

Transformative Words Transforming Acts: The Liturgy and Rituals of the Giur Process

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Abbreviations

ARK	Allgemeine Rabbinerkonferenz (German Progressive Rabbinic Organisation)
CCAR	Central Conference of American Rabbis (US Reform Movement USA)
CvR	College van Rabbijnen (Dutch Liberal Rabbinic Organisation)
EBD	European Beit Din
EUPJ	European Union for Progressive Judaism
IMPJ	Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism
MARAM	<i>Moetzet ha-Rabanim ha-Mitkadmim bi-Yisrael</i> (Council of Progressive Rabbis in Israel)
MJLF	Mouvement Juif Liberal de France
RA	Rabbinical Assembly (US Conservative Movement)
WUPJ	World Union for Progressive Judaism
WW II	World War Two

Chapter 1 Introduction

Much has been written about the issues of identity and transformation that are central to the conversion process. The examination of the Jewish lives of *gerim* (converts to Judaism), their affiliation rates, levels of observance and the like has also been extensive. As in any case where boundaries are at stake and the delineation of in and out groups must occur, the process of *gerut* (conversion to Judaism) is the subject of much controversy, discussion, litigation, legislation and policy discussions. Little has been written about the rituals and liturgy that mark the journey that a prospective Jew by Choice makes as they step onto the road leading toward their ultimate *giur* (conversion).

Scope

This thesis is a relatively broad survey of a subject about which nothing has previously been written. The principal focus of this work is on the ritual and liturgy that have been developed around and as part of the giur process. So while there were fascinating areas to further research, explore and analyse, the paper by its nature is limited to the major themes and patterns that help shed some light on the current situation in Western Europe and Israel. To the degree that the ceremonies and prayers reflect the realities, needs and aspirations of the communities that write and use them, there has been an effort to point out how those have influenced the shape the liturgy and rituals assumed. However, the issues of giur and communal policy are not the primary focus. This work then is a small first step in examining the giur process' rituals and liturgy. Much more remains to be done in researching and publishing works on the ritual and liturgical practice of communities in this area. The historical development of those practices should be further studied and so should the implications for current policy makers: communal leaders, rabbis, national and regional organisations and others addressing the religious and spiritual needs of the Jewish people. The attitudes of Jewish communities to the other, to non-Jews and the broader world are also reflected in decisions about giur and the associated ritual. As these attitudes play a crucial role in both defining the giur process and determining its success they deserve further attention. The question of the ability of rabbinic and educational leadership to influence those attitudes and perhaps the best means of doing so may also merit research. There is also value in reviewing the practices themselves that were developed by the pioneering rabbis of the nineteen fifties, sixties and seventies as well as those who came after in light of the very different world Jews live in than was the case forty years ago, with all implications this could have for future practice.

The ritual and liturgical development of the giur process was spurred as a result of the social, political and legal changes brought about in Europe as a consequence of the Emancipation of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The paper therefore examines the period from the beginning of the nineteenth century but chiefly considers the period from the end of World War II until the present in Western Europe and where possible in Israel. From Western Europe, The Netherlands, France, Germany, Switzerland (Zurich) and the UK provided the bulk of the material presented in the paper. The rituals and liturgy of the Reform Movement in the US are included as a

basis for comparison and given that it has had an impact on the development of ritual and liturgy in Europe and Israel. The work of the Conservative Movement in the US is also included as a point of comparison from another part of the spectrum of non-Orthodox movements with a different approach to giur. However, there are points of overlap. In some countries, such as Germany, members of Masorti communities¹ also are part of the national rabbinic organisation and sit on batei din (plural of beit din, a rabbinic court composed of three rabbis) that consider the cases of progressive giur candidates.

The paper is organised sequentially following the progression of a prospective ger through the giur process. Each chapter discusses the respective elements of the giur process, looking at the context, how that moment in the process is implemented in different communities and then analyses the rituals and liturgy that exist and the trends and/or issues they raise. Although it would have been interesting to include more historical comparisons within and across movements, countries and communities, this survey did not permit more extensive in-depth work to be done in that area.

Translations of texts from the Tanach are from the new JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh.²

Definitions

Several key terms, the majority in Hebrew appear throughout the paper, generally in English transliteration. Due to the fundamental nature of the terms in relationship to this topic, each term will be defined briefly here to facilitate its accessibility and usefulness. Other terms that do not appear here will be explained in the text as and when they appear.

The term *ger* or *gioret* (masculine and feminine respectively. Plural *gerim*.) denotes a non-Jew that had chosen to become a Jew, has completed the conversion process and is now Jewish, a full convert. Such a person can also be called a *ger tzedek*, a righteous convert.³ In English such a person may also be called a Jew by Choice, a term that will be used interchangeably with *ger/gioret*. *Gerim* the plural of *ger*, are those who have undergone the complete *giur* process. *Ger* and *gioret* will be used interchangeably throughout the paper unless there is a specific reason, such as when discussing *brit milah*, to mention either men or women in particular.

Giur “is a structured ritual process through which a Gentile becomes a Jew” and by which the transformation of identity takes place.⁴ In keeping with the practice of Sagi and Zohar in their seminal book on giur, the term giur will be used consistently throughout this work. The word ‘conversion’ has in many cases come to be associated in Western thought with what is understood

¹ Masorti and conservative synagogues are part of Masorti Olami – the World Council of Masorti/Conservative Synagogues.

² Second Edition (Philadelphia, 1999).

³ In the Tanach, the term *ger* can also designate a stranger, a *ger toshav* “one who has come to dwell”, but it is not used that way in the rabbinic literature nor is it used as such here. (Menachem Finkelstein, *Conversion, Halakhah and Practice*. (Ramat Gan, Israel 1994) 18.

⁴ Avi Sagi and Zvi Zohar, *Transforming Identity, The Ritual Transformation from Gentile to Jew- Structure and Meaning* (New York 2007) 1.

by Christian theology as an internal psychological transformation and/or commitment characteristic of people who become Christian believers.⁵

The *beit din* is a Jewish court that according to rabbinic literature is traditionally composed of three rabbis who function as *dayanim*, judges. Where three rabbis are not available, the *beit din* can be composed of three people, preferably the most learned in a community. The *beit din* is charged with approving the *giur* of those who have met the requirements of the *giur* process.

Finally, the term *zarah kodesh*, literally meaning holy seed, or *zera yisrael*, literally translated as the seed of Israel, is derived from a verse in the Book of Ezra 9:2 and is used to designate someone who is a biological descendant of a Jew. One can be Jewish without being holy seed and vice versa.⁶ The term attributes a relationship between a person and Judaism that does not connote Jewish status per se.⁷

Dedication

To my beloved wife, Max and my three wonderful children, Yirgalem, Ronit and Saraf.

Thank you for your support, understanding and patience.

This work was only possible because you
made time and space for me to complete this project

Chapter 2 Rituals of Beginning: Liturgy for the Start of a Transformative Journey

First contact and the initial interview(s)

The Talmud both in Tractate Yevamot (47a-b) and in Tractate Gerim (1a) presents a situation in which a prospective *ger* approaches a rabbi and asks to become a Jew. The rabbi responds by explaining the dangers and difficulties of being a member of the Jewish people. If the person replies I am aware and I still want to become a Jew he is accepted. While the texts of the two passages in the Talmud are formulaic, the impression given is that the decision about whether to accept a potential *ger* and proceed with the *mikvah* or *milah* occurs quite quickly. In contradistinction, the majority of *giurim* in the previous one hundred years have been through extended affairs that usually last at least six months, but more commonly one to two years. While in Talmudic times the initial interview may have been ritualised, there acceptance, *mikvah* and *milah* all occurred in quick succession so there may not have been a moment for ritual or liturgy to sanctify or mark the acceptance of the *giur* candidate and the beginning of their journey to becoming a *ger tzedek*. The modern model and

⁵ Sagi and Zohar *Transforming Identity*, 3.

⁶ Sagi and Zohar, *Transforming Identity* 57.

⁷ The term may have been introduced in this context by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (Poland 1795-1874) one of the great rabbis of his day as a justification for taking a lenient position regarding a person's motive for converting. Instead he offers the overarching policy position of redeeming the *zarah kodesh*, bringing them back into the Jewish people by having them undergo *gerut*.

its lengthy timeframe do provide both a framework and opportunity. However, it seems that there have been no liturgies and rituals developed for this opening stage of the process.

Very little if anything is done in the Jewish world to mark the first steps of a ger from a ritual or liturgical perspective. This may have something to do with the tradition that has grown up of discouraging a potential convert three times before accepting them as participants in a giur process. At the same time, the progressive movements have largely dispensed with this approach to gerut. Both the US based Central Conference of American Rabbis' (CCAR) and the Conservative Movement's Rabbinical Assembly (RA) Guidelines on working with prospective gerim have taken a genial approach instead and "welcomes those who have chosen to become Jewish and cast their lot with the Jewish people."⁸ The UK's Movement for Reform Judaism's website reflects more accurately the approach of European progressive movements. "Reform Judaism is not missionary but sees no reason why a person should not become Jewish if they so wish. This is especially the case if the person is engaged or married to a Jew, and their conversion will help unify the family and ensure that any future children will be brought up in the Jewish faith."⁹ The Israeli Progressive Movement's booklet of Questions and Answers echoes this openness without reference to the creation of Jewish families.

”היהדות המתקדמת מקבלת בברכה את אלה המבקשים להצטרף לכלל ישראל ודעתו באופן כן
ואמתי...קהילות היהדות המתקדמת פותחות שעריהן בפני "בניהם ובנותיהם של אברהם אבינו ושרה
אמינו".¹⁰

In essence this approach to potential *gerim* dispenses completely with the ritual of discouragement.

Another reason that there may be little in the way of ritual at this point in the process is the recognition that "[a]t times conversion is a non-linear process; a person may opt to renew contact with the Jewish community at a later date."¹¹ An initial contact and discussion with a rabbi or representative of a community may not lead directly to an application for giur. Finally, there is a long standing rejection of the need for rules and rituals as part of the giur process which is reflected in the 1893 resolution of the CCAR that permits the admission of gerim "without any initiatory rite, ceremony, or observance whatever."¹² While there has been a trend to reintroduce such rituals in the progressive Jewish communities in the US and elsewhere, from the middle to late 1800s until the post-war period in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, many rituals were dispensed with, including the discouragement of potential gerim. The resolution still remains the official policy of the CCAR though progressive Judaism in Europe and Israel, as well as many communities in the US, do on the whole require certain rituals. The particular rituals that are required during gerut vary by community, movement and country, one common thread is the practice of actively discouraging prospective Jews by Choice has not reappeared.

⁸ Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Guidelines for Rabbis Working with Prospective Gerim* (<http://ccarnet.org/g/gerim7.html>) accessed 27 August 2001.

⁹ <http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/conversion-and-mixed-faith-relationships/conversion.html> accessed 13jun2012.

¹⁰ Harari, Ze'ev, Yehoram Mazor, Uri Regev and Mordechai Rotem, *She'elot u'teshuvot al ha-yahadut ha-mitkademet* (Questions and Answers about Progressive Judaism; Jerusalem 2001).

¹¹ Rabbi Jonathan Lubliner, *At the Entrance to the Tent, A Rabbinic Guide to Conversion* (New York, 2011), 9.

¹² CCAR Yearbook 3 (1893), 73–95; American Reform Responsa (ARR), no. 68, 236–237.

Once the prospective ger makes contact with a community, they are usually interviewed by the community's rabbi. In many places, such as Germany and in the UK's Movement for Reform Judaism, where there is a national beit din, the sponsoring rabbi is likely to be the only one to interview a prospective Jew by Choice and it is up to her/his discretion how to proceed with candidate. The Rabbinical Assembly (RA) of the Conservative Movement in the U.S. suggests in its *At the Entrance to the Tent, A Rabbinic Guide to Conversion* that the individual be given time to "digest the information shared" during an interview.¹³ The rabbi does not, in principle, pursue the person. It is up to the individual of their own accord to express interest in commencing the journey of giur.

In addition to the sponsoring rabbi, certain communities have other rabbis or community members interview the prospective gioret. For example, in Zurich, one of the members the conversion committee that is composed of synagogue members also interviews prospective candidates and advises the rabbi on whether to accept them for giur. The synagogue's Board of Directors also votes on whether to accept each candidate. This is an acknowledgement of the community's responsibility for the candidate, over and above the responsibility that the rabbi assumes when she decides a candidate may be accepted into the giur programme. In the Netherlands, the prospective candidate, after first meeting with the rabbi of the community they would like to join, is referred to two additional rabbis who also speak with the prospective ger. Decisions to accept the person into the giur programme are then taken by the College van Rabbijnen (CvR), the Dutch national conference of liberal rabbis of which all recognized Dutch Liberal rabbis are members.

Once the prospective ger or gioret has decided to formally take part in the process and the rabbi of the sponsoring community approves of the individual's participation the "ritual" of administration begins. While in each community the formal process is different it is usually composed of some or all of the following elements:

Completion of an application form; writing an essay about their motivation, their relationship to Judaism, and/or their spiritual autobiography; providing proof of a familial connection to Judaism where that may exist; providing other papers or proof that one is not a member of a different faith community; giving evidence of other status related issues such as marriage, divorce, custody of children; evidence that a Jewish community will be responsible for oneself and accept one as a member following completion of the giur; and sometimes a statement of commitment.

When the paperwork is complete and the fees, if any, are paid the candidate is invited to begin the formal elements of the giur: participation and integration, learning, and practice.

Acceptance into the gerut programme is recognition that the rabbi (on behalf of or also the community itself) has accepted that the prospective ger will be a part of the community in the not too distant future if all goes according to plan. In some fashion, the acceptance of someone into the giur programme is a tentative or conditional acceptance of the candidate as a ger. That carries consequences for the community as well as the individual. The community has accepted a responsibility for working with the candidate to ensure that s/he can integrate and be functioning members of the community, both from a social standpoint and the standpoint of knowledge. Over and above that level of acceptance, at this point the ger or gioret begins to acquire some status

¹³ Lubliner, *At the Entrance to the Tent*, 10.

within the Jewish community. Not only are they present for most if not all services, they also attend social events, classes and other programs that occur throughout the Jewish year.

Two situations that occurred in the Netherlands further highlight the new role and relationship that the potential ger assumes at the moment they are officially accepted into the giur programme. In one situation a Jewish man had been married to a non-Jewish woman for a long time before she expressed an interest in converting. While she was still a participant in the basic Judaism course her husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She appealed to her sponsoring rabbi to perform her conversion before her husband died. After consulting with some colleagues, it was agreed that they would finalize her conversion although she had not yet finished her basic Judaism class- in part because she had been living a Jewish life with her partner and knew quite a lot about the practice of progressive Judaism. The other reason was one of compassion, enabling her dying partner to know that she did convert. The second circumstance also involved a female giur candidate who had not yet completed her basic Judaism course when she was diagnosed with terminal cancer.¹⁴ She asked if she would be able to be buried in the Jewish cemetery when she died although she had not yet been formally accepted as a gioret. When she received an affirmative reply she asked 'why am I acceptable dead but not alive?' At which point at the recommendation of her sponsoring rabbi and with the agreement of the College van Rabbijnen her giur was formalised.

Besides the compassion so evident in these interactions which reflect how people should ideally treat each other, these events highlight another issue relevant to ritual and giur. Once an individual has been accepted into a giur programme, as noted above, they have placed their foot across the threshold with the consent of the representative(s) of their sponsoring community. In essence, as the previous stories demonstrate they are conditionally Jews pending the outcome of the longer term mutual decisions making process. From the community perspective, the Jew by Choice is on probation pending the finalisation of checks and the completion of the screening process. For the Jew by Choice, the community and the decision to utterly transform one's identity is also pending the final determination by the person that this is beyond a doubt what they want to do, what is right for them and this is the community and manner in which they want to formalise their giur. Despite the liminal nature of the decision, and its import for the individual and the community, no liturgy has been developed to mark the occasion; not for the rabbi and/or laypeople making the decisions, not for the community accepting responsibility for a new soul, a new fellow member of *khal yisrael*, the People of Israel and not for the person who has received the official support and tentative acceptance as they begin the formally recognised segment, the next leg of their spiritual journey towards Judaism and becoming part of the Jewish people.

Chapter 3 Rituals for Development: Liturgy for Learning and Integration

Learning, integration and the development of a new identity occupy more time than any other part of the giur process, and is arguably the most important component. It is during the period following

¹⁴ Interview with Rabbi David Lilienthal May 2012.

one's acceptance into a giur programme that the majority of the transformative journey from non-Jew to Jew takes place. The prospective gioret engages in a demanding learning process, is intensively active in the synagogue and the community and begins a concentrated effort to observe Judaism, including festivals, daily rituals, Shabbat, and home/family related practices. Over the course of months or years, the prospective ger begins to develop a new world view, a new life style, new friends, a new sense of ownership of Judaism, that it is really the person's own faith, their home. As they transition to a life as a Jew and a Jewish lifestyle, candidates also have to address the changes Judaism will make in their life and decide how best to cope with them. How will they negotiate family celebrations, holidays, weddings, funerals, and so forth? If the changes lead to problems with their family, how will they be managed? Each person must adjust in a manner that is appropriate to them and compromise accordingly.¹⁵ One gioret noted how during this period of her process, she began to make subtle alterations in her life: changing how and what she ate, fighting with work to have Shabbat off, spending less time at work and at the social club, and having her social life revolve increasingly around shul.¹⁶ In general, as candidates begins to learn more about Judaism and to live increasingly Jewish lives they frequently finds that their initial motive for undergoing giur is no longer the primary reason for becoming Jewish. Slowly Judaism is becoming home; hopefully one the prospective Jew by Choice likes.¹⁷ Those working with the prospective gerim should note these changes in them. There should be differences in their motivation for becoming a Jew¹⁸ as well as in many other aspects such as their attitudes and ways of thinking. This is a consequence of the transformation each individual undergoes over the long course of study, attendance and participation.

There is a tremendous amount of time and energy invested by all concerned throughout this segment of the process. The transformations that occur during this period are crucial and the gerim and those that work with them develop their hopes and expectations. Despite this, there have been no rituals or liturgy developed for this part of the giur process.

Study course

Everyone expects the prospective ger to learn. At the same time there is no standard length of time, no generally accepted curriculum, no agreement on who should teach the course, the role of the rabbi, the ultimate outcome of what the ger should know. This is one of the most variable elements of the entire process. The course of study can range in length from as little as three months to more than two years. How it takes place, how long it is, what materials are covered, whether it is a group or individual experience, the access one has to a rabbi or teacher and many other factors depend on where one undergoes the giur process and what one's background is.

In Israel, there are times when a member of *zera yisrael*, usually someone with a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, who was raised as a Jew and has a strong Jewish identity, will want to convert. Generally they take a specially arranged course or undertake individual study with someone. The

¹⁵ Rabbi Hadassah Davis, 'I DON'T Like Converts', in: Walter Homolka, Walter Jacob and Esther Seidel eds., *Not by Birth Alone, Conversion to Judaism* (London and Washington 1997) 137-142.

¹⁶ Davis, 'I DON'T Like Converts', in: Homolka, et al eds., *Not by Birth Alone*.

¹⁷ Blue 'Insiders and Outsiders' in: Homolka, et al eds., *Not by Birth Alone*, 135.

¹⁸ Blue Insiders and Outsiders in: Homolka, et al eds., *Not by Birth Alone*, 134.

goal of the course for the teacher is primarily to help the person clarify their identity and support the individual as they decide how they want to practice Judaism at home and elsewhere. The course tends to last approximately two months, but can be faster. If the person has sufficient knowledge, there can simply be a giur directly. For people who are not considered Jewish by but have lived as Jews for ten to fifteen years, a special programme is designed that lasts approximately 6 months and is meant to complement what the person already knows and does. People with no connection to Judaism enter the regular year-long giur programme of one and a half hours of study per week complimented by attendance at Shabbat services and being active in the community.¹⁹

In the small liberal communities in Vienna or Cologne that meet once a month, the giur course is largely self-driven, based on a reading list, monthly sessions with the rabbi to discuss topics and questions emailed to all the participants in advance, as well as email or phone interaction with the rabbi as requested.²⁰ In the Netherlands, the basic Judaism course required of all prospective gerim (and their partners where relevant) meets once a week over the better part of two years. Although the curriculum is not formally set, there is a general agreement among the Dutch rabbinate about the topics that should be covered. The length of the course is designed in part to provide the candidate Jews by Choice the opportunity to integrate as fully as possible into the community. The course in Zurich follows a slightly different model. They meet one full Sunday a month, from 9h00 to 17h00 for eighteen months. The MJLF used to have a seven to eight month study programme that included learning basic Hebrew. That was changed in 2006 or 2007. Currently, there is a seven week *mechinah*, preparation, course that focuses on learning basic Hebrew. After completing that, the prospective gerim attend their study course two hours per week for seventeen or eighteen months. One of the course's goals is to focus on what a person will be incorporating into their life and practice.

There are numerous other variables. What is consistent is the absence of a ritual or liturgy specific to the giur process to mark either the commencement of the course of study or its completion. The exception to this was one of the more recent giur courses in Zurich, where the participants expressed a desire to mark the end of the course. They made a *siyyum*, a traditional ritual that celebrates completing the study of a specific Jewish text such as a book of the Mishnah or a chapter of Talmud. This seems like a particularly appropriate ritual form that can be adapted to celebrate the accomplishments of those who studied, and also provides them with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with a tradition not often used in progressive Jewish circles. Besides that, the creation of a *siyyum* is an opportunity for the prospective gerim to delve into the liturgy and produce a ceremony of their own to which they can invite the congregation, their families and friends. This will also promote integration, and demonstrate in a real way the contributions that these future Jews by Choice could make to the communities of which they will most probably be members.

Integration into the community

Rabbi Lionel Blue, the former convenor of the Beit Din of the Movement for Reform Judaism in the UK noted the ambivalence of communities towards gerim.²¹ He observed that after the Shoah many

¹⁹ Interview Rabba Galia Sadan 25 June 2012.

²⁰ Interview with Rabbi Dr. Walter Rothschild 9 July 2012.

²¹ Blue, 'Insiders and Outsiders' in: Homolka, et al eds., *Not by Birth Alone*, 130.

Jews consciously or subconsciously accepted gerim provisionally, and very often welcomed them only grudgingly.²²

In the early years after WWII, one of the members of the liberal synagogue in The Hague objected to accepting gerim, calling them luxury Jews; people who were only willing to become part of the Jewish people when everything was safe and good.²³ There was a point in the sixties and seventies during which potential gerim in the Netherlands were asked “if the fascists come again, would you choose to suffer with the Jews or renounce your Judaism, hoping that not being born Jewish would save you?”²⁴

By the very action of seeking to become Jewish, gerim raised a dilemma in many fragile Jewish communities that were still struggling to rebuild themselves. The communities and their members wanted to be full members of the post-war open society, but also needed to be safe and secure in the familiar, warm, tight-knit society or community they raised from the ashes. This often made for erratic reactions from communities to the gerim they had ostensibly accepted.²⁵ There was also a fear of overwhelming the tiny remnant communities with outsiders. In some places, this remains a very active concern even today.

Although that hypothetical question about the fascists returning has not been asked for decades in the Netherlands, there is still a degree of ambivalence about gerim that remains in most communities. This is true even in communities in which the Shoah does not occupy the same communal space as it does for the Dutch.²⁶ Gerim are “outsiders trying to find a place in an insider’s religion.”²⁷ That ambivalence is reflected in the approach to integration. Both the literature reviewed and the people interviewed for this paper revealed a general consensus that not enough is done to support and promote the integration of prospective gerim and gerei tzedek into communities.

In Israel, unlike in other places, there is a sense that the people from all over the world without much in common are interested in integrating, but into Israeli society - - not in a progressive Jewish synagogue.²⁸ Nevertheless, at one point Beit Daniel, the progressive synagogue in Tel Aviv, did attempt activities for the many twenty to thirty year-olds that came for giur, but without much success.²⁹ Some people think it is easier to integrate into a bigger congregation,³⁰ others say it easier to integrate into a smaller community.³¹ In the Mouvement Juif Libéral de France (MJLF), where there are between fifteen and thirty gerim each cycle, successful integration remains a challenge. On

²² Blue, ‘Insiders and Outsiders’ in: Homolka, et al eds., *Not by Birth Alone*, 130.

²³ Interview with Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, 20 May 2012.

²⁴ Interview with Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, 20 May 2012.

²⁵ Blue, ‘Insiders and Outsiders’ 131.

²⁶ While it would seem strange that there are European countries where the Shoah does not occupy a very significant portion of Jewish individual and communal thought, it is of course the case in UK, as well as in France due to the huge immigration of North African Jews in the 1950’s and 60s and even in to an extent in Germany as a result of the large immigration of Jews from the countries of the Former Soviet Union.

²⁷ Blue, ‘Insiders and Outsiders’ 130.

²⁸ Interview Rabba Galia Sadan, 25 June 2012.

²⁹ Interview Rabba Galia Sadan, 25 June 2012.

³⁰ Interview with Rabbi Jonah Sievers 11 June 2012.

³¹ Interview Rabba Galia Sadan 25 June 2012.

the large main campus it is difficult to achieve the goal of finding a sponsor/mentor for each prospective ger. In the smaller MJLF centre in the eastern part of Paris, members invite giur candidates to their homes for Shabbat and a ger tzedek is now giving advice and support to new giur candidates. At the same time, the reality is that the majority of conversion students leave the community.³² In the UK and in Germany, each community's investment in this area is different. The resources and programming that are available, if any, vary from community to community and from synagogue to synagogue.

In the Netherlands, one of the reasons for having such a long course of study is to promote integration as well as to give the students time to emotionally integrate the material they studied. It is meant to give the prospective gerim time to experience the cycle of the Jewish year, learn the prayers and etiquette, while learning how things in the synagogue and community go. The period of study and attendance also offers the chance to make social connections. When the individuals become gerei tzedek, they are ready to be members and the members are ready to accept them. Dutch rabbis (as well as rabbis in other communities) place a premium on integration and ensuring that the candidates will fit into the community. However, as is true in most places, the community itself has little contact with the candidates for gerut, and little if any role in interviewing, accepting, teaching or otherwise engaging with them. Individuals may meet each other in a congregational or social setting, but formally there is at best a minimal attempt to organise activities to support or promote the integration process.³³ For it to be successful, the congregation must somehow feel a sense of responsibility for the gerim and a connection to them. Otherwise integration will remain problematic and not occur to the extent desired.

While this is largely a programmatic issue as opposed to a liturgical or ritual one, it is important to highlight. It has an impact on the giur process, the experience of both prospective gerim and gerei tzedek, on the needs, desires and hopes of the community and therefore on the ritual and liturgy they create and use in the context of giur. For example, the semi-private nature of the Dutch post-giur welcome ceremony reflects a certain paradox. There is a stated desire for the gerim to integrate, to be part of the Dutch Jewish community as a whole. At the same time, the communities are not actively involved in the process and do not feel a responsibility for the gerim that will be their future members. This plays out in fact that although the rabbis are present at the service, the community is not present at the ceremony that formally welcomes the gerim into the Jewish people as its newest members.

One approach is to address the issue from both sides. The CCAR recommends that "attention must also be paid to the continual need to educate the community on the importance of accepting [Jews by Choice] wholeheartedly and integrating them completely into the community."³⁴ The other side is the Jews by Choice with whom the rabbi is already working. In the end, "the degree to which there is true integration of the Jew-by-Choice into a community depends on the extent to which they are on

³² Interview with Rabbi Stephen Berkowitz 20 June 2012.

³³ Integration for gerim differs from that of new members. If someone who can prove they are Jewish and asks to become a member pays dues, their membership is not conditional on integration nor would it be revoked if everyone saw the person was not integrating. Rather in these cases, barring a terrible problem, the leadership usually relies on the person feeling uncomfortable or unwelcome enough to leave of their own accord.

³⁴ CCAR *Guidelines for Working with Gerim* 15.

the radar-screen of fellow congregants and have the self-confidence to engage in shul life without needing the rabbi to facilitate such.³⁵

Another more programmatic approach is based on a model called the Ruth Group. It was an all women's group that started after Rabbi Colin Eimer at the request of a gioret from his London congregation held a programme of 6 discussion sessions for converts in his community. Six women and one man met regularly with a facilitator to explore and share their experiences as converts vis-à-vis their individual families, their new families, and their new community. The Ruth Group met at times that were particularly difficult for the participants, for example before Christmas or Jewish holidays. Each woman was able to call a meeting whenever she needed support. Being able to share their conversion experiences and the problems that arose when they became a member of the Jewish family and community was helpful to all the participants. It enabled them to put their experiences in a new perspective and gave them a sense of being part of something, that they were not alone. Finally, through the group they developed friendships that provided them with a new sense of security in the community.³⁶

From a liturgical perspective, one could imagine ceremonies that are designed to introduce the prospective gerim to the community and to create, recognise and sanctify mentorship bonds between the individual candidates and existing members. Such a ceremony could be performed during the Torah reading or just afterwards, as it is a point in the Shabbat service when those in shul engage in study. The liturgy could be based on a contractual model, such as a ketubah and the wedding ceremony (also to be celebrated!). Alternatively it could be based on a model of brit; a covenant between two partners. One other option is to see what, if any, liturgy exists around acquiring a "haver" which could then form the basis for this ceremony.

Developing a Jewish Identity

"Really every convert converts him or herself. Rabbis are only needed to verify it and administrate it."³⁷

Developing an identity, any identity is a life-long process. The identity of those born as Jews is a fluctuating construct that is modified continuously in response to experience, learning, emotion and many other factors. A prospective ger is no different. Most have travelled a long way to arrive at the threshold of beginning a course of study for giur. What is different is that the course of study is designed in part to be a crucible in which a major alteration in the person's identity takes place and a new one emerges from the forge. This comes as a result of study and exposure to new ideas and new perspectives, learning to see with Jewish eyes. It is a result of being active in the community, experimenting with living in Jewish time and trying to create a Jewish life style. Often the candidates are asked to keep a journal that maps their experiences, doubts, questions and thoughts. One gioret described the experience as entering a new country with a new language, new culture and customs,

³⁵ Lubliner *At the Entrance to the Tent* 20.

