certainly made for the *eved* to integrate himself. There were frequent marriages between Israelites and slave women, and the children of these unions took their places as freemen. In addition, the *eved* could be initiated into the Israelite cult through circumcision and then partake of the Passover offering (Exodus 12:44). This would parallel the development of the *ger*, who would eventually become a full proselyte equal in every way with the *eizrach*. Indeed, in one passage, slaves bought with money and slaves born in the master's house "must be circumcised" (Genesis 17:12ff.). Presumably it is just this kind of *eved*, the circumcised slave, who, under certain conditions, may even inherit his master's estate (Proverbs 17:2, Genesis 15:3). The individual's having been a foreigner or a slave did not prevent his becoming fully integrated into Israelite society as an equal. Regardless of the person's past life, the tendency of Israelite society was to give him full participation and equal status. In this way a relatively small group of people was able not only to conquer a territory inhabited by many peoples, but to integrate them eventually into a single society by means of initiating them into a specialized cult.

APPENDIX 2: UAHC OUTREACH COMMISSION MISSION STATEMENT

UAHC-CCAR Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach

Mission Statement¹

The mission of the UAHC-CCAR Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach is to invite Jewish choices by bringing the Jewish value and vision of *keruv* (drawing people closer to Judaism) to those involved in issue of conversion and intermarriage—interfaith couples, their families and children, those in the process of conversion to Judaism and new Jews-by-choice, and all religious seekers. The commission develops programs of Jewish education and socialization in conjunction with Reform synagogues and works with congregations to create a community that is welcoming and receptive to interfaith families and new Jews-by-choice.

The Outreach Commission is the governing body for Outreach program planning, implementation and evaluation, resource development, education and advocacy on Outreach issues for UAHC congregations and affiliates.

Goals

- Welcome and provide education and support of those who are exploring Judaism and to make it a viable option for those who are seeking a religious home.
- Nurture those who choose Judaism by integrating them fully into the Jewish community.
- Welcome intermarried couples to participate in synagogue life and encourage them to explore and study Judaism, thereby creating a meaningful relationship with Judaism.
- Educate and sensitize the Jewish community to be receptive to Jews-by-choice and intermarried couples and to enact it through temple policies, resources and programs.
- Encourage and support the efforts of interfaith couples to raise their children as Jews.
- Encourage and support young people in strengthening their Jewish identity and in exploring Jewish life choices, including the implications of dating and marriage for themselves.
- Actively encourage people to make Jewish choices in their lives through special discussion groups, community support, adult educations and Jewish resources.

¹ This mission statement was reproduced from the UAHC website as of February, 2002, and is included here as it was foundational for the research of this thesis. The department has since merged with the Department of Synagogue Affiliation to form the Department of Outreach and Synagogue Community. The mission statement for the new joint department is not currently available on the website at the time of completion of this thesis (February 2003).

APPENDIX 3: OUTREACH: THE CASE FOR A MISSIONARY JUDAISM

Address to the Board of Trustees by Alexander M. Schindler, President
to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Houston, Texas 1978

It is good to be here, my friends, good to be re-united with the leaders of Reform Jewry, with men and women from many congregations and communities but of one faith, bound together by a common sacred cause. Your presence here gives us much strength as does your work throughout the year. We are what we are because of you, a product of those rich gifts of mind and heart you bring to our tasks.

It is good to have our number enlarged by the presence of leaders and members of our Southwest congregations. We are grateful for your hospitality. You are true sons and daughters of Abraham whose tent, so the Midrash informs us, has an opening on each of its sides so that whencesoever a stranger might near he would have no difficulty in entering Abraham and Sarah's home.

We are grateful for the sustaining help which you have given us over the years, your material help, and the time and talents and energies of your leaders who have always played an indispensable role in our regional and national councils.

It is not my intention this night to give you a comprehensive report of the Union's activities—as I do at these Board meetings from time to time—but rather to offer a resolution which recommends the creation of an agency within our movement involving its every arm which will earnestly and urgently confront the problem of intermarriage in specified areas and in an effort to turn the tide which threatens to sweep us away into directions which might enable us to recover our numbers and, more important, to recharge our inner strength.

