



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE  
**AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES**  
A DIVISION OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

**MS-630: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler Digital Collection, 1961-1996.**

Series A: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1961-1996.

---

Box  
11

Folder  
11a

Outreach [Response], 1978-1989.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the  
American Jewish Archives website.

---

OUTREACH: THE CASE FOR A MISSIONARY JUDAISM

Address of

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

President

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

to the

Board of Trustees

HOUSTON, TEXAS

DECEMBER 2, 1978

It is good to be here, my friends, good to be re-united with the leaders of Reform Jewry, with men and women from many congregations and communities but of one faith, bound together by a common sacred cause. Your presence here gives us much strength as does your work throughout the year. We are what we are because of you, a product of those rich gifts of mind and heart you bring to our tasks.

It is good to have our number enlarged by the presence of leaders and members of our Southwest congregations. We are grateful for your hospitality. You are true sons and daughters of Abraham whose tent, so the Midrash informs us, has an opening on each of its sides so that whencesoever a stranger might near he would have no difficulty in entering Abraham and Sarah's home.

We are grateful for the sustaining help which you have given us over the years, your material help, and the time and talents and energies of your leaders who have always played an indispensable role in our regional and national councils.

It is not my intention this night to give you a comprehensive report of the Union's activities -- as I do at these Board meetings from time to time -- but rather to offer a resolution which recommends the creation of an agency within our movement involving its every arm which will earnestly and urgently confront the problem of intermarriage in specified areas and in an effort to turn the tide which threatens to sweep us away into directions which might enable us to recover our numbers and, more important, to recharge our inner strength.

I begin with the recognition of a reality: the tide of intermarriage is running against us. The statistics on the subject confirm what our own experience teaches us:

intermarriage is on the rise. Between 1966 and 1972, 31.7 percent of all marriages involving a Jew were marriages between a Jew and a person born a non-Jew. And a recent survey shows that the acceptance of such marriages among Americans in general is on the rise, most dramatically, as we might expect, among Jews.

We may deplore it, we may lament it, we may struggle against it, but these are the facts. The tide is running against us, and we must deal with this threatening reality. Dealing with it does not, however, mean that we must learn to accept it. It does not mean that we should prepare to sit shiva for the American Jewish community. On the contrary, facing and dealing with reality means confronting it, coming to grips with it, determining to reshape it.

Most often, Jewish education - more of it, and better - is put forward as the surest remedy to intermarriage. And, indeed, there is some evidence that suggests that the more the Jewish education, the less the likelihood of intermarriage. But alas, it is not always so. As the Mishnah long ago averred, "Not every knowledgeable Jew is pious", not every educated Jew is a committed Jew.

Nonetheless, we believe in Jewish education, for its own sake as well as because we believe it a powerful defense against the erosion of our people. The bulk of the resources and the energies of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations is invested in programs of formal and informal education of which we are justly proud. We operate summer camps and Israel tours and youth retreats, college weekends and kallahs and teacher training institutes. We generate curricula and texts and educational aids. And some 45,000 youngsters participate each and every year in the programs which we sponsor.

We know that such programs are our first line of defense in the battle against intermarriage. We know as well, however, that they are an imperfect defense, that even among those who are exposed to our most ambitious efforts, there are hundreds, if not thousands, who will intermarry. There is a sting to the honey of freedom.

But we know also that Jewish education is not "wasted" even on those who do intermarry. Study after study informs us that is the Jewish partner of an intermarried couple who is most likely to determine whether or not there will be a conversion to Judaism, and whether or not the children of the couple will be raised as Jews. The richer the background and the stronger the commitment of the Jewish partner, the less likely is the absolute loss.

Most simply stated, the fact of intermarriage does not in and of itself lead to a decline in the Jewish population. As Fred

Massarik, one of our leading demographers, has observed (MOMENT, June 1978), "That decline - if a decline there be - depends on what the Jews who are involved in the intermarriage actually do."

As important as Jewish education is, in this context, I believe that there are other steps we can - and must - take if we are to deal realistically with the threat which intermarriage presents to our survival. And it is on three such steps that I want to focus my attention.

The first of these has to do with the conversion of the non-Jewish partner-to-be. It is time for us to reform our behavior towards those who become Jews-by-Choice, to increase our sensitivity towards them and, thereby, to encourage growth in their numbers.

In most communities, the UAHC offers "Introduction to Judaism" courses, and congregational rabbis spend countless hours providing instruction in Judaism. History and Hebrew are taught, ideas explored, ceremonies described. But there, by and large, our efforts ends. Immediately after the marriage ceremony, we drop the couple and leave them to fend for themselves. We do not offer them help in establishing a Jewish home, in raising their children Jewishly, in grappling with their peculiar problems, in dealing with their special conflicts. More important still, we do not really embrace them, enable them to feel a close kinship with our people.

On the contrary: If the truth be told, we often alienate them. We question their motivations (since only a madman would choose to be a Jew, the convert is either neurotic or hypocritical). We think them less Jewish (ignoring that they often know more about Judaism than born Jews). Unto the end of their days, we refer to them as converts.

A colleague of mine recently received a letter from one who elected to become a Jew:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I know that I personally resent being referred to as a convert - a word that by now is alien to my heart. My conversion process was nearly ten years ago - I have been a Jew for a long time now. I think, eat and breathe Judaism. My soul is a Jewish soul though I am distinctly aware of my original background and birthright. This does not alter my identity as a Jew. If one is curious about whence I come or if indeed "am I really Jewish," the answer is categorically "Yes, I'm really Jewish - a Jew-by-Choice." I shall continue to grow and to search as a Jew. My "conversion process" was just that - a process which ended with the ceremony. From then on I was a Jew.

Such Jews-by-Choice have special needs and we need special guidance on how to meet those needs. What, for example, is to be done where a convert is more enthusiastic than his/her Jewish-born partner? And what of the past of the new Jew? He may have broken with the past, but in human terms he cannot forget, nor should he be expected to, his non-Jewish parents or family, and, at special times of the year, say Christmas or Easter, he may well feel some ambivalence. And what of the difficult process through which one learns that the adoption of Judaism implies the adoption of a people as well as a faith, of a history as well as a religion of a way of life as well as a doctrine? May this not sometimes seem overwhelming to the new Jew?

It is time for us to stop relating to the new Jews as if they were curiosities, or as if they were superficial people whose conversion to Judaism reflects a lack of principles on their part, a way of accommodating to their partners-to-be. We should do that for their sake, and also for our own. For we need them to be part of our people. They add strength to us only if they are more than a scattering of individuals who happen to share our faith. Newcomers to Judaism, in short, must embark on a long-term naturalization process, and they require knowledgeable and sympathetic guides along the way, that they may feel themselves fully equal members of the synagogue family.

Let there be no holding back. It was Maimonides himself, answering a convert's query, who wrote:

You ask whether you, being a proselyte, may speak the prayers: "God an God of our Fathers" and "Guardian of Israel who has brought us out of the land of Egypt," and the like.

Pronounce all the prayers as they are written and do not change a word. Your prayers and your blessings should be the same as any other Jew...This above all: do not think little of your origin. We may be descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but your descent is from the Almighty Himself.

\* \* \*

But we must look beyond conversion. Most of the non-Jewish partners to intermarriage do not convert to Judaism. Such data as we have suggest that two out of every three intermarriages involve a Jewish husband and a non-Jewish wife, and in these cases, one out of four wives converts to Judaism. In the one third of intermarriages which involve a Jewish wife and a non-Jewish husband, the incidence of conversion is much, much lower. But we also know that in very many cases of intermarriage without conversion, there is a "Jewish drift"; Massarik informs us, for example, that "nearly fifty percent of non-Jewish husbands, although they do not formally embrace Judaism by their own

description nonetheless regard themselves as Jews."

I believe that we must do everything possible to draw the non-Jewish spouse of mixed marriage into Jewish life. The phenomenon of Jewish drift teaches us that we ought to be undertaking more intensive Jewish programs which will build on and build up these existing ties, this fledgling sense of Jewish identification. If non-Jewish partners can be brought more actively into Jewish communal life, perhaps they themselves will initiate the process of conversion. At the very least, we will dramatically increase the probability that the children of such marriages will be reared as Jews.

Nor can we neglect to pay attention to the Jewish partners of such marriages. Frequently, they have felt the sting of rejection by the Jewish community, even by their own parents. They may feel guilty, they may feel resentful, they are almost sure to feel some confusion and ambivalence toward active involvement in the community. They may feel inhibited out of a sense of regard for their partner's sensibilities, or out of embarrassment in the face of a community they think will be hostile to their partners.

We must remove the "not wanted" signs from our hearts. We are opposed to intermarriage, but we cannot reject the intermarried. And we cannot but be aware that in our current behavior, we communicate rejection. If Jews-by-Choice often feel alienated by our attitudes and behavior, how much more alienated do the non-Jewish spouses of our children feel?

We can also remove those impediments to a fuller participation which still obtain in all too many of our congregations. Even the strictest halachic approach offers more than ample room to allow the non-Jewish partner to join in most of our ceremonial and life cycle events. The halachah permits non-Jews to be in the synagogue, to sing in the choir, to recite the blessing over the Sabbath and festival candles, and even to handle the Torah. There is no law which forbids a non-Jew to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

And as for the children born of such a marriage; if the mother is Jewish then the child is regarded as fully Jewish. But if she is not, even Orthodox Judaism, provided the consent of the mother is obtained, permits the circumcision of the boy, his enrollment in religious school and his right to be called to the Torah on the occasion of his bar mitzvah - and everlastingly thereafter, to be considered a full Jew.

All this is possible under Orthodoxy. How much the more so within Reform, which has insisted on the creative unfolding of halachah.

As a case in point, why should a movement which from its very birth-hour insisted on a full equality of men and women in religious life unquestioningly accept the principle that Jewish lineage is valid through the maternal line alone? In fact, a case can be made that there is substantial support within our tradition for the validity of Jewish lineage through the paternal line, and it is this kind of possibility which we should begin energetically to explore. I am not scholar enough to propose an instant revision in our standard practice; but I do think it is important that we seek ways to harmonize our tradition with our needs.

It may well be that when we have done that, our collective wisdom and our concern for Jewish unity will lead us to conclude that there are certain privileges which simply cannot be extended to non-Jews. If that proves to be the case, then I am confident that the thoughtful non-Jew who is favorably disposed to Judaism will recognize and respect what we have concluded, and will understand that conversion remains the path of entry to the totality of what Judaism has to offer.

Let no one misinterpret and infer that I am here endorsing intermarriage. I deplore intermarriage, and I discourage it. I struggle against it, as a rabbi and as the father of five children. But if all our efforts do not suffice - and, manifestly, they do not - do we really to banish our children, to sit shiva over them? No. Our task then is to draw them even closer to our hearts, to do everything we can to make certain that our grandchildren will nonetheless be Jews, that they will be part of our community and share the destiny of our people.

\* \* \*

I now come to the third and likely the most controversial aspect of the matter. I believe that the time has come for the Reform movement - and others, if they are so disposed - to launch a carefully conceived Outreach program aimed at all Americans who are unchurched and who are seeking religious meaning.

It would be easy to tip-toe here, to use obfuscatory language and be satisfied to hint at my purpose. But I will not. Unabashedly and urgently, I propose that we resume our vocation as champions of Judaism, that we move from passive acceptance to affirmative action.

No, I do not have in mind some kind of traveling religious circus. I envisage instead the development of a dignified and responsible approach. Let us establish information centers in many places, well-publicized courses in our synagogues, and the development of suitable publications to serve these facilities and purposes. In short, I propose that we respond openly and positively to those God-seekers whose search leads them to our

door, who voluntarily ask for our knowledge.

I do not suggest that we strive to wean people from the religions of their choice, with or without the boast that ours is the only true and valid faith; I do not suggest that we enter into rivalry with all established churches. I want to reach a different audience entirely. I want to reach the unchurched, those reared in non-religious homes or those who have become disillusioned with their taught beliefs. I want to reach those seekers after truth who require a religion which tolerates - more than tolerates, encourages - all questions. I want especially to reach the rootless and the alienated who need the warmth and comfort of a people known for its close family ties, a people of ancient and noble lineage.

The notion that Judaism is not a propagating faith is far from the truth. It has been a practiced truth for the last four centuries, but it was not true for the forty centuries before. Abraham was a convert, and our tradition lauds his missionary zeal. Isaiah enjoined us to be a "light unto the nations" and insisted that God's house be a "house of prayer for all peoples." Ruth of Moab, a heathen by birth, became the ancestress of King David. Zechariah foresaw the time when men of every tongue would grasp a Jew by the corner of his garment and say, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

During the Maccabean period, Jewish proselytizing activity reached its zenith: schools for missionaries were established, and by the beginning of the Christian era they had succeeded in converting ten percent of the population of the Roman Empire - roughly four million people.

It is true that the Talmud insists that we test the sincerity of the convert's motivations by discouraging him, by warning him of the hardships he will have to endure as a Jew. But the Talmud also says that while we are "to push converts away with the left hand" we ought to "draw them near with the right."

After Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire, and later, again, when Islam conquered the world, Jews were forbidden to seek converts or to accept them. The death penalty was fixed for the gentile who became a Jew and also for the Jew who welcomed him. Many were actually burned at the stake, and the heat of the flames cooled our conversionist ardor. Even so, it was not until the 16th century that we abandoned all proselytizing efforts; only then did our rabbis begin their systematic rejection of those who sought to join us.

But this is America and it is 1979. No repressive laws restrain us. The fear of persecution no longer inhibits us. There is no earthly - and surely no heavenly - reason why we cannot reassume our ancient vocation and open our arms to all newcomers.

Why are we so hesitant? Are we ashamed? Do we really believe that one must be a madman to embrace Judaism? Let us shuck our insecurities; let us recapture our self esteem; let us, by all means, demonstrate our confidence in the value of our faith.

For we live in a time when millions of our fellow-Americans are in search of meaning. Tragically, many of the seekers go astray, and some fall prey to cultic enslavement. Searching for meaning, they find madness instead.

Well, Judaism offers life, not death. It teaches free will, not the surrender of body and soul to another human being. The Jew prays directly to God, not through an intermediary who stands between him and his God. Judaism is a religion of hope, not despair. Judaism insists that man and society are perfectible. Judaism has an enormous wealth of wisdom and experience to offer in and to this anguished world, and we Jews ought to be proud to speak about it, to speak frankly and freely, with enthusiasm and with dignity.

## AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

There is tension in the air; there is trouble in our hearts. Men and women are restless, in quest. But the restlessness is not born of despair, the quest is not the child of hopelessness. People want meaning; they want to find a way that makes sense, and matters, and they are determined to succeed. Properly addressed, responded to with sensitivity, the quest becomes an adventure of the spirit, the discovery a nourishment to a hunger that is growing day by day. The prophet Amos spoke of such a hunger when he said,

Behold, the Day cometh, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine into the land. Not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.

Has the spirit of our age ever been more vividly captured? Is there anywhere a more striking metaphor for our time?

And have we not, we Jews, water to slake the thirst and bread to sate the great hunger? And having it, are we not obliged - for our own sake as well as for those who seek that which we have - to offer it freely and proudly?

\* \* \*

## RESOLUTION

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 an increase in the numbers of non-Jews converting to Judaism. These trends require our profound, serious and continuing attention. 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.

Accordingly, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, at its Board meeting in Houston on December 2, 1978, resolves:

- 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 congregations, 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.
- 5) To implement these principles, we call upon the Chairman of the Board to appoint a special task force of members of the Board, to examine these recommendations for implementation in all program departments of the UAHC and to report back to the Spring 1979 meetings of the Board.