³⁶ Dorothea Magonet 'Building Bridges: A German of Christian Origin Marries a Rabbi' in: Walter Homolka, Walter Jacob and Esther Seidel eds., *Not by Birth Alone, Conversion to Judaism* (London and Washington 1997) 143-151, there 144.

³⁷ Blue 'Insiders and Outsiders' 134.

new tastes, new yearly rhythms with new celebrations, new community and often, new family. It also happens along-side the memory and experiences of the previous life which is gradually altering and assuming a new shape. She goes on to say that the real work of giur comes after the formal giur process is over.³⁸

As before, there is no liturgy or ritual specific to this aspect of the giur process; the development of a Jewish identity. Only at the end, after being accepted by the beit din or in the post-mikvah ceremony there is the ritual of bestowing a new name on the ger tzedek, which is an incontrovertible sign of the individual's new identity. That being said, it is difficult to create and use a liturgy for an ongoing process as opposed to distinct individual events. Even so, this may be a place where liturgy could be helpful. That is not to say there is a need to design a specific ritual or ceremony to acknowledge and sanctify the process of developing a Jewish identity. However, the prospective gerim could be guided to review selections from existing Jewish liturgy and look at how people express themselves and their Judaism in all its facets in different periods. They could explore how liturgy responds to different exigencies in life. A review and study of this sort could be a way of exposing prospective gerim to different models of Jewish identity and of different options or possibilities of Jewish expression that have been developed and used over time that might resonate with people.

All three areas, the study, integration and identity formation are processes, and as such they are difficult to celebrate with a ceremony. Nevertheless, there are discrete moments such as beginnings, middle points and ends that can be made to stand apart from the ongoing flow of the process where rituals could be introduced. The ceremonies could further the specific process and encourage wider interactions with the congregation, while also enriching the experience of the prospective gerim.

Chapter 4 Rituals of Confirmation and Commencement: Liturgy for the *Beit Din and Gemirat Da'at*

Once the candidate for giur has completed the prescribed course of study and has spent, in most cases, at least one year following the Jewish calendar and the cycle of Jewish life, they have a final interview with the sponsoring rabbi. At this point, the rabbi who has been following their process assesses the individual's knowledge and assimilation of what they have learned, the development of their identity as a Jew, the degree of integration, their practice and whether the individual, the rabbi and the community still agree that becoming a Jew and a member of the Jewish people is still the best option for all involved.

When the sponsoring rabbi is convinced that the candidate is ready to become a Jew by Choice, the rabbi will bring the candidate before a beit din who will interview the individual to ascertain for themselves that the person is appropriately motivated, has learned and mastered the required subjects, is committed to Judaism and the Jewish people, has become an integral part of the sponsoring community, has created a Jewish home and taken on Jewish observances and practices. The beit din must also be convinced that the candidate is aware that giur is a lifelong commitment to an exclusive relationship with Judaism and the Jewish people. For the most part the interaction

³⁸ Magonet 'Building Bridges' 147.

between the ger or gioret and the beit din is not meant to be an extensive examination. Usually it is more of an opportunity to discuss the issues above with the prospective ger and to confirm the assessment of the sponsoring rabbi. When telling their stories many gerim mentioned the atmosphere during the interview and the attitudes of those present as crucial in setting the tone for the meeting and the level of comfort and ease that the prospective gioret experienced. Respect for the solemnity of the occasion was appreciated but so was a note of appropriate humour or other means to lighten the potentially stressful and nerve-wracking meeting. After the discussion comes to a close the candidate is usually asked to leave the room. In some batei din the partner and/or children of the prospective ger or gioret are also interviewed, with or without the candidate present. Finally the beit din deliberates and in most cases comes to a positive determination welcoming the ger or gioret to Judaism and as a member of klal yisrael. There are only some cases, such as when neither mikvah nor brit are performed, where this is the final ritual in the process of becoming a Jew. In the majority of communities the ger must undergo a brit or hatafat dam and/or t'vilah in a mikvah. These rituals and their liturgy will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Traditionally, a beit din for the sake of conversion must be composed of three people, but those three do not have to be rabbis. They can be Jewish professionals, such as cantors and teachers or educated lay people. This tradition is reflected in the various configurations of batei din convened to meet with prospective ger. In some areas the local rabbis are able to convene a beit din of three rabbis. In others, where there are simply not three rabbis in close enough proximity, either the beit din is composed of a rabbi and two other Jewish professionals, such as cantors or teachers or its membership is supplemented by educated members of the local Jewish community. For instance this was the approach used by the liberal Jewish community in Hungary in the early years following the fall of communism in the country.³⁹

Another approach to the lack of rabbis, initially centred on Eastern and Central Europe, was the creation of the European Beit Din. The Beit Din in principle works in countries where there is not a functioning local Progressive rabbinic body or where there are not sufficient numbers of rabbis in the locale. It also helps the rabbi who is alone in the country to get more colleagues to form a rabbinic beit din. The three members sitting at any of its sessions are drawn from the ranks of European rabbis whose smicha, rabbinic ordination, is recognised by the Rabbinic Review Committee of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ).⁴⁰ Israel, The Netherlands, France, Germany, Switzerland, Russia and the two progressive movements in the UK all have national batei din that officiate at all giurim that are sponsored by members of their rabbinic conferences and/or where the ger or gioret will become a member of one of the country's progressive Jewish communities. One other factor that influences the composition of the beit din is the role of the sponsoring rabbi. In some communities the sponsoring rabbi sits on the beit din as one of its members. In others and in the European Beit din the rabbi accompanies the candidate for giur but as an involved party is not able to participate as a member of the beit din him/herself.

³⁹ Interview with Rabbi Kati Kelemen, March 2012.

⁴⁰ The Rabbinic Review Committee is composed of representatives of the WUPJ, the Rabbinic Training seminaries, and the main professional rabbinic bodies in major Jewish countries. (Correspondence with Rabbi David Lilienthal 20 June 2012.)

Rabbis, when acting as dayanim for the European Beth din follow a set of procedures and practices established for the EBD. These may vary from the rules they follow when acting according to the rules of their own national organisation or local community. Since the EBD is primarily intended for areas with emerging communities, where rabbinic support is often provided by many different rabbis, the standard set of rules helps avoid confusion in these communities. It also, as a side effect, proved to be helpful to prospective Jews by Choice since it makes giur possible in places where the individual would otherwise struggle to find an established community and a rabbi who will accept them for giur. In addition, the European Beit din was intended also to combat the proliferation of false giur certificates that was rife in the 1990s.⁴¹ By creating a central repository of information regarding gerim accepted by the EBD that includes an archive of *teudot giur*, conversion certificates, and files on all those who have applied to become a ger it became possible to verify all documents with the European Beit din stamp on them. This had the added benefit of giving EBD documents the reputation of being trustworthy. This encouraged several rabbis who were alone in a country to also avail themselves of the services of the EBD. National batei din and rabbinic organisations can promote some uniformity of practice that enables the national movement to be able to vouch for the legitimacy of all gerim who complete their giur through their system. This is vital when a ger or giorer decide to make aliyah and the appropriate representations need to be made to the relevant authorities in Israel regarding the individual's Jewish credentials. While the standards vary from country to country and between different branches of Progressive Judaism, within each national system they are generally consistent.

In the US, on the other hand, while the CCAR Guidelines recommend the use of mikvah and brit or hatafat dam as part of a giur, the policy of the movement is that it is up to the individual rabbi how they would like to conduct the process with the results that the validity of individual's giur is judged based on the sponsoring rabbi, those who participate in the beit din and the rituals that were or were not incorporated into the process.

Beit Din

As a ritual, the meeting of a beit din is largely without liturgy. Traditionally, the participants meet, at times sitting in order of seniority, and after some internal organising the convenor calls in the first person and the session begins. Seemingly, the only liturgy that has been developed for this element of the giur process is a *tefilah*, prayer, or *kavanah*, written by Rabbi Yehoram Mazor for the members of the beit din to recite prior to beginning their work.⁴² The brief *tefilah* (*the full text can be found in Annex B*) combines a number of liturgical elements from various sources and periods. Its opening formulation **הִנְנוּ מוֹכְנִים וּמְזַמְנִים** is adopted from the kabbalists and references the commandment of loving the ger, a theme that is carried throughout the rest of the *tefilah*. The next phrase makes a requests from God using the traditional formulation **יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ**. The request to imbue the love of the ger in the hearts of those sitting on the beit din is placed in the context of their work: judging and accepting converts. What is more, by ending the phrase with a paraphrase of the *pasuk*, the verse, from Vayikra 25:23-

⁴¹ Correspondence with Rabbi David Lilienthal 20 June 2012.

⁴² Email correspondence with Rabbi Yehoram Mazor 26 January 2012. NB- discussions about formally beginning to use the kavanah in the MARAM beit din will take place in the near future.

וְהָאָרֶץ לֹא תִמְכַר לְצִמְתָּת כִּי־לִי הָאָרֶץ כִּי־גֵרִים וְתוֹשְׁבִים אַתֶּם עַמִּדֵי :

And the land shall not be sold eternally because the land is Mine. As you are strangers and temporary dwellers in My eyes.

that reminds us that we are all strangers and residents with temporary status before God. In so doing, the tefilah reinforces the notion that the dayanim, the judges of the beit din, are on the same level as the prospective ger standing before them awaiting their judgement. They should conduct themselves with love for a person who no different from them in the eyes of God. The importance of gerim and their value to Judaism and the Jewish people is reinforced by the reference to Avraham and Sarah and the *zechut*, the merit of our ancestors, and to Ruth and her *zechut* as the mother of all who make the choice to become Jewish in faithfulness. Again this is a reminder to the dayanim that our past and our future were founded on Jews by Choice and that traditionally, the quintessential nature of a ger is considered to be *tzedek* and *emunah*- righteousness and trusting in God. Using the formulation from the **יְעֻלָּה** the dayanim ask that the memory of the merit of all righteous converts be present on this day. The **יְעֻלָּה** as one of the prayers of Yom Kippur invokes the theme of judgement and recalls that the fate of the candidate's future as a Jew lies in the hands of the beit din, but above them, the fate, the future of the dayanim as well as the ger lie in the hands of God. The references to *zechut* and the equality of their position as human beings is a cue to treat the candidates coming before the beit din in that light and to judge them *l'kaf zechut*, by giving them the benefit of the doubt. The verse from *tehilim*, Psalms, continues the same theme of the beit din being strangers/converts in the land and asks that the mitzvot, in this case probably a reference back to the beginning of the prayer which commenced with the mitzvah of loving the ger, not be hidden from them. This is a further reiteration of the relationship between the candidate, the members of the beit din and God as supporter, protector, revealer and inspirer of love who enables the beit din to fulfil its commanded function of loving the ger. The following reference from the amidah, asks for mercy for all who are just and love kindness, for the righteous ger and for those sitting on the beit din, which if taken as written, is a reinforcement of the need for humility in the face of those whose qualities surpass their own. The final line of the tefilah refers to travellers. This is perhaps to remind the rabbis on the beit din that not only is the prospective ger on a journey, they are as well, and that as travellers their success is as much dependant on God as is the success of prospective ger or ger's spiritual journey in building a relationship with God, with Judaism and the Jewish people.

Gemirat Da'at

In his book *Conversion: Halakhah and Practice*, Menachem Finkelstein writes that there is a reciprocal process involved in giur. The beit din accepts the ger and gives the individual approval to complete the formal rituals of conversion, and the prospective gioret undertakes to live the rest of her life as a Jew and a member of the Jewish people. Finkelstein translates *gemirat da'at* as the "final resolve to convert."⁴³ For Finkelstein, the "unreserved internal resolve", the final lifelong decision that the candidate never intends to reverse or rescind is expressed in the formal rituals of giur: brit (for males) and mikvah.⁴⁴ In some progressive communities, in addition to the acts of brit

⁴³ Finkelstein, *Conversion* 30.

⁴⁴ Finkelstein, *Conversion* 32.

and mikvah, prospective gerim are required to also sign a statement indicating their commitment to Judaism and the Jewish people.

At the beginning of the 20th century in the US, the gemirat da'at, as it were, was expressed according to the CCAR rabbi's manual during the conversion service which took place in the synagogue. This took the form of questions that the candidate had to answer (See Annex 1 Liturgy for the Beit Din) and ended with the pledge in Annex 2 (Liturgy Related to Gemirat Da'at). The questions and pledge as they appear in the 1988 CCAR Rabbi's Manual have changed slightly from those included 60 years earlier, but are substantively the same with one exception. The more recent set of questions includes one about the pursuit of Torah and Jewish knowledge which did not appear earlier. The conservative Movement's Rabbi's Manual also contains a series of standard questions that rabbis are supposed to put to the prospective ger. These however include ten essay questions to be followed by ten questions for the beit din to put to the candidate at the interview itself. Interestingly, neither the Israeli nor European batei din make use of standard lists of questions. This may have to do with the smaller numbers of rabbis performing conversions and with the ability of the national batei din and the European Beit Din to support standards that have largely been adopted by all the affiliated rabbis. In the US, the situation is dramatically different in this regard; the wide variety of practice among the large numbers of affiliated rabbis and the culture of individualism requires a different response. The inclusion of a list of standard suggested questions in the respective movements' Guidelines and Rabbis' manuals is an attempt to create a shared approach among the many affiliated Conservative or Reform rabbis. As the CCAR *Guidelines for Rabbis Working with Prospective Gerim* says, the Guidelines are "... a document of compromise and consensus...Our goal is not to force requirements upon individual Reform rabbis, but rather to be able to speak as a community with a unified voice on matters so crucial to our self-definition."⁴⁵ It strongly encourages the extensive use of the resources available to assist and guide rabbis in their work with gerim such as the Ma'aglei Tzedek: CCAR Rabbi's Manual.

All the questions deal common issues: is the individual converting of their own free will? Is the commitment to Judaism exclusive? Will the person establish a Jewish home and become an active Jew? Will the person join a synagogue and be involved there? Will they pursue Jewish learning and knowledge? Does the candidate pledge loyalty or bind themselves to the Jewish people? And will you raise any children you may have as Jews? The rabbis who were interviewed for this paper as a whole also expressed their interest in knowing the answers to these questions as well and being certain of the potential ger's commitments on these counts.

Worthy of note are the differences in the list of questions. Only the Conservative list asks about a relationship with the Land of Israel and making the State a part of one's life and one's family life. They also go further than the Reform in seeking reassurance that the giorer has given up all religious practices, holidays and life cycle events associated with the her previous religion. They ask about the acceptance of "the God of Israel as the one universal and indivisible God".⁴⁶ They also ask much more from the candidate regarding their children. They include not just raising them as Jews but also

⁴⁵ CCAR Guidelines for Rabbis Working with Prospective Gerim (<http://ccarnet.org/glgerim7.htm> from a library print out of the site as accessed 27 August 2001), 2.

⁴⁶ *Moreh Derekh*, J-12.

“providing them with a quality Jewish education and timely involvement in Jewish life-cycle events.”⁴⁷

One other item of note is the adoption by the Conservative Movement and MARAM of the language of *קבלת עול מצוות*, accepting the yoke of the commandments. This concept was originally adopted by the Orthodox anti-reformers in the nineteenth century, as a way of distinguishing themselves and their gerim from those gerim who went through the process under the auspices of Reform communities. In the post-war period, some halakhic authorities “affirmed the most unbending standards regarding conversion.”⁴⁸ In the present it remains one of the major differences used by the Orthodox to differentiate between themselves and the non-Orthodox movements as well as between the giurim each performs. In many circles, *kabbalat ol mitzvot* is understood as the acceptance and observance of all mitzvot as the Orthodox conceive of it. This has become the defining notion for a ‘kosher’ conversion. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and others in the US, Europe and Israel hold that

“there was a need for a sincere “acceptance of the yoke of the commandments” before a qualified rabbinical court, which has to consist of Orthodox rabbis..... acceptance and observance of the commandments on the part of the convert remained the sine qua non for a valid conversion.”⁴⁹

The accepted Orthodox rabbinic ruling is that there can be no leniency in this regard. The “acceptance of the commandments, ... is indispensable” for conversion and its absence nullifies it.⁵⁰

The use of the term by MARAM (the Rabbis of the Israeli Progressive Movement) is qualified and redefined. In its reply to the question about the process of giur, the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism’s (IMPJ) booklet on Questions and Answers on Progressive Judaism says that “the requirements for conversion of the beit din affiliated with MARAM are the same as the requirements of tradition: study, *brit milah* or *hatafat dam brit*, immersion and acceptance of the yoke of the commandments.”⁵¹ Later there is a further explanation clarifying that in the progressive manner, acceptance of the yoke of the commandments means by one’s free will; the commandments are understood in light of personal and societal ethics and the development of personal obligation.⁵² On the face it would seem that this desire to reclaim and reinterpret the idea of *kabbalat ol mitzvot* is part of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism’s initiative to position themselves for the Israeli population in relationship to tradition and the traditional terms that are familiar to Israelis. Adopting the terms may perhaps make Israelis more at ease with the idea of progressive Judaism, providing them reassurance that while the IMPJ offers

⁴⁷ *Moreh Derekh*, J-12.

⁴⁸ David Ellenson and Daniel Gordis, *Pledges of Jewish Allegiance, Conversion, Law, and Policymaking in Nineteenth- and Twentieth- Century Orthodox Responsa* (Stanford, CA 2012) 90.

⁴⁹ Ellenson and Gordis, *Pledges* 107.

⁵⁰ *Shulhan Arukh*, Y.D. 268:3 quoted in: Rabbi Moshe Zemer, *Evolving Halakhah, A Progressive Approach to Traditional Jewish Law* (Woodstock, VT 2003) 130.

⁵¹ Ze’ev Harari, Yehoram Mazor, Uri Regev and Mordechai Rotem, *She’elot u’teshuvot al ha-yahadut ha-mitkademet* (Questions and Answers about Progressive Judaism; Jerusalem 2001) 13.

⁵² Harari et al. *She’elot u’teshuvot* 8.

them a different approach it retains a basic connection to traditional approach to Judaism, to the same concepts with which they are acquainted. Perhaps the hope is that by positioning themselves in this way, the IMPJ will be more appealing to the actual lifestyle of someone for whom the shul they do not go to is Orthodox, but who may still be looking for a different way to approach Judaism and/or looking to Judaism as a source of meaning and inspiration. The European Progressive Movements located in a very different Jewish context still largely attract their members by providing a clear alternative to traditional or Orthodox Judaism. A closer alignment with tradition is most likely not in their interest, nor a part of their heritage of religious reform. Were the European progressive communities to adopt standard sets of questions, while the set may very well include questions about observance of Jewish practice, life cycle and ritual, it seems very unlikely that it would be phrased in a manner that made reference to ol mitzvot, the yoke of the commandments.

Although the European progressive communities do not have a standard list of questions for the beit din to use, several of them ask the ger to sign a declaration or statement testifying to their gemirat da'at. The Swiss Beit Din uses a statement of obligation that refers to many of the same issues about which the standard questions seek to provide reassurance. It begins by stating that what the individual is doing is voluntary. It reaffirms that the person binds themselves to the God of Israel, the Torah of God and the Jewish people. It highlights identity with the Jewish community; home observance of Shabbat and chagim, Jewish holidays; fulfilment of the obligation to perform *tzedakah* and *gemilut chasadim*, acts of justice (charity) and loving kindness as well as *tikkun olam* (which is undefined); and that the signatory will participate in the Jewish communal life. It closes with a prayer that the Eternal help the person prove themselves worthy of the people and the tradition to which they bind themselves through the document and the giur. It ends with the *Sh'ma Yisrael*, what one might characterise as the statement of faith of the system of Judaism and the Jewish people.

The attestations of this certificate carry the echoes of the opening text of tractate Gerim and of the beraita found in Yevamot 47a-b, both of which lay out the ritual of giur. The beraita intimates that a person must accept membership in, or phrased in a different way, identity with, the Jewish people. The person must be taught about the sin of neglecting the mitzvot of gleaning, the forgotten sheaf, the corners of the field and the poor person's tithe- all commandments that have to do with *tzedakah* and *gemilut chasadim*. Then the person must be warned that if they become Jewish they face consequences for not keeping Shabbat for example, whereas for a non-Jew that is a non-issue. The declaration carries the parallel in the commitment to observe Shabbat and the chagim. The opening of masechet Gerim contains the warning offered to the prospective ger that refers to the suffering that comes as a result of the performance of mitzvot.⁵³ The response indicates that the person must be aware that they are not just entering into membership of a people but that this membership is instrumental in attaining the core purpose: a relationship with the One Who Spoke and Universe was Created. Here we have the relationship with God mentioned in the declaration and the obligation to participate in public life as a Jew.

⁵³ Sagi and Zohar, *Transforming Identity* 143.

The declaration also contains a limited list of five commitments that the prospective ger is asked to sign. This too is a manifestation of the principle in the Yevamot text expressed as a warning not to overwhelm the Jew by Choice. The prayer at the end of the declaration, echoes the high value both sources place on the candidate's reply 'I am not worthy' which embodies the assumption that the person, like the ger in the Talmud texts, are unworthy and so they turn to God for help to prove themselves worthy of the tradition, of Judaism, and the Jewish people. The conclusion of the declaration with the Sh'ma is a sort of avowal of membership and affiliation, an affirmation that at the end, the person has entered into the relationship with God. The text in masechet Gerim reminds us that kind words should be offered the gioret. The words should reassure her by reaffirming that the world was created for Israel who are called God's children and of which she is now a part. Israel is the only people beloved of God and the ger cleaves to God the creator. The Sh'ma Yisrael, offers a parallel message: Hear O Israel, you have a unique covenantal relationship with the unique God to whom you are beloved and of whose people you are now a part.

Chapter 5 Rituals of Confirmation and Commencement: Liturgy for the Moments of *Giur*

Following the final interview with the beit din, the candidate for giur must undergo one or two more of Judaism's ancient rituals which formalise the giur. Although the beit din has accepted the individual, they do so in their role as representatives of the klal yisrael, "the congregation of Israel as a whole, and, as it were, the *Shekhinah*."⁵⁴ In the cases of a child being converted, the Court in the legal sense actually takes responsibility for the conditional conversion and permits the process to proceed under its authority and with its knowledge.⁵⁵ However, traditionally, the approval by the beit din is not the moment when a person's status officially changes. The moment when the individual truly becomes a ger or gioret occurs when the person immerses themselves in the mikvah. In some communities, a ger is required to have a brit milah or *hatafat dam brit* a ritual letting of a drop of blood of the covenant, prior to the mikvah. In others, the brit is done following immersion in the mikvah. There are those who do not require brit at all and still others who do not require mikvah either. In the later case, the decision of the beit din to accept the ger or gioret marks their entrance into klal yisrael and their becoming a Jew.

This section will examine the liturgy for the rituals of brit milah or hatafat dam brit and *tevilah*, immersion in the mikvah. There have not been many new developments in the liturgy around the brit milah. However, the usage and the necessity of having a brit milah or hatafat dam have changed, particularly in the past 50 years. As will be discussed further below, the location and standards of the local rabbis plays a decisive role in this regard as does the rabbi's and beit din's policy regarding whether a prospective ger who has already been circumcised must have a hatafat dam. On the other hand, there has been a true flowering of creativity in relationship to the ritual used prior to, during, or after the *tevilah* in the mikvah itself.

⁵⁴ Finkelstein, *Conversion* 28.

⁵⁵ Finkelstein, *Conversion* 28.

Brit Milah/Hatafat Dam

For much of Jewish history, *brit milah*, circumcision, has been considered one of the key rituals by which Jewish men were identified and identified with the Jewish people. Nevertheless, in times of danger and also in periods where Jews were freer to assimilate, *brit* has also been something that Jews in certain circles strove to undo or to avoid.⁵⁶ It is also a source of great controversy. Some find it barbaric, disfiguring or dangerous. Others find it powerful, moving and connecting. From the early reform period in Germany and afterwards, many reformers and reform communities declared circumcision to be incompatible with the enlightened times in which they lived and the ethical tenets of Judaism. This fundamental rejection of *brit milah* was reflected in the 1893 resolution of the CCAR which “declared the initiatory rites of *berit mila* and *tevila* unnecessary and held that it was sufficient for prospective converts to declare, orally and in writing in the presence of a rabbi and no fewer than two lay leaders of the congregation and community, their acceptance of the Jewish faith and the intention to live in accordance with its mitzvot (Yearbook III, p. 36 reprinted in American Reform Responsa, p. 230).” The Rabbi’s Manuals published by the CCAR from at least 1928 until 1961 included the text of the above mentioned resolution stating the movement’s desire “... to accept into the sacred covenant of Israel, and declare fully affiliated with the congregation לְכָל דָּבָר שֶׁבְּקִדּוּשָׁה any honourable and intelligent person who desires such affiliation, without any initiatory rite, ceremony or observance whatever;...” This was also the case in many Reform communities in Germany before WW II.

After the war, when there was still one unified Rabbinic conference in Germany, including both Orthodox and Progressive rabbis, *brit milah* was required for all conversions. That continued to be the case even after 2005 when the rabbinic conference split and the progressive rabbinic organisation, the Allgemeine Rabbinerkonferenz (ARK) was formed. The German progressive *beit din* continues to require all prospective *gerim* to have a *brit milah*. There are however individual rabbis not affiliated with the ARK who accept *gerim* without requiring *brit milah* or *hatafat dam*.⁵⁷ In the Netherlands and in the Liberal Movement in Britain, there was a period during which if someone had suffered as a Jew during the Holocaust and expressed the desire to convert, they were accepted without *mikvah*, *brit* or *hatafat dam* *brit*, whether or not they were halakhically Jewish. With that exception, which in the Netherlands was the case only in the 1950s and 60s in Amsterdam, *brit milah* or *hatafat dam* has always been a requirement for *gerut* as it currently is. In Zurich, the community (which was founded relatively late in 1978) has always required *brit milah* for *gerut*. However, if a person has a Jewish father and they had a *brit* prior to requesting to be a *ger* they are not asked to do a *hatafat dam* *brit*. The same holds true in Israel. In general, *brit milah* is required for all uncircumcised men and *hatafat dam* *brit* is required from candidates for *giur* that have no connection to Judaism. As in Zurich, there are exceptions. For example, a male with a Jewish father who was circumcised earlier in his life, will not be asked to have a *hatafat dam* *brit* if the circumcision was actually a *brit* as opposed to a purely medical procedure. Muslims who come for *giur* are also not asked to have a *hatafat dam* *brit*. MARAM is of the opinion that Muslims’ reason for their circumcision is also based on Avraham our mutual ancestor, to enter into the covenant that he

⁵⁶ *Encyclopaedia Judaica* IV (Detroit, 2007) 730-735. 731. During the Hellenistic period Jewish males were known to have undergone a surgery called *epispasm* to reverse their circumcisions so they could participate in sporting events and appear in the nude resembling the pagan athletes against whom they were competing.

⁵⁷ Interview with Rabbi Jonah Sievers 11 June 2012.

had with God, in essence both the Muslim and the Jewish commandments have a similar religious source and therefore Muslims wishing to become gerim are not required to have a hatafat dam.⁵⁸

Brit milah is one of the commandments where the intention of those performing the ritual is important. A medical circumcision, although also a circumcision is not considered by most rabbis to be a brit milah. Only a circumcision performed with the appropriate *brachot* indicating the purpose for which the circumcision is being performed: to bring an individual into the covenant of our ancestor Avraham, is considered to have fulfilled this mitzvah. The brit need not be performed by a mohel(et), a person who performs ritual Jewish circumcisions. The intention is no less important when the brit is performed for the sake of giur. For example, in Zurich, a brit performed on an adult is done by a Jewish surgeon and the rabbi is present to say the brachot. While the liturgy differs from that used for a Jewish baby boy, the circumcision must be performed with the intent of it being done for the sake of giur, for entering into the covenant. Where a prospective Jew by Choice has already had a medical circumcision they may be sent to a mohel or surgeon who performs brit milah to affirm that the previous circumcision is complete and need not be repaired or completed. In the Netherlands, there is a practice called "half circumcision" which seems to be done for medical reasons when parts, but not all, of the foreskin is removed. Where that is the case, the rest of the foreskin must also be removed for the mitzvah of brit milah to be fulfilled. If however the previous circumcision is complete, traditionally there is a requirement for hatafat dam brit that in practice means a drop of blood is taken from the site of the circumcision and the appropriate blessings are recited expressing the intent of performing the ceremony for the sake of entering the covenant of the Jewish people. Technically, a person may do a hatafat dam brit himself, as before, a mohel is not required. There should also be some form of attestation that the brit milah or hatafat dam was performed, either by a known and trusted mohel or surgeon, and that the brit was witnessed by a rabbi or by a beit din.

In some instances, men and boys who have had a brit/hatafat dam are also given a certificate attesting to that fact. In others the final giur certificate states that there has been milah and tevilah l'shem giur. The RA Manual includes an example of a Certificate of Hatafat Dam Brit (see Annex 3 for the text.) The certificate attests to the candidate's having had a circumcision earlier in his life. Having come to the beit din expressing his desire to shelter under the wings of divine presence, to become a Jew, a drop of blood was drawn as hatafat dam brit in order to convert him and bring him into the covenant of our ancestor Avraham. This section of the certificate sets out the fulfilment of the requirements both for hatafat dam and this element of the giur process. The second half of the document is a supplication that God, the God of Avraham and Sarah should grant the prospective ger strength to remain faithful to the Torah and to keep its mitzvot. It does not at this point refer to ol mitzvot, the language that is used in the declaration to be signed by the candidate for a Conservative giur just prior to their immersion in the mikvah. The reference is to mitzvot in general. The certificate ends with the wish that just as the man has entered into the covenant so too may he enter into Torah, chuppah and *ma'asim tovim*, good deeds. Although there is nothing on the certificate itself instructing that the man be unmarried, the common practice is not to let a married person become a ger unless their partner is also going to become Jewish as well, though there are

⁵⁸ Interview with Rabba Galia Sadan 25 June 2012.

some exceptions.⁵⁹ Most of the rabbis interviewed also confirmed that a great number of the people coming to them for giur are coming because of their relationship with a Jew, most often the person the non-Jew is going to marry. Both elements contribute to a de facto situation in which the male receiving the certificate for having a hatafat dam is most likely to be single and hence the wish for the person to enter into chuppah is appropriate.

