



**A Case-Study and Analysis of the Role of the Non-Jew  
in Reform Synagogues**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination  
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
Cincinnati, Ohio

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3 March 1997

## Digest

Over the course of the past several decades, the Jewish community experienced tremendous demographic change. As Jews assimilated into the larger American society, the number and percentage of interfaith families grew. The presence of non-Jewish family members forced congregations to confront the difficult problem of balancing their mission, and that of Liberal Judaism, with the needs and desires of their extended congregational "families."

Jews have never lived in isolation, and the contemporary Jewish community is not the first Jewish community to struggle with this subject. Biblical, Hellenistic, and Rabbinic literature all address this same general issue. This thesis examines the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue as understood through traditional and modern literature.

Part I of this thesis focuses on Biblical, Hellenistic, and Rabbinic literature. Biblical and Hellenistic literature portray a relatively more receptive Jewish community than that seen in Rabbinic literature. However, to varying degrees, all accept the non-Jew into Jewish society.

Biblical literature utilizes terms such as *ger* and *re'ua* to denote the stranger or non-Israelite and demands "Love therefore the stranger (*ger*) for you were strangers (*gerim*) in the land of Egypt."<sup>1</sup>

Hellenistic literature clearly documents the existence of non-Jewish "sympathizers" who were active within the Jewish community. Particularly of interest is the archaeological evidence uncovered in Aphrodisias that attests to the participation of "god-fearers" in Jewish ritual settings.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 10:19.

Rabbinic literature, though often insisting on rigid boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, guarantees certain rights, if not rites, to non-Jews in Jewish society

With traditional literature as a foundation, in Part II of this thesis the American Jewish community -- and specifically the Reform Movement -- is studied in greater detail

Demographics of the changing American Jewish population are presented utilizing information taken primarily from the *1990 National Jewish Population Survey* and the *Medding Report*. Policies and practices of American Reform Jewish synagogues are then presented. Along with this look at synagogues, the major rubrics of membership, governance, and ritual are explored. These three issues concerning the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue are then studied through the use of responsa produced by the Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis

Finally, a case-study and analysis of eleven American Reform synagogues is included. These synagogues vary in size and practice. They are grouped according to the completeness of their policies. Some have policies that cover all three areas of concern: membership, governance, and ritual. Some have policies that address only two of these three categories. Some are still in the process of creating policy. In addition to excerpts from written policies, each aspect of a congregation's policy is labeled as "more inclusive", "inclusive", "exclusive", or "more exclusive". This assessment is based upon criteria established by the author.

It is hoped that this thesis will provide guidance for congregations, congregants, and rabbis who are struggling with the issue of the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Traditional Jewish sources are provided to encourage Jewish solutions. Modern demographics, responsa, and congregation policies are provided to encourage modern Jewish solutions.



For Corey, my wife

and

For Max Riter (מַיִס), my grandfather  
(1914-1996)

I can still hear you humming

## Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to all of those congregations who have struggled with the role of the non-Jew in their own synagogues and were willing to share this important, and sometimes very personal information with me.

Thank you also to all of those who work with Outreach on a regular basis and served as a wonderful resource for this thesis: Rabbi Amy Coben Weiss, Mimi Dunitz, and Marcia Elbrand

A special thank you must go out to Dru Greenwood, without whose untiring work in this field, Outreach would not be what it is today

Thank you also to Rabbi Sam Joseph, who guided me through this process and taught me the importance of "tushy work"

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## Introduction

This thesis addresses one of the major issues confronting North American Jewry today — the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Over the course of the past several decades, the Jewish community experienced tremendous demographic change. As Jews assimilated into the larger American society, the number and percentage of interfaith families grew. The presence of non-Jewish family members forced congregations to confront the difficult problem of balancing their mission, and that of Liberal Judaism, with the needs and desires of their extended congregational “family.”

The Reform Movement established an Outreach program to deal with this situation. In 1990, then President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Rabbi Alexander Schindler wrote

“Reform Judaism’s Outreach program is predicated on the assumption that intermarriage will remain a reality of American Jewish life, that, far from diminishing, the rate of intermarriage is likely to increase, and that, in consequence, the better part of wisdom is not to reject the intermarried, but rather to love them all the more, to do everything we humanly can to draw them closer to us, and to involve them in Jewish life.

The synagogue embraces the non-Jewish mates of our children. We invite them to worship with us, to learn about Judaism, to share the Jewish life-cycle celebrations of their family members, and to participate in the temple’s work should they choose to do so.

The role of the non-Jew in the synagogue, however, requires clarification, its bounds must be defined.

[The goals of Outreach are] to bring non-Jews bound to us by marriage to Judaism, or to make certain that the children issuing from these marriages, our children’s children, and their children in turn — *l’dor vador* — will, in fact, be reared as Jews and share the destiny of this people Israel.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Schindler, Defining the Role, Preface.

Rabbi Schindler addresses the reality that Jews in America do not live in isolation. Jews today play a vibrant role in society and are accepted and valued in America. It is therefore no wonder that non-Jews are attracted to both Jews and the synagogue. In this context, Rabbi Schindler's approach to Outreach is not novel. His call for outreach to and inclusion of the non-Jew is an echo of Jewish tradition. Biblical, Hellenistic, and Rabbinic Jews also lived amongst non-Jews, including them, to varying degrees, in the Jewish community and in Jewish ritual. In Biblical literature, the non-Israelite enjoys a protected status and is encouraged to bring sacrifices to the Temple. In Hellenistic literature, the non-Jew is often found in the synagogue, side-by-side with both Jews by Birth and Jews by Choice. In Rabbinic literature, even though some restrictions are placed upon contact with gentiles, certain non-Jews are accepted into the Jewish community and are even included in ritual practice.

As modern liberal Jews face the growing ranks of non-Jews wishing to be included in the synagogue, it is natural, if not necessary, to return to these traditional Jewish sources to find authentic Jewish solutions. Biblical, Hellenistic, and Rabbinic texts provide just such a foundation upon which to build modern policies toward the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. These three literary periods evolved under very different circumstances -- sovereignty and exile, threatened existence and peaceful co-existence. Yet, each offers a distinctive voice for the modern Jew to consider. Part I of this thesis outlines each of these periods and draws timeless answers from this literature.

Part II focuses on American Jewry -- specifically Reform Jewry. The demographics of the Jewish community are examined to illustrate the trend toward a Jewish community that is increasingly tied by familial bonds to non-Jews. The implications of this trend in Reform synagogues are then discussed. How do we, as Rabbi Schindler suggests, "invite them to worship with us . . . (and) participate in the temple's work . . . ?" The Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis continues to respond to questions such as these. A sample of some of the pertinent responsa from this committee are therefore studied in order to delineate some of the boundaries established by the Reform Movement.

Finally, this thesis looks at the membership, governance, and ritual policies of eleven Reform synagogues in the United States. By doing so, one can discover how the theories provided by Biblical, Hellenistic, Rabbinic, and Reform Responsa literature are balanced with modern demographics and the unique needs and visions of each congregation. Although no congregation in this study turns the non-Jew away at the door of the synagogue, some congregations' policies are more inclusive of the non-Jew than others. A scale is provided that labels each congregation's policies as more exclusive, exclusive, inclusive, or more inclusive.

It is hoped that this thesis will provide guidance for congregations, congregants, and rabbis who are struggling with the issue of the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Traditional Jewish sources are provided to encourage Jewish solutions. Modern demographics, responsa, and congregations' policies are provided to encourage modern Jewish solutions.

## Part I

### The Role of the "Stranger" or Non-Israelite in Biblical Literature

The Bible commands the Jewish people to love three things. In the Book of Deuteronomy it is written: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."<sup>1</sup> Moses later tells the people of Israel: "Love therefore the stranger (*ger*) for you were strangers (*gerim*) in the land of Egypt."<sup>2</sup> Finally, in Leviticus it reads: "but thou shalt love thy neighbour (*re'aha*) as thyself. I am the Lord."<sup>3</sup>

Who are the *ger* and *re'ah* that they should be grouped with God? And, how do we show our love for them? The *ger* and *re'ah* are but two of the many designations for the non-Jew affiliated with the ancient Hebrew tribes and later Israelite communities. According to the Bible, the way to "love" these strangers -- these "others" -- is to protect them through legislation and incorporate them, to varying degrees, into society.

Although it is difficult to ascertain whether or not historically these categories were recognized and these pieces of legislation were adhered to, the texts remain of great value. The Biblical texts, at the most, reflect actual Biblical practice and at the least, reveal the ethics and desires of the Biblical authors and redactors. Biblical literature thus serves as a worthy

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5. All Biblical Hebrew and English references are quoted from: The Holy Scriptures (Jerusalem: Koren, 1988). Some words that appear transliterated in the English text are translated in this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 10:19.

<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 19:18.

model for those modern congregations seeking to formalize appropriate boundaries for the non-Jew in the synagogue.

### Terms

The Hebrew terms for “stranger” or in the Bible include the following *ger*, *nochri*, *re’a*, *toshav*, and *yirei Adonai*.<sup>4</sup> However, not all of these terms refer exclusively to the non-Israelite. According to Theophile Meek, in “The Translation of *Ger* in the Hexateuch and its Bearing on the Documentary Hypothesis,” the term *ger* evolved over time from the original meaning of “immigrant”, to “resident alien”, to “proselyte”.<sup>5</sup> The original Biblical meaning of *ger*, he contends, is “immigrant.” Specifically, this refers to the Hebrew immigrant in Palestine and Egypt.<sup>6</sup> In Genesis, Gods words to Abram are: “... know surely that thy seed shall be a stranger (*ger*) in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years.”<sup>7</sup> Later, Abraham says “I am a stranger (*ger*) and a sojourner (*toshav*) with you, give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.”<sup>8</sup> The term *ger*, in this context, also appears when Moses and Zipporah

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<sup>4</sup> Respectively, these are transliterated from: יראי יהוה, תושב, רע, נכרי, גר.

<sup>5</sup> Meek 177.

<sup>6</sup> Meek 172.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 15:13.

<sup>8</sup> Gen. 23:4.



name their son a derivative of the word: "And she bore him a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger (*ger*) in a strange land."<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the Hebrew immigrant, the term *ger* also refers to the conquered indigenous population of Palestine. Meek understands the *ger* in this instance to be inferior to the Israelites.<sup>10</sup> Exodus reads, "But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger (*gercha*) that is within thy gates."<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy also reads, "nor thy stranger that is within thy gates."<sup>12</sup> Meek notes that in these passages the possessive ending is used with the word "*ger*", thus implying the subservience of the *ger* to the Israelite. This is supported by numerous groupings in which the *ger* is included in categories of children, orphans and widows, in which it may be inferred that the *ger* holds the lowest rank. In Deuteronomy 29 it is written: "You stand this day all of you before the Lord your God: your captains, of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger (*gercha*) that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood to the drawer of thy water."<sup>13</sup> And again in chapter 31: "Gather the people together, men and women and children, and thy stranger that is within thy

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<sup>9</sup> Exodus 2:22.

<sup>10</sup> Meek 173.

<sup>11</sup> Exod. 20:10. "Stranger" here is written: גֵּרָךְ.

<sup>12</sup> Deut. 5:14.

<sup>13</sup> Deut. 19:9-10.

gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God and observe to do all the words of this Torah.”<sup>14</sup>

Meek notes that the *ger*, “is an alien and so he does not enjoy the privileges of full membership in the tribe; but he does have certain privileges.”<sup>15</sup> Elie Wiesel writes that the *ger* is the “assimilated gentile.”<sup>16</sup> He is, “the stranger who lives in your midst, meaning on Jewish land, in Jewish surroundings, in a Jewish atmosphere, he has not adopted the Jewish faith but he has acquired Jewish customs, values and friends.”<sup>17</sup> Rabbi Joseph Rosenbloom, in his book *Conversion to Judaism: From the Biblical Period to the Present*, adds that the *ger* is living away from his family and exists only under the protection of the people amongst whom he is living.<sup>18</sup>

The *nochri*, on the other hand, is the complete outsider who has no interest in being a full member of his host society. Mordechai Zar-Kavod, in “The *Nochri* and the *Ger* in the *Mikrah*,” writes that, “it is possible to say that the *nochri* is outside of Israelite law, there are no obligations for him or rights from me.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Deut. 31:12.

<sup>15</sup> Meek 172.

<sup>16</sup> Wiesel 28.

<sup>17</sup> Wiesel 27.

<sup>18</sup> Rosenbloom 18.

<sup>19</sup> Zar-Kavod 553.

Elie Wiesel adds that, as opposed to the assimilated gentile, the *nochri* is the friendly gentile outsider who remains aloof. He writes, “the *nochri* has come on a temporary basis; tomorrow he may leave with his prey; he has always been -- and will continue to be -- attached to another home, another system. Even when he is with you -- he is elsewhere.”<sup>20</sup> In an article written in 1926, Michael Guttman insists that the *nochri* is a “real stranger who is only temporarily in the country; the foreigner who has not given up his original home.”<sup>21</sup> He thus retains political and social ties to his own country and keeps his former status. Furthermore, he, “does not stand under the force of the laws of the host-country.”<sup>22</sup>

A third term is the *re'a*, the non-Jewish neighbor of a Jew. In Exodus it is written “Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man ask of his neighbor (*re'a*) and every woman of her neighbor (*re'a*), jewels of silver, and jewels of gold.”<sup>23</sup> The *re'a* thus maintains a distinction from the Jews. However, as noted above in the command to “love thy neighbor”, this term may have changed over time to become an Israelite.

A fourth term for “stranger” in the Bible is the *toshav*. Meek contends that the word *ger* and *toshav* used in conjunction indicate an inferior position socially.<sup>24</sup> This configuration is found in Leviticus 25: “If thy brother grows poor and his means fail with thee, then thou

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<sup>20</sup> Wiesel 40.

<sup>21</sup> Guttman 1.

<sup>22</sup> Guttman 19.

<sup>23</sup> Exod. 11:2.

<sup>24</sup> Meek 175.

shalt relieve him: though he be a stranger (*ger*) or a sojourner (*toshav*), that he may live with thee."<sup>25</sup> Again, in Numbers are the words: "These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger (*ger*) and for the sojourner (*toshav*) among them."<sup>26</sup>

In the Psalms, a reference to a new and somewhat controversial title is made: "You that fear the Lord (*Yirei Adonai*)"<sup>27</sup> Jacob Bernays holds that *Yirei Adonai* are a special class of "sympathizers" that appear in Hellenistic literature.<sup>27</sup> However, Louis Feldman, professor of classics at Yeshiva University, insists that this is not a category at all but refers to the collective of Israel.<sup>28</sup> In Psalm 115 the term appears as: "O Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield! O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield! You who fear the Lord (*Yirei Adonai*), trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield."<sup>29</sup> (9-11) Psalm 118 reads: "O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good: for His steadfast love endures forever. Let Israel now say, that His steadfast love endures forever. Let the house of Aaron now say, that His steadfast love endures forever. Let those now who fear the Lord (*Yirei Adonai*) say, that His steadfast love endures forever."<sup>30</sup> Psalm 135 states

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<sup>25</sup> Leviticus 25:35.

<sup>26</sup> Numbers 35:15.

<sup>27</sup> A full discussion of God-fearers is found in the chapter on Hellenism.

<sup>28</sup> Feldman, "Omnipresence" 201-202.

<sup>29</sup> Psalm 115:9-11.

<sup>30</sup> Psalm 118:1-4.

"Bless the Lord, O house of Israel: bless the Lord, O house of Aaron: Bless the Lord, O house of Levi: you who fear the Lord (*Yirei Adonai*), bless the Lord."<sup>31</sup>

### **The Relationship between Israelites and Non-Israelites**

Although the "stranger" is not a full citizen, he or she does retain certain rights and has certain duties to fulfill. The *ger* is expected to be loyal to his protectors and to be bound by their laws. In Genesis 21, Abraham agrees to an oath offered by Abimelech and Phicol that announces Abraham's status as *ger*/immigrant. "Now therefore swear to me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son, but according to the kindness that I have done to thee, thou shalt do to me and to the land in which thou hast sojourned (*gerta*)."<sup>32</sup> In Numbers 15, the *ger*/resident alien is protected: "One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation and also for the stranger (*ger*) that sojourns with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations, as you are, so shall the stranger (*k'ger*) be before the Lord. One Torah and one code shall there be for you, and for the stranger that sojourns with you."<sup>33</sup>

This special relationship is explained by Mary Douglas, who writes in 1994, "My idea is simply that the *ger* was one of the other descendants of Jacob, not descended from Judah, nor from Levi or Benjamin, but those other remnants of the twelve tribes who had been defeated and scattered by invaders and who still lived in Canaan during and after the exile in

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<sup>31</sup> Psalm 135:19-20.

<sup>32</sup> Gen. 21:23.

<sup>33</sup> Num. 15:15-16.

Babylon. His special status at law would be precisely that he was neither a foreigner nor a Jew.<sup>34</sup>

Daniel Smith-Christopher believes that the key to this relationship lies in the number of citations using the root *lavah* (attach to/join) in referring to gentiles who are "joined" to the people of God.<sup>35</sup> In Esther, this root appears in "the Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all who joined (*lavah*) themselves to them."<sup>36</sup> Isaiah reads "For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land, and the stranger shall be joined (*lavah*) with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob."<sup>37</sup>

### The Civil Rights of the Non-Israelite

The non-Israelite, according to Biblical literature, is fully protected under Israelite law. Although the Israelite obviously has the power to subjugate the *ger*, the Bible warns over and over again: "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers (*gerim*) in the land of Egypt."<sup>38</sup> Deuteronomy reads: "And I charged your judges at that

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<sup>34</sup> Mary Douglas, "The Strangers in the Bible," *Archives Europeenes de Sociologie* 35/2 (1994): 286. (qtd. in Rolf Rendtroff 86.)

<sup>35</sup> Smith-Christopher 137.

<sup>36</sup> Esther 9:27.

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 14:1.

<sup>38</sup> Exod. 22:20.

time, saying: Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger (*ger*) that is with him."<sup>39</sup>

The *nochri* retains a status slightly different from the *ger*. Guttman notes that the *nocher* is mentioned four times in the Torah.<sup>40</sup> In Deuteronomy 14, a *nocher* may buy non-kosher meat from a Jew: "You shall not eat of any thing that dies of itself: thou shalt give it to the stranger (*ger*) who is in thy gates, that he may eat it: or thou mayest sell it to an alien (*nochri*)."<sup>41</sup> In the next chapter, the *nocher* is not relieved of his debt in the seventh year and can also collect debts from Jews in this year: "of a foreigner (*nochri*) thou mayest exact it (debts) again."<sup>42</sup> In Deuteronomy 23, the *nocher* may be charged interest and may collect interest from Jews: "to a stranger (*nochri*) thou mayest give interest."<sup>43</sup> In Deuteronomy 17, it is written that the *nocher* may not be elected King: "Then thou mayest appoint a king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set as king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger (*nochri*) over thee, who is not thy brother."<sup>44</sup> From these passages, it is apparent that the *nochri* has intimate contact with

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<sup>39</sup> Deut. 1:16.

<sup>40</sup> Guttman 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> Deut. 14:21.

<sup>42</sup> Deut. 15:3.

<sup>43</sup> Deut. 23:21.

<sup>44</sup> Deut. 17:15.

the Jew in commerce and in general relations. It is such an integrated relationship, that the *nochri* could become king without the stated prohibitions!

Some have contended, particularly Theophile Meek, that the *ger* is a "naturalized alien and hence, in so far as his rights and privileges are concerned, he is on exactly the same footing as the Hebrew."<sup>45</sup> In other words, he is a proselyte. In reference to Leviticus 18, which reads: "You therefore shall keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourns among you."<sup>46</sup> Brian Michelson, in his Rabbinical thesis, picks up Meek's theme that the *ger* must be a proselyte, "because a simple resident or stranger would not be subject to the seven Noachide laws. Thus, the stranger in the verse must be a naturalized stranger, one who has accepted God and the laws of the Torah."<sup>47</sup>

Michelson also contends that, "Ezekiel's understanding of strangers in chapter 47 reflects the priestly conception of *ger*, because if the Israelites were expected to treat these 'strangers' as equal, they must have been naturalized in some way. In other words, they are converts."<sup>48</sup> The text from Ezekiel reads: "And it shall come to pass, that you shall divide it by lot for an inheritance to you and to the strangers that sojourn among you, who shall beget children among you, and they shall be to you as those born in the country among the children

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<sup>45</sup> Meek 174.

<sup>46</sup> Leviticus 18:26.

<sup>47</sup> Michelson 6.

<sup>48</sup> Michelson 8.



of Israel, they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that <sup>49</sup>in whatever tribe the stranger may sojourn, there shall you give him his inheritance, says the Lord God.<sup>49</sup>

This theory is, however, hard to validate. Biblical literature offers no formal means for conversion nor even a real mind-frame for integration into the community in Biblical times. Ezra and Nehemiah, it seems, knew nothing of conversions. If they had had such a concept, they would not have demanded the dissolution of marriages to foreigners, instead they would have called for conversion -- forced conversion if necessary.<sup>50</sup> Ezra instead commands the people: "Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all such (foreign) women, and such as are born of them and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the alien women."<sup>51</sup> Nehemiah also recounts: "In those days also I saw Jews who had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon and of Mo'av. And I contended with them, and cursed them, and beat some of them, and pulled out their hair, and made them take oath by God, saying, you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons, or for yourselves."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ezekiel 47:22-23.

<sup>50</sup> Levenson 162.

<sup>51</sup> Ezra 10:3,11.

<sup>52</sup> Nehemiah 13:23,25.

As Lawrence Schiffman writes in *Who was a Jew?* “... conversion was originally accomplished by attachment to the land and collective fate of the Jewish people.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, in Deuteronomy, the progeny of an intermarriage become Israelites only in the third generation: “Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for this is thy brother, thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian, because thou wast a stranger in his land. The children that are begotten of them shall enter in to the congregation of the Lord in their third generation.”<sup>54</sup>

Ruth, who is considered by later Rabbinic sources to be the paradigm of the convert, is not even fully integrated. Her designation continues to remain “Ruth the Moabite.” The text reads: “So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite woman, her daughter-in-law, with her, who returned out of the country of Moav.”<sup>55</sup> This is not to say that Ruth the Moabite is not permitted to live and worship with the Israelites. In fact, in the Prophets, Doeg the Edomite and Uriah the Hittite are both described as non-Israelite zealous worshipers of Israel’s God.<sup>56</sup> They were thus included into the community while retaining their identities and forgoing formal conversion.<sup>57</sup>

Shaye J.D. Cohen, of the Jewish Theological Seminary, contends that conversion must include the following: 1) practice of Jewish law; 2) exclusive devotion to Jewish God, and 3)

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<sup>53</sup> Schiffman 15.

<sup>54</sup> Deut. 23:8-9.

<sup>55</sup> Ruth 1:22.

<sup>56</sup> Milgrom 18.

<sup>57</sup> See I Samuel 21:8 and II Samuel 11:3.

integration in to the community.<sup>58</sup> This third criterium seems to be the most illusive. The first reference to a conversion that meets Cohen's standards is not found until the Apocryphal Book of Judith. In this work, an Ammorite general is impressed by the deliverance of the Jews and as a result he formally converts.<sup>59</sup> Chapter 14 reads: "And when Achior saw all that the God of Israel had done, he believed firmly in God, and was circumcised, and joined the house of Israel, remaining so to this day."<sup>60</sup>

The *ger* in the Bible simply does not meet the criteria for conversion. Rather, the stranger retains this "outsider" status while being included -- especially the *ger* -- in many aspects of the society. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the *ger* is given special standing through God's commandments. Such constant reminding to love and include the *ger* is likely needed to reinforce the protection required of such a vulnerable class. Yet, in these Biblical texts the *ger* is much more than protected, the *ger* in Biblical times is included as either a necessary or inevitable member of Israelite society.

### **The Religious Rights of the Non-Israelite**

Inclusion for non-Israelites extends beyond civil rights to religious participation. In Isaiah it is written: "Also the sons of the stranger (*nachar*), that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it and all that take hold of my covenant: Even them will I bring

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<sup>58</sup> S.J.D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary" 26.

<sup>59</sup> S.J.D. Cohen, "Conversion to Judaism" 35.

<sup>60</sup> Judith 14:10.

to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer, their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted on my altar; For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people."<sup>61</sup> Jon D. Levenson writes that this passage does not imply naturalization, but "does endorse the acceptability of a gentile's participation in the cult of the God of Israel in Jerusalem, provided the gentile, accepts the Covenant."<sup>62</sup>

Rolf Rendtroff notes that the *ger* is closely related with the majority of the citizens, "in particular in the cultic fields. In several respects, the *ger* is simply included in the cultic life of his surrounding."<sup>63</sup> He contends that it is difficult to figure out the exact role of the *ger*. Although some argue that *gerim* are bound by the prohibitive but not performative commandments, this, he says, is hard to justify. The biggest problem, Rendtroff contends, is that the term "*ger*" seems to have been edited in by different people at different times with no real uniformity.<sup>64</sup>

As documented above in Exodus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 5:14, the *gerim* are expected to observe Shabbat. The *gerim* are also expected to participate in festivals, as noted in Deuteronomy: "And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite who is within thy gates, and the stranger (*ger*), and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place

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<sup>61</sup> Isaiah 56:6-7.

<sup>62</sup> Levenson 162-163.

<sup>63</sup> Rendtroff 84.

<sup>64</sup> Rendtroff 85.

which the Lord thy God has chosen as the residence of His name. And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and the stranger (*ger*).<sup>65</sup>

Regarding Yom Kippur, Leviticus 16 reads: "And this shall be a statute for ever to you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, the home-born, or the stranger (*ger*) that sojourns among you."<sup>66</sup>

In Leviticus, the *ger* is permitted to bring a sacrificial offering: "Whosoever he be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers in Israel, that bringeth his offering, whether it be any of the vows, or any of their freewill-offerings."<sup>67</sup> In Numbers 15, it is written: "If a stranger (*ger*) sojourn with you, or whoever may be among you, throughout your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor to the Lord; as you do, so he shall do."<sup>68</sup>

The paschal offering is even allowed in certain circumstances: "And when a stranger (*ger*) shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it, and he shall be as one that is born in the land; for no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and to the stranger (*ger*) that sojourns among you."<sup>69</sup> In Numbers 9, it is written: "If a

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<sup>65</sup> Deut. 16:11, 14.

<sup>66</sup> Levit. 16:29.

<sup>67</sup> Levit. 22:18.

<sup>68</sup> Num. 15:14.

<sup>69</sup> Exod. 12:48-49.

stranger (*ger*) shall sojourn among you, and will keep the passover unto the Lord according to the ordinance of the passover, and according to its prescribed manner, so shall he do: you shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land."<sup>70</sup>

### Conclusion

The non-Israelite, according to Biblical thought, is by no means excluded from Israelite society. In fact, as Elie Wiesel writes, "one must make an effort to understand the *ger* and make him feel welcome, at home; one must love him -- or her."<sup>71</sup> The civil rights given to the stranger are identical with those guaranteed to the Jew in certain, if not all instances. With regard to the cultic rites the stranger is also included among the community. Granted, the *ger* must adhere to certain standards. However, this conformity is not to be confused with conversion. Ultimately, the stranger retains his or her own identity in the inclusive society portrayed through Biblical literature.

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<sup>70</sup> Num. 9:14.

<sup>71</sup> Wiesel 29.

### The Role of the “Sympathizer” or non-Jew in Hellenistic Literature

The spread of Jewish values and customs throughout the Mediterranean area is well documented in the Hellenistic period, which roughly spans the years from 300 BCE to 330 CE. During this time period, the Jewish Diaspora blossomed and trade routes opened, enabling the spread of Judaism in various forms. This process was helped in the Third century BCE by the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Bible.

It is estimated that by the middle of the first century CE, ten percent of the Roman Empire's population practiced Judaism in some form.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to conclude from Hellenistic literature the degree of participation for this large group. Some may surely be classified as converts or “proselytes.” However, many are best described as “sympathizers”, retaining a status somewhere between Jew and non-Jew.

#### Terms

Hellenistic literature uses a number of different terms to refer to sympathizers: the Greek terms *phoboumenoi* (those fearing), *sebomenoi ton theon* (those reverencing God), *theosebets* (God worshipers), and the Latin *metuentes* (those who fear).

Grouped together as “god-fearers” or “sympathizers”, Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannenbaum describe such a person as:<sup>2</sup>

“... someone who is attracted enough to what he has heard of Judaism to come to the synagogue to learn more; who is, after a time, willing, as a result,

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<sup>1</sup> Baron 170.

<sup>2</sup> Reynolds, of Cambridge University, and Tannenbaum, a noted writer and scholar, were charged with publishing the findings from Aphrodisias.

to imitate the Jewish way of life in whatever way and to whatever degree he wishes (up to and including membership in community associations, where that includes legal study and prayer); who may have had held out to him various short codes or moral behaviors to follow, but does not seem to have been required to follow any one; who may follow the exclusive monotheism of the Jews and give up his ancestral gods, but need not do so, and is, whether he does or not, promised a share in the resurrection for his pains."<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not sympathizers fit the definition provided by Reynolds and Tannenbaum is actively debated today. Some argue that the terms listed above are only used as literary devices. However, recent archaeological finds and subsequent new understandings of Hellenistic texts support at least the existence, if not the exact role, of non-Jewish sympathizers to Judaism.

### **The Attraction of Sympathizers to Judaism**

Unquestionably, Judaism had an impact on non-Jewish society throughout the Greek and later Roman Empire. Shaye Cohen suggests seven ways by which a "gentile can show respect or affection for Judaism." These are

"1) admiring some aspect of Judaism, 2) acknowledging the power of the god of the Jews or incorporating him into the pagan pantheon, 3) benefiting the Jews or being conspicuously friendly to Jews, 4) practicing some or many of the rituals of the Jews, 5) venerating the god of the Jews and denying or ignoring the pagan gods; 6) joining the Jewish community; 7) converting to Judaism and 'becoming a Jew'."<sup>4</sup>

For the purposes of this study, the last point is not of major concern. "Joining the Jewish community," on the other hand, may provide the clearest model for modern communities considering the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. This relationship assumes

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<sup>3</sup> Reynolds 65.

<sup>4</sup> S.J.D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary" 14-15



that the Jewish community is inclusive enough to allow such joining without full conversion. A more complete discussion of these sympathizers and their role is included in the next section of this chapter. Cohen's first five points must first be fully examined to understand the attraction that non-Jews in the Hellenistic period have for Jewish tradition and practices.

Numerous Hellenistic authors allude to pagan admiration for some aspects of Judaism. Documents are preserved from as early as 300 BCE that hold the Jews or Judaism in high regard. Megasthenes, writing in Greek around the year 300 BCE, compares the Jews to Greek philosophers: "All the opinions expressed by the ancients about nature are found also among the philosophers outside Greece, some among the Indian Brahmans and others in Syria among those called Jews."<sup>5</sup> Augustine also preserves favorable opinions of Judaism in a statement by Varro<sup>6</sup> equating the greatest Roman god, Jupiter, with the Jewish God: "Since the Romans habitually worship nothing superior to Jupiter and they consider him the king of all the gods, and as he perceived that the Jews worship the highest God, he could not but identify him with Jupiter."<sup>7</sup> According to Menahem Stern, professor of Jewish history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, "[Varro] adduces that the Jewish form of divine worship, because of its opposition to cultic images, is an example of a pure and useful worship and one that resembles the original cult of old Rome in this respect."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Varro, *Indica*, Book 3, M. Stern, vol. I, 46.