I begin with the recognition of a reality: the tide of intermarriage is running against us. The statistics on the subject confirm what our own experience teaches us: intermarriage is on the rise. Between 1966 and 1972, 31.7 percent of all marriages involving a Jew were marriages between a Jew and a person born a non-Jew. And a recent survey shows that the acceptance of such marriages among Americans in general is on the rise, most dramatically, as we might expect, among Jews.

We may deplore it, we may lament it, we may struggle against it, but these are the facts. The tide is running against us, and we must deal with this threatening reality. Dealing with it does not, however, mean that we must learn to accept it. It does not mean that we should prepare to sit *shiva* for the American Jewish community. On the contrary, facing and dealing with reality means confronting it, coming to grips with it, determining to reshape it.

Most often, Jewish education — more of it, and better — is put forward as the surest remedy to intermarriage. And, indeed, there is some evidence that suggests that the more the Jewish education, the less the likelihood of intermarriage. But alas, it is not always so. As the Mishnah long ago averred, "Not every knowledgeable Jew is pious", not every educated Jew is a committed Jew.

Nonetheless, we believe in Jewish education, for its own sake as well as because we believe it a powerful defense against the erosion of our people. The bulk of the resources and the energies of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations is invested in programs of formal and informal education of which we are justly proud. We operate summer camps and Israel tours and youth retreats, college weekends and *kallahs* and teacher training institutes. We generate curricula and texts and educational aids. And some 45,000 youngsters participate each and every year in the programs, which we sponsor.

We know that such programs are our first line of defense in the battle against intermarriage. We know as well, however, that they are an imperfect defense, that even among those who are exposed to our most ambitious efforts, there are hundreds, if not thousands, who will intermarry. There is a sting to the honey of freedom.

But we know also that Jewish education is not "wasted" even on those who do intermarry. Study after study informs us that it is the Jewish partner of an intermarried couple who is most likely to determine whether or not there will be a conversion to Judaism, and whether or not the children of the couple will be raised as Jews. The richer the background and the stronger the commitment of the Jewish partner, the less likely is the absolute loss.

Most simply stated, the fact of intermarriage does not in and of itself lead to a decline in the Jewish population. As Fred Massarik, one of our leading demographers, has observed (MOMENT June 1978), "That decline – if a decline there be – depends on what the Jews who are involved in the intermarriage actually do."

As important as Jewish education is, in the context, I believe that there are other steps we can – and must – take if we are to deal realistically with the threat which intermarriage presents to our survival. And it is on three such steps that I want to focus my attention.

The first of these has to do with the conversion of the non-Jewish partner-to-be. It is time for us to reform our behavior towards those who become Jews-by-Choice, to increase our sensitivity towards them and, thereby, to encourage growth in their numbers.

In most communities, the UAHC offers "Introduction to Judaism" courses, and congregational rabbis spend countless hours providing instruction in Judaism. History and Hebrew are taught, ideas explored, ceremonies described. But there, by and large, our efforts end. Immediately after the marriage ceremony, we drop the couple and leave them to fend for themselves. We do not offer them help in establishing a Jewish home, in raising their children Jewishly, in grappling with their peculiar problems, in dealing with their special conflicts. More important still, we do not really embrace them, enable them to feel a close kinship with our people.

On the contrary: If the truth be told, we often alienate them. We question their motivations (since only a madman would choose to be a Jew, the convert is either neurotic or hypocritical). We think them less Jewish (ignoring that they often know more about Judaism than born Jews). Unto the end of their days, we refer to them as converts.

A colleague of mine recently received a letter from one who elected to become a Jew:

Dear _____:

I know that I personally resent being referred to as a convert – a word that by now is alien to my heart. My conversion process was nearly ten years ago – I have been a Jew for a long time now. I think, eat and breathe Judaism. My soul is a Jewish soul though I am distinctly aware of my original background and birthright. This does not alter my identity as a Jew. If one is curious about whence I come or if indeed "am I really Jewish," the answer is categorically "Yes, I'm really Jewish – a Jew-by-Choice." I shall continue to grow and to search as a Jew. My "conversion process" was just that – a process which ended with the ceremony. From then on I was a Jew."