# Outreach

V, which includes introductions written by Lisa and articles culled from other sources, is currently in the hands of readers for their critique.

Discussion followed about how to reach the largest number of interested people (and also how it's possible to publish such a long text that might have a relatively small readership - i.e., separately, such as (IV. "Encouraging Conversion" so that more rabbis might have access to it, and V, "Source Materials" so that people who are interested, but not taking Intro, can have access.

## 7. Update on "A Taste of Judaism"

Kathy Kahn

Kathy Kahn explained that all three sessions (on spirituality, ethics, community) of this free (or small fee) course have now been completed. Attempts to fund the project through grants have not been successful. Ready to go ahead with 4 pilot programs in New Jersey beginning in April: at Rutgers campus, at two synagogues, in the conference room of a hospital in Jersey City. Need several thousand dollars to publicize widely and to pay expenses. Rabbi Schindler and Mel Merians promised to find money for this pilot project. This project has been two years in the making. Everyone at the meeting expressed excitement and support.

Discussion then turned to some broader issues. David Belin asked about the possibility of having a shorter course of study (including sessions like "A Taste of Judaism" perhaps on videotape) leading to conversion. Rabbi Schindler said that the move has been in the opposite direction - longer studies before conversion. Discussion followed about the need for developing and offering exciting free programs like "A Taste," but not as a means to "quick conversion." Perhaps Outreach should open up an ongoing discussion about requirements for conversion, as well as needs that must be met to allow people to experience the "process" of conversion, without an expectation of a certain length of study. The importance of additional CCAR and HUC-JIR Commission members was reiterated.

## 8. Reaching the Religiously Non-Preferred

Rabbi Alexander Schindler

Rabbi Schindler gave a presentation on outreach to the religiously non-preferenced in order to update the Committee on what has transpired since his speech at the Biennial, why he gave the speech he gave, what role he hopes Outreach will play. Below is a summary of his remarks:

Intermarriage (the high rate of it) was the catalyst for Outreach, but the idea in and of itself has nothing to do with intermarriage. It's an affront to Judaism and to the choice of Judaism by a convert to suggest that a spouse or loved one would be the only reason for choosing Judaism.

Outreach to the religiously non-preferenced has been a goal of Outreach from the beginning. It was part of the package of resolutions in Boston in 1981, approved by Task Force and the

Biennial convention. Early on, it was moved to the back burner; now it's returning to the front burner. There are 2 external and 2 internal reasons why.

External:

1. Want to change perception of non-Jews that Judaism is an exclusive club, that a person must be born Jewish or married to a Jew to be Jewish.
2. Want to become just a little more assertive in seeking the conversion of spouses in intermarriages who are part of our community now.

Internal: why particularly made a big public issue

1. A teacher has to study in order to teach others, needs to find out something about Judaism for him/herself. "Inreach" component of Outreach.
2. Effort to overcome the psyche that says that Judaism isn't good enough to be shared by others. "Are you crazy? Who would want to become a Jew?" (John Bush in "Choosing Judaism" film)

Rabbi Schindler expected a much worse reaction to his speech than he got. The reaction was more positive because of Outreach; the rabbinate was more supportive than he expected and the lay response was overwhelmingly positive. Jacob Stein from Conservative movement wrote a very supportive piece.

Most of the questioning had to do with funding. \$5 million endowment with an income of \$200-250,000 a year. An intrinsic part of the overall Outreach effort--intermarried, unaffiliated, religiously non-preferenced.

The Outreach Commission is the entity that will plan and carry out programming. The kind of programs Rabbi Schindler envisions will combine unaffiliated, intermarried and religiously non-preferenced in order to maximize current and future funds.

Discussion included the following subjects:

David Belin, who is heading the solicitation of the \$5 million, suggests marketing to three groups of people: 1) to the unaffiliated; 2) to the intermarried (many of whom are also unaffiliated); 3) to the religiously non-preferenced. He believes that the Commission will have to put together a plan for what to do with the money, and then ask for the money.

Rabbi Gluck commented that much of the dissent he has heard has to do with separating the \$5 million from other funds to the UAHC. People read that as putting a higher priority on non-Jews than on UAHC members. Rabbi Schindler said that he deliberately made the separation in order that people not mistakenly think that their MUM dues were being syphoned off to other people instead of being used to help the congregations who pay those dues.

Rabbi Schindler commented that he is absolutely convinced that once people realize the doors to Judaism are not closed, they will come.

A suggestion was made that Rabbi Schindler write a series of articles for secular press. He suggested that the Commission solicit a number of people to write such articles. He also suggested that someone under the auspices of Outreach might be hired to train people in this work of seeking out the non-preferenced. Rabbi Gluck suggest that perhaps we really need to send out a "clarion call" to return to our religious roots -- to call it the "The Jonah Project."

9. Additional Pamphlets to accompany "Inviting..."

Dru Greenwood made the following suggestions for new/revised pamphlets:

"20 Questions" revised

A pamphlet on conversion: how do you do it? What are the steps? She assigned Lisa Edward to write a draft. David Belin requested that he be in on editing the draft.

David Belin proposed two pamphlets: one on why it does not work to raise children in two religions, and why Judaism is a good choice; a second on why we need religion at all, and Judaism is a good choice. Rabbi Schindler stated his feeling that such discussion should be held one-on-one after people have come in to the synagogue. Dru Greenwood pointed out the materials that are already available in Working With Interfaith Couples, What Judaism Offers for You, and Andrea King's new book. The consensus was not to move forward with these pamphlets at this time.

10. Good and Welfare

David Belin raised the issue of the Outreach budget and the need, in particular, for full-time staff. Harris Gilbert urged Commission members who are on the UAHC Executive Committee to make their feelings known on this issue at next week's meeting.

Mazal tov to Rabbi Schindler on the birth of a new granddaughter.

Congratulations to Pam Waechter on her job as Emergency Assistance Worker and Coordinator of Food Bank for JFS in Seattle.

Speedy recovery to Ellyn Geller, she has pneumonia.

Thankfully everyone in the L.A. office came through the earthquake in pretty good shape.

Mazal tov to Mickey Finn on the coming marriage of her son Solomon in Israel this July.

Condolences to David Toomim on the loss of his friend.

Harris Gilbert adjourned the meeting at 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Edwards  
Rabbinic Intern

By Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

file

It was with disappointment tinged with sadness that I read Prof. Jack Wertheimer's article titled, "Proselytizing is Bad for Jews."

Disappointed because he wrote a 1074 word essay on the basis of a brief report in a newspaper without taking the trouble to read my speech -- a most unprofessorial act, it seems to me.

And sadness for two reasons -- first, because his words place him among those who are ashamed of the notion of an assertive Judaism, who believe that it has little if anything to offer to the world; and second, because he fails to grasp the historic nature of the opportunity that now avails itself to offer our faith and the spiritual strength it contains to the many of our fellow Americans who have no religious affiliation but who are searching for meaning in their lives.

Indeed, Professor Wertheimer bypasses my central theme in its entirety, and instead initiates a multiparagraph diatribe against Reform Judaism and its synagogues which distorts reality and denigrates the Reform rabbinate.

Had he attended our Assembly and seen and felt the earnestness with which our nearly five thousand delegates approach their faith -- the fervor with which they voiced their prayers, the eagerness with which they engaged in Torah study -- he could not have written as he did. Come to think of it, he might have anyway, for I find that those who hate usually see ~~see~~ what they want to see and hear what their bias inclines them to hear.

Professor Wertheimer manifests such a sinat chinam, an unreasoned hatred of Reform. Just as one case in point, he writes that Reform Rabbis are "so intimidated by the Outreach 'lobby' that they will not publicly affirm the desirability of Jews marrying Jews for fear of offending or alienating interfaith families." What nonsense this! He isn't describing any Reform Rabbi I know!

Indeed, at the Baltimore Biennial, and before an audience equally massive, I made precisely the kind of plea which Professor Wertheimer accuses us of muting. I said then, that "we must lose no opportunity to persuade our children either to marry Jews or to urge their non-Jewish partners to opt for Judaism...We need to affirm our Judaism frankly, freely, proudly, and without fear that it will offend the non-Jewish spouses. Quite the contrary, it can only enhance their regard for Judaism, for if we lack in missionary zeal, they are bound to surmise that we have no message at all, or, at any rate, that we do not prize it."

This indeed, is my central thesis: that Judaism, from its very beginnings was a missionary religion; that our Tanach and subsequent rabbinic literature underscored the compelling need for such conversionary activity -- indeed, the prophets made Israel's mission a clarion call; and that it was only when our enemies instituted severely restrictive legislation that our conversionary zeal waned. But such restrictive legislation no longer inhibits us. Then why not resume our ancient vocation of being champions of Judaism?

Why does Professor Wertheimer resist the notion of an assertive Judaism? Is it that his self-image still mirrors the contempt of our

traducers? Or does he, perhaps, think that Judaism has little if anything to offer to our world?

Well, look about you and see: Look at this planet earth, riven as it is by conflicts of every conceivable kind? Would not Judaism's insistence that every human being is created in God's image provide healing for such a fractured world?

Consider the fear that shuts doors to the hungry and borders to the persecuted. Mightn't the Judaic emphasis on loving the stranger -- and the Jewish experience of being the stranger -- help to wedge open the doors of the world's conscience?

Consider the yearning in our lands for a deeper life rhythm than the rat race, a richer reward than the accumulation of wealth, a fuller purpose than just "making it." Cannot Judaism's sanctification of time and space and of the daily things of life satisfy that hunger?

Yes, Judaism has and enormous amount of wisdom and experience to offer to our troubled world, and we Jews ought to be proud to proclaim it with fervor and with pride.

Professor Wertheimer charges that Reform proselytism encourages "religious switching," that we promote the trend toward religious identity as "a matter subject to easy disposal," indeed, that we are encouraging individuals "to treat religion yet as another replaceable shmate, a cheap suit...and dispose of it when the fashion passes." That is an affront not just to me personally, but above all to the many thoughtful, feeling men and women who have within their own brief lives recapitulated the entirety of the Jewish experience -- the exile, the

longing, the returning in love. He owes these people an abject apology. His intemperate language ill befits an academician. It also violates the manner in which Judaism enjoins us to behave towards those who have chosen to share our faith and fate.

And let his thoughts and language be tempered by the knowledge that fully 50% of those who are raised as Conservative Jews <sup>are currently marrying</sup> ~~also marry~~ non-Jews -- at least so the demographers instruct us.

My dream is to see our Judaism unleashed as a resource for a world in need: not as the exclusive inheritance of the few, but as a renewable resource for the many; not as a religious stream too small to be seen on the map of the world, but as a deep flowing river, hidden by the overgrown confusion of modern times, that could nourish humanity's highest aspirations.

Let us therefore be champions of Judaism. Let us not be among those who in their pain and confusion respond to the fear of self-extinction by declaring casualties before the fact; who respond to the suffering of the past by living in the past; who react to the long-drawn isolation of our people with an isolationism of their own.

Let us rather recall and act on those lofty passages from the Tenach and the Chazal, from Bible and Commentary that define Jewish "chosenness" not as exclusive but as exemplary, not as separatist but as representative, not as closed but as open, not as rejecting but as all-embracing and compassionate.

"It is too light a thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the offspring of Israel. I will also give thee for a light unto the nations, that my salvation may be unto the ends of the earth."

**C.C.A.R. RESPONSA COMMITTEE**

Responsum 5754.5

**Gentile Participation In Synagogue Ritual**

*She-elah*

What are the traditional and Reform positions on the participation of non-Jews in synagogue services? We are especially interested in the area of ritual and prayer leadership. (Question submitted by the C.C.A.R. Committee on Reform Jewish Practice)

*Teshuvah*

**INTRODUCTION**

During the last quarter of the twentieth century profound changes have taken place in the demography of North American Judaism. The rate of mixed marriage has increased dramatically, with one marriage partner remaining outside the Jewish faith community. When such couples, often with their children, wish to find a synagogue where they can worship and enroll their offspring for a Jewish education, they will most likely turn to Reform congregations, which are sure to welcome and accommodate them.

Since in most congregations the family is the unit of membership, the status of the non-Jewish partners remains frequently undefined, especially when congregational constitutions do not specifically state that members must be of the Jewish religion.<sup>1</sup> But even where the constitution is unequivocal in this respect (as it probably is in the majority of temples), the fact is that emotionally, physically, and financially such families have a stake in the synagogue. They support it; they attend its services; and their children are enrolled in the religious school, where they prepare for

bār/bat mitzvah and confirmation. Especially on the latter occasions, questions of parental participation in the celebratory ritual arise and may become the seed bed of conflict.<sup>2</sup> Rabbis are put under pressure to make the widest possible accommodation to the non-Jewish partners, in order to give them a role in the service.

This scenario is paralleled by other developments. The Responsa Committee has lately been asked questions about various kinds of non-Jewish appearances at services (e.g., Resp. 5751.14; 5753.13 and 19), which suggest a worrisome tendency toward increasing syncretism. 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.

The debate begins when we try to formulate specifics and attempt to determine what is permissible and what is not. For it is not enough to say *yesh gevul*, "there must be boundaries." As our teacher Leo Baeck, z'l, reminded us, God is served in small increments. The fabric of Jewish life is woven of single strands.

The *she-elah* does not concern itself with the obvious, that is, with non-Jews attending Jewish services. Worshipping God in a synagogue is not dependent on the worshipper's religion. Rather, the question asks about non-Jews *leading* any part of the service or being called to the *beema* for any singular participation which at that moment is not available to others.

It is also clear that the *she-elah* assumes that *some* participation of non-Jews in public ritual is possible. This responsum will consider the principles which would determine the degree and nature of such participation.

Hopefully, this will provide a meaningful direction for the Reform movement.

As is our custom, we divide our answer into two parts. We first ask what Jewish tradition, as reflected in many centuries of halakhic rulings and debates, has to say on the issue. If indeed there is a body of precedents we inquire whether there are any Reform principles that would lead us to suggest departing from Tradition, and if so, why and to what extent. We begin with Halakhah, and then look at it in the light of contemporary insights and requirements.

Part of this responsum is based on a study paper prepared by Rabbi Joan Friedman of Bloomington, IN. While she is not a member of our Committee, she has graciously made her research available to us. She is not, however, responsible for any formulations at which this Committee has arrived, nor should there be an assumption that she agrees with all of them.

### I. THE VOICE OF TRADITION.

When we turn to our traditional sources for guidance in this matter, we find that they do not have a great deal to say about this particular aspect of Jewish-Gentile relations, because it is not one that would easily have arisen before the modern period. When the Temple still stood in Jerusalem, non-Israelites were permitted limited access to it and were also allowed to make offerings, including sacrifices.<sup>3</sup> These sacrifices, however, unlike the public offerings of the Jewish community, were entirely voluntary.

Until the modern period, non-Jewish attendance at synagogues was rare, for obvious reasons. The only period in which there were significant numbers of non-Jews regularly attending synagogues was the Roman

period, when Judaism was fairly widespread in the Empire.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore significant that this question did not arise at that time, which was the very period during which the laws governing Jewish public worship were formalized, including laws concerning participation in public worship.

While an argument from silence is often risky, in this instance it would appear reasonable to infer that the question never arose because even the possibility of active non-Jewish participation was never admitted, and not because it was taken for granted as permitted. Just as in the Temple, participation in the form of offerings was open to all, but officiating was restricted to the *kohanim*. Similarly, participation in the form of attendance and reciting prayers in the synagogue was open to all, but leadership was still restricted, though according to different criteria. We will first consider what those criteria were.