<sup>6</sup> Varro (116-27 B.C.E.) is considered the greatest scholar of republican Rome and the forerunner of the Augustan religious restoration.

<sup>7</sup> M. Stern, vol. I, 210.

<sup>8</sup> M. Stern, vol. I, 207.

The Greeks and Romans are thus very open to Judaism. Judaism apparently plays such an influential role in Hellenistic society that it is often fodder for writers, philosophers and satirists. In Plutarch's life of *Cicero* the first century BCE quaestor, Quintus Caecilius Niger, tries to acquit Verres, but is thrown off the case for suspicion of "Judaizing".<sup>9</sup> Although this does not prove that the non-Jewish Niger adhered to some Jewish practices it does imply that such practices are known in the period. If "Judaizing" by non-Jews were unknown, Plutarch would be forced to explain the nature of such adherence.

In 19 CE, Emperor Tiberius banishes the Jews from Rome, along with, "others of the same race or similar beliefs."<sup>10</sup> Seneca, in the first century CE, derides Jews for wasting one-seventh of their lives in laziness by observing Shabbat. In doing so, he addresses wide-spread Jewish influence in the Greek world. He says, "the custom of this most accursed race has gained such influence that it has now been received throughout the world."<sup>11</sup> In the same century, the satirist Petronius plays off the Jewish sympathizer who observes dietary laws but not circumcision or Shabbat. He writes, "The Jew may worship his pig-god and clamor in the ears of high heaven, but unless he also cuts back his foreskin with a knife, he shall go forth from the people and emigrate (sic) to Greek cities, and shall not tremble at the fasts of Sabbath imposed by the law."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Plutarch, *Cicero* 7.6.5. M. Stern, vol. I, 566.

<sup>10</sup> Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36. M. Stern, vol. II, 112.

<sup>11</sup> M. Stern 432.

<sup>12</sup> Petronius. M. Stern, vol. I., 444.

The sympathizer population grows so much by the first century CE that the Stoic philosopher Epictetus is led to proclaim in *Dissertationes*: "Why do you act the part of a Jew when you are a Greek? Whenever we see a man halting between two faiths we are in the habit of saying, 'He is not a Jew, he is only acting the part.' But when he adopts the attitude of mind of the man who has been baptized and has made his choice, then he both is a Jew in fact and is called one."<sup>13</sup>

In *Lives of the Caesars*, Suetonius, a First and Second Century Roman biographer, states that two classes of people were persecuted by the Roman Emperor Domitian (who reigned from 81 to 96 AD) for evasion of the special tax on the Jews -- those who lived as Jews without acknowledging this faith and those who concealed their origin. He writes: "Besides other taxes, that on the Jews was levied with the utmost vigour, and those who were prosecuted who without publicly acknowledging that faith yet lived as Jews, as well as those who concealed their origin and did not pay the tribute levied upon their people."<sup>14</sup> The first category, it seems, refers to sympathizers. Also, in the second century, the satirist Juvenal differentiates between Jewish proselytes and sympathizers. As with the others, if he is speaking about this in popular forums, the illustrations he uses cannot be unknown to the population. He writes: "Some who have had a father who reveres the Sabbath, worship nothing but the clouds and the divinity of the heavens and see no difference between eating

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<sup>13</sup> Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 9:19-21. M. Stern, vol. I, 543.

<sup>14</sup> Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars* 12.2. M. Stern vol. II, 128.

swine's flesh, from which their father abstained, and that of man; and in time they take to circumcision."<sup>15</sup>

In the Second Century, the Christian theologian Justin Martyr writes, in *Dialogue with Trypho*, that the Jewish Trypho derides the Christians for failing to observe feasts, Sabbaths and circumcisions. He states that all God-fearing people even do so.<sup>16</sup> In the fourth century, Julian writes, those "whose minds were drawn to the doctrines of the Jewish religion (are) partly God-fearers"<sup>17</sup>

Jewish sources also make reference to the sympathizers. Philo of Alexandria, in his commentary on the Book of Exodus, understands the word "proselyte" not as a convert but rather as a "sympathizer" who has done all but practice circumcision.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, circumcision is not practiced by the Jews in Egypt at this time and thus conversion, in Philo's mind, is not a viable option. The most that one could achieve is the status of partial-convert or sympathizer.<sup>19</sup>

Philo also writes in *The Life of Moses*: "The Jewish institutions attract and gain the attention of all — of Barbarians, of Greeks, of dwellers on the mainland and islands, of nations of the east and the west, of Europe and Asia, of the whole inhabited world from end to

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<sup>15</sup> Juvenal 14.96-99. M. Stern, vol. II, 102-103.

<sup>16</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 10.2.

<sup>17</sup> Julian, *Epistula Ad Theodorum* 89A [453C].

<sup>18</sup> Exodus 22:20 and 23:9; Philo, *Questions on Exodus* 2.2.

<sup>19</sup> Feldman, "The Omnipresence" 61.

end.”<sup>20</sup> Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, makes several references to those attracted in some way to Judaism. In *Jewish War*, commenting on the situation in Syria at the beginning of the war, he states that each city thought it had rid itself of its Jews, but still has Judaizers about, who aroused suspicion.<sup>21</sup> In this work, Josephus also writes that Izates, King of Adiabene in Mesopotamia, wants to convert through circumcision, feeling that only in this way will he be a real Jew.<sup>22</sup> Further indication that sympathizers, who have not converted -- and likely have no plans to convert -- are prevalent, can be found in Josephus’ *Against Apion*. Here Josephus writes: “There is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and the lighting of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed.” He also declares that gentiles throughout the world, “attempt to imitate our unanimity, our liberal charities, our devoted labor in the crafts, our endurance under persecution on behalf of our laws.”<sup>23</sup>

### **The Involvement of Sympathizers in the Synagogue**

Attraction, as it has been shown, is not difficult to document in Hellenistic literature. However, actual non-Jewish involvement in Jewish ritual and in Jewish settings is slightly

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<sup>20</sup> Philo, *The Life of Moses* 2.4.20.

<sup>21</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.463.

<sup>22</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.17-96.

<sup>23</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.39.

more ambiguous.<sup>24</sup> Josephus notes in the *Jewish War*, that Jewish rituals are so popular, that in Damascus all the wives “submitted to the Jewish religion.”<sup>25</sup> He writes later in this work, that large numbers of Greeks are attracted to the religious ceremonies of the Jews of Antioch.<sup>26</sup> This attraction is enhanced because they “in some measure” are incorporated with the Jews, though they do not convert. In *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus reports that those who contribute to the Temple are both Jews and those who worship God (*Sebomenon ton theon*).<sup>27</sup> Thus, according to one important historian, sympathizers were active in Jewish practices and institutions.

Shaye J. D. Cohen points out that even Alexander the Great made sacrifices at the Temple. He writes: “If the dignitary was the ruler of the Jews, the political meaning of his gestures was clear: by sacrificing to the god of the Jews, he confirmed his sovereignty over the Jews because he represented the people before their god. The theological meaning of the gesture was clear as well. The Jews are a respectable nation, and their god is a respectable deity. An empire has many nations and many gods.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The difference here is between the incorporation of Jewish practices into non-Jewish traditions, compared to the participation of sympathizers in Jewish practices in synagogues or at least under Jewish auspices.

<sup>25</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.559-61.

<sup>26</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.45.

<sup>27</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14.110.

<sup>28</sup> S. J. D. Cohen, “Crossing” 16.

Non-Jewish sources are enlightening as well. Christian sources indicate that sympathizers are the majority of early converts to Christianity. The Apostle Luke mentions this class of people in several places in the Book of Acts. In Chapter 10, Cornelius, an Italian centurion, sends for Peter. He is described as, "devout, and he and all his people were god-fearing, he made generous contributions to the people, and was committed to continual prayer."<sup>29</sup> This implies that Cornelius participates in the service at the synagogue. The text in this chapter continues, "The centurion Cornelius, who is a just and god-fearing man, of good repute throughout the Jewish people."<sup>30</sup> And, indeed, Peter baptizes this man on the condition that, "God is not biased in his judgment of mankind, but that in every nation he who fears him and deals justly is accepted by him."<sup>31</sup>

In Asia minor, Paul addresses the local synagogue-goers by saying, "Israelites, and you who fear God, listen to me!"<sup>32</sup> Critics argue that this statement is directed toward "Israelites" who are described as "you who fear God." However, a more reasonable understanding is that two classes of people are being addressed: 1) the Israelites, and 2) those who fear God. Later, Paul draws out the beginning of his sermon by saying, "Brothers, descendants of Abraham, and those of you who fear God."<sup>33</sup> In this same chapter it is

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<sup>29</sup> All "New Testament" sources are quoted from The New Oxford Annotated Bible With The Apocrypha, Expanded Edition, Revised Standard Version. Acts, 10:2.

<sup>30</sup> Acts, 10:22.

<sup>31</sup> Acts, 10:34-35.

<sup>32</sup> Acts, 13:16.

<sup>33</sup> Acts, 13:26.



written, "when the synagogue congregation had been sent away, many Jews and god-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas. . . ."<sup>34</sup> And again, ". . . the Jews stirred up the god-fearing women of high rank and the men of standing in the city . . ."<sup>35</sup>

Paul and Silas again meet God-fearers in the synagogue of Macedonia. They preach to the Sabbath worshipers and it is accounted that, "Some of them were convinced and joined Paul and Silas, together with a large number of the god-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women."<sup>36</sup> Concerning the trip to Athens, it is written that, "(Paul) argued with the Jews and god-fearing people in the synagogue."<sup>37</sup> In Corinth, Paul is rebuffed by the Jews and so, "went away and came to a house belonging to a man named Titius Justus, a god-fearing man, whose house stood beside the synagogue." Finally, in chapter 18, Paul again has no success with the Jews and goes, "to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue."<sup>38</sup>

Luke, the author of Acts, obviously has a definite vision of the "god-fearer" in mind. Although Acts is the earliest literary source for these people, Thomas Finn argues in "The God-Fearers Reconsidered," that the term "god-fearer", as used in Acts, is probably based

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<sup>34</sup> Acts, 13:43.

<sup>35</sup> Acts, 13:50.

<sup>36</sup> Acts, 17:4.

<sup>37</sup> Acts, 17:17.

<sup>38</sup> Acts, 18:7.



on previously established terminology.<sup>39</sup> Some, however, go so far as to suggest that in Acts, “god-fearers” and “gentiles” are interchangeable. Therefore, the missionary work that is directed at “gentiles” is actually focused on those non-Jews who are attached to the synagogue. This view, however, is not widely held.<sup>40</sup>

Other scholars in Hellenistic Judaism, most notably A. Thomas Kraabel, writing with Robert S. MacLennan, argue that there really are no God-fearers or that their numbers are insignificant and isolated. Kraabel suggests, rather, that “we see God-fearers as theological characters, an integral part of Luke’s understanding of the Church in its relation to pagans and Jews.”<sup>41</sup> Such an understanding paves the way for a legitimate transition from a Jewish based Christianity to one that is gentile based.<sup>42</sup> In fact, Kraabel points out that Luke has no long-term need for the term “god-fearers” after Acts 18:7, nor does “going into the synagogue” remain a theme after Acts 19:9, thus leading to the conclusion that god-fearers are simply a literary device to segue into a new approach to proselytizing.

Kraabel writes that, “The New Testament is not so much a history book, in a modern sense, as a collection of early Christian sermons and letters.”<sup>43</sup> Since the time of these

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<sup>39</sup> Finn 80.

<sup>40</sup> Sanders, 443.

<sup>41</sup> MacLennan 47.

<sup>42</sup> MacLennan 53.

<sup>43</sup> MacLennan 51.

writings, all references to God-fearers in other sources are, “a figment of the scholarly imagination, based on literary and theological expansion of what Luke says in Acts.”<sup>44</sup>

Kraabel bases these assertions on his findings that while the synagogue was the central focus for Jewish communities, in over one hundred synagogue inscriptions from the first century BCE until the seventh century CE, there is not a single mention of *phoboumenoi* or *sebomenoi*. Furthermore, the only occurrence of the word *theosebeis* is actually in reference to Jewish donors. Nor is there any mention of unconverted gentiles who might have been involved with synagogue life. In fact, he argues that there is no archaeological evidence of outreach to non-Jews at all.<sup>45</sup>

Kraabel points out that some of these terms have wide usage beyond the Jewish community. They are often used in describing gentiles who have never even met a Jew. Greek historian Herodotus labels the sixth-century BCE King Croesus of Lydia as *theosebeis* in his *History*.<sup>46</sup> In Rome, anti-Christian graffiti has been found with the inscription, “Alexamenos worships God [*sebete theon*],” which is the precise language used in Acts.<sup>47</sup>

Although “god-fearers” may be a literary term coined by Luke, as Kraabel insists, pagan sources also refer to such non-Jews attached to the synagogue. The most convincing argument for the existence of these sympathizers comes from archaeological finds ignored by

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<sup>44</sup> MacLennan 48.

<sup>45</sup> MacLennan 50.

<sup>46</sup> Herodotus, *History* 1.86.2.

<sup>47</sup> MacLennan 51.

Kraabel. These inscriptions attest that there were non-Jews attached in a ritual way to the synagogue and that this practice was wide spread. Below is a sampling of these Greek inscriptions:<sup>48</sup>

- 1) From Deliler, near Philadelphia in Lydia, Asia Minor: "In the most holy synagogue of the Hebrew, I, Eustathios the God-fearer, in memory of my brother Hermphilos, have set the laver-basin together with my betrothed Athanasia."
- 2) From a tomb in Rhodes: "Eyphrosyna the God-fearer, the worthy, farewell."
- 3) From Kertsch, Crimea: "I release in the synagogue Elpias, he shall remain undisturbed, the community of the Jews and the God-fearers will be guardian."
- 4) The Latin inscription found at a tomb in Venosa, Northern Italy: "Mark the God-fearer, who lived fifteen years, has been received here in peace."
- 5) And finally, the controversial Greek inscription from the theater at Miletus, Asia Minor: "Place of the Jews and the God-fearers."

Critics, such as Louis Feldman, professor of Classics at Yeshiva University, offer their own translations of this last inscription from the second century CE. Feldman insists that it should read: "Place of the Jews, who are also (called) God-fearers." As evidenced here, Feldman holds that the term "*theosebets*" also denotes Jews, both born and converted, in early inscriptions. He argues that *phobumenoi* and *sebomenoi* are not technical terms, but rather refer to religious or pious people.<sup>49</sup>

A relatively recent discovery in Aphrodisias, which is in southwest Turkey, sheds important light on this matter, and contains what many believe to be conclusive evidence for the inclusion of non-Jews in the synagogue during the Hellenistic period. In, 1976, Professor

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<sup>48</sup> Figueras 202-203.

<sup>49</sup> Feldman "The Omnipresence" 59.

K. T. Erism discovered an inscription that dates back to 210 CE. One translation of the inscription reads, "God help the givers to the soup-kitchen. Below (are) listed the (members) of the decany of the disciples of the law, also known as those who fervently praise God, (who) erected, for the relief of suffering in the community, at their personal expense, (this) memorial (building)." <sup>50</sup> On two steles are listed 126 donors to the institution, although it appears that at one time more were present but have been lost over the centuries. These benefactors made up an association of prominent Jews and citizens from Aphrodisias, who may have gathered to supervise charities and to assure a prayer minyan. <sup>51</sup> The inscription contains two lists of donors. The first contains clearly identifiably Jewish names such as Jacob, Joseph, and Rueben. This list is followed by a break and then the words "and those who are God-fearers." <sup>52</sup> These lists also contain, in addition to the god-fearers, the names of two men listed as "proselytes." This indicates that there is a definite distinction between Jews, proselytes and god-fearers.

Regarding the fifty-four people described as *theosebeis*, or "God worshipers", Tannenbaum asserts that, "these are gentiles interested in the Jewish religion, and attached,

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<sup>50</sup> Tannenbaum 55.

<sup>51</sup> Tannenbaum speculates that this soup-kitchen was influenced by Rabbi Meir (teacher of Yehuda HaNassi) during his travels as *shaliach*. Though Diaspora Jews did not generally follow the teachings of Palestine until the sixth century, this may have been the beginning of applying Mishnaic rulings to the Diaspora. This particular ruling was to establish centers for giving charity; Tannenbaum 56.

<sup>52</sup> Reynolds 5.

however loosely, to the Jewish community.”<sup>53</sup> To support the theory that these were non-Jewish *theosebeis*, it is noted on the inscription that nine of these men are members of the city council. Such officials, it may be assumed, perform pagan sacrifices that are part of the city council ceremonies. If they are indeed involved with the synagogue, they must partake in Jewish modes of worship without relinquishing all of their pagan rituals.<sup>54</sup>

The Aphrodisias site reveals yet another archaeological find which lends more light to the subject. An inscription at the theater reads “the place of those who are complete Hebrews.”<sup>55</sup> The obvious conclusion from this inscription is that “incomplete” Jews, or sympathizers, were also likely to visit the theater.

Kraabel argues that it is a misconception to assume that anyone interested in Jews must be interested in the religion of Judaism or in converting to Judaism. They could, in fact, simply be interested in a person or group of people – not unlike some situations today.<sup>56</sup> This is especially so when we see what a great impact Jews had on some societies such as Sardis, where archaeologists have discovered a great Jewish influence on, and acceptance by, the local community. J. Murphy O'Connor is skeptical of the Aphrodisias conclusions as well. In his article, “Lots of God-fearers? *Theosebeis* in the Aphrodisias Inscription,” he suggests that in fact, if it is a soup kitchen of some sort that benefits the public, it could very well be

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<sup>53</sup> Tannenbaum 56.

<sup>54</sup> Tannenbaum 57.

<sup>55</sup> Feldman, “The Omnipresence” 63.

<sup>56</sup> MacLennan 51.

that non-Jewish council members were simply interested in the welfare of the citizens. Their support for the project could therefore have been a political move with no religious relevance.<sup>57</sup>

### Conclusion

The argument against the existence of god-fearers certainly has merit in a discussion of non-Jewish sympathizers to Judaism. Josephus, Luke, and the Greek writers all had certain biases that they carried with them, and their work at times is clearly polemical. However, when all of the evidence is gathered -- Pagan, Christian, and Jewish literature and inscriptions -- there is a very strong case for the existence of god-fearers. The influence of this class, its character, and its exact role are difficult to pinpoint. However, it is clear from all of these sources that not only were non-Jews attracted to Jews and Judaism in the Hellenistic period, but they were included in both the Jewish community and in Jewish ritual.

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<sup>57</sup> O'Connor 422.

## The Role of the Non-Jew in Rabbinic Literature

Rabbinic literature portrays a more exclusive set of civil and religious boundaries for non-Jews than those illustrated through Biblical or Hellenistic literature. Especially in the earlier years, non-Jews are often presented in a negative, if not hostile, light.<sup>1</sup> However, inclusive tendencies also exist and must therefore be examined when studying the role of the non-Jew in Rabbinic literature.

### Concerning the non-Jew in civil matters

Dr. Jacob Petuchowski argues, in his Rabbinical thesis of 1952 entitled "The Concept of *Hukkoth Hagoyim* in the Tannaitic Period," that monotheism did not immediately succeed in the Biblical or Rabbinic times.<sup>2</sup> He draws upon Prophetic passages to illustrate a continued adherence to idolatry by Jews in Biblical times.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Petuchowski also notes that the Jews of Elephantine prayed to as many as five gods. This is likely a tradition brought from Jerusalem and further influenced by Egyptian neighbors. He writes, "the mere fact that such a

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this study the following broad dates may be used for the Rabbinic period: Tannaim (1st-3rd century C.E.), Amoraim (3rd-6th century), Geonim (6th-11th century), Rishonim (11th-16th century), Ahronim (16th-18th century).

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Petuchowski glosses over much of the Hellenistic age in his presentation, however, his observations can easily be extended to this interim, albeit overlapping, period.

<sup>3</sup> Petuchowski identifies: II Kings 17:7-8 (the children of Israel, "had feared other gods and walked in the statutes of the nation."), II Kings 21:3 (Menasseh, King of Judah for fifty-five years, builds altars to other gods), II Kings 23 (Josiah leads a reformation against the idolatry which seems to be rampant in his time), Jeremiah 44 (the Egyptian Jews are threatened for their idolatrous ways), Ezekiel 8 (pagan rituals appear in a vision).



syncretistic cult was still possible does make us doubt the efficacy of the Deuteronomic Reformation, and points to the strength of popular religion."<sup>4</sup>

However, Petuchowski also notes that, "once Monotheism was victorious, all other religions had to appear in a negative light, and their institutions shunned."<sup>5</sup> This was made possible through the erection of legal barriers which served to safeguard the Jewish religion in the face of foreign attraction. Petuchowski believes that feelings toward gentiles are justified in the early Rabbinic period because in the second generation of Tana'im the Temple is destroyed and during the third generation the Bar Kohba rebellion is quashed.<sup>6</sup>

Sacha Stern, in *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings*, presents an important analysis of Rabbinic thinking: "aside from enhancing Israel's distinction from the nations, the exclusion of the nations and the inaccessibility of Israel may proceed from an ontological urge to protect Jewish identity against the threat of non-Jewish impingement and engulfment. The strategy of 'isolationism' would lead to a solitary, secretive and solipsistic<sup>7</sup> experience of being Israel. This may be related to the introvert, self-referential stance of early rabbinic writings with reference to the concept of 'Israel'.<sup>8</sup>"

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<sup>4</sup> Petuchowski 19.

<sup>5</sup> Petuchowski 5.

<sup>6</sup> Petuchowski 60-61.

<sup>7</sup> "Solipsism" is an extreme preoccupation with and indulgence of one's feelings, desires, etc.; egoistic self-absorption.

<sup>8</sup> Sacha Stern 223.



In an article in 1979, Yehezkel Cohen writes that, "The Tannaitic leadership aimed at full social segregation from the Gentiles. . . social relations between Jews and Gentiles were regarded as a danger to the special character and exclusiveness of the Jewish nation and its morality. Such relations were seen as likely to lead the way to involvement with the idolatrous and imperial cults."<sup>9</sup> Contact with non-Jews is, therefore, minimized in Tannaitic literature so that approval is not given to their idolatrous ways. Nor is anything done that might appear to be "approval" for idolatry.<sup>10</sup>

In his Rabbinical thesis entitled, "The Gentile in Relation to Jewish custom and Law According to Tannaitic Sources," Irving Bloom writes that the Jewish people, "desired to maintain its distinctive character and to withstand being engulfed by its neighbors who happened to be in the majority. They therefore set up obstacles to assimilation and integration."<sup>11</sup> *Hukkat Ha'Goi* is one such set of obstacles. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* defines *Hukkat Ha'Goi* as, "laws or customs of the gentiles. . . term designating heathen customs of idolatrous (or superstitious) origin that Jews are forbidden to emulate."<sup>12</sup> These laws are based upon the instruction from Leviticus 20:23, "you shall not walk in the customs of the nations."<sup>13</sup> Three categories are traditionally delineated: 1) "Customs that are closely

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<sup>9</sup> Yehezkel Cohen 39.

<sup>10</sup> Bloom 10.

<sup>11</sup> Bloom 20.

<sup>12</sup> "Hukkat Ha-Goi," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 8:1061.

<sup>13</sup> Similar passages also exist elsewhere in the Bible.

connected with idolatry or that form part of a non-Jewish religious ritual" -- which includes modes of dress -- are not allowed. 2) "Gentile folk customs deriving from superstitious beliefs" -- are not allowed. 3) "Laws and customs of gentiles which do not have any direct connection with religious worship" -- are, however, allowed

Thus, as the *Encyclopedia Judaica* explains, in the later Second Temple period, "a sharp distinction and barrier of separation was erected between the Jew and the gentile."<sup>14</sup> In this period, marriage prohibitions are expanded from the original Canaanite nations in Deuteronomy 7:1-4<sup>15</sup> and the acceptance of monotheism becomes a distinguishing mark.<sup>16</sup>

In order to effectively erect such a barrier between Jews and non-Jews, the latter must be made to appear vile. The Rabbis, therefore, denigrate the gentile by describing their morals and focusing on their idol worship. Gentiles are said to be prone to idol worship (*avodah zarah*).<sup>17</sup> Jews are therefore not to use any wine they have touched, help them deliver a baby, or even do business with them on certain days.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Gentile," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 7:410.

<sup>15</sup> Deut. 7:1-4: "... the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou. ... neither shalt thou make marriages with them."

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Megilla 13a, Esther Rabbah 6:2.

<sup>17</sup> Y. Berachot 8,6; Ruth Rabbah pet. 3.

<sup>18</sup> M. Avodah Zara 4:8-12, 5:3-6; M AZ 2,1; B. AZ 6a, 7b.

Concerning business relations, the Rabbis believe that gentiles cannot be trusted. They are depicted as liars and thieves, and therefore, any land that they own is presumed by the rabbis to be stolen.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding moral behavior, the rabbis insist that non-Jews are liable to commit murder at any minute without provocation. Jews are therefore warned to be extra cautious in their company.<sup>20</sup> Tosefta on this passage from Avodah Zarah reads that, "a nochrī may circumcise an Israelite in the presence of others, but alone it is prohibited because we are afraid of danger to life."<sup>21</sup>

Rashi<sup>22</sup> comments that a Jew may not sell tzitzit to a non-Jew, lest another Jew sees him wearing these, mistakes him for a Jew and therefore does not take precautions not to be murdered.<sup>23</sup> The Tosefta in Avodah Zara continues, "and you must not sell them . . . books, tefilin or mezuzot whether gentile or Samaritan."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> B. Suk 30a

<sup>20</sup> M. AZ 2, 1-2; Tosefta AZ 3, 12; 3, 3-5; 2, 4; 2, 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> T. A.Z. 3, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Rashi — Solomon ben Isaac (1040-1105), Troyes, France.

<sup>23</sup> B. Men. 43a

<sup>24</sup> T. A.Z. 2, 4.

Non-Jews are suspected of being adulterous and promiscuous and engage in bestiality and homosexuality. Jewish men and women, and their animals, are therefore not considered safe when left alone with non-Jews.<sup>25</sup>

Along the same lines of denigrating the gentile, the rabbis make numerous comparisons between the gentile and the Jew. The rabbis write:<sup>26</sup>

"You (Israel) are called 'man', the nations are not."<sup>27</sup>

"When Israel eat and drink, they engage in words of Torah, but the nations engage in obscenities."<sup>28</sup> "The prepuce is repulsive, circumcision is great."<sup>29</sup>

"The nations are 'strangers' before the Almighty. Israel are close to Him, [they are] His 'sons'."<sup>30</sup>

"'The wise' -- these are Israel, 'the fools' -- these are the nations."<sup>31</sup>

"The nations are a seed of impurity, you are a seed of truth and holiness."<sup>32</sup>

"(God) distinguishes between holiness and the profane, between light and darkness, between Israel and the nations."<sup>33</sup>

"See how different you are from the nations! Among the nations, they adorn their wives and pass them on to other men, etc."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> B. Avodah Zarah 22b

<sup>26</sup> The following citations are suggested by Sacha Stern.

<sup>27</sup> B. Yevamot 61a

<sup>28</sup> B. Meg 12b; Est R. 3,13

<sup>29</sup> M. Ned 3,10; T. Ned 2,4-7

<sup>30</sup> Est R. 7,13

<sup>31</sup> Tanhuma Tetzave 11

<sup>32</sup> Tanh. Naso 7

<sup>33</sup> B. Pesachim 103b

<sup>34</sup> Sifra Kedoshim 11,18.

"Since Israel stood at Mt. Sinai, their filth has been removed, as to the nations who did not, their filth has not been removed."<sup>35</sup>

Yet, along with all of these negative views of the gentile -- the prohibitions, the limitations, and the descriptions of moral character -- the gentile does have some rights as a member of a minority within the Jewish community. Yehezkel Cohen writes: "Our sources, finally, show a nation which sees itself endangered by the Gentiles and thus develops a vast halakhic system in order to protect itself against them. At the same time, however, the sources teach that this halakhic system did not cut the Jew off entirely from Gentile society, and, indeed, did not intend to do so."<sup>36</sup>

It is written that in matters of law a gentile may testify in court as long as he did not intend to do so: "Concerning a gentile, if he had intended to testify, his testimony is not valid. Abba Judan of Tyre tells of a gentile and an Israelite who were walking along the road. The gentile said, 'Woe unto an Israelite who died here and I eulogized him and buried him,' and this episode came before the Sages and they permitted his wife to remarry."<sup>37</sup> According to this passage, the rabbinic court accepts the inadvertent testimony of the gentile concerning this death and because of this testimony, the widow is allowed to remarry.

In regard to capital punishment, the law is the same for both Jew and gentile. In Tosefta Sanhedrin the Rabbis write: "Capital offenders among the Israelites or capital

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<sup>35</sup> B. AZ 22b

<sup>36</sup> Yehezkel Cohen 41.

<sup>37</sup> T. Yebamoth 14:7

offenders among the nations of the world will descend to Gehinom and there be judged for twelve months, and after twelve months their souls will be destroyed and their bodies burned, and Gehinom will discharge them, and they will become dust.<sup>38</sup>

The non-Jew is protected in other ways as well. Sifre to Deuteronomy 23:16 comments: " 'in the place which he shall choose' -- where his livelihood is to be found, 'in one of your gates' -- he is not to be set wandering from place to place."<sup>39</sup> Seder Eliyahu Rabbah summarizes, "I call heaven and earth to witness that whether one be gentile or Jew according to the merit of his deeds does the Holy Spirit rest on him."<sup>40</sup>

#### Concerning the non-Jew in religious matters

In *Goyim: Gentiles and Israelites in Mishnah-Tosefta*, Gary Porton offers an important synopsis of the Jew/non-Jew relationship with regard to religious matters. It is worth including in large part:

"From the point of view of our authors,<sup>41</sup> gentiles could voluntarily choose to recognize YHWH's sovereignty over the world and the obligations which all humans owed to him. For this reason, gentiles could bring voluntary offerings to the Temple. Even when they brought these offerings, however, the complex rules which applied to the offerings of Israelites were not applied to them. Non-Israelites were not permitted to perform the detailed rituals expected of Israelites. Thus, even though both groups might approach the

<sup>38</sup> T. Sanhedrin 13:4

<sup>39</sup> Sifre Deut. 23:16; Deut 23:16-17: "Thou shalt not deliver to his master the servant who is escaped from his master to thee: he shall dwell with thee, among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it likes him best: thou shalt not oppress him."

<sup>40</sup> Seder Eliyahu Rabbah on Genesis.

<sup>41</sup> This refers to the authors of both the Mishnah and Tosefta.