As mentioned above, the inclusion of *brit milah* in the *giur* ritual is very much an issue about which there is no uniform position in the progressive Jewish world. It depends on where the actual *giur* takes place. The UK's Liberal Movement does not require *brit milah* but recommends it strongly, in certain circumstances it is also a question of whether the prospective *ger* is from *zarah kodesh*, literally meaning holy seed which is a term applied to a person with Jewish ancestry- a Jewish father or grandparent, also called *zarah yisrael* by the IMPJ.

For example, in the Netherlands, if a boy is born to a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother and the parents have decided to raise the child exclusively Jewishly, with the assent of the local rabbi, the infant may be circumcised, traditionally on the eighth day after his birth. The LIG siddur, *Seder Tov Lehodot*, contains the service to be said at the milah⁶⁰ clearly states that "the ceremony, wherein no Jewish name will be given, is the beginning point of a process that ends with a confirmation of Jewish status of the boy before the beit din and with his immersion in the mikvah in the period immediately preceding his bar mitzvah."⁶¹ As such, the brachot said during the service are the brachot used when circumcising a prospective *ger*. This is the case even though technically the *giur* is conditional on the boy's acceptance of Judaism when he becomes a bar-mitzvah or in some communities when the boy reaches confirmation or the equivalent. The ceremony for the confirmation of the boy's Jewish status at the age of thirteen does not include a hatafat dam. The initial *brit milah* performed when the boy was an infant is accepted as the intention was to bring the child into the covenant of Avraham our ancestor. For men and older boys who are from *zarah yisrael* and previously have been circumcised, most progressive communities such as the MJLF, Zurich, the Netherlands, and IMPJ do not require them to undergo a hatafat dam *brit*.

Another variable related to *brit milah*/hatafat dam is that of timing. In France, Germany, Israel and the Reform Movement in the UK, the men coming before the beit din have already had their *brit* or hatafat dam. The advantage to this approach is that candidates meet with the beit din, and if they are accepted go to the mikvah directly thereafter and receive their certificate of *giur*. At the MJLF in Paris this also facilitates the distribution of *giur* certificates to the degree that contrary to what happened in the past, nearly all *gerim* receive their certificates.⁶² In the Netherlands, and Zurich the *brit* or hatafat dam is usually performed after the person has been accepted by the beit din. In practice, this means there is often a wait of approximately six weeks between when the individual

⁵⁹ If for example a person who is older and neither now has nor will have children and the partner and family are supportive, the beit din or local rabbi may agree to allow her/him to convert without their partner also converting.

⁶⁰ NB. This is not a *brit* as the boy's status as a Jew is still legally conditional. At the moment, of the circumcision it is a *milah*, a circumcision for the purpose of conversion, does not immediately bring the boy into the covenant at that point.

⁶¹ David Lilienthal, et al, eds. *Seder Tov Lehodot* (Amsterdam 2001) 560.

⁶² Interview with Rabbi Stephen Berkowitz 20 June 2012.

was accepted by the bet din and when they are able to go to the mikvah and complete the requirements for the formal giur process. The rationale for this approach in the Netherlands was to avoid creating any sense of moral obligation on the part of the bet din not to refuse him, even if in other circumstances they would have, since he went through the procedure on their order. After that, sending him away without accepting him as a ger may not seem right.⁶³ In Zurich, in order to address this dilemma, if a male prefers to undergo the brit prior to appearing before the bet din he is required to sign a form stating that he is undergoing the brit of his own free will and that there is no guarantee to him or requirement on the part of the bet din to accept him as a ger just because he has already undergone brit milah.⁶⁴

There seems to be little variation in the liturgy for the *brit milah l'shem giur*, circumcision for the sake of giur. Unlike for an eight day old boy, the brit for an older male is a surgery. It is also not done in public as an open ceremony. Since the man may be being wheeled into the operating theatre on a gurney⁶⁵ rather than the way an eight day infant is brought into the room in which the milah will take place, one might surmise that is the reason the *baruch ha-ba* which is usually sung to greet the boy being circumcised is left out. In fact almost all of the pageantry and liturgy of the brit for a Jewish baby boy is left out. The liturgy where the service is meant for a man is spare and direct. The two services meant for adults (the LIG mohalim use the liturgy from the Moreh Derekh, the Rabbi's Manual published by the Rabbinical Assembly of the Conservative Movement in the US, when performing a brit on an older male) all have the same first bracha: *limol et ha-gerim*. They each service proceeds directly to the second of the two brachot that varies according to the service.

The Conservative Movement service includes the traditional bracha text *koret ha-brit*, Who concludes the Covenant as its second brachah. (For the text, see Annex 3.) The service from the US Reform movement uses the bracha that ends in *li-hachniso bi'vrato shel Avraham avinu*, Who commanded us to bring him into the covenant of our ancestor Avraham, which is traditionally used when performing a *brit* on a Jewish infant. This might be a result of some discomfort with the text of the bracha *koret ha-brit* that includes a multivalent verse from Jeremiah. One way it can be understood that presents certain problematic theological images is how the Moreh Derekh translates the verse: "Without My covenant, day and night, the laws of heaven and earth, I would not sustain."⁶⁶ The decision not to use this bracha and replace it with the one traditionally used during the brit of a Jewish infant may be a parallel here to the exclusion of the second paragraph of the Sh'ma from the Reform siddur. The decision to remove the *vihayah im shamaa* from the siddur, most recently repeated in the new siddur *Mishkan Tefilah*, is based on the notion that "traditional Reform thinking challenges Deuteronomic theology, that bad events which occur are a result of communal sinful behavior."⁶⁷ "To the modern scientific mind, this seemed rather primitive and

⁶³ Email correspondence with David Lilienthal 25 June 2012.

⁶⁴ Interview with Rabbi Reuven Bar-Ephraim 12 June 2012.

⁶⁵ Personal experience with *milah l'shem giur* for our son. For adult males where the brit can be performed as an outpatient procedure, the process may last approximately half an hour. When it is over the person may walk out of the hospital by themselves. (Email correspondence with David Lilienthal 25 June 2012)

⁶⁶ Moreh Derekh J-8.

⁶⁷ Rabbi Richard Sarason, PhD. *The Three Paragraphs of the Sh'ma* [web document]

<http://urj.org//worship/mishkan/current//?syspage=article&item_id=3585>, accessed 25 June 2012.

gross, both as an account of the weather and as an understanding of divine providence.”⁶⁸ The bracha of *koret ha-brit* seems to suggest that day and night, the laws of physics, of heaven and earth depend on the covenant with the people Israel, troubling from the side of chosenness that it is because of God’s relationship to the people of Israel that creation is sustained. From perspective of the modern scientific mind it would be inconceivable to maintain an image where God would be ready to let creation lapse into chaos if the covenant between Israel and God were somehow not upheld. The other bracha, *li-hachniso bi’vrityo shel Avraham avinu*, about entry into the covenant certainly is less fraught with theological problems, which speaks in favour of its inclusion. It is not out of place, since performing the brit for the purpose of conversion does in fact bring the person into the covenant of our ancestor Avraham as the bracha states.

The Moreh Derekh includes a note that if, because the male has already been circumcised, only a hatafat dam brit is required there is no need to recite either bracha, “though the Committee on Law and Standards does authorise the recitation of both ברכות”.⁶⁹

The Seder Tov Lehadot (the LIG siddur) includes a brit milah service which is meant for an infant with a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother. It more closely parallels the liturgy for a brit performed on a Jewish baby boy born to two Jewish parents. It too begins with baruch ha-ba and like the others skips over the preliminaries found in brit for a Jewish infant and leaps right to the first bracha *limol et ha-gerim*, to circumcise converts, at which point the brit is performed. The LIG siddur follows the traditional form and includes the bracha *boreh peri hagafen* over a cup of wine as the next element of the service after the brit itself. Subsequently, the mohel sips and the child has a few drops of wine and then the second of the two brachot is said, in this case *koret ha-brit* which avoids the theological issues by understanding the Jeremiah verse in a different way. Seder Tov Lehadot translates the pasuk “As surely as I established at creation the laws of heaven and earth and day and night so will I keep my covenant with Yisrael.” The final element of the service is the *mi sheberach*, a prayer blessing the (non-Jewish) mother and the child and asking God to speedily grant them a complete healing. In addition, it concludes with the formulation common to many of the *mi sheberach* brachot said at life cycle events for children, such as birth, adoption, naming ceremonies, brit and bar/bat mitzvah, is “May his parents/ father/ mother merit to rear him to maturity, guiding him to the blessings of Torah, chuppah and a life of *ma’asim tovim*, good deeds.”⁷⁰ The Dutch translation of the *mi sheberach* renders the prayer slightly differently, giving it a rather different meaning. “May God bless and protect this family and give the parents the strength and wisdom to educate their child to live an involved Jewish life. May their son bring joy and friendship, hope and satisfaction to his parents and to all with whom he comes in contact. And let us say: Amen.”⁷¹ While the Hebrew text remains as translated above, the Dutch understands Torah as “an involved Jewish life” and *chuppa* as “bring[ing] joy and friendship” and *ma’asim tovim* as bringing “hope and satisfaction to his parents and to all with whom he comes in contact.” Joy and friendship is a much more open and inclusive manner of referring to *chuppa*.

⁶⁸ Sarason *Sh’ma*.

⁶⁹ Moreh Derekh J-8.

⁷⁰ Translation from *Moreh Derekh* F-15.

⁷¹ Seder Tov Lehadot 561.

Mikvah Ceremonies

Mikvah is a part of the *giur* process that is incumbent on both sexes regardless of age. It is also a *khok*, a law for which there is no explanation in the Torah and the reason for which is not apprehensible to all through rational thought.⁷² Unlike the other formal final elements of the *giur* process, *beit din* and *brit milah/hatafat dam* which involve covenant and reciprocity, mikvah is an act of faith, it is done solely because we are commanded to do it. In this way it is a symbol of faithfulness and acceptance of God, Judaism and the mitzvot.⁷³ Likewise it is a link to the giving of the Torah at Sinai. According to the Talmud in Yevamot 46b when the Torah in Shemot (19:10) speaks of God commanding Moshe to go down from Sinai and sanctifying the people of Israel and have them change their garments, this is a reference to *tevilah*, immersion in a mikvah. Just as the Israelites immersed themselves prior to receiving the Torah, the *gerim* do so as well. Immersion in the mikvah also symbolises the transformation the *giur* process has wrought and that the individual has undergone during their entire journey leading up to the moment they enter the waters of the mikvah. These are life changes that in essence recreate a person who then emerges from the process spiritually and emotionally different, with different social and familial patterns, with a new faith, a new lifestyle and practices, a new national affiliation and a new identity. As the *ger* enters the water and stops breathing, they in essence pass through death and emerge again into life as a new person. The emerging Jew has been, as it were, reborn with a new status, part of a new people and with a new religion and a new God.⁷⁴ For many, without going through the *t'vilah*, the process of *giur* is not complete.

As in many of the other aspects of the *giur* process, mikvah is at times the field on which the Orthodox and Progressive movements battle for control over who defines who a Jew is and who controls the borders and entry points into the Jewish people. In many locations in Europe the mikvaot are controlled by the Orthodox organisations who were often heirs to the pre-WWII Jewish infrastructure or who invested in building or repairing/renovating the mikvaot after the Shoah. In Israel, the situation is different in terms of causes, but the end result has been largely the same. The Progressive Jewish movements are very frequently not permitted to use the community mikvah for their conversions. This reality has created substantial hardship for communities that wanted to make mikvah a part of the *giur* process, but did not have their own mikvah or access to one. This meant that the progressive community in Zurich that is not allowed to use the mikvaot in the city have had to travel to London and Geneva. In the Netherlands, before there was a progressive synagogue with a mikvah, *gerim* and the *beit din* had to travel to Hamburg and later to Paris to use a mikvah. In Germany, the national *beit din* of the ARK performs its *giurim* in the main synagogue in Berlin. While in some communities the Progressive movements do not have access to the local mikvah, the decision to use Berlin's old synagogue that was formerly the largest in Berlin is a matter of history and symbolism. Now it is a both a synagogue and a museum and it is where the interviews with the *beit din* take place and then the prospective *gerim* use the mikvah downstairs in the same building.⁷⁵

⁷² Alona Lisitsa, et al. *Parashat Hamayim: Immersion in water as an Opportunity for Renewal and Spiritual Growth* (Israel 2011)

⁷³ Lisitsa, et al *Parashat Hamayim* *tevilah kechelek metahalich hagiur*.

⁷⁴ Lisitsa *Immersion and Giyur, Introduction* in Lisitsa, et al *Parashat Hamayim*,

⁷⁵ Interview with Rabbi Jonah Sievers 11 June 2012.

Mikvah has been the subject of much discussion in progressive Jewish circles since the beginning of the reform movement in the nineteenth century. Almost all matters related to ritual purity, including mikvah, were dispensed with early on in the process of reforming Judaism as something archaic ritual, was associated with menstruation,⁷⁶ and was not considered to be consistent with rational thought. Requiring mikvah for giur was also rejected by many as well. There is a giorer who recalls thinking to herself 'it is very odd to be going such a long way for a bath.'⁷⁷ Where mikvah is offered as an option or where it is required, the Jew by Choice, who has thoroughly cleaned themselves beforehand, enters the waters of the mikvah. The individual immerses herself completely in the water, so that there is no place on their body that is not in contact with the water. The immersion of males is supervised by male rabbis and females by female rabbis or in some cases by the traditional "mikvah lady". Where the Jew by Choice is of the opposite sex of the rabbi, the two most common options are that either a knowledgeable, trustworthy volunteer supervises the immersion or the rabbi stands outside the door in order to preserve the dignity and modesty of the person while still being a witness. In Israel, where the t'vilah takes place publicly in the ocean, the custom is to wear very loose fitting clothes or robes that will still make it possible for the ocean's water to completely embrace the person's entire body, but still preserve their modesty and dignity.

There is not really a clear pattern that can be discerned in relation to the communities that require mikvah and brit or even recommend it and the locations where it is not. Much depends on the convictions of the sponsoring rabbi, where they have discretion in the matter, and in other places on the agreements reached by the rabbinic conference or the beit din. In Amsterdam after WW II, mikvah was not required of people wanting to convert to Judaism; above all, those who had suffered as a Jews during the Shoah. Regardless of their halakhic status, if those who had survived wanted to become or to be recognised as Jews, they were accepted as Jews and welcomed into the community without having to undergo either brit or mikvah. Similarly, orphans and non-Jews who had helped to save their Jewish spouses during the Second World War⁷⁸ were also accepted as Jews without their being required to perform any rituals such as brit or mikvah. On the whole, the non-Jewish spouses wanted to be recognised as Jews so that they could be buried in the Jewish cemetery with their partner. The Jewish community accepted them in gratitude saying: "if Hitler could not separate them, neither should we."⁷⁹ The Liberal Movement in Britain took a similar approach to people who wished to convert to Judaism that had suffered as Jews during the war. In the early 70s when a new rabbi came to Amsterdam, he began to offer mikvah as an option, to recommend it and finally to require it. Currently, the College van Rabbijnen requires all gerim to immerse themselves in the mikvah as part of their giur, prior to being granted their certificate and full recognition as a member of the Jewish community. In France, after the Shoah and the big immigration of Jews from North Africa, Rabbi Zaoui who served the MJLF from 1946 to 1969 converted approximately 500 people who were required to use the mikvah.⁸⁰ His successor, Rabbi Farhi also required mikvah. When the

⁷⁶ Interview with Rabbi Andrew Goldstein 15 March 2012.

⁷⁷ Davis, 'I DONT Like' 141.

⁷⁸ In the Netherlands, Jews who were in mixed marriages were generally not deported. Even so, many non-Jewish spouses deserted their Jewish partners to save themselves. This rule refers specifically to those who were loyal and thus saved the lives of their Jewish partners.

⁷⁹ Email correspondence with Rabbi David Lilienthal, 19 July 2012.

⁸⁰ Interview with Rabbi Stephen Berkowitz 20 June 2012.

MJLF synagogue was founded as a break-away congregation from Rue Copernic⁸¹ they built a mikvah that was not kosher in that it only made use of city water. When the MJLF synagogue was renovated in 2008, the mikvah was converted into a halakhic mikvah. Until relatively recently the system at the MJLF was organised in such a manner that gerim would come to the beit din for their interview, then they would have to make a second trip to the synagogue to use the mikvah and then a third to pick up their certificate. Now, as is the case in the Netherlands, converts in Paris have their interview with the *beit din* then go to the mikvah immediately thereafter (unless for example, as is the practice in the Netherlands, they did not yet have a brit milah). Once they have immersed themselves there is a welcoming ceremony that will be analysed in a later part of this paper, during which they receive their signed certificates of gerut.

In both Germany and Switzerland, gerim are required to use the mikvah and it is also requirement for all gerim who pass through the European beit din.

The position of the Liberal Movement in the UK is that the mikvah is strongly recommended. The sponsoring rabbi has a significant influence on whether mikvah is used, which roughly fifty percent of the gerim do.⁸² The Movement for Reform Judaism in the UK prior to the 1960s did not require mikvah. During the 1960s, a rabbinic board was established by the movement in part to work with, limiting the influence of individual rabbis and as of 1978 there was a greater focus and stronger support for gerim to use the mikvah. Coupled with the mikvah that was built in the Sternberg Centre in 1981 and what may be a stronger sense of tradition among the younger people who make up a large part of the cadre of gerim, there could be as many as ninety percent of Reform gerim use the mikvah.⁸³

Mikvah is one of the most intense and emotional experiences for most converts. Unlike any other ritual during the final stage of the giur process, mikvah is not cerebral and not exclusive. It is a physical, emotional and often spiritual experience that is shared by all gerim regardless of age, sex or original faith. "T'vilah can be a moment of great spiritual significance- a culmination of many months of preparation, a feeling of having crossed a bridge of immense meaning. Rabbis are encouraged to recognise this with the inclusion of a prayer or suitable text ..."⁸⁴ Perhaps that is why there has been a significant development of liturgy related to the mikvah experience: tefilot/kavanot that prepare a person for the experience; tefilot that supplement the brachot for tevilah itself; and rituals/liturgy for after the Jew by Choice emerges from the mikvah. This section will consider the mikvah ceremony in Siddour Taher Libénou of the MJLF, two from Parashat Hamayim, one from the CCAR, and one from the RA.

The MJLF immersion service is primarily just the brachot traditionally used for immersion. At one point in the recent past, the ceremony included a recitation of the Sh'ma, but as discussed further below, that has been eliminated. According to the notes preceding the service, immersion in the

⁸¹ Rue Copernic was founded in 1895 and was the first liberal congregation in France. (Interview with Rabbi Stephen Berkowitz 20 June 2012.)

⁸² Interview with Rabbi Danny Rich 16 March 2012.

⁸³ Interview with Rabbi Andrew Goldstein 15 March 2012.

⁸⁴ Lubliner. *At the Entrance to the Tent* 18.

mikvah marks the definitive entrance of the gioret into the family of Israel. The act requires the presence of a rabbi and the recitation of the blessings. The gioret is instructed to immerse herself completely one time and then recite two brachot:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו על הטבילה.

We praise You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has hallowed us by mitzvot and commanded us concerning immersion in the mikvah.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Blessed are you Eternal our God that has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to be present at this moment.

The person is then instructed to immerse themselves entirely three times in a row. When that is complete the individual is to say the Sh'ma Yisrael and the Baruch hem k'vod in Hebrew and French. In fact, the current rabbinic leadership of the congregation does not require people to say the Sh'ma, as was the practice under the previous rabbi. The current rabbi believes it is difficult for someone to concentrate on the meaning and significance of what they are saying, especially with the rabbis watching them. The Sh'ma has also been incorporated into the welcome service which takes place in the main synagogue on a Shabbat after the giur is finalised and will be discussed in the following chapter.

The LJG communities in the Netherlands had a similar practice. The moment in the mikvah is marked by the rabbi explaining the process to the individual and the ger immersing himself once and saying the brachot and then immersing themselves two more times for a total of three. At which point they leave the mikvah, dress and go to the main sanctuary where the ceremony of welcome will take place with the gerim and those that accompanied them. In Germany an analogous process is followed.

In the US, the Conservative Movement has slightly expanded the basic service.⁸⁵ As above, it begins by the gioret immersing herself once in the water and reciting the two brachot: *al ha-t'vilah* and *shehehianu*. The person then immerses twice more and while they are still in the mikvah, a member of the *beit din* recites selected portions of Ezekiel 36:25-28:

וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מֵיִם טְהוֹרִים וְטָהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל-גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם אֲטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם. וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב הַדָּשׁ וְרוּחַ חַדְשָׁה אֶתֶן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם . . . וְעָשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר-בְּרַחֲמֵי

תֵּלְכוּ וּמְשַׁפְּטִי תִשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם . . . וְהֵייתֶם לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים:

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean . . . And I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit into you . . . Thus I will cause you to follow My laws and faithfully to observe my rules. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God.⁸⁶

There are numbers of texts dealing with water and forgiveness and observing God's commandments. Though this text speaks about a new spirit and a new heart that God will place in us, it is a promise God made in spite of the Israelite people profaning the name of God among the nations to which they had been scattered. For God's own sake God promises to save the Israelite

⁸⁵ *Moreh Derekh* J-18 – J-19.

⁸⁶ Translation from the *Moreh Derekh* J-19.

people and to bring Israel to sanctify God in the eyes of the nations. These verses do not seem the most applicable to someone who does not have a historic relationship with the God of the Israelites. Although the text is incorporated into the High Holiday literature, and as such could symbolise rebirth through forgiveness, as the mikvah symbolises rebirth, there may be other texts more relevant than this for someone who just a minute or so earlier completed their giur.

Ma'agle Tzedek, offers a different service for tevilah for an adult and for a child. The service for the adult⁸⁷ begins with an introduction/ kavanah from the rabbi that begins with the

יְיָ מְקוֹר מַיִם חַיִּים

God is the fountain of living waters. _____, you are here to immerse yourself in the *mikvah* as a sign that you have immersed yourself in the fate and faith of the People of Israel.

Gioret or Ger:

May this tevilah strengthen my commitment to the Jewish people and to the Jewish way of life.
Amen.

[Then the gioret or ger reads from Megilat Ruth 1:16-17*]

טו וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אֶל תִּפְגְּעִי בִּי לְעִזְבֶּךָ לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרֶיךָ כִּי אֵל אֲשֶׁר תִּלְכִּי אֵלֶיךָ וּבְאֲשֶׁר
תִּלְיִנִי אֶלְיִן עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי : יו בְּאֲשֶׁר תִּמְוֹתֵי אֲמוֹתַי וְשֵׁם אֲקַבֶּר.

Ruth said, Do not entreat me to leave you, or to keep from following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; 17. Where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if even death parts me from you.

The person immerses and then recites the bracha *al ha-t'vilah* whereupon the ger recites with the witnesses the *shehehyanu*. Thereafter he is given a blessing by the Rabbi.

The ceremony here is all of one piece utilising the theme of immersion throughout. The beginning statement about the nature of God is not really integrated into the rest of the service, but dangles there and is not taken up by the rest of the prayer that goes on to discuss the ger tzedek's immersion in the Jewish people's fate and faith. This is echoed by the gioret who prays that the physical immersion, the parallel to the spiritual and religious one, strengthens the person's commitment to the Jewish people and the Jewish way of life. This hope is again recapitulated in the verses from Ruth which speak of her steadfast commitment to being part of the Naomi's way of life, her people and her God. The bracha *al ha-t'vilah* speaks of commanding us concerning immersion in the mikvah and the sanctifying nature of the commandments. Finally all present celebrate the moment of submergence into the Jewish people and its faith by joining in reciting the *shehehyanu*.

The ceremony for a child/infant differs in that it reflects the parent's commitment rather than that of the adult Jew by Choice. It begins with the parent before entering the mikvah saying: "We bring you to these waters (even as I have entered them), and we pray, 'May we together serve God and

⁸⁷ Polish, ed. *Ma'agle Tzedek*, 201-212.

* Author's note added to the original text

help strengthen our people through *mitzvot* and acts of compassion. May God be praised for bringing us to this moment.”⁸⁸

The parent is the one bringing the child and prays that together the parent and child are able to serve God and strengthen the Jewish people through *mitzvot* and acts of compassion. At this point the blessing *al ha-tevilah* is said and the child is immersed. Then the *sheheḥiyanu* is said. The ceremony closes with the recitation of the *birkat kohanim*, the priestly blessing, over the child. This is also one of a piece with the rest of the service. As a covenantal relationship, the parent prays that s/he and the child will be able to serve God and the people, while at the same time, ask that God blesses the child and remains in relationship with her/him, being gracious and present in the child’s life.

The ceremony by Rabbi Yehoram Mazor that is used by MARAM, unlike the previous ceremonies, takes place with a group of *gerim* and is purposefully sited on the beach so that the *t’vilah* can take place in the ocean. As in other situations, the leader of the ceremony, in this case the representative of the *beit din* explains to the *gerim* the procedure to be followed. The *brachot* proceed as in the ceremonies discussed above: the first immersion is followed by the recitation of the *bracha al ha-t’vilah*. From that point on, the ceremony diverges from the others that have been analysed previously. The ceremony addresses the element of rebirth inherent in the *mikvah* through an explanation by the *netzig beit din*, the representative of the *beit din*, who then reads a verse from Tehilim (2:7) “I will tell of the decree; the Lord has said to me, You are my son; this day have I begotten you.” Not only is the text appropriate in itself, but the context of the Psalm also is suited to the ceremony. The Psalm at the end enjoins the kings and judges of the earth to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling and ends with “Happy are all who put their trust in God.”⁸⁹

The ceremony proceeds with all the *gerim* reciting the same selections from Ezekiel 36:25-28 as are included in the Conservative Movement service. Then all who are present say the *Sh’ma* and *baruch shem kevod* together. In distinction from the recitation of these two lines by the *gerim* themselves as an expression of their individual personal commitment, by saying these lines together the representatives of the community who have joined the *gerim* for the *t’vilah* accept the *gerim* as one of themselves and create an *agudah*, a unity, attesting to God’s unity and the relationship between God and the people of Israel, of whom everyone present is a part. Interestingly, it is the representative of the *beit din* that then reads the *ve-ahavta* and the *psukim*, verses, from Ruth 1:16-17. One could understand that it might be the role of the representative of the *beit din* to remind the *gerim* of their obligations, which could be a function fulfilled by the reading of the text of the *ve’ahavta*, though one would hope that it would not be necessary to read such a reminder immediately after exiting the *mikvah*. But the Ruth text is usually read by the *gioret* themselves to tie themselves to the chain of *gerim* within Jewish tradition and to reinforce or echo with a traditional formulation the transformation so well formulated with the Book of Ruth.

As is the case with a new born and with a person who has undergone a procedure, as it were, the *gerim* are given a *mi she-berakh* during which they are also give their Hebrew names, and God is

⁸⁸ Polish ed. *Ma’agle Tzedek* 214-215.

⁸⁹ Psalms 2:12.

asked to bless them as they come under the shelter of the Shekhinah to become part of the Jewish people and be counted among the *geri tzedek* of the nation of Avraham and Sarah, the ancestors of all *gerim*. God is asked to enable the *gerim* to succeed on their path and to see a blessing on all the work of her/his hand, together with all Israel their relations. Again this reinforces the theme of joining the people of Israel and cleaving to their God, but also to their history, stories, and to all the other righteous *gerim* and all Israel of whom they are now a member of the family and share a common ancestor- Avraham and Sarah.

In the spirit of Ezekiel, the ceremony ends with a symbolic act that will carry forward the moment into the next phase of the lives of the *gerim*. The representative distributes to each of the *gerim* a shell with a hole in it and invites them to tie the shell to their Shabbat candlesticks so that every Shabbat, they are reminded of the day and of the *t'vilah* that transformed them into a member of the People of Israel. Shabbat is a sign of remembrance of the covenant between God and Israel. It serves as an opportunity, at the moment when it is sanctified and set apart by the act of lighting candles, to remember another act of sanctification and affirmation of the covenant between God and Israel. The *geri tzedek* have come under the wings of the Shekhinah, which some have it, dwells more closely with us on the Shabbat. The final moment of the service, as has been the case in many of the other rituals is the recitation of the *shehehianu* rendering thanks to God for enabling us to be present at this special moment.

In addition to the ceremony by Yehoram Mazor, the book *Parashat Hamayim* also includes another ceremony by two female Israeli rabbis, Alona Lisitsa and Maya Leibovich. The ceremony itself is a private one and can be understood as a *kavanah* and/or *tefilah*. The individual begins by evoking the nature of the mikvah experience as rebirth and tying it to new life and renewal of God's people and God's world. The candidate expresses their readiness for a new life and to sanctify it through *t'vilah*. The prayer continues by connecting the individual with Rivkah and Rachel who started new lives by the side of wells, with Yocheved who gave life to Moshe on the current of the river and Miriam who sang and danced her thanks for the salvation that was wrought on the shores of the sea. Water is referred to as a gift from God to all living beings, to clean and purify, to live and be reborn anew.

This then transitions to the next section which deals more with service of God, Jewish life and faith and learning. As the priests were purified before serving God, the mikvah purifies the *ger* who comes to God's service. This becomes more specific as the person expresses their willingness to tie their lives to the lives of the Jewish people, and the God of the Jews, to be a participant in the joy of Jewish life, to learn and celebrate the rhythms of Jewish life. All of this is then tied together in a prayer directed specifically to God, the Source of Life. The person enters the mikvah as an expression of their obligation to immerse themselves in the Jewish faith and the waters of Torah- two elements that arguably could encapsulate the God, faith, and the participation in and celebration of Jewish life. It is striking here how positive the image of Judaism is that is being projected. None of the other services speak of celebrating the rhythms of Jewish life, the joys of living Jewishly or even of living Jewishly as a form of serving God comparable to the service that the priests rendered in the time of the Mishkan, Tabernacle, or the Beit HaMikdash, the Temple. In them we also hear little about the mothers, about the song and dance of thanks and not about the act of giur as an act of renewal of the Jewish people and of God's world. The latter certainly evokes the image of a covenantal

relationship not just between God and the *ger*, but also between *gerim* and the people of Israel that welcome them into their midst. The people make the *gerim* welcome and the *gerim* refresh and bring new life into the community which they now call their own.