#### 1. Leading a service.

The liturgy of the service consists primarily of blessings and prayers whose recitation is fixed. Recital of the *shema* and its blessings, as well as the *amidah*, is considered a *mitzvah*.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there are individual prayers which, over the centuries, have become standard parts of the service, such as *aleinu*.<sup>6</sup> As such, they are by definition not obligatory upon Gentiles, whom Tradition regards as subject only to the seven Noahide laws.<sup>7</sup> But, though Gentiles are free to worship with Jews, may they *lead* the service, i.e., function as *shelichei tsibbur* even though they are not obligated to recite those prayers? To answer this, we first must examine the function of the *sheliach tsibbur* (often known by the acronym *shats*), the "emissary of the congregation."

Until as late as the tenth century there was a great deal of fluidity in the language of the liturgy (although not in its overall structure). Written copies of the liturgy were rare, and many, if not most, Jews, were not familiar enough with the prayers to be able to recite them by themselves. The leader, therefore, read or chanted them and the congregation had only to listen and respond *Amen* at the proper time, to fulfill their obligation. But the leader had to be a special kind of person. The Mishnah states:

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]."<sup>8</sup>

Hence, since non-Jews are not so obligated, they do not qualify.<sup>9</sup>

An additional consideration is the emphasis upon communal worship in our tradition. Because of the value placed on community, it has always been considered more meritorious to recite one's prayers with others rather than alone.<sup>10</sup> This is expressed halakhically in the principle that certain parts of the liturgy, *devarim she-bik'dushah*, "matters which [involve the] holiness [of the divine Name]," may only be recited in public.<sup>11</sup>

For liturgical purposes, "public" as opposed to individual, is defined through the concept of *minyan*, the minimum of ten qualified individuals required for public worship. When ten are present, they are no longer a random collection of individuals, but a community in which God is publicly worshipped.

From where [do we learn] that an individual does not recite the *kedushah*? As it is said, "that I might be sanctified [*ve-nikdashti*] in

the midst of the Israelite people (Lev. 22:32)." All matters of holiness [*devarim she-bik'dushah*] should not have fewer than ten present. How is this derived? As Ravnai the brother of R. Hiyya bar Abba taught: from [the word] 'midst' [*tokh*] which comes [in two verses, and we interpret them in light of each other]. It is written here, 'that I might be sanctified in the midst of the Israelite people,' and it is written there, 'Separate yourselves from the midst of this community [*edah*]' (Num. 16:21)." Just as in the latter [verse *edah* meant] ten, so in the former [verse *b'nei Yisrael* means] ten.<sup>12</sup>

A *minyan* is thus a mini-recreation of the entire people of Israel. When a *minyan* is present, God is present. This is the rabbinic understanding of the verse, "God stands in the divine assembly [*edah*]" (Ps. 82:1).<sup>13</sup> The constitution of a *minyan* for worship, therefore, is a reaffirmation of the relationship between God and Israel. Within the *minyan*, Israel collectively expresses its relationship with God, and the members of the *minyan* reaffirm their membership in the covenant community (*b'nei b'rit*). *Minyan* thus defines a Jewish community in a spiritual sense, as opposed to an organizational or institutional sense.

When this spiritual community gathers as such for communal prayer, it must be led by one who is a full member of the community, i.e., one who is obligated to participate in fixed prayer. For this reason Tradition restricted the function of *sheliach tsibbur* to those upon whom it placed the obligation for public worship: free adult Jewish males<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Analogies.

While we have no exact precedent in halakhic tradition that would respond to our *she-elah*, there are passages that *may* appear analogous.

Even though, as we shall point out, their application as precedents for the *she-elah* submitted to us is inappropriate, we shall proceed with an extended exposition of the *halakhah* for the sake of completeness.

In the discussion of *birkat ha-mazon*, we find the following statement:

One answers "Amen" after a Jew who blesses, but one does not answer "Amen" after a Samaritan [*kuti*] who blesses, unless one hears the entire blessing.<sup>15</sup>

This mishnah clearly delineates a situation in which a non-Jew -- specifically, a Samaritan -- could recite a blessing and a Jew could fulfill a religious obligation by responding "Amen."

At the time when this *mishnah* was written, relations between Jews and Samaritans, despite their hostility, were still closer in many ways than relations between Jews and any other religious/ethnic group. Samaritans were, after all, the only other monotheists in the Greco-Roman world, and possessed the same scripture as the Jews. There was an awareness of their historical links, as well as the reasons for their separation. The rabbis of the mishnaic period therefore were at pains to delineate both the points of contact and divergence.

It was different with Gentiles, who at that time were all pagans of various sorts. During the Middle Ages, however, when Jews lived almost exclusively in Christian or Muslim lands, many areas of *halakhah* concerning relations between Jews and non-Jews were re-examined and often modified, since most Jewish authorities clearly understood that Christians and Muslims were not idolaters in the classic sense.<sup>16</sup> They continued to refer to Christians and Muslims, however, in the same terms which their talmudic predecessors had used for pagans: *goy* (Gentile), *nokhri* (stranger, foreigner), or, most commonly, *akum* (acronym for *oved*

*kokhavim u-mazalot* (literally "one who worships stars and constellations").

Bearing these facts in mind, it is significant to find that the trend among rabbinic authorities, especially those living in Christian countries, has been to apply the provisions of the mishnah cited above to non-Jews in general.<sup>17</sup> The following comment by R. Yonah Gerondi (c.1200-1263) <sup>18</sup> is the most articulate statement on the issue:

"A Samaritan": The reason that if one hears only the mention of God, one is not to respond "Amen" is that perhaps [the Samaritan's] intent is [still] toward *avodah zarah* (idolatry). But if one hears the entire blessing, then one should respond "Amen," since then it is proven that [the Samaritan's] intent was not toward *avodah zarah* when he said the blessing.

And there are those who say that only with a Samaritan may one respond "Amen" after hearing the entire blessing, but not after any other foreigner, since it is certain that they are referring to false gods only; and now, since [the rabbis] have decreed that Samaritans are to be considered like any other foreigners, even if one hears a blessing from their lips, one is not to respond. But it appears to my teacher, may God preserve and bless him, that one should respond even after a foreigner, if one has heard him recite the entire blessing. For since we then see that he is making the blessing in this matter in God's name, even though he does not really know God, but thinks that his false god is the Creator -- even so, since his intention was to praise God, and we hear the blessing from his mouth, we answer "Amen."

And a Samaritan in our day is like a foreigner in this regard, and we do respond if we have heard the entire blessing, as it says in the Palestinian Talmud<sup>19</sup>: "R. Berechiah said, 'I answer "Amen" after anyone who blesses, because it is written, "You shall be blessed from all peoples." (Deut. 7:14)"<sup>20</sup> That is to say, he used to answer "Amen" to all the other nations, because the Holy One of Blessing is in the mouths of all nations. And even though they do not recognize him, since their intent is to bless God's name, and we hear the entire blessing from their mouths, we answer "Amen" after them.

So it appears from the language of the *baraita*, "One answers 'Amen' after everyone [reciting a blessing];" for it excludes only children when they are learning [to recite the blessings], for then their intent [in reciting them] is not at all directed to God.<sup>21</sup>

As indicated earlier, we have listed these sources *in extenso* for the sake of completeness, and also because they throw a light on the process of the traditional halakhah. When all is said, however, this discussion cannot serve our *teshuvah*. For it teaches only what to do *after* a Gentile has blessed the name of God. It is a matter of *bedi'avad*, something that has already happened, and likely by chance. R. Yonah Gerondi and R. Asher b. Yechiel (and followed by Isserles)<sup>22</sup> rule that we say "Amen" if we have heard the entire blessing, because at that point we are certain that his intent was toward God and not toward a pagan deity. After all, what he has said is true, and "Amen" is our attestation to the truth.

Yet we cannot infer from this that the "Amen" which we pronounce *bedi'avad*, after we have heard a Gentile's blessing, can serve as an analogy *lekhatchilah* (before it is spoken). It does not treat of the subject with

which we are concerned, for it says nothing about a Gentile being invited to say the blessing so that we may respond "Amen."

The logical impossibility of using these cases as a precedent in such situations is highlighted by a passage in the *Mishnah Berurah*.<sup>23</sup> There we find that the logic of the above-noted permission to respond "Amen" applies even when the blessing has been spoken by an apostate Jew (assuming that his intent, too, is toward the Creator). Clearly, such a ruling would never have been made *lekhatilah*. In fact, the *Arukh HaShulchan* states specifically that none of this applies to a situation when a Gentile recites a fixed *berakhah*, but only when he has simply declared the praise of God.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. The public reading of Torah.

The *locus classicus* for the definition of which liturgical functions require a *minyan* is Mishnah Megillah 4:3, which explicitly includes the public reading of Torah among those functions. It did not necessarily follow, however, that only members of the *minyan* could participate in the actual reading of the Torah, and a *baraita* states:

All may come up as part of the seven [Torah readers on Shabbat morning], even a minor or a woman; but our sages say that a woman should not read for the sake of the honor of the congregation.<sup>25</sup>

It must be remembered that in the Tannaitic era the seven readers actually read from the scroll, but did not necessarily recite a blessing. The first reader recited the blessing before reading Torah; the seventh reader recited the concluding blessing.<sup>26</sup> The Amoraim changed this practice to require each reader to say both blessings.<sup>27</sup> Eventually the practice changed again, to what we are familiar with: a trained reader does the

actual reading, and the seven people called to the Torah recite only the blessings.

What, exactly, is the status of public Torah reading in the hierarchy of *mitsvot*? Its origin sets it apart from the other practices in that it began as a form of public education and information, which only gradually became formalized and ritualized. This distinction becomes clear when we consider that the blessing *asher kid'shanu be-mitsvotav vetzivanu la'asok be-divrei Torah* is not recited for the public Torah reading. It was, however, understood as a *takanah*, which obligated people to hear it.<sup>28</sup>

Since the Torah reading takes place in a liturgical context, it was inevitable that many of the same considerations came to be applied to it. The most obvious was the exclusion of women. A related consequence was that those called up for *aliyot* (that is, to recite the blessings while another person does the actual reading) were required to be members of the *minyan*.<sup>29</sup> Although the authorities differ among themselves on whether a boy may be called for an *aliyah*, there is agreement that in order to read he must have reached his majority.<sup>30</sup>

### Summary.

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.

## II. REFORM PERSPECTIVES.

### 1. General observations.

In its 180 years of development, the Reform movement has gone through a number of stages. It began in Europe with a pervasive concern for halakhic precedent, a concern that never left it up to the destruction of continental Jewry. It remains clearly visible in the reconstituted communities as well as in the United Kingdom, and especially in its vigorous expression in Israel.

In North America, however, in a frontier environment with its loosening of traditional bonds, the movement lost many of its halakhic moorings. But during the last generation, spurred on by the efforts of Rabbis Solomon B. Freehof and Walter Jacob, the presence of a developing Liberal Halakhah has become evident. The C.C.A.R.'s Responsa Committees were entrusted to give it voice.

During these decades the question to which our *she'elah* addresses itself has faced previous Committees in one form or another.

Thus, in 1969, R. Freehof was asked whether a non-Jewish stepfather of a bar mitzvah might receive an *aliyah* and recite Torah blessings. He suggested that the Jewish grandfather should do it instead.<sup>31</sup>

In 1979, the Responsa Committee was asked by the Committee on Education: "To what extent may non-Jews participate in a Jewish public service?" The answer touched on the status of non-Jews as *b'nei noach* and *gerei tsedek* and went on to say:

We have invited non-Jews, including ministers and priests, to address our congregations during our public services...In addition, nowadays, because of intermarriage, we find the non-Jewish parent involved in a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. It would be appropriate to have that 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...(The Committee recommended that, instead, a special English prayer might be read by the Gentile.)

The Committee went on to speak of "essential elements of the service" which should be reserved exclusively for Jews.

Non-Jews who fall into the category of *b'nei noach* may participate in a public service in any of the following ways: (1) though anything which may not require a specific statement from them, i.e., by standing silently witnessing whatever is taking place (e.g., as a member of a wedding party or as a pall bearer); (2) through the recitation of special prayers added to the service at non-liturgical community-wide services, commemorations, and celebrations (Thanksgiving, etc.); 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.<sup>32</sup>

In 1980, R. Freehof answered a question whether a Gentile might bless the Shabbat candles or recited the Kiddush. He answered in the negative.<sup>33</sup>

We will not here rehearse the principles which have become self-evident in these and in the many hundreds of responsa which have been issued over the last forty years. They 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.

Therefore, the fact that certain terms and categories of Jewish tradition are no longer familiar to most Reform Jews is a regrettable fact but in itself not decisive for the decisions we reach. It is the task of our Committee to make it clear whence we came, so that we may more securely decide where we should go.

Thus, such categories as *sheliach tsibbur* or *chiyuv* (obligation) are not on the tongues of most of our members, but they belong to the underpinnings of the very traditions upon which our movement is founded. For that reason, we have taken pains to expose them in some detail.

We live in a time of unprecedented religious freedom - a freedom that not only allows Jews to exercise their religion without restraint, but also to choose the level on which they want to be Jewish (or, for that matter, choose not identify with their religion at all). The lure of a secular, non-particularistic, leveling environment is for many Jews irresistible. The increasing incidence of mixed marriages adds to the undeniable fact that Jewish identity is being seriously eroded.

Questions which are asked of the Responsa Committee may appear to many Reform Jews as marginal or even irrelevant to their lives. This increases, rather than diminishes our responsibility. We see it as our task to stem the tide of *hefkerut*, and to cast the growth and development of our movement into a framework of continuity rather than sectarian separation. If each Jew makes *shabbes* for him/herself, in the end no one will make *shabbes* at all.

## 2. The *sheliach tsibbur* in Reform Jewish life.

It is generally understood that the rabbi has the function of leading the congregation in worship. While in theory every Jew should be capable of doing this, in practice it is the rabbi who holds the service together and gives it leadership. A similar function is assigned to the cantor, who will lead the congregation in singing and to whose recitation of prayers it will listen. Reform Jews (like other Jews) regard these positions with special respect, even though the terminology of earlier days is no longer current or even fully understood.

Therefore, when Jews assemble for prayer and ask a rabbi or cantor to lead them, they do so in the time-honored way of placing *shelichei tsibbur* into positions of special responsibility. They represent the community and guide it in carrying out its religious obligations.

What then about the fact that in many congregations (and in earlier days, in nearly all of them) non-Jewish choristers and soloists have occupied positions which seemed to make them into *shelichei tsibbur*?

We note this fact with regret and consider it an anachronism for our time and, in retrospect, an historical error.<sup>34</sup> Yet we would claim that even when Gentile choirs were quite common in our temples, there was a vestige of embarrassment about that fact. How else would we explain the strange dichotomy: that the same choristers in their own Christian congregations sang as proud members of the congregation and guided it in worship, and could not only be heard but also be seen doing it. However, in Reform synagogues these same singers were carefully hidden away in choir lofts or behind screens, as if the purpose was to produce beautiful music which came from unidentified, unseen persons. One listened, so to speak, to the music and not to those who made it.

It is further noteworthy that even when the Gentile soloist stood on the *beemah*, s/he was never identified as "cantor" and certainly not as *chazan/chazanit*. Those terms were reserved for Jews. R. Freehof ruled that Gentile choristers were not to be considered *shelichei tsibbur*.<sup>35</sup>

What all of this says is that the employment of Gentile singers cannot and should not be a Reform precedent for us. There may have been historical reasons for their introduction - such as the absence of equivalent musical personnel who were Jewish - but those reasons have disappeared. Even when their presence was commonplace, they were always seen as apart from the congregation. Their voices provided lovely music - but they, as persons, were never considered representatives of those present. 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.