Temple with their offerings to YHWH, they did so differently. Again we see that the gentile has a complex relationship to a central symbol of the sages who produced Mishnah-Tosefta. On the one hand, the sovereignty of YHWH is such that the gentiles may, and perhaps should, be cognizant of it, so that they may approach him through the rites performed at the Jerusalem Temple. On the other hand, the gentile cannot respond to YHWH and the Temple in the same manner that Israelites do. For this reason, our authors set out requirements which differentiate between Israelites and gentiles. The sovereignty and holiness of YHWH is maintained and the uniqueness of his people, the Israelites, is also upheld. This also points to the complexity of the meaning of the Temple for the sages, for at one and the same time it was a Ethnic (sic.) symbol and the residence of the Ruler of the Universe, the Sovereign of all peoples.<sup>42</sup>

Non-Jews, as portrayed in Rabbinic literature, are thus included in certain general areas and excluded from more specific rites. For instance, the gentile is not trusted with regard to matters of ritual cleanliness or tithes. Tosefta Demai reads: "He who grinds near a peasant or near a Samaritan does not have to be suspicious of them because of uncleanness, but he who grinds near a Gentile must suspect him of ritual uncleanness."<sup>43</sup> It continues, "An Israelite shall not say to a Gentile or a Samaritan or to anyone who is not believed concerning the tithes."<sup>44</sup>

In Mishnah Terumoth, the gentile is grouped together with the deaf-mute, the imbecile, and the minor, all of whom are forbidden to give the heave-offering.<sup>45</sup> Tosefta Terumoth offers two conflicting opinions: "[if] a gentile gives the heave-offering from that

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<sup>42</sup> Porton, *Goyim* 267-268.

<sup>43</sup> T. Demai 4:27.

<sup>44</sup> T. Demai 6:4.

<sup>45</sup> M. Terumoth 1:1.

which belongs to an Israelite, even with the permission of the Israelite, his heave-offering is not valid [If] a gentile offers the heave-offering from that which belongs to an Israelite, and the owner fulfills the commandment through his hands, his heave-offering is valid <sup>46</sup>

However, in Tosefta Shekalim, some notable rabbis make exceptions <sup>47</sup> Rabbi Jose the Galilean accepts burnt offerings and peace offerings from gentiles. The Tosefta remarks "All public and private sacrifices may come from Palestine or from outside Palestine even from among the gentiles except for the offering of the first born and the tithe which may come only from Palestine and only from Israelites." <sup>48</sup> Rabbi Akiba accepts, in addition to burnt offerings and peace offerings, fowl and gift offerings from gentiles. The work also indicates that the priest and Israelite can accept peace offerings from a gentile <sup>49</sup> In Tosefta Hullin, gentiles may participate with a Jew in slaughtering, which does not render meat non kosher. The Rabbis write: "An Israelite and a gentile who were holding the slaughtering knife and killing, even if one was holding it from the top and the other from the bottom, their slaughtering is kosher" <sup>50</sup>

Most references to non-Jewish participation in religious rites is, however, negative. While Exodus (20:10) reads, "...the seventh day is a sabbath unto the Lord thy God, in it thou

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<sup>46</sup> T. Terumoth 1:15.

<sup>47</sup> T. Shekalim 1:7.

<sup>48</sup> T. Menahoth 9:1.

<sup>49</sup> T. Shekalim 3:12.

<sup>50</sup> T. Hullin 1:3.



shalt not do any manner of work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates," the Talmud insists that, "an idolater who keeps a Sabbath is liable to death."<sup>51</sup>

Extensive commentary is given to the issue of Torah study by non-Jews. In Sanhedrin, Rabbi Yohanan proclaims, "A non-Jew who engages in the study of Torah is culpable of death."<sup>52</sup> In Deuteronomy, it is written: "Moses has commanded us the Torah, an inheritance (*morashah*) for the community of Jacob."<sup>53</sup> Based on this verse, the Rabbis argue: "The one who says that the verse should be understood literally, to call the Torah an 'inheritance' (*morashah*), prohibits a Noahite against Torah study, because he is stealing the Torah by studying it. And the one who says that the verse should be expounded, to call the Torah 'a betrothed' (*me-orasah*) of the Israelites, would say the judgment is like that of one who commits adultery with a betrothed and is therefore subject to stoning." However, Rambam<sup>54</sup> and Kesef Mishneh<sup>55</sup> later insist that any punishment is meted out by the Heavenly and not human court.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> B. Sanhedrin 58b.

<sup>52</sup> T. Sanhedrin 59a.

<sup>53</sup> Deut. 33:4.

<sup>54</sup> Rambam -- Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1135-1204) Morocco and Egypt. Rambam was a rabbinic authority, legal codifier, philosopher, and physician.

<sup>55</sup> Kesef Mishnah refers to the sixteenth-century work by the Sephardic rabbi Joseph Karo.

<sup>56</sup> Rambam, Teshuvot Pe'or ha-Dor #50; Kesef Mishneh, Hilkhoh Melakhim 10:9

The purpose of Torah study, as understood by the rabbis, is to implement its teachings. Two potential problems arise from this notion: 1) A gentile who will not implement the teachings commits an offense. Thus, the Meiri<sup>57</sup> says that a non-Jew may study Torah and even acquire merit for doing so if his intentions are to fulfill the precepts which he studies. 2) Gentiles might purposefully or accidentally misinterpret the Torah and thus cause others to commit heresy – assuming that they then teach these misunderstandings to others.<sup>58</sup> The Tosafists<sup>59</sup> in Baba Kamma also assert that “one who teaches Torah to non-Jews transgresses a positive commandment.”<sup>60</sup>

However, even in Sanhedrin there is descent over the prohibition of Torah study by non-Jews. The statement by Rabbi Yohanan is challenged: “From where do we know that even an idolater who engrosses himself in Torah study is like the Cohen Gadol (High Priest)? It is stated: (concerning Torah) that a ‘man should keep them and live by them.’<sup>61</sup> It is not stated, ‘Cohanim, Levi'im and Yisraelim,’ rather, ‘man’. You have thus learned that even an idolater who engrosses himself in Torah study is like a Cohen Gadol.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Meiri – Menachem b. Solomon Meiri (1249-1316), Provence, France. Commentator and Halachist, wrote the Beit HaBechirah.

<sup>58</sup> Blicch 313-314.

<sup>59</sup> Tosafists (12th-14th century), Ashkenaz. Commentators whose works (the Tosafot) are included on each Talmud page.

<sup>60</sup> Baba Kamma 38a.

<sup>61</sup> Leviticus 18:5.

<sup>62</sup> B. Sanhedrin 59a.

In the Yerushalmi, Tabi, a servant of Rabbi Gamaliel, acquires vast knowledge because he either sits in on discussions or receives direct instruction.<sup>63</sup> The Gemara of Haggigah 13a says that such instruction is contrary to the meaning of Psalm 147, which reads: "He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgements to Israel. He has not dealt so with any other nation. And as for His ordinances, they have not known them."<sup>64</sup> Rabbi Ami adds that, "it is not permitted to give over the words of Torah to a non-Jew." However, Maharsha understands "to give over" as "to give over the secrets and reasons" of the law. Therefore, everything that is not a secret or a reason can be taught. The Tosaphists, however, contend that any teaching is akin to putting a stumbling block in front of the blind<sup>65</sup> because the gentile is not able to understand the commandment nor is he interested in following the precepts.

Rambam claims that the prohibition against teaching Torah is only for those gentiles who do not accept the divinity of the Torah.<sup>66</sup> For Rambam, this category of gentiles includes Muslims. However, since Christians accept the Bible as the revealed word of God, they can be taught the mitzvot and their explanations. He believes that at best this may lead them to accept the "correct" meaning of the Bible, but in any case it will do them no harm.

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<sup>63</sup> Y. Megilla 5:3.

<sup>64</sup> Psalm 147: 19-20.

<sup>65</sup> This is a reference to Lev. 19: 14: "Thou shalt not curse the deaf nor put a stumbling block before the blind. . . ."

<sup>66</sup> Teshuvot ha Rambam #364 — ed. Chaim Freiman.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Judah Hassid teaches that a Jew should not even teach the Hebrew alphabet to a priest.<sup>67</sup> He believes that such knowledge might be used against the Jews at a later time. However, he also writes that, "If one comes unto thee, who does not know the Hebrew language, but is God-fearing, or if it is a woman, tell them they should say the prayers in the language they are accustomed to."<sup>68</sup>

### Who is a gentile?

"Who is a gentile?" is not as easy a question for the Rabbis as it might appear. In numerous places, the Rabbis write, "that anyone who denies idolatry is called a Jew."<sup>69</sup> The Rabbis state in Hullin: "the gentiles outside of the Land are not idolaters, they only continue the customs of their ancestors."<sup>70</sup> The Tosefta adds: "within the land of Israel, too, they do not really intend that their actions will be in the name of idolatry."<sup>71</sup>

Rabbenu Asher<sup>72</sup>, in his commentary to Avodah Zarah 11b, accepts that idolaters of the past are not the same as gentiles today. He writes:

"we do not refrain from doing business with gentiles, or lending and borrowing from them, or collecting from them, or paying them, even on their festival day. Rashbam, in the name of his teacher Rashi explains: 'Now the gentiles amongst us are not idolaters and they do not worship, as it says

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<sup>67</sup> Sefer Hasidim #238.

<sup>68</sup> Sefer Hasidim #11.

<sup>69</sup> B. Meg 13a, Y. Ned 3.4.38 a&b; B. Ned 25a.

<sup>70</sup> B. Hullin 13b.

<sup>71</sup> T. Hullin 13b.

<sup>72</sup> Rabbenu Asher -- Asher b. Jehiel (Rosh) (c.1250-1327), Talmud commentator.

in the first chapter of Hullin, 'gentiles outside the land of Israel, they are not idolaters, rather they follow the customs of their ancestors.' Now that we see that gentiles outside the land of Israel do not go out and give thanks even on their festival days, there is (room) to permit (business with them even on their festival days). Additionally, the main issue is our making a living from them and we do business with them all the days of the year. If we separated from them (every day of the year) their festival days there would be enmity."<sup>73</sup>

Rambam alludes to the idolatrous nature of Christianity in his time: "Canaanites are idolaters and Sunday is their [festival] day."<sup>74</sup> However, he does not view Muslims (or Ishmaelites) in this same idolatrous light.<sup>75</sup>

Moses Isserless<sup>76</sup>, the Bach and Shabbetai ben Meir HaKohen<sup>77</sup> (Siftei Kohen) insist that Christians today are not idolaters.<sup>78</sup> Isserless writes, regarding the idolatrous practice of pouring out wine for idols and the subsequent prohibition against using any wine handled by gentiles: "at this time we do not find nations practicing libation." The Siftei Kohen adds: "The Bach wrote that even if they poured it (wine) out before idols in the fashion of libations, it has been established that idolatry outside the land is not idolatry, but is rather a practice

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<sup>73</sup> Rosh to Avodah Zarah 11b.

<sup>74</sup> Hilchot Avodah Zarah 9:4.

<sup>75</sup> Malachot Asurot 11:7.

<sup>76</sup> Moses Isserles -- the Rama (c. 1525-1572), Poland. Wrote commentary on Shulchan Aruch.

<sup>77</sup> Shabbetai ben Meir HaKohen (1621-1662), Lithuania. Wrote the Siftei Kohen and he is often referred to by this title, which is a commentary on "Yoreh Deah" of Shulchan Aruch.

<sup>78</sup> Yorei Deah 123:1.

passed down by their ancestors. If so, then one who pours out wine for idolatry is not called 'libational', since we say of them that they do not know the true nature of idolatry."

**Who is a sympathizer, *Ger Toshav*, or *Yirei Shamayim*?**

The citations above prompt the question: if these people are not idolaters and they are not Jews, what are they? *Makilta* de-Rabbi Ishmael provides an answer as it delineates four categories of true worshipers of God: 1) the sinless Israelite, 2) the righteous (i.e., full) proselyte, 3) the repentant sinner, and 4) the heaven-fearer (*Yirei Shamayim*)<sup>79</sup>

It is this last category of worshipers that is most enlightening. Louis Feldman writes that the term *Yirei Shamayim* is developed, "by the rabbis as a complimentary term for the 'sympathizers', as distinguished from the proselytes and the 'resident aliens' "<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the listing in *Makilta* above distinguishes between proselytes and heaven-fearers. Feldman asserts that the sympathizers do not necessarily accept monotheism, as the *gerei toshav* do, which is a basic tenet of the Noachian creed. This distinction, however, seems to be counter-indicated by the *Makilta*.

Rabbinic literature recognizes a number of these *yirei shamayim*. In Deuteronomy Rabbah, a Roman senator, who commits suicide rather than allow the Jews to be killed (around 95 CE), is described as such. It is written: "the Roman Senate issued a decree that within thirty days no Jew would be found in the Roman world. . . . Now one of the Emperor's senators was a God-fearing man. His wife was even more righteous than he and she said

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<sup>79</sup> *Makilta* 18 on Ex. 22:20

<sup>80</sup> Feldman, "Jewish 'Sympathizers' " 200 note 2.

to him, 'have you not a ring (containing poison)? Suck it and die and the sitting of the Senate will be suspended for thirty days and the decree will not come into force.' He followed her advice and sucked his ring and died."

In Leviticus Rabbah the rabbis expound on Psalm 22, which reads: "You who fear the Lord, praise him." R. Joshua ben Levi and R. Samuel bar Nahman do not agree on whether the term "you who fear the Lord" refers to proselytes or heaven-fearers.<sup>81</sup> Their argument, though not providing a clear definition, does indicate that there is a difference between these two categories.

Pesikta Rabbati also carries on a dispute which confirms two classes. Here the discussion focuses on a Midrash in which Sarah nurses the nations of the world after giving birth to Isaac.<sup>82</sup> "According to Rabbi Levi, those who were brought (to nurse) in sincerity became proselytes. . . those who were brought to check up on Sarah achieved distinction in the world through promotion to great office. Accordingly, all Gentiles throughout the world who accept conversion and all Gentiles throughout the world *who fear God* spring from the children who drank of the milk of Sarah."<sup>83</sup>

In Genesis Rabbah, the distinction between a convert and a fearer of Heaven is stated. Rabbi Hannina is quoted: "The cities of the sea are deserving of extermination, and by what

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<sup>81</sup> Lev. Rabbah 3.2., on Psalm 22:24.

<sup>82</sup> This is meant to satisfy the nations that Sarah is indeed fertile and that Isaac is her son and not the son of a handmaid.

<sup>83</sup> Pesikta Rabbati 43.



ment are they delivered? By the merit of a single convert, or a single fearer of Heaven whom they produce each year.”<sup>84</sup>

In the Jerusalem Talmud, it is written that in the time of the Messiah, only the heaven-fearers, “who shared the tribulations of Israel would be accepted as full proselytes, with the Emperor Antoninus, at their head.”<sup>85</sup>

The fourteenth-century Magid Mishnah states that, “... an uncircumcised slave who stipulates that he will not be circumcised or immersed, but will observe the seven noahite commandments is called a ‘resident slave’ (*eved toshav*). In a few places he is called an uncircumcised slave.” His legal status is *k’ger toshav*.<sup>86</sup>

In all of the definitions of *ger toshav*, the key distinction is the renunciation of idolatry. This is understandable given the view of idolatry in the Talmud. In Horayot, it is written: “All the commandments of the Torah were compared to the prohibition against idolatry.”<sup>87</sup> In Hullin: “Grave is idolatry in that he who denies it is as if he accepts the whole Torah.”<sup>88</sup> And Megillah: “For anyone who repudiated idolatry is called a Jew, as it is Written, ‘there are certain Jews, etc.’”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Gen. Rab. 28.5

<sup>85</sup> Y. Megillah 3.2.74a

<sup>86</sup> B. Shabbat 20.12.

<sup>87</sup> B. Horayot 8a

<sup>88</sup> B. Hullin 5a.

<sup>89</sup> B. Megillah 13a.



Unlike the *theosebais* in Hellenistic times, it is difficult to establish whether or not the *Ger toshav* actually exists in practice for the Rabbis. David Novak writes in *The Origins of the Noahide Laws*, that “in situations of less than full Jewish sovereignty, the *ger toshav* did not constitute a complete political status because the Noahide laws<sup>90</sup> which defined the status were not fully enforceable.”<sup>91</sup> The Talmud only enforces the status when the Jubilee is celebrated. “Rabbi Shimon ben Eleazer said: ‘The law concerning the resident alien applies only at the time when the law of the Jubilee applies.’ Bibi said, ‘What is the reason?’ ‘Because it is inferred from the (repeated) word ‘well’. Here it is written ‘because it is well for him with you,’<sup>92</sup> and there it is written ‘where it is good (well) for him, do not wrong him.’”<sup>93</sup>

Following the exile of 587 BCE, two and a half tribes did not return to the Land of Israel. Since the Jubilee is only celebrated when all Jews are free and living in the Land, it is likely that the status was not enforced. William Braude, believes that it is “very likely the *ger*

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<sup>90</sup> The Noahide Laws are, according to Jewish tradition, incumbent upon all non-Jews as descendants of Noah. These are the seven laws according to Sanhedrin 56a: 1) Not to deny God (idolatry); 2) Not to blaspheme God; 3) Not to murder; 4) Not to engage in incestuous, adulterous, bestial, or homosexual relationships; 5) Not to steal; 6) not to eat a limb torn from a living animal; 7) To set up courts to ensure obedience to the other six laws.

<sup>91</sup> Novak, *Origins* 303.

<sup>92</sup> Deut. 15:16.

<sup>93</sup> Deut. 23:17; Arakin 29a.

*toshav* disappeared as a legal entity even before the first century.<sup>94</sup> Yehezkel Cohen, believes that the *ger toshav* did not even exist during or after the Second Temple Period.<sup>95</sup>

The Rambam defines the *ger toshav* but gives him no status in his day. He writes, "He is a gentile who has agreed to obey the Noachide laws and not worship idols. He is not circumcised nor does he undergo ritual immersion. We accept him, for he is one of the righteous of the nations. He is permitted to be among us in Eretz Yisrael, however, we do not accept him except at the Jubilee, and even now, even if he has accepted all of the Torah, we do not accept him."<sup>96</sup> This category, for Rambam, is therefore only applicable when Jews are living in the land of Israel. However, he also writes in his Mishneh Torah that "slaves (servants) that are not circumcised or immersed, but have accepted the seven commandments that were commanded to the Sons of Noah – behold, they are like a *ger toshav*."<sup>97</sup> Thus, even though the Jubilee is not celebrated today, one who accepts the seven Noahide laws may be considered like a *ger toshav*.

The Meiri continues in this line of thinking. He writes: "They (the laws regarding non-Jews) all concern ancient nations that were not delineated by the ways of religion. Therefore, every individual who worships the Deity even though he is not of the (our) religion, is not, heaven forbid, included under this law (of the idolatrous nations). And, as

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<sup>94</sup> Braude 136.

<sup>95</sup> Yehezkel Cohen 35.

<sup>96</sup> Rambam, "Issurei Be'ah" 14:7-8.

<sup>97</sup> Shabbat 20:14.

you know, in the case of the resident alien, i.e., the one who has accepted the seven Noahide laws, you are commanded to keep him alive."<sup>98</sup> He writes elsewhere: "Nations that are controlled by religious or ethical tradition must be considered as such who have accepted the Noahide laws. No matter how far removed we are from their creeds, they must be treated like Jews in that their lost property must be returned, an error to their disadvantage must be corrected and all similar righteousness and kindness must be observed."<sup>99</sup>

### **The role of the *Ger Toshav***

Whether or not the *ger toshav* exists for the Rabbis in actuality, the *ger toshav* does exist in potentiality. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine the role of the *ger toshav* in Rabbinic Literature. Adam Fisher writes that "a *ger toshav* was not a Jew but one who accepted some of the most basic laws of human decency and was, therefore, permitted to live within the favor of the autonomous Jewish community in its own land."<sup>100</sup> He also notes that "these individuals had a legal claim on the generosity of the Jewish community in times of need."<sup>101</sup> *The Encyclopedia Talmudit* states that the *ger toshav* is not bound to the Sabbath laws. He may choose to do something for a Jew without being asked. However, a Jew is not permitted to request work from a *ger toshav* on the Sabbath.<sup>102</sup> The Magid Mishneh states

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<sup>98</sup> Beit HaBechirah to Avodah Zarah 59-60

<sup>99</sup> Jung 36.

<sup>100</sup> Fisher, "The Ger Toshav" 52.

<sup>101</sup> Fisher, "The Ger Toshav" 51.

<sup>102</sup> "Ger Toshav," *Encyclopedia Talmudit* 298.

that, "A resident slave and a *ger toshav* cannot do work [on Shabbat] for any Israelite, whether it is his master or not – this is a matter from the Torah. However, they may do work for themselves like an Israelite during the rest of the week."<sup>103</sup>

The Rabbis in *Avodah Zarah* note that a *ger toshav* is one who takes upon himself the Noahide laws and one who observes all precepts except ritual slaughter (*kashrut*). The Rabbis argue:

"Who is a *ger toshav*? Any gentile who takes upon himself in the presence of three *haberim*<sup>104</sup> not to worship idols – such is the statement of Rabbi Meir. But the Sages declare: [A *ger toshav* is] any Gentile who takes upon himself the seven precepts which the sons of Noah undertook. Still others maintain: These do not come within the category of a *ger toshav*, but who is a *ger toshav*? A proselyte who eats of animals not ritually slaughtered, i.e., he took upon himself to observe all the precepts mentioned in the Torah apart from the prohibition of (eating the flesh of) animals not ritually slaughtered."<sup>105</sup>

However, the next Talmud page asserts that, "three *haberim* are necessary only if the *ger toshav* requires the support of the community."<sup>106</sup>

Rashi, in his commentary on *Yebamot*, writes that a *ger toshav* is, "one that agrees not to worship idols, but eats unclean foods. Scripture warns him concerning the Sabbath,

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<sup>103</sup> Shabbat 20:14.

<sup>104</sup> *Haberim* are in this instance, representatives of the community or judges on a rabbinical court.

<sup>105</sup> A.Z. 64b.

<sup>106</sup> A.Z. 65a.

because profaning the Sabbath is like idolatry.<sup>107</sup> The Tosafists add that not only must a *ger toshav* refrain from idol worship and keep Shabbat, but he must also keep the seven Noahide laws.<sup>108</sup> Elsewhere, the Tosafists hold that a *ger toshav* is an idolater who has rejected idolatry and does not break Shabbat for an Israelite's benefit.<sup>109</sup>

The Rabbis in Babba Kama write: "all who hold to the seven commandments are treated equally in the law with us and there is no favoritism for us. It goes without saying that this is so for the nations who are disciplined in the ways of religions and civilization."<sup>110</sup>

In Gerim there is a dispute recorded between two rabbis. The text asks: "What is a 'resident proselyte'?" [in the view of Rabbi Meir:] One who undertakes to abstain from idolatry; Rabbi Judah said: Whoever undertakes not to eat flesh that has not been ritually slaughtered.<sup>111</sup>

The Meiri, states that, "Anyone we know who does not practice idolatry is called a *ger toshav* [in terms of the ability to trade their wine]. But [in regard to] the commandment to sustain him, he is not called a *ger toshav* until he accepts the seven precepts [of the

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<sup>107</sup> Yebamot 48b.

<sup>108</sup> Yebamot 48b, Shabbat is not one of the seven Noahide laws.

<sup>109</sup> Keritot 9a.

<sup>110</sup> Babba Kama 37b.

<sup>111</sup> Gerim 3:1.

Noahide laws] before three [rabbis]. Although [such a person] is not circumcised or immersed, [he is] a regular *ger toshav* by keeping the seven precepts."<sup>112</sup>

Joseph Karo<sup>113</sup>, in *Shulchan Aruch*, seems to take the *ger toshav* status for granted. He states, "a *ger toshav* that has accepted upon himself the seven commandments, and so too, the uncircumcised, unimmersed proselyte, his touch forbids [it, wine] from drinking."<sup>114</sup> Elsewhere he writes, "I have already written above that there is no resemblance between an unimmersed, circumcised proselyte and a *ger toshav*. Because a *ger toshav* accepts [the seven commandments] now and the proselyte does not accept until after immersion."<sup>115</sup>

The Rambam writes: "Anyone who accepts the seven commandments and who accepts not to violate them, behold, he is from the righteous of the nations, and he has a place in the world to come [provided] that he accepts them and observes them because God commanded them in the Torah and made them known through Moses, our teacher, that the children of Noah were commanded concerning [them, the observance of the seven laws] earlier. However, if he observes them because of rational thought, he is not a *ger toshav* and his is not one of the righteous of the nations nor of their wise men."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Avodah Zarah 64b

<sup>113</sup> Joseph Karo (1488-1575). Wrote the Beit Yosef and Shulchan Aruch.

<sup>114</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Yorei Deah 124:2.

<sup>115</sup> Beit Yosef to Tur, Yorei Deah 124.

<sup>116</sup> Melachim 8:11.

The *ger toshav* reaps many benefits of this favored status. The Rabbis note in Babba Kama: "a resident alien, of a different race and of a different religion, since he respects the covenant of the law made by God with all the children of Noah . . . he is a citizen enjoying all the rights and privileges of civil law."<sup>117</sup> On the other hand, those who do not uphold Noahide laws are outside of the protection of the civil law of Israel. "God beheld the seven commandments which were accepted by all the descendants of Noah, but since they did not observe them, He rose up and declared them to be outside the protection of the civil law of Israel."<sup>118</sup>

Rambam notes that Israelites are to provide judges for a *ger toshav* that will rule based upon non-Israelite laws. He writes, "An Israelite court is required to provide judges for *gerai toshav* to decide for them according to their laws so the world will not be destroyed. It is within the court's authority to appoint *ger toshav* or Israelite judges for them. . . . we always judge him (the *ger toshav*) by their laws. Thus it seems to me that we should practice the same consideration and kindness to the *ger toshav* as to an Israelite."<sup>119</sup> Elsewhere the Rambam writes, "a *ger toshav*, behold you are commanded to sustain him, we tend to him for free."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Babba Kama 113b

<sup>118</sup> Babba kama 38a.

<sup>119</sup> Melachim 10:11-12.

<sup>120</sup> A.Z. 10:2.

The protection for a *ger toshav* is given support in Gittin: "For it is has been written 'They shall not dwell in your land lest they make you sin against me, etc. (Ex23:33) Shall I say that the text speaks of a heathen who has undertaken not to practice idolatry? [This cannot be, because] it is written, 'You shall not deliver unto his master a servant which is escaped from his master unto you.'<sup>121</sup> What is to be done with him? 'He shall dwell with you, etc.'"<sup>122</sup>

In Gerim it is stated: "We do not marry him (to a Jewess) or take to wife women from him. We do not lend to him or borrow from him on interest."<sup>123</sup> But, the *ger toshav* is given good land to ensure a healthy living and life and is not treated as a second class citizen.<sup>124</sup>

In Babba Metzia, an interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:14 is given: "'You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether from among your brothers or from among your converts who are in your land and in your gates,' in which we are told that the phrase 'from among your converts' refers to the righteous convert, and the phrase 'who are in your gates' refers to the *ger toshav*."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Deut. 23:16.

<sup>122</sup> Gittin 45a.

<sup>123</sup> Gerim 3:3.

<sup>124</sup> Gerim 3:4.

<sup>125</sup> Babba Metzia 111b.



The rabbis lay out a number of limitations for the *ger toshav*. Tosefta Negaim states that the *ger toshav* may not live in Jerusalem.<sup>126</sup> Babba Metziah says that they may not be charged usury and that they contract ritual impurity due to leprosy.<sup>127</sup>

### The role of the convert

The liturgical role of the sympathizer or semi-proselyte is not discussed in rabbinic literature. A quick study of liturgical restrictions placed upon converts may therefore be instructive as these people are held in higher esteem than the non-Jew, sympathizer, or *ger toshav*. Sacha Stern, writes: "It seems that to be non-Jewish and righteous is so inherently contradictory that the only viable option, for these exceptional individuals, is to convert."<sup>128</sup> Yet, even converts are not given free reign. In Mishnah Bikkurim, the following is laid out regarding the bringing of the first fruits to the Temple<sup>129</sup>

- 1) A convert may bring the offering but does not say the quote from Deuteronomy, "(the land) which God has sworn to our fathers to give us."
- 2) If one's mother is of Israel, he recites this passage.
- 3) When a convert prays by himself he says, "God of the fathers of Israel."
- 4) When a convert is with the community he says "God of your fathers."
- 5) If his mother is of Israel he says "our fathers."

In Yerushalmi Bikkurim, Rabbi Judah rejects this Mishnah and says that converts can indeed bring the first fruits and recite the declaration because Abraham is the father to all

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<sup>126</sup> T. Negaim 6:4

<sup>127</sup> Babba Metziah 5:6 and 3:1

<sup>128</sup> S. Stern 30.

<sup>129</sup> Bikkurim 1:4-5:4.

gentiles who convert.<sup>130</sup> Rabbi Abbahu extends this provision to include the recitation “our fathers” in the prayer of converts. Although using a different context, Bavli Makkot supports the Mishnah’s exclusiveness.<sup>131</sup> In Babba Batra, Rabbenu Tam and his nephew, Rabbi Isaac of Dampier argue over whether a convert can lead prayer. They cite both of these passages, with Rabbi Tam following the lead of the Mishnah, while his nephew favored the Yerushalmi.<sup>132</sup>

Shaye J.D. Cohen brings evidence that in Wurzburg a convert was prevented from being the prayer leader for the community.<sup>133</sup> A convert in Egypt was prohibited from saying “our fathers” and in France a convert was not allowed to lead *Birkat Hamazon*.<sup>134</sup> In a letter to Obadiah the Convert, however, Rambam uses the Yerushalmi’s inclusion of converts to affirm that a convert may say anything in prayer that a born-Jew can say, i.e., “our” fathers and chose “us”. Later, the Shulchan Aruch also allows converts to say “God of our fathers” and lead the congregation in prayer and *Birkat Hamazon*.<sup>135</sup>

In Sefer Hassidim it is written that a Jew should not “answer ‘amen’ when a gentile says: ‘our God will help thee,’ but to say ‘amen’ on the other hand when the gentile says:

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<sup>130</sup> Y. Bikkurim 1:4.

<sup>131</sup> B. Makkot 19a.

<sup>132</sup> Babba Batra 81a.

<sup>133</sup> This information is transmitted by R. Eliezer b. Joel Halevi. qtd. in Cohen, “Can Converts to Judaism” 424-5.

<sup>134</sup> Cohen, “Can Converts” 425-426.

<sup>135</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Orah Hayyim 53:19 and 199:4.

'Thy God will help thee'.<sup>136</sup> Sefer Hassidim adds that, "unless a Gentile accepts the whole Torah with no exceptions whatever, they do not receive him into the community, nor does he live up to the ideal of *torah Adonai t'mimah*."<sup>137</sup> Sefer Hassidim also warns not to let a gentile view a corpse in the grave, nor to let him open the ark which contains the Torah.<sup>138</sup>

From this short study of the rules for converts in regard to religious ritual, it is possible to conclude that non-Jewish sympathizers would not have been welcome in public prayer during the Rabbinic era. At times it is difficult for the Rabbis to extend equal rights to the full proselyte, let alone a semi-proselyte or *ger toshav*.