Such Jews-by-Choice have special needs and we need special guidance on how to meet those needs. What, for example, is to be done where a convert is more enthusiastic than his/her Jewish-born partner? And what of the past of the new Jew? He may have broken with the past, but in human terms he cannot forget, nor should he be expected to, his non-Jewish parents or family, and at special times of the year, say Christmas or Easter, he may well feel some ambivalence. And what of the difficult process through which one learns that the adoption of Judaism implies the adoption of a people as well as a faith, of a history as well as a religion of a way of life as well as a doctrine? May this not sometimes seem overwhelming to the new Jew?

It is time for us to stop relating to the new Jews as if they were curiosities, or as if they were superficial people whose conversion to Judaism reflects a lack of principles on their part, a way of accommodating to their partners-to-be. We should do that for their sake, and also for our own. For we need them to be part of our people. They add strength to us only if they are more than a scattering of individuals who happen to share our faith. Newcomers to Judaism, in short, must embark on a long-term naturalization process, and they require knowledgeable and sympathetic guides along the way, that they may feel themselves fully equal members of the synagogue family.

Let there be no holding back. It was Maimonides himself, answering a convert's query, who wrote:

You ask whether you, being a proselyte, may speak the prayers: "our God and God of our Fathers" and "Guardian of Israel who has brought us out of the land of Egypt," and the like.

Pronounce all the prayers as they are written and do not change a word. Your prayers and your blessings should be the same as any other Jew...This above all: do not think little of your origin. We may be descended from Abraham. Isaac and Jacob, but your descent is from the Almighty Himself.

* * *

But we must look beyond conversion. Most of the non-Jewish partners to intermarriage do not convert to Judaism. Such data as we have suggests that two out of every three intermarriages involve a Jewish husband and a non-Jewish wife, and in these cases, one out of four wives converts to Judaism. In the

one third of intermarriages which involve a Jewish wife and a non-Jewish husband, the incidence of conversion is much, much lower. But we also know that in very many cases of intermarriage without conversion, there is a "Jewish drift"; Massarik informs us, for example, that, "nearly fifty percent of non-Jewish husbands, although they do not formally embrace Judaism by their own description nonetheless regard themselves as Jews."

I believe that we must do everything possible to draw the non-Jewish spouse of mixed marriage into Jewish life. The phenomenon of Jewish drift teaches us that we ought to be undertaking more intensive Jewish programs which will build on and build up these existing ties, this fledgling sense of Jewish identification. If non-Jewish partners can be brought more actively into Jewish communal life, perhaps they themselves will initiate the process of conversion. At the very least, we will dramatically increase the probability that the children of such marriages will be reared as Jews.

Nor can we neglect to pay attention to the Jewish partners of such marriages. Frequently, they have felt the sting of rejection by the Jewish community, even by their own parents. They may feel guilty, they may feel resentful, they are almost sure to feel some confusion and ambivalence toward active involvement in the community. They may feel inhibited out of a sense of regard for their partner's sensibilities, or out of embarrassment in the face of a community they think will be hostile to their partners.

We must remove the "not wanted" signs from our hearts. We are opposed to intermarriage, but we cannot reject the intermarried. And we cannot but be aware that in our current behavior, we communicate rejection. If Jews-by-Choice often feel alienated by our attitudes and behavior, how much more alienated do the non-Jewish spouses of our children feel?

We can also remove those impediments to a fuller participation, which still obtain in all too many of our congregations. Even the strictest *halachic* approach offers more than ample room to allow the non-Jewish partner to join in most of our ceremonial and life cycle events. The *halachah* permits non-Jews to be in the synagogue, to sing in the choir, to recite the blessing over the Sabbath and festival candles, and even to handle the Torah. There is no law which forbids a non-Jew to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

And as for the children born of such a marriage: if the mother is Jewish then the child is regarded as fully Jewish. But if she is not, even Orthodox Judaism, provided the consent of the mother is obtained, permits the circumcision of the boy, his enrolment in religious school and his right to be called to the Torah on the occasion of his bar mitzvah – and everlastingly thereafter, to be considered a full Jew.