The next section, a *yehi ratzon*, May it be Your will, picks up where the previous section left off, with the Torah, bringing it back to the source, to *har Sinai*, Mount Sinai, asking that just as our ancestors crossed the sea to be given the Torah, may the immersion bring me under the wings of the Shekhinah, transforming me as it transformed the relationship of the People of Israel with God. Seal me, the person prays, for a life of faithfulness to the Torah, to service and to acts of loving kindness. These last lines return the prayer back to its beginning in a circle of sorts. The three things referred to in the last line, Torah, *avodah* and *gemilut chasadim* are part of the mishnah in Pirkei Avot 1:2. "Shimon the Righteous was one of the last members of the Great Assembly. He used to say 'the universe stands on three things: on the Torah, on worship (Divine Service), and on the reciprocation of righteous acts.'" By asking God for a life of faithfulness to the things on which the world rests, the *gioret* refers back to their role in renewal of life, beginning a new cycle and a renewal of God's people and God's creation.

The prayer, *khotmeni*, seal me, a reference to the High Holidays and God as judge and ruler of all, creates a link to the optional text which follows, the same text that begins with the words included in the machzor "and I will throw pure water on you and purify you" and the rest of the full text of Ezekiel 36:25-28.

The liturgy ends with the three immersions in the mikvah. After the first, the *ger* says the bracha *al ha-t'vilah*. The second immersion is followed by *shehehiyanu* and the third is followed by the recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4: *Sh'ma Yisrael*, a final confirmation of faith and statement of identity and belonging to having emerged with a new identity: a member of the Jewish people an adherent of the Jewish faith and a believer in the God of Israel. The cycle has begun anew and the person reborn.

The second service from the book *Parashat Hamayim* was created by Corrie Zeidler who herself was *gioret* in 1979 and at the time experienced her moment in the mikvah as just another step in the process she had to complete in order to become Jewish. In looking back she realised that from the moment of immersion, the Jewish journey of a person begins, a journey that will last the individual's entire life. As a result it is crucial that the mikvah be meaningful enough and gives enough emphasis to the new beginning, the purification and the stream all of which are necessary for the spiritual flowering of the *ger/gioret*.⁹⁰

Zeidler's ritual and liturgy is unique in that it recognises that the *gioret* leaves things from their old life behind and there is pain and a sense of loss coming from that separation. In addition, her liturgy also speaks to what the individual *gerim* bring into Judaism, what they contribute to the fabric of Jewish life and faith. The liturgy is also structured as an interchange of readings by the representative of the community leading the ceremony who expresses her/his wishes for the person and the commitments that the community makes to her/him and the *ger* who expresses their

⁹⁰ Cory Zeidler *Tevilat Mitgayarim* in: Lisitsa, et al *Parashat Hamayim*.

experience of the transformation and the role they aspire to play in the people they are joining through immersion in the living waters of the mikvah.

As in the previous liturgy, though not as poetically, the ritual mentions the roles and associations of water in Jewish tradition. It brings in the example of God hovering over the face of the water at the beginning of *Bereshit*, Genesis, the Well of Miriam that sustained the people of Israel in the desert and the tendency of water to find the lowest point as a symbol of the deepest learning and Torah as the portion of the humble and poor. The connection here between the ger and the poor and humble is the biblical category of those who are vulnerable in society, in which the two groups exist side by side and for whom the Jewish People must care and be compassionate. An important reminder to all who are present as representatives of the community to bear in mind as the Jew by Choice moves forward from this point on their journey as vulnerable new Jews who need support and protection as they continue to form their Jewish identity and their new Jewish lives. This theme is further stressed in the next section that the leader of the ceremony reads to the soon to be Jew by Choice. "Know that just as the waters surround you and touch you with their warm embrace, so too do the Jewish people warmly embrace you and welcome you into our midst with **blessings.**"

In exchange the Jew by Choice expresses her/his aspirations as a new member of the Jewish faith and the Jewish people: to find a way into the ancient and endless traditions of Jewish life; to contribute to the ongoing continuity of the flow of tradition; to leave behind what the person would like to shed; to acknowledge the pain and tears of that loss, but also to have them dissolved in the overwhelming gains that will come from the living waters of Judaism and the Jewish people in which s/he is about to immerse her- or him- self.

The next section that refers to the contributions that the person desires to make has a different tone, one that is more direct and factual as opposed to the wishful hopeful nature of the previous section that reflects the positive hoped for outcome of a process that is difficult and at times painful as the prospective Jew by Choice decides which elements of her/his self to leave behind, pieces that at one point may have been important and may still be meaningful or hold a special valence. The Jew by Choice is hoping that pain of loss will be negated by the positive and good that comes with immersing in the living tradition and people. What one brings is almost always more certain: most people know what they have to offer while they may not be sure if the hoped for gains materialise and if so that they will more than compensate for the losses experienced on the road to realising the goal.

The section ends with the hope that her/his contribution to the fabric of Jewish life contributes to its unity. This is also something not brought up in the other liturgies. It is a paradox, but an important one with which Jews are constantly wrestling. How to create a unity out of a diverse pluralistic Judaism? The liturgy recognises that each individual brings their own values and contributions, but has to do so in a manner that promotes communal unity and harmony, something a new member may not appreciate or may not be aware of the proverbial communal landmines that await the unwary and can generate an explosion of divisive infighting and conflict.

The final benediction of the leader is a two part prayer, reflecting the two sides of the covenantal relationship. On the one side, God, Mikveh Yisrael, will be strength and support to you forever. Perhaps this is a wish, as expressed in her comment about the moment of

immersion, that it be a source of ongoing inspiration on the Jew by Choice's life long journey of spiritual development. The second element is that of the Jew by Choice who it is prayed will be a source of peace for her/his family, community and the entire People of Israel seemingly referring back to the issue of unity raised in the previous prayer of the *ger/gioret*. The leader brings the reading part of the liturgy to a close with the text from Ezekiel which has made an appearance in almost all the services.

The concluding element of the ritual is the immersion itself. This is a repeat of the pattern of three immersions that appeared in the service by Alona Lisitsa and Maya Leibovich. After the first, the *ger* says the bracha *al ha-t'vilah*. The second immersion is followed by *shehehiyanu* and the third is followed by the recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4: *Sh'ma Yisrael*, a final confirmation of faith and statement of identity and belonging to having emerged with a new identity: a member of the Jewish people, an adherent of the Jewish faith, and a believer in the God of Israel.

The mikvah ceremonies reflect different approaches to *gerim* and *giur* in general. In the first instances there are the non-existent ceremonies from the movements and communities that do not require mikvah. *Giur* in these communities and movements is more a question of the individual and their investment in and dedication to becoming Jewish, not on the rituals that are performed. If *gerim* would like to join the Jewish people and become Jewish, if they have demonstrated their commitment through learning and participation to the satisfaction of the sponsoring rabbi, they are accepted. The mikvah is not what makes a Jew by Choice a Jew. The ceremonies from the MJLF, the RA and the CCAR are what one might call elemental ceremonies, in the sense that they are focused on the completion of this element of the *giur* process, of which mikvah according to many is among the final requirements. The core of the liturgy is the traditional brachot with little added to it. This may reflect a discomfort among the members of the CCAR with the idea of mikvah, even as a recommendation. In contrast, the other elements of the liturgy and ritual for *giur* included in the Rabbi's Manual, with the exception of *brit milah* or *hatafat dam*, are more fully elaborated. For the RA, perhaps this minimalist structure stems from a focus on Halakhah and doing what is required from their standpoint without change or addition that might make their conversions less legitimate. The concern on an institutional and organisational level seems to be largely on the process and its legitimacy to the outside world. That is not to say that there is no concern, or that there is less focus on the individual undergoing *t'vilah*. The work of individuals with their sponsoring rabbi is most likely where personal relationship, development and personality of both the mentor and the Jew by Choice are apparent. The Rabbi's Manual developed by the RA for its members has a different set of priorities which are manifest in the straightforward construction of the mikvah liturgy. For the MJLF, as with the LJG, the mikvah is a last step in the process which is culminated in the more public ceremony that will be discussed in the following chapter of this paper. The individual attention to the *ger* will be fully expressed in the culmination ceremony, rather than in the immersion in mikvah itself.

As the ceremonies become more elaborate, they touch more on the meaning of mikvah- to the Jew by Choice, to the community and to the Jewish people. The liturgy also begins to address the new relationships that are formed as a result of the transformation the *gioret* undergoes during their *giur* and what those involved in the relationships have gained or lost, what can be expected from the various parties and the hopes that all sides have attached to the new situation. Jewish ritual and

liturgy often enhances the nature of a given experience, heightening it by focusing attention on the holiness inherent in a given situation, the presence of God that can be detected by those so inclined or on the faith and religious import of a particular action. Mikvah can be another step in the giur process or a powerful transformative experience in which the liturgy creates the framework that acknowledges the positive and negative elements of the candidate's experience during the transformation and lays the foundation for the further life long journey that the new Jew begins. The shape of the liturgy is influenced by the institutional concerns of the organisations that publish the ceremonies and reflects the different approaches of the movements and communities to gerim as individuals, the giur process and the relationship the community, as writers of liturgy, imagines as the optimal interaction between the Jew by Choice, the community, the Jewish people and God.

Conversion Certificates

The giur certificate is the final formal element of the giur process. By the time the Jew by Choice receives the certificate they are already formally Jewish. The importance of the certificate is not its role in the transformative process, but that it documents that process for the broader Jewish community (including the State of Israel where relevant) and confirms for them the validity of the giur. As a result, the certificate frequently outlines the entire process, highlighting the requirements that have been fulfilled and the criteria by which the beit din judged the candidate and accepted them as a Jew and welcomed them into the Jewish people. It is also for this reason that in many places there is an attempt to standardise the criteria for accepting gerim. Where there are standards employed by all participating rabbis, the issue of legitimacy no longer depends on the individual rabbis: the sponsoring rabbi who supervised the process and those on the beit din. Rather it is a question of where the giur took place and whether the standards employed there are acceptable to the authority in question. To illustrate this point, there was a point in time when the gerim from Zurich were brought to London to finalise their giur, in part to have the name of the European Beit Din on their certificates. It was the opinion of the community's rabbi at the time that having the European Beit Din and therefore the assurance that their standards were complied with during the giur would make the gerut of the Jews by Choice more widely accepted. The current rabbi is of a different opinion and no longer takes the candidates to London. He is convinced that if the individuals signing the certificate are respected and their standards are acceptable within the wider world of Progressive Judaism that will ensure that the gerut of the individuals who are accepted by the Swiss Beit Din is also generally accepted.⁹¹

The certificate is almost always signed by the sitting members of the beit din and in some instances, by the giorer as well. Most often the certificate is given to the ger as documentation of the process and another original or copy is filed with the movement's main office, the synagogue office or some other archive as a means of safeguarding the record of the person's giur and therefore the evidence of their Jewish identity. Where the certificate is read out loud to the gerim that usually takes place at a ceremony following immersion in the mikvah. The Liberal Movement in the UK is different in this

⁹¹ In most, if not all cases, progressive conversions will not be accepted by Orthodox religious authorities as valid. The State of Israel asks IRAC for confirmation that the gerim applying for aliyah or citizenship or in relation to other status questions have undergone a giur before a valid beit din. IRAC and MARAM will certify (or not) the giur, based on their knowledge or that of their contacts in relevant countries for the relevant state authorities.

regard, as they reads the certificate to the ger tzedek when the person is accepted by the beit din and together the members of the beit din and the ger say the sheheḥiyanu to mark the momentous occasion in the life of the Jew by Choice.⁹²

There is a common thread that runs through many of the teudot in Western Europe which is an outgrowth of their common origin in the mid- 1970s when the teudot were made by the Continental rabbis of the time working together to forge common documents.⁹³ Having said that, it is important to note that in some locations there are different forms of documents. In addition to the differences in Hebrew related to the gender of the gioret such that there are often different documents for men and women⁹⁴, there are also in some locations different documents for children and adults and at times different documents for people with a Jewish father and people who have no Jewish parents. The difference in certificates for children and adults is a result of the difference in process. The giur of a child is performed by the beit din for the child and is conditional. As a minor cannot consent to a legal proceeding, the giur has to be confirmed by the former child when they reach the age of majority-either bar/bat- mitzvah, as is the case in the Netherlands, Zurich, Germany and Israel or at the time of confirmation as is done in the UK by both the Reform and Liberal movements. If, when the child reaches the age at which they must confirm their giur, they should decline and say they do not want to be Jewish, it is considered as if the giur never happened and they are not considered Jewish. In truth, this rarely happens.⁹⁵ In almost all cases, a child that has been raised as a Jew, given some form of Jewish education and Jewish upbringing as well as an involvement of some type in the Jewish community will confirm the choice made for her/him by her/his parents and the beit din and will agree that they identify as Jews and consider themselves Jews and a part of the Jewish people.

The second set of different documents is for people who are from zerah yisrael and those without Jewish parents. In many places, there is an interest in facilitating the process of giur for those with a Jewish father, to formalise their status bringing it out of the realm of doubt into the arena of general acceptance by progressive Jewish communities everywhere. In Germany, this is a focus as is the situation of many “Jews” from the Former Soviet Union who have Jew on their identity documents, but are in all likelihood not halakhically Jewish. The communities in Germany would like to facilitate the giur process for them and to formalise and confirm their Jewish status. While each case is judged on its individual merits and circumstances, these cases are often asked to undergo a shortened procedure- perhaps with a shorter period of study if that is warranted or a shorter time required for integration. These giur procedures are called Confirmation of Jewish Status in some places, such as the Netherlands and Zurich. Prospective gerim from a completely non-Jewish background receive a certificate reflecting that their experience of giur was a complete transformation of identity and practice. They receive a *Teudat Giur*, a certificate of conversion.

Like other Jewish documents, such as a get, a divorce decree or a ketubah, a marriage contract, the certificate of gerut mentions the name of the person in Hebrew and usually in the vernacular. It also

⁹² Interview with Rabbi Danny Rich, 16 March 2012.

⁹³ Email correspondence with Rabbi David Lilienthal 26 June 2012.

⁹⁴ The annex contains documents for both men and women and each are intended to represent the other. This is only done where the content is the same and the differences are a result of language differences associated with the different sexes.

⁹⁵ Confirmed by most rabbis during interviews with them.

includes the Jewish and secular dates, the location where the beit din met and the names of the witnesses- the rabbis of the beit din. Where there are witnesses for specific acts such as the brit or the t'vilah, the names of those persons may also be included. It differs from the other documents in that it refers to a person's past, present and future. In their own way, each teudah describes how the beit din examines what the person has done and/or their spiritual life journey to arrive at the decision to convert, examines their attitudes and opinions at the moment of the interview with the beit din and finally refers in some way to the kind of Jewish life that the new Jew by Choice will lead as they begin the rest of their life-long Jewish journey.

The teudot used in The Netherlands and Zurich are the same as those used by the European Beit Din. However, unlike almost all other countries, the Dutch teudot are only in Hebrew.

The first, for a ger without Jewish parents, is called a Teudat Giur. It begins by stating that a prospective ger came to the beit din desiring to convert according to the Halakhah, meaning with milah and t'vilah, and to attach himself to *nachalat yisrael*, the inheritance of Israel. After investigation and questioning the beit din decided he was worthy. The criteria on which this decision was based are by and large the same criteria used in the teudot from other European communities. The standards are: his honest heart- he has integrity; his knowledge of the laws of the Torah, Jewish customs and the Jewish ways of life. Additionally, the man must have been circumcised and both men and women must have immersed in a kosher mikvah- it being important to emphasise that the mikvah is kosher. Finally the beit din must be convinced that the ger has a burning love for Israel and Zion and that s/he has accepted *ol torat* Israel, the yoke of the Torah of Israel. On this basis the person is accepted *takhat kanfei ha'shekhinah*, under the wings of the Divine Presence, in other words he is accepted as a convert. The remainder of the text is largely formulaic and is repeated nearly word for word in the majority of the European teudot. The person is considered a member of the people of Israel for all purposes, and we say to him "You are our Brother!" The person is given their Jewish name: his name will be called in Israel.... son of our forefather Avraham and this will be his name for all matters of ritual and holiness. The final section of the teudah is the signature section where the date as well as the place is noted and the signatures of all members of the beit din are affixed.

The Dutch beit din and Swiss German speaking beit din also issue a certificate of Confirmation of Status.⁹⁶ It differs in a significant respect from the Teudat Giur discussed above in that the entire section referring to the knowledge of law, custom and way of life the ger must have is replaced by "seeing that s/he has lived as a Jew for a many years". The assumption here being that having lived as a Jew one knows what a Jew must know. Whether or not that assumption proves true is arguable, but certainly it can be said that the individual with a Jewish father accepted under this rubric is likely to know what the average member of the community knows which is probably related more to custom and culture, to the way of life than the laws of the holy Torah. Of course, the Dutch conversion process, even for someone with a Jewish father requires one to either pass a test indicating possession of the requisite knowledge or to take a Basic Judaism Course to acquire that

⁹⁶ The Movement for Reform Judaism in the UK has a similar practice of issuing a status certificate to people whose father is Jewish. It is accompanied by a conversion certificate as well that is kept in the movement offices in case the person should ever decide to make aliyah, as the State of Israel does not accept the status certificates.

knowledge. The other major difference between the certificate and the teudah is in the name elements. The Confirmation of Status Certificate begins with a reference to the Jewish father of the person and thus s/he receives a name including son/daughter of the Jewish father. Further, it is acknowledged in the certificate that s/he is of *zera yisrael*. Lastly, whereas the ger who is not of *zera yisrael* must be considered worthy of being a ger tzedek, and later in the teudah is granted status as a member of the People of Israel, the gioret with a Jewish father, who already has a connection with the people of Israel has the status of ger tzedek applied to her/him and through that is counted among the Jewish people. While a person with no connection must form a completely new identity, adopt a new culture, internalise a new religion and a new way of life, having lived as a Jew for many years means that s/he does not undergo that process to the same extent and therefore the confirmation of her/his status as a ger tzedek is adequate. This is also symbolised by not having a completely new name. The person with a Jewish father retains the name of her/his father. For a Jew by Choice with no previous connection to Judaism the teudah recognises that becoming a Jew is a more involved and different process than for someone with a previous connection. As a result, the teudah includes both being accepted as worthy of being a ger tzedek and as a separate step, becoming a member of the Jewish faith, and of the Jewish people with a new identity symbolised by a new name.

The MJLF giur certificate has a clear textual relationship to the teudah of the European beit din. It begins with the preliminaries outlined above: Jewish and corresponding solar calendar dates, name of the person and the names of the three rabbis who, it is specifically mentioned, have gathered to constitute a beit din. Then the certificate states that the individual came before the beit din to be examined, both in writing and orally, specifically for the purpose of giur. None of the other teudot utilise this formulation, though most of them refer to investigation and questioning which is based on Talmudic language about the role of a beit din.⁹⁷ The certificate then continues by describing what it is that the person was required to do: preparation courses, attendance at religious services, the level of knowledge demonstrated by the response to the exam of the beit din and the individual's sincerity in the performance of Jewish acts. Based upon these things, the beit din declares the candidate a Jew ("introduced into the community of Israel") with the Hebrew name of _____. The certificate also testifies to the person's having had a brit milah and t'vilah in a mikvah including also the names of the witnesses to these acts. It is worth of note that the milah and t'vilah are "[i]n addition" and not included in the elements of the process upon which the beit din based their decision to declare the person a ger tzedek. They appear at the bottom after the statement of commitment made by the gioret when signing the certificate. This may reflect the reality that until relatively recently, the MJLF did not have access to a kosher mikvah. It may also be a reflection of how the mikvah is viewed, as a step in the process, which was mentioned above in the discussion of the mikvah liturgy included in the MJLF Siddour Taher Libénou. The same may be said about brit as well. It is required as a step in the process, but the related liturgy is not in the siddur. One could say this is because a brit is generally performed in private by a mohel who knows the liturgy and does not require it to be in the siddur. On the other hand, it could also be that as a required step in the process, there is an expectation that it will be completed, but there has not been any liturgy developed to provide a context or a Jewish means by which the momentous occasion of the mikvah and/ or the brit and its impact on a potential ger can be expressed.

⁵ In Masechet Sanhedrin based on Devarim 13:15

... "ודרשת וחקרת ושאלת"

The MJLF certificate also serves as a limited declaration of intent for how the ger will lead the rest of their lives. The text includes a commitment made by the gioret when they sign the certificate that s/he “agrees to follow the precepts and moral ways and practices of Judaism that were taught in our synagogue.”⁹⁸ This is not found in any of the other teudot. It seems as an element of *gemirat da'at* were inserted after the fact, i.e. after the meeting with the beit din. It begs the question why it is necessary to have someone sign a paper to that effect if the beit din believes the candidate is trustworthy, sincere and committed already to living a Jewish life? At the same time, there seems to be an element of difficulty in living an active and affiliated Jewish life in Paris that is compounded by the large distances that people have to travel to reach the MJLF. Most of the gerim end up leaving the community.⁹⁹ It is not clear if integration plays a role in this as well, but it remains an issue, particularly at the main campus which is a very large community and it is difficult to find a mechanism by which members can connect to potential gerim. The good intentions and energy inspired by the desire to attain the goal of becoming a Jew that are part of what sustains a person's level of activity and commitment and convinces a beit din, may fade as the ger faces the often difficult transition to being a Jew rather than a potential Jew and challenges of daily life that are not contained by boundaries of time and process. In this context, the declaration of intention may be a reminder of what one had truly desired when still undaunted or energised to rise above the difficulties and obstacles that present themselves on the path to remaining active in the Jewish community and in following the “practices of Judaism taught in the synagogue”.

The Hebrew text of the MJLF teudat gerut has a slightly different meaning than the French text. After the preliminaries of name and date are completed, which are in Aramaic rather than in Hebrew as the Dutch/European beit din teudah is, the Hebrew speaks of a person who comes before the beit din requesting to attach himself to the portion of Israel. He was examined and investigated and found to be worthy of being counted among the gerei tzedek as part of the Children of Israel due to his upright heart and his knowledge of the laws of our Torah and our way of life. Prior to his entry under the wings of the Shekhinah he completed all that is required of a ger according to the halakhah and the customs of Israel. Therefore we say to him: “you are our brother.” And his name will be called in Israel _____ the son of our forefather Avraham. And this will be his name for all holy matters from now to eternity.

Whereas the requirements for giur are spelled out quite specifically in the French, in the Hebrew, they are almost an exact replica of the phrasing in the European Beit Din teudah, more generally focusing on the candidate's upright heart. The latter half regarding the ger/gioret's knowledge of the laws of Torah and the ways of Jewish life is specified in the French as well. What also seems curious is the revision in the order of phrases in the teudah. The reference to conversion according to halakhah appears at the later end of the teudah, as it does in the French and it includes the mention to Jewish custom here as part of the definition of what was “imposed” on the ger- “according to the halakhah and customs of Israel”. It seems strange that language of imposition would be used in a teudah in which everything connected to the giur is supposed to have been done of the free will of the prospective Jew by Choice. In contrast, the mention of halakhah comes at the beginning of the

⁹⁸ Mouvement Juif Libéral de France. *Certificat de Conversion*.

⁹⁹ Interview with Rabbi Stephen Berkowitz, 20 June 2012.

teudah of the European beit din which in both the MJLF and EBD teudot refers to brit and t'vilah l'shem giur. The reference to culture in the European beit din teudah refers to the prospective ger's knowledge of Jewish culture rather than to the practices of giur being dictated in part by Jewish culture. Another phrase that has been omitted in the French teudah that is included in the European beit din teudah is the love of Israel and Zion. Another noteworthy difference between the Hebrew and the French is the lack of any Hebrew parallel to the French statement of commitment, which may simply be the MJLF addressing a particularly French problem in French rather than further changing the Hebrew that is closer in nature to a common giur document.

The teudah used by Rabbi Walter Rothschild in Germany begins as do many of the other teudot with the statement that the prospective ger appeared before the beit din to convert to Judaism and in this context makes use of the translation of the phrase *l'histapek b'nachalat Yisrael*, to attach one's self to the portion/heritage of Israel, in the German text. Like the MJLF teudah, the German teudah discuss the person's attribute of integrity and her knowledge of Jewish laws, customs and manner of living. Based on these criteria the beit din is convinced that she is worthy of being counted among the gerei tzedek. In addition, as another item speaking in her favour, she has a burning love for Israel and Zion, as is the case with the EBD teudah. Finally, the teudah describes her as having accepted the yoke of the heavenly kingdom (*ol malchut shamayim*) and has immersed herself in the mikvah. The teudah concludes with the formula "she is a Jew in every respect; we say to you "You are our sister!" and then she is given her name for all ritual and ceremonial purposes.

There is a bit of historical irony in the teudah of German beit din, where the reform movement began and mikvah was done away with as an archaic rite, mentioning mikvah as a preliminary to being accepted as a Jew, in addition to requiring a gioret to accept the yoke of the heavenly kingdom. Also there is some irony in the use of such traditional formulations for the majority of the teudah's text. These traditional requirements and phraseology may be a result of a return to tradition within the Progressive movements and/or as a result of a desire to use the same or similar text as that used by the European Beit din.

The teudah used by MARAM is a very short document and its text has many parallels to the Hebrew text of the teudah used by the EBD. It also begins with date place and the name of the candidate and their identification number. The latter makes it clear that unlike any of the other teudot, this has legal significance to the State itself. None of the European or American teudot require an official identification document since they are in the religious sphere and therefore legally outside the realm of government control. The teudah emphasises that the individual came of their own free will to attach themselves to the portion of Israel. Unlike the MJLF or EBD teudot, the text does not speak about the character of the person, just that the beit din investigated and question about his life and his knowledge. Based on that, he was found worthy of being counted among the Congregation of Israel. His entry under the wings of the Shekhinah was preceded by milah and t'vilah l'shem gerut, but even before that the candidate accepted upon himself, in front of the beit din, the yoke of the torah and the mitzvot.¹⁰⁰ Once that was done, the person is accepted as a Jew, called our brother and given his Hebrew name, son of Abraham our forefather and Sarah our foremother which will be used for all matters of all ritual and holy matters.

¹⁰⁰ As understood by IMPJ. Interview with Rabba Galia Sadan 25 June 2012.

The use of *ol torah v'mitzvot*, the yoke of the torah and the commandments is unique to Israel. The other teudot, where it is used, employ the phrase *ol torat yisrael*, the yoke of the Torah of Israel, which is seemingly easier to reconcile with Progressive Judaism. In Israel however, where it is important for the movement to work with the Israeli government it is helpful to use the same terms as they do in order to maintain a common language and not to raise questions unnecessarily. It is also a matter of tradition: the phrase has been used for so long that it would be strange not to include it.¹⁰¹ The difference in formulation regarding the qualifications of the candidate may have to do with the various procedures available to meet the needs of various categories of people. Those who are from a completely non-Jewish background go through a complete process. Individuals from *zarah yisrael* who were raised as Jews though their mother was not Jewish have a slightly different process that is tailored to the individual and has as its goal the clarification of the person's identity and practice. Finally the person who has been living as a Jew for an extended period, but is not Jewish and is not *zarah yisrael* is in a separate category. This person also has a individualised course developed for them. In essence, unlike most places in Europe, there are regularly three categories into which prospective gerim are sorted and upon which their programme of learning is based. This means the course is not what is checked and is not a benchmark as it is in the French teudah, the focus for the MARAM beit din is on how the person arrived at the moment wherein they are standing in front of the beit din to convert, what the person knows and how they will practice in the future which is alluded to in the phrase of "acceptance of torah and mitzvot".¹⁰²

The Conservative Movement teudat giur is a similar short document that utilises much of the same language used by MARAM's teudah. The teudah begins with a person coming and expressing their desire to attach himself to the portion of Israel and to shelter under the wings of the Shekhinah- the same phraseology used in the other teudot, though combined here into one rather than *nachalat yisrael*, the portion of Israel, coming at the beginning and then *takhat kanfei ha-Shekhinah*, under the wings of the divine presence, appearing at the end. Unlike MARAM, but more in line with the MJLF, it includes reference to witnesses to brit and t'vilah. Similar to the previous teudot, but more closely paralleling the MARAM teudah, the prospective ger accepts upon himself the commandments and here there is a new element, to study Torah. For these reasons the person was accepted as a ger tzedek. The teudah does not use the language of "You are our brother." It goes immediately to "And his name in the congregation of Adonai will be _____ the son of Avraham our forefather and Sarah our foremother." In place of the quote "you are our brother" there is a different text which follows the naming: "And I called on the name of God and we worshiped God all together, with Israel for the sake of the mercy, the truth, the justice and the peace. And may it be God's will."¹⁰³ The Hebrew text concludes with a paragraph that is unique to this teudah: What we have seen, heard and was done before us we have written and sealed on X date, and all is in order and established. With the signatures of all three members of the beit din.

As in the other cases, the Hebrew text and the vernacular (in this case English) differ from each other. The two phrases to attach her/himself to *nachalat yisrael*, and to shelter *takhat kanfei ha-*

¹⁰¹ Interview with Rabba Galia Sadan 25 June 2012.

¹⁰² Interview with Rabba Galia Sadan 25 June 2012.

¹⁰³ Author's translation.

Shekhinah are explained as “declared (his/her) intention to enter God’s brit with Israel. (He/She) has shown an understanding of our faith, affirmed an attachment to the Jewish people and pledged to continue observing the mitzvot and studying Torah. This is a very different understanding of giur. While both the English and the Hebrew refer to *milah* and *t’vilah l’shem giur* as criteria for conversion, the Hebrew, does not mention the understanding of the Jewish faith and the attachment to the Jewish people is presumably subsumed under the phrase *l’histapek b’nachalat Yisrael*, to attach one’s self to the portion of Israel as criteria for conversion. Arguably, one could read the English text as saying that because the person did all these things: has an understanding of the faith, and an attachment to the Jewish people and committed to observe and further study, as well as underwent brit and mikvah, therefore s/he was accepted as a *ger tzedek*. With this major difference, both texts include a specific reference to keeping the commandments and studying torah and unlike the German and French teudot, there are no references to personal characteristics or attributes that contribute to making the person an acceptable candidate to the *beit din*.