### Conclusion

The role of the gentile, *yerei hashamayim* and *ger toshav* within the Jewish community may never have been a practical issue. It is likely that the Rabbis only view their involvement in the community as hypothetical. However, today the Sabbatical year is symbolically observed in remembrance of both the ancient Jubilee and the ancient Sabbatical year.<sup>139</sup> As Brian Michelson writes, "If some of the laws concerning the Sabbatical year are being observed as a memory, then it is not unreasonable to suggest that some of the laws of

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<sup>136</sup> Sefer Hassidim #1348.

<sup>137</sup> Sefer Hassidim #805.

<sup>138</sup> Sefer Hassidim #1563.

<sup>139</sup> The Sabbatical year is observed every seven years in Israel today.

the Jubilee year could be 'reinstated'. If this was to be the case, then, from a traditional standpoint, the reinstatement of the status of *ger toshav* may be possible.<sup>140</sup>

Even without the reinstatement of such classifications as *ger toshav* and *yirei shamayim*, it must be remembered that the laws concerning the gentile were not derived out of hatred of the non-Jew, but rather in order to preserve Judaism itself. Furthermore, Rambam writes, "The Sages ruled that even for idolaters, one should visit their sick, bury their dead with Jewish dead, and support their poor along with the poor of Israel, out of the principle of *darchei shalom* (the paths of peace) . . ."<sup>141</sup>

From this study we can conclude that whether or not the role of the sympathizer was actual for the rabbis, the role was, at the least, potential. The category of "sympathizer" was being prepared for should the occasion of its need arise. Therefore, although Rabbinic literature portrays an exclusive society, it also makes allowances for the participation of the non-Jew in the Jewish community.

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<sup>140</sup> Michelson 89.

<sup>141</sup> Hilchot Melachim 10:12.

## Part II

### A Portrait of the American Jewish Community Today

In a 1990 article, Dr. Egon Mayer<sup>1</sup> writes the following: "From the dawn of the liberal era in late eighteenth- early nineteenth-century Europe, the majority of Jews chose social, religious, and cultural adaptability as a strategy for group survival. The operative slogan for the Jewish *modus vivendi* was to be a Jew in one's home and a citizen on the street. As part of this strategy, liberal Jewish thought argued that Jewish survival is best secured by three factors: tolerance, law, and social invisibility."<sup>2</sup> Dr. Mayer argues that Jews were indeed successful in this endeavor. In general, Jews achieved tolerance within the greater European and later American society. "Gentiles did not single out Jews for any special deprivation simply because of their Jewishness. It was perceived as generalized social amiability, or at the very least a benign neglect of those aspects of personal belief and religious practice that distinguished Jew from Gentile."<sup>3</sup> Jews understood that to ensure this tolerance, rights and liberties had to be guaranteed for all. Jews thus became leading proponents of civil rights and liberal social legislation. Finally, Mayer concludes, social invisibility, in which Jews did nothing to make them look different, was necessary. These three factors proved successful for the first few generations of American Jews. Later generations, however, did not understand that letting go of self-identity markers in order to become invisible was only done

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Egon Mayer is professor of Sociology at the Center for Jewish Studies, CUNY Graduate School and University Center, New York.

<sup>2</sup> Mayer, "Intermarriage" 202.

<sup>3</sup> Mayer, "Intermarriage" 202-203.

by predecessors to gain access to the larger society. Instead, these next generations saw invisibility as the natural course of events. Jews assimilated into mainstream society and "Jew" simply became one of a multitude of possible labels for people -- nothing more.

In Mayer's portrait of American Jewry, the old adage applies that, "too much of a good thing can be detrimental." The more the Jew assimilates to find a safe place in society, the less he/she is able to retain a hold of Judaism. This fact is proven by the data on American Jewry that is ever increasing and becoming more sophisticated. One of the most important recent studies of the Jewish community was conducted by the Council of Jewish Federations, under the leadership of Dr. Barry Kosmin.<sup>4</sup> This study, *The National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS)*, has been the igniting spark for volumes of literature since it was published in 1990. It paints a stark, although not unexpected, picture of the Jewish community.

### **The American Jewish Population**

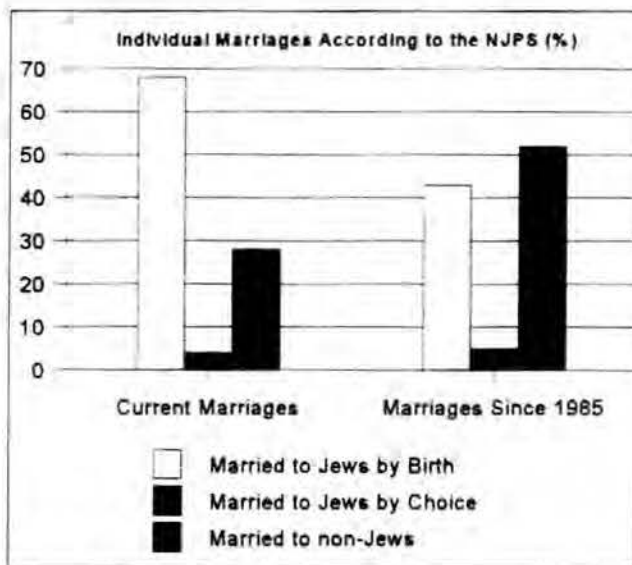
The *NJPS* finds that approximately 8.1 million people are currently living in 3.2 million households where someone identifies ethnically or religiously as Jewish.<sup>5</sup> This study also defines a "core" Jewish population which numbers 5.5 million people. A "core" Jew is one who is a Jew by Choice or a Jew by Birth, not currently practicing another religion. An additional 1.35 million people, or sixteen percent (16 %) of the population, is not Jewish. The remainder consists of over 1.3 million children and adults who either converted out of Judaism or were/are being raised as non-Jews.

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Barry A. Kosmin is the Director of the North American Jewish Data Bank.

<sup>5</sup> All data in this thesis that is attributed to the National Jewish Population Survey is found in: Barry A. Kosmin, et al, Highlights

Of current marriages of Jews by Birth, sixty-eight percent (68%) are to other Jews by Birth, four percent (4%) are to Jews by Choice, and twenty-eight percent (28%) are to non-Jews. This includes all those currently married, regardless of the date of their wedding. Since 1985, however, numbers have decreased to the point that only forty-three percent (43%) of born Jews marry other born Jews, with an additional five percent (5%) marrying Jews by Choice. Even taken together, these low numbers are dramatized when one recognizes data for "households" rather than "individuals". For instance, this forty-eight percent (48%)



represents forty-eight (48) of every one hundred (100) individual marrying Jews, not marriages or households. Simple arithmetic shows that these forty-eight (48) of every one hundred (100) Jews since 1985 who married only created twenty-four (24) Jewish households. On the other hand, the remaining fifty-two percent (52%) of the

population who married non-Jews created fifty-two (52) interfaith households. Thus, less than one-third of the marriages involving a Jew included another Jew by Birth or Jew by Choice. With such statistics, it is clear that more and more non-Jews are joining the Jewish community, even if only tangentially.



Steven Cohen, in an article entitled "Why Intermarriage May Not Threaten Jewish Continuity," disagrees with many of the statistics produced by the *NJPS*. He maintains that due to questionable collection and interpretation of data, actual rates of assimilation, out-conversion, and interfaith marriage are much lower than reported. For instance, he insists that the American Jewish community has gained three times as many people from conversion as have been lost.<sup>6</sup> Cohen estimates the interfaith marriage rate at forty-one percent (41%), rather than the fifty-two percent (52%) suggested by the *NJPS*.<sup>7</sup> Discrepancies aside, Cohen agrees that interfaith marriage rates are high and increasing.

In 1992, further information on the American Jewish community was provided by a study published in the *American Jewish Yearbook* by Peter Medding, et al. Though the *Medding Report* uncovers slightly different data regarding interfaith marriage, it none-the-less sheds further light on the expanding ranks of non-Jews in the broader Jewish community.<sup>8</sup>

According to the *Medding Report*, prior to 1960, ninety-four percent (94%) of Jews by Birth married other Jews by Birth. However, in-marriages in each of the succeeding decades dropped by ten percent (10%) so that the percentage of Jews by Birth married to Jews by Birth in the 1980's was down to sixty-two percent (62%). In this decade, five

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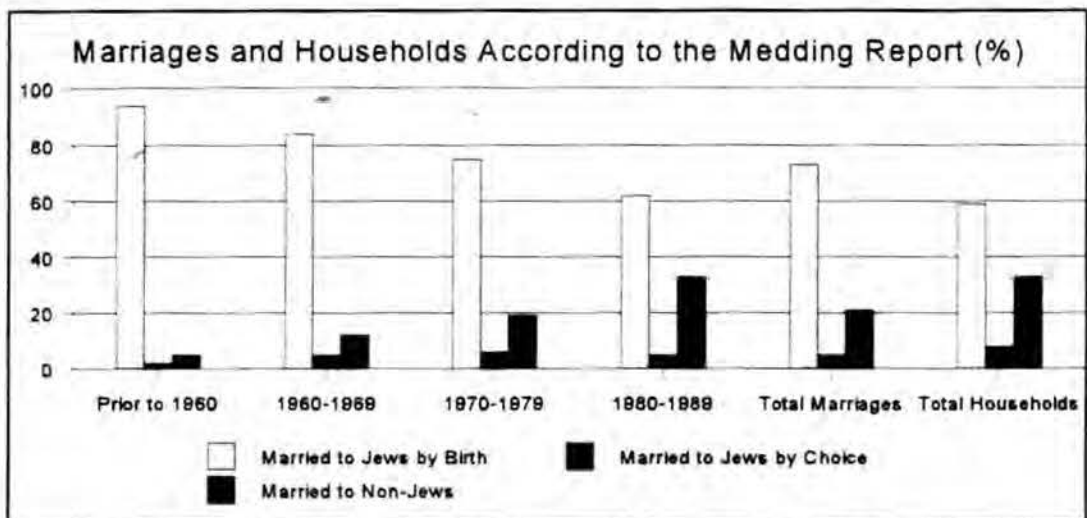
<sup>6</sup> S.M. Cohen 57.

<sup>7</sup> S.M. Cohen 95.

<sup>8</sup> The *Medding Report* is based on surveys by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. The data are collected from eight Jewish communities, comprising 9.75% of American Jewry. The communities are: Baltimore, Boston, Essex and Morris counties (New Jersey), Providence, Worcester, Cleveland, Dallas, and the San Francisco Bay area.



percent (5%) of Jews by Birth married Jews by Choice, while an additional thirty-three percent (33%) of Jews by Birth married non-Jews. Data for households is again illuminating in this study. According to these numbers, in the 1980's, forty-five percent (45%) of the marriages created Jewish households, seven percent (7%) created conversionary households, and forty-eight percent (48%) created interfaith households.



When factoring in all marriages that are currently in existence, the percentage of Jews by Birth who are married to Jews by Birth is approximately seventy-three percent (73%). Five percent (5%) of Jews by Birth are married to Jews by Choice and twenty-one percent (21%) are married to non-Jews. However, this still indicates that thirty-three percent (33%) of the households with at least one adult Jew today are interfaith households.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Medding 9.

Steven Cohen does not read these statistics pessimistically. Rather, he sees an evolutionary survival of the fittest -- or in this case, survival of the "committed." He writes, "What we are really witnessing is a transformation to, using the current argot, a 'leaner and meaner' American Jewish community, a somewhat pared down version that is, in many ways, stronger, more committed and more observant. Even with such a high rate of intermarriage, there is a good chance that coming generations will produce almost as many Jews active in home observance or communal life as there are today."<sup>10</sup> He continues, "by the year 2050, the American Jewish community may shrink numerically but be stronger qualitatively."<sup>11</sup>

### Affiliation and Practice

The *Medding Report* finds that, "on the one hand, marriage to non-Jews may indicate the successful integration of Jews in to American society and their achievement of a high level of social acceptance. On the other hand, intermarriage may betoken and contribute to the decline of Judaism in America."<sup>12</sup> This is illustrated by some of the data concerning denominational self-identification and synagogue affiliation.<sup>13</sup> The *Medding Report* finds that among those who identify themselves as Reform Jews, seventy-one percent (71%) are

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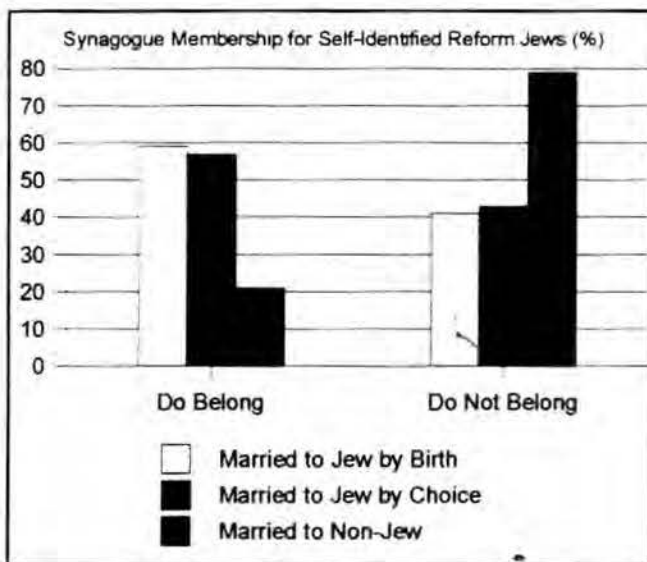
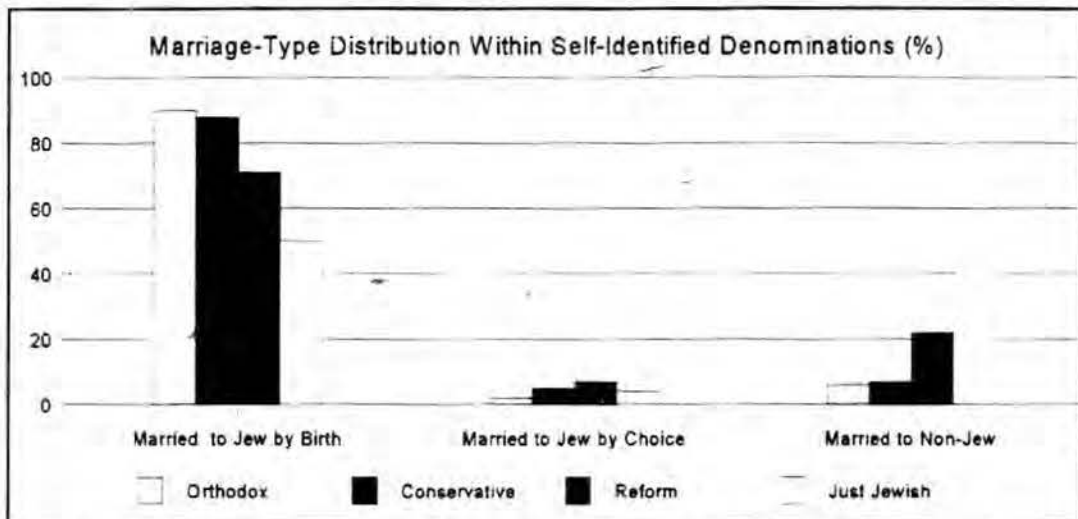
<sup>10</sup> S.M. Cohen 54.

<sup>11</sup> S.M. Cohen 95.

<sup>12</sup> Medding 3.

<sup>13</sup> For purposes of this thesis, only data concerning Reform Judaism are included. Reform Judaism is today the largest religious movement in the United States, with approximately thirty-eight percent (38%) of American Jews self-identifying as such.

inmarried, seven percent (7%) are in conversionary marriages, and twenty-two percent (22%) are in interfaith marriages. In household terms, approximately one-third of Reform households are interfaith.



Of all who identify with Reform Judaism, only fifty-one percent (51%) are affiliated with a synagogue. Breaking this down further, fifty-nine percent (59%) of the Reform-identified inmarriages affiliate and only twenty-one percent (21%) of the

Reform-identified interfaith marriages affiliate.<sup>14</sup>

Responding to the data in the *Medding Report*, Rabbi Janet Marder notes that one who self-identifies as a Reform Jew is not necessarily identical with one who is a member of a Reform synagogue. "It seems likely that the term 'Reform' in this study includes large numbers of unaffiliated Jews who mistakenly view 'Reform' as a catch-all term for those of minimal Jewish activity."<sup>15</sup> This comment by Marder is an important observation, but like Cohen's critique of the *NJPS*, should not be used to completely discount the implications of the *Medding Report*.

Dr. Egon Mayer writes: "intermarriage can -- and does -- also result in greater Jewish self-awareness among some intermarriers and in the conversion of their Gentile partners to Judaism."<sup>16</sup> However, the *Medding Report* proves this to be a small impact, if any at all. In close examination of those who identified themselves as Reform, only four percent (4%) of those in interfaith marriages light Shabbat candles, as compared with the overall twenty-one percent (21%) of all Reform Jews. Of those in interfaith marriages, ten percent (10%) attend synagogue on a "monthly, weekly or more" basis as compared to twenty percent (20%) of all Reform Jews. In addition, thirty-seven percent (37%) of those married to non-Jews only

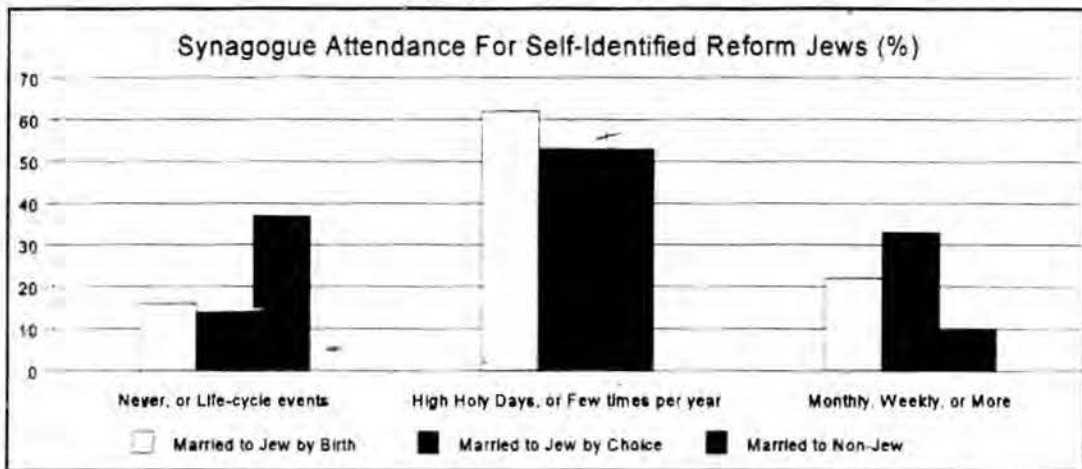
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<sup>14</sup> *Medding*, tables 16-18.

<sup>15</sup> Marder 6.

<sup>16</sup> Mayer, "Intermarriage" 204.

attend synagogue services for life cycle events as opposed to twenty percent (20%) of the entire Reform population.<sup>17</sup>



The authors of the *Medding Report* note that, “Jewish identification in mixed marriages is accompanied by the presence of symbols of Christian identification, resulting in dual-identity households at all levels of Jewish identification.”<sup>18</sup> This provides only a small chance that an interfaith marriage will result in a single-identity household at any level of Jewish identification. “Under these circumstances, the likelihood of creating an unambiguous Jewish identity, should such indeed be the intention or the desire, is virtually nil.”<sup>19</sup> The *NJPS* confirms the findings of the *Medding Report*. Of the interfaith households, a full eighty

<sup>17</sup> *Medding*, tables 19-20.

<sup>18</sup> *Medding* 39.

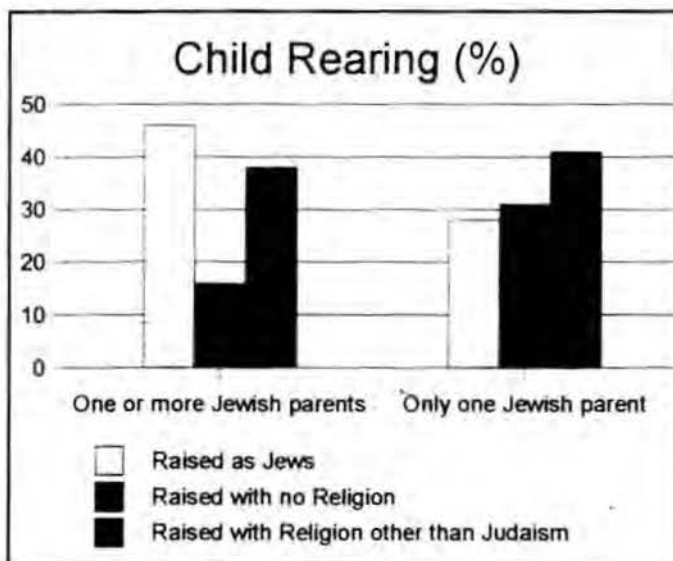
<sup>19</sup> *Medding* 39.

percent (80%) have had or do have Christmas trees.<sup>20</sup> The authors of the *Medding Report* point to statistics such as this and conclude that "mixed marriage must be regarded as a virtual bar to the achievement of a high level of Jewish identification."<sup>21</sup>

### Child Rearing

Some of the most studied statistics are those that concern child rearing. The *National Jewish Population Survey* finds that of the 1.9 million children in homes with a Jewish parent, forty-six percent (46%) are being raised as Jews, sixteen percent (16%) are being raised without religion and thirty-eight percent (38%) are being raised in a religion other than Judaism. When the numbers for inmarried households are factored out of this equation, the numbers are even lower for being raised as a Jew. In these 444,000 interfaith households of

770,000 children, twenty-eight percent (28%) are being raised as Jews, thirty-one percent (31%) with no religion and forty-one percent (41%) with a religion other than Judaism. It can be concluded from these statistics that less than one-third of the children from



<sup>20</sup> Kosmin 36.

<sup>21</sup> Medding 39.

interfaith homes have any expectation to live their adult lives as Jews. It is therefore not surprising to read the *Medding Report*, which concludes that when a non-Jew does not convert, Jewish identity terminates by the third generation.<sup>22</sup> Steven Bayme<sup>23</sup> reports that an astonishing ninety percent (90%) of the children from interfaith marriages in turn marry non-Jews.<sup>24</sup>

The *Medding Report* argues that, "Mixed marriage thus not only decreases the likelihood that an unambiguous Jewish identity will be formed, but also raises the possibility that no Jewish identity at all will emerge."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, "identifying wholly with one parent may prove traumatic to the extent that it involves the rejection of the other parent, as well as part of the self." Maintaining both identities simultaneously may create tensions and conflicts that prevent the development of an integrated personal identity. Thus, the most commonly chosen solution may turn out to be identifying with neither parent and focusing on shared, general, secular values.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bayme, "Changing Perceptions" 339.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Bayme is the Director for the Jewish Communal Affairs Department of American Jewish Committee.

<sup>24</sup> Bayme, "NJPS" 146.

<sup>25</sup> *Medding* 20.

<sup>26</sup> *Medding* 21.

### Conversionary Marriages

An important distinction is made in both the *NJPS* and the *Medding Report* between non-Jews and Jews by Choice. The data illustrates that Jews by Choice are indiscernible from Jews by Birth in their child rearing strategies and affiliation. In fact, according to a national study by Egon Mayer and Amy Avgar, Jews by Choice are even more active than those who identify as Reform Jews.<sup>27</sup> According to their study, sixty-seven percent (67%) of Jews by Choice “regularly participate in Jewish religious services,” as opposed to only forty-seven percent (47%) of Reform Jews. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of Jews by Choice are members of Jewish congregations, while only seventy percent (70%) of Reform Jews by Birth have such affiliations. The *Medding Report* confirms that forty-nine percent (49%) of Reform-identified conversionary marriages affiliate with the synagogue while only twenty-three percent (23%) of the Reform-identified inmarriages do so.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Mayer and Avgar find that seventy-five percent (75%) of Jews by Choice “feel a need to be part of the Jewish community,” while eighty-one percent (81%) of Reform Jews by Birth feel the same need.<sup>29</sup>

As the *Medding Report* argues, however, conversionary households tend to be religiously ambiguous. Although Steven Bayme reports that ninety-nine percent (99%) of the

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<sup>27</sup> Mayer *Conversion* 29.

<sup>28</sup> *Medding*, tables 16-18.

<sup>29</sup> Mayer and Avgar 29.



children of Jews by Choice are raised as Jews,<sup>30</sup> a Chicago area study by Dr. Brenda Forster and Rabbi Joseph Tabachnik produces a number of only seventy-four percent (74%)<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in their study of students and graduates of an *Introduction to Judaism* course, Forster and Tabachnik find that ten percent (10%) of Jews by Choice "continue to hold major Christian beliefs."<sup>32</sup> One-third of the respondents even "occasionally" attend Christian services. With regard to child rearing, eighty-three percent (83%) of Jews by Choice do not "plan to restrict (their) child's dating to Jews."<sup>33</sup> Seventy-nine percent (79%) believe that it is important for their children to choose their own religion. Thirty percent (30%) believe that it is important for their children to have "positive beliefs about Jesus' ministry."<sup>34</sup>

The most peculiar and perhaps instructive number found in the many surveys and studies may be the following: of those who self-identified in the *NJPS* as converts, only seventy percent (70%) had formally converted.<sup>35</sup> If the thirty percent (30%) who did not

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<sup>30</sup> Bayme, "National Jewish" 147.

<sup>31</sup> Forster 99.

<sup>32</sup> Forster 106.

<sup>33</sup> Forster 99.

<sup>34</sup> Forster 99.

<sup>35</sup> Kosmin 126.

undergo formal conversion follow similar patterns as those who have undergone formal conversion, interfaith marriage numbers may not be so bleak. However, it must be remembered that only one in fourteen (7%) interfaith marriages result in a conversion of any sort.<sup>36</sup>

### Conclusion

This limited optimism aside, statistics clearly indicate that non-Jews are entering the Jewish community at an ever-increasing rate. Unfortunately, when interfaith marriages are created it is less likely that the household will affiliate with a synagogue or raise children solely as Jews. However, the above inference is instructive. If those who consider themselves to be defacto Jews affiliate at the same high rate, practice at the same high rate and raise children at the same high rate as formal Jews by Choice, a much different portrait of American Jewry may be painted.

An effort to make non-Jewish family members feel included in the Jewish community may in fact increase the affiliation rate, identification rate, and child rearing practices of interfaith households. The converse is of course also true. The inclusion of non-Jews into the Jewish community may instead dilute Reform Judaism to a state that is no longer recognizable as Judaism. Such a dilemma, in various forms, has faced the Jewish community

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<sup>36</sup> Bayme "NJPS" 147.

for centuries. Primarily this issue is played out in the drawing of boundaries and finding the proper balance between "inclusion" and "exclusion". The following chapters explore where, when, and why boundaries are established both historically and today for the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue.

## The Role of the Non-Jew in American Reform Jewish Synagogues

In his address to the 1993 UAHC Biennial in San Francisco, then President of the UAHC, Rabbi Alexander Schindler spoke the following words concerning life-cycle events:

"... in this realm, my personal position is one of maximum openness: not the total abandonment of boundaries, but rather their enforcement through creative ritual. . . . I believe that non-Jewish parents or partners should be allowed to participate in a manner virtually identical to that of Jews. Such rituals should maximize their roles as parents of a Jewish child, and magnify their experience of Jewish spirituality. Of course, truthfulness should never be violated by our desire to be inclusive -- thus, for example, the wording of specific *tefilot* (prayers) would place the role of *sheliach tzibur* beyond the pale of non-Jews.<sup>1</sup> But in all other ritual matters -- the offering of a specific prayer, the lighting of candles, the recitation of the *kiddush*, singing in a choir, and yes, handling a Torah scroll -- we should strive to present our synagogue as a 'house of prayer for all peoples.' If we choose to fence in that house, to create a hedgerow around our Judaism, that is our right -- but let us be certain of our motivation and not use ritual exclusion to express our emotional grievances, conscious or unconscious, historical or contemporary."<sup>2</sup>

Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, in an address before the NAORRR convention in 1994, has a much different approach. He declares:

"We are now doing something which in the 200 years of Reform Judaism we have never done: we are integrating non-Jews into our religious structure. We are not only courteous and welcoming, we are more than that. We witness a trend that gives non-Jews the kind of stake in our future which in my opinion will radically alter what we are all about. If we go the way many of our congregations and I suppose many of our rabbis and certainly some of the leadership of the Union are bent on going, Reform Judaism 50 years from now will be unrecognizable, if in fact, it will exist altogether. . . . We must warn Reform Jews against the dissolution that has taken place under the guise

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<sup>1</sup> The *Sheliach Tzibbur* or *Shatz* is the "emissary of the congregation" who leads the communal worship. Today this role is filled primarily by the Rabbi or Cantor in Reform synagogues, however, the Shatz may also include anyone who ascends the *bima*.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander M. Schindler, "Biennial Keynotes" 62.

of tolerant accommodation. I believe we do not hurt a young person's growth when he or she is given to understand that there are boundaries."<sup>3</sup>

Thus the two sides of the debate<sup>4</sup> rage on today. The question that these two Reform leaders focus on is: what boundaries are to be drawn, where are they to be drawn, and by whom are they to be drawn? According to Nancy Gad-Harf, a regional outreach coordinator for the UAHC, two variables must be considered: location and size. She notes that in larger communities there are not only multiple congregations from which to choose, but there are also plenty of opportunities to be active in the Jewish community without joining a synagogue. In small communities, however, the Reform synagogue is the only option for Jewish involvement. Just as importantly, a small congregation in a large or small community cannot afford to overlook the issue of non-Jews in the synagogue. She writes:

"In small congregations . . . the issue of the role of the non-Jew cannot be ignored. It is often the spouse who is not Jewish who breathes the life into the congregation. It is often the spouse who is not Jewish who struggles to make a Jewish home and to observe the Jewish holidays -- often without the tools to do so, often without the support of the Jewish spouse. It is often the spouse who is not Jewish who takes the kids to Sunday School and Hebrew school, who volunteers in congregational activities, and who even teaches in the Religious School.

The smaller congregations are facing a critical dilemma: how do they maintain the integrity of Jewish life without turning away the non-Jewish spouse. I would suggest to you that if the congregations were to exclude the non-Jew from a rich congregational experience, they would cease -- in the very near future -- to exist. Moreover, were they to turn away the non-Jew, they would also turn away an entire family. We would lose the Jewish spouse as well. We would lose the children. We would lose our hopes for the future."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Plaut, "Boundaries"

<sup>4</sup> Gad-Harf

"Our hopes for the future" are certainly also the concerns of both Rabbis Schindler and Plaut. However, their approaches toward boundaries -- the former toward inclusive and the latter toward exclusive -- differ greatly. Below, the subjects of membership, governance, and ritual are closely explored to discover what issues are raised when defining boundaries for non-Jews in American Reform synagogues. The section on "ritual" is the largest simply because it has drawn the most attention from rabbis and congregants. However, the categories of "membership" and "governance" are now receiving more and more attention in Reform synagogues.