All this is possible under Orthodoxy. How much the more so within Reform, which has insisted on the creative unfolding of *halachah*.

As a case in point, why should a movement which from its very birth-hour insisted on a full equality of men and women in religious life unquestioningly accept the principle that Jewish lineage is valid through the maternal line alone? In fact, a case can be made that there is substantial support within our tradition for the validity of Jewish lineage through the paternal line, and it is this kind of possibility which we should begin energetically to explore. I am not scholar enough to propose an instant revision in our standard practice, but I do think it is important that we seek ways to harmonize our tradition with our needs.

It may well be that when we have done that, our collective wisdom and our concern for Jewish unity will lead us to conclude that there are certain privileges which simply cannot be extended to non-Jews. If that proves to be the case, then I am confident that the thoughtful non-Jew who is favorably disposed to Judaism will recognize and respect what we have concluded, and will understand that conversion remains the path of entry to the totality of what Judaism has to offer.

Let no one misinterpret and infer that I am here endorsing intermarriage. I deplore intermarriage, and I discourage it. I struggle against it, as a rabbi and as the father of five children. But if all of our efforts do not suffice – and, manifestly, they do not do we really banish our children to sit *shiva* over them? No. Our task then is to draw them even closer to our hearts, to do everything we can to make certain that our grandchildren will nonetheless be Jews, that they will be part of our community and share the destiny of our people.

* * *

I now come to the third and likely the most controversial aspect of the matter, I believe that the time has come for the Reform movement – and others, if they are so disposed – to launch a carefully conceived Outreach program aimed at all Americans who are unchurched and who are seeking religious meaning.

It would be easy to tip-toe here, to use obfuscatory language and be satisfied to hint at my purpose. But I will not. Unabashedly and urgently, I propose that we resume our vocation as champions of Judaism, that we move from passive acceptance to affirmative action.

No, I do not have in mind some kind of travelling religious circus. I envisage instead the development of a dignified and responsible approach. Let us establish information centers in many places, well-publicized courses in our synagogues, and the development of suitable publications to serve these facilities and purposes. In short, I propose that we respond openly and positively to those God-seekers whose search leads them to our door, who voluntarily ask for our knowledge.

I do not suggest that we strive to wean people from the religions of their choice, with or without the boast that ours is the only true and valid faith; I do not suggest that we enter into rivalry with all established churches. I want to reach a different audience entirely. I want to reach the unchurched, those reared in non-religious homes or those who have become disillusioned with their taught beliefs. I want to reach those seekers after truth who require a religion which tolerates – more than tolerates, encourages – all questions. I want especially to reach the rootless and the alienated who need the warmth and comfort of a people known for its close family ties, a people of ancient and noble lineage.

The notion that Judaism is not a propagating faith is far from the truth. It has been a practiced truth for the last four centuries, but it was not true for the forty centuries before. Abraham was a convert, and our tradition lauds his missionary zeal. Isaiah enjoined us to be a "light unto the nations" and insisted that God's house be a "house of prayer for all peoples." Ruth of Moab, a heathen by birth, became the ancestress of King David. Zechariah foresaw the time when men of every tongue would grasp a Jew by the corner of his garment and say, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

During the Maccabean period, Jewish proselytizing activity reached its zenith: schools for missionaries were established, and by the beginning of the Christian era they had succeeded in converting ten percent of the population of the Roman Empire—roughly four million people.

It is true that the Talmud insists that we test the sincerity of the convert's motivations by discouraging him, by warning him of the hardships he will have to endure as a Jew. But the Talmud also says that while we are "to push converts away with the left hand," we ought to "draw them near with the right."

After Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire, and later, again, when Islam conquered the world, Jews were forbidden to seek converts or to accept them. The death penalty was fixed for the gentile who became a Jew and also for the Jew who welcomed him. Many were actually burned at the stake, and the heat of the flames cooled our conversionist ardor. Even so, it was not until the 16th century that we abandoned all proselytizing efforts; only then did our rabbis begin their systematic rejection of those who sought to join us.

But this is America and it is 1979. No repressive laws restrain us. The fear of persecution no longer inhibits us. There is no earthly—and surely no heavenly—reason why we cannot reassume our ancient vocation and open our arms to all newcomers.

Why are we so hesitant? Are we ashamed? Do we really believe that one must be a madman to embrace Judaism? Let us shuck our insecurities; let us recapture our self-esteem; let us, by all means, demonstrate our confidence in the value of our faith.

For we live in a time when millions of our fellow-Americans are in search of meaning. Tragically, many of the seekers go astray, and some fall prey to cultic enslavement. Searching for meaning, they find madness instead.

Well, Judaism offers life, not death. It teaches free will, not the surrender of body and soul to another human being. The Jew prays directly to God, not through an intermediary who stands between him and his God. Judaism is a religion of hope, not despair. Judaism insists that man and society are perfectible. Judaism has an enormous wealth of wisdom and experience to offer this troubled world and we Jews ought to be proud to speak about it, to speak frankly and freely, with enthusiasm and with dignity.

* * *

Following Rabbi Schindler's address, the Board of Trustees adopted a resolution that created the Reform Movement's Outreach efforts.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jewish Source Texts

(all time periods approximate)

Biblical Period (to 200BCE):

Cohen, Rev. Dr. A., ed., The Soncino Chumash. London: The Soncino Press, 1983

Fox, Everett, The Five Books of Moses. New York, Schocken Books, 1995

Jewish Publication Society, Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures. Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985

Plaut, W. Gunther, The Torah: A Modern Commentary. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981

Rabbinical Assembly, The, and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, The, Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary. New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2001

Scherman, Rabbi Nosson, The Stone Edition Chumash. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1996

Scherman, Rabbi Nosson, ed, The Stone Edition Tanach. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1993

Rabbinic Period (200BCE-500CE):

Blackman, Philip, F.C.S., Mishnayoth, Judaica Press, LTD., Gateshead, 1977

Cohen, Rev. Dr. A. trans., The Minor Tractates of the Talmud. London: Soncino Press, 1965

Neusner, Jacob, trans., The Mishnah: A New Translation. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988

Neusner, Jacob and Sarason, Richard S., ed., The Tosefta. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1986

The Soncino Talmud (CD-ROM). Davka Corporation

Whiston, William, A.M., trans., The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus. Philadelphia and Toronto: The John C. Winston Company, 1957

Midrashic Period (500CE-1100CE):

Midrash Rabbah

Freedman, Rabbi Dr. H., trans., Midrash Rabbah, Genesis. London: Soncino Press, 1939

Lehrman, Rabbi Dr. S.M., trans., Midrash Rabbah, Exodus. London: Soncino Press, 1939

Israelstam, Rev. J., trans., Midrash Rabbah, Leviticus. London: Soncino Press, 1939

Slotki, Judah J., trans., Midrash Rabbah, Numbers. London: Soncino Press, 1939

Rabbiniowitz, Rev. Dr. J., trans., Midrash Rabbah, Deuteronomy. London: Soncino Press, 1939

Other Midrashic Sources

Braude, William G. trans., The Midrash on Psalms. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959

Braude, William G. and Kapstein, Israel J., trans., Pesikta de Rab Kahana. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975

Hammer, Reuven, trans., Sifre A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986

Lauterbach, Jacob Z., Ph.D., trans., Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1949

Neusner, Jacob, Sifre to Numbers: An American Translation and Explanation. Atlanta: Scholars' Press, 1986

Townsend, John T., Midrash Tanhuma. Ktav Publishing House, Inc., Hoboken, NJ, 1989

Halachic Period (1100CE-1700CE):