After the naming portion in the English there comes a prayer for the *ger* that is not found in the Hebrew at all. “May the God of our ancestors Abraham and Sarah bless (him/her) and grant (him/her) the strength and courage to aide faithfully and loyally by the precepts and observances of our holy Torah, so that (he/she) may be a worthy member of the House of Israel, called upon to bear testimony to God’s unity and righteousness.”¹⁰⁴ Although different in nature from the statement of commitment contained in the French teudah, there is a parallel in terms of its focus on the *ger/gioret’s* future practice and beliefs. Here it is expressed as a prayer on behalf of the *gioret* that God should aid the person in fulfilling her/his obligations. It goes further by including a mention of the *ger/gioret’s* obligation, as it were, to be a worthy member of the House of Israel and even more so to testify to God’s unity and righteousness. None of the other teudot refer to specific beliefs nor does that seem to be within the culture of Progressive conversions. While many of the acceptance services (discussed in the following chapter) include a recitation of the *Sh’ma*, and in some cases the *Ve’ahavta*, *Aleinu* or even the Ten Commandments, these can be understood not only in terms of articles of faith, but given the diversity of messages in these texts it is more likely they are meant as a means by which the *ger tzedek* can express allegiance, joining together with the people of Israel in affirming submission to the Jewish God as in the *Aleinu*, or expressing identification with tenets of Jewish action as in the Ten Commandments or a love of God and Judaism and a commitment to study and educating one’s children that are articulated in the *v’ahavtah*. The Conservative teudah apparently requires acceptance of belief in God’s unity and righteousness, the latter certainly is and has been problematic even among born Jews for centuries. Regardless of the difficult nature of the particular theological tenet, as God wrestlers and questioners, the Children of Israel, certainly in rabbinic Judaism are not required to believe in God, let alone in a certain depiction of God’s nature. Jews are required to act and to do and many believe that it is by our actions, rather than our thoughts and beliefs that Jews will be judged. As such, including a requirement that anyone, a born Jew or a Jew by Choice, must espouse a particular image of God seems foreign to the nature of Judaism, certainly progressive Judaism as it exists today.

As the final formal step in the giur procedure the teudah reflects back on the journey that the prospective *ger* took to reach the point of transformation and it also looks ahead to a greater or

¹⁰⁴ Moreh Derekh J—50.

lesser, in a more implicit or explicit manner to what kind of observance and Jewish life is expected from the newly accepted ger tzedek. The teudot are of course also a mirror of the context and reality in which the movements and batei din find themselves, as well as that of the gerim. Finally, they certificates also reveal the movements understanding of the process and which elements of the giur procedure are of primary import and which are of lesser significance.

Chapter 6 Rituals of Homecoming, Celebration and Affirmation: Liturgy for Welcoming a Ger Tzedek into the Community

Once the gioret tzedek have received her formal recognition as a Jew the individual returns to her community as its newest member. This is one of the very many transformations that the Jew by Choice undergoes and it represents a liminal moment in the life of the ger. The person no longer has the framework of a group or the regular programmatic support of the rabbi or teacher and has limited experience as acting as Jew, but is expected and perhaps more importantly expects of himself to be fully Jewish. There are needs on the side of the Jew by Choice and on the side of the community. "The importance of staying in touch with recent גרים cannot be overestimated. Following the intensity of the גרות process, feelings of alienation and abandonment are not unusual."¹⁰⁵ The traditional characterisation of a gioret who has just completed her giur being like a newborn come from a recognition that the growth of a new identity that is spiritual, physical, social and more requires a lifetime of work. The ger's needs for connection and support are if anything only heightened by the loss of structured encouragement and growth, the loss of structured contact with teachers and rabbis and also the anti-climax of feeling inauthentic.¹⁰⁶ The CCAR urges rabbis to "to remain in contact with recent גרים: to ensure that any unforeseen difficulties are being addressed; to provide opportunities for גרים to continue their studies and deepen their Jewish identity in appropriate and sensitive ways; and to find opportunities to integrate new גרים into the Jewish community."¹⁰⁷ The community has similar needs and the rabbi should play a role by paying attention to "the continual need to educate the community on the importance of accepting גרים wholeheartedly and integrating them completely into the community."¹⁰⁸ Public ceremonies can play a role in this regard and meet a need felt by both the individual and the community. Both the CCAR and the RA encourage holding post-giur ceremonies of welcome.¹⁰⁹

This is among the most developed area of liturgy related to giur. After the Jew by Choice has fulfilled all the requirements and completed all rituals, acquired a new name and a new identity, rabbis and communities have prepared services, ceremonies or adapted existing forms such as a mi she-berakh in order to acknowledge the achievements of the ger tzedek and to welcome them into the community. On a certain level this is the most comfortable moment of the entire process to

¹⁰⁵ CCAR *Guidelines for Working with Gerim* 15.

¹⁰⁶ Lubliner *At the Entrance to the Tent* 19.

¹⁰⁷ CCAR *Guidelines for Working with Gerim* 15.

¹⁰⁸ CCAR *Guidelines for Working with Gerim* 15.

¹⁰⁹ CCAR *Guidelines for Working with Gerim* 13 and Lubliner *At the Entrance to the Tent* 19.

celebrate. The giur has successfully taken place. The Jew by Choice is no longer an outsider hovering at the edges of the community, a foreign presence trying to make its way inside, and in some cases a taboo not to be discussed¹¹⁰. They are now members of the community. Their desire to become Jewish, their work and dedication is a compliment of sorts and now that the demands and potential danger they represent has been subsumed into the community, the boundaries have been crossed, it is safe to acknowledge and celebrate them. There are typically three moments during which these rituals take place: immediately after the mikvah, on the Friday night, erev Shabbat immediately following the mikvah ceremony or the Shabbat morning after the mikvah.

Post-conversion ceremonies

Immediately following the mikvah

Both the LJG in the Netherlands and the liberal community in Zurich conduct a ceremony immediately following the t'vilah. Those who accompanied the gerim to the beit din interview are invited also be seated in the sanctuary for the service. It may also be attended by members of the synagogue Board, the teachers and other involved in working with the candidates as well as family and friends whom the gerim themselves have invited.

Netherlands

The ceremony performed by the rabbis of the Dutch Liberal movement has a general outline, but it is a protean liturgy and the specifics change depending on who is performing the ceremony and who it is for. It is not written in the siddur or elsewhere. In general, all the people who have met with the beit din at a given session and gone to the mikvah come into the synagogue and sit with the families and friends that have accompanied them. Together the rabbis of the beit din and the sponsoring rabbis, if they are present, lead the group in reciting the Sh'ma, and ve'ahavta. The each Jew by Choice is invited to open aron where they are often given a Torah scroll to hold. The rabbi reads them their certificate in full or abbreviates it, translating the Hebrew into Dutch. The rabbi usually takes the opportunity to say a few words to the ger tzedek recalling some of their achievements, remarking on positive personality traits and/or offering a prayer for their continued success on their transformative journey. Thereafter, the rabbi gives them the Priestly Blessing and the following person is called up until everyone has had the opportunity to stand before the aron kodesh. The ceremony ends with the recitation of the first part of the Aleinu, and Adon olam is sung at the end.

The ceremony is semi-private in that it only involves the gerim and a select group of people they invite. The gerim are likely to be from different communities and have come together just for the sitting of the national beit din. They may never have met before, if they were in the other of the two basic Judaism courses taught to prospective gerim. The gerim are essentially passive recipients of a ceremony being performed for them. That is not to say the ceremony is not meaningful. In fact many of the gerim are moved to tears as they stand for the first time as Jews before the aron kodesh and hold a sefer Torah. The communal recitation of the Sh'ma and other tefilot gives the gerim a sense

¹¹⁰ The issue of taboo around giur and gerim was pointed out by Rabbi Reuven Bar-Ephraim. Interview 12 June 2012.

of being a part of a larger whole, that the ceremony marks their attainment of a long awaited and hard won goal: being formally welcomed into the Jewish people as its newest members.

Zurich

The ceremony conducted by the Swiss beit din is similar to that of the Dutch Jewish community. The prospective gerim meet with the beit din, are accepted sign the certificate, go to the mikvah and subsequently to the shul. The aron kodesh is opened and the group say the Sh'ma together. Each individual goes to the aron and holds a sefer torah and the rabbi reads the giur certificate to them in Hebrew or German and gives them the signed certificate. Each ger is also blessed with the birkat kohanim by the rabbi. Together the whole group completes the ceremony by saying the Aleinu and Adon Olam. What differs is that in the community, on a subsequent Shabbat there is a complimentary public ceremony that is described in full below.

In the congregation after completion of the giur process

Netherlands

In Dutch communities there is a custom to call up a ger tzedek for an aliyah on the first Shabbat following the completion of their giur. At that point a special mi she-berakh is said, the Hebrew and Dutch text of which can be found in Annex G. The Hebrew text announces the person's new name, the daughter/son of our forefather Avraham and states in three different ways that s/he has become a Jew, part of the People of Israel. It ends with a short prayer asking for God to help the Jew by Choice be successful in their journey, be blessed in their endeavours and to have their heart's desires granted for good. The Dutch is less spare and speaks more about the long preparation that was required to be taken into the Jewish people and be counted among those who are of the children of Avraham and Sarah- meaning both the Jewish people and the gerei tzedek. The prayer at the end is also a bit more comprehensive adding that the success, prosperity, protection, satisfaction and contentment come while the gioret tzedek is carrying out her portion of God's work in the world. It ends with the hope that the Jew by Choice will always encounter openness, friendship and connectedness among his people Israel. Usually the community sings siman tov u' mazal tov afterwards in a sign of shared happiness for the achievement of the person and one could say, a sign of acceptance of the person into the community.

The symbolism of being called to the torah for an aliyah as the gioret's first public Jewish act is potent and evocative. By being called up for an aliyah, there is an implicit recognition by the community that they accept the ger to represent them in a "דבר שבקדושה", a matter of public sanctity. Historically, the person who had an aliyah was also the one who read the aliyah for the community and fulfilled the religious obligation of all those in the minyan on their behalf. As such, the person receiving the aliyah is considered to be of equivalent religious status and obligation as the other members of the community. This actualises the text of the giur certificates by reinforcing through public action that the ger is a member of the Jewish people and his new name is then used at as part of a ritual of public sanctity. The bimah, where the Torah is read is also a symbolic representation of Mount Sinai whereby all who come for an aliyah symbolically accept the Torah over which they make a bracha and invite the other members of the community to join them in blessing God. In this way it is a very public ceremony of acceptance: the new Jew by Choice

accepting the Torah and their role as a responsible participatory member of the community, and the community's acceptance of their newest members. In addition, the public *mi she-berakh* gives honour to the *ger* and recognises their commitment and the work and effort they have lavished on their quest to be accepted as a Jew and a member of the Jewish people. However in a community where integration is highly valued and much emphasised, the ritual of the *aliyah* and the liturgy of the *mi she-berakh* does not really aid in forging a connection between the community and their newest member. Nor does it create a sense of responsibility among the community for the *gioret* and for the need to support the *gerim* now that the structure that supported them during the initial phases of their transformation is no longer accessible even as they continue their individual journeys as a Jew.

Zurich

In Zurich, the ceremony has been extended one step further. Each of the *gerim* who have just completed the formal process, receives an *aliyah* and a *mi she-berakh*. At which point the full group stands together on the *bimah* and the entire community says the *sheheḥiyanu*. There is also a special *Kiddush* organised by the community. The added communal celebration complements the semi-private nature of the initial ceremony and involves the community in a more active manner in the final official transformation. Over and above what is also done in the LIG, is often the manner in which the community celebrates and commemorates the major events in its institutional life and in the life of its members and clergy. It is a non-ritual and therefore more accessible and human sign that the *gerim* have been not only accepted into the community, but that the members will stand with them as they stand with all the other members of the community, to celebrate the good and support during the bad times, that they are part of the social life of the community as it is represented by and takes place at the *Kiddush*.

MJLF, Paris

The Shabbat following the *mikvah*, new *gerim* are encouraged to choose a few verse to read from the Torah and to have an *aliyah*. Although the regular *mi she-berakh* is said, the Rabbi says something about the *gioret* having an *aliyah* for first time and *sheheḥiyanu* is said.

The MJLF also has an extensive ceremony that is conducted during a service and includes the *gerim* as well as their Jewish and non-Jewish family. The service, which is mostly in French begins with the traditional welcome of *brachium ha-ba'im*. The ceremony is then contextualised by the opening lines that mention renewing the covenant and a verse from Isaiah that refers to end of days when the *ger*, the stranger, joins Israel and cleaves to the House of Jacob, using the same verb *יִרְדָּף* that is used in the *teudot giur*. The service continues with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for God's blessings including the light of torah, a truth of relevance to all humanity and the faithfulness of God to the descendants of Avraham and Sarah and to those who chose to serve God by becoming Jewish. This is followed by a prayer that rabbi says on their behalf. It asks God to grant favour to the people being welcomed into the Jewish faith and people. The sentence expressing the awareness the new *gerim* have of the misfortunes that have struck the Jewish people and their willingness nevertheless to become Jews is in line with the text of Yevamot 47a-b where the prospective *ger* is informed of the suffering of the Jewish nation and if he replies, I know and I am not worthy, he is accepted

immediately. In the face of the history and to a degree the present suffering and challenge of being Jewish, the rabbi goes on to ask God to strengthen the gerim to help the live by the commitments they made and to find joy and satisfaction in living a Jewish life as well as happiness and strength as members of the community. The section closes with a bracha referring to God, whose presence is a source of joy. In essence a wish that the gerim be aware of and experience the presence of God and find that divine presence a source of joy.

The next element of the service is a public statement of commitment that parallels very closely some of the statements that were discussed in the section on gemirat da'at. It includes the elements of freely of her/his own volition committing exclusively to Judaism, and entering into the covenant, a pledge of loyalty to Judaism and the Jewish people, an undertaking to live an active Jewish life- in the home, in the synagogue and in the community, as well as to continue her/his Jewish study. Finally the declaration ends with a forward looking vow to raise any children the gioret may have as Jews. What follows is the recitation of selections from Psalms 19: 8-10 that describe the Torah, the teachings of God, the fear of God and God's judgement, that may be intended to reassure the ger of the wisdom of their choice to follow God and the Torah. The subsequent verse from Proverbs 4:2 and 3:17-18 continue the theme of a good inheritance not to be abandoned and the Torah being a tree of life to which one should hold fast. In addition to the verse from the Tanach, the service also includes selections from Edmond Flag's 1927 letter to his unborn grandchild about why he is a Jew. It is a text of compassion, hope, promise and optimism, of the Jew's belief that humanity can complete the work of creation and still remember that humanity has its specific place in creation. The final text is the famous quote from Ruth in which she commits herself to joining Naomi, her people, and her God. The section of verses presents a characterisation of the Torah and the teachings of Judaism that the gerim associate with through reading the text of Ruth's unbreakable lifelong commitment to Naomi, her people and her God. Having declared their allegiance to Judaism, to the Jewish people and to God in two different ways, the gerim stand before the open aron kodesh where symbolically they again accept the Torah, physically, holding it in their arms and over their hearts and spiritually with the recitation of the Sh'ma and ve'avavta.

The final section of the service is one of affirmation of the relationship- to the past, the non-Jewish family that confirms the shared universal elements of their faith and Judaism and pledges to respect the different choices that their relative has made. The Jewish family, representing those who are born Jewish, the present and future family of the gerim, welcome the new Jews by Choice and reassure them that the Torah, that Judaism, the revelation and the relationship with God, is not the specific preserve of those born Jewish, but is open and accessible to all. The rabbi concludes by reassuring all present. The bond with the past, with those who raised the gioret will remain intact and the Jewish name links the person to the People of Israel who are their destiny and on their behalf, the rabbi expresses delight in being able to welcome those who in faith join the Jewish people. With the relationships established and reconfirmed, the gerim are blessed with the Priestly Blessing, a blessing of relationship and the presence of God in one's life. The final note is one of thanks to God for enabling all present to live to see the moment they have been experiencing.

What is striking is the repeated reassurances built into the MJLF service. Although the gerim are welcomed in statements redolent of hope and trust in a future in which they play a role in reshaping

the world as Isaiah knew it, the prayers offered on behalf of the gerim are for strength and success on what the rabbi clearly expects to be an arduous journey. The gerim are asked to pledge allegiance in an affirmative verbal pledge, through the repetition of the pledge of Ruth, the symbolic representative of all gerim, also related to messianic expectation as the one who tradition would have it gave birth to the forefathers of the messiah. The gerim once more go through the symbolic action of receiving a Torah scroll from the aron kodesh and holding it while reciting the Sh'ma as a founding principle of the Jewish people. It is only after repeating their vows of loyalty three times that they can proceed to recognise their ties to their non-Jewish family and their non-Jewish past and be welcomed by Jewish family. Only after being certain of their commitment beyond any doubt that the rabbi acknowledges that the gerim have two names, two identities that they must juggle and balance. Then the rabbi welcomes the gerim into the community and blesses them as one of the people of Israel, with the Priestly Blessing.

Liturgy from Ma'aglei Tzedek¹¹¹

The siddur contains a giur service for the synagogue that combines all the different elements of the giur process into a liturgical whole that can be performed by a rabbi and two others, who meet as a beit din. The texts in the Ma'aglei Tzedek were apparently the model for the MJLF ceremony. The only difference in the services is the addition in the MJLF service of the readings for the non-Jewish and Jewish families, texts which do not appear in the service in the Rabbi's Manual.

With the service framed as an entire conversion service, the composition of the liturgy makes more sense. The initial prayer frames what is being offered to the prospective ger: God's blessings, truth revealed to all humanity, the Torah and all those who have made a similar choice before, joining the People of Israel of their own volition. Then there is a reference to our history of martyrdom (a nod to the text in Yevamot) and still the candidate decided to become Jewish. The remainder of the text is the second half of the equation. If the ger accepts may s/he always find satisfaction in that decision, strength and happiness as a member of the community and finding joy in the presence of God.

Having presented the candidate with the situation the individual is asked to make an affirmation, not to prove something to the community, but to confirm her/his choice for the beit din that must be convinced of her/his sincerity and commitment. The gemirat da'at, the final resolve to convert is expressed through the declaration and supported by the recitation of the verse from tehilim (Psalm 19 and 119- for the full text see Annex E) that speak of the wonderful qualities of the torah and the teachings of God. The reading written by Edmond Fleg is a different sort of reaffirmation, a modern set of verse that touch on the emotional, ethical, moral nature of Judaism and of the universal elements of Judaism, the promise and obligation to be God's partner in continuing the work of creation while recognising that humanity is still part of that creation, not its pinnacle or its master. The recitation of Ruth's pledge to Naomi is the final affirmation the gioret presents to the beit din.

When the beit din is satisfied with the candidates sincerity, integrity and allegiance the Jew by Choice is brought to stand before the open ark where s/he is handed a Torah to place over her/his heart and recite the Sh'ma "the affirmation that has sustained the Jewish people in life since our

¹¹¹ Polish, ed. Ma'agle Tzedek.

beginnings.”¹¹² Having joined her/himself to the history of Israel through this ancient statement of faith and spoken of love for God, the ger returns the sefer torah to the aron and is given her/his Jewish name and the priestly blessing emblematic of the relationship between God and Israel, God’s nation of priests. Together, all the Jews participating in the ceremony, new and less new join in reciting the shehehianu.

As a giur service, the liturgy has an altogether different role than it appears to in the MJLF context where it is a ceremony for welcoming new members of the People of Israel. In the setting of a beit din, the multiple repetitions of the Jew by Choice’s commitment, pledges of loyalty and faith, assurances of allegiance have a proper place. There seems less justification for the congregation demanding such an extensive reassurance from someone newly accepted by the beit din who as their representative and as it were, the representative of the divine contractor of the covenant with the giorer has already been convinced of the person’s sincerity and decided that the candidate was worthy of attaching themselves to the inheritance of Israel and to be counted among its members.

Liturgy from the Moreh Derekh¹¹³

The liturgy is designed to give the rabbi using a series of choices and options in order to enable her/him to create a service. The preliminary instructions suggest “some public acknowledgement [of having met the requirements of r giur] may also be in order.”¹¹⁴ Erev Shabbat, Shabbat morning, Shavuot when the Megilat Ruth is read or when receiving an aliyah are all mentioned as potentially appropriate moments for the ceremony to take place. The instructions encourage the rabbi to conduct the service before the aron kodesh or the Torah that is being read for the congregation.

The liturgy begins with a choice of two tefilot, both of which are entirely in English. The first contextualises God and Torah by emphasising the universal role of the particularistic adherents of Judaism. Avraham and Sarah were called to make God’s sovereignty known to all humanity and Moshe was summoned to teach Torah, bringing it to all humanity and as a result all people closer to God. It then petitions God to bless the Jew by Choice who is standing before the aron kodesh as if standing at Sinai to accept God’s sovereignty and the mitzvot with love. The tefilah proceeds to express the hope that the Jew by Choice will live as a true and righteous member of Israel, sharing the heritage, the burdens and joys and the anticipated glory of the redemption. God is asked to spread over the giorer the shelter of peace and grant the person the treasure of God’s blessings that result from a life of torah and ma’asim tovim. The prayer gives a universal meaning to the receiving of Torah, a mission as it were to the one who desires to join the Jewish people. Then it provides the mechanism for joining, accepting Torah, as the Israelites did at Sinai and finally asks God to support the person in living out their new identity as a Jew and to do so in peace and joy.

The alternate prayer is very similar to one contained in the services in Taher Libénou and Ma’aglei Tzedek which begins “At this sacred and joyous moment...” and is placed immediately after the baruch ha-ba. The differences in the text are a result of the different relationships the two movements have with the Torah. The Moreh Derekh speaks not of a universal truth revealed by God

¹¹² CCAR Rabbi’s Manual 1988 205.

¹¹³ Rabbinical Assembly *Rabbi’s Manual* (New York 1998) J-20 – J-25.

¹¹⁴ *Moreh Derekh* J-20.

to all, but of the gift of Torah that lights the path, enhances our lives with meaning and helps Jews to live a life that reflects the divine image human beings bear. Similarly, when speaking of previous Jews by Choice, the CCAR/MJLF version describes them seeking to serve God through the faith and people of Israel as opposed to the RA version that has the Jews by Choice embracing “a life of Torah and *mitzvot*, thereby accepting the destiny of the Jewish people.” These types of changes continue through the remaining paragraph of the second prayer.

The next element of the liturgy is the *keriyat shem*, the naming. It speaks of the significance of the name, linking the Jew by Choice to the Jewish people in all times and all places. The Hebrew name is announced along with the hope that it brings respect and honour to the person and the Jewish people. Unlike the other ceremonies which mention both of the *ger/gioret*'s names and the ties they represent to the person's past and their new future, the Moreh Derekh ceremony only concerns itself with the ties to the Jewish people which is not as realistic and demands a much greater sacrifice and a much more significant loss on the part of the Jew by Choice, a loss which none of the ceremonies acknowledge, though one could say that on such joyous occasions it is not appropriate to introduce sadness or distress.

Torah, in the following paragraph is portrayed as a guide through history from the moment of revelation until today and in taking the teachings of the Torah to heart recall Ruth. At this point Ruth's declaration of allegiance to Naomi, her people and her God is repeated. The transition from the naming to Torah as guide and then to Ruth is not particularly clear or self apparent. While Ruth is a model of faithfulness and good deeds, she is not a scholar and it would be challenging to find evidence in the simple meaning of the Megilat Ruth being learned or a Torah scholar. She was not guided by torah per se as much as by her innate goodness and kind nature. Perhaps the connection is that the teachings of the Torah will guide a person to develop such a good and kind character, but such a speculation is simply that.

The Jew by Choice is then asked to open the aron kodesh and read the kabbalat ol mitzvot document, the acceptance of the yoke of the commandments, that was discussed in the chapter on gemirat da'at. With the pledge made by the Jew by Choice to be obligated by all the mitzvot as reassurance, the *ger* can proceed to read the Sh'ma and the ve'ahavta once again binding her/himself to the people, to God and to Judaism through love, heart and might and to do so at all times in all locations and to teach the commandments to one's children. The ceremony ends with the reading of the teudat giur.

This liturgy has much more of the feeling of being a legal procedure than a welcome or a celebration of the *gioret* and their choices. There are no words of welcome, in spite of the ceremony being titled “A welcoming ceremony”. The drum beat that resonates throughout is the idea of covenant, relationship to the Torah and the mitzvot and all the value historic and present that comes from observing the commandments and the teachings of the Torah. Given this approach *torat Adonai temimah* and the remainder of those verse from Tehilim would have been appropriate but do not appear. The emphasis seems to be primarily on the binding nature of the commitment, “you shall be

linked to the Jewish people wherever you are, in this lifetime and beyond.”¹¹⁵ Without the welcome and the celebration and the focus on the Jew by Choice her/himself, the Judaism that is revealed in the words of this liturgy is dry, obligating and focused on Torah rather than the people who live by it.

Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues (UK)

The service for Admission to Judaism, קבלת גרים, may be done either in public or in private. While the majority of gerim have in the past preferred a private ceremony, recently the trend seems to be that there are increasingly more public ceremonies.¹¹⁶ The ceremony itself is relatively short and has parallels to the MJLF liturgy, although whereas the MLJF ceremony begins with baruch haba and then cites a text from Isaiah, this liturgy begins with a text from Isaiah that also draws a link between the end of days and gerim, those strangers who choose to serve the God of Israel in love. The ending, “My house of prayer shall be called a house of prayer for all people” might seem to obviate the need for giur, since all people not only Jews, by choice or birth, will be able to pray in God’s house. Nevertheless, the pledge that God will bring those that hold fast to the covenant to God’s holy mountain and make them joyful in God’s house is certainly an oath to remember. It provides one with hope during a difficult and demanding journey and gives one the energy needed to reach the moment of promise. The ger is then welcomed and immediately asked the questions that in other movements or communities are asked during the beit din as gemirat da’at. These are meant to ascertain: that the prospective ger is indeed in all respects committed to becoming exclusively Jewish, by her/his own free will, he desires to enter the covenant, will be loyal in all circumstances to Judaism and the Jewish people, will practice Judaism in his personal life and as an active member of the community and finally, will secure the future by raising any children he may have as Jew. Since the Liberal Movement does not require either brit or mikvah, these questions as well as the declaration of faithfulness and allegiance that follows are the sign that the gioret provides the rabbis as representatives, as it were, of the divine and of the community that in exchange for acceptance and welcome, the future Jew by Choice has understood the reciprocal nature of the relationship in addition to the obligations and responsibilities the covenantal relationship entails and will fulfil them. The declaration makes exactly that point and leads into an entreaty to God to give the person strength to honour their commitment in a way that makes them a credit to their newly adopted people, a blessing to humanity and glory to God’s name, in that as a ger tzedek the individual will be under the scrutiny of both the Jews that s/he has just joined and the non-Jews s/he has just forsaken.

As in the other ceremonies, the declaration is read before the open aron kodesh while the ger is holding a sefer torah, again a representative of God and God’s presence through the revelation and the text that the Jewish people hold sacred. While holding the Torah, the gioret repeats one line from the words of Ruth to Naomi: “Your people shall be my people and your God my God.” This is similar to the MJLF ceremony and in a further parallel to that and to the Dutch and Swiss ceremonies the Sh’ma and the first line of the ve’ahavta are recited. This construction is in a way similar to biblical poetry where the first half of the verse and the second half have parallel meanings though they may have different slightly in nuance or shading. The Amech ami statement is in a manner of speaking a parallel statement of identity and belief to the Sh’ma and ve’ahavta. It joins the individual

¹¹⁵ Moreh Derekh J-23.

¹¹⁶ Interview Rabbi Danny Rich, 16 March 2012.

to the People of Israel and also articulates the new relationship between the Jew by Choice and the God of Israel, of whom they are now a part.

With these commitments and declarations of identity and faith, the representatives of the community reciprocate the amekh ami statement by declaring akhinu ata, you are our brother. The text goes on to provide a reciprocal reassurance to the ger/gioret. Quoting verses from Mishlei, Proverbs and Tehilim, Psalms, the Torah, the tradition and wisdom of Israel is described as a good inheritance. The text elaborates by adding that it is a tree of life, it makes its adherents happy and brings them to pleasantness and peace. Having established the relationship, one could say that both sides have made their commitment vows, in the presence of God as represented by both the Torah and the ark, the Torah is replaced and the aron kodesh is closed.

Based on the new relationships that redefine the person's connection to their former and present world, they are given a new name to mark the transformation from who they were before to becoming a Jew and a member of the Jewish People. The mi she-berakh asks God to bless "our brother/sister who has come to shelter under God's wings. And announces her/his new name by which s/he will be known in the community of Israel. Finally, the new Jew, crowned with a new name and bond with new ties to the Jewish people, Judaism and the God of our ancestors is given the Priestly blessing as a guide and shield before going into the world. A prayer that God will honour the newly sanctified covenantal relationship by being present in the ger tzedek's life, protecting her/him, being gracious to her/him and giving the gioret peace.

The Movement for Reform Judaism (UK)

The Service of Affirmation of the Jewish Faith is also a relatively short ceremony that was developed in the late 1960's and was usually performed as a private ritual. The candidate stood before the aron kodesh and was asked to confirm their dedication and the principles of Judaism and practice to which they would adhere. The torah was then handed to them and some additional prayers and benedictions were said. More recently, the service is predominantly conducted on a Friday night in front of the congregation.¹¹⁷ This seems to be a general trend repeated across communities.

Since it was first written the service has been revised. In comparison with the service as it appeared in the 1977 Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship¹¹⁸, the Service of Affirmation that was included in the 2008 edition of Forms of Prayer¹¹⁹ is not extremely different in terms of the texts and the substance. Nonetheless, the reordering of the elements of the service and the use of more egalitarian language make some significant statements. The 1977 version of the service begins with a prayer by the ger that in part is a declaration of commitment, but is also a statement of identity, "I stand in Your presence as a member of Your people". The Jew by Choice's prayer is also an appeal for support and success in the supplicant's Jewish journey. "Help me follow the teachings of Judaism, live a Jewish life and be part of Israel's destiny." There is a request for strength to share in the difficulties, and dangers as well as in the responsibilities and opportunities. The gioret asks for

¹¹⁷ Interview with Rabbi Andrew Goldstein 15 March 2012.