### Membership

In *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue*, the following is written:

"Membership concerns are generally related to who may join the synagogue. These concerns touch on such questions as: What is the mission of the synagogue? How can this mission best be promoted? Can a non-Jew be a member of a synagogue? If so, is s/he entitled to the same rights and privileges as a Jewish member? Is it appropriate to establish different categories of membership?"<sup>5</sup>

Eligibility for membership is one of the primary issues for discussion concerning the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Consideration must be given to whether a non-Jew may be a member in his/her own right or whether such membership must be contingent upon that of a Jewish spouse or partner. Questions arise: If an interfaith couple is accepted for membership in the congregation, does the family get one vote in congregational meetings or

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<sup>5</sup> *Defining the Role* 7.

does each of the adults receive one vote? Should the spouse or partner receive some "affiliate" status situated between that of member and non-member? If so, may the non-Jewish partner vote on congregational matters that are not specifically religiously based, such as grounds keeping? May the same person vote on issues concerning ritual and education? If the Jewish spouse dies, does the surviving non-Jewish spouse have some continued relationship with the congregation? If only one adult member of a family is Jewish and therefore the only one accepted as a full member, are dues the same as for a Jewish couple? If so, what are the implications of this? Will this encourage some Jewish couples to pay dues based upon the involvement of only one parent? With all of these possibilities, it must also be asked whether there is a difference for the congregation between a non-Jew who holds no particular religious beliefs or practices and an active practitioner of another religion.

An illustration may be helpful.

David is eleven years old and all of his Jewish friends are beginning to prepare for their B'nai Mitzvah. David's parents are divorced and he lives with his non-Jewish mother. However, before his parents separated, David attended religious school every Sunday and even started attending mid-week Hebrew school. Now, David would like to have a Bar Mitzvah. Can David's mother apply for membership at the temple so that David can attend religious school and have a Bar Mitzvah? Can David be a member of the congregation even though children are not typically given membership status? Can David have a special membership such as a "junior" membership? If David is allowed some membership status in

his own right, will some uninvolved Jewish parents interested in having their children educated also demand a student membership for their own children?

The *UAHC Outreach Census of 1991* focuses on many of these issues of membership.<sup>6</sup> The *Census* finds that the majority of surveyed congregations do not have



written policies on membership status for non-Jews. Forty-six percent (46%) do, however, have such written provisions.<sup>7</sup> The study finds that thirty-two percent (32%) of UAHC congregations provide for the membership of "Non-Jews in their own right."<sup>8</sup> However, it is unclear whether these congregations only grant

such membership when the non-Jew is married to a Jew, or whether they accept non-Jews with no Jewish spouse. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of these congregations grant membership

<sup>6</sup> 432 of 840 (or 51%) UAHC congregations responded in time to be included in this survey.

<sup>7</sup> Greenwood 15.

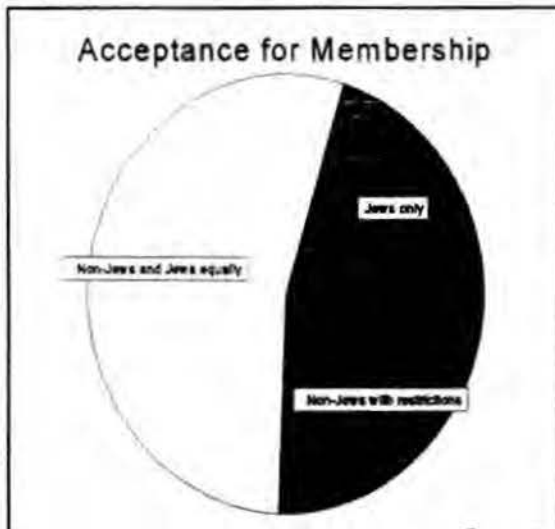
<sup>8</sup> Greenwood 15.



status to "Non-Jews as part of a family unit." Sixty-two percent (62%) of these congregations offer the privilege of voting to non-Jews. The published summary of the census states:

"There is difficulty in interpreting the above data because of inconsistencies among congregations in the definition of membership (sic.) units. Some define a unit as a family and others as an individual, some provide for both. Consequently it is unclear, whether almost one third of Reform congregations permit non-Jews to be members in their own right without any Jewish family connection or whether, in some of these cases, the non-Jew must be married to a Jew in order to be a member in his own right. In any case, most responding temples, either by policy or *minhag*<sup>9</sup>, do allow non-Jews to be members and to vote."<sup>10</sup>

The inference is therefore that much of what directs the census is *minhag*, rather than written policy. In a closer look at congregational policy, the *Outreach Census* summary looks at 104 temple constitutions and bylaws that were submitted along with the survey. Of the



policies collected, it is found that twenty percent (20%) of those congregations who formally address the issue and create a statement on the role of the non-Jew, exclude non-Jews from Temple membership. Twenty-five percent (25%) of these congregations accept non-Jewish spouses of Jewish members as

<sup>9</sup> *Minhag* in this context refers to unwritten or informal policy.

<sup>10</sup> Greenwood 15.

members with special provisions. Fifty-three percent (53%) of the constitutions surveyed offer "the same privileges and responsibilities" to Jews and non-Jews alike. Within this last category, thirty-two percent (32%) of the cases reviewed accept all non-Jews as members regardless of whether or not the non-Jew has a Jewish spouse.<sup>11</sup>

Of those congregations who accept non-Jews as members,<sup>12</sup> two-thirds do so with no restrictions. The remaining one-third of those accepting non-Jews as members do put some restrictions on voting privileges and eligibility for certain committee positions. Breaking this first category down further, of the congregations who accept Jewish members and non-Jewish members equally, one-third<sup>13</sup> define a member as: "a person of the Jewish faith or a person who is not an active adherent of another faith and who wishes to associate with the Jewish faith." Another one-third stipulate that, "any person desiring to associate with the Jewish faith may be a candidate for membership." This more liberal wording does not require the individual to renounce membership in other religious organizations. In the final third, no requirements are placed upon the candidate for full membership. "This final group of constitutions represents the most liberal policy found in the survey. The congregations do not require that the potential member sever any other religious ties or profess an affiliation with the Jewish people."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Greenwood 19.

<sup>12</sup> Eighty percent (80%) of the 104 congregations submitting written policies.

<sup>13</sup> Approximately seventeen percent (17%) of the original 104 constitutions.

<sup>14</sup> Greenwood 19.

A study conducted by the Great Lakes Region of the UAHC in 1990 adds further light to the subject.<sup>15</sup> Thirty-eight of the fifty-two regional congregations responded to this survey, producing a particularly high rate of return -- approximately seventy-three percent (73%). Of the respondents, thirty-seven of the thirty-eight congregations offer membership to interfaith couples as a family unit. Seventy-six percent (76%) specifically apply that membership to the non-Jewish spouse and give them voting rights. In twenty-one percent (21%) of these congregations, a non-Jew who is not married to a Jew may become a member. In addition, the percentage increases dramatically to approximately seventy-four percent (74%) when a non-Jew is raising children as Jews.

### Governance

In *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue*, the following is written: "Governance/leadership issues refer to the decision-making process in congregations. The following questions may be raised by congregations: How are Jewish values reflected in the leadership of the congregation? To what extent are the values expressed by the leadership uniquely Jewish? Are non-Jews permitted to chair committees? Auxiliary organizations? To become Board members? Officers of the congregation? What is the basis for determining the involvement of non-Jews in the governance and leadership of the temple?"<sup>16</sup>

As recognized above, in most congregations non-Jewish spouses are welcomed in some way into the congregational family. In return, the non-Jewish spouses may become

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<sup>15</sup> UAHC Great Lakes Region.

<sup>16</sup> *Defining the Role* 7.

active in different aspects of synagogue life. This may include participation in social action projects, fundraisers, or the religious school. As is the case with many organizations, eager volunteers are quickly steered onto committees. Once on these committees, energetic and devoted committee members are often appointed to chair sub-committees and standing committees. In many congregations, the chairperson of a standing committee is automatically allowed to attend board meetings or may be given a vote on the board of directors. In studying the role of the non-Jew in issues of governance, the questions must be asked, are there certain issues upon which non-Jews may or may not vote? Does a non-Jew on the board of directors help fulfill the mission of the Temple or does it detract from that mission? Is it possible or productive to have non-voting members on a temple's board. May a board member be excluded from certain voting issues? May a non-Jew be excluded completely from certain committees, such as ritual?

The *Outreach Census* finds that thirty-five percent (35%) of the congregations have written policies on the participation of non-Jews in temple governance.<sup>17</sup> Fifty-nine percent (59%) of these congregations permit a non-Jew to serve on all temple committees. Twenty-eight percent (28%) allow service on "most committees".<sup>18</sup> The typical difference is that some congregations do not allow non-Jews to serve on ritual or educational committees.

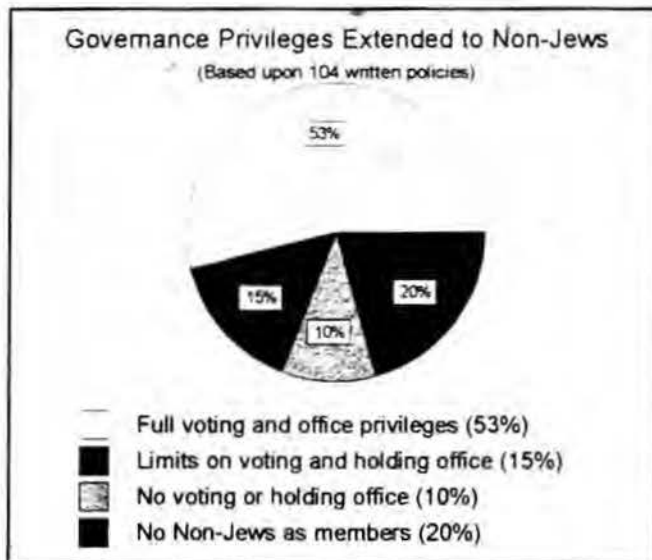
The numbers for leadership within the synagogue is not quite as high. The *Outreach Census* finds that just over half (51%) permit non-Jews to serve as chairpersons of

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<sup>17</sup> Greenwood 15.

<sup>18</sup> Greenwood 20.

committees. Thirty-three percent (33%) allow for non-Jews on the board of trustees and twenty-seven percent (27%) for congregation officers. Twenty-one percent (21%) offer the office of presidency of congregation affiliates to non-Jews (sisterhood, brotherhood, youth). It must be noted that while these may be the official policies of the congregations -- whether written or *minhag* -- it is sometimes understood that non-Jews may not serve in certain positions such as the president of the congregation.



As noted earlier, of the 104 constitutions surveyed by the Outreach department, twenty-five percent (25%) allow non-Jewish spouses of Jewish members to become members, but with certain provisions. Forty percent (40%) of these<sup>19</sup> allow non-Jewish spouses to become members but do not permit them to vote or

hold elected office. The other sixty percent (60%)<sup>20</sup> "provide the non-Jewish spouse with membership and voting privileges, but limit elected and leadership roles. Most of these

<sup>19</sup> Ten percent (10%) of the 104 congregations submitting written policies.

<sup>20</sup> Fifteen percent (15%) of the 104 congregations submitting written policies.

synagogues stipulate that only Jewish members may vote on issues relating to the religious life of the congregation."<sup>21</sup>

### Ritual

The role of the non-Jew in communal Jewish rituals can be one of the most divisive issues for a congregation. Rabbi Larry Hoffman writes that it is possible to break down the public Jewish worship experiences in which non-Jews may be present into three categories where, "we worship in common," "indigenous services with guests," and "life-cycle liturgies with mixed married families."<sup>22</sup> The first grouping is best illustrated by the interfaith communal Thanksgiving Day celebrations. The second may include any Shabbat service at which non-Jews are in attendance. Within this group are also family Seders, a common Jewish ritual to which non-Jewish guests are invited.

The third grouping is most likely to touch the heart of the issue of the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. With the ever-increasing proportion of Jewish families who have non-Jewish members in the extended, if not immediate family, it is more likely than ever that families are interested in including non-Jewish members in life-cycle events. Many questions arise: what prayers, if any, may a non-Jew recite from the *bima*? May a non-Jew sit or even come up to the *bima*? May a non-Jew hold the Torah, have an *aliyah*, or read a translation of the *Haftarah*?

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<sup>21</sup> Greenwood 20.

<sup>22</sup> Hoffman, Defining the Role 65.

In his Biennial presentation, Rabbi Schindler specifically addresses the need for inclusion in life-cycle events. Rabbi Larry Hoffman, a Professor of Liturgy at HUC, agrees and writes: "If they wished to, why couldn't a non-Jewish parent hold the Torah scroll and hand it to his or her child as a vivid symbol of the way he or she took Jewish tradition into the home, inculcated it in the child, and now watches that child accept the Torah as his or her life-long spiritual guide?"<sup>23</sup> Rabbi Joan Friedman counters that such actions are not appropriate. She writes, "Even if the individual read an altered blessings it would cause cognitive dissonance, because the very act of being called to bless the Torah in public is one that says 'we Jews'."<sup>24</sup>

The *Outreach Census* finds that such cognitive dissonance is created in many Reform congregations. The survey notes that the vast majority (94%) of Reform temples allow for non-Jewish family members to participate on the *biimah* as a child celebrates life-cycle events such as namings, consecrations, and *b'nai mitzvah*. However, this participation is not detailed by the survey. When ritual acts are broken down into categories we find that the rate of inclusion is much lower. Forty-one percent (41%) of Reform congregations allow non-Jews to light the Shabbat candles in the Temple, thirty-two percent (32%) permit a non-Jew to lead the *Kiddush*, and twenty-two percent (22%) call on a non-Jew for an *Aliyah* to the Torah.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hoffman *Defining the Role* 75

<sup>24</sup> Joan Friedman 31.

<sup>25</sup> Greenwood 16.



We are then left to ask whether the person on the *bima*, or the reader of the service, acts for the Reform synagogue today as the *sheliach tzibbur* in the traditional sense of the title? Rabbi Lester Bronstein writes, "A leader cannot technically fulfill another's obligation unless the leader is personally obligated to recite the service to the same extent as the worshipers are. Thus the leader must consider him/herself personally commanded to perform the task of worship."<sup>26</sup> Can a non-Jew be so commanded and properly fill this role? If not, can a non-Jew find a way to lead the congregation in prayer, even if not through "particularistic" Jewish prayers? Some congregations have identified "universal" prayers in order to enable non-Jews to lead parts of the prayer service. Others have created universal prayers for the same purpose.<sup>27</sup>

This issue is easily extended beyond the life-cycle events. If a non-Jew has limited access to the *bima* and prayer leadership, is a non-Jewish choir member or soloist also confined by the same set of parameters? An illustration may be helpful.

Allison's mother is called up to the *bima* to light the Shabbat candles the night before Allison's Bat Mitzvah. This is the role that the mothers of *b'nai mitzvah* traditionally fill in Allison's temple. The fathers of *b'nai mitzvah* are typically invited to recite the Shabbat *Kiddush*, however, Allison's father is not Jewish and may therefore not do so. Instead, Allison's uncle is given the honor of sanctifying the Sabbath through the public recitation over the wine. After Allison's mother and uncle recite the appropriate blessings, the sanctuary is

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<sup>26</sup> Bronstein, Defining the Role 40.

<sup>27</sup> Examples are given below.



filled with the full sounds of the organ as the well-trained non-Jewish soloist sings the blessings. Is this in keeping with the spirit of not allowing Allison's non-Jewish father to recite the *Kiddush* and thus lead the congregation in prayer?

The late Rabbi Edwin Friedman, an expert in family systems theory, writes that *b'nai mitzvah* ceremonies or "rites of passage" are all really family events. By that I mean the family goes through more change and stress than the individual(s) who are focused on in the ceremony.<sup>28</sup> The *b'nai mitzvah* ceremony thus involves the entire family. Is it appropriate therefore to exclude a member?

Most congregations, as noted above, do not exclude family members from life-cycle events. The Great Lakes Region survey finds that non-Jewish relatives are often permitted to do a reading during the service (89%) or bless their child (79%). However, a clear plurality (84%) are not allowed to have an *aliyah* to the Torah.

Rabbi Michael Signer asks, "What is the nature of the worshiping community in our synagogues at a *Bar Bat Mitzvah*?" He answers, that if normally there are no Saturday morning services, then it can be argued that it is indeed a family affair. Therefore, all family members may take part. If, however, there are normally Saturday morning services, then these congregants are gathering in an affirmation of their Jewish identity and non-Jewish family members leading any part of the service would be inappropriate.<sup>29</sup> In some of North America's larger synagogues it seems that the former is the more apt scenario. Rabbi Joan

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<sup>28</sup> Edwin H. Friedman 54.

<sup>29</sup> Signer 82-83.

Friedman admits that, "Few people have any sense that the child is participating in an ongoing ritual, that this is actually a Shabbat morning service at which there happens to be a *bar/bat mitzvah*."<sup>30</sup>

### Liturgy

The discussion of liturgy may be further broken down in the general categories of "what words are we reciting?" and "what are we trying to achieve?" Rabbi Larry Hoffman writes that we must ask the following questions about our liturgy: "First -- What does the text say? Second -- How does it say it? Third -- what does it mean? Fourth -- How does it get said?"<sup>31</sup>

Rabbi Lester Bronstein prepared a textual resource for the congregational resource, *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue*.<sup>32</sup> Rabbi Lester Bronstein divides his discussion of liturgical texts into two categories. The first he understands as "Formulas wherein the reciter identifies personally with the Jewish people, with Jewish history, or with the Covenant of Judaism."<sup>33</sup> These recitations include such pivotal prayers as the blessings over the Shabbat and festival candles, the blessings for the Torah reading, the *Aleinu* and the *Shema*. The second category he identifies as "... examples of formulas wherein the reciter acknowledges or seeks God's particular favor for the Jewish people. (The reciter does not

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<sup>30</sup> Joan Friedman 27.

<sup>31</sup> Hoffman, *The Art of Public Prayer* 226.

<sup>32</sup> This resource is included in its entirety as Appendix A.

<sup>33</sup> Lester Bronstein 36.

necessarily identify him/herself personally as a Jew.”<sup>34</sup> These recitations include those prayers that are found immediately preceding the *Shema* in both the morning and evening liturgy and the final line of the *Kaddish*.

Michael Signer argues, however, that it is not the words that are recited, but the framework in which they are recited and the atmosphere established by the community for such a recitation. He states that, “what is significant in the utilization of the community as the context for interpretation is that the content of the prayers is not the criterion for determining participation.”<sup>35</sup>

Rabbi Larry Hoffman does not disagree. He writes, “the way people look at the texts we use has changed drastically over the last century. The question of what a text says must be asked along with the question of how it says it. The history of what a text meant once upon a time can no longer be imagined to have any necessary relationship to what it means now.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, according to Hoffman, the texts cannot be examined for their literal meanings alone. Instead, we as the speakers are left to give meaning to the words. Rabbi Herbert Bronstein takes issue with this approach. He writes, “ritual acts or words cry out that the person reciting the text or doing the act is declaring a definite, specific identity doing something specifically and clearly self-defining, marking a limit.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Lester Bronstein 38.

<sup>35</sup> Signer 83.

<sup>36</sup> Hoffman, *The Art* 229.

<sup>37</sup> Herbert Bronstein, “Non-Jews and Jewish Observance” 2.

Hoffman continues that words are only performative when they “bring reality into being.”<sup>38</sup> In order to do so, the proper environment must be set up and the words must be said in an appropriate manner. Everything must conform to a convention that people recognize, otherwise it does not work. Elsewhere he writes, “ritualized language is very highly performative, and only slightly informational. People engage in it not so much to tell truths as to perform tasks. It creates community, expresses faith, raises consciousness, marks sacred time, and so forth.”<sup>39</sup> Yet the community that is created through the worship experience is, as Rabbi Joan Friedman writes, “the entire people of Israel in microcosm, and the constitution of a *minyan* for worship, therefore, is a reaffirmation of the covenant between God and Israel.”<sup>40</sup>

The crucial element for all of these contributors is the question of, “what are we trying to achieve through our liturgy?” Rabbi Hoffman writes that “Worship, like a play, depends on the willingness of all concerned to suspend their disbelief in the alternative world about to unfold before their eyes, and to give themselves over as willing partners in the words and actions that will bring it about.”<sup>41</sup> Yet, Joan Friedman laments that the *minyan* has

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<sup>38</sup> Hoffman, *The Art* 231.

<sup>39</sup> Hoffman, “Non-Jews” 74.

<sup>40</sup> Joan Friedman 31.

<sup>41</sup> Hoffman, *The Art* 234.

become theater. Our efforts have been toward the "aesthetics and its components to move the individual worshiper."<sup>42</sup>

Rabbi Harvey Fields writes, "Integrity demands that identities be sustained not abandoned, acknowledged and uplifted, not trivialized with forms of mimicry and masquerade."<sup>43</sup> Rabbi Lester Bronstein adds that, "When one who is not a Jew performs specific acts, it can prove unsettling to a congregation assembled in worship."<sup>44</sup> Rabbi Joan Friedman continues, "It is inappropriate participation when a non-Jew creates cognitive dissonance for the congregation by speaking words or performing acts that themselves say 'we Jews'."<sup>45</sup>

To avoid just such cognitive dissonance created by the spoken word, some congregations adopt alternative liturgy that permits a non-Jewish speaker to participate in ritual leadership. This, of course, does not relieve the cognitive dissonance created by the speaker him or her self. Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin, in his book, *Putting God on the Guest List*, offers universal prayers to be recited by a parent on the occasion of a child's *bar bat mitzvah*. After the Jewish parent reads the traditional Hebrew blessing for the Torah reading, the non-Jewish parent continues.

"O God of all humanity: We lift up our voices in gratitude that the Torah has come into the world through the Jewish people. We lift our voices in

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<sup>42</sup> Joan Friedman 26.

<sup>43</sup> Fields, *Defining the Role* 90.

<sup>44</sup> Lester Bronstein 39.

<sup>45</sup> Joan Friedman 31.

gratitude for the ideals it teaches: justice, compassion, devotion, the partnership of mind, heart, and deed. We lift our voices in gratitude that our son/daughter today takes his/her place among the people of Israel. We pray that he/she will do so with pride and joy. As you called Israel to be a light to the nations, so, too, we pray that our son/daughter will be his/her own ray of light to the world."<sup>46</sup>

Rabbi Hillel Cohen offers a reading for the same situation:

"These writings are the foundation of significant human values. We acknowledge the importance of study and the development of law. Thus we offer praise to the Source of Life who has enabled us to engage in study. May these words and the many other words of these writings continue to bring enlightenment to all who study them. As we fashion our lives in the spirit of these teachings may we bring greater blessing to one another and to the entire world."<sup>47</sup>

### **Burial**

A pertinent, yet often overlooked, area in ritual policy concerns the non-Jew in issues of death and burial. As opposed to the internal issues of congregational leadership and those ritual issues discussed above, cemeteries are often communally governed. In these situations, difficulties are compounded as each congregation must ensure that their own religious and ethical needs are met. Yet, even when a synagogue owns its own cemetery, policy can be difficult to create and implement. According to the Outreach Census, eighty-seven percent (87%) of Reform synagogues have their own cemetery or section of a community cemetery. Sixty percent (60%) of these congregations make provisions for burial of non-Jewish

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<sup>46</sup> Salkin 145.

<sup>47</sup> Hillel Cohen, online, "HUCALUM"

members.<sup>48</sup> In a report by Rabbi Sanford Seltzer, in 1980 only eleven percent (11%) of UAHC congregations did not allow burial of non-Jews in privately owned cemeteries.<sup>49</sup>

The obvious question is whether or not non-Jews may be buried in a Jewish cemetery. However, as congregations quickly discover, the issue is not that simple. Officiation for a non-Jewish burial must also be discussed. May a non-Jewish member of the clergy perform the funeral? May he/she do so at the gravesite or only at the funeral home? If funerals are typically conducted at the Temple, may a non-Jewish clergy member officiate? Considering all these questions of officiation, if they are permitted, are there guidelines? May there be Christian liturgy or symbols? If the rabbi conducts the ceremony are there certain restrictions? May it be a specifically Jewish or non-Jewish ceremony? May the rabbi co-officiate?

Who may purchase plots and be buried must also be discussed. This may best be explained with the following scenario

Joyce recently married Karl, a non-Jew, after she had been a widow for over seven years. Before her first husband Milton died, the two purchased adjacent burial plots in the Temple's cemetery. Although Joyce never formally converted to Judaism, she was always very involved in congregational life. The Temple's policy states that a Jewish member and his/her non-Jewish spouse may be buried together in the Temple's cemetery. However, when the congregation adopted this policy, no one anticipated the possibility that a non-Jewish

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<sup>48</sup> Greenwood 17.

<sup>49</sup> Seltzer, "Membership Status".



widow would remarry a non-Jew. Can Joyce still be buried in the Temple's cemetery next to her first husband Milton?

Endless variations spring from this scenario. Can Karl also be buried in the cemetery? Can Joyce's non-Jewish mother be buried in the cemetery? If the cycle of events are switched and Joyce precedes Milton in death, can Joyce be buried in the synagogue's cemetery? If Milton remarries, can his new non-Jewish spouse also be buried in the cemetery? Furthermore, may the congregation, with good conscious, bury a non-Jew with Jews from previous generations who would possibly not have wanted to be buried in an interfaith cemetery?

### Conclusion

Rabbi Gunther Plaut, again in his NAORRR speech, says

"We have to make up our minds that we cannot guarantee the future of Reform merely by increasing the number of people who pay dues. We have a strong universalist bent, but we are not a universalist religion, access to which can be obtained by cash at the ticket window. We are a particular religious people. We gladly accept willing converts and are sensitive, courteous and understanding to others who are in our midst. But as congregations we have a right and a duty to preserve our particularity. Particularity does not exclude the universal, but it means that there are boundaries. If we are everything to everyone, we are nothing at all. Boundaries are determined by specific *tachlis*<sup>50</sup> and not by broad philosophies. They may on occasion appear to be arbitrary or picayune, but life goes by *tachlis* and not by clouds of incense."<sup>51</sup>

Determining policy based upon *tachlis* is a common concern for both those who draw loose and tight boundaries -- those who find the need for inclusion or exclusion. However,

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<sup>50</sup> *Tachlis* in this context refers to tangible matters.

<sup>51</sup> Plaut, "Boundaries".



illustrations portray the issues of membership, governance, and ritual as multi-faceted rather than clear-cut. As exemplified by statistics, each congregation finds its own answers to unique questions. The following chapter examines some of the guidance offered by the Reform Movement to congregations making these decisions.

### **The Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue as Addressed through Reform Responsa Literature**

In every generation, Jews search for new answers to contemporary questions. While Biblical, Hellenistic, and Rabbinic literature provide many textual sources, finding one's way through the maze of this literature can at times be daunting, if not impossible. Since Talmudic times, therefore, rabbis and laypeople have directed their questions to scholars in order to find clear answers in the form of Responsa Literature. Traditionally, the responsa take the form of questions (*she'elot*) and answers (*teshuvot*) covering every aspect of Jewish life. The answers are commonly accepted as legal interpretations of Jewish law and are considered binding.

Reform Judaism continues the responsa process today. Reform responsa typically follow the ancient model of drawing upon traditional sources (many of which are noted in previous chapters), interpreting these sources, and then formulating specifically Reform Jewish approaches to the *she'elot*. *Teshuvot* found in Reform responsa are not binding, as they are in other communities and in other ages, rather they are used as guidance for modern issues. These responsa are often used by the UAHC, congregations, and rabbis in establishing policies.

The Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis was established in 1906 to provide this sort of guidance. Since this time, the chairmen of this committee have produced volumes of responsa -- some through their committees and some

privately under their own names.<sup>1</sup> Each brought with them to the committee their own understanding of the texts and of Reform Judaism, but as Walter Jacob writes:

"As we look at the total responsa of the CCAR and those of Solomon B. Freehof, the following becomes clear: guidance has been sought in almost every area of life, the approach to the questions is realistic, patterns which seemed fixed by tradition have been shown to be much more flexible than ever imagined by a thorough study of their development. Permissive answers predominate, but they are often accompanied by cautionary strictures."<sup>2</sup>

Looking at this Responsa literature, it becomes clear that each generation seeks new answers to old questions. The role of the non-Jew in the synagogue is one reoccurring question in Reform Responsa literature. For instance, beginning in 1914, the Responsa Committee and its chair visit and revisit questions regarding the burial of non-Jews in a Jewish cemetery. In general, this issue falls under the larger rubric of "Jewish practice", which includes participation and leadership in worship services and life cycle events. The other major rubric regarding the role of non-Jews is that of "affiliation", which includes membership and leadership within the synagogue.

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<sup>1</sup> The following are the Rabbis who have served as the Chairmen of the Reform Responsa Committee: Kaufmann Kohler (1908-1922), Jacob Lauterbach (1923-1933), Jacob Mann (1934-1939), Israel Bettan (1940-1954), Solomon B. Freehof (1955-1976), Walter Jacob (1976-1996), and Mark Washofsky (1996- present).

<sup>2</sup> Jacob, *ARR* xviii.

## Concerning the non-Jew in matters of Synagogue membership and governance

### Membership

Responsa Literature has often focused on the issue of formal membership for the non-Jew in the synagogue. In 1916, Kaufmann Kohler and Jacob Lauterbach cite "self-preservation" as the reason for supporting a congregation's bylaw that requires congregants to forfeit their memberships when they "contract a forbidden marriage." However, in the same responsum they write that this bylaw, "does not imply that they entail forfeiture of membership when concluded before the affiliation to the congregation."<sup>3</sup>

Solomon Freehof consistently argues against the acceptance of non-Jews as full congregational members and leaders. He writes, "in case of a mixed marriage, the family as a whole becomes a member and the membership shall be in the name of the Jewish spouse."<sup>4</sup> Such an approach, he believes, will encourage the family to raise their children as Jews and will eventually lead to the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse.<sup>5</sup> He holds that there is no reason to "reward" a non-Jew for marrying a Jew by making him/her a full voting member.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kohler and Lauterbach, "Forfeiture of Congregational Membership by Inter-marriage," ARR #12.

<sup>4</sup> Freehof, "Gentile Membership in Synagogue," RROT #47.

<sup>5</sup> Freehof, NRR 21.

<sup>6</sup> Freehof, RRT #47.

In 1977, the Committee again addresses the issue of "Gentiles in a Jewish Congregation." At this time the authors hold that a non-Jew may not join a synagogue because that implies full privileges and participation in services, policy making, etc. However, "he should feel free to contribute to it, attend its services and functions; perhaps later that individual will convert and join the congregation."<sup>7</sup> The Committee also explores the use of the term *ger toshav* in considering a non-Jew's status. However, citing the Shulhan Arukh<sup>8</sup> they conclude that although a non-Jewish spouse could be considered a *ger toshav*, he/she will "not be considered part of the quota for a *minyan* or for *m'zuman*, nor could he lead a worship service, etc."<sup>9</sup>

In 1982, the Committee reports

"we have recognized these marriages as civil marriages and are quite willing, even eager, to have the children raised as Jews. Clearly, the children of such marriage will often become Jewish, and so a major portion of the family -- father or mother and children -- will have a role in the religious life of the synagogue. This need not involve full synagogue membership of the non-Jewish family partner. It would be better for the synagogue to arrange that membership be held by the Jewish partner, even in those congregations in which the membership is normally held by the entire family. This would spare the congregation and the individual embarrassment."<sup>10</sup>

In 1983, the Responsa Committee looks again at various categories for potential non-Jewish members of congregations. This time, however, they are not open to the idea of

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<sup>7</sup> Committee, "Gentiles in a Jewish Congregation," CARR #161.