HaLevi, Rabbi Aaron (Charles Wengrov, trans.) Sefer haHinnuch. The Book of Mitzvah Education. Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1978

Maimonides, Moses (Rabbi Dr. Charles B. Chavel trans.) The Commandments (Sefer Ha-Mitzvot). New York and London: Soncino Press, 1967

The Soncino Zohar (CD-ROM). Davka Corporation

Modern Collections of Texts

Bar Ilan's Judaic Library (CD-ROM). New York, Torah Educational Software
A searchable collection of essentially all Jewish sacred texts (Hebrew)

Bialik, Hayim Nahman and Ravnitzky, Yhoshua Hana (ed.) (William Braude, trans.), The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha-Aggadah (CD-ROM edition). Davka Corporation
A modern collection of midrash categorized by subject.

Ginzberg, Louis (Henrietta Szold trans.), The Legends of the Jews. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1954
A modern collection of midrash organized in order of the Bible.

Harlow, Rabbi Jules, ed. and trans., Siddur Sim Shalom. New York: Rabbinical Assembly, the United Synagogue of America, 1985

Kahn, Kathryn (compiler), Outreach Fellows Resource Book, unpublished, obtained from UAHC Outreach Department New York
Source texts compiled for the purpose of training people to mentor conversion candidates in the UAHC's Outreach Fellows program.

Nachshoni, Yehuda (Raphael Blumberg, trans.), Studies in the Weekly Parashah. Jerusalem: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1988
Translations and commentary of traditional Torah commentators.

Modern Secondary Sources on Texts related to Outreach

Bamberger, Bernard J., DD, Proselytism in the Talmudic Period. New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., New York, 1939
An academic study of conversion during the Rabbinic Period, including text references from Biblical, Hellenistic, Talmudic, Midrashic and Historical works.

Braude, William G., Jewish Proselyting in the First Five Centuries of the Common Era, the Age of the Tannaim and Amoraim. Providence, RI: Brown University, 1940
An academic study of the concept of converts in Biblical and Rabbinic literature, organized from the perspective of the convert.

Goodman, Martin, Mission and Conversion. Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994
An academic study and discussion of Roman, Jewish and Christian proselytizing in the first 500 years of the Common Era.

Porton, Gary G., The Stranger Within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1994

A comprehensive academic study of all mentions of the concept of converts and conversion in Mishna, Tosefta, early Midrash, and Talmud. Includes both an index of Biblical citations and of Rabbinic citations.

Rosenbloom, Joseph R., Conversion to Judaism: From the Biblical Period to the Present. Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press, 1978

A solid overview of the concept of conversion throughout the history of Judaism, with significant information about post-Rabbinic and medieval period, and moderate information about the modern period, primarily focused on intermarriage.

Reference Works

Encyclopedia Judaica, CD-ROM Edition, Judaica Multimedia,

Articles on:

- Gentile—Daniel Sperber, Theodore Friedman
- Judaizers—Cecil Roth, Yehuda Slutsky
- Mixed Marriage, Intermarriage—Erich Rosenthal, Ben-Zion Schereschewsky, Sergio Della Pergola, Mervin F. Verbit
- Noachide Laws—Steven S. Schwarzschild and Saul Berman
- Proselytes—Encyclopedia Hebraica, Louis Isaac Rabinowitz
- Strangers and Gentiles—David L. Lieber

Amsel, Nachum, The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues. New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1994

Robinson, George, Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals. New York: Pocket Books, 2000

Modern Works on Outreach Related Topics

Bayme, Steven, Outreach to the Unaffiliated: Communal Context and Policy Direction, The American Jewish Committee, Institute of Human Relations, New York
A demographic and sociological study related to Outreach

Belin, David W., Putting Human Values First: Universalism and Jewish Affirmation in Outreach to the Intermarried

An essay encouraging Jewish Outreach

Belin, David, What Judaism Offers for You: A Reform Perspective, UAHC-CCAR Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach, UAHC Press, New York

An essay extolling the virtues of Judaism published in pamphlet form by the UAHC as part of its early Outreach efforts