It is no accident that while in their Christians churches they led the congregation in singing, they did not so in our temples. We *listened* to them; and many is the rabbi or cantor who has testified to the difficulty of turning a listening congregation toward active participation in the service.

We repeat: the phenomenon of non-Jewish choristers is on its way out. It represents a phase of Reform history which no longer can serve as precedent for our *teshuvah*. The *shelichei tsibbur* must be members of the covenant community and they cannot yield this responsibility to outsiders.

### 3. The Torah reading and ritual.

As with regard to the *sheliach tsibbur* (also known by the acronym *shats*,) so here, too, the possibility of a non-Jew participating in the public

Torah reading is simply beyond the pale of Tradition's imagination. Can we extrapolate from this to find an answer to our concerns?

The answer lies in the traditional acknowledgment that the public reading of Torah is an essential community act.

Moses our teacher ordained that Israel should read from Torah publicly at the morning service on Shabbat, Monday, and Thursday, so that they would not allow more than three days to pass without hearing Torah.<sup>36</sup>

Participation in the Torah reading is one of the most potent symbols of inclusion in the Jewish community. It was precisely for that reason that Jewish women had to fight twenty years ago not only for the right to be called to the Torah and to read from it, but even to carry or even touch the scroll. The same emotional response is behind the new "tradition" of passing the Torah from family member to family member to the bar or bat mitzvah. Access to the Torah symbolizes full inclusion in the Jewish community. That is precisely why bar/bat mitzvah is celebrated in the way it is.

For this reason a non-Jew should not be called to the Torah for an *aliyah*. The reading of the Torah requires the presence of a community, because it is one of the central acts by which the community affirms its reason for existence, i.e., the covenant whose words are contained within the scroll. 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.

In many congregations the pressure to grant non-Jews *aliyot* comes in connection with the celebration of a bar/bat mitzvah. The reasons for this may be found in the ways our movement has both deliberately and unintentionally given the public Torah reading an altogether different context and meaning than the one just outlined. Relieving this pressure, therefore, is for this Committee not merely a matter of issuing clear guidelines; it is also a matter of reeducating our people to the real significance of what they are doing.

First, we must acknowledge the extent to which our movement removed the Torah reading from the public. The "Ritual Directions" in I. M. Wise's Divine Service of American Israelites for the Day of Atonement, for example, state:

The sections from the Pentateuch are read in a style agreeable to modern delivery and without calling any person to it [emphasis added]. The minister and two officers of the congregation have to do all the *mitsvot* connected therewith.<sup>37</sup>

While this practice, which was widespread, may have greatly added to the decorum of the service and reduced its length, it also ensured that the individual congregant had little personal access to the Torah scroll, and learned not to view an *aliyah* as something which the regular worshipper should be honored to do. This process was reinforced for some generations by the devaluation of bar mitzvah. Thus, any common understanding of the significance of the public Torah reading atrophied, and in some cases, disappeared altogether.

Second, in far too many of our congregations, so little Torah is read, and in such a disjointed fashion, that our congregants have little or no context in which to comprehend the ritual they are watching. Most of our

people, even if they attend services weekly, do not perceive the Torah as a continuous whole, which is read in a particular order and in a particular fashion. How can they, when in the vast majority of cases perhaps they hear ten verses read, excerpted randomly from the week's portion (except in parts of Leviticus, which some congregations skip completely)?

In addition, although many congregations have re-appropriated various degrees of traditional observance, the aesthetic element all too often takes precedence over the spiritual: rituals are seen to "enhance" our religious lives. Thus, any ritual becomes fair game for "enhancing" the experience of the congregation -- including non-Jewish participation, if that end is served thereby.

Finally, there is the problem of bar/bat mitzvah itself. The vast majority of our children now celebrate the event. However, many of our congregations hold Shabbat morning services only when there is a bar/bat mitzvah, and in these instances many Reform Jews have come to think that a Shabbat morning service at which Torah is read is a "bar mitzvah service" -- in fact, that it is "the child's and the family's service." In their eyes it resembles other family occasions, such as *b'rith milah*, engagement or wedding celebrations, where the family chooses the participants.

Since this is the popular context, it is easy to see why so many of our people consider it quite natural that non-Jews, and especially a non-Jewish parent, should be asked to take an active part on this occasion as well.

It is the view of this Committee that it is essential to preserve or recover the central elements of the Jewish service. Our members may not know the traditional categories we have adumbrated, but the rabbis should use every occasion to make them understood. Their observance

safeguards the integrity of the congregation whose members are and remain representatives of the total community of Jews.

This view in no wise denigrates the non-Jews in our midst. 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.

The nature of our service can and must be communicated to them with full respect for their integrity. While they have chosen to remain non-Jews, the congregation chooses to be Jewish and sets the parameters of its services. A child who prepares for bar/bat mitzvah must be taught to appreciate that there are boundaries and rules. They pertain to personal as well as communal life, and parents know this as a fundamental premise of education. It speaks to the essence of a child's maturation, of growing into adulthood. Are Reform Jewish parents different in that they should not teach their offspring that there are standards which define who we are, what sets us apart and lends meaning to what we do as Jews?

What the congregation can accord the Gentile worshipper is proximity and recognition. There is no reason why a non-Jewish parent should not accompany the Jewish parent to the *beemah* when the latter is called for an *aliyah*. There are ways by which the non-Jewish parent may express his/her sentiments and make them meaningful to child and congregation. Boundaries of this sort will help the celebrant understand that the sacred occasion is observed with full respect both to Jewish tradition and to the non-Jews in the child's family.<sup>38</sup>

There has been some discussion whether the rules enunciated above pertain also to the *aliyot* of *hagbahah* and *g'lilah*. After all, it might be argued, believing Christians too respect the Torah as part of their tradition

- why then should they not be permitted to lift the scroll high and acknowledge their respect thereby?

We give the same answer because a principle is at stake: *aliyot* are reserved for the Jewish members of the worshipping congregation. In addition, there is the matter of *mar'it ayin*, that is, the question how an otherwise well-intentioned act is perceived by others. Worshippers will be hard put to make a distinction between one type of *aliyah* and another; therefore it is better to keep the lines clear, so that the essential elements of integrity and obligation not be obscured.

#### 4. A final observation.

Many of the questions we have addressed arise in connection with bar/bat mitzvah celebrations. We are cognizant that frequently they will be seen by many if not most of those attending as a symbolic *rite de passage*. This will be especially true for celebrations in congregations which ordinarily have no Shabbat morning service. For them, to put it baldly, the service is all too often a form of religious theatre, with actors filling prescribed roles. In Shakespeare's plays, men played the role of women; here, youngsters play the scholar - so why should non-Jews not assume the role of Jews? After all, for many participants, a "bar/bat mitzvah service" is merely a symbolic performance.

But in our view, while religious services may *use* symbols they are not in themselves symbolic exercises. Whether arranged specially or whether they are weekly observances, our religious services must afford those who attend an opportunity to stand in the presence of the Living God, and do so as a covenantal congregation. True, such a service may fall short of its goal, and many a service may verge on "performance" - but we may not take

these aberrations as excuses to alter the very nature of Jewish worship, where despite all obstacles, the essential element of *mitzvah* must not be lost sight of.

There will be individuals, perhaps many of them, who will have their own reaction patterns, but it is the congregation's task to place the celebration on the common ground of Jewish tradition. That common ground, with all the respect we have for the non-Jewish parent's sensitivity, must first and foremost be the way in which a Jewish congregation expresses its love for God, Torah and Israel. It is a community in which the young person affirms his/her membership, and that community too needs constant reaffirmation and strengthening.

At the same time we treat the non-Jews in our midst with full sensitivity. They are welcome amongst us; we welcome their support and will help them to fulfill their needs as much as possible within the limits possible. (For examples, see above, pp.13/14 and footnote 38.) We are confident that in this spirit they in turn will respect our needs in these changing times.

At the same time, we must make a clear distinction between Jewish worship service in the narrow sense of the word, and religious observances which by definition include participation of Gentiles. Such special events as communal Thanksgiving service, held in many parts of the United States, are of a different hue. Such services do not, as such, fall under the strictures we have delineated.

A brief word should also be said on congregational membership. Where the constitution of the synagogue is not specific on the subject, Gentiles have obtained membership as partners in a family unit. Some congregations therefore conclude that all who have the legal status of

members must be entitled to all religious privileges as well. We would disagree. Religious membership is not the same as synagogue membership. The latter is the outflow of an institutional arrangement, the former a spiritual and historic category. Therefore, even where non-Jewish spouses of Jews are considered full temple members, their religious privileges and obligations derive from sources other than congregational by-laws and partake of the limitations set out above.

We are aware that there are differing views of the nature of Jewish worship and much that pertains to it.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

The *she-elah* to which we responded came to us from the Reform Practices Committee of the C.C.A.R. We hope that the Committee will create liturgical opportunities which will reflect the principles we have discussed and thereby provide our movement with further guidance in this complex area of Jewish existence.

#### C.C.A.R. RESPONSA COMMITTEE

W. Gunther Plaut, Chair; Mark Washofsky, Vice-Chair.

\*\*\*

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See pp. 22/23.
- <sup>2</sup> Rabbi Edwin Friedman describes such tensions when the parents have split up: "Bar Mitzvah When the Parents Are No longer Partners," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Spring 1981.
- <sup>3</sup> The outermost courtyard of the Temple in Jerusalem was sometimes called the "Court of the Gentiles, since they were not allowed to enter the innermost precincts. On contributions of sacrifices by non-Jews see B. Menachot 73b; Yad, Ma'aseh Hakarbanot 3:2-3; also *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 15:979, "Temple".
- <sup>4</sup> Evidence for the attendance of large numbers of Gentiles interested in Judaism who regularly attended synagogue comes, for example, from the letters of Paul in the New Testament. See also Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), vol. I, pp. 171ff.
- <sup>5</sup> Mishnah Berakhot, chapters 1 and 2, *passim*. The question of the exact nature of the *mitzvah* of the *tefillah* is a complicated one, but does not need to be discussed for the sake of the issue at hand.
- <sup>6</sup> *Arukh Ha-Shulchan*, Orach Hayyim 133:1: "After *U-va le-Tsiyon* the *shatz* recites the *Kaddish Titkabal*, since the Prayer is finished. However, it has been our practice to say following it the great praise of *Aleinu le-shabbe'ach*, of which the early authorities said that Joshua ben Nun instituted it at the conquest of Jericho. And the Ari of blessed memory cautioned that it should be recited following every Prayer, aloud and standing, joyously..."
- <sup>7</sup> Maimonides, *Yad*, Hilchot Melachim 8:10-11; 9:1.
- <sup>8</sup> Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8.
- <sup>9</sup> This principle is at the crux of the Conservative movement's debates over women in the *minyan* and the investiture of women as cantors.
- <sup>10</sup> E.g.: "Said the Holy One of Blessing: Everyone who engages in Torah and in the practice of deeds of loving kindness and who prays with the community --I consider such persons as if they had redeemed Me and My children from among the nations." (Berakhot 8a)
- <sup>11</sup> Berakhot 21b; Megillah 23b; *Shulchan Arukh* OH 55:1. The *Arukh HaShulchan* sums it up: "All matters of holiness [*kol davar she-bi-k'dushah*] are impossible with fewer than ten free (thus excluding slaves), male, adult Jews. And therefore for *kaddish*, *kedushah*, and *barekhu*, are not said if there are not ten; for the Shekhinah dwells with the presence of ten." (OH 55:6)
- <sup>12</sup> Berakhot 21b, and a fuller version Megillah 23b. Numbers 16:21 needs to be understood in the light of Num. 14:26, "How long shall that wicked community [*edah*] keep muttering against Me?" referring to the ten spies who brought back evil reports of the Land of Israel. Thus, ten constitute an *edah*, and God is sanctified in the midst of an *edah*, which is like the whole people of Israel.
- <sup>13</sup> Berakhot 6a.
- <sup>14</sup> Except for one who is an *onen*, i.e., who has just suffered the death of one of the seven immediate relatives for whom one is obligated to mourn, but the burial has not yet taken place. Such a person is not obligated to perform positive *mitzvot*, and hence cannot aid others to fulfill their obligations. For the *onen* is presumed to be immersed in the *mitzvah* of burying his dead and is therefore covered by the rule *במצוה פטור ממצוה* (see Sh.A. YD 341:1).
- <sup>15</sup> Berakhot. 8:8.

<sup>16</sup> For an excellent analysis of this process in Christian lands, see Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

<sup>17</sup> Maimonides (H. Berakhot 1:13) prohibits responding to either a Samaritan or an *akum*, under which heading he subsumes all Gentiles, although he exempts Islam (*Yad*, Ma'akhalot Asurot 11:7 and *Teshuvot HaRambam*, ed. Freiman, #369). On the other hand, he was less generous toward Christians, with their religious statuary and concept of the Trinity (see the uncensored editions of *Yad*, Avodah Zarah 9:4), probably following B. Avodah Zarah 6a and 7b, which in all MSS and in the Rashi of some of the old printed editions read our *yom echad* as *yom notsri* or *notsrim*.

R. Isaac Or Zarua of Vienna (12th-13th century), an adherent of the pietist Hasidei Ashkenaz, also held it forbidden (*Halakhot* of Alfasi to Berakhot, 40a, *Shiltei ha-Gibborim* 4). However, both Rabbenu Asher and his son R. Jacob ben Asher, author of the *Tur*, declare it permissible to answer "Amen" after a *nokhri* ("foreigner") as long as one has heard God's name mentioned (*Ibid.*). In the *Shulchan Arukh* (1575), R. Joseph Karo states only that one may not respond to a *kuti*; R. Moses Isserles in his gloss adds explicitly that one does respond after an *akum* (by this time, just a generic term for gentiles) if one hears the entire blessing (*Sh.A.* O.H. 215:2). The most authoritative modern commentary on this section of the *Shulchan Arukh*, by R. Israel Meir Kagan ("the Hafetz Hayim"), written around 1900, agrees with Isserles on the grounds that when a gentile mentions God, s/he is not referring to an idol or a false god; but he also notes that an earlier commentator on the same law declared that responding after a gentile was only optional (*Mishnah Berurah* to O.H. 215:2).

If one analyzes all these and other references, one sees that while a wide range of attitudes toward the religiosity of non-Jews is expressed, the trend is mostly toward acceptance. This is true even if we allow for the fact that any of these sources may have read slightly differently in original form: terms such as *kuti* and *akum* (instead of *goy*) were very often inserted by Christian censors from the sixteenth century onward.

<sup>18</sup> R. Yonah is known as a halakhist (his comments on Alfasi's *Halakhot* are included in the standard editions of the latter), an early kabbalist (he was a cousin and an associate of Nahmanides), and a pietist (his famous ethical treatise is called *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, "Gates of Repentance"). His fundamental conservatism was revealed in his active participation in the so-called Maimonidean controversy, on the side opposing Maimonides' philosophical thought. Furthermore, his formative years were spent studying in the *yeshivot* of southern France during the period when the Cathars (Albigensians) flourished there, and when the Church launched its Crusade against them. The spearhead of this crusade was the Dominican Order, to which the pope entrusted the Holy Office, better known as the Inquisition, which soon broadened its investigations of "heresy" to writings by Jews. R. Yonah, in other words, lived in a time and place where the Catholic Church, out of its desire for internal reform, was beginning to take serious and organized action against rabbinic literature. While it is not certain that the Dominican Inquisitors actually burned Maimonides' works in Montpellier in 1232, a huge quantity of manuscripts of the Talmud were burned in Paris in 1244 under their auspices, at the order of King Louis IX ("St. Louis"); and in 1263 Nahmanides was forced to debate the friars (led by the Jewish apostate, Pablo Christiani) before King James of Aragon in Barcelona. R. Yonah's statement is the more noteworthy when placed in this context.