¹¹⁸ The Assembly of Rabbis of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, eds. *Seder Ha'tefilot, Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship* (London 1977) 287-288.

¹¹⁹ Movement for Reform Judaism *Seder Ha'tefilot, Forms of Prayer* (London 2008) 363-365.

guidance and that her/his words and actions be worthy of a blessing, bringing honour to Israel and make God's name holy in the world. These last few lines are quite similar to the final words of the ger's prayer in the Liberal's Kabalat Gerim service. As in other services discussed here, the gioret then recites the Sh'ma and the first line of the ve'ahavta.

Following these pledges of allegiance and reaffirmation of identity, the rabbi reads a text that commences with a welcome, bestows on the gioret her/his Hebrew name. The prayer continues to ask for God to care for this person who has been "called to serve You". God's image should be a source of inspiration and foster love for God's teachings. The prayer asks that Jew by Choice be a loyal member of the community and gain it respect among the general population with the ultimate goal of helping humanity to righteousness and truth. The Rabbi proceeds to recapitulate the Jew by Choice's pledges and declarations regarding belief in God that formed and loves everyone, in God that judges humanity by their righteousness is approachable by all through prayer and integrity. The ger relies on God's love and mercy. The last section of the rabbi's prayer expresses the hope that the Jew by Choice's learning will stay with he/him, that the person's devotion and love for Judaism and the Jewish family will grow and be a source of comfort, strength and joy as needed. The Jew by Choice, God is reminded, has come to shelter under your wings, and therefore, the prayer concludes, be the ger's shield and refuge from now on.

The 2008 version of the service for the most part employs more egalitarian language. Rather than mankind, it refers to humanity and it maintains the genderless references to God that are facilitate by the form of address being in the second person: You. The service is also preserves the previous arrangement of the service that presents the rabbi with two versions of the same prayer; one for a man and one for a woman. This enables the texts to consistently use his/him in the one and her/hers/she in the other. A consistent approach was taken to the quote from Megilat Ruth¹²⁰ that follows the rabbi's prayer for the ger. It is also presented in two versions one to be read for a woman and the other for a man. Given the universal ideals of Progressive Judaism that include an inclusive egalitarian approach to the role of men and women in society and Judaism, that many if not most of the prospective gerim are women and the increasingly important (public) role that women play in Jewish communities and Jewish life, the change of mankind for humanity and people is welcome.

The other significant change is the order of the service. The most recent version of the Affirmation service begins with a welcome by the rabbi and the extended prayer for the gioret tzedek that is the same as the text in the 1977 version. The community has already accepted the person through the auspices of the beit din. Requiring the Jew by Choice to once again initiate the process with an additional declaration of loyalty and faith prior to receiving a welcome and recognition of the person's hard won new identity must have seemed an unnecessary first step. That is not to say that the Movement was ready to dispense with it altogether. Precisely the same text remains in the service, but after the Rabbi's prayer. However, there is a substantive difference between the statements of commitment found in other services and the text incorporated here. Whereas the Liberal's service includes a statement that begins with "I solemnly declare..." a sentiment that resonates with most of the other post-giur liturgies discussed here, the text in the Reform service is more holistic and accepting of the Jew by Choice's new identity. The ger stands before the

¹²⁰ Megilat Ruth 2:12.

congregation and makes an offering to God, an offering of the heart and states her/his chosen identity, "I have chosen to enter the family of Israel. I stand in your presence as a member of Your people." The Jew by choice is an active participant, empowered by the text to claim their identity publicly and to approach God in prayer on her/his own behalf and as one whose actions and words have an influence on Israel and on how God is perceived. Even the rabbi's prayer for the Jew by Choice does not start from a presumption of deficit, of something missing. It asks for the ger/gioret's love to grow stronger over the years, her/his devotion grows from strength to strength and speaks about the relationship between God and the person as already existing- s/he relies on God, is filled with awe and trust and so on. The change of order in the liturgy and the change in the instruction, in 1977 the note says "To be recited by the convert" and in the 2008 version "To be recited by the ger tzedek", create an entirely different atmosphere and project a very different image of the Jew by Choice- a ger tzedek, who is welcome and not always required to prove himself. Instead the gioret is one that brings skills, experience, knowledge and a pre-existing relationship with God into the community. In that way this text recalls the approach that was employed in the mikvah liturgy written by Corrie Zeidler, based on a ceremony by Rabbi Jeffrey A. Marx: holistic, respectful, trusting, cognisant of what the ger tzedek experiences and welcoming of who they are and what they can contribute.

Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism

The Ceremony for the Welcoming of Converts to the Community, טקס קבלת הגרים לקהילה, is usually conducted on the erev Shabbat following the t'vilah.¹²¹ It begins in the same fashion as the 2008 Movement for Reform Judaism Service of Affirmation of the Jewish Faith with a welcome to our new brothers and sisters who after months and years of learning and spiritual journey are joining the People of Israel. It is an honour for us and we welcome them into the heart of the community with happiness and outstretched arms. The rabbi blesses the gerim in all that they will do and in their coming to the Jewish people. The rabbi then explains that the gerim are entering a covenant with God who guides us in our lives and who orients our ways. She completes the prayer with a wish that the new gerei tzedek always feel blessed strengthened and protected by the orientation and protection of God. The pattern found in most of the other ceremonies repeats here, with a text from Isaiah (2: 2-3) related to the end of days when all the nations go up to the mountain of God and God will show them the divine ways and they will follow because Torah will come forth from Tzion and the word of God from Jerusalem. An appropriate text given the location of the service and hope for a redemptive future inspired by living in the land. The subsequent texts from tehilim, Psalms (118: 26-29) are the traditional verses of welcome and thanksgiving to God.

Having concluded the preliminaries, the gerim are invited to the aron and each one is given a sefer torah to hold and they stand together under a chuppah made from a tallit. They say together "Our God, God of Avraham and Sarah, before this holy congregation we are choosing to be counted among the congregation of Israel, to inherit from its inheritance to take part in its destiny and to be obligated by its mitzvot. Give us the strength to walk in your ways in truth, righteousness and faithfulness. Praiseworthy are we, how good is our portion, how pleasant our fate and how lovely our inheritance. Praiseworthy are we that we say Sh'ma Yisrael, Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God Adonai is One." This is a reaffirmation of their choices, of their identity and obligation. Combined with the use of several lines from *birkhot ha-shahar*, the blessings that begin *shaharit*, the weekday

¹²¹ Interview with Rabba Galia Sadan 25 June 2012.

morning service, that express their joy at having made the choices that they did make is both intended for the community of which the *gerei tzedek* are now a part and is symbolic of the relationship they have entered into with God, the Jewish people and the community- symbolised by the Torah and the chuppah. The image of Torah and chuppah is reminiscent of the midrashim that depict the revelation at Sinai as a wedding between God and the Jewish people with the Torah as the *mohar*, the item of value exchanged to make the wedding contract valid, the wedding gift or the *ketubah*, the wedding contract. Here the *gerim* are standing with God under the tallit that symbolises the sheltering wings of the divine presence, under the chuppah expressing their joy and their good fortune at being with such a wonderful partner.

The leader of the ceremony then offers a *mi sheberakh* for the *gerei tzedek*. Naming them all by their Hebrew names, the leader identifies them as *gerei tzedek* that have joined the congregation of Israel and like those who are already members are children of Avraham and Sarah, in that way setting them on the same level as the existing members and emphasising the heritage the Jew and new Jews by choice share. And with words from *tefilat ha-derekh*, the traveller's prayer, the service leader asks God to guide them in peace and ensure they enjoy grace, loving-kindness and compassion in the eyes of all who see them. To spread over them and over us the *sukkah*, the shelter of divine peace. Finally the leader paraphrasing Psalm 90 asks God that "the Lord our God show us compassion and may God establish the work of our hands. May God firmly establish the work of our hands."¹²² The prayer reaffirms the new identity of the *gerim* and their place within the community, but also that they still have a journey to travel, one that involves God, other Jews and other human beings. It is a voyage of discovery and development where the kindness, compassion and good will of others shape the *ger/gioret's* experience, their learning and their emotional associations. The *tefilah* asks for them and for the community that in some way will travel with them on their journey, on a parallel journey as the ones who host the newborn Jews and must care for them and make them one of their own, for peace and shelter; perhaps it also refers to the broader meanings of peace as well: contentment, tranquillity, serenity and wholeness. At this, the entire congregation says, "You are our brothers and sisters". By acclaim the *gerim* are now unequivocally part of the community and the leader blesses them with the *birkat kohanim* and everyone joins together in the *Sheheḥiyanu*, to mark this point in time which was hallowed by sanctifying the relationship between the *gerei tzedek*, the community, God and the entire People of Israel.

Here again the *gerim* are active participants in a ceremony that while still having them restate their choices and the resulting new identity, enables them to express their joy at the decisions they have made and provides the community the opportunity to support and reaffirm those choices by welcoming the *gerei tzedek*, accepting them, articulating their shared heritage and spiritual ancestry and finally, in the last *tefilah* referencing the parallel connected journeys they must take with each other and asking God to watch over both the *gerim* and those who are already members. It is service which is positive and creates an open environment for the *gerim* to begin take up their new roles as members of the community and perhaps more importantly for most *gerim*, as members of the Children of Israel.¹²³

¹²² Translation from Rabbi Jules Harlow, ed. *Siddur Sim Shalom* (New York 1994) 684.

¹²³ Most of those who convert in Israel do not remain active members of synagogues; they visit for holidays and life cycle events, if that. The *giur* provides them an opportunity to integrate more fully in Israeli society

Conclusion

The liturgy of the various ceremonies convey a wide range of emotions and tones as well as depicting various relationships and their distinct characteristics. Most of the ceremonies address the relational aspect of the Jew by Choice's transformation: the person's relationship to God and the tradition, mitzvot and Torah, the ethical and moral birthright in addition to the relationship with the people of Israel, the individual's community and the in some instances humanity writ large. Many of the ceremonies present Judaism and its adherents as having a role to play in completing creation and making it better. The liturgy written by Rabba Sadan, and those from the Movement for Reform Judaism dealt with the Jew by Choice themselves more than any other and were more supportive and celebratory too. The services to welcome a ger tzedek into the community should do just that. It should be a celebration of entering the covenant as is a brit milah and a *zeved ha-bat*. The transformation from candidate to ger tzedek is momentous and life altering, having a wider impact on the community, the Jewish people, and the wider general community as well. The completion of this step in the giur process should have a liturgy that reflects the significance of transformation and the potential that is heralded in the different verses from Isaiah that are quoted but almost never made explicit, the redemptive potential of choosing Judaism, a relationship with God and God's holy people and nation of priests, the Children of Israel.

Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

In general, one could say that progressive Judaism, wherever the movement or community is located is open to people who seek to become gerim and by and large the people are helped to do so. The batei din that interview the prospective Jews by Choice are also not seeking to reject candidates,¹²⁴ though on very rare occasions that does happen. As Moshe Zemer, the former MARAM Av Beit Din, Head of the beit din, wrote : "[w]e encourage candidates and welcome them cordially, as tradition demands, and promise them that if they sincerely comply with our requirements and master the material within a reasonable period of time they will be accepted into our faith,..."¹²⁵ Based on the interviews conducted for this paper, while not exhaustive, the trend seems to be that those seeking to become gerim are categorised by communities into three groups. The smallest group in practice are people who are not Jewish and have no connection to the Jewish people at all, but who seeking to become gerim come out of their own personal desire to become Jewish. The second group is composed of patrilineal Jews, adults and children with a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, who

and be part of the greater whole of the Jewish people that one experiences throughout Israel and Israeli society, culture, politics, and so forth. (Interview with Rabba Galia Sadan 25June 2012.)

¹²⁴ Jonathan A. Romain. *Faith and Practice, A Guide to Reform Judaism Today*, Reform Synagogues of Great Britain: (London, 1991). 177.

¹²⁵ Zemer, Rabbi Dr. Moshe, *Evolving Halakhah, A Progressive Approach to Traditional Jewish Law* (Woodstock, VT, USA 2003). 138.

would like to become Jews for all purposes in the progressive Jewish world. The third cohort is composed of people already in a relationship with a Jew and are interested in becoming Jewish as well. Each of these groups is dealt with in a slightly differently manner during the giur process. The variations can be found in: the time it takes to be accepted into the process, the length of the study course and its contents, whether or not a hatafat dam is required from males who already have had a brit; whether the formal giur is called a giur or some variation of 'confirmation of Jewish status' and so forth. Almost all the rabbis interviewed indicated that they tried to make the process more accessible to people who were from zerah kodesh and many indicted there is a concentration on facilitating the process of transforming mixed marriages into Jewish families where both parents are Jewish.¹²⁶

For all the points of accord, the giur process in Europe and Israel is a symphony with variations on a theme playing in different sections of the orchestra. In some areas national batei din have made it possible to have national standards and requirements for giur. In others, each community has its own approach. Even in places where there is a national beit din, local rabbis still retain a significant amount of autonomy as it relates to the initial intake process, the study course, and the final ceremonies if any. They are the ones who have the initial interview with persons interested in becoming gerim. They decide to refer someone to a colleague, to accept them or to send them away. The rabbi assesses the prospective ger's progress and ultimately decides when it is appropriate to inform the beit din that a person is ready to undergo the final rituals. For communities that cannot constitute a beit din or are too small, the European Beit Din is available to organise and bring in 3 rabbis in order to convene a beit din to interview candidates and decide whether to accept them as Jews and welcome them into the Jewish community as gerim. The EBD has its own set of standards that are in many cases, but not always, similar to those implemented by the individual progressive movements and synagogues in Europe.

The rituals and liturgy that play a role in the giur process have developed unevenly. There is very little developed for the beginning of the process with the exception of the administrative rituals of meetings, interviews, forms and applications. Thereafter the process of learning, identity formation and integration are also not marked by any ceremonies. It is only after the preparatory steps are completed that the first of the traditional formal rituals takes place. New liturgy has been added to the mikvah ceremony, and ceremonies have been created to welcome Jews by Choice into the congregations they will call home. Finally, the post giur process is also a wilderness in which the gerim, called newborns by the Talmud in Yevamot (22a), wander. They have lost the special status of student, but nothing else supports them as they try and translate their book learning and limited experience into practice. They are also trying to fit in, to learn from a community in which they are now among the most knowledgeable, a position that many born Jews resent, though they have not chosen to gather more knowledge about Judaism themselves.

The analysis and discussion in the paper brought into focus a range of issues and patterns. Below are a number of recommendations developed as a first attempt to stimulate conversation about the issues, the root causes, as well as if and how they might best be addressed.

¹²⁶ Interview with Awraham Soetendorp 20 May 2012.

Recommendations

1. There is much to be said for the attitude of most batei din that see their role as being there to help people become Jewish. Given that the rabbis are not looking to refuse people, the fact is that as far as one can tell, if all goes well and the prospective gerim fulfil all their obligations under the giur programme, they will become members of the community. As soon as a community accepts candidates into the programme, the congregation has an obligation to them and they have certainly committed to the congregation and the giur process. One could view it as a covenantal relationship by which both parties are bound, a moment of assumption of obligation both by the prospective ger and by the community. Rather than do nothing to mark that moment, it probably makes sense to have a ceremony at the beginning of the giur process, after the rabbi or rabbinic institution permits the candidate to begin the giur process to recognition that a moment of consequence has occurred that changes things for all concerned.
2. The course of study that the prospective gerim will follow is not just another course. It is another step on a journey that will change their lives, their identities, their lifestyles, their relationships, and the context of their lives. A ritual held for the potential Jews by Choice and the teachers when they start the education course/programme could alter what is now a mundane event into a powerful moment of sanctity and transition. Such a ceremony would frame the learning programme as something other than just another course of study. Rather the ritual would contextualise the moment of beginning and keep foremost in the minds of the candidates, as a sort of kavanah, the relationship between this step and the journey as a whole.

In addition, the end of the ceremony could include a look forward. The rabbis and teachers could say to the students, today we are conducting a ceremony of welcome for you. At the end of the study course you are going to be designing your own ceremony- as a way of demonstrating your knowledge of liturgy and of Judaism but also as a way of saying thank you and to recognise the changes that each of you has gone through during this process.

3. The completion of the study programme and the final interview with the sponsoring rabbi are the last pre-beit din events of enormous significance that candidate will go through. As mentioned above, it is an opportunity for the prospective gerim to develop some ritual or event to mark the moment, and for the congregation to do something meaningful for them in recognition of what they have accomplished and the investment of time resources and self that made this possible. Such an approach would provide the moment with meaning and import in way that would otherwise not happen. As one possible model for a ceremony it could be appropriate to introduce the candidates to the idea of a siyyum, the cycle of learning, the ongoing interchange between beginning and end. From the congregational perspective one of the messages could be that rather than completing a step, this completion is in reality a commencement exercise. The prospective ger will be encouraged

to make study a regular part of their lives instead of bidding it farewell when the programme ends.

4. The dayanim of the beit din are sitting in judgement on the sincere desire of someone's heart. The kavanah written by Rabbi Yoram Mazor is an important reminder of that and therefore worth being adopted by batei din. It is a regular reminder that the members of the beit din have convened to judge someone's life and desires and should be cognisant of that before it begins to interview people. In some batei din it is a custom to light a candle when they convene to formalise a get, a Jewish religious divorce, and also when deciding on a giur. This is another model that could be used or adapted so there is some other symbolic presence in the room to remind people that the dayanim are sitting as representatives of klal yisrael and also, as it were, of the Shekhinah and they are to decide if someone will sit *takhat kanfei ha-shekhinah*.
5. Once an individual has met with the beit din and has been interviewed, the beit din could have a short liturgy or ceremony they use to celebrate with the ger who receives their approval to become Jewish and join the Jewish people. Alternatively one could say that since the mikvah in most places occurs so close in time that (where that is the case) the mikvah ceremony could serve that purpose, in which case there should be some element referring to that included in the mikvah ceremony.
6. In most places there is a huge emphasis placed on integration. This has been mentioned in a number of places above. In addition, once the giur process has been completed, abruptly everything stops. There is no more support for the gerim. According to the accounts gerim have written of their giur, it would be extremely helpful for there to be some ongoing support; be it a mentorship programme, a committee to facilitate and organise invitations for meals, support and/ or discussion groups such as the Ruth Group. Zurich, where the Board of Directors votes on whether to accept individuals into the giur programme is an interesting model. In some of the small communities in the Netherlands, this process may not be as formal, but the Board is involved in deciding how many gerim and in some cases which ones will be accepted. Without taking a position on having the Board vote on all prospective gerim, there is something to be said for involving the congregation and ensuring they have a sense of ownership for the giur programme and the gerim themselves.
7. The European Beit Din is the only institution that draws from communities in different countries and has a regional legitimacy no other institution possesses. As such it could in theory catalyse the development of a standard minimum set of requirements that all batei din or all member congregations of the EUPJ could adopt. It would help create a regional set of standards and especially for small congregations including those in Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union that do not have the resources, human or financial, to develop these resources on their own. This could include a curriculum and learning goals for the study course, standards about what a prospective ger should know and so forth. It would then be available to everyone who is a member of the EUPJ or the European Beit Din.

Chapter 8 Proposed Liturgy for a Ceremony Welcoming New Prospective Gerim as They Commence the Giur Process

Introduction

As discussed in chapter two, there are no rituals to mark the beginning of the giur process. The proposed ceremony would take place when there is a new group of prospective gerim that have been accepted by the rabbi or other approving institution to begin the giur process. Alternatively, the ceremony could take place just prior to the beginning of the study programme. In either case the ceremony would be an opportunity for the congregation to welcome the new prospective gerim that will begin the study course as well as attending services and shul events.

The rationale for having this kind of service at this early point in giur process is twofold. As soon as someone is accepted into the programme the community has a responsibility for them- if they die for example, they can be buried in the Jewish cemetery. However the community almost never acknowledges that obligation. In addition, there is a desire for the prospective gerim to integrate, but the community has almost no formal interaction with the people in the JBK at all. One of the other goals of the service is to provide an early introduction of the candidates for giur to the community and for the community to both acknowledge and accept their place in the community in a manner that will hopefully facilitate interaction between the members the prospective gerim.

Ceremony of Welcome and Acceptance

Community Leader:

It is said "Not only does the candidate go through the giur process, but the entire community accompanies them on the journey."¹²⁷

You have knocked on our communal gates as a seeker and of your own free will have asked to join your destiny with the destiny of the People of Israel. To shelter under the wings of the Shekhinah, the presence of God that dwells among us.

You have met with our rabbis, who spoke with you, questioned and probed. With them you shared the story of your journey, how you came to be standing here in this congregation before this community. And now you begin to take the next steps in your journey... And the congregation accompanies you.

הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי שֹׁלַח מִלְאָךְ לִפְנֵיךְ לְשַׁמְרֶךָ בְּדַרְךְ וְלְהַבְיֵאֶךָ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הִכְנַתִּי:

(Exodus 23:20)

Prospective ger(im):

¹²⁷ Zeidler, Corrie, 'T'vilat mitgayarim' (The immersion of those undergoing giur) in: Lisitsa et al, *Parashat Hamayim*.

אחת | שאלתי מאת-יהוה אותה אבקש שבתי בבית-יהוה כל ימי חיי לתזות בנעם-
יהוה ולבקר בהיכלו:

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. (*Psalms 27: 4*)

Leader:

The Ethics of the Fathers, *Pirkei Avot*, tells us that God tested Avraham ten times.¹²⁸ The question then asked was why did God, who is all knowing, need to test Avraham. One answer given is that though God knew what Avraham would do, Avraham did not. The tests were as much, if not more, for Avraham himself to know what he was capable of accomplishing.

You too are about to enter a period of learning about yourself. You have answered the call that was Avraham's first test:

ויאמר יהוה אל-אברם לך-לה מארצה וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל-הארץ אשר אראך:

The Lord said to Abram "go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you." (*Genesis 12:1*)

You have put a foot across the threshold and the next phase of your journey awaits. You are about to leave your native land, the faith in which you were raised, the language which is a comfort in your mouth, the smells and sounds that touch the youth in your soul.

The Haggadah, our guide during the Passover celebration, reminds us that we have all taken a similar journey. "In the beginning our ancestors were idol worshippers. But now God has brought us near to serve Adonai."¹²⁹

Avraham too left home and habit. His home would be where faith and truth led. Avraham went into Canaan as an outsider. "And God took him outside, and said, "Gaze now, towards the heavens, and count the stars if you are able to count them!" (*Genesis 13:5*)

We will walk next to you on your journey, provide guides, teachers, Jewish experiences, mentors and hopefully you will find among us friends. Like you, we do not know the end of the journey, nor can we guarantee success. Who can say if at the end you will find the doorway you seek or if the elders at the gate will grant access.

Prospective ger(im):

¹²⁸ Pirkei Avot 5:4.

¹²⁹ Translation from Mishael Zion and Noam Zion, *A Night to Remember, The Haggadah of Contemporary Voices*, Zion Holiday Publications (Jerusalem, 2007) 56.

“Everyone must know that within them burns a candle and no one’s candle is identical with the candle of another. It is our obligation to work hard to reveal the light of our candle, and make of it a great torch to enlighten the whole world.”¹³⁰

Congregation:

Be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and try and love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to *live* the questions now. Perhaps you will gradually without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answers some distant day.”¹³¹

Congregation:

We receive you as our fellow human being created as we are in the image of God.
We receive you out of respect for your desire for earnest study,
We admire your resolute conviction and the decision of your own free will.

It is an honour to be your companions on this journey.

(The congregation showers the prospective gerim standing on the bimah with candy symbolising their good wishes and support for the candidate Jews by Choice.)

Congregation:

“There is no way of getting from here to there except by joining together and marching.”¹³²

Leader:

As you set out in your journey of learning and change, of seeking and new experiences and the community travels by your side, we bless you with the travellers prayer said by those who have already left the gates of their city and ask help from the Creator of All, the Everpresent, to help you reach your destination successfully, in peace and well-being.

רבוננו של עולם, אחינו ואחיותנו אשר נבראו בצלם אלהים באו לבקש פניך ולהסתבך בקהילתך. אנחנו חקרנו ודרשנו אותם ומצאנוהם ראוי להתחיל תהליך הגיור בתוך הקהלה הדושה הזאת.

אלהי הרחות לכל בשר יהי רצון מלפניך, שיצליחו בדרכהם: שתוליכיהם לשלום, ותצעידהם לשלום, ותדרכיהם לשלום, ותגיענו קולנו מבקשי פניך למחוז חפצנו לחיים ולשמחה ולשלום. ותצילנו מעזי פנים ומעזות פנים, מכף כל אדם רע, ומחבר רע, ומשכן רע, ומפגע רע, ומשטן המשחית, ומכל מיני פרעניות המתרגשות לבוא לעולם, ותשלח ברכה בכל מעשה ידינו, וימלאו כל־משאלות־לבינו לטובה, ותתננו לחן ולהסד

¹³⁰ Rav Avraham Isaac HaCohen Kook in: Zion and Zion, *A Night to Remember* 7.

¹³¹ Maria Rainer Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, Austria 1922. in: Zion and Zion, *A Night to Remember* 47.

¹³² From Michael Walzer *Exodus and Revolution* in: Zion and Zion, *A Night to Remember* Front cover.

ולרחמים בעיניך ובעיני כל רואינו, ותשמע קול תחנונינו, כי אל שומע תפלה ותחנון
אתה. ברוך אתה יי, שומע תפלה.

Master of All, our brothers and sisters who like us were created in the image of God have come to seek Your face and to join Your community. We investigated and we asked them and we found them worthy of beginning the conversion process among this holy community.

God of the spirit of all that lives may it be Your will that their journey will be successful. Lead them in peace, and guide their steps in peace, and orient them towards peace, and bring us, all of us who are seeking your presence, to our desired destination in life and joy and peace. And save us from insolence in others and from arrogance in ourselves, from vicious people, from evil neighbours, and from corrupt companions. Preserve us from misfortune, pestilence and from the powers of destruction and from all manner of punishments that may come into the world. Fulfil all the worthy desires of our heart for good. May we find grace, love and compassion in Your sight and in the sight of all who look on us. Hear the voice of our supplications, because you are God who hears prayers and supplications. Blessed are You, Eternal, who listens to prayer.

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¹³³ Also published in English as Parashat Hamayim, Immersion in Water as an Opportunity for Renewal and Spiritual Growth.

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Annexes

Annex A Talmud Texts on Giur Rituals

מסכות יבמות דף מז. א-ב

תנו רבנן: גר שבא להתגייר בזמן הזה, אומרים לו: מה ראית שבאת להתגייר? אי אתה יודע שישראל בזמן הזה דוויים, דחופים, סחופים ומטורפין, ויסורין באין עליהם? אם אומר: יודע אני ואיני כדאי, מקבלין אותו מיד. ומודיעין אותו מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות, ומודיעין אותו עון לקט שכחה ופאה ומעשר עני. ומודיעין אותו ענשן של מצות, אומרים לו: הוי יודע, שעד שלא באת למדה זו, אכלת חלב אי אתה ענוש כרת, חללת שבת אי אתה ענוש סקילה, ועכשיו, אכלת חלב ענוש כרת, חללת שבת ענוש סקילה. וכשם שמודיעין אותו ענשן של מצות, כך מודיעין אותו מתן שכר, אומרים לו: הוי יודע, שהעולם הבא אינו עשוי אלא לצדיקים, וישראל בזמן הזה - אינם יכולים לקבל - לא רוב טובה ולא רוב פורענות. ואין מרבין עליו, ואין מדקדקין עליו. קיבל, מלין אותו מיד. נשתיירו בו ציצין המעכבין את המילה, חוזרים ומלין אותו שניה. נתרפא, מטבילין אותו מיד ושני ת"ח עומדים על גביו, ומודיעין אותו מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות טבל ועלה - הרי הוא כישאל לכל דבריו. אשה, נשים מושיבות אותה במים עד צוארה, ושני ת"ח עומדים לה מבחוץ, ומודיעין אותה מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות. אחד גר ואחד עבד משוחרר. ובמקום שנדה טובלת, שם גר ועבד משוחרר טובלין וכל דבר שחוצץ בטבילה, חוצץ בגר ועבד משוחרר ובנדה.

מסכות קטנות, מסכת גרים פרק א'

(א) הרוצה להתגייר אין מקבלין אותו מיד. אומרים לו: מה לך להתגייר והלא אתה רואה את האומה הזאת נמוכה וכפופה ושפילה מכל האומות וחולאים ויסורים באים עליהן וקוברין בנים ובני בנים ונהרגין על המילה ועל הטבילה ועל שאר כל המצות ואינם נוהגים בפרהסיא כשאר כל האומות:
(ב) אם אמר: איני כדאי, פוטרין אותו והולך לו:
(ג) קבל עליו, הורידהו לבית הטבילה וכיסהו במים עד מקום הערוה, ואומרים לו מקצת דקדוקי מצות על מנת שהוא נותן בשכחה ובלקט ובפיאה ובמעשר:
(ד) כשם שאומרים לאיש כך אומרים לאשה ע"מ שתהא זהירה בנדה ובהדלקת הנר:
(ה) טבל ועלה אומרים לו דברים טובים ונכונים: במי נדבקת אשריך במי שאמר והיה העולם. שלא נברא העולם אלא בשביל ישראל, ולא נקראו בנים למקום אלא ישראל,
ואין חביבין לפני המקום אלא ישראל. כל אותם דברים שדברנו לך לא אמרנו לך אלא להרבות שורך:

Annex B Liturgy related to the Beit Din

Tefilah / Kavanah for the Beit Din before beginning their work

By Rabbi Yehoram Mazor

הַנְּנוּ מוֹכְנִים וּמְזַמְּנִים לְקַיֵּם מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה שֶׁל וְאַהֲבַתֶּם אֶת הַגֵּר.
בְּשִׁבְתֵּנוּ כְּבֵית דִּין לְדוֹן וּלְקַבֵּל גְּרִים,
יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלוֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלוֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ,
שֶׁתִּתֵּן בְּלִבֵּנוּ אֲהַבַת הַגֵּר, כִּי גְרִים וְתוֹשְׁבִים אֲנַחְנוּ עִמָּךְ.
אֲבָרְהֵם וְשָׂרָה אִמָּם שֶׁל גְּרִים, בְּזִכּוֹת הָאָב
וּבְזִכּוֹת רוּת - אִם כָּל הַבּוֹחֲרִים בְּאַמוּנָתְךָ,
יַעֲלֶה זְכוּרֹן כָּל גְּרֵי הַצֶּדֶק לְפָנֶיךָ וּלְפָנֵינוּ בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה.
כִּי "גֵּר אָנֹכִי בְּאֶרֶץ אֵל תִּסְתַּר מִמֶּנִּי מִצְוֹתֶיךָ" (תהילים קי"ט, יט).
עַל הַצְּדִיקִים וְעַל הַחֲסִידִים וְעַל גְּרֵי הַצֶּדֶק וְעַלֵּינוּ יְהִמוּ נָא רַחֲמֶיךָ.
וְהַצֵּלחַ דְּרַכְּנוּ אֲשֶׁר אָנוּ הוֹלְכִים בָּהּ.