- Berkowitz, Rabbi Allan L. and Moskovitz, Patti, Embracing the Covenant. Converts to Judaism Talk About Why and How. Vermont: Jewish Lights, 1996
A wonderful collection of essays by people who have converted to Judaism divided into chapters on different issues
- Brynjegard-Bialik, Shawna, Reform Judaism Responds to Intermarriage: How Outreach is Changing the Institutions of Reform Judaism (Rabbinic Thesis). Copyrighted by the author, 2002
A discussion of the history of Reform Jewish Outreach
- Buber, Martin, Judaism and the Jews. From "On Judaism". New York: Schocken Books, 1967 pp. 11-21
A modern discussion about why Jews should embrace Judaism.
- Cohen, Rabbi Simcha J., Intermarriage and Conversion: A Halachic Solution. New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1987
An attempt to define the most liberal perspective possible regarding intermarriage from a halachic perspective.
- Cohen, Steven M., Jewish Outreach: Strategies and Opportunities. Copyrighted by the author, 1993
A discussion of definitions, demographics, programs, and strategies for Jewish Outreach
- Diamant, Anita, Choosing a Jewish Life: A Handbook for People Converting to Judaism and Their Family and Friends. New York: Schocken Books, 1997
A well-written and fairly comprehensive guide for people exploring conversion. Touches on most major issues and attempts to be respectful of all streams of Judaism, though leans toward liberal denominations of Judaism.
- Epstein, Lawrence J., Questions and Answers on Conversion to Judaism. New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1998
A guide to many of the issues people exploring conversion wrestle with. Very accessible as a reference work through the table of contents making it easy to find exactly what one is looking for.
- Epstein, Lawrence J., Readings on Conversion to Judaism. New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1995
A wonderful collection of essays by leading figures in the Jewish Outreach world (including Alexander Schindler, Dru Greenwood, Egon Mayer) and world-renowned scholars (including Leo Baeck, Jonathan Sarna, David Eichorn and Immanuel Jakobovits) on Jewish views about conversion. A great resource to see how traditional sources and modern sensibilities conflate around the issue of conversion.
- Kukoff, Lydia, Choosing Judaism. New York: UAHC, 1981
A collection of Lydia Kukoff's writings and experiences working with people on the conversion process. Divided by issue.
- Kukoff, Lydia, ed., Reform Jewish Outreach: A Program Guide. New York: UAHC, 1978
The original proposal for Reform Jewish Outreach based on Rabbi Alexander Schindler's organization of a task force for the effort.

Lamm, Rabbi Maurice, Becoming a Jew. New York: Jonathan David, 1991

The best guide available to conversion from the Orthodox perspective, and also one of the most accessible resources on *halacha* of conversion.

Mayer, Egon, Ph.D. and Dragone, Luann, ed., The Imperatives of Jewish Outreach: Responding to Intermarriage in the 1990s and Beyond. New York: The Jewish Outreach Institute and The Center for Jewish Studies, the Graduate School of the City University of New York, 1991

An excellent collection of essays and demographic studies on intermarriage issues and conversion issues related to intermarriage.

Mayer, Egon, Ph.D. ed., Jewish Intermarriage, Conversion, and Outreach. New York: The Jewish Outreach Institute and The Center for Jewish Studies, the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, 1989

An excellent collection of essays and demographic studies on outreach, with some focus on intermarriage issues.

Miller, Avis and Marder, Janet and Bayme, Steven; Approaches to Intermarriage: Areas of Consensus. New York: The American Jewish Committee, Institute of Human Relations, 1993

Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Website of the Department of Outreach: www.uahc.org/outreach. February 13, 2002

Weinberber, Rabbi Moshe, Jewish Outreach: Halakhic Perspectives. New Jersey and New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., Hoboken, NJ in association with Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals, 1990

A discussion of the Jewish legal issues and requirements about outreach to Jews.

Wiesel, Elie, The Stranger in the Bible. From: *The Kingdom of Memory*, New York: Summit Books, 1990 pp. 49-74

A modern discussion about the concept and implications of the character of the stranger in the Bible.