<sup>19</sup> Berakhot 8.

<sup>20</sup> An unusual understanding of the Hebrew, which is ordinarily rendered as "above" all peoples.

- 21 R. Yonah Gerondi in his commentary on Alfasi, Halakhot, Ber. 40a, s.v. Onin amen achar yisrael ha-mevarekh. R. Yonah's commentary was redacted by one of students. When he speaks of R. Yonah's teacher as one of the most vociferous of Maimonides' opponents, it is likely that R. Yonah himself is meant.
- 22 Sh. A. OH 215:2.
- 23 215:12.
- 24 OH 215:3.
- 25 B. Megillah 23a.
- 26 M. Megillah 4:1-2.
- 27 B. Megillah 21b. This is the procedure prescribed by Maimonides, *Yad*, Hilchot Tefillah 12:5.
- 28 *Massechet Sofrim* 18:4; Be'er Hetev to Sh. A. OH 282:2. A *takanah*, literally "remedy," was a rabbinic ordinance, introduced as a measure to improve the public welfare. Since the thrice-daily recitation of the tefillah is itself a *takanah*, it partakes of the obligation; see *Yad*, Hil. Tefillah 1:5. The Rambam's source is Baba Kama 82a.
- 29 The end result of this evolution is amply demonstrated in the lengthy discussion of the phrase *ha-kol olin le-minyan shiv'ah* found in the *Arukh Ha-shulchan*, OH 282:9-11. The phrase refers to being called to the Torah to recite the blessings while another person reads. The same is also true of the briefer pronouncement in the Sh.A. OH 282:2.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 "Gentile Stepfather at Bar Mitzvah," *Current Reform Responsa* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1969), pp. 91-93.
- 32 *American Reform Responsa*, ed. Walter Jacob (New York: C.C.A.R. Press, 1983), #6.
- 33 "Gentiles' Part in the Sabbath Service," *New Reform Responsa* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1980), pp. 33-36.
- 34 Walter Jacob, *Contemporary American Reform Responsa* (New York: C.C.A.R. Press, 1987), # 132, deals with this subject and says: "Despite their [the choristers'] frequent use we feel that every effort should be made to use a Jewish choir...the *kavvanah* of such a choir will add beauty to the service." While he would allow their participation in songs which are not essential to Jewish belief or practice, this caution is surely honored only in the breach.
- 35 *Reform Jewish Practice*, vol. II, p. 71.
- 36 *Yad*, Hil. Tefillah 12:1.
- 37 Cincinnati: Bloch, 1891.
- 38 Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, wrote on December 7, 1993, in a letter his Board of Trustees, clarifying the intent of his address to the Union Biennial which had been held in San Francisco:

We should be as welcoming as possible, yet boundaries need to be drawn...My colleague [Rabbi] Norman Cohen of Hopkins, MN, established a pattern which concretizes to a "T" what I have in mind:

When a non-Jewish spouse is supportive of the Jewish upbringing of the children, he involves them in a number of ways in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. While the non-Jewish partners do not actually pass the Torah, they stand with the Jewish spouse and Norman says to them quite clearly: 'The Torah is passed from your grandparents to your mother who, with the loving support of your father, passes it on to you.' And when the Jewish parent is invited to do the Torah blessing, the non-Jewish parent stands with him/her and recites the following words:

'My prayer, standing at the Torah, is that you, my son/daughter will always be worthy of this inheritance as a Jew. Know that you have my support. Take its teachings into your heart and, in turn, pass it on to your children and those who come after you. May you be a faithful Jew, searching for wisdom and truth, working for justice and peace.'

In this and like manner, we can meet our two-fold obligations: to be true to the integrity of our tradition, even as we respond to the sensitivities of those non-Jews who have not yet embraced Judaism, but who nonetheless have agreed, and indeed are determined, to rear their children as Jews.

39 Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman has occupied himself extensively with the nature of Jewish prayer. He speaks of categories such as "multivocality" and "performative liturgy." The bottom line of his argument may be stated as follows:

If a congregation sees a ritual as an affirmation of its covenantal status, the ritual is reserved for Jews, and for Jews only. But if it is symbolic and affirms the spiritual worth of the participant, whether Jew or non-Jew, we may insist that all parents say it, especially a non-Jewish parent who had an easy option of denying this child's Jewish education, but did not do so. See "Non-Jew and Jewish Life-Cycle Liturgy," in *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Summer 1990, pp. 1-16. (Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut wrote a response to his exposition, *ibid.*, pp. 17-20.) See also R. Hoffman's "Worship in Common: Babel or Mixed Multitude?" in *Crosscurrents: Journal of the American Association for Religion and Intellectual Life*, 40:1 (Spring 1990).

40 Rabbi A. Stanley Dreyfus would be more accommodating to non-Jews, especially with regard to *birchot nehenin*. In view of rising mixed-marriages, he calls for such accommodation as a much needed "heroic measure."



# MEMORANDUM

From Rabbi Bernard M. Zlotowitz  
To Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

Date March 14, 1989

Copies

Subject

*File in Responsa*

*Outreach*  
I'm honored and appreciative that you asked me to translate this responsum because I learned something new, thanks to you.

Questions asked by Reb Ovadia, a righteous convert, of our teacher Moses (Maimonides), the memory of the righteous is for a blessing, and his responsa:

Moses, the son of Maimon, among the exiled of Jerusalem, who lives in Spain, the memory of the righteous is for blessing, says: Questions have reached us from the master and teacher, Ovadia, the enlightened and understanding one, a righteous convert. The Lord compensates His worker, who comes under the protection of His wings, and his wages from the Lord of Israel are complete.

You asked concerning your private blessings and prayers, or if you pray publicly, if you can say, "Our God and the God of our Fathers," "And who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us", "and who has separated us", "and who has chosen us", "and who has bequeathed to our Fathers," "and who has taken us out of the land of Egypt", and "did miracles for our fathers", and all such similar expressions.

You may recite all the rules that the rabbis instituted and you need not change a word, in the same manner, as every native born Jew, prays and blesses, so may you bless and pray, be it privately, or as a leader in prayer.

The important matter is that Abraham our father taught all the people and caused them to be enlightened and to know the true religion and the unity of the Holy One, blessed be He. He scorned idolatry and violated their worship and brought many under the wings of the Shechina, (Divine Presence); and assuredly taught them and commanded his children and his household after him that they keep the way of the Lord, etc. Therefore all who converted, until the end of all generations, and all who declare the unity of the name of the Holy One blessed be He, is as it is written in the Torah, a student of Abraham our father may he rest in peace, as is his (the convert), whole household because he caused them to reform just as he (Abraham) caused the people of his generation to reform with his mouth.



אחדות  
ליהדות  
פזקדנות  
באמריקה

Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

So by his teaching he caused all who are yet to be converted in the future, by his testament which he commanded his children and his household afterward. Abraham, our father, may he rest in peace, is the progenitor to his fit seed who go in his ways and is the father to his students and every convert who converts. Therefore, you have every right to say "Our God and the God of our fathers" since Abraham, may he rest in peace, is your father, and you may say "who has bequeathed our fathers" since to Abraham was given the land as it says "arise, walk around the length and breadth of the land because to you I have given it." With regard to "you took us out of Egypt" or "you did miracles for our fathers", if you wish to change [the wording] and say "you took Israel out of Egypt" or "you did miracles for the people of Israel", say (it). And if you do not [want] to change [the wording] there is nothing at all wrong since you have entered under the wings of the Shechinah and accompanied Him, there is no difference between you and us. And all the miracles that He did, it is as if He did it for us and you. Here is what is said in Isaiah, "Let not the foreigner, who has joined himself to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from his people'." (56:3). There is no difference at all between us and you whatsoever. You may definitely say the blessing "who has chosen us" "who has given us" "who has bequeathed" and "who has separated us". For the adored Creator had already chosen you and separated you from the nations and gave you the Torah. Torah is for us and for converts as it says "For the Assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the sojourner be before the Lord." (Num. 15:15). One Torah and one ordinance shall be for you and the convert who dwells with you. And know that our forefathers when they went out of Egypt, the majority of them were idol worshippers in Egypt mixed in with the nations (goyim) [among whom they lived], and they learned their deeds until the Holy One blessed be He sent Moses our teacher of blessed memory, the teacher of all the prophets and separated us from the nations and brought us under the wings of the Shechinah, us and all the converts and established for us one statute. And let not your lineage be any less in your eyes, though we trace our lineage to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you trace your lineage to He who said let the world come into being. And so is it explained in Isaiah, "This one will say, 'I am the Lord's, another will call himself by the name of Jacob, etc. (44:5). And all that was said to you regarding the blessings that you are not allowed to repeat them is stated in Tractate Bikkurim in which it is taught that the convert who brings [bikkurim] "doesn't read" and he can't say "The Lord swore to our fathers to give us"; or when he prays by himself he must say, "our God and the God of the fathers of Israel". Or when he prays in the synagogue he

must say "our God and the God of your fathers," that is merely a Mishna. And this view is according to Rabbi Meir. But this is not the law as explained in the Palestinian Talmud, There it is related in the name of Rabbi Judah, "a convert brings and reads," the reason being that in the past Abraham had been the father of a multitude of people but henceforth became the father of all peoples.

R. Joshua son of Levi said the law is according to R. Judah. A similar case came before R. Abahu and his decision was like R. Judah. Hence to clarify, you may say the "Lord swore to our forefathers to give", and since Abraham is your and our father and of all the righteous who go in his ways, this is also the law with the other blessings and the prayers. You need not change them at all. So wrote Moses the son of Maimon of blessed memory.

Responsum # 293, Responsa of Maimonides, edited by Yehoshua Blau, VOL. II, pp. 548-549.





RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

TELECOPIER COVER LETTER

PLEASE DELIVER THE FOLLOWING PAGE(S) TO:

NAME:

*Rabbi Alexander Schindler*

LOCATION:

*to Las Vegas*

FAX NUMBER:

*203-454-3419*

TOTAL NUMBER OF PAGES:

*4*

INCLUDING THIS COVER LETTER.

OUR FAX NUMBER IS (212) 570-0895

WE ARE SENDING FROM A FAX PHONE 20

If you do not receive all of the pages, please call our office number and the noted extension immediately. Thank you.

UAHC - (212) 249-0100 Extension: 210 or 211

DATE:

*3/30*

*3/31*

TIME:

*3:11 PM*

*12 Noon*

# MEMORANDUM

From Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz  
To Rabbi Alexander Schindler

Date February 24, 198

Copies

Subject Further on Maimonides' Attitude towards Proselytes

"The Mishna states: These may bring but do not make the declaration: the proselyte may bring (the first fruits) but does not make the declaration because he cannot say, which the eternal swore to our ancestors to give unto us (De. 26:3). According to the Rambam, the ruling is not as in this Mishnah, but the proselyte brings and reads, i.e. the proselyte may bring and he makes the declaration because the earth was given to Abraham and he became the father of (all) proselytes." "A Digest of Jewish Laws and Customs", compiled by J.D. Eisenstein, Hebrew Publishing Co., 1938, p. 78.



*Outreach Response*

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

November 16, 1981

Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz

Many thanks for the comprehensive response to Joe Edelmet. It will be an important resource paper for me and I am grateful for your efforts in this connection.

When are you sleeping these days? I know you spoke at Congregation Emanu-El of N.Y. this Shabbat, I'm sure it went well. It's a source of delight to me to know that you graced their pulpit.





איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

# Union of American Hebrew Congregations

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE—JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100 CABLES: UNIONUAHC

NEW YORK FEDERATION OF  
REFORM SYNAGOGUES

Rabbi Bernard M. Zlotowitz, D.H.L., D.D.  
Director

11/13  
November 13, 1981

Dear Rabbi Edelheit:

Thank you for your 9 September, 1981 response to our memo of 22 July, 1981. Rabbis Schindler and Hiat suggested that I respond to your letter. Please excuse my delay in so doing, but as the following data shows, your letter required a detailed answer. This took more time than I anticipated. I believe that the sources cited prove our contention that the statement in the paragraph under the Satus and Acceptance of Gerim, second sentence, is definitely inaccurate.

There is no statement in the Tanach regarding the meritorious status of the ger. Quite often just the reverse is the case. The ger is looked down upon as occupying an inferior status.

For the purposes of ascertaining the biblical meaning of the term ger and its attitude towards the ger we have divided this paper into the following sections:

1. General Statement and Definition of the term ger.
2. Ger as a substituted expression for an individual Israelite or the people Israel.
3. Difference between ger and ezrah.
4. Difference between ger and toshav.
5. Biblical attitude towards the ger and his status:
  - a. rights and privileges
    - (1) participate in religious festivals

- (2) equal rights under the law
- (3) regulations governing food
- b. obligations to the ger (defend, help, love, etc.)
- c. inferior status of the ger
- 6. Obligations of the ger
- 7. Seeming equality of the ger
- 8. Enemy of Israel
- 9. Conclusion

1. General Statement and Definition of the term ger.

The term ger is found 92 times in the Tanach. At no time does it mean "convert to Judaism" (proselyte). In the Bible the term ger means "a resident alien" (II Sam. 1:13 *And David said unto the young man that told him, whence art thou? And he said, the son of a ger, an Amalekite, am I*) who is generally not viewed in a meritorious light in contradistinction to an ezrah (<sup>native</sup>~~home~~born) and/or toshav (dweller). Though at times the ger comes close to having equal status with the Israelite, he never gains full equality and occupies a status inferior to the Israelite. The Bible frequently admonishes the Israelite to love the ger and protect him.

2. Ger as a substituted expression for an individual Israelite or the people Israel. The term ger is a substituted expression for an individual Israelite or the people Israel and its meaning as "resident alien" is unmistakable:

Gen. 15:13

*And he said unto Abram, know of a surety that thy seed shall be a ger in a land which is not theirs, and they will make them serve, and they will afflict them four hundred years.*

The term ger here certainly means "resident alien". The descendants of Abraham

- (2) equal rights under the law
- (3) regulations governing food
- b. obligations to the ger (defend, help, love, etc.)
- c. inferior status of the ger
- 6. Obligations of the ger
- 7. Seeming equality of the ger
- 8. Enemy of Israel
- 9. Conclusion

1. General Statement and Definition of the term ger.

The term ger is found 92 times in the Tanach. At no time does it mean "convert to Judaism" (proselyte). In the Bible the term ger means "a resident alien" (II Sam. 1:13 *And David said unto the young man that told him, whence art thou? And he said, the son of a ger, an Amalekite, am I*) who is generally not viewed in a meritorious light in contradistinction to an ezrah (<sup>native</sup>~~home~~ born) and/or toshav (dweller). Though at times the ger comes close to having equal status with the Israelite, he never gains full equality and occupies a status inferior to the Israelite. The Bible frequently admonishes the Israelite to love the ger and protect him.

2. Ger as a substituted expression for an individual Israelite or the people Israel. The term ger is a substituted expression for an individual Israelite or the people Israel and its meaning as "resident alien" is unmistakable:

Gen. 15:13

*And he said unto Abram, know of a surety that thy seed shall be a ger in a land which is not theirs, and they will make them serve, and they will afflict them four hundred years.*

The term ger here certainly means "resident alien". The descendants of Abraham

will have to reside and serve in a foreign land - the land of Egypt for hundreds of years before they are redeemed and brought to their own land;

Ex. 2:22

*And she bore a son, and he called his name Gershom; for he said, I have been a ger in a foreign land.*

The verse here is clear: ger means a resident alien.