Questions for the Beit Din to ask the *Ger/Gioret*

Giur Service in the Synagogue¹³⁴

(Questions are directed to ger/gioret by rabbi [and members of beit din].¹³⁵

1. Do you choose to enter the eternal covenant between God and the people Israel and to become a Jew of your own free will?
2. Do you accept Judaism to the exclusion of all other religious faiths and practices?
3. Do you pledge your loyalty to Judaism and to the Jewish people under all circumstances?
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. Do you commit yourself to the pursuit of Torah and Jewish knowledge?
6. If you should be blessed with children, do you promise to raise them as Jews?

Conversion Service¹³⁶

... At least two persons representative of the Jewish community; preferably Rabbis, should be invited to witness the conversion service. If Rabbis are not available, the two leading officers of the congregation should be selected.

It is suggested that this service take place in the synagogue whenever possible.

The convert should then be examined in the subject matter of instruction. Having proved to the witnesses a satisfactory acquaintance with the subjects as specified above, the prospective convert should be asked the following questions by the Rabbi:

QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED THE CONVERT.

1. Is it of your own free will that you seek admittance into the Jewish fold?
2. Do you renounce your former faith?
3. Do you pledge your loyalty to Judaism?
4. Do you promise to cast in your lot with the people of Israel amid all circumstances and conditions?
5. Do you promise to lead a Jewish life?
6. Should you be blessed with children, do you agree to rear your children according to the Jewish faith?
7. Do you also agree to have male children circumcised?

When all these questions have been answered in the affirmative, the convert is to take the following pledge, to be recited by heart or to be repeated by the convert, with the Rabbi prompting it: . . .

¹³⁴ Polish, ed., *Ma'aglei Tzedek*, 200-201.

¹³⁵ In place of the questions, the *ger/gioret* can also make an affirmation. See Annex C Gemirat Da'at for the text of the affirmation.

¹³⁶ CCAR *Rabbi's Manual* (Cincinnati 1928) 30-31

Questions for the Beit Din to ask the prospective *ger/gioret*¹³⁷

Essay questions for the Bet Din

About a month to six weeks before meeting with the Bet Din, a conversion candidate should begin preparing an essay. The document should include the candidate's: (1) full name, (2) address, (3) home and business phone numbers, and (4) desired Hebrew name. In addition, the paper, to be distributed to each member of the Bet Din, should address the following issues:

1. Describe the process that led you to want to become Jewish.
2. Which Jewish values and beliefs do you find most appealing and persuasive?
3. How is Judaism more appropriate for you than your former religion or lifestyle?
4. Describe how your personal and home life has changed because of Jewish tradition and how it may yet change in the future.
5. Describe your sense of identification with the Jewish people in relation to Israel, world Jewry, the local Jewish community, and your synagogue.
6. Describe how you intend to fulfill the mitzvah of *צדקה*.
7. What is your commitment to prayer and religious services?
8. What are your plans for future Jewish study?
9. If blessed with children, how will you handle their Jewish education?
10. List the Jewish books you have read and the newspapers or periodicals to which you subscribe.

The Bet Din's final questions of the conversion candidate

If the Bet Din is satisfied with the written answers and oral responses, the interview may be concluded with the following questions:

1. Are you converting to Judaism by your own free will and volition, without coercion or undue external influence?
2. Do you renounce all beliefs you may once have had in any other religion?
3. In becoming Jewish, are you giving up all religious practices, holidays, and life cycle events such as baptism and communion that might be associated with your former religion?
4. Do you accept the God of Israel as the one universal and indivisible God?
5. Do you commit yourself to observing the mitzvot of Judaism, as defined by Jewish law, to the best of your ability and knowledge?
6. Do you commit yourself to the further study of Judaism and to continued growth in the observance of its mitzvot?
7. Will you support all those who seek to reestablish and revitalize our Jewish homeland by making the land and State of Israel a part of your life and the life of your family?
8. If blessed with children, do you pledge to raise them exclusively in the Jewish religion by providing them with a quality Jewish education and timely involvement in Jewish life-cycle events?
9. Do you commit yourself to associating with the Jewish community by joining a synagogue?
10. Do you bind your personal destiny to the destiny of the Jewish people?

¹³⁷ Rank, et al eds., *Moreh Derekh* J-10 – J-13

Annex C Liturgy related to Gemirat Da'at

Declarations to be signed by the Ger/Gioret

Declaration from the Progressive *Beit Din* of Switzerland

Rav Bea Wyler

Rav François Garaï

Rav Reuven Bar-Ephraïm



Ich, , binde mich an diesem Tag aus freien Stücken an den Gott Israels, an Seine Tora und an das Jüdische Volk.

Ich verpflichte mich:

- mich mit der Jüdischen Gemeinschaft zu identifizieren
- den Schabbat und die feiertage in meinem Haus zu heiligen
- die Pflichten der Zedaka und der Gemilut chassadim wahrzunehmen
- am Jüdischen Gemeindeleben teilzunehmen
- und zum Tikkun Olam beizutragen

Möge der EWIGE - gelobt sei ER - mir helfen, mich der Tradition und dem Volk, an welche ich mich heute binde, würdig zu erweisen.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֶחָד

Höre Israel, der EWIGE ist unser Gott, der EWIGE ist einzig!

Erstellt in

am 57 71 /2011

Im Glauben an dieses unterschreibe ich:

Unterschrift der Mitglieder des Bet Din, Zeugen der Verpflichtung:

.....
.....
.....

* * * * *

(English translation)

I, , on this day bind myself voluntarily to the God of Israel, to His Torah and the Jewish people.

I undertake:

- To identify with the Jewish Community
- The Sabbath and the holy holidays in my house
- To carry out the obligations of charity and Gemilut Hassadim
- Participate in Jewish community life
- And contribute to Tikkun Olam

May the Eternal - praise be to Him - help me prove myself worthy of the tradition and the people to which I bind myself today.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֶחָד

Hear, O Israel, the Eternal is our God, the Eternal is One!

Posted on 57 71/2011

In belief in this I sign:

Signature of the members of the Bet Din witnesses of the obligation:

* * * * *

CONVERSION SERVICE¹³⁸

It is presumed that this service has been preceded by the Rabbi's careful instruction of the convert. The instruction should include the following subjects: Summaries of Jewish History, Jewish Ceremonies, with special emphasis on the origin -and observance of Sabbath and holy days, and Principles of the Jewish Faith and Conduct.

At least two persons representative of the Jewish community; preferably Rabbis, should be invited to witness the conversion service. If Rabbis are not available, the two leading officers of the congregation should be selected.

It is suggested that this service take place in the synagogue whenever possible.

The convert should then be examined in the subject matter of instruction. Having proved to the witnesses a satisfactory acquaintance with the subjects as specified above, the prospective convert should be asked the following questions by the Rabbi (see Annex 2 Liturgy for the Beit Din for the text of the questions.)

When all these questions have been answered in the affirmative, the convert is to take the following pledge, to be recited by heart or to be repeated by the convert, with the Rabbi prompting it:

PLEDGE¹³⁹

I, _____, do herewith declare in the presence of God and the witnesses here assembled, that I, of my own free will, seek the fellowship of Israel and that I fully accept the faith of Israel.

I believe that God is One, Almighty, Allwise and Most Holy.

I believe that man is created in the image of God; that it is his duty to imitate the holiness of God; that he is a free-will agent, responsible to God for his actions; and, that he is destined to everlasting life.

I believe that Israel is God's priest-people, the world's teacher in religion and righteousness as expressed in our Bible and interpreted in the spirit of Jewish tradition.

I believe that God ruleth the world with justice and love and in the fullness of time His kingdom will be established on earth.

I promise that I shall endeavor to live, as far as it is in my power; in accordance with the ideals of Jewish life.

I further promise, that should I ever be blessed with children, I shall rear them in conformity with the Jewish religion. May God strengthen me in these my resolutions. Most fervently, therefore, do I herewith pronounce the Jewish confession of faith:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֶחָד

Sh'ma yisroel adonoy elohenu adonoy echod.

Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

Boruch shem kvod malchuso l'olom voed.

Praised be His name whose glorious kingdom is for ever and ever.

* * * * *

¹³⁸ CCAR *Rabbi's Manual* (Cincinnati 1928) 30-32

¹³⁹ This pledge should be given the convert in writing in advance.

¹⁴⁰ קבלת עול מצוות

The following declaration can be used as a study text during conversion classes. Ultimately, it is presented to the Jew by Choice candidate just prior to the טבילה במקוה כשר, as a document he or she signs in the presence of the Bet Din.

I hereby affirm, of my own free will and volition, my commitment to the God of Israel, the Torah of Israel, and the people of Israel. Irrevocably accepting Judaism, I sever my ties to any other religion with which I may once have been affiliated.

I pray that my present conviction may guide me through life, that I may be worthy of the sacred tradition and community which I now join. As I am thankful for the privileges thus bestowed upon me, I pray that I may always remain conscious of the obligations that are mine as a member of the House of Israel.

Today I hereby pledge myself to live the Jewish way of holiness, by accepting the mitzvot of Judaism I now and always, here and wherever I may be. In preparation for this moment, I have sought both to infuse my life with Jewish values and to create a distinctively Jewish atmosphere in my home. Specifically, I declare that I have determined, to the best of my ability, to make the following Jewish observances an integral part of both my life and that of my family:

- By entering all sons born to or adopted by me, subsequent to this conversion, into the covenant of Abraham, through the ritual of *Brit Milah*;
- By welcoming all daughters born to or adopted by me, subsequent to this conversion, into the Jewish community by naming her in accordance with Jewish tradition;
- By giving these children a quality Jewish education;
- By making Shabbat and Jewish holidays important moments of holiness in my home and by opening my home to others so that I may become God's partner in sharing the holiness of sacred time with those who are searching or in need;
- By enhancing my observance of Shabbat and Jewish holidays by lighting candles, reciting *Kiddush* and *Birkat Hamazon*, and performing other rituals distinctive for each holy day;
- By incorporating *kashrut* into my life and by sharing my bread with others who are hungry;
- By affiliating with the Jewish people through a synagogue and attending religious services;
- By praying regularly, either at synagogue or at home, using the Jewish liturgy as the basis of worship;
- By remembering those who are ill and visiting them;
- By participating in the life of the Jewish community through supporting religious and communal institutions in Israel and the Diaspora and by dedicating my life to making this world a better place in which to live, for all people;
- By identifying with the State of Israel, the Jewish homeland, the center of Jewish hopes and aspirations;

¹⁴⁰ Moreh Derekh J-14 – J-15.

- By engaging in Jewish study on a continuing basis.

I pray that in all these ways, I may continue to grow in the love of Judaism and find blessing because of my decision to become one with the Jewish people. By joining Judaism and the Jewish people, may I add my willing heart and hands to our eternal task of being God's partners in seeking to perfect the world under God's universal sovereignty.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֶחָד
Hear, O Israel: Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.

Signature of the Jew by Choice _____

Secular Date _____

Beit Din Signatures

* * * * *

Annex D Liturgy related to the Brit Milah

Liturgy from the Moreh Derekh¹⁴¹

ברוך אתה אֱדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְמוֹל אֶת הַגֵּרִים.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, whose *mitzvot* add holiness to our lives and who gave us the *mitzvah* to circumcise converts.

ברוך אתה אֱדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְמוֹל אֶת הַגֵּרִים וְלְהַטִּיף מֵהֶם דָּם בְּרִית שְׂאֵלְמָלָא דָם בְּרִית לֹא נִתְקַיְּמוּ שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ, שְׁנֵאמַר: אִם לֹא בְרִיתִי יוֹמָם

וְלַיְלָה חֻקֹּת שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ לֹא שָׁמַתִּי. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֱדֹנָי כּוֹרֵת הַבְּרִית.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, whose *mitzvot* add holiness to our lives and who gave us the *mitzvah* to circumcise converts and, through such an act of

kedushah, deepen our connection with heaven and earth, as it is written {Jeremiah 33:25},

“...Without My covenant, day and night, the laws of heaven and earth, I would not sustain.”

Praised are You, Adonai, who establishes the covenant.

Liturgy from Ma'aglei Tzedek¹⁴²

Circumcision Ceremony for the purpose of conversion

ית מילה

BERIT GERIM

(The service of giur precedes berit mila. Portions of that service might be omitted, except for the affirmation, naming, and blessing. After the service of giur, continue as follows.)

RABBI

Berit mila, the Covenant of circumcision, has been enjoined upon us as a sign of the Covenant between God and the Jewish people, as it is written: "God said to Abraham, 'You shall keep My Covenant, you and your children after you.'" We present (civil name, Hebrew name), ben Avraham veSarah, for the Covenant of circumcision.

We praise You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has hallowed us by mitzvot and commanded us concerning the circumcision of gerim.

ברוך אתה אֱדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְמוֹל אֶת
הַגֵּרִים.

We praise you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has hallowed us by mitzvot and commanded us concerning admission into the Covenant of Abraham, our father.

ברוך אתה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַכְנִיסוֹ
בְּבְרִיתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ.

¹⁴¹ *Moreh Derekh*, J-8 – J-9.

¹⁴² *Ma'agle Tzedek*, 212-214.

(Hatafat dam berit or the circumcision is performed.)

Liturgy from Seder Tov Lehodot¹⁴³

Circumcision Ceremony for a Child Whose Father is Jewish and Whose Mother is Not ברית מילה

Bij het binnenbrengen van het kind zegt de mohél:
When the child is brought in the mohel says:

בְּרוּךְ הַבָּא

Gezegend is hij die komt met de intentie opgenomen te worden in het Verbond.

Blessed is he who comes with the intention to be included in the Covenant.

De mohél plaats het kind op een kussen op de knieën van de sandak. Direct voor de mila zegt hij:

The mohel place the child on a cushion on the knees of the sandak. Immediately before the mila he says:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְמוּל אֶת־הַגֵּרִים.

Geprezen bent U, Eeuwige onze God, koning van tijd en ruimte, die ons leven heiligt met Zijn opdrachten en die ons heeft opgedragen alle jongens te besnijden die worden binnengebracht in het Verbond dat de Schepper van het Al met Jisraël sloot.

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, ruler of time and space, who sanctifies our lives with His commands and who has commanded us to circumcise all boys who are brought into the Covenant that the Creator of All concluded with Israel.

Na de besnijdenis zegt de mohél de beracha over de wijn:

After the mila the mohel says the beracha over the wine:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Het kind krijgt enkele druppels van de wijn te drinken. Daarna zegt de mohél de volgende beracha:

The child gets a few drops of wine. Then the mohel says the following blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְמוּל אֶת־הַגֵּרִים וּלְהַטִּיף מֵהֶם דַּם־בְּרִית, שְׂאֵל־מֵלֵא דָם בְּרִית לֹא נִתְקַיְּמוּ שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ, שְׁנַיִמְרָ: אִם־לֹא בְּרִיתִי יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה חֻקּוֹת שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ לֹא־שָׁמְתִי. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, כּוֹרֵת הַבְּרִית.

Na afloop drinken de ouder(s) en de sandak van de wijn.

After this the parent (s) and the sandak drink the wine.

Geprezen bent U, Eeuwige onze God, koning van tijd en ruimte, die ons leven heiligt met Zijn opdrachten en die ons heeft opgedragen alle jongens te besnijden die worden binnengebracht in het Verbond dat de Schepper van het Al met Jisraël sloot. Zoals er staat geschreven: “Zo zeker als Ik de wetten van hemel en aarde en van dag en nacht bij de schepping heb vastgesteld, zo zeker zal Ik Mijn verbond met Jisraël bewaren.” *Jirmejahoe* 33:25. Geprezen bent U, Altijd aanwezige, die het Verbond in stand houdt.

Blessed are You, Eternal our God, king of time and space, which sanctifies our lives with His commands and who has commanded us to circumcise all boys who are

¹⁴³ Siddur of the Verbond van Liberaal-Religieuze Joden in Nederland (Amsterdam 2001) 560-561.

brought into the Covenant that the Creator of All concluded with Israel. As it is written: "As surely as I established at creation the laws of heaven and earth and day and night so will I keep my covenant with Yisrael." *Jirmejahoe 33:25*. Blessed are You, All Present One, who maintains the Covenant.

Hierna kan de mohél of de rabbijn de volgende zegen uitspreken:

Thereafter, the mohel or rabbi pronounces the following blessing:

מִי שֶׁבֵרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ אֲבֹרָהֶם וְשָׂרָה, יִצְחָק וְרִבְקָה, יַעֲקֹב רָחֵל וְלֵאָה, הוּא יְבָרֶךְ אֶת
הָאִשָּׁה הַיּוֹלֶדֶת וְאֶת הַיֶּלֶד הַנּוֹלָד לָהּ בְּמִזְל טוֹב.
הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יִשְׁלַח מְהֵרָה לְאִם הַיּוֹלֶדֶת וְלִילָד רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם. יְהִי רָצוֹן
/ שְׂיִזְכּוּ הוֹרָיו / שְׂתִזְכֶּה אִמּוֹ / שְׂיִזְכֶּה אָבִיו / לְגַדְלוֹ לְתוֹרָה וּלְחֻפָּה וּלְמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים, וְנֹאמַר
אָמֵן .

Moge Hij die onze voorouders Awraham en Sara, Jitschak en Riwka, Jaäkov, Rachél en Léa zegende, Zijn zegen geven aan deze moeder en haar zoon die nu zijn besnijdenis heeft ondergaan.

Moge de Heilige, Hij zij geprezen, zowel de moeder als de jongen voorspoedig laten genezen. Moge Hij dit gezin zegenen en beschermen en de ouders de kracht en de wijsheid geven hun kind op te voeden tot een betrokken joods leven. Moge hun zoon vreugde en vriendschap, hoop en tevredenheid brengen voor zijn ouders en voor allen met wie hij in aanraking komt.

Daarop zeggen wij: Amén.

May God who blessed our ancestors Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rivka, Yaakov, Rachel and Leah bless this mother and her son who just has undergone his circumcision.

May the Holy and Blessed One grant a speedy and complete healing to both the mother and her son. May God bless and protect this family and give the parents the strength and wisdom to educate their child to live an involved Jewish life. May their son bring joy and friendship, hope and satisfaction to his parents and to all with whom he comes in contact. And let us say: Amen.

* * * * *

Annex E Liturgy related to the Mikvah

Liturgy from the Moreh Derekh¹⁴⁴

Full text from Ezekiel 36: 25-28

כה וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מֵיִם טְהוֹרִים וְטָהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל טְמְאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל גְּלוּלֵיכֶם אֲטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם :
כו וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב חֲדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה אֶתֶן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְהִסְרֵתִי אֶת לֵב הָאֲבָן מִבְּשָׂרְכֶם וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם
לֵב בָּשָׂר : כז וְאֶת רוּחִי אֶתֶן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְעָשִׂיתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר בְּחַקִּי תַלְכוּ וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם :
כח וְיִשְׁבַּתֶּם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם וְהִיְתֶם לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים :
25. Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26. And I will give you new heart, and put a new spirit into you; and I will take away the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. 27. And I will put my spirit inside you, and cause you to follow my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them. 28. And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Liturgy from Ma'aglei Tzedek¹⁴⁵

Tevilah

The text of the service is included in the paper itself.

Liturgy from Siddour Taher Libénou¹⁴⁶

Tevilah

The text of the service is included in the paper itself.

* * * * *

Liturgy from MARAM

טקס טבילה בים כסיום תהליך גיור¹⁴⁷

כלל נקוט בידי בית הדין לגיור של מר"ם (מועצת הרבנים המתקדמים בישראל) כי את הטבילה, השלב האחרון של הגיור, שהוא באחריות בית הדין, מבצעים בים. מתחילה נקט בית הדין בגישה זו משום שלא יכול היה להשתמש במקוואות הציבוריים, אולם גם בדיעבד נראה לבית הדין כי הים הולם את השקפתנו, בהיותו מקווה מים טבעי.

¹⁴⁴ Rank et al eds., *Moreh Derekh* J-18 – J-19.

¹⁴⁵ Polish ed., *Ma'agle Tzedek* 210-212.

¹⁴⁶ Siddur of the Mouvement Juif Libéral de France (Paris 1997) 425-426.

¹⁴⁷ Yehoram Mazor, *Tekes t'vilah ba-yam ki-siyum tahalikh giur* (A Ceremony for immersion in the ocean as the conclusion of the giur process) in: Alona Lisitsa, Dalia Marx, Maya Leibovich, and Tamar Duvdevani, *Parashat Hamayim, t'vilah k'hizdamnut li'tzmicha, li'hitharut v'li-rifui* (The Story of Water, Immersion in Water as an Opportunity for Renewal and Spiritual Growth; Israel 2011).

קודם הכניסה לים מסביר נציג בית הדין לטובלים כי במהלך הטבילה עליהם להכניס את כל גופם אל מתחת למים שלוש פעמים.

לאחר הכניסה הראשונה אל מתחת למים הטובלים מברכים את ברכת הטבילה:
ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על הטבילה.

לאחר שכל המתגיירים טבלו בים יוצרים כל הנוכחים מעגל. נציג בית הדין מסביר את משמעות הטבילה, שיש בה מן הגשמי – שהרי הטבילה כמוה כנולד היוצא ממי השפיר ומרחם אמו, ומן הרוחני – שהרי טבילה במים חיים כמוה כמתן לב חדש ורוח חדשה.

נציג בית הדין אומר:

למתגיירים גברים: אַסְפְּרָה אֶל חֶק ה' אָמַר אֵלַי בְּנֵי אֶתְּהָ אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יִלְדְּתִיךָ (תהילים ב, 7)
למתגיירות נשים: אַסְפְּרָה אֶל חֶק ה' אָמַר אֵלַי בְּתִי אֶתְּ אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יִלְדְּתִיךָ (לפי תהילים ב, 7)
אם המתגיירים הם משני המינים אומרים את שני המשפטים הנ"ל.
וְזָרְקִתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מִיַּם טְהוֹרִים וּטְהַרְתֶּם... וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב חֲדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה אֶתְּןָ בְּקִרְבְּכֶם... וְעָשִׂיתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר בְּחַקֵּי תַלְכוּ וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם... וְהֵייתֶם לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים (יחזקאל לו, 25 – 28)

ואומרים כל הנוכחים:

שָׁמַע וְשָׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד (דברים ו, 4)
ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.

נציג בית הדין אומר:

וְאֶהְבֶּתְּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ,
וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לִבְבְּךָ,
וְשָׁנַנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִקְתְּךָ בְּדַרְךָ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ,
וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטַטְפֹּת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ,
וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל מְזוֹזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ (דברים ו, 5 – 9)

ותאמר רות אל תפגעי בי לעזבך לשוב מאחרוך כי אל אשר תלכי אלך ובאשר תליני אליו
עמך עמי ואלהיך אלהי, באשר תמותי אמות ושם אקבר כה יעשה ה' לי וכה יסוף כי המות
יפריד ביני ובינך (רות א, 16 – 17)

לגבר :

מי שברך אבותינו אברהם יצחק ויעקב ואמותינו שרה רבקה רחל ולאה, הוא יברך את
אחינו בן אברהם אבינו ושרה אמנו, בבואו לחסות תחת כנפי השכינה
ולהסתפח בנחלת ישראל בהמנותו על גרי וגרות הצדק בעם אלוהי אברהם ושרה. יהי רצון
שיצליח בדרךך ויראה ברכה בכל מעשה ידיו עם כל ישראל אחיו ואחיותיו ונאמר אמן.

לאשה :

מי שברך אבותינו אברהם יצחק ויעקב ואמותינו שרה רבקה רחל ולאה, הוא יברך את
אחותנו בת אברהם אבינו ושרה אמנו, בבואה לחסות תחת כנפי השכינה
ולהסתפח בנחלת ישראל בהמנותה על גרי וגרות הצדק בעם אלוהי אברהם ושרה. יהי רצון
שתצליח בדרךך ותראה ברכה בכל מעשה ידיה עם כל ישראל אחיה ואחיותיה ונאמר
אמן.

בזמן שהמתגיירים טובלים נציג בית הדין אוסף צדפים שיש בהם חורים. לפני סיום
הטקס מחלק הנציג צדף אחד לכל מתגייר ומתגיירת ומציע להם לקשור את הצדף לפמוטי
השבת, כך שבכל ערב שבת בעת הדלקת הנרות יזכרו את היום ואת מעמד הטבילה, אשר
הפך אותם לבני העם היהודי.

כל הנוכחים יחד מסיימים את המעמד בברכת :

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Liturgy from Parashat Ha-Mayyim¹⁴⁸

Conversion Ceremony at the Mikveh by Alona Lisitsa and Maya Leibovitch

Now, as I immerse myself. I begin a new cycle,
a cycle of rebirth and renewal
of Your world and Your people Israel.
I prepare for my new life
and for the sanctification of that life

¹⁴⁸ Alona Lisitsa and Maya Leibovich *tekes t'vilah le'giyur* (Ceremony for the immersion for conversion) in:
Lisitsa, et al *Parashat Hamayim*. English version from [http://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/conversion-ceremony-
mikveh](http://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/conversion-ceremony-mikveh) accessed 4 July 2012.

through the ritual of immersion.

Our mothers Rebecca and Rachel were betrothed and began new lives
at the gently flowing water of the well.
Our mother Yocheved gave life to her child Moses
in the ever-flowing waters of the Nile.
Our sister Miriam danced for the saving of lives
beside the overflowing water of the Sea of Reeds.

Water is God's gift to living souls,
to cleanse us, to purify us,
to sustain and renew us.

As Moses and Aaron and the priests of Israel
washed with cleansing waters before attending to God's service at the altar,
so I now cleanse myself - before your altar of sanctification.

I am now prepared to link my life with the life of the people of Israel,
and with the God of Israel,
to become a partner in sharing the joys of Jewish living,
to learn and to celebrate the rhythms of a Jewish life.

O God, you are the Fountain of Life! I enter this Mikveh as an expression of my commitment to
immerse myself in the faith of Israel and in the waters of Torah. Even as our ancestors crossed the
sea on their pilgrimage to Sinai, may my Tevilah (immersion) nurture my resolve to take shelter
under the wings of the Shekhinah and seal my devotion to a life of Torah. Avodah and Gemilut
Chasadim (learning, worship and deeds of justice and kindness).

Take a few moments for silent personal reflection before continuing and entering the Mikveh.

Some may choose to read the following verses:

"With pure waters will I purify you, that your life be pure and blameless. A new heart will I give you,
and a new spirit I will place within you. I will direct you in my teachings. and you shall keep my
statutes. You shall be my people, and I will be your God." (Ezekiel 36:25-28)

ENTER MIKVEH, TAKE DEEP BREATH, IMMERSE COMPLETELY AND REMAIN UNDER WATER FOR A
FEW MOMENTS.

STAND, TAKE A BREATH. AND SAY THE BLESSING:

Barukh attah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al ha-t'vilah.

Blessed are you, Eternal God, ruler of the universe, who sanctifies us through mitzvot and has
enjoined us concerning immersion.

DUNK A SECOND TIME!

STAND, TAKE A BREATH, AND SAY THE BLESSING:

Barukh attah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, sheheḥiyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higianu, la-z'man ha-zeh.

Blessed is the Eternal, the God of all creation, who has blessed me with life, sustained me, and enabled me to reach this moment.

DUNK A THIRD TIME!

Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad.

HEAR O ISRAEL, THE ETERNAL OUR GOD, THE ETERNAL IS ONE!

Ceremony of Tevilah

By Corrie Zeidler, based on a ceremony by Rabbi Jeffrey A. Marx

Rabbi:

We are gathered here today to serve as witnesses, as representatives of the Jewish people, as friends and family, to be with you as you enter the waters of the mikvah.

In our tradition, water has always played a pivotal role. There is something elemental about it. Before the world was created, there existed the presence of God hovering over the surface of the water.

Our patriarchs and matriarchs met at the well, for the source of water was the center of community life. Thus the well marked the promise of new beginnings in their lives.

Water is the symbol of redemption for our People. We recall that waters of the Red Sea parted and allowed us to go forth from slavery into freedom.

Water is also a symbol of sustenance. When the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, God caused a well, Miriam's Well it was called, to accompany the people and sustain them with water.

And finally, water in our Rabbinic tradition, represents learning and knowledge. We are taught, that as water brings life to the world, so too the Torah brings life to the world. As water leaves the high places and rests in the low lands, so too the deeper teachings of our religion leave one who is haughty and proud but cleave to one who is lowly and humble.

ALL:

As you enter the living waters of the mikveh here today, we pray that you continue to immerse yourself in the living waters of our tradition.

Know that just as the waters surround you and touch you with their warm embrace, so too do the Jewish people warmly embrace you and welcome you into our midst with **blessings**.

Giyor(et):

May my entry into the waters of the mikveh inspire me and strengthen me in my resolve to enter the ancient and endless stream of Jewish life. May I be among those who will help that stream to continue strong and unbroken.

May it be that my deeds and ways will contribute to further the continuity of the stream in independence and security.

May I be able to leave behind the parts of myself from my past that I choose not to take with me into my new life.

All separations involve pain, but this separation I undertake at my choosing in order to being something new.