<sup>8</sup> Orah Hayim 199.4.

<sup>9</sup> Committee, CARR #161.

<sup>10</sup> Committee, "Synagogue Membership of a Mixed Couple," ARR #10.

renewing terminology. Citing numerous Talmudic, Hellenistic and modern sources, the Committee holds that the terms *ger toshav* and *yirei adonai* are only theoretical terms used for a few centuries in rabbinic literature. These titles, they write, at most designate non-idolaters who accept some ethics of Judaism. At the least, the titles simply indicate how the rabbis would theoretically like to treat resident aliens in Israel. The Committee concludes that there is no role for these categories in modern times and any inclusion of such terms will confuse matters.<sup>11</sup>

### **Governance**

In 1977, Freehof addresses the growing phenomena of leadership in Reform Synagogues by non-Jews. Basing his responsum on historical and textual sources, he writes that, "provision was constantly made while the Temple was in existence for sacrificial gifts from gentiles to be accepted and offered."<sup>12</sup> However, Deuteronomy 17:15, he continues, is explicit in stating, "One from among thy brethren thou shalt set king over thee. Thou mayest not put a foreigner [i.e., a non-Jew] over thee who is not thy brother." He asserts that both the rabbis of the Talmud and later Maimonides argue that leadership must be in Jewish hands. Thus, he concludes, since one of the goals with mixed marriage in his view is to achieve conversion, having a non-Jewish sisterhood president, "would be an obstacle to one of the important goals of the congregation."

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<sup>11</sup> Committee, "Congregational Membership for a Non-Jewish Spouse," CARR #162.

<sup>12</sup> Freehof, "Gentile President for Sisterhood," RRT, #53.

In 1982, the Responsa Committee once again addresses this issue. They conclude that full membership for a non-Jewish spouse, "could very likely lead to an absurd condition in which a Jewish congregation would have a non-Jewish officer whose knowledge of the workings of the synagogue would be gained only from the practical organizational experience but without any Jewish background."<sup>13</sup>

In 1983, the Committee takes a closer look at the issue of non-Jewish members serving on congregational committees. The responsum emphatically states that synagogues are not "general charities or social clubs open to everyone."<sup>14</sup> As such, non-Jews must be excluded from: 1) "those committees which deal with matters which specifically involved Jewish knowledge or feelings..." and 2) "committees which are viewed as stepping-stones to congregational leadership." However, the Responsa Committee is open to the inclusion of non-Jews on general interest committees, provided that no leadership position nor vote is given to the person.

#### **Concerning the non-Jew in religious matters**

Most questions regarding Jewish practice focus on life-cycle events such as weddings and funerals. It is at these important, and often very emotional, occasions that people are most likely to butt heads with certain rules, or lack thereof, in their congregations. Rabbis and congregations have, therefore, often turned to the Responsa Committee of the CCAR to address these very difficult and often divisive issues.

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<sup>13</sup> Jacob, "Synagogue Membership of a Mixed Couple," ARR #10.

<sup>14</sup> Jacob, "Gentile Membership Congregational Committees," CARR #164.

## Death

In general, the chairmen of the Responsa Committee are very open to the burial of non-Jewish spouses in Jewish cemeteries. In 1914, Kaufmann Kohler writes that, "our cemeteries are not as a whole consecrated ground, in the sense that those not of the Jewish faith are excluded from them. Only the spot where the body is interred becomes sacred thereby."<sup>15</sup> Kohler, this time writing with Jacob Lauterbach, reaffirms this commitment in 1916, while insisting that the reverse situation is not acceptable. They write that, "the rabbi has no business to officiate at his [a Jew married to a non-Jew] funeral in a non-Jewish cemetery," as such a burial implies that the deceased had no "Jewish allegiance."<sup>16</sup> Two years later, in the context of a woman who practiced as a Christian Scientist, Kohler writes that to perform this woman's funeral in a non-Jewish cemetery is "*Chilul Hashem*" (profaning the name of God).<sup>17</sup> In 1919, Kohler again writes on this subject, this time citing both the Talmud and Philo. He notes that the only non-Jews who may have been buried in Jewish cemeteries in pre-modern times were unrecognizable bodies found unburied. He writes that burying such a body constitutes a *met mitzvah*, a humanitarian law which applies to all people.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kaufman Kohler, "Burial of Non-Jewish Wives in Jewish Cemeteries," ARR #98.

<sup>16</sup> Kohler and Lauterbach, "Burial of Non-Jewish Wives in Jewish Cemeteries," ARR #98.

<sup>17</sup> "Rabbi Officiating at Christian Scientist's Funeral," ARR #94.

<sup>18</sup> Kohler, "Burial of Non-Jewish Wives in Jewish Cemeteries," ARR #98.



In 1919, Rabbi Gotthard Deutsch writes an exhaustive responsum on the subject of burying non-Jews in a Jewish cemetery. He delves into Biblical and Talmudic literature as well as modern sources. He concludes in part that:

"1) The Bible gives no clear evidence by which the question can be decided, though -- speaking of family graves -- its testimony would be rather negative

2) The Talmudic writings do not decide the case clearly, but glossarists and codifiers derive from the Talmud a negative view, with the exception of one authority [Joel Sirkes] who limits the burial of non-Jews in Jewish cemeteries to emergency cases, such as battles and epidemics"<sup>19</sup>

In this specific case, however, Deutsch defers to the congregation to gage its own local conditions, insisting that congregational policy, "does not lie within the line of theological argument."

In 1936, Jacob Mann and the "Majority of [the] Committee," take issue with the earlier Responsum of Kohler and Lauterbach of 1916. Mann believes that a non-Jewish wife should not be buried with her Jewish husband in a Jewish cemetery because she was active in her own church and thus should be buried by her minister, which Mann adds cannot be done in a Jewish cemetery.<sup>20</sup> Julius Rappaport counters that this person should indeed be buried in a Jewish cemetery with her own minister. Citing numerous Rabbinic sources, Rappaport concludes that, "we may safely rely upon his [the Christian minister's] sense of decency to realize that he is in a Jewish cemetery."<sup>21</sup> A "dissenting member of the

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<sup>19</sup> Deutsch, "Burial of Non-Jewish Wives in Jewish Cemeteries," ARR #98.

<sup>20</sup> Mann, "Burial of Non-Jewish Wives in Jewish Cemeteries," ARR #98.

<sup>21</sup> Rappaport, "Burial of Non-Jewish Wives in Jewish Cemeteries," ARR #98.

Committee" adds that, "the interment ritual would have to be of a neutral character, and that the tombstone could not bear the symbol of her church."<sup>22</sup> The conflicting opinions within the committee prevent a concrete resolution to this issue.

In 1963, Freehof picks up the argument of Kaufmann Kohler to suggest that since the cemetery itself has no firm basis in law, it is hard to argue that a Jewish cemetery should not include non-Jews.<sup>23</sup> He holds that the sanctity of a Jewish cemetery is based solely on *minhag*, while the sanctity of the grave itself is *halahik*. In fact, he notes that, the cemetery, unlike the school and synagogue, is not a requirement for a community and many communities therefore do not have them. Freehof cites Meir Friedman, who in the 1880s bases his understanding on Gittin 61a,<sup>24</sup> and writes that in Mishnaic times it was regular practice to bury non-Jews with Jews. Eleazer Hausdorff disagrees with most of Friedman's points, however he argues that the Gittin reading is not *halahik*. Instead, it comes from the feelings of the Jewish community. In such a light, a non-Jew is not buried next to a Jew for the sake of the dignity of the dead Jew -- who would not, or may not, want to be buried in such close proximity to the non-Jewish dead. Freehof also notes in this responsum that while a non-Jewish minister should only officiate at the funeral home, if necessary he/she may officiate at the Jewish cemetery, providing that the rabbi's manual or certain Psalms are used.

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<sup>22</sup> Anonymous, "Burial of Non-Jewish Wives in Jewish Cemeteries," ARR #98.

<sup>23</sup> Freehof, "Non-Jewish Burial in a Jewish Cemetery," ARR #99.

<sup>24</sup> Gittin 61a states: "We sustain the poor of non-Jews, comfort their mourners, and bury their dead with the dead of Israel." Rashi understands "with" to mean in the same cemetery. Friedman understands "with" to mean in the same grave.

He clarifies his statements by writing that burial should only be for family members and no area should be set aside for non-Jews not related to Jews

In 1981, Walter Jacob addresses this same point his predecessor addressed when he makes a distinction in a responsum noting that when the deceased non-Jew is not a spouse of a Jew, even when the deceased is studying for conversion, burial is not permitted in a Jewish cemetery, “as this individual at that time has only a preliminary relationship to Judaism”<sup>25</sup>

In 1983, the Committee deems it appropriate to conduct a slightly modified Jewish service for a non-Jewish spouse. One suggestion is to delete “*el male rahamim*”<sup>26 27</sup> Two years later, the Committee states that Jews may be buried in a non-Jewish cemetery, with the condition that the plot be set apart and the area clearly identified through Hebrew lettering.<sup>28</sup> In a related note, in 1987, the Committee writes that even an apostate from Judaism may be buried with a simple ceremony.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the question of burial, death also brings the question of mourning and *kaddish*.<sup>30</sup> In 1955, Israel Bettan is asked to address the issue of a proselyte reciting *kaddish*

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<sup>25</sup> Jacob, “Burial of a Prospective Convert,” ARR #97.

<sup>26</sup> “*El Male Rahamim*” is the traditional memorial prayer that is read during a funeral.

<sup>27</sup> Jacob, “Jewish Funeral for Non-Jewish Spouse,” CARR #99.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob, “Burial in a Christian Cemetery,” CARR #105.

<sup>29</sup> Jacob, “Burial of an Apostate,” CARR #100.

<sup>30</sup> “Kaddish” is a prayer recited for the deceased any time after the funeral.

for her non-Jewish parents. He answers that although the proselyte is considered a new-born, even the Rabbis permit inheritance and the exercising of Jewish mourning customs.<sup>31</sup> In 1957, Freehof writes a similar responsum based on the recitation of *kaddish* for an apostate sibling.<sup>32</sup> He cites David Cohen, a 16th Century rabbi from the Island of Corfu, who says that even for the son of an apostate, "it is the duty of the son to honor his father and to benefit him as much as he can be saying Kaddish." And, as Abraham Toomim wrote in the 19th century, "there certainly can be no prohibition to utter this praise to the Almighty, i.e., the kaddish."<sup>33</sup>

In 1977, Walter Jacob writes that non-Jews may be memorialized on a Yahrzeit list.<sup>34</sup> And, in 1986, the Committee holds that not only is there ample precedence for mourning a righteous gentile who is a benefactor or protector of some sort of the Jewish community, one mourns a non-Jewish parent because the parent, "has presumably also influenced her child for good."<sup>35</sup>

### **Weddings**

Another life-cycle event which has gained much of the public's attention is interfaith-weddings. In 1919, Kaufmann Kohler addresses the issue of a rabbi officiating at such a union. He states that rabbis may not do so, not even in a lay capacity, as "neither Judaism nor

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<sup>31</sup> Israel Bettan, "A Proselyte Reciting Kaddish for Deceased Parents," ARR #123.

<sup>32</sup> Freehof, "Kaddish for a Unitarian Sister," ARR #124.

<sup>33</sup> Freehof, "Kaddish for a Unitarian Sister," ARR #124.

<sup>34</sup> Jacob, "Memorializing Christian Relatives," ARR #125.

<sup>35</sup> Jacob, "Mourning for a Non-Jewish Spouse," CARR #121.

the State law acknowledges such a marriage as legal." He adds, "A Christian minister cannot consecrate a Jewish home, nor can a Jewish minister consecrate a Christian home, and if man and wife belong to two different religions, it will be a house divided against itself."<sup>36</sup>

In 1960, Freehof disagrees with Kohler and acknowledges that State law recognizes any marriage officiated by a rabbi.<sup>37</sup> Freehof draws from traditional sources to explain that just as a Jewish woman may be a professional or amateur midwife for a non-Jew when a refusal to do so might cause ill-will, so too may a Jew set up a marriage for a non-Jew. He adds that a wedding ceremony between two non-Jews cannot be a Jewish ceremony and the rabbi must act as "minister" not "rabbi." However, he concludes that although such a ceremony is not kiddushin, it is legitimate.

In 1980 the Responsa Committee once again addresses the issue of interfaith-weddings. At this time, the Committee explains in great length the Biblical, Hellenistic, Talmudic, Medieval, and Modern attitudes toward such marriages. This responsum aims at explaining the resolution passed by the CCAR in 1973 which states in part: "The Central Conference Of American Rabbis, recalling its stand adopted in 1908 'that mixed marriage is contrary to the Jewish tradition and should be discouraged,' now declares its opposition to participation by its members in any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Kohler, "Rabbi Officiating at Mixed Marriages," ARR #148.

<sup>37</sup> State laws may have changed during these 40 plus years; Freehof, RR&RRR #44.

<sup>38</sup> Jacob, "Reform Judaism and Mixed Marriage," ARR #146.

### Other Rites

Although many rabbis, whether following the suggestions of the CCAR or their own conscience, do not perform interfaith-weddings, some welcome the interfaith couple into the congregation in other manners. In 1969, Freehof writes that a non-Jewish parent may be called up to the Torah but should recite an alternative blessing. He suggests: "Praised be Thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who has given His sacred law unto all His children that we may learn, observe, and serve Him in righteousness."<sup>39</sup>

In 1979, Walter Jacob is asked whether or not a couple contemplating intermarriage could receive a prayer by the rabbi. He concludes that the rabbi cannot bless the couple in advance of their wedding because it would appear to be approval or acceptance of such a union. They could, however, be welcomed into the community at a later time.<sup>40</sup> Freehof, at an earlier time, also looks at this issue. He recognizes that for a bridegroom, the "calling up to the Torah" is deemed one of the most important of the various "obligations."<sup>41</sup> However, doing so in the instance of an interfaith wedding seems to be, "more than we can properly do to allay the understandable grief of the Jewish parents."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Freehof, Current Reform Responsa #23.

<sup>40</sup> Jacob, "Prayer for Couple Contemplating Inter-marriage," 1979, ARR #147.

<sup>41</sup> Freehof, "A Gentile bridegroom called to the Torah," TRR #3.



One of the most often cited Reform Responsa on this matter answers the question posed in 1979: "To what extent may non-Jews participate in a Jewish public service?"<sup>42</sup> The committee answers:

"We should, of course, remember that good treatment and many privileges were extended to pagans in earlier times, both in Israel and in Babylon, *mipenei darchei shalom*."<sup>43</sup> We comforted their dead, visited their sick, helped their poor, etc. Proper consideration was to be extended, as they were human beings despite pagan beliefs.

It would be appropriate to have that [non-Jewish] parent participate in some way in the service, but not in the same way as a Jewish parent. For example, he or she should not recite the traditional blessing over the Torah which includes the words "*asher bachar banu*"<sup>44</sup>

We have, therefore, gone much further than any generation before our time by permitting non-Jews a larger role in our public services; this is part of a more open and friendly interreligious attitude which the Reform movement has encouraged and led. Yet, these steps have remained within definite limits. We have not included non-Jews, no matter how friendly, in the essential elements of the service.

If we follow the line of reasoning which divides between the essential service and supplemental prayers and statements, we may conclude that Christians, Moslems, and other non-Jews who fall into the category of *Benei Noach* may participate in a public service in any of the following ways: (1) through anything which does not require specific statement from them, i.e., by standing and silently witnessing whatever is taking place (e.g. as a member of a wedding party or as a pallbearer); (2) through the recitation of special prayers added to the service at non-liturgical community-wide services, commemorations, and celebrations (Thanksgiving, etc.); (3) through the recitation of prayers for special family occasions (Bar/Bat Mitzvah of children raised as Jews, at a wedding or funeral, etc.). All such prayers and statements should reflect the mood of the service and be non-Christological in nature."

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<sup>42</sup> Jacob, "Participation of Non-Jews in a Jewish Public Service," 1979, ARR #6

<sup>43</sup> "For the sake of peace."

<sup>44</sup> "Who has chosen us."

Non-Jewish involvement in the worship service, whether for Shabbat or life-cycle events takes a dramatic swing in the 1980's. The Committee in 1983 is seriously divided on the role a parent could/should play in a child's *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. The majority of the Committee seeks complete or partial exclusion of the non-Jewish parent. A dissenting voice, however, is in favor of full inclusions with some prayer modifications. The consensus holds that it is inappropriate for a non-Jewish parent to lead major segments of the service, recite *berakhot*, or make statements that proclaim "we" or "us" in reference to the Jewish people.<sup>45</sup>

In 1985, Walter Jacob writes a responsum regarding the use of non-Jewish choirs or soloists. He sees no objection to a non-Jewish choir that sings with the congregation or performs solo pieces that are not essential elements of the service. However, he holds that all efforts should be made to organize a Jewish choir, because the *kavanah*<sup>46</sup> they exhibit will outdistance their ability, or their lack of ability.<sup>47</sup>

In 1994, the Committee takes a less ambiguous stance. Addressing non-Jewish choirs and singers, they write: "We note this fact with regret and consider it an anachronism for our time, and in retrospect, an historical error."<sup>48</sup> They maintain that non-Jewish choirs were always hidden because the congregations were a bit embarrassed by them not being Jewish. "One listened, so to speak, to the music and not to those who made it." The responsum goes

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<sup>45</sup> Jacob, "Non-Jewish Participation in a *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*," CARR #160.

<sup>46</sup> The intention.

<sup>47</sup> Jacob, "Non-Jewish Voices in Congregational Choir," CARR #132.

<sup>48</sup> This, and all other references to the 1994 Responsum are found in Plaut and Washofsky.



on. "They enhanced the esthetic environment, but they were not part of the congregation who prayed and, most important, they were not expected to pray with it. They were there to sing, and nothing else." Finally, they conclude that the choir acts as the *Shelichei tsibbur* (*Shatz*), and therefore must be members of the "covenant community," a responsibility that cannot be yielded to "outsiders."

Such a position, regarding the *Shatz*, guides the entire premise of the 1994 Committee for establishing boundaries within the worship structure. Given that this is the most recent responsum by this Committee it deserves a close look. From the outset the Committee states "Our decisions have held that there must be boundaries in order to assure the identity and continued health of our congregations as well as our movement. If we are everything to everyone, we are in the end nothing at all. On this, there is general agreement." And they conclude:

"We are aware that there are differing views of the nature of Jewish worship and much that pertains to it. However, in the view of this Committee, there is a clear and present danger that our movement is dissolving at the edges and is surrendering its singularity to a beckoning culture which champions the syncretistic. Jewish identity is being eroded and is in need of clear guide lines which will define it unmistakably. To provide such markers is the task of the Responsa Committee."

The 1994 Committee further explores the role of the *Shatz* in Talmudic literature, a role commonly filled today by the rabbi or cantor. Due to a lack of prayer books and a general unfamiliarity with Jewish liturgy early in our history, the *Shatz* read the prayers and the congregation was only required to reply with an affirmative "amen". The 1994 responsum quotes Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8: "This is the general principle: One who is not obligated

in a matter [of ritual observance] cannot enable others to fulfill their obligation [in that matter]” Thus, the leader must already be obligated for public worship. The recitation of the *shema* and its blessings and the *amidah* are considered *mitzvo*, so by definition are not obligated to non-Jews. Traditionally, the Committee recognizes, responsa look at the issue of saying “amen” once a non-Jew has said a prayer. The 1994 Responsa Committee stresses that such an incidence is only looked at *Bediavad* -- once the prayer has already been said. In such instances the rabbis try to make the best of what they view as an unfortunate situation. They do not, the Committee argues, look at the situation *L'haichila* -- or before the incidence has occurred.

The Committee continues, “Halakhic tradition considers participation in communal ritual as an outflow of obligation. The absence of obligation disqualifies a Jew from leading the congregation as a *sheliach tsibbur*. By long-standing practice, being called to the *beema* for an *aliyah* partakes of the same principle.” However, they feel that the Torah service has been changed by the Reform community. It is now perceived as a ritual for special occasions rather than for regular practice. Therefore it may seem appropriate to have the parents, both Jewish and non-Jewish, recite the blessings at a child’s *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*. However, they conclude that: “To be called to the Torah is to take one’s position in the chain of privilege and responsibility by which the Jewish community has perpetuated itself. A non-Jew, no matter how supportive, does not share that privilege or that responsibility as long as s/he remains formally outside the Jewish community.”

Noting that worship has historically been conducted in the communal setting of a *minyan*, the 1994 Committee writes that a *minyan* is a "mini-recreation of the entire people of Israel. When a *minyan* is present, God is present." Such a prayer quorum reaffirms the relationship between God and Israel and thus, "defines a Jewish community in a spiritual sense, as opposed to an organizational or institutional sense." Thus, any role for the non-Jews in this "mini-recreation" must be very limited if permitted at all.

While the 1994 Committee establishes exclusionary boundaries in the worship service, it also enables a certain amount of inclusion. The Responsum carefully states: "We should of course be sensitive to the Gentile parents who are committed to raising their children as Jews, and to acknowledge their commitment, but do so without violating the community's integrity." They add: "What the congregation can accord the Gentile worshiper is proximity and recognition. There is no reason why a non-Jewish parent should not accompany the Jewish parent to the *beema* when the latter is called for an *aliyah*." Here the Committee clearly includes the non-Jewish family members in Jewish life-cycle events.

### Conclusion

Responsum committees and their respective chairs have over the years taken repeated looks at integral questions for the Reform Jewish community. Some responsa concerning the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue tend toward a greater degree of inclusion and some toward a greater degree of exclusion. However, in no case are the doors to the synagogue closed and locked to the non-Jew. In recent years the boundaries are drawn closer. Yet, even

in the most recent responsum of 1994, the non-Jewish family member is acknowledged as a member of the larger Jewish community

The Responsa Committee continues to explore traditional Jewish texts and balance them with modern realities. New, unforeseen, questions arise and are brought to this Committee to provide guidance for Reform Jews and Reform Jewish institutions. In some ways, the Responsa Committee is the embodiment of true Reform Judaism, as presented by the late Biblical scholar, Rabbi Chanan Brichto

"It is obvious that Reform, except in the context of tradition, is an absurdity. For reform is a refashioning, a modification, a refinement, often a return to pristine precedent – and not a nihilistic repudiation. And so long as we refuse to add the *-ed* to Reform which would turn the verbal noun into a past participle, Reform is committed to an ever-continuing re-examination of the changes it has adopted, of the tradition it has reshaped and of the tradition it has itself become."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Brichto.

### **A Case Study and Analysis of Reform Jewish Congregations' Policies**

As stated previously, traditional texts provide an important foundation for modern policies addressing the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. At times, however, a tension exists between these textual sources and the modern circumstances that previous generations did not anticipate. Each congregation is left to find a balance between the critical nature of fulfilling its own needs and visions and the importance of Jewish tradition. Therefore, a case study and analysis will examine how the modern Reform congregation constructs a balance between contemporary congregational issues and Jewish tradition.

The congregations in this study include **Washington Hebrew Congregation**, Washington, D.C., **Rockdale Temple/K.K.Bene Israel**, Cincinnati, OH, **Temple Beth El**, Charlotte, NC, **Anshe Hessed Congregation**, Erie, PA, **Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple**, New Brunswick, NJ, **Temple Kol Ami**, West Bloomfield, MI, **Temple Emanu-El**, Edison, NJ, **Congregation Beth Shalom**, Bryan, TX, **Congregation Oheb Shalom**, Sandusky, OH, **Temple Beth-El**, Somerville, NJ, and **Temple Emanuel**, Grand Rapids, MI.

Some of the congregations have written policies covering all areas of synagogue life including Temple membership, governance, and ritual. Others have less extensive policies that address only one or two of these categories. Two congregations are currently in the committee stage of establishing policy. In addition to the written statements, most congregations have unwritten policies concerning the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. In at least one instance, a congregation has not followed through with some of its recorded policies.

Each congregation that is included in the sampling below is introduced with pertinent historical background information. This information is followed by a summary of the congregation's policy as well as an assessment of this policy. The assessment is based upon a sliding scale developed by the author of how, where, and when a congregation draws its boundaries. On one extreme are the "more inclusive" congregations and at the other are the "more exclusive" congregations. This is followed by excerpts from congregation documents where available.

The labels applied to congregations' policies are not necessarily based upon explicit references to inclusivity and exclusivity made by the congregation. Most policies attempt to be amicable, using welcoming language. Thus, any assessment is based on the tone and feeling of the policy, in addition to the written or unwritten words. No value judgement is intended through the use of the words "inclusive" and "exclusive". These labels are used solely to indicate the boundaries set by a congregation. Each may be very appropriate approaches given different circumstances. Inclusivity is not to be equated with welcoming, nor is exclusivity to be equated with unwelcoming. A congregation may, in fact, have a very rigid boundary with regard to ritual and thus may deserve the label of ritually "exclusive", while at the same time creating an overall welcoming atmosphere by providing programs for non-Jews. Furthermore, many non-Jews find a congregation more welcoming when boundaries are clearly delineated, regardless of the inclusivity or exclusivity of a congregation's policy.

Rabbi Herbert Bronstein writes of his own experience with establishing policy

“... it became clear that the biggest issues for the non-Jewish person was clarity in several various senses.<sup>1</sup> First of all, they did not want ‘any surprises’. They did not want to be put into any embarrassing or marginal situations. They wanted to know ahead of time exactly what was expected of them. They did not want to be excluded or made to feel self-conscious. Nor did they want to be put in compromising situations. In short, they wanted definition.”<sup>1</sup>

In the area of **membership**, the “more inclusive” congregation grants full membership and voting rights to non-Jews regardless of whether they are married to Jews or are raising Jewish children. The “inclusive” congregation accepts non-Jews as members when they are married to Jews. The “exclusive” congregation accepts family units as members and thus grants *de facto* membership to non-Jewish family members. The “more exclusive” congregation does not grant membership status to non-Jews.

Membership			
More Inclusive	Inclusive	Exclusive	More Exclusive
Accepted outright	Member if married to a Jew	Defacto member if married to a Jew	Not accepted at all

In the area of **governance**, the “more inclusive” congregation puts no restrictions on non-Jews. Non-Jews can thus serve on any committee and hold any office -- including that of president of the congregation. The “inclusive” congregation offers leadership positions on certain committees to non-Jews. The “exclusive” congregation allows participation but no leadership positions on committees for non-Jews. The “more exclusive” congregation does

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Bronstein 3.



not allow such participation by non-Jews. This congregation may or may not accept non-Jews as members.

Governance			
More Inclusive	Inclusive	Exclusive	More Exclusive
All positions are open	Leadership is limited to certain committees	Serve on committees but no leadership	No positions are open

The final area, and the most difficult to define, is that of **ritual**. The “more exclusive” congregation does not allow the non-Jew to have any leadership role in the worship service whether for regular services or life-cycle events. Leadership, here, refers to any time the individual addresses the congregation or ascends the *bima*, and thereby assumes the role of *sheliach tzibur*. This is not to say that non-Jews are not welcome to attend worship services, as this seems to be universally accepted. The “exclusive” congregation allows the non-Jew to lead any part of the service that is not “particularistic” to Judaism. Such a congregation accepts the non-Jew as a non-Jew.

Other congregations allow full leadership rights to all non-Jews. Some of these congregations allow the non-Jew to lead any part of the service. In other congregations, those parts of the service that are traditionally “particularistic” to Judaism are altered to be “universalistic”, and the congregation allows the non-Jew to lead any part of this re-written service. These congregations blur the lines between Jew and non-Jew by transforming the particular into the universal. For the purposes of this study, congregations that make liturgical changes are deemed “more inclusive”.



Ritual			
More Inclusive	Inclusive	Exclusive	More Exclusive
All rituals with liturgical changes	All rituals without liturgical changes	Universal prayers and readings only	No leadership

### Congregations with Membership, Governance, and Ritual Policies Regarding the Role of the Non-Jew

Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, D.C.			
Membership Policy	Governance Policy	Ritual Policy -- Life cycle	Ritual Policy -- non Life-cycle
More Exclusive	More Exclusive	Exclusive	More Exclusive

Washington Hebrew Congregation, in Washington, D.C., is the largest congregation in this study. Organized originally in 1852, as a traditional congregation with some elements of Reform Judaism, the congregation formally adopted ritual reforms in 1870. Today, Washington Hebrew records 2745 members on its roster. Three rabbis serve the congregation along with a large professional staff that includes a full-time educator, cantor and administrator. The congregation describes itself as, "a place where its members pray as a community, study Judaism and its application to our contemporary society, and gather to celebrate the happiest life-cycle events along with those that bring us great sorrow."<sup>2</sup> There

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<sup>2</sup> Washington Hebrew Congregation, online, Internet, 9 Jan. 1997.

are many Reform congregation alternatives to Washington Hebrew in the Washington, D C Metropolitan area.

In Washington Hebrew Congregation, non-Jews cannot be members, nor can they serve on the Board. According to their policy, membership is open to "individuals of the Jewish faith." Rabbi Kenneth S. Weiss, the congregation's Assistant Rabbi, notes that the congregation has a "relatively low percentage of interfaith marriages." This may account for the fact that membership and governance policies are "more exclusive."

Recently, the President of the congregation requested that the Senior Staff formulate a policy on the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue in order to avert any possible future conflicts. The document was presented to the congregation in segments through their weekly bulletin, beginning in November, 1996. The policy was accepted without a formal vote by the congregation as a whole or by the congregation's Board of Trustees.

The ritual policy developed by the Senior Staff of Washington Hebrew is "exclusive." It opens, "We are committed to warmly embracing all who wish to worship with us while maintaining the integrity of our worship services." This is understood to mean that non-Jews may come to worship services. However, they go on to say that while some rituals are open to non-Jews during life-cycle events, most are deemed "appropriate" only for performance by Jews. Although exclusionary language such as "permitted" or conversely "not allowed" is not used in the document, the policy is "exclusive." It must be noted that whatever inclusion does exist in this policy applies to life-cycle events only, and not to other worship experiences.

**Excerpts from "Draft Proposal for Guidelines for the Participation of a Non-Jewish Family Member in Life cycles":**

We are committed to warmly embracing all who wish to worship with us while maintaining the integrity of our worship services.

B'rit Milah, B'rit Banot or Naming In the case of mixed-married families, our rabbis often arrange for additional readings to be recited by parents or grandparents.

Both parents, regardless of their Jewish status, may stand with their child on the Bimah during a naming ceremony.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Parent support during this special time makes a great impact on the child and the Temple and its rabbis and cantor are eager to embrace the total family during this important period of preparation.

One parent or a designated member of the family may sit on the Bimah, whether Jewish or not. The other parent or designated member of the family may participate in either (a) the blessing of Sabbath candles, if that parent or designated family member is Jewish, or (b) the recitation of one of several readings recited at the time of the candle ritual.

Saturday Morning or Havdalah Service -- At Saturday morning or Havdalah services, both parents, Jew and non-Jew may be seated on the Bimah during the service. One parent takes the Torah out of the Ark. It is appropriate for this to be done by a Jewish parent.