Ex. 18:3; 22:20

*...for gerim ye were in the land of Egypt;*

Ex. 23:9; Lev. 19:34; 25:23; Dt. 10:19; 23:8; Ps. 39:13; 119:19; and I Chron. 29:15

*For gerim are we before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: like a shadow are our days on the Earth, and there is no hope (of abiding).*

The analogy of a shadow which is not permanent concretizes the concept of ger as a resident alien, i.e. a temporary residency.

### 3. Difference between ger and ezrah.

Ger and ezrah appear together several times in the Bible. In each case, the difference between the terms ger (resident alien) and ezrah (<sup>native</sup> ~~home~~ born) is discernible.

Ex. 12:19

*Seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses; for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether ba-ger oo-v'ezrah ha-aretz;*

Ex. 12: 48,49; Lev. 17:15; 18:26; 24:16,22; Nu. 9:14

*...one statute shall be for you, v'la-ger oo-l'ezrah ha-aretz;*

and Josh. 8:33.

4. Difference between ger and toshav.

When ger and toshav appear together in the Tanach, ger means "resident alien" and toshav means "sojourner":

Gen. 23:4; Lev. 25:35,47 (3 times)

*And if a ger and toshav wax rich near thee, and thy brother (aḥiḥa) become poor near him, and he sell himself to the ger toshav near thee or to a descendant of the ger's family.*

It is definitely clear from this verse that a ger and toshav are not Israelites and the distinction is made among the ger (resident alien), toshav (sojourner) and aḥiḥa - your brother i.e. and Israelite; Nu. 35:15 and I Chron. 29:15.

5. Biblical attitudes toward the ger and his status:

a. rights and privileges

(1) right to participate in religious festivals and the cult

Ex. 12:48

*And when a ger sojourneth with thee, and will prepare the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and prepare it, and he shall be as one that is born in the land (ezrah); but no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.*

One may erroneously conclude from this verse that a ger who is circumcised is a converted Jew. But the preponderant evidence simply indicates that such a person is in close sympathy with Jewish religious thought and life without implying absolute identity with and inclusion in Judaism. The reference in this verse to *no uncircumcised person* includes an uncircumcised Israelite (Isaac Leeser) which indicates that whether one is an Israelite or a ger they may not partake of the passover if they are uncircumcised. It does not mean that the ger by becoming circumcised is now accepted as a Jew.

cf. Nu. 9:14

And if a ger sojourn among you, and will prepare the passover lamb unto the Lord: according to the ordinance of the passover lamb, and according to its prescribed rule, so shall he prepare it; one statute shall be for you, both for the ger and the ezrah in the land where no mention is made of the requirement for circumcision to celebrate the passover.

The right of the ger to participate in the cult is clearly stated in Nu. 15:14

And if a ger sojourn with you, or whosoever may be among you in your generations, and will make an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord: as ye do, so shall he do.

(2) Equal rights under the law

Ex. 12:49

One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the ger that sojourneth among you.

The Bible is emphasizing the right of equal protection under the law both for the alien resident and the citizen.

Nu. 9:14; 15:15, 16, 26, 29; Dt. 1:16

And I commanded your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously, between a man and his brother, and between his ger.

(3) Regulations governing food

Lev. 17:10

And if there be any man of the house of Israel, or of the ger that sojourn among them, that eateth any manner of blood: I will set my face against the person that eateth the blood, and I will cut him off from among his people.

The law of the land required that both the citizen and the alien resident abide by the law not to eat the blood of an animal.

Nu. 17:12,13,15; Dt. 14:21

*Ye shall not eat anything that dieth of itself; unto the ger that is in thy gates canst thou give it, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien...*

There is no question that if the ger were a Jew he would not be permitted to eat such food. The fact that a differentiation is made between him and the Israelite indicates that he is not a convert or so considered by the Bible.

b. Obligations to the ger

The Bible enjoins the Israelite to defend, help, love the ger, not to oppress him and to accept his sacrifices:

Ex. 22:20

*And a ger thou shalt not vex, and shalt not oppress him...*

Ex. 23:9; Lev. 19:10,33,34 (...and thou shalt love him (ger) as thyself); 22:18; 23:22

Dt. 10:18; 24:14

*Thou shalt not withhold the wages of a hired man, of the poor and needy, (whether he be) of thy brethern, or of thy ger that is within thy gates (cf. Malachi 3:5);*

Zech. 7:10

*And defraud not the widow, or the fatherless, the stranger, or the poor; and imagine not evil in your heart one against the other.*

c. Inferior status of the ger

The ger is classed with widows, orphans, the poor and is viewed as belonging to the lower classes of society.

Lev. 23:22

*And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not cut away altogether*

*the corners of thy field when thou reapest, and the gleanings of thy harvest shalt thou not gather up; unto the poor, and to the ger shalt thou leave them...;*

Dt. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14, 24:14, 17

*Thou shalt not pervert the cause of the ger, or the fatherless; and thou shalt not take in pledge the raiment of a widow;*

Dt. 24:19, 20; 24:21, 13; 27:19; Josh. 8:35

*There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded, which Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the ger that walked in the midst of them;*

Jer. 7:6; 22:3; Ps. 94:6; 146:9

*The Lord guardeth the gerim; the fatherless and widow he helpeth up....*

*The resident aliens were to be hewers of stone:*

I Chron. 22:2

*And David ordered to gather together the gerim that were in the land of Israel: and he appointed (them) to be masons to hew cut stones to build the house of God.*

Gerim were not permitted to hold Hebrew slaves which was the right of every Israelite. (see Lev. 25:47 ff)

#### 6. Obligations of the ger

He was required to observe the Sabbath (Ex. 21:10; and Dt. 5:14); not work on Yom Kippur (Lev. 16:29); not permitted to eat the blood of an animal (Lev. 17:14-16 cf. Dt. 14:21 where the ger is permitted to do this); prohibited from performing abominations (Lev. 18: 1 ff.); not to give their seed to Molech (Lev. 20:2); to abide by the law (Nu. 15:30).

7. Seeming equality of the ger

It would seem from a number of verses that the ger was the equal of the Israelite (Ex. 12:48; Lev. 16:29; 17:8, 10; 22:18; Nu. 19:10; Dt. 26:11; 31:12; Josh. 20:9; Isa 14:1; Ezek 14:7; 47:22, 23 (the right to inherit); II Chron. 30:25.

All of these laws simply reflect acts of justice and not equality. There were to be just laws administered to the Israelite and the resident alien just as for example in our country whether one is a citizen or not justice and equality is the right of all people.

8. Enemy of Israel

The following verses poignantly demonstrate how wary the Israelite should be of the ger:

Dt. 28:43

*The ger that is in the midst of thee shall get up above thee higher and higher; but thou shalt come down lower and lower;*

and II Sam 1:13 ff

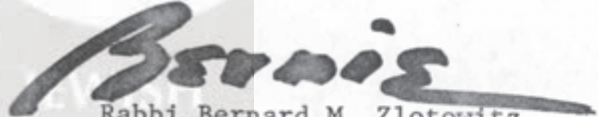
*And David said unto the young man that told him, Whence art thou? And he said, The son of a ger, an Amalekite, am I. And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thy hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? And David called one of the young men, and said, Come near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died. And David said unto him, Thy blood is upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying I myself have slain the Lord's anointed.*

The implication of these verses are clear: only a ger would perform so dastardly an act as regicide.

9. Conclusion

The Hebrew Bible nowhere views the term ter as a convert to Judaism. If he were, the Tanach would not have to pinpoint him as different. He is a resident alien and as such he has certain rights and enjoys special privileges: he may share in celebrating certain religious festivals, to be treated kindly and not to be oppressed. At the same time he has certain responsibilities and obligations to the community. But at no time is the ger considered a Jew in the Bible.

Warmly,

  
Rabbi Bernard M. Zlotowitz

cc: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler ✓  
Rabbi Philip Hiat  
Rabbi Joseph Glazer

P.S. I respectfully disagree with your statement that BDB defines ger in biblical context as "proselyte". BDB defines ger as (1) "sojourner" and (2) usually of gerim in Israel ... (Amalekite) ... dwellers in Israel with certain conceded, not inherited rights" and a host of other usages. But never as "convert". BDB's reference to "proselyte" is in context of ger's Aramaic cognate giyur, and the Aramaic referred to is not biblical. No where does BDB s. ger define the word as a convert to Judaism in the biblical context.

Regarding the secondary sources you cite, I trust will now be read in a different light and that you recognize that the conclusions reached by our colleagues do not jive with the facts. Incidentally, I am sure it was a typo but the reference to Siegel's article in Conservative Judaism is in the Fall issue 1979 and not 1980.

## Rabbi Joseph A. Edelheit

September 9, 1981

Rabbi Philip Hiat  
Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz  
Rabbi Alexander Schindler  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Dear Colleagues,

I was sent a copy of the memo of July 22, 1981 regarding Divre Gerim which was passed on to Joe Glaser. I have only recently assumed responsibility as Chairman of the CCAR Committee on Gerut and am only now taking up such correspondence. I'm pleased that the document received close and careful scrutiny and the committee and I appreciate the time taken in forwarding this information to us.

I would, however, question the charge of inaccuracy with regard to the statement, in the paragraph under The Status and Acceptance of Gerim, the second sentence, which is "the Tanach and rabbinic literature are replete with statements regarding meritorious status, respectively, of the GER and GER TZEDEK, the righteous stranger who choses to become a member of the Jewish people and faith. "

I would, first of all, draw your attention to page 158 in the BDB in which the word Ger used in the biblical context is defined as proselyte. I would further draw your attention to Joseph Rosenblum's book Conversion to Judaism, page 20ff. I would also suggest a careful review of Rabbi Seymour Siegel's article Gerut and the Conservative Movement, Conservative Judaism, fall 1980, page 33. Further, Arthur Lelyveld's article Conversion in the History of Jewish Thought in the Congress Monthly, Nov. 1979 on page 5. Finally, I would suggest very careful scrutiny of the document titled On Becoming a Jew: Twenty Questions Commonly Voiced by Persons Considering Conversion to Judaism, written by Rabbi Sanford Seltzer. Please note that the first question is answered in part by "Both the



SINAI TEMPLE

2800 Franklin Street Michigan City, IN 46360 (219) 874-4477 Study  
(219) 874-6475 Home

September 9, 1981  
page 2

Bible and rabbinic literature are replete with examples of individuals who made this decision. " I would, therefore, suggest that these other documents are either equally incorrect and inaccurate or that the statement in Divre Gerim is misunderstood.

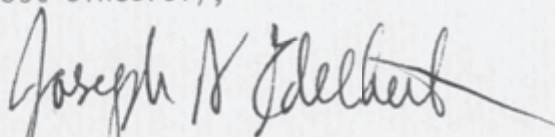
The grammar of the sentence is correct, although possibly cumbersome. It is, most certainly possible, to have misunderstood, because of the word respectively, from which text which term was being used. This might be corrected in a later edition by reworking 2 sentences.

I would suggest that the intent of that sentence and, in fact, that whole paragraph in the Divre Gerim is similar to page 7, paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of the presidential address by Alex Schindler in Houston in 12/78. For there too, the intention was to provide a historical context of full and universal acceptance and, in fact, encouragement for the proselyte. In the Divre Gerim, we felt that the CCAR should, most certainly, draw upon what is commonly accepted as the Jewish historical approach.

Having, I hope, resolved the issue of inaccuracy, I would, then, ask the question-What is the intent of the memo dated July 22? Should the Divre Gerim not suggest a biblical or rabbinic acceptance of those who chose to become Jewish? I would appreciate, as the Chairman of the Committee, knowing specifically what change in the text is needed and/or suggested and the rationale for such a suggestion. I would be more than happy to bring that before the committee. I look forward to increasing the close and open communication between this very important committee and the very important work that the Union is doing in this area.

My best to all three of you and may your Seasons of Holiness be filled with serenity, health and peace for you and your families.

Most sincerely,



Rabbi Joseph A. Edelheit

JAE/dk

cc Joe Glaser

July 24, 1981

Rabbi Joseph B. Glaser  
CCAR  
790 Madison Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Dear Joe:

The enclosed memo from Phil and Bernie is self explanatory. I think it would be of interest to you.

With warmest regards, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

Enclosure

July 24, 1981

Rabbi Joseph B. Glaser  
CCAR  
790 Madison Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Dear Joe:

The enclosed memo from Phil and Bernie is self explanatory. I think it would be of interest to you.

With warmest regards, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

Enclosure

Keep  
This copy

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

July 24, 1981

Rabbis Phil Hiat and Bernie Zlotowitz

I want to thank you both for your July 22 memo in regard to Gerut. I am forwarding the information on to the CCAR so that they are advised of the inaccurate statement in the proposed draft.

I am deeply grateful to you both for pointing out this serious error in the CCAR statement.

With warmest regards,



Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

July 24, 1981

Rabbis Phil Hiat and Bernie Zlotowitz

I want to thank you both for your July 22 memo in regard to Gerut. I am forwarding the information on to the CCAR so that they are advised of the inaccurate statement in the proposed draft.

I am deeply grateful to you both for pointing out this serious error in the CCAR statement.

With warmest regards.



# MEMORANDUM

From Rabbis Phil Hiat and Bernie Zlotowitz

Date July 22, 1981

To Rabbi Alexander Schindler

Copies

Subject Gerut

*Thank Phil  
+ Bernie*  
*Send memo to  
Joe Glaser.*

We thought that you would like to know that the Divre Gerim proposed statement of the CCAR has a serious error. Perhaps you would like to point out the inaccuracy to the CCAR:

In the proposed draft "as changed 4/81" in the paragraph The Status and Acceptance of Gerim, 2nd sentence, it is stated, "The Tanach and rabbinic literature are replete with statements regarding the meritorious status, respectively, of the GER and the GER ZEDEK, the righteous stranger who chooses to become a member of the Jewish people and faith." This statement is inaccurate.

The "GER" in the Tanach (which appears 91 times) is not considered a convert to Judaism. If anything, the "GER" of the Tanach is either a "stranger", "an alien", "a foreigner" or "sojourner" dwelling in the midst of Israel. The possible exception is in Dt. 29:10 where it might mean "convert". While the term "GER ZEDEK" does appear in Talmud it never appears in the Tanach.

While the Tanach does state that you must treat the "GER" respectfully, the status is still the same, "alien", "foreigner", "stranger" or "sojourner". Toward this "GER" the commandment is clear, "Love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Dt. 10:19). There are Biblical prohibitions against mistreating the "GER" (the alien stranger who dwells in the midst of Israel) e.g. "And a stranger you shall not wrong, neither shall you oppress him; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 22:20). The Talmud discusses the status of "GER TOSHAV" and "GER TZEDEK" (e.g. in AVODA ZARA 64b, SANHEDRIN 112a, BABA KAMA 113b, NEGAIM 3:1). The "GER TOSHAV" is regarded as a resident alien and the "GER TZEDEK" as a proselyte and as a new born person.

*Bernie & Phil*



Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

אחדות  
ליהדות  
ממקדמות  
באמריקה

# MEMORANDUM

cc to  
Rabbi

From Rabbi Bernard M. Zlotowitz

Date 11/18/78

To Rabbi Alexander Schindler

Copies

Subject Halachot on Mixed marriage and the relation to the synagogue as it affects the non-Jewish spouse and the child/children.

Dear Alex:

The following halachot represent the salient points on problems relating to mixed marriage i.e. marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew. Many of these are complex halachot and require further elucidation. If you wish me to elaborate on them I would certainly be happy to do so.