Since the Torah is the symbol of our Jewish heritage and is being passed as a legacy from one generation to the other, it is appropriate that the physical passing of the Torah to the bar/bat mitzvah be done by the Jewish parent.

The personal words that are spoken to the bar/bat mitzvah may be spoken by either parent or both the Jewish and the non-Jewish parent.

During the Torah reading, all of the family and friends desired and designated by the parents, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, may stand grouped around the bar/bat mitzvah on the Bimah.

*Aliyot*, the recitation of blessings over the Torah reading, may be given to anyone who is both Jewish and over the age of 13.

When a non-Jewish member of an inter-faith family passes away, if that individual has expressed a desire to be buried in our cemetery, we will honor that desire so that that person and the spouse as well as other family members can be together.

Rockdale Temple/K. K. Bene Israel, Cincinnati, Ohio			
Membership Policy	Governance Policy	Ritual Policy – Life-cycle	Ritual Policy – non Life-cycle
Inclusive	Exclusive	Inclusive	Exclusive

Rockdale Temple/K. K. Bene Israel, in Cincinnati, Ohio, is a Reform congregation of 943 families. The congregation has two full time rabbis as well as a professional educator, administrator, and full support staff. Rockdale was established in 1824 and is the, "oldest, continually functioning congregation west of the Allegheny Mountains."<sup>3</sup> Although originally an Orthodox institution, the congregation became firmly grounded in Classical Reform at an early date. Today, some vestiges of "Classical" Reform still remain. For instance, *The Union Prayer Book* is used once a month and few congregants cover their head in the sanctuary. However, there is a slow yet progressive movement toward tradition, such as *hakafot* (Torah processions) on Shabbat. Cincinnati's Jewish population is approximately 25,000. Other congregations, including two other Reform congregations, are near by.

In 1992, the congregation formed a Temple Life Committee "to define the role of the non-Jewish partner in Temple life." The committee produced a document which was accepted by the Board of Trustees in 1996. Since then, the document was published in the

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<sup>3</sup> Concerning Judaism

congregation's monthly bulletin. In addition, articles explaining the policy were published in installments in the bulletin beginning in November 1996.

The congregation's membership policy is "inclusive." A non-Jew may be elected to membership as part of a Jewish family. No renunciation of other religious affiliation is necessary, nor is a commitment to Judaism required. However, the governance policy of Rockdale is "exclusive." All congregants may serve on committees but a non-Jew is not given a vote on certain "religious-based committees" such as the Ritual and Education committees. Non-Jewish members are also excluded from congregational votes, and serving as a committee chair, Board Member, Officer, or Trustee.

Rather than devote a policy to life-cycle events alone, as was the case with Washington Hebrew, Rockdale's policy clearly distinguishes between the ritual participation extended to non-Jews in life-cycle and non life-cycle events. The latter is "exclusive", while the former is "inclusive", albeit always under the "discretion of the Senior Rabbi." Three issues are highlighted by the Board of Trustees as differing depending upon the nature of the service: holding/carrying the Torah, aliyot to the Torah, and candle lighting and kiddush. While each of these rituals is normally reserved for a Jew, during life-cycle events the Senior Rabbi may extend the privilege to non-Jewish family members. No changes are made in the liturgy to accommodate non-Jewish participation. The congregation's bulletin states: "... it is important for the parent and/or grandparent who fosters the child's Judaism and who is comfortable and understands the meaning and significance of the symbolism of the act, to participate in the ceremony. During preparation for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah the family meets

with the Rabbi, who can determine whether or not the non-Jewish family member may meaningfully participate.”

**Excerpts from “The Role of the Non-Jew at Rockdale Temple”, October 1996:**

Membership: Any Jewish individual or a family which has at least one Jewish member may apply to be elected to membership of Rockdale Temple in accordance with the Temple’s code of regulations. A family can include one or more adults, and dependent children living at home or away at school (until the age of 23)

Voting: Jewish members eighteen years of age or older who are in good standing shall be entitled to vote. Thus a member unit may have several votes; one for each person defined as a “member”.

Committees: There are two categories of committees at Rockdale (1) organizational/social, and (2) religious. Examples of the first category (organizational/social) are Building and Grounds, Membership, Outreach, Budget and Finance. The second category (religious-based committees) includes Ritual and Education (adult, youth, nursery school). Any Temple member (Jew or non-Jew) may be asked to serve on any committee. However, only Jewish members shall be permitted to vote on matters coming before religious-based committees.

Committee Chairs: Committee chairs are appointed by the president. All committee chairs must be Jewish.

Board of Trustees: Because we are a Jewish community in which only Jewish members may vote, members of the Board of Trustees must be Jews.

Officers: Since only Jews may serve on the Board of Trustees, only Jewish members may be officers.

Auxiliaries: the Auxiliaries are governed by their constitutions and, therefore, may elect officers in accordance with their rules. However, the representative from an auxiliary to the Board of Trustees who would have voting rights must be Jewish.



Religious practices within the Temple

Universalistic prayers do not imply that the reciter is Jewish. These can be recited by anyone

When an individual recites particularistic prayers from the *bima*, s/he is acting as *sheliach tzibur* (the representative of the congregation). A person taking that role acknowledges his/her covenantal relationship with God and the Jewish people. Thus, by the act of leading the congregation in such a prayer, the reciter declares that s/he is a Jew.

The Board recognizes that certain life-cycle events are so vitally important in promoting family unity that non-Jewish family members may be permitted to lead prayers which are reserved by tradition to the *sheliach tzibur*. This broadening of the non-Jew's role is especially significant in *B'nei Mitzvah* ceremonies and the rituals which accompany them (e.g., candle lighting and *Kiddush* on the Shabbat prior to the ceremony, *Aliyot*, passing of the Torah). In this instance, the Senior Rabbi may allow non-Jewish family members full participation, provided that they demonstrate their support, and their understanding of the significance of the commitment being expressed by their Jewish family member.

**Excerpts from "A commentary on Rockdale Temple's policy statement on the role of the non-Jew in congregational life":**

Rockdale Temple has long been in the forefront of Reform Judaism, often leading the movement to interpret newly-emerging issues, and to find solutions to the very real life problems which its members encounter. This is especially true in our enthusiastic welcoming of interfaith couples into our extended family. Our goal is to be as inclusive of all our members as possible. However, certain boundaries must exist, and without identifying and defining those boundaries, we would no longer be a Jewish community.

Over the years our Temple has broadened its understanding of what constitutes the 'extended Rockdale family' as a part of the dynamic, ongoing reforming process that is the essence of Reform Judaism. Our tradition has grappled with the role for the non-Jew in the community during various times and in different contexts. We turn to the wisdom of our heritage, but we find little absolute guidance. Ultimately, each congregation must find its own level of comfort.

Through a lengthy, deliberative and thoughtful process of focus groups, community meetings and Board retreats, Rockdale has articulated its policies.

**Excerpts from Bulletin articles:**

Currently our constitution allows only individuals who are Jewish to participate in Temple life. As our Temple has been a leader in outreach to our non-Jewish friends and family members, Rockdale's practices have changed. Our Temple reaches out to embrace the spouses, life partners and significant others of our children.

Boundaries allow us to identify who we are. Therefore, anyone born of a Jewish mother or father or who has converted to Judaism is Jewish.

As an example, the Torah is passed from one generation to the next during B'nei Mitzvah. Since the Torah can never be made unclean by touching, holding, carrying or reading it, the answer lies in understanding the ceremony. The passing of the Torah symbolizes the transmission of the moral, ethical and religious traditions of the family. It is our belief that the parent or grandparent, who has nurtured the bar/bat mitzvah candidate and understands the meaning and significance of the ritual, be encouraged to participate. In this manner, non-Jewish family members can be included in meaningful ways during the service, including the recitation of certain prayers.

Candle lighting and kiddush: The prayers that are recited at these times are particularistic and, therefore, only Jews may recite them. A last example is the honor of an aliyah. This prayer acknowledges that the person who recites the blessing accepts the Torah and its teachings, and is, therefore, Jewish.

The Temple Life Committee does not believe that private ceremonies which are not performed during public worship services should have tightly defined restrictions and, therefore, more variations may be allowed.



Temple Beth El, Charlotte, North Carolina		
Membership Policy	Governance Policy	Ritual Policy
More Inclusive	Inclusive	More Inclusive

Temple Beth El, in Charlotte, North Carolina, is a fast-growing Reform congregation of 850 members.<sup>4</sup> The congregation organized in 1943, after breaking away from a local Conservative synagogue. According to Rabbi James Bennett, “for the first fifty years Beth El was the smaller less significant stepsister.” Now, however, he believes that Beth El is the largest congregation between Washington, D.C. and Atlanta. Rabbi Bennett describes the congregation as, “a very mainstream middle-of-the-road Reform congregation.” The congregation’s focus is primarily on family, youth, and outreach programming. Rabbi Bennett notes that, “we are a place where it is fun to be Jewish, exciting to be Jewish -- families feel welcome.”

In addition to the leadership of Rabbi James Bennett, the congregation’s professional staff consists of an assistant rabbi, a full-time cantor, and an administrator/educator. Understaffing is one of the congregation’s greatest concerns at this time and recently the congregation hired its first Assistant Rabbi.

According to Rabbi Bennett, his predecessor had relatively tighter restrictions on non-Jewish participation in synagogue ritual. As a self-acclaimed adherent to the message of Rabbi Schindler’s Biennial address, Rabbi Bennett tends toward the “more inclusive” side of

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<sup>4</sup> James Bennett, personal interview, 7 Jan. 1997.

the spectrum.<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Bennett identifies the congregation as, “an extremely warm, family-oriented, inclusive, open-minded congregation.” He does note, however, that there is sometimes a dilemma being the only Reform congregation in the area. He asks rhetorically: “How do you serve the needs of everybody without betraying the needs of some?”

Rabbi Bennett partially attributes the more than 100 percent growth in his congregation over the last three and a half years to the congregation’s “progressive” policy. Rabbi Bennett’s unofficial estimate is that approximately thirty percent of the congregants are in interfaith families. The congregation is primarily composed of families with children and the average age of congregants is fifty years old.

Temple Beth El has no formal document focusing on the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. However, their constitution of 1995 sheds light on their policy. The membership of Temple Beth El is “more inclusive”, allowing anyone with an interest in Judaism to join. There are no special requirements that one must be married to a Jew or give up one’s practice of a non-Jewish religion. Any adult member, Jewish or non-Jewish, is allowed to vote on all issues.

In regard to governance, the congregation is only “inclusive”. Non-Jews may serve on certain committees, however, the ritual and religious school committees as well as the Board of Directors are off limits.

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<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Schindler’s address is included in the chapter entitled, “The Role of the Non-Jew in American Reform Jewish Synagogues.”

Ritually, the congregation finds itself once again as one of the "more inclusive" Non-Jews are allowed full participation. Rabbi Bennet adds that "although non-Jews are given options to participate, most often they do not."

**Excerpts from Temple Beth El's Constitution of 8 August 1995:**

Eligibility for Membership Any person wishing to practice the Jewish faith, or any couple or family in which one or both spouses wish to practice the Jewish faith, or the surviving non-Jewish spouse of a Jewish member, shall be eligible for membership in the Temple

The right to vote All heads of household (i.e., husband and wife if applicable) who are members of the Temple shall have the right to vote at congregational meetings

The right to hold office All Jewish members shall be eligible for nomination, and, if elected or appointed, to serve on the board of Directors or hold any office of the Temple. Additionally, only Jewish members shall be eligible to serve as members of the ritual committee and Religious School Board.

The right of participation All member shall be eligible to participate in all religious and social activities held under the auspices of the Temple.

The right of attendance All members shall have the right to attend any meeting of the Board of Directors of the Temple. However, only members of the Board of Directors may vote.

Anshe Hessed Congregation, Erie, Pennsylvania		
Membership Policy	Governance Policy	Ritual Policy
Inclusive	Inclusive	More Inclusive

Anshe Hessed Congregation, in Erie, Pennsylvania, became a Reform congregation in 1875 and joined the UAHC in 1895. Although the larger community was once home to 1600

Jews, the population has declined and today the congregation counts only 240 members. However, there has been a recent resurgence of new interest as forty families have joined within the past few years. The congregation is currently led by Rabbi Michael Feshbach, who is in his fifth year at this pulpit. In addition to the full-time rabbi, the congregation has a complete part-time staff, including a student cantor on a monthly basis.

According to the congregation's literature, "Anshe Heseḏ began as a 'Classical' Reform congregation, with a strong commitment to American Jewish life and to the pursuit of social justice. It is now 'Mainstream' Reform, with a warm approach to Jewish tradition mixed with a spirit of creativity and innovation. We strive to be a warm and welcoming community, with cherished traditions -- yet open to new faces and new ideas."<sup>6</sup>

According to the Rabbi, sixty to eighty people in the congregation are not Jewish. The congregation's literature continues: "We have an active Havurah for Jews-by-choice and Interfaith Families. This group has been a source of friends and a supportive place for many of our members to grapple with challenges and difficult issues in an atmosphere of warmth and support."

In regard to membership and governance, Anshe Heseḏ is "inclusive." Non-Jews may become members as part of a Jewish family. As members, they are given a vote. According to the Rabbi, although non-Jews may not be elected to the congregation's Board, the President may appoint a non-Jew to serve. This is not evident from a reading of the "Bylaws" which only states that members are eligible for election to the Board. According to Rabbi

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<sup>6</sup> Temple Anshe Heseḏ, online, Internet, 9 Jan. 1997.

Feshbach, this policy was passed two years ago. Controversy surrounded the vote, however, in the end few voted against the document.<sup>7</sup>

In the context of ritual boundaries there is some ambiguity. According to Rabbi Feshbach, the ritual policy is "inclusive": "all should be welcomed and appropriately included, while retaining the integrity of tradition. If a prayer is universalistic and only Jews can recite it, it is chauvinistic. If a prayer implies a Jewish reader, we should respect its integrity." In the congregation's written policy, however, ritual boundaries are "more inclusive", adopting alternative language for particularistic prayers. Rabbi Feshbach self-identifies as more liberal or "inclusive" when ritual issues fall in a "grey area" such as in touching the Torah.

**Excerpts from "Constitution of the Anshe Hessed Reform Congregation of Erie, Pennsylvania," 1 July 1992:**

Membership: Any person of the Jewish faith eighteen (18) years of age or over may be elected to membership upon approval of his or her application by a majority vote of the Board of Directors present and voting. In the case of married persons so desiring, the unit of membership shall be the family.

**Excerpts from "By-Laws of the Anshe Hessed Reform Congregation of Erie, Pennsylvania," 1 July 1992:**

Article I, Section 2: A member in good standing shall be entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership, including, but not limited to, those specifically set forth herein, plus the following:

- a) to participate in all activities held under the auspices of the Congregation;
- b) to be eligible for election as an officer or director of the Congregation;
- c) to vote at all meetings of the congregation in the manner prescribed herein and to sign all petitions.

Article I, Section 6, a: in the event of death or divorce, a non-Jewish spouse may continue as a special member in good standing and is welcome to share in the fellowship of the Congregation.

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Feshbach, personal interview, 9 Jan. 1997.

Article II, Section 4. All members in good standing shall have voice and vote on all questions that arise at the meetings of the Congregation, provided that an individual member, or in the case of a family, the husband, wife, and children eighteen (18) years of age or older who are not self-supporting, shall each be entitled to no more than one vote on the same question, election, or issue.

**Excerpts from "Temple Anshe Hessed Ad Hoc Committee on the Role of the Gentile in the Synagogue Ritual Policy Guideline Proposal: The role of the gentile in ritual," 1995:**

The Rabbi, Board of Directors, and members of Temple Anshe Hessed recognize the importance of setting a welcoming tone in the religious as well as the social life of the congregation. We strongly encourage a wide range of exploration and experimentation with Jewish ritual on the part of individuals and families in home and private observance. In our public worship service as well, we strive for a sense of inclusion while respecting the integrity of the Jewish tradition. The following guidelines concerning appropriate inclusion of gentiles in public religious ritual express the consensus of the community, and are meant to establish a fair and consistent framework in which those specific decisions can be made.

Guiding principles

- 1) We wish to set a tone of "appropriate" inclusiveness.  
We strive to be an open and welcoming community. The words etched in stone on the outside wall of the Currick Memorial state our desire to be "a house of prayer, a house of study and a house of fellowship for all people." To reflect this philosophy, ritual decisions should be framed in as positive and welcoming a manner as is possible.
- 2) The bimah is a place for truth -- in participation by word or deed.  
The pulpit of a synagogue is a place for a Jewish view of the world to be played out and conveyed. It is the only place with that goal as its primary purpose. We should not create cognitive dissonance for the congregation by creating situations which are at odds with that world view.
- 3) The synagogue is the embodiment of Jewish values, which include the ideals of *derekh eretz* (politeness; kindness) and *mipnei darkai shalom* (for the sake of peace). To this end it is incumbent upon all activities within the synagogue to reflect peace, healing, and the betterment of the world, and to avoid acts of humiliation, denigration and desecration. We should work



creatively to establish appropriate alternative readings where necessary. Such a practice should not be limited to life-cycle events at which parents are “expected” to participate, but should be welcome during “regular” Shabbat worship as well.

### **Congregations with Partial Policies Regarding the Role of the Non-Jew**

<b>Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple, New Brunswick, New Jersey</b>		
<b>Membership Policy</b>	<b>Governance Policy</b>	<b>Ritual Policy</b>
Inclusive	Exclusive	More Exclusive

Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, was founded in 1859 as an orthodox synagogue with “liberal tendencies.” Currently, the congregation counts 526 members on its roster, and since 1974 it has been under the leadership of Rabbi Bennett Miller. Anshe Emeth has a full professional staff that includes two rabbis, a rabbinical intern, a cantor, an administrator, and an educator. Anshe Emeth is, according to Rabbi Miller, “136 years young, an urban synagogue serving several suburban communities so congregants come by choice.”<sup>8</sup> Other Reform temples are located in the area.<sup>9</sup>

Rabbi Miller describes the congregation as, “a reform Jewish congregation with a small “r” and a capital “J.” There is an emphasis on education for both children and adults, and a special focus on the “celebration of life.” Anshe Emeth has been a member of the

<sup>8</sup> Bennett Miller, personal interview, 7 Jan. 1997.

<sup>9</sup> One near-by congregation is Temple Emanu-El in Edison, NJ.



UAHC since 1948, and, according to Rabbi Miller, serves as a "flagship congregation in the region." The congregation is "willing to be on the cutting edge and serve as a model."

Anshe Emeth is an "inclusive" congregation with regard to membership. According to the new congregation's constitution, a non-Jew may only become a member of the congregation as part of a family with at least one Jewish adult. Prior to the adoption of this constitution, a non-Jew could not be a member, with or without a Jewish adult in the family. However, the congregation is "exclusive" in the area of governance. The non-Jewish member may not hold elected office on the board or chair a committee. Participation on non-standing committees is allowed. However, non-Jews are excluded from the committees for religious education, adult education, and ways and means.

Anshe Emeth is "more exclusive" with regard to ritual. Although no written ritual policy exists, according to Rabbi Miller a non-Jew may not represent the congregation in prayer or sit on the *bima*. A non-Jewish parent is permitted limited access to the bima during a child's *bar bat mitzvah*. On these occasions, the non-Jew can meet the child and Jewish parent on the bima after the Torah has been handed down in a generational chain. In addition, the non-Jewish parent may ascend the bima to speak to the *bar bat mitzvah*. The congregation does not have a ritual committee and ultimately, the Rabbi is responsible for carrying out rituals of the congregation as long as they are in keeping with Reform Jewish practice.

Rabbi Miller describes the new constitution as a "simple" document that gives broad guidelines without providing details. The constitution is one year old and was designed to codify the current congregational practice.

**Excerpt from Anshe Emeth's constitution of 1996:**

The unit of membership shall be the individual, or in the case of married persons or other domestic partners who are economically and emotionally committed to each other, the family. At least one adult member of the family shall be Jewish. The family unit shall consist of the husband and wife, or other couple as defined above, and their dependent children all living in one household. Non-Jewish members of a family unit shall be considered as members in good standing and welcome to share in the communal life of the Congregation, including membership on committees other than the standing committees provided for in Article VII, except that Congregational voting privileges and the holding of elected office shall be reserved to Jewish persons.

Temple Kol Ami, West Bloomfield, Michigan	
Membership Policy	Governance Policy
Inclusive	Inclusive

Temple Kol Ami, in West Bloomfield, Michigan, is a congregation of 474 members led by Rabbi Norman Roman. In 1995, the congregation ratified a new constitution which addresses the role of the non-Jew in non-ritual congregational matters. According to Rabbi Roman, however, the congregation is now stepping back from some unspecified statements in the document. Ritual policy is formulated and implemented by the Rabbi.

Cecilia Lakin, the President during the constitutional drafting, said in a phone interview that she had two reasons for initiating the process of creating a new statement. She believes that there are different roles for the rabbi to assume in relation to the congregational leadership. In this respect, the Board, and not the Rabbi, should act as a "gate keeper". The second motivating factor for this initiative was that the growth and subsequent size of the congregation necessitated a new constitution -- as future conflicts were foreseen. The resulting document formally sets a maximum limit of 500 individual and family units for the congregation.

Temple Kol Ami is "inclusive" in its membership and governance policies. A member must be Jewish or married to a Jew and not be "committed to another religion." A non-Jew is not prohibited from serving on any committee, however, she or he is not allowed to serve as the chair for certain committees or sit on the Board of Trustees. Further, a non-Jew may not vote on rabbinical tenure or "matters which are ritual in nature."

In a letter to the congregation, Lakin describes some of the differences between the previous constitution and the current document, which is excerpted below. The changes indicate a move toward more "exclusivity", although Lakin is clearly not comfortable with such a designation.

In a letter, Lakin writes: "The goal of Jewish outreach should be to bring the unaffiliated in to contact with the living, vibrant tradition of Judaism -- not to so confuse and

blur the distinctions between those who are Jewish and others that they are no longer perceptible.”<sup>10</sup>

**Excerpts from a letter to the congregation by the President (Cecilia Lakin):**

The current Constitution permits a person who is not Jewish, but who is not “committed to another faith” to apply for membership. Under the new Constitution, one who is “not committed to another religion” may become a member, but only if s/he is married to a Jewish person. In the case of an interfaith marriage, where one spouse is Jewish, and the other practices another faith, the Jewish person becomes a member, but the spouse does not.

Under current practice, it has been customary for most Trustees to also serve as committee chairs. This practice is not preserved in the new Constitution. Theoretically, certain committees (e.g., Building and Grounds, Cemetery, Communications, Endowment, Finance, Fundraising, Long Range Planning, Social, and Social Action) could be chaired by a member who was not Jewish.

The question raised was whether we can continue to see ourselves as a welcoming congregation if we establish such requirements. I believe the answer is certainly, “Yes!”

These issues are not about exclusion, but about self-definition. We do, indeed, welcome those who join us. We offer hospitality and a place to grow and learn. Given the strong traditions of our Temple, I could not imagine any other possibility. Having a clear sense of who we are makes our welcome no less genuine.

**Excerpts from “Constitution, Temple Kol Ami, West Bloomfield, Michigan,” effective 1 June 1995:**

**Membership:**

Any person who is Jewish according to Reform Jewish rabbinic criteria or any family, i.e., wife and husband at least one of whom is Jewish according to Reform Jewish criteria and the other of who is not committed to another

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<sup>10</sup> Cecilia J. Lakin, letter to the author, 21 Jan 1997.

religion, may be admitted to membership in this Congregation upon approval by its Board of Trustees.

Except as otherwise provided by this Constitution, each member shall have the opportunity to attend worship service, participate in adult studies, be elected to office, be appointed to committees, and be eligible for rabbinic participation in life cycle events.

A non-Jewish spouse member shall not have voting rights on rabbinical tenure or those matters which are ritual in nature.

The aggregate number of individual and family membership units in this Congregation shall not exceed 500.

#### Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees shall consist of the following (Each of whom must be a member of the Congregation and Jewish)

- a. The members of the Executive Board
- b. Fifteen members of the Congregation, elected at large.
- c. A member from each of the Temple Brotherhood, Temple Sisterhood and the Temple Youth Group, to be elected by each organization

#### Committees

The chairpersons of the following committees must be Jewish: Adult Education, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Membership, Religious School, and Religious Services.

#### Rabbi

The Rabbi shall be the spiritual leader of the Congregation. In consultation with the Board of Trustees, the Rabbi shall (i) determine the ritual and mode of worship and (ii) further perform the duties incumbent on a Rabbi in accordance with the customs and traditions of Reform Judaism.

Temple Emanu-El, Edison, New Jersey		
Membership Policy	Governance Policy	Ritual Policy
More Inclusive	More Inclusive	More Inclusive

Temple Emanu-El, in Edison, New Jersey, is a Reform congregation under the leadership of Rabbi Alfred Landsberg. The congregation was formed in 1961 and Rabbi Landsberg arrived in 1968. This 225 member suburban congregation is one of three Reform congregations in the area. According to the congregation's brochure, Emanu-El is "A young, dynamic, Reform congregation serving the Jewish community." The brochure then establishes who is to be considered a Reform Jew. It reads in part:

- A Reform Jew is someone who is so in love with Abraham and Moses and the Prophets, that he allows them to grow and perhaps even change their minds;
- A Reform Jew is someone who understands that a genuine Judaism may be born in the Temple, ... but it must live its life in the streets of Reality;
- A Reform Jew is someone who is deeply and truly traditional, ... for he or she feels the warmth and stimulation of people who respect each other's right to search for meaning;
- A Reform Jew is someone who understands that our Hebrew tree is 4,000 years old because we not only remembered to feed the roots, but also pruned the branches.

The brochure does not stipulate that one must be born or convert to Judaism in any formal manner. This is indicative of the fact that Temple Emanu-El is "more inclusive" in its membership policy. According to the constitution, a member must be "religiously affiliated solely with Judaism." Governance and ritual policies are "more inclusive." Any member can

serve as an officer of the congregation and is entitled to a vote. All offices, according to Rabbi Landsberg, are in theory open to non-Jew as well as Jews.

Emanu-El has no formal written ritual policy. Rabbi Landsberg's belief is that with regard to ritual, few people take the words literally. Instead, "It is a mantra without examination. It is not a theological statement." For this reason, Landsberg is comfortable opening up the entire prayer service to the non-Jew. He states that he would be comfortable altering prayers should this be necessary for one to participate, but the issue has never been raised. Rabbi Landsberg takes this "more inclusive" approach because he believes that he is, "in the salvage business and in the risk taking business."

**Excerpts from "By-Laws of Temple Emanu-El, Edison, New Jersey," May 1993:**

Eligibility: Any person of the Jewish faith, his or her spouse and children, and those who have religiously affiliated solely with Judaism shall be eligible for membership in the Congregation.

One vote: For voting purposes, dues-paying members shall be entitled to one vote. In family memberships, each partner shall have a separate vote.

Privileges of Member in Good Standing: A member in good standing shall have, among others, the following rights and privileges:

- a. To vote at all meetings of the Congregation,
- f. To participate in all of the activities held under the auspices of the Congregation and its affiliated bodies, and
- g. To be eligible for election as an officer or trustee of the Congregation.

Duties of the Rabbi:

- b. Unless excused therefrom by the President, the Rabbi shall officiate at life-cycle functions which occur in the lives of the members using such rituals and procedures as the Rabbi shall determine, provided that the Rabbi shall have the right not to so officiate when procedures are demanded which are contrary to the customs of the Congregation or to the Rabbi's personal convictions.



Congregation Beth Shalom, Bryan, Texas		
Membership Policy	Governance Policy	Ritual Policy
More Inclusive	More Inclusive	Exclusive

Congregation Beth Shalom, in Bryan, Texas, is a small congregation of sixty members. For many years the congregation was affiliated with the Hillel of Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. However, in 1990 the congregation bought its own building and soon after affiliated with the UAHC. For most of its history, the congregation's worship services were lay-lead. Currently the congregation is served on a monthly basis by a student rabbi from the Hebrew Union College.<sup>11</sup> The congregation is primarily populated by university professors and their families and has a high rate of interfaith marriage and conversionary marriage.

Beth Shalom has a "more inclusive" policy on membership and governance. Membership is open to all, and in addition, governance is open to all members. The congregation has no policy on ritual, written or unwritten. In practice, however, the congregation follows an "exclusive" pattern. Beth Shalom is one of the few congregations to address non-Jews in relation to the cemetery. The congregation currently owns a cemetery of a previously existing synagogue. While written policy excludes non-Jews from burial in that cemetery, the congregation is willing to be "inclusive" should it purchase a new cemetery. This view is consistent with the general desire in the congregation to balance inclusion of the non-Jew with respect for tradition, or in this case, respect for Jews no longer living.

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<sup>11</sup> The author is the current student rabbi serving the congregation and is thus aware of the demographics.

**Excerpts from "Congregation Beth Shalom Constitution," updated 17 March 1996:**

To provide Jewish religious services and education for the people of the community, and to promote social and charitable Jewish purposes.

Freedom of worship according to the tenets of Judaism shall be available to all persons wishing to worship.

Membership shall be open to all persons.

**Officers and Board of Directors**

Ten voting board members shall be elected at large from the Congregation annual meeting. The president of the sisterhood or a duly authorized representative of the Sisterhood shall be a voting member of the board of directors. All persons serving on the board as ex-officio, elected or by nature of position in a congregation auxiliary organization must be a member in good standing of the congregation throughout their term of service. Only one member of a family unit may serve as voting director at any point in time.

All members of the congregation standing committees must be members of the congregation in good standing.

**Cemetery policy**

Persons not of the Jewish faith may not be buried in the Temple Freda cemetery. If and when Congregation Beth Shalom purchases its own cemetery, any member may be buried there.

Congregation Oheb Shalom, Sandusky, Ohio		
Membership Policy	Governance Policy	Ritual Policy
Inclusive	Inclusive	Exclusive

Congregation Oheb Shalom, in Sandusky, Ohio, is a small congregation of fifty members. The congregation has been served for at least half a century by student rabbis from

the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.<sup>12</sup> The congregation has no full-time staff. Given the regular turnover of rabbinical leadership, the religious practice of the congregation has changed with each generation of student. The congregation is today in the mainstream of the Reform movement.

Oheb Shalom's congregants predominantly are older adults, many of whom relocate to warmer climates in the winter months. In addition, there are a few families with school-age children. Few congregants are in interfaith families, yet, many are in conversionary families.

With regard to membership and governance, the congregation is "inclusive." Membership is extended to non-Jewish spouses of Jews and special provisions are made for those "interested in conversion." Ritually, there is little regular participation by non-Jews in the service, apart from the soloist who is not Jewish.

According to the chairman of the ritual committee: "the board set a policy which essentially allows non-Jewish family members, i.e., a husband, wife, grandparent, etc., to participate "non-verbally" in life cycle events such as standing under the *hoopah*, passing the Torah generationally in a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, dressing the Torah, etc. We do not allow verbal participation, where the prayers or readings relate to Jewish beliefs and would not express the beliefs of the non-Jew. However, we do accept that there can be exceptions to this policy and in such cases leave it up to the rabbi and ritual chairman to come up with a suitable solution."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The author served as the student rabbi for the congregation during the 1995-6 school year.