## Mixed Marriage:

A marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew is not kiddushin (ein kiddushin tofsin) i.e. it is not a religious marriage according to Jewish law. A child born of a Jewish woman and a Gentile man is kosher, i.e. legitimate and Jewish (see b.Yevamoth 45a; Yad, Issur Biah XV:3 and Shulchan Aruch, Even ha Ezer 4:5)

However the child born of a Jewish man and a Gentile woman is also legitimate but is not Jewish. The general rule is that the child follows the status of the mother (b. Kiddushin 68B):

הבא מישראלית קרוי בן ואין בןק פסא מ/הואקרת באביו קרוי בןק אלא בןק  
(see also Yad, Issur Biah XV:3,4 and Kiddushin III:12)

Likewise Shulchan Aruch, Even ha Ezer 44:8

ישראל פסא אלא אהא מאלו הילך כח/תה ואלו פסא וסלא כח/ת

## Circumcision of a child of a non-Jewish mother:

A child of a non-Jewish mother may not be circumcized on the Sabbath (Sh. A. Yore Deah 266:13). We therefore derive from this law that ritual circumcision (m'shum mitzvath milah) may be performed so long as it is not done on the Sabbath.

Some modern authorities have some doubts whether the mitzvah should be performed, even though it is permitted by the halachah, because the child does not become a Jew until he is taken to the mikveh. If he is not taken to the mikveh, he may grow up thinking he is Jewish and marry a Jewess.

From the Reform point of view, the request of a non-Jewish mother to have a Jewish religious circumcision for her son should be honored since we do not require mikveh for conversion.

## Enrolling a child of a non-Jewish mother in Religious School:

R. Ami says: "We do not give (ein mosrin) the words of the Torah to idolators" (b.Chagiga 13a). The meaning of this passage has generated heated debate among Poskim, some arguing that Torah should not be taught to non-Jews, while others are more lenient. Two of the latter view are Eilenberg and Chalfan. I. Eilenberg (1570-1623) interprets this Talmidic passage to mean the Christians may be taught Torah but not the deeper meaning of the Torah. E. Chalfan (16th C.) cites a precedent to support his view that the simple meaning (p'shat) of the Torah may be taught to non-Jews. In b. Baba Kama 38a, the Gemara records the



Union of American Hebrew Congregations

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEWYORK, N.Y. 10021 (212) 249-0100

incident of rabbis teaching Torah to two companies sent by the Roman Emperor; the consensus is that only the p'shat was taught but not the sisrei Torah.

Since the kind of Torah learning referred to in the Talmud and Responsa is not applicable to our Religious Schools, (where Bible, History, prayer, customs and ceremonies constitute the basic curriculum) the discussion is academic. A non-Jewish child may be enrolled in our Reform Religious Schools and derive the benefit of the teachings of Judaism.

#### Aliyot:

The Sefer Torah is not susceptible to ritual uncleanness (b. Berachot 22a). Maimonides (Hilchot Sefer Torah X:8) rules that anybody may handle the Torah Scroll and read from it, even a non-Jew. However there is the problem of the Torah blessings--specifically "Who chose us from among all peoples"! Thus how can a non-Jew recite this b'racha? Freehof (Modern Reform Responsa, p.77) suggests that the non-Jew recite no blessing or a new blessing be written for the occasion.

#### Bar Mitzvah:

Bar mitzvah is the attainment of the age of religious majority by a boy when he reaches 13 years and one day. (The term is first used in b.Baba Metzia 96a). The privileges and responsibilities of a Bar Mitzvah i.e. a gadol (adult) or bar onshin (son of punishment) is discussed in b. Nid. V:6 and in Rashi b. Nid. 45b. In Avot (5:24) we find the statement *13 sh'et metz'ele* 1? The ceremony of calling up a Bar Mitzvah to the Torah is only several hundred years old (dating either from the 13th or 14th centuries). It is not the aliyah that makes the boy a Bar Mitzvah, but his chronological age. The ceremony is merely the public recognition that he has come of age and may be counted in the minyan, etc. (In modern times, however, the minhag has developed that it is the ceremonial ritual that makes the boy a Bar Mitzvah).

Since it has been established that a non-Jew may be called to the Torah for an aliyah (see immediately above s. aliyot), a boy of a non-Jewish mother who has been a student in the Religious School may be called to the Torah for his Bar Mitzvah. The Bar Mitzvah ceremony then becomes also the ritual for conversion (if he had not been previously converted) and he would be recognized as a Jew in accordance with Reform Jewish Practice (so Freehof).

Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation are not mentioned in the halachah since both these ceremonies are relatively new to Judaism and observed exclusively by Conservative and Reform. However the same principle--upon which a boy of a non-Jewish mother can become "Barmitzvahed" and converted at the same time can be equally applied here.

#### Participation in the Synagogue:

##### 1. Membership of a mixed couple:

Sexual relationships between Jews and Gentiles were forbidden (b.Sanh. 82a and Sh. A., Even ha Ezer 16). Therefore if a mixed marriage did take place it would not be considered a Jewish marriage. The Jewish community would be offended by it and the question of whether to accept for membership a couple of mixed marriage in the Kehillah or the synagogue is not even discussed in the halachah. This is a question that arises only in modern times. Freehof contends that if such a couple were admitted "it may dilute Jewish identity or, from a practical point of view, anybody who is admitted as a member may become an officer. It is possible that a Christian who believes not in Judaism could become President of the Sisterhood." (Since Freehof wrote his responsum before the advent of women becoming Temple Presidents, I'm sure he would have, by extension, added "Presidents of the Temple"). My personal view is that a couple of mixed marriage be admitted as members of the Temple for the sake of sh'lom bayit and allow the

non-Jewish mother to become a member of the Board, but not be permitted to become an officer and certainly not a president.

2. Contributions:

A gift from a Gentile to the Temple may be accepted (Moses Isserles to Shulchan Aruch, Yore Deah 254:2) Even if a non-Jew gives a specific object like a menorah, it is acceptable (Sh. A., Yore Deah 259:4)

3. Gentiles in synagogue choirs:

This type of question would hardly be considered in Jewish law. However, in a matter closely related there is a great deal of discussion. The Responsa deals with Christian musicians and singers entertaining a bride and groom in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Though the halachists are divided on this issue, the Tur (Orach Hayyim, 338) permits a Gentile to play instruments on the Sabbath in honor of bride and groom. Freehof (Reform Jewish Practise, Vol. II, p.70) cites a responsum of Moses, Pardo, Smyrna, 1874) whether it is permitted "to have Gentile musicians to play on the first day of Shavuot in the procession bringing to the synagogue a Sefer Torah presented on that day. He concludes that it is permitted both on Holidays and on the Sabbath and adds that it is a well-established local custom."

Gentile choir singers are not sh'liach tzibbur but are there only to enhance the service. And even though he/she recites the Hebrew responses and blessings, one may answer "Amen". (For a fuller discussion on this matter see b.Berachot 44a and Tur to Orach Hayyim 215). In Orach Hayyim 215:2, Caro says one may not say "Amen" after a Samaritan or an infidel. But Isserles states that we may say "Amen" after a Gentile if the entire blessing has been heard.

4. Blessing of Sabbath and Holiday candles in the synagogue:

The Halachah does not deal with this because candles are blessed in the home. It is the Reform movement that introduced this ritual into the synagogue. However we can arrive at an answer from another source which has a bearing on the subject. We have established that when a non-Jew recites a blessing one may say "Amen". (see immediately above s. "Gentiles in synagogue choirs") Thus if a Gentile woman recites a blessing over the Sabbath and Holiday candles we say "Amen".

5. Handling the Torah:

A non-Jew may touch and handle the Torah (Tosefta (b. Berachot II, 13): b. Berachot 22a and Sh. A., Yore Deah 282:9). In fact even one who is ritually unclean may handle the Torah because the Torah itself is not susceptible to defilement.

Conversion of a child:

If a child is converted by his/her parent or parents (in the case where a mother is a non-Jew, the child is Jewish. However when the boy reaches the age of 13 and one day and wishes to renege his conversion it is accepted and considered as if he was never a Jew. But if upon reaching the age of 13 years and one day he reaffirms his Judaism and then at a future date renounces his Judaism he is accounted a mumar (apostate). Yore Deah 268:7,8,12.

Burial of a non-Jew in a Jewish cemetery:

In b. Gittin 61a the Talmud states that for the sake of peace we shall bury the dead of the non-Jews with the dead of the Jews. The question arises what does the word בְּ (lit. "with") mean in this context? Does בְּ mean "just as" or "by the side of". All authorities agree that בְּ in this context means "just as". However the ח"א (Joel Saerks) did permit burial of non-Jews in a Jewish cemetery albeit in a separate plot (Yore Deah, 151).

There are precedents for burial of non-Jews in Jewish cemeteries. To cite

but two:

A Venetian Christian who died in Avlona of the plague, 1515. He requested on his death bed that he be buried in the Jewish cemetery. The request was granted (Vessillo Israelitico, 1888, pp. 190-191--see CCAR Yearbook - 1919 p.82.). Stephen De Werboz, a non-Jew living in Buda in 1514, was buried in a Jewish cemetery (CCAR Yearbook - 1919, p.82).

K. Kohler takes the view "that our cemeteries are not as a whole consecrated ground in the sense that it excludes those not of the Jewish faith." (CCAR Yearbook, 1914 p.154).

Five years later K. Kohler wrote (CCAR Yearbook, 1919, p.78) "There is no law forbidding a non-Jew to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. While there are congregations whose constitution expressly prohibits non-Jews, respectively non-Jewish wives or husbands, to be buried in their cemeteries..."

"Another point for consideration is that we have no consecrated ground which would exclude non-Jews. Each plot is consecrated-- **אין קדש** by the body buried there. Hence the owner of the plot ought to have full disposal of the same. It is his family plot."



Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler

October 30, 1978

Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz

A favor please. Can you do some research for me on Halachah in regard to non-Jewish members of synagogues - spouses of Jewish members, children of non-converted mothers, etc. I plan to deal with this subject in my report to the Board at the December 1-3 meeting in Houston and would like to have some data. ....participation in services, cemeteries, role in congregation as officers or board members etc.

I know you're busy planning for your Biennial - knowing how you operate I am confident everything is already in ship-shape order - so I ask that you not feel you must do the research before your convention - there's time afterwards!

Edie told me of your mother's illness, I pray things are looking up and that she will be granted a refuah shlema.



Theodore K. Broido

*File*  
5/7/80

Rabbis Philip Hiat, Sanford Seltzer, Alexander M. Schindler, Leonard A. Schoolman

This is the report which was presented to the Executive Committee of the Conference which was referred back to the committee.

The letter from Walter Jacob, which is attached, is being presented to the Conference in June.

I thought you would be interested.



GUIDELINES ON MATTERS CONCERNING PROSELYTES

Introduction

The Central Conference of American Rabbis reaffirms its long standing position on the full acceptance as Jews of those individuals who of their own free will wish to accept the joys and responsibilities of the Jewish faith and people. Since the Conference does not represent a monolithic view of theology or ritual observance, these guidelines and suggested procedures seek to establish a working consensus of practice within the Reform Rabbinate rather than a set of standardized requirements. For the purpose of this document we will use the following Hebrew terms: ger/gioret ( a male/female proselyte ); giur ( the process of becoming a Jew ); gerut ( the actual ceremony through which one formalizes the acceptance of the ger/gioret as a Jew ). These terms are found to be more appropriate and less potentially stigmatizing than the usage of such intrinsically non-Jewish terms as convert and conversion. Without forsaking the inherent freedom of Reform Judaism, this document represents an awareness of and sensitivity to tradition-the Halakah and Massorah-as well as the fundamental of K'lal Israel.

THE STATUS AND ACCEPTANCE OF GERIM

The status of those individuals who become Jews through a formal process of giur has long been established in Judaism as fully equal to those born as Jews. The Tanach and rabbinic literature are replete with statements regarding the meritorious status of the Ger Zedek, the righteous stranger who chooses to become a member of the Jewish people and faith. Thus, it is incumbent upon our colleagues and congregations to fully accept, as equals, in all areas of participation those who complete the process of giur. To that end, we em-

phasize that once an individual has gone through gerūt, he/she is Jewish and not a convert. The warmth and vigor with which we accept these Jews and integrate them into our communities and activities is among our highest priorities and obligations.

#### MARRIAGE AND GIUR

We are aware that each individual has his/her own unique and complex motivations in making the final decision to become a Jew. We recognize that the issue of mixed marriage is a critical area for concern. The CCAR has long held the position that the initial motivation of marriage is a wholesome and appropriate stimulus in seeking Jewish identity.<sup>1</sup> Thus, as the problem of mixed marriage continues to concern the Jewish community, the Conference once again reaffirms its stand: the individual who seeks Judaism because of his/her desire to establish a Jewish marriage, Jewish home and shalom bayit is to be encouraged in all matters of giur. Further, the Conference urges its members to more actively implement point two of the third paragraph of its 1973 resolution on mixed marriage: " to provide ( for those already mixed married ) the opportunity for gerut ( conversion sic! ) of the non-Jewish spouse." Finally, we stress the importance of the lifelong commitment of the ger/gioret to Judaism which heavily outweighs the immediacy of a Jewish wedding service.

1. CCAR Yearbook 1947 p. 158ff: Solomon B. Freehoff's Report on Mixed Marriage.

The CCAR reaffirms the current practices and standards regarding children and the question of giur. Such cases involve: (a) An adopted child, (b) A child born of a mixed marriage.

The Reform Movement does not require a formal process of giur in either case.<sup>1</sup> For the adopted child the practices of Reform Judaism which pertain to any natural child are recognized as appropriate ( see Solomon B. Freehof, CCAR Yearbook, Vol. LXV, 1956, p. 107-110; and Gates of Mitzvah, CCAR, p. 18 ).

The Central Conference of American Rabbis recognizes the historic basis that underlies the traditional position which holds that the maternal line determines the "Jewishness" of progeny. Nevertheless, we affirm that authentic Jewishness with regard to the identity of all children of mixed marriages, whether or not the father or mother is Jewish, ultimately depends upon how the child of a mixed marriage is reared and educated.

Thus, in the case where the father is Jewish and the mother is not, or where the converse obtains - the mother being Jewish and the father not - the identity of the child will be determined by his or her participating in those rites of Jewish life which lead to Bar or Bat Mitzvah and/or Confirmation. Such a child is Jewish by virtue of the family's intention to raise the child as a Jew.

1. While no apologetics are necessary in reference to the above stated practice of Reform Judaism, it is essential to explain carefully to parents the variants of this issue as practiced by other branches of Judaism. This is suggested in order to insure a fully sensitized understanding by the parents and when appropriate by the child.

## GIUR - THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A JEW

Giur involves a complex set of variables for each individual. It is beyond the scope of these guidelines to define any specifics regarding how long each giur should take or the course of study for each giur. We offer a consensus of opinion and practice knowing that the rabbi and prospective ger/gioret will ultimately have to define such terms within each given situation. The time required for giur will vary depending upon the community's educational program; a large group course or private tutorial; the prospective ger/gioret and his/her specific background in Judaism; and the rabbi. All variables considered, the least amount of time recommended for giur should be four months, with the average being six to nine months and some situations extended to a full year. The gravity of the decision and the necessary exposure to Judaism take precedence over the social and family pressures of a wedding date.

The fundamentals of Judaism encompass ritual observances of Sabbath, holy days and festivals in the home and the Synagogue; basic theology; Jewish history; liturgy; and Hebrew language. These areas are basic in the educational process of giur. The particulars of such a course are relative to community and rabbi. It should be carefully noted to the ger/gioret that such a course of study is intrinsically insufficient and only an introduction to Judaism. Rabbinic involvement in giur beyond an educational level is essential; mere sponsorship in a community course without regular tutorials and meetings is not appropriate. Individuals will undoubtedly require advice, counseling and encouragement during and after their decision-making process. The rabbi should work closely with the ger/gioret and the mate or future mate as well as the respective families. The rabbi should also provide opportunities for the ger/gioret to share this experience with former gerim.

Since so much of giur is passive education, the ger/gioret should be encouraged to attend Sabbath services regularly and participate in holy day observances and other Jewish communal activities. Opportunities for exposure to Jewish home observance of the Sabbath and festivals should be made possible. Finally, the importance of synagogue affiliation and communal responsibility should be discussed and emphasized so that the gerut ceremony will be a statement of communal as well as religious commitment.

#### GERUT - THE CEREMONY OF WELCOMING

The traditional halachic requirements of brit milah, ritual circumcision; hatafat dam brit, drawing blood as a ritual re-circumcision; and t'vilah, a ritual immersion; have not been required practices by most Reform rabbis. There is a long standing CCAR position which obviates the necessity of these halachic prescriptions and requires that the ger/gioret declare acceptance of the Jewish faith and people before a bet din made up of no less than one rabbi and two associates or lay leaders. The composition of Reform Judaism has evolved beyond the previous statement of the CCAR. The Conference "...recognizes that there are social, psychological and religious values associated with the traditional rituals and it is recommended that the rabbi acquaint prospective gerim with the halachic background and rationale for brit milah, hatafat dam brit and t'vilah and offer them the opportunity if they so desire, to observe these additional rites."<sup>1</sup> The use of the bet din in gerut is of great value, for it provides the opportunity to discuss and evaluate with the ger/gioret the process of giur. This need not take on a critical or defensive tone, for the rabbi should already be aware of the ger/gioret's knowledge and commitment.

The actual gerut ceremony may vary in place and time depending on the rabbi,

community and ger/qioret. There is no one gerut ceremony more appropriate than another, whether found in the rabbi's manual or a creative service. The ceremony should include the rabbi asking the ger/qioret the following five questions:

1. Do you, of your own free will seek admittance into the Jewish people and faith?
2. Have you given up your former faith and severed all other religious affiliations?
3. Do you pledge your loyalty to Judaism and to the Jewish people amid all circumstances and conditions?
4. Do you promise to establish a Jewish home and to participate actively in the life of the synagogue and of the Jewish community?
5. If you should be blessed with children do you promise to rear them as Jews?

The ger/qioret is asked to make declaration of commitment. This usually includes the sh'ma as a public statement of Jewish identification. The ceremony may include appropriate liturgical passages as well as some dealing with gerut, such as Ruth (1:16-17). The rabbi may then choose to speak to the ger/qioret welcoming him/her into K'lal Israel. As a symbol of the newly acquired Jewish identity, the ger/qioret is given a Hebrew name. The Hebrew name should be chosen by the proselyte, and is added to the phrase ben/bat Avraham Avinu V'Sharah Imenu.<sup>2</sup> After conferring the name, the ceremony concludes with the Birkat ha-kohanim.

T'udah shel gerut, a certificate, is presented with the appropriate signatures of the rabbi and other members of the bet din. Three additional copies of the T'udah shel gerut should be kept, one for the Temple's records, one for the rabbi's records and the other for the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio. Whenever possible and appropriate one should take into consideration the ger/qioret's family and friends. Their presence at the gerut can be a very positive and supportive act. The rabbi might take the opportunity before or after the

ceremony to speak with them to further their understanding and clarify their questions. The relationship developed with the rabbi should continue beyond the ceremony of gerut.

1. Statement of the CCAR Committee on Gerut 1978, published in Gates of Mitzvah, CCAR, p. 146-147.
2. While the traditional verbiage is only Avraham Avinu, it is well within the mood of the movement to be more broadly inclusive. Berachot 16b provides us with the generalized terms of patriarch and matriarch:

תקורין סות אבות-אטאלשה וקורין את אמתיו  
אוסא לארבא.

Korin et Avot Eleh L'Sh'losha V'Korin et Emahot Eleh L'Arbah.

The term 'patriarchs' is applied only to three, and the term 'matriarchs' only to four.

Other option might be:

Avraham V'Sarah



The Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis spent several hours debating the proper way in which to proceed with the proposed change in determining Jewish status. These lengthy discussions made it quite clear that there are numerous halachic issues which must be investigated in detail before the Conference is ready to take a stand on this change to patrilineal descent. Although many members of the Conference accept the premises which underlie the proposed change for practical purposes, this has been done on an individual case basis and not as a matter of principle. The question contains overtones for every aspect of Jewish law and, of course, touches upon our relationship not only with other groups but also with our relationships within the Reform Movement.

Many additional questions about specific resolutions introduced by the Committee on Conversion have also arisen. We have these concerns and that resolution suggests two changes: it advocates patrilineal descent and makes both patrilineal and matrilineal descent dependent on education. This would change the basic character of Judaism from a community entered by birth to a faith community. There are many additional problems with that resolution as one looks at the details and specifics mentioned in it.

We feel that a year devoted to a thorough study of this question will lead to a clear resolution of this issue that will enable everyone in the Conference to understand its implications. It may well be that the Conference will feel more comfortable at the end of such a period of study with a responsum or a report on the issue rather than with a formal resolution. So both the manner of resolution and the matters at issue themselves deserve our detailed study. We urge the Executive Board to follow this procedure and to postpone definite action until further study has been undertaken.

I apologize for being unable to attend the Board meeting but, as you know, plans for my attendance were made at the last minute and they conflicted with a commitment in Pittsburgh which could not be changed.

Walter Jacob, Chairman

Responsa Committee

Introduction

The Central Conference of American Rabbis reaffirms its long standing position on the full acceptance as Jews of those individuals who of their own free will wish to accept the joys and responsibilities of the Jewish faith and people. Since the Conference does not represent a monolithic view of theology or ritual observance, these guidelines and suggested procedures seek to establish a working consensus of practice within the Reform Rabbinate rather than a set of standardized requirements. For the purpose of this document we will use the following Hebrew terms: ger/gioret ( a male/female proselyte ); giur ( the process of becoming a Jew ); gerut ( the actual ceremony through which one formalizes the acceptance of the ger/gioret as a Jew ). These terms are found to be more appropriate and less potentially stigmatizing than the usage of such intrinsically non-Jewish terms as convert and conversion. Without forsaking the inherent freedom of Reform Judaism, this document represents an awareness of and sensitivity to tradition-the Halakah and Massorah-as well as the fundamental of K'lal Israel.

THE STATUS AND ACCEPTANCE OF GERIM

The status of those individuals who become Jews through a formal process of giur has long been established in Judaism as fully equal to those born as Jews. The Tanach and rabbinic literature are replete with statements regarding the meritorious status of the Ger Zedek, the righteous stranger who chooses to become a member of the Jewish people and faith. Thus, it is incumbent upon our colleagues and congregations to fully accept, as equals, in all areas of participation those who complete the process of giur. To that end, we em-

phasize that once an individual has gone through gerut, he/she is Jewish and not a convert. The warmth and vigor with which we accept these Jews and integrate them into our communities and activities is among our highest priorities and obligations.

## MARRIAGE AND GIUR

We are aware that each individual has his/her own unique and complex motivations in making the final decision to become a Jew. We recognize that the issue of mixed marriage is a critical area for concern. The CCAR has long held the position that the initial motivation of marriage is a wholesome and appropriate stimulus in seeking Jewish identity.<sup>1</sup> Thus, as the problem of mixed marriage continues to concern the Jewish community, the Conference once again reaffirms its stand: the individual who seeks Judaism because of his/her desire to establish a Jewish marriage, Jewish home and shalom bayit is to be encouraged in all matters of giur. Further, the Conference urges its members to more actively implement point two of the third paragraph of its 1973 resolution on mixed marriage: " to provide ( for those already mixed married ) the opportunity for gerut ( conversion sic! ) of the non-Jewish spouse." Finally, we stress the importance of the lifelong commitment of the ger/gioret to Judaism which heavily outweighs the immediacy of a Jewish wedding service.

1. CCAR Yearbook 1947 p. 158ff: Solomon B. Freehoff's Report on Mixed Marriage.

The CCAR reaffirms the current practices and standards regarding children and the question of giur. Such cases involve: (a) An adopted child, (b) A child born of a mixed marriage.

The Reform Movement does not require a formal process of giur in either case.<sup>1</sup> For the adopted child the practices of Reform Judaism which pertain to any natural child are recognized as appropriate ( see Solomon B. Freehof, CCAR Yearbook, Vol. LXV, 1956, p. 107-110; and Gates of Mitzvah, CCAR, p. 18 ).

The Central Conference of American Rabbis recognizes the historic basis that underlies the traditional position which holds that the maternal line determines the "Jewishness" of progeny. Nevertheless, we affirm that authentic Jewishness with regard to the identity of all children of mixed marriages, whether or not the father or mother is Jewish, ultimately depends upon how the child of a mixed marriage is reared and educated.

Thus, in the case where the father is Jewish and the mother is not, or where the converse obtains - the mother being Jewish and the father not - the identity of the child will be determined by his or her participating in those rites of Jewish life which lead to Bar or Bat Mitzvah and/or Confirmation. Such a child is Jewish by virtue of the family's intention to raise the child as a Jew.

1. While no apologetics are necessary in reference to the above stated practice of Reform Judaism, it is essential to explain carefully to parents the variants of this issue as practiced by other branches of Judaism. This is suggested in order to insure a fully sensitized understanding by the parents and when appropriate by the child.

## GIUR - THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A JEW

Giur involves a complex set of variables for each individual. It is beyond the scope of these guidelines to define any specifics regarding how long each giur should take or the course of study for each giur. We offer a consensus of opinion and practice knowing that the rabbi and prospective ger/gioret will ultimately have to define such terms within each given situation. The time required for giur will vary depending upon the community's educational program; a large group course or private tutorial; the prospective ger/gioret and his/her specific background in Judaism; and the rabbi. All variables considered, the least amount of time recommended for giur should be four months, with the average being six to nine months and some situations extended to a full year. The gravity of the decision and the necessary exposure to Judaism take precedence over the social and family pressures of a wedding date.

The fundamentals of Judaism encompass ritual observances of Sabbath, holy days and festivals in the home and the Synagogue; basic theology; Jewish history; liturgy; and Hebrew language. These areas are basic in the educational process of giur. The particulars of such a course are relative to community and rabbi. It should be carefully noted to the ger/gioret that such a course of study is intrinsically insufficient and only an introduction to Judaism. Rabbinic involvement in giur beyond an educational level is essential; mere sponsorship in a community course without regular tutorials and meetings is not appropriate. Individuals will undoubtedly require advice, counseling and encouragement during and after their decision-making process. The rabbi should work closely with the ger/gioret and the mate or future mate as well as the respective families. The rabbi should also provide opportunities for the ger/gioret to share this experience with former gerim.

Since so much of giur is passive education, the ger/gioret should be encouraged to attend Sabbath services regularly and participate in holy day observances and other Jewish communal activities. Opportunities for exposure to Jewish home observance of the Sabbath and festivals should be made possible. Finally, the importance of synagogue affiliation and communal responsibility should be discussed and emphasized so that the gerut ceremony will be a statement of communal as well as religious commitment.

#### GERUT - THE CEREMONY OF WELCOMING

The traditional halachic requirements of brit milah, ritual circumcision; hatafat dam brit, drawing blood as a ritual re-circumcision; and t'vilah, a ritual immersion; have not been required practices by most Reform rabbis. There is a long standing CCAR position which obviates the necessity of these halachic prescriptions and requires that the ger/gioret declare acceptance of the Jewish faith and people before a bet din made up of no less than one rabbi and two associates or lay leaders. The composition of Reform Judaism has evolved beyond the previous statement of the CCAR. The Conference "...recognizes that there are social, psychological and religious values associated with the traditional rituals and it is recommended that the rabbi acquaint prospective gerim with the halachic background and rationale for brit milah, hatafat dam brit and t'vilah and offer them the opportunity if they so desire, to observe these additional rites."<sup>1</sup>

The use of the bet din in gerut is of great value, for it provides the opportunity to discuss and evaluate with the ger/gioret the process of giur. This need not take on a critical or defensive tone, for the rabbi should already be aware of the ger/gioret's knowledge and commitment.

The actual gerut ceremony may vary in place and time depending on the rabbi,

community and ger/gioret. There is no one gerut ceremony more appropriate than another, whether found in the rabbi's manual or a creative service. The ceremony should include the rabbi asking the ger/gioret the following five questions:

1. Do you, of your own free will seek admittance into the Jewish people and faith?
2. Have you given up your former faith and severed all other religious affiliations?
3. Do you pledge your loyalty to Judaism and to the Jewish people amid all circumstances and conditions?
4. Do you promise to establish a Jewish home and to participate actively in the life of the synagogue and of the Jewish community?
5. If you should be blessed with children do you promise to rear them as Jews?

The ger/gioret is asked to make declaration of commitment. This usually includes the sh'ma as a public statement of Jewish identification. The ceremony may include appropriate liturgical passages as well as some dealing with gerut, such as Ruth (1:16-17). The rabbi may then choose to speak to the ger/gioret welcoming him/her into K'lal Israel. As a symbol of the newly acquired Jewish identity, the ger/gioret is given a Hebrew name. The Hebrew name should be chosen by the proselyte, and is added to the phrase ben/bat Avraham Avinu V'Sharah Imenu.<sup>2</sup> After conferring the name, the ceremony concludes with the Birkat ha-kohanim.

T'udah shel gerut, a certificate, is presented with the appropriate signatures of the rabbi and other members of the bet din. Three additional copies of the T'udah shel gerut should be kept, one for the Temple's records, one for the rabbi's records and the other for the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio. Whenever possible and appropriate one should take into consideration the ger/gioret's family and friends. Their presence at the gerut can be a very positive and supportive act. The rabbi might take the opportunity before or after the

ceremony to speak with them to further their understanding and clarify their questions. The relationship developed with the rabbi should continue beyond the ceremony of gerut.

1. Statement of the CCAR Committee on Gerut 1978, published in Gates of Mitzvah, CCAR, p. 146-147.
2. While the traditional verbiage is only Avraham Avinu, it is well within the mood of the movement to be more broadly inclusive. Berachot 16b provides us with the generalized terms of patriarch and matriarch:

הקורין את אבות-אברהם וקורין את אמתי  
אם לארבע.

Korin et Avot Eleh L'Sh'losha V'Korin et Emahot Eleh L'Arbah.

The term 'patriarchs' is applied only to three, and the term 'matriarchs' only to four.

Other option might be:

Avraham V'Sarah



7. IDENTITY OF CHILDREN  
OF MIXED MARRIAGE

The Central Conference of American Rabbis takes cognizance of the historic background that underlies the traditional position which holds that the maternal line determines the Jewishness of progeny. Nevertheless, since 1947 the Central Conference of American Rabbis has held that authentic Jewishness with regard to the identity of children of mixed marriages where the mother is not Jewish ultimately depends upon how the child of such a mixed marriage is reared and educated. This policy has been reflected in the Rabbi's Manual since 1961 (page 112).

Now, we further affirm that, in the case where the father is Jewish and the mother is not, or where the converse obtains - the mother being Jewish and the father not - the identity of the child will be determined by his or her participating in those educational activities and rites of Jewish life which lead to Bar or Bat Mitzvah and/or Confirmation. Such a child is Jewish by virtue of the family's intention to rear the child as a Jew.