<sup>13</sup> David Sapper, e-mail to the author, 9 Jan. 1997.

**Excerpt from the constitution of Temple Oheb Shalom:**

Any person of the Jewish faith may become a regular member upon approval of his or her application by the board of trustees. In the case of a married couple, one spouse must be of the Jewish faith. Non-Jewish persons interested in conversion to Judaism may apply to the Temple Board for an associate membership. An associate member is entitled to participate in all Temple functions and programs but cannot hold office or a seat on the Temple board and does not have voting privileges. Associate members will pay dues as determined by the Temple finance committee.

**Congregations Currently in the Process of Establishing Policy on the  
Role of the Non-Jew**

Temple Beth-El, Somerville, New Jersey		
Membership Policy – current/proposed	Governance Policy – current/proposed	Ritual Policy – current/proposed
More Exclusive/Inclusive	More Exclusive/Exclusive	Exclusive/Exclusive

Temple Beth-El, in Somerville, New Jersey, is a 342 member congregation. According to Rabbi Arnold Gluck, the Temple's rabbi, the congregation has approximately 20-25% interfaith families and one of the highest conversion rates in the United States. He feels that this is a direct result of, "being strong about being Jewish."<sup>14</sup> In other words, the congregation has attempted to, "provide a sense of definition," while still being, "as inclusive as that would allow."

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<sup>14</sup> Arnold Gluck, personal interview, 7 Jan. 1997.

Beth-El is currently "more exclusive" in its membership and governance policies. These privileges are only open to Jews. With regard to ritual, the congregation is "exclusive." Non-Jews are not permitted to recite the *kiddush* for the congregation or act in any other way as *sheliach tzibur*. Parents of *b'nai mitzvah* may, however, participate in the passing down of the Torah to their children and speak to the *bar bat mitzvah* from the *bima*.

The congregation has recently composed a "Blue Ribbon Committee" to establish a new policy on the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. The proposal presented by the committee significantly changes the policy of the congregation and is more inclusive. In particular, membership, which is currently "limited to those of the Jewish faith," is now applied to whole families in which at least one adult is Jewish. Governance, however, remains "exclusive." Voting is still reserved for only the Jewish member. Because of the change in membership requirements, a new clause pertaining to leadership was included. Whereas previously, any member could serve in a leadership position when all the members were Jewish, the proposal clarifies that only Jews may serve on the ritual and religious school committees, chair committees, or serve on the Board.

**Excerpts from an introductory letter that accompanies the Blue Ribbon Committee's Policy:**

The overall guiding principle, as stated in the policy document, was to make Temple Beth-El a welcoming and inclusionary organization, while at the same time preserving and protecting its identity and continuity as a Jewish house of worship, study and assembly. This is in keeping with the basic mission of Temple Beth-El of maintaining the age-old covenant of the Jewish people with God. The committee set out to accomplish its goal and sustain the guiding principle by clearly defining the boundaries of membership governance and ritual participation.

On the committee were people from members of families with both adults being Jewish and Jewish members of interfaith households.

**Excerpts from the "Temple Beth-El, Blue Ribbon Committee, Policy on the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue," 14 October 1996:**

It is recognized that certain performative acts of ritual participation presuppose that the participant is Jewish. This policy sets out to make specific those portions of ritual that afford participation by the entire community, including non-Jewish members of that community and non-Jewish family of Temple Beth-El members.

Membership The unit of membership shall be defined as the family. The non-Jewish partner of an inter-faith family shall be considered a member should he or she choose to be and shall be welcomed to share in the fellowship of the congregation. The non-Jewish surviving adult partner of an interfaith member family shall be welcomed to maintain membership.

Children of members shall have the right to receive their religious education in accordance with the assumptions and understandings of the congregation that the children are being raised in the Jewish faith and are not receiving formal education in another faith.

Governance

All adult Jewish members of Temple Beth-El shall be entitled to vote at congregational meetings.

Eligibility for election as an officer or trustee of Temple Beth-El shall be reserved only for members of the Jewish faith. The Ritual, Religious School and Membership Finance committees and lay leadership (i.e., chairpersons or designated heads of committees) of all other committees are limited to Jewish members.

Ritual

Ritual participation is symbolic of the Jewish covenant with God. Therefore, certain performative acts presuppose that the participant is Jewish. However, there are many opportunities for non-Jewish members and their family, and non-Jewish members of the general community, to participate in ritual at Temple Beth-El.



The core prayers, which constitute the Mitzvah of the prayer service including candle lighting and other formulaic blessings, the Shema and its blessings, the Amidah, the Torah service and the concluding service (Aleinu, Kaddish and Kiddush), have meaning only if lead by a person of the Jewish faith. Non-Jews are welcomed and encouraged to join with the congregation in reciting any or all of these prayers to the extent that they feel comfortable. A non-Jewish family member may accompany a Jewish adult to the Bima to recite prayers such as those for candle lighting or Kiddush.

The entire family of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, whether Jewish or not, is encouraged to participate in this most significant ceremony. While it is the Jewish parent who is called to recite the blessings of the reading of the Torah on behalf of the congregation, the non-Jewish parent may accompany the Jewish parent to the Bima. In this way both parents can share the joy of their child reading from the Torah, honoring the commitment that both parents made in raising their child as a Jew.

The passing of the Torah from generation to generation is a unique feature of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony as celebrated at Temple Beth-El. This innovation is a symbolic act open to many interpretations. The non-Jewish parent is encouraged to participate in this ceremony in recognition of his or her support of passing on the Jewish heritage to his or her child. Non-Jewish grandparents, who wish to participate in this ceremony, are welcomed to do so if they understand and accept its significance indicating their support of their grandchild's Jewish identity. Participation in the rite of Torah passing is not a performance of an act that presupposes on one to be Jewish. Honors, such as dressing the Torah, lifting the Torah or opening the ark may be done by non-Jews.

Temple Emanuel, Grand Rapids, Michigan			
Membership Policy	Governance Policy	Ritual Policy, life-cycles current/proposed	Ritual Policy, non-life-cycle current/proposed
Inclusive	Inclusive	Inclusive/Inclusive	Inclusive/Exclusive

Temple Emanuel, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, incorporated in the year 1871 "for the purpose of holding divine worship according to the rites and usages of American Israelites."



In that year, the congregation firmly grounded itself in the Reform tradition by adopting Isaac M. Wise's *Minhag America Prayer Book*. Today the congregation is made up of 320 members and is lead by Rabbi Albert Lewis. Rabbi Lewis has been with the congregation for twenty-five years and has overseen a move away from Classical Reform and toward the center of Reform Judaism.

Grand Rapids is a fast growing area of approximately 500,000 citizens, including 2,200 Jews. A Conservative synagogue of 200 members is located in the area as well as a Chabad congregation. According to Rabbi Lewis, "if it's going to happen in the Jewish community it's going to happen here"<sup>15</sup>. The congregation has a small staff that includes a secretary/ administrator and a part time principal. The average age of the congregant is in the 40's, although there is a large young adult and geriatric population as well. Approximately twenty-five percent of the families are interfaith, and over half of the children in the religious school are from interfaith or conversionary families.

The "working paper" below is not a ratified document. The process to draft a policy on the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue was begun after the San Francisco Biennial of 1993. The process was initiated by congregants who attended this Biennial and were impressed by the UAHC's Outreach Program. However, according to Rabbi Lewis, a task force was set up to proceed with the project but "did not do its homework" and "did not anticipate the responses." The process was not completed and has been on hold since March 1996.

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<sup>15</sup> Albert Lewis, personal interview, 9 Jan. 1997.

The congregation is "inclusive" in membership and governance, and is mixed in ritual practice. In a congregational survey in 1995, the members were asked if non-Jews should be allowed to serve on the Temple's board. The majority answered positively for all offices except President, which they felt should be reserved for a Jew. The congregation does currently have non-Jews on the board, teaching in the religious school, and participating in worship services. Ritual participation includes reading English translations of Torah and Haftarah.

Although Rabbi Lewis, who prepared the following working paper over one year ago, is a supporter of inclusivity, he indicates that he would like to re-think some of the details of the document. In particular, he would like to re-examine the adjustment of boundaries for life-cycle events. According to the working paper, during life-cycle events the ritual policy is "more inclusive"

In matters of membership and governance, the congregation is "inclusive". Any position is open to the non-Jew other than the office of the President. In ritual matters, the working paper suggests an "exclusive" atmosphere, in that non-Jews are only allowed to recite universal prayers. However, for life-cycle events, the boundaries are "inclusive". The document cites *kibud av v'em* (honoring of parents) and *shalom bayit* (peace in the home/congregation) as the guiding principles in these situations.

**Excerpts from "A Working Paper -- The role of the non-Jew in worship and ritual":**

While all members are encouraged to participate in leading portions of the worship experience, the rabbi and Religious Services Committee try to be

sensitive to the multiple religious backgrounds of our members and to invite non Jewish members to participate in ways that do not compromise their religious identities or beliefs. At the same time, we want to respect and maintain the Jewish integrity of those portions of the service that are uniquely identified with Jewish worship.

The prayer book contains other examples of prayers and readings which contain language and concepts that would be comfortable for both Jews and non Jews to read and to lead in worship. Such prayers are considered "**Universal Prayers**" and as such are comfortable to Jews and Christians.

We recognize too, that there are prayers and readings that express a uniquely Jewish theology and/or philosophy and which are framed in a very particularistic Jewish formula. Such prayers are considered to be a portion of the legacy of Jewish liturgy and express a "**particularistic**" theology and, as such, should be lead by a Jewish reader.

The Rabbi and Religious Services Committee believe that those prayers which are framed in the unique formula of Jewish prayer or which express the beliefs, doctrines, affirmations or concepts which have historically distinguished the Jewish people from other peoples are most appropriately led by Jewish readers.

**Torah service:** In Jewish worship, one of the most sacred elements of the service is the reading of the Torah and the rituals associated with the Torah. The Torah is understood as the most fundamental and defining documents of the Jewish community. The rites and ceremonies surrounding the Torah and its reading assist in defining the spirituality of the Jew and his/her unique relationship with God. The Torah service, including the readings that introduce this aspect of the worship experience, the blessings before and after the Torah and *Haphtorah*, the Hebrew reading of the Torah (and the *Haphtorah*) are appropriately led by Jewish members. All members of the congregation may be invited to read the translation of the Torah and/or *Haphtorah*. The honor of being called to the Torah (*Aliyah*), carrying the Torah (*Hakafah*), dressing and raising the Torah (*G'lilah* and *Hagbahah*) are rituals to be performed by Jewish participants.

**Bar and Bat Mitzvah Services:**

The same guidelines that guide the involvement of Temple members in the Shabbat worship experience will be applied to the family of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

During the regularly scheduled Shabbat service, the Mitzvah of lighting the Shabbat candles may be performed by a Jewish member, male or female.

In the context of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, a non Jewish parent may light the candles and recite the appropriate blessing. We believe that the principles of **Kibud Av V'Em** (respect for one's parents) and **Shalom Bayit** (the peace of the family) should be applied and that Bar/Bat Mitzvah at Temple Emanuel should be designed and promoted as an inclusive family-life cycle.

During the regularly scheduled Shabbat service, the Mitzvah of leading the Kiddush may be performed by a Jewish member, male or female or by a member in the process of conversion to Judaism. In the context of a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, a non Jewish parent may lead the Kiddush and recite the short Hebrew version of the prayer, i.e. **Baruch Atah Adonai...Boreh P'ree HaGofen**.

#### Funerals

All members of Temple Emanuel may be buried in the Temple cemetery at Oak Hill. If the family would like the funeral service to be conducted at Temple Emanuel, only our rabbi or his designee will officiate. If the family wishes to invite non Jewish clergy to officiate, the funeral may be conducted at a funeral home or at grave side.

## Conclusion

This thesis explores one of the major issues facing modern Jewry in North America today -- the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Jews have never lived in isolation, and the contemporary Jewish community is not the first Jewish community to struggle with this subject. Biblical, Hellenistic, and Rabbinic literature all address this same general issue, albeit with slightly different results. Biblical literature demands: "love therefore the stranger (*ger*) for you were strangers (*gerim*) in the land of Egypt."<sup>1</sup> And also: "It shall come to pass, that you shall divide it by lot for an inheritance to you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, who shall beget children among you, and they shall be to you as those born in the country among the children of Israel."<sup>2</sup> Hellenistic literature documents the attraction of non-Jews to Jewish customs and society: "The customs of this most accursed race have gained such influence that [the race] has now been received throughout the world."<sup>3</sup> In Christian literature god-fearers are often found in the synagogue: "[Paul] argued with the Jews and god-fearing people in the synagogue."<sup>4</sup> In Rabbinic literature some boundaries are clearly established, yet even here there is inclusivity: "All public and private sacrifices may come from Palestine or from outside Palestine even from among the Gentiles, except for the

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 10:19.

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 47:22.

<sup>3</sup> Seneca, qtd. in Stern 432.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 17:17.

offering of the first born and the tithe which may come only from Palestine and only from Israelites."<sup>5</sup>

What is common to Biblical, Hellenistic, and Rabbinic literature is the overall acceptance of the non-Jew in Jewish society. Biblical and Hellenistic literature portray a relatively more receptive Jewish community than that seen in Rabbinic literature. For instance, only Rabbinic literature preserves such statements as: "A non-Jew who engages in the study of Torah is culpable of death."<sup>6</sup> However, even at the most exclusive, non-Jews are guaranteed certain rights in Jewish society.<sup>7</sup> Sifre Deuteronomy explains of the non-Jew: "'in the place which he shall choose' -- where his livelihood is to be found, 'in one of your gates' -- he is not to be set wandering from place to place."<sup>7</sup> Regarding those non-Jews who accept the Noahide laws: "all are treated equally in the law with us and there is no favoritism for us."<sup>8</sup> At the most inclusive, non-Jews are guaranteed certain rites in Jewish public worship. In Numbers 9 it is written: "If a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the passover to the Lord, according to the ordinance of the passover, and according to its prescribed manner, so shall he do: you shall have one ordinance both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> T. Menahoth 9:1.

<sup>6</sup> T. Sanhedrin 59a.

<sup>7</sup> Sifre Deuteronomy 23:16.

<sup>8</sup> Baba Kamma 37b.

<sup>9</sup> Num. 9:14.

With this as a foundation, in Part II of this thesis the American Jewish community -- and specifically the Reform Movement -- is studied in greater detail. The American Jewish community is blessed to live in a democracy where religious freedoms are guaranteed and religious practices are protected. In addition, each generation of Jews is more and more accepted by the larger American community. This acceptance, however, is paralleled by increased assimilation and growing numbers of interfaith families.

Questions involving boundaries naturally arise in the Twentieth Century out of this atmosphere of both increased acceptance and increased assimilation. In response, the Reform Movement addresses issues relating to the inclusion or exclusion of the non-Jew in congregational life. What are the boundaries? May a non-Jew be a member of the congregation? May a non-Jew lead the congregation in prayer from the *bima*?

Today, the Reform Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis continues to wrestle with the rights of, and rites open to, non-Jews in the Reform Jewish community. In its process, the Responsa Committee returns to some of the sources examined in Part I of this thesis. For instance, in 1979 the committee writes: "We should, of course, remember that good treatment and many privileges were extended to pagans in earlier times, both in Israel and in Babylon, *mipenei darchei shalom*. We comforted their dead, visited their sick, helped their poor, etc. (Git. 59b, 61a; Tur, Choshen Mishpat 266). Proper consideration was to be extended, as they were human beings despite their pagan beliefs."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jacob, ARR #6.



With these traditional texts as a foundation, committee members and committee chairmen bring their own expertise and ideas to given issues. Whether this expertise is a result of formal training in the field of sociology or psychology, or is simply based upon life experience in the Rabbinate, no person enters the responsa process as a blank slate. This background enables the Responsa Committee to balance traditional sources with modern sources and thus create new interpretations of Judaism for the Reform Movement. The Committee writes: "[Reform Responsa] advise the questioner of the view of Tradition and then ask whether there are overriding principles to which Reform subscribes which would counsel diverging from *halakhic* precedents. For Liberal Judaism has always seen itself as part of the total flow of historic Jewish life, and its Responsa Committees have tried to maintain this connection."<sup>11</sup>

These responsa often become guiding documents for congregations, congregants, and rabbis who are struggling with such issues as the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Responsa are also used by the UAHC to establish policy and develop programming. This often takes the form of resolutions which are ratified during Biennial Conventions of the UAHC and/or by the UAHC Board of Trustees. In 1978, the UAHC Board of Trustees adopted a resolution that begins:

"Rapid demographic change is doing much to affect the future of American Jewry. Among the significant and critical demographic trends are: The growth of mixed marriage, the decline of the Jewish birth rate relative to the general population and increase in the numbers of non-Jews converting to Judaism. These trends require our profound, serious and continuing attention.

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<sup>11</sup> Plaut, Washofsky

They call for creative leadership so that we reach out to shape our future and do not become passive products of forces beyond our own control."<sup>12</sup>

The Board of Trustees then resolved:

"1. To intensify our formal and informal Jewish educational programs within the Reform synagogue and the Reform Jewish Movement to stimulate positive and knowledgeable Jewish identification.

2. To develop a sensitive program of welcoming and involving converts to Judaism, recognizing that those who choose Judaism in good faith are as authentic in their Jewish identity as those who are born Jewish.

3. To develop an effective Outreach program by which the Reform synagogue can seek out mixed married couples in order to respond to the particular emotional and social stresses in their situations and to make the congregation, the rabbi and Judaism itself available to them and their families.

4. To plan a special program to bring the message of Judaism to any and all who wish to examine or embrace it. Judaism is not an exclusive club of born Jews, it is a universal faith with an ancient tradition which has deep resonance for people alive today."

Thus the Reform Movement's Outreach Program for religiously unaffiliated Jews and non-Jews was born. Over the course of these nineteen years, the UAHC Outreach program has amassed a small library of resources for those interested in Outreach. For instance, the UAHC Outreach department has published the following: *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue: A Resource for Congregations*, *Reform Jewish Outreach: The Idea Book*, and *Jews and Non-Jews: Getting Married*.<sup>13</sup> Officially, Outreach is a program which aims to:

"Welcome those who seek to investigate Judaism;  
Welcome Jews-by-Choice as full citizens of the Jewish community;  
Welcome intermarried couples into the congregation. Outreach seeks to enable non-Jewish partners to explore, study and understand Judaism,

<sup>12</sup> "Outreach," 1979.

<sup>13</sup> A full listing of UAHC Outreach publications and books can be found in Appendix B.

thereby providing an atmosphere of support in which a comfortable relationship with Judaism can be fostered.  
 Educate and sensitize the Jewish community to be receptive to new Jews-by-Choice and intermarried couples;  
 Encourage people to make Jewish choices in their lives through community support, adult education and availability of Jewish resources.  
 Assist young people in strengthening their Jewish identity and in examining the implications of interdating and intermarriage for themselves."<sup>14</sup>

Imbedded in the mission of Outreach is the process of defining the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Biblical, Hellenistic, and Rabbinic literature offer guidance in this area by outlining the role non-Jews may have once played in Jewish society. The Bible states: "Even them [the stranger] 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 on my altar. For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people."<sup>15</sup>

These traditional sources serve as a starting point for those congregations contemplating the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Yet, as is evident from the differing congregational policies of inclusion and exclusion of the non-Jew from synagogue life, the sources are open to interpretation. Reform Jewish congregations across North America factor in circumstances unique to them and thus derive unique resolutions. For instance, the size and location of a congregation may play a large role in policy making -- the smallest of congregations may hesitate to even make policy for fear of turning potential congregants away.

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<sup>14</sup> "What is Outreach," Defining the Role 128.

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 56:7.

Compelling arguments may be offered for the degree of inclusion or exclusion of the non-Jew from synagogue life. A congregation may choose to focus on some of the restrictions found in Rabbinic literature: "One who teaches Torah to non-Jews transgresses a positive commandment."<sup>16</sup> Conversely, a congregation may focus on "even an idolater who engrosses himself in Torah study is like a Cohen Gadol."<sup>17</sup> When the process of creating this policy is grounded in Jewish sources, both modern and traditional, the process is Jewish. And, when the process is Jewish, the responses are Jewish. Ultimately, however, each congregation must chart its own course. Each synagogue must establish and justify its own policy.

Nancy Gad-Harf concludes her presentation on the subject of Outreach:

"... with a word of caution. If among our primary goals in Outreach are the following: creating a welcoming, nurturing Jewish environment to interfaith families; helping interfaith families learn how to create Jewish homes and Jewish memories for their children; sanctifying the very basic Jewish value of human dignity -- then we must act accordingly. It would certainly be easier for all of us if the role of the non-Jew were an unimportant question. We would all probably prefer that every non-Jewish spouse of an interfaith couple adopt Judaism formally. But, let us always remember one very important point -- that non-Jewish spouse, by becoming part of congregational life, has--on some levels, cast his/her fate with ours. On some levels, he/she has indeed chosen Judaism. He or she has given us his or her time, energy, and money to ensure the future of a given congregation's existence. He or she has also given us something even more important -- his or her children. We have been given these children to educate, to nurture, and to raise as Jews. By giving us this precious gift, the non-Jew has helped to ensure not just the future of a

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<sup>16</sup> Baba Kamma 38a.

<sup>17</sup> Sanhedrin 59a.

particular congregation, but the future of *K'lal Yisrael*, the future of the Jewish people."<sup>18</sup>

Ultimately, the question must be asked, "is it good for the Jews?" The answer is just beyond the grasp of Jews today. Only later generations will be able to evaluate the results of today's inclusion or exclusion of non-Jews from Reform synagogues. Perhaps the most important lesson is that we Jews, living amongst the nations, must struggle with these issues in every generation. We must revisit our texts and explore our own society. In this way, we will not only define the role of the non-Jew in relation to the synagogue, but in so doing, we will be forced to constantly redefine the role of the Jew in relation to non-Jews, other Jews, and God.

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<sup>18</sup> Gad-Harf

Jewish Communal Ritual:  
Some Terms, Formulas, and Concepts

Section One: Liturgical Texts

This section examines verbal formulas which occur frequently in Jewish public ritual. The leader to recites these him/herself, or leads the assembly in such recitation.

Category A: Formulas wherein the reciter identifies personally with the Jewish people, with Jewish history, or with the Covenant of Judaism:

- 1) בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו  
וְצִוָּנוּ ...

Baruch atah adonai ēloheynu melech haolam, asher kid-shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu... ("Blessed are You, O Eternal our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has made us holy by Your commandments and commanded us to...")

This is the rabbinic formulation for the beracha (blessing). It accompanies all sacred acts which biblical or rabbinic dictum requires Jews to perform at prescribed times. Examples of such acts are: lighting Sabbath and festival candles, eating ritual foods like matzah and horseradish at the Passover seder, circumcising an eight-day-old boy, reciting the Shema in the morning or evening, or engaging in the study of sacred texts. The reciters are literally stating that they believe themselves to be commanded by God to perform these acts as part of a general process of sanctification ("who has made us holy by Your commandments"). With few exceptions, these are rituals unique to the practice of Judaism, and are not universalistic ethical injunctions.

- 2) אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים ...

...asher bachar banu mikol ha-amin ("...Who has chosen us from among all peoples")

This is another rabbinic formulation derived from various biblical passages where God makes a specific covenant with one of the forebears of Israel (as, for example, with Abraham in Genesis 12). This particular version is found in the blessing preceding the public reading of the Torah ("You have chosen us from among all peoples and given us Your Torah"). Reciters of this phrase identify themselves with the people of Israel, recalling that they have been divinely chosen for certain earthly tasks. There is no explicit indication here that other peoples might not also have been



divinely called for specific purposes. Nor is this a statement of Jewish superiority. The reciters merely indicate that they acknowledge their particular obligations as Jews. The Sabbath Kiddush expresses this same idea in the phrase "For you have chosen us and distinguished us (in a sacred way) from all peoples." Some humanistically inclined Jews recite these passages as a positive acknowledgement of their Jewishness, rather than as a belief that God would (or could) somehow single out any one people. Other Jews object to the tone of these phrases and substitute altogether different formulas.

3) ולא שמנו כמשפחות האדמה ...

...v'lo samanu k'mishp'chot ha-adamah ("Who has not made us like the other nations, and Who has not situated us like the other families of the earth")

This is a segment of a larger public statement of faith known as the Aleinu ("It is incumbent upon us to praise the God of all"). The formulation appears in the earliest Jewish prayerbooks from the ninth century onward and is found at the end of every Jewish worship service. It juxtaposes the universal (the "God of all", the "Maker of Creation") with the particular ("Who has not made us like the other nations"). Reciters of this formula thus summarize their belief that the universal God who governs all peoples, in fact all creation, nonetheless expects certain behaviors from Jews in particular because of the Covenant that God made with the Jewish people. As with formula #2 above, some Jews either reinterpret this paragraph humanistically or substitute other versions.

4) שמע ישראל: "אלהינו, " אחד

Shema yisrael, adonai eloheynu, adonai echad ("Hear, O Israel, the Eternal is our God, the Eternal is One")

This is a biblical quotation (Deuteronomy 6:4) which became a central creed and is recited at both morning and evening services. There is strong evidence that it held a key position in the liturgy of the ancient Temple long before our present forms of Jewish worship were developed. In its biblical context it is presented as a form of public liturgical declaration, reaffirming the covenant of Torah for a people who would soon experience the national and spiritual crisis of their leader Moses' death. It is phrased as a charge to the Jewish people. As such, it could be recited by anyone. But it quickly switches to the first person plural, "our God," indicating that whoever recites the Shema identifies him/herself with the people being addressed.



Category B: The following are examples of formulas wherein the reciter acknowledges or seeks God's particular favor for the Jewish people. (The reciter does not necessarily identify him/herself personally as a Jew.)

- 1) בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵי עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל

Baruch atah adonai ohev amo yisrael ("Blessed are You, O Eternal; You love Your people Israel")

Recited in the evening service immediately prior to the Shema, this is an ancient rabbinic formulation, similar in theme to #2 and #3 above. Like #1 above it is a beracha (blessing), though in this form its reciter makes no mention of being "sanctified" or "commanded" to do or say something.

- 2) בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ, הַבּוֹחֵר בְּעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה

Baruch atah adonai habocheh b'amo yisrael b'ahavah ("Blessed are You, O Eternal; in love You choose Your people Israel")

This is the morning version of the blessing discussed in the preceding entry. Statements made there apply here.

- 3) צוּר יִשְׂרָאֵל, קוּמָה בְּעֶזְרַת יִשְׂרָאֵל

Tzur yisrael, kuma b'ezrat yisrael... (O Rock of Israel, arise to Israel's aid...)

This paragraph from the morning service invokes God's active intercession on behalf of the Jewish people. It immediately follows a liturgical retelling of Israel's exodus from Egyptian slavery.

- 4) הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל

Hu ya'aseh shalom aleynu v'āl kol yisrael ("May God establish peace for us and for all Israel")

Recited in every Jewish service at the end of the Kaddish, it asks God for the blessing of peace for Israel. Since grammatically, it is not clear who the "us" is, the reciter could construe the statement as one which avoids direct identification with Jews and Judaism.

## Section Two: Extra-Textual Elements

The previous section dealt with the inherent meaning of the liturgical text. This section deals with the extra-textual dimension of the worship service, which provides the context for the textual and which in itself carries meaning. For instance, the "choreography" of the service, who stands where and who says what, communicates a message.

In addition, kavod ha-tzibur also informs congregational expectations of the worship experience. Kavod ha-tzibur (the honor of the congregation) is the Jewish concept that relates to a sensitivity to the time-honored values of a congregation and certain expectations which participants have of their Jewish religious environment. For instance, there is an assumption in all congregations that persons who identify themselves as rabbis and cantors have had a prescribed period of training and education; if that is found not to be true, it violates expectations. In the same way, those who have grown up as Jews have the expectation that those who lead the congregation in prayer or who bless the Torah are Jews. When one who is not a Jew performs those specific acts, it can prove unsettling to a congregation assembled in worship. (This is not only true of Judaism. For example, Catholics would be unsettled if a non-Catholic went forward to take communion.)

- 1) Lifting, rolling, dressing, carrying, blessing, or reading from the Torah scroll

These rituals have their earliest roots in the late sixth century B.C.E. when Jews returned from Babylonian captivity and began reading the Torah regularly in public. While the specifics developed over the centuries, their collective purpose is to display the Torah before the public as a powerful symbol of the divine covenant with Israel. Generally, one person blesses the Torah and then another reads from the Torah. The one who blesses is considered to have fulfilled the mitzvah of reading from the Torah. Hagbah, the custom of lifting an open Torah scroll in order to hold the Torah script up to the view of the entire congregation, goes back at least to the seventh century C.E. Lifting, rolling, dressing and carrying the Torah are viewed as honors which are bestowed upon individuals who are participating in the worship service. The entire congregation recites a verbal formula while these ritual acts are performed.

- 2) Publicly blessing the Sabbath or festival candles

Traditionally, this mitzvah (commandment) has been a private, home-based ritual. But today, in many synagogues, this private ritual has been added to the communal service.

3) Leading the communal worship service (in whole or in part)

Adult male Jews are required by Jewish law to recite prescribed services three times each day. Reform Judaism teaches that men and women share equally in the responsibility to fulfill the mitzvah of prayer. Private recitation is totally acceptable, though public worship is deemed preferable. If one worships publicly, one is allowed to appoint a designated leader, known as a sheliach tzibur, (emissary of the community), to recite certain key elements of the service. By praying along with the leader, or by uttering an assenting "amen" to the leader's recitations, one may fulfill one's worship requirement. A leader cannot technically fulfill another's obligation unless the leader is personally obligated to recite the service to the same extent as the worshippers are. Thus the leader must consider him/herself personally commanded to perform the task of worship.

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## UAHC Outreach Publications

### Program Guides:

*Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue: A Resource for Congregations*

*Introduction to Judaism: A Course Outline*

*Jewish Parents of Intermarried Couples: A Guide for Facilitators*

*The New Idea Book*

*Outreach and the Changing Reform Jewish Community: Creating an Agenda for Our Future*

*Reaching Adolescents: Interdating, Intermarriage and Jewish Identity*

*Reform Jewish Outreach: The Idea Book*

*Times and Seasons: A Jewish Perspective for Intermarried Couples — A Guide for Facilitators*

*To See the World Through Jewish Eyes: Guidelines for Outreach Education: Developing Sensitivity to the Needs of Children Who Have Non-Jewish Relatives*

*A Supplemental Process Guide for Congregations: Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue*

*Working with Interfaith Couples: A Jewish Perspective — A Guide for Facilitators*

### Books:

*Every Person's Guide to Judaism*

*Introduction to Judaism: A Course Outline*

*The Jewish Home: A Guide for Jewish Living*

*Jews and Non-Jews: Getting Married*

*New Jews: The Dynamics of Conversion*

*Why Choose Judaism: New Dimensions of Jewish Outreach*

*Your Jewish Lexicon*

### Films:

*Choosing Judaism: Some Personal Perspectives*

*Intermarriage: When Love Meets Tradition*

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