Tears of pain over what I will leave behind will be nullified¹⁴⁹ in the living waters that will embrace me.

Giyor(et):

As a one newly joining the Jewish people, I bring with me from my past values I think are appropriate to weave into the fabric of Judaism. And I hope to add to the fabric a unity that it did not have prior to my joining it.

Rabbi:

May God, whom we call Mikveh Yisrael, be a source of hope and sustenance to you, now and always.

As you enter the waters in peace, may you emerge as a source of peace to your family, to this congregation, and to the Jewish people.

(Ezekiel 36: 25-28)

25. Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26. And I will give you new heart, and put a new spirit into you; and I will take away the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. 27. And I will put my spirit inside you, and cause you to follow my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them. 28. And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Before entering the water, the individual should take time to build their intention. One possibility is for the ger/gioret to take the opportunity to think about what s/he is leaving behind and what s/he is taking with her/him to her/his new life.

Giyor(et) enters the mikveh

1st t'vilah: Barukh attah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al ha-t'vilah.

¹⁴⁹ Batel bi-shishim is a rabbinic concept perhaps best explained by example. If a drop of milk were to fall into 60x as much chicken soup, the soup would remain kosher since the milk is considered nullified in relationship to the overwhelming proportion of the soup to the drop of milk.

Blessed are you, Eternal God, ruler of the universe, who sanctifies us through mitzvot and has enjoined us concerning immersion.

2nd t'vilah: Barukh attah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, sheheḥiyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higianu, la-z'man ha-zeh.

Blessed is the Eternal, the God of all creation, who has blessed me with life, sustained me, and enabled me to reach this moment.

3rd t'vilah: Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad.

Hear O Israel, the Eternal Our God, the Eternal Is One!

Annex F Giur Certificates

The Netherlands/ Zurich¹⁵⁰ / European Beit Din¹⁵¹

Certificate for a Man without a Jewish parent.

תעודת גרות

בזה להעיד שבא לפנינו הב"ד ח"מ המכונה ובקש להתגייר על פי הלכה על-ידי מילה וטבילה ולהסתפח בנחלת ישראל. אנחנו חקרנו ודרשנו אותו ומצאנוהו ראוי להתקבל ולהמנות בין גרי הצדק בתוך בני ישראל הן מפאת ישר לבבו והן מפאת ידיעותיו בחקי תורתנו הקדושה ומנהגינו ודרכי חיינו. בפנינו הב"ד נמול לשם גרות וגם הוטבל במקוה כשר לשם גרות. ואחרי שראינו שבוערת בלבו אהבת ישראל ואהבת ציון, וגם שקבל על עצמו עול תורת ישראל, הננו מסכימים להכניסו תחת כנפי השכינה והרי הוא בזה כישראל לכל דבר וקוראים לו אחינו אתה ויקרא שמו בישראל בן אברהם אבינו, וזה יהיה שמו לכל דבר שבקדושה מעתה ועד עולם.

הננו באים על החתום ביום ראשון, פרשת "....." .. "....." .., אמשטרדם, הולנד.

יהי ה' אלוהיו עמו ויעל.

נאום

נאום

נאום

Conversion Certificate

This is to testify that there came before us, a properly constituted beit din, known as and he request to convert to Judaism according to the halakhah by circumcision and immersion and to attach himself to the inheritance of Israel. We investigated and we asked him and found him worthy to be accepted and be counted among the *gerei tzedek*, the righteous converts within the Children of Israel both due to his honest heart and also due to his knowledge of the laws of our holy Torah, and our customs and our ways of life. Before us, the beit din, he was circumcised for the purpose of conversion and was immersed in a kosher mikvah for the purpose of

¹⁵⁰ According to Rabbi Reuven Bar-Ephraim, the Swiss German-speaking Beit Din uses the same certificates as are used in the Netherlands which is why they are grouped together here.

¹⁵¹ Email correspondence with Rabbi David Lilienthal 26 June 2012.

conversion. And after we saw that the love of Israel and love of Zion burns in his heart and also that he accepted upon himself the yoke of the Torah of Israel, we agreed to bring him under the wings of the Shekhinah and therefore he is considered a Jew in all contexts and for all things. And we said to him "You are our brother!" And his name will be called in Israel _____ son of Avraham our forefather..... and this will be his name for all matters of ritual and holiness from now and for all time.

We came to sign on Sunday, the week of Parashat, 575.....", Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up! (2 Chron 36:23)

Signed: (three members of the beit din).

Certificate for a Woman who has a Jewish father. (Confirmation of Jewish Status)

בעזהשי"ת

בזה להעיד שבאה לפנינו הב"ד ח"מ המכונה
שנולדה מאב ישראל, ובקשה להתגייר על פי הלכה, על-ידי טבילה. בפנינו הב"ד
הוטבלה במקוה כשר לשם גרות. ואחרי שראינו שהיא חיה הרבה שנים כיהודיה,
ובוערת בלבה אהבת ישראל ואהבת ציון, וגם שקבלה על עצמה עול תורת ישראל,
הננו מסכימים להכניסה תחת כנפי השכינה, וייקרא שמה בישראל בת
.....זרע אברהם אבינו, וגיורת צדק תיחשב ובתוך גרי הצדק תימנה לכל דבר .
הננו באים על החתום ביום, פרשת, "..... התשע"....., טילבורג, הולנד .
יהי ה' אלוהיה עמה ותעל.

נאום

נאום

נאום

With the help of God Who is Blessed

This is to testify that there came before us, a properly constituted beit din,
known as who was born of a Jewish father and she request to convert to Judaism according
to the halakhah by immersion. Before us, the beit din, she immersed in a kosher mikvah for the
purpose of conversion. And after we saw that she has lived many years as a Jew and the love of
Israel and love of Zion burns in her heart and also that she accepted upon herself the yoke of the
Torah of Israel, we agreed to bring her under the wings of the Shekhinah and therefore she is
considered a Jew in all contexts and for all things. And we said to her "You are our sister!" And her

name will be called in Israel _____ daughter of _____ of the offspring of Avraham our forefather. She should be considered a righteous convert and counted among the righteous converts for all things.

We came to sign on ____ day, the week of Parashat, 575....." , Tilburg, The Netherlands.

The Lord her God be with her, and let her go up!¹⁵²

Signed: (three members of the beit din).

* * * * *

Germany

GLAUBENSÜBERTRITT URKUNDE¹⁵³

Hiermit wird verkündet, daß sich

vor diesem ordnungsgemäß eingesetzten Beit Din eingefunden hat, um gemäß jüdischer Gesetze und Gebräuche zum Judentum überzutreten und sich mit dem Kulturerbe Israels zu verbinden. Im Anschluß an eine Prüfung und Ermittlungen befinden wir nun, daß sie sowohl im Hinblick auf ihre persönliche Integrität als auch auf ihr Wissen um die Gesetze unserer heiligen Torah, unserer Gebräuche und Lebensweise würdig ist, in die Gemeinschaft der zum jüdischen Glauben bekehrten rechtschaffenen aufgenommen und gezählt zu werden. Wir haben uns eigenhändig von ihrer Liebe zu Israel und zu Zion überzeugt. Sie hat sich unter das Joch des himmlischen Königreiches begeben und sich zum Zwecke des Glaubensübertritts in einer koscheren Mikveh untergetaucht. Wir heißen sie daher einmütig im Schutze des Heiligen Allgegenwärtigen willkommen. Fortan ist sie Jüdin in jeder Hinsicht; wir sagen zu ihr, Du bist unsere Schwester. Für alle rituellen Zeremonien trägt sie in Israel den Namen

Von uns in der _____ Woche hier in _____, **Deutschland** am _____ Tage des Monats _____ und Jahres _____ entsprechend dem _____ Tage des Monats _____ und Jahres _____ unterzeichnet.

Rabbiner

Rabbiner

Rabbiner

¹⁵² Based on II Chronicles 36:32.

¹⁵³ From Rabbi Walter Rothschild.

Wer nun unter Euch von seinem Volk ist,
mit dem sei der Herr, sein Gott, und er ziehe hinauf?

(2. Chron 36:23)

CONVERSION CERTIFICATION

Hereby a declaration is made that _____

appeared before this properly convened Beit Din, to convert to Judaism and connect to the heritage of Israel in accordance with Jewish laws and customs. Following an examination and investigations, we now conclude, that with regard to her personal integrity as well as her knowledge of the laws of our holy Torah, and our customs and manner of living, she is worthy of being absorbed and counting among the community of righteous converts. We have personally become convinced of her love to Israel and to Zion. She has accepted upon herself the yoke of the heavenly kingdom, and immersed herself in a kosher mikvah with the goal of conversion. We therefore unanimously welcome her in the protection of the Almighty. Henceforth, she is a Jewess in every respect; we say to her, you are our sister. For all ritual ceremonies in Israel, she carries the name _____.

By us the _____ week here in _____, Germany on the _____ day of the month _____ and year _____ according to the _____.

Day of the month and year signed:

rabbi
rabbi
rabbi

Whoever is among you of all his people, the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up! (2 Chron 36:23)

* * * * *

France

Mouvement Juif Libéral de France

CERTIFICAT DE CONVERSION

Le jour du mois de
de l'an du monde cinq mille sept cent)

à Paris (France),
.....
fils de et de.....
s'est présenté devant nous:

Rabbin Rabbin
..... Rabbin
.....

réunis en Beth-Dine, pour y subir les épreuves écrites et orales de conversion au judaïsme.
Après avoir constaté la préparation suivie dans nos cours, l'assiduité aux services religieux, le niveau
des réponses fournies par le candidat, et sa sincérité dans toutes ses démarches, nous le déclarons
solennellement introduit dans la Communauté d'Israël avec le prénom hébraïque de

.....

En signant ce document, il s'engage à suivre les préceptes et voies morales, ainsi que les pratiques
du judaïsme qui lui ont été enseignés dans notre synagogue.

En outre M.....s'est soumis à la circoncision le
en la présence du Rabbin
Il a pratiqué la tevilah en notre présence le

Les rabbins

M. :

Jewish Liberal Movement of France

CERTIFICATE OF CONVERSION

The day of
the year of the world five thousand seven hundred
(.....)
in Paris (France),

.....
son of and
appeared before us:

rabbi.....
rabbi.....
rabbi.....

gathered in *Beth-Din*, to undergo written and oral tests for conversion to Judaism.
After observing the preparation he followed in our courses, his attendance at religious services, the
level of the responses provided by the candidate, and his sincerity in all his actions, we solemnly
declare him introduced into the Community of Israel with the Hebrew name of

.....

By signing this document, he agrees to follow the precepts and moral ways and practices of Judaism that were taught to him in our synagogue.

In addition, Mr. has undergone circumcision on(date)..... in the presence of Rabbi

He underwent tevilah, immersion, in our presence the.....(date).....

The rabbis:

M.:



* * * * *

Israel

מר"ם. מועצת הרבנים המתקדמים בישראל

תעודת גיור

במותב תלתא בי דינא כוזא הוינא כאן _____ במדינת ישראל

_____ ימים לחודש _____ שנת

בא _____ בעל תעודת _____ מספר

וביקש להסתפח מרצונו החופשי לנחלת ישראל.
לאחר שחקרנו ודרשנו באורח חיי ולימודיו מצאנוהו ראוי להימנות על קהל ישראל.
קודם היכנסו תחת כפי השכינה קבל עליו בפנינו עול תורה ומצוות, מל ושבל לשם גרות.

על כן יאמר לו: אחזינו אתה ויקרא שמך בישראל.
בן אברהם אבינו ושרה אמנו לכל דבר שבקדושה.

ועל זאת באנו על הזתום פה _____



The seal is circular with a blue border. Inside the border, the text 'בית דין צדק דקדויות' is written at the top, 'התנועה ליודות מתקדמת בישראל' at the bottom, and 'יחידות' on the left and 'חוקרת' on the right. In the center is a menorah with a globe behind it, and below it, the text 'יחידות חתומות בישראל'.

2. Name of state or province.
3. Day of the week. See complete table on page J-69.
4. Hebrew date. See complete table on page J-69.
5. Hebrew month. See complete table on page J-69.
6. Hebrew year. See complete table on page J-70.
7. Name of the convert written in Hebrew; e.g., Susan Lynn Scott becomes סוסן לין סקוט
8. Convert's Hebrew name.
9. Signatures of witnesses in Hebrew.

* * * * *

Annex G Liturgy for Post-Conversion Ceremonies

Immediately following Conversion

Netherlands/Zurich

The service does not have a fixed liturgy. The outlines of the texts and symbolic actions included in the service are described in the chapter on Post-Conversion Ceremonies.

In the Congregation on the Shabbat following the Conversion

Israel

טקס קבלת הגרים לקהילה / הרבה גליה סדן

A Ceremony for the Welcoming of Converts to the Community

By Rabba Galia Sadan

כבוד גדול הוא לנו לקבל אל קהל ישראל אחים ואחיות חדשים, גרי וגרות צדק. מרצונם החופשי ולאחר לימוד ומסע רוחני של חודשים ושנים, הם מצטרפים אל קהל ישראל. אנו מקבלים אותם אל תוכנו ואל חיק היהדות בשמחה ובזרועות פתוחות. בפרשת "ואתחנן" נאמר: "ואהבת את ה' אלוהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך", מילים כה מתאימות לרגע כזה. ברוכים אתם, אחינו ואחיותינו החדשים, בכל אשר תלכו, ברוכים אתם בבואכם אל עמנו. אתם כורתים היום ברית עם אלוהים, המנחה אותנו בחיינו ומכוון את דרכנו. מי ייתן, ותחושו תמיד מבורכים, מחוזקים ומוגנים בהדרכתו והגנתו של האל.

כך מנבא הנביא ישעיהו:

וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים, נִכּוֹן יִהְיֶה הַר בֵּית-ה' בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָרִים, וְנִשְׂא מִגְבְּעוֹת; וְנִהְרָו אֱלֹהֵי כָל-הַגּוֹיִם. וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים, וְאָמְרוּ לָכוּ וְנַעֲלֶה אֶל-הַר-ה' אֶל-בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב, וְיִרְנוּ מִדְּרָכָיו, וְנִלְכֶה בְּאַרְחֵתָיו, כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה, וּדְבַר-ה' מִירוּשָׁלַם.
ישעיהו, ב', 2-3

בְּרוּךְ הַבָּא בְּשֵׁם ה'; בְּרַכְנוּכֶם מִבֵּית ה'.

אֱלֹהֵי אֶתְּהָ וְאוֹדֶךָ; אֱלֹהֵי, אֲרוּמְךָ.
הוֹדוּ לֵה' כִּי-טוֹב: כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֶסֶדְךָ. תהילים, קי"ח, 26-29

אני מזמינה אל הבמה את (מזכירים כל גיורת וגר בשמם הלועזי ובשם העברי שבחרו),
מוסרים לכל אחד ואחת ספר תורה, המתגיירים החדשים עומדים תחת חופת טלית
ואומרים יחד:

אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵינוּ וְשָׂרָה לְפָנֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ הַזֶּה
אֲנַחְנוּ בּוֹחֲרִים לְהִמָּנֹת בְּקֵהֶל יִשְׂרָאֵל, יוֹרְשִׁים לְמוֹרֶשְׁתּוֹ, שׁוֹתְפִים לְגוֹרְלוֹ וְחַיִּיבִים
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו.

תָּן בָּנוּ כּוֹחַ לְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכֶיךָ בְּאֵמֶת, בְּחֶסֶד וּבְאֱמוּנָה.
אֲשֶׁרֵינוּ, מֵה טוֹב חֶלְקֵנוּ, וּמֵה נְעִים גּוֹרְלֵנוּ, וּמֵה יִפֶּה יִרְשָׁתֵנוּ.
אֲשֶׁרֵינוּ שְׂאֲנַחְנוּ אוֹמְרִים:

"שמע ישראל ה' אלוהינו ה' אחד."

מנחה הטקס:

מי שברך אבותינו אברהם, יצחק ויעקב ואימותינו שרה, רבקה, לאה ורחל הוא יברך את:
(מזכירים את הגרים והגרות בשמם העברי)
גרי וגרות צדק, שבאו בקהל ישראל, וכמונו הם בנותיהם ובניהם של אברהם אבינו ושרה אימנו.
יהי רצון מלפניך, אבינו שבשמים, שתדריכם לשלום ותתנם לחן ולחסד ולרחמים בעיני כל רואיהם.
פרוש עליהם ועלינו סוכת שלומך. ויהי נועם ה' אלוהינו עלינו, ומעשה ידינו כוננה עלינו,
ומעשה ידינו כוננהו. אמן.

ונאמר להם יחד את המילים שנתברכה בהן רבקה אמנו:

אחינו ואחיותינו אתם!

מנחה הטקס: 'יברככם ה' וישמרכם

יאר ה' פניו אליכם ויחונכם

ישא ה' פניו אליכם וישם לכם שלום

ברוך אתה ה', אלוהינו מלך העולם, שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה !

* * * * *

Netherlands

Voor een Man die Joodse is Geworden

מי שִׁבְרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ, יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה רַבְקָה, רַחֵל וְלֵאָה, הוּא יִבְרַךְ אֶת־אֲחֵינוּ ר'
כִּן אֲבֹתֵנוּ אֲשֶׁר עָלָה לְתוֹרָה (בְּיוֹם שִׁבְתַּת קוֹדֶשׁ זֶה) כְּבוֹאוֹ לְחֶסֶת תַּחַת פְּנֵי הַשְּׂכִינָה
וּלְהַסְתַּפֵּחַ בְּנַחֲלַת יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּבְהִמָּנֹתוֹ עַל גְּרֵי הַצֶּדֶק בְּתוֹךְ עַם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵנוּ וְשָׂרָה.

יְהִי רָצוֹן שְׂפִיזָלִיחַ בְּדַרְכּוֹ וְיִרְאֶה בְּרַכָּה בְּכָל־מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו, וְיִמְלֵאוּ כָּל־מְשָׁאֵלוֹת־לְבָבוֹ לְטוֹבָה, עַם
כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן.

Moge Hij die onze voorouders Avraham, Jitschak, Jaäkov, Sara, Riwka, Rachél en Léa zegende, Zijn zegen geven aan die (deze heilige Sjabbat) is opgeroepen voor de Tora, nadat hij bij ons is gekomen om te schuilen onder de vleugelen van Gods Aanwezigheid. Hij heeft een lange weg van voorbereiding afgelegd om te worden opgenomen in het joodse volk en te worden gerekend onder hen die behoren tot het volk van de God van Avraham en Sara.

Moge de Heilige, Hij zij geprezen, met hem meegaan en hem voorspoed geven op zijn levensweg, hem beschermen en zegenen met voldoening en tevredenheid als hij zijn deel van Gods werk in deze wereld verricht. Mogen al zijn wensen ten goede in vervulling gaan en moge hij altijd openheid, vriendschap en verbondenheid ondervinden onder zijn volk Jisraël.

Daarop zeggen wij: Amén.

May the One who blessed our ancestors, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel v' Leah bless our brother reb_____ the son of Avraham our forefather who has come up for an aliyah to the Torah (on this holy Shabbat) as he has come to be sheltered under the wings of the divine presence, the Shekhinah, and to attach himself to the inheritance of Israel and to be counted among the righteous converts of the nation of the God of Avraham and Sarah.

May it be God's will that his journey will be successful and that he will see all the work of his hands blessed and the wishes of his heart fulfilled for good with all the People Israel and let us say Amen.

* * * * *

MJLF

**Office d'accueil
des nouveaux venus au sein d'Israël**

Les rabbins :

Bénis soient ceux qui viennent au nom de l'Éternel !

Nous vous bénissons dans la maison de l'Eternel !

Blessed are those who come in the name of the Eternal!

We bless you in the house of the Eternal!

En cette occasion joyeuse et solennelle, nous renouvelons l'alliance du Sinaï, conclue entre Dieu et le peuple d'Israël, en évoquant les paroles du prophète: « L'étranger les accompagnera et se joindra à la maison de Jacob.»¹⁵⁵

In this solemn and joyous occasion, we renew the covenant of Sinai, between God and the people of Israel, citing the words of the prophet: "the stranger (ger) shall be accompanied and shall join the house of Jacob."

¹⁵⁵ Isaïe 14 : 1.

Ô Éternel notre Dieu, nous Te remercions pour Tes multiples bénédictions. Nous Te savons gré de la vérité que Tu as révélée à l'humanité tout entière. Nous Te louons pour le don de la Tora qui a toujours été une lumière sur notre chemin. Nous nous souvenons avec respect et gratitude de tous les descendants d'Abraham et de Sara qui T'ont été fidèles et de tous ceux qui, de par leur choix propre, ont cherché à Te servir en épousant la tradition du peuple d'Israël.

Eternal our God, we thank You for Your many blessings. We are grateful to You that You have revealed the truth to all humanity. We praise You for the gift of the Torah that has always been a light to our path. We remember with respect and gratitude all the descendants of Abraham and Sarah who have been faithful to you and all those who, by their own choice, have sought to serve You by espousing the tradition of the people Israel.

Éternel notre Dieu, accorde Ta faveur à ces hommes et ces femmes que nous accueillons aujourd'hui solennellement dans le peuple d'Israël et la vie juive. Conscients des malheurs survenus dans notre histoire, ils ont pourtant choisi de rejoindre notre peuple et de devenir les dignes héritiers, de notre tradition. Nous leur ouvrons nos cœurs. Puisses-Tu, ô Eternel, les renforcer dans leur résolution. Aide-les à vivre en fidélité à la décision qu'ils ont prise et à la promesse qu'ils vont faire. Puissent-ils trouver joie et satisfaction dans l'accomplissement de Tes commandements. Accorde-leur de nombreuses années de force et de bonheur en tant que dignes membres de notre communauté. Nous Te bénissons, ô Éternel notre Dieu, dont la présence est source de joie. Amen.

Lord our God, grant Your favour to these men and women whom today we solemnly welcome into the people of Israel and Jewish life. Aware of the misfortunes that we have overcome in our history, they nonetheless chose to join our people and become the worthy heirs of our tradition. We open our hearts to them. May You, O Lord, strengthen them in their determination. Help them to be faithful to the decision they made and to the promise they will keep. May they find joy and satisfaction in the fulfilment of Your commandments. Grant them many years of strength and happiness as worthy members of our community. We bless you, O Lord our God, whose presence is a source of joy. Amen.

Les nouveaux venus:

The new gerim say :

De mon propre choix, j'ai décidé d'entrer dans l'Alliance éternelle entre Dieu et le peuple d'Israël, et de devenir juif (juive). J'accepte le Judaïsme à l'exclusion de toute autre foi et pratique religieuse. En toute circonstance, je resterai loyal(e) envers le peuple juif et le Judaïsme. Je promets de fonder un foyer juif et de participer activement à la vie de la synagogue et de la communauté juive. Je m'engage à poursuivre l'étude de la Tora et du judaïsme. Si Dieu m'accorde des enfants, je promets de les élever dans le judaïsme.

Of my own choice, I decided to enter the eternal covenant between God and the people of Israel, and become a Jew(ess). I accept Judaism to the exclusion of any other faith and religious practice. In all circumstances I will remain loyal to the Jewish people and Judaism. I promise to found a Jewish home and to participate

actively in the life of the synagogue and the Jewish community. I pledge to continue studying the Torah and Judaism. If God grant me children, I promise to raise them as Jews.

תּוֹרַת יְהוָה תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ. עֲדוֹת יְהוָה נְאֻמָּנָה מְחַפֵּימַת פֶּתִי. פְּקוּדֵי יְהוָה יִשְׁרִים מְשֻׁמְחֵי-לֵב.
מִצְוֹת יְהוָה בְּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינַיִם. יְרֵאת יְהוָה טְהוֹרָה עוֹמֶדֶת לְעַד. מִשְׁפָּטֵי-יְהוָה אֶמֶת צְדָקוֹ יִחְדָּו:
«L'Enseignement de l'Éternel est parfait : il restaure l'âme. Le témoignage de l'Eternel est véridique :
il donne la sagesse au simple. Les préceptes de l'Eternel sont droits : ils réjouissent le cœur. Le
commandement de l'Eternel est lumineux : il éclaire les yeux. La crainte de l'Eternel est pure : elle
subsiste à jamais, Les jugements de l'Eternel sont vérité; ils sont parfaits tous ensemble. »¹⁵⁶

"The teaching of the Lord is perfect: it restores the soul. The testimony of the Lord is true: it gives wisdom unto the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right: they rejoice the heart. The commandment of the Lord is light: it brightens the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure: it endures forever. The judgments of the Lord are true and they are perfect together. "

כִּי לָקַח טוֹב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם. תּוֹרַתִּי אֶל-תַּעֲזוּבוּ: עֲצֵ-חַיִּים הִיא לְמַחֲזִיקִים בָּהּ. וְתִמְכְּיָהּ מְאֹשָׁר: דְּרָכֶיהָ
דְּרָכֵי-נֵעִם וְכָל-נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם.

«Je vous ai donné un bon héritage, ne l'abandonnez pas. La Loi du Seigneur est un arbre de vie pour ceux qui s'attachent à elle, et le bonheur est le partage de ceux qui l'observent. Qu'ils sont beaux les sentiers que nous ouvre l'Enseignement divin! C'est à la paix qu'ils nous conduisent. »¹⁵⁷

"I have given you a good inheritance, do not abandon it. God's law is a tree of life to those who cling to it, and all who observe it are happy. It's ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace."

Pourquoi je suis juif

[...] Je suis juif, parce que la foi d'Israël réclame, de mon cœur, toutes les abnégations.

Je suis juif, parce qu'en tous lieux où pleure une souffrance, le Juif pleure.

Je suis juif, parce qu'en tout temps où crie une désespérance, le Juif espère.

Je suis juif, parce que la parole d'Israël est la plus ancienne et la plus nouvelle.

Je suis juif, parce que la promesse d'Israël est la promesse universelle.

Je suis juif, parce que, pour Israël, le monde n'est pas achevé: les hommes l'achèvent.

Je suis juif, parce que, pour Israël, l'Homme n'est pas créé: les hommes le créent.

Je suis juif, parce qu'au-dessus des nations et d'Israël, Israël place l'Homme et son Unité.

Je suis juif, parce qu'au-dessus de l'Homme, image de la divine Unité, Israël place l'Unité divine, et sa divinité.

Edmond Fleg

[...]I am a Jew because the faith of Israel requires of me all the devotion of my heart.

I am a Jew because in every place where suffering weeps, the Jew weeps.

I am a Jew because at every time when despair cries out, the Jew hopes.

¹⁵⁶ Psaumes 19 : 8-10.

¹⁵⁷ Proverbs 4 : 2 et 3 : 17-18.

*I am a Jew because the word of Israel is the oldest and the newest.
I am a Jew because the promise of Israel is the universal promise.
I am a Jew because, for Israel, the world is not yet completed; people are completing it.
I am a Jew because, above the nations and Israel, Israel places the person and his Unity.
I am a Jew because above the person, the image of the divine Unity, Israel places the divine Unity, and its divinity.*

« Mais Ruth répliqua: "N'insiste pas auprès de moi pour que je te quitte et m'éloigne de toi; car partout où tu iras, j'irai; où tu demeureras, je veux demeurer; ton peuple sera mon peuple, et ton Dieu sera mon Dieu; là où tu mourras, je veux mourir aussi et y être enterrée." »¹⁵⁸

But Ruth answered, "Do not entreat me to leave you, to return from following you, for wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.

*On ouvre le Arone hakodesh (tabernacle) ; on remet un Séfer-Tora (rouleau de la Tora) à chaque converti.
The Aron hakodesh (tabernacle) is opened and a Sefer-Torah (Torah scroll) is given to each convert.*

Les rabbins : The rabbis:

Vous vous tenez devant l'Arche ouverte et face à la Tora, le trésor du peuple juif. Elle nous a guidés depuis que nous l'avons reçue au Sinaï. Elle a été portée à des moments de joie intense et lorsque nous avons fui les synagogues et les villages en feu.

Nous plaçons la Tora dans vos bras. Prenez-la sur vos cœurs en récitant le Shema -- ces mots qui ont été prononcés par le peuple Juif depuis ses origines.

You stand before the open Ark facing the Torah, the treasure of the Jewish people. It has guided us since we received it at Sinai. The Torah Scroll was brought to moments of intense joy and when we fled the synagogues and burning villages.

We put the Torah in your arms. Place it over your heart when reciting the Shema - the words that have been spoken by the Jewish people from its beginnings.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד :

כָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מְלֻכּוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד :

וְאַתְּהֵבֵת אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֵדְךָ : וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל-לִבְבְּךָ : וְשָׁנַנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלֻכְתְּךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ : וְקִשְׁרָתָם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטָטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ : וְכַתַּבְתָּם עַל-מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ :

Écoute Israël, l'Éternel est notre Dieu,

l'Éternel est Un .

¹⁵⁸ Ruth 1 : 16-17.

Béni soit-Il ! la gloire de Son règne est éternelle !

Tu aimeras l'Eternel ton Dieu de tout ton cœur, de toute ton âme et de tout ton pouvoir. Que ces paroles que Je t'adresse aujourd'hui soient gravées dans ton cœur. Tu les inculqueras à tes enfants, tu en parleras en demeurant dans ta maison, en allant en chemin, en te couchant et en te levant. Imprime-les sur ton bras, grave-les entre tes yeux, inscris-les sur les poteaux de ta maison et sur tes portes.

Deutéronome 6 : 4-9

**Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God;
the Lord is one.**

Blessed is the glorious name of God's kingdom for all eternity!

And you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means: And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your heart: n And you shall teach them to your children and speak of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk on the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up: And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be ornaments between your eyes: And you shall inscribe them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

Avant de replacer les Sifrei- Tora dans le Arone hakodesh, on les fait passer dans les bras de tous les convertis. On peut chanter un ou deux chants durant cette opération.

Before replacing the Sifrei Torah in the Aron kodesh, they are passed to all the converts. A song or two may be sung during this process.

Les familles non juives :

Un membre de notre famille a choisi de chercher Dieu par une autre voie que la nôtre. Nous faisons tous de notre mieux pour accomplir la volonté de Dieu, en empruntant parfois des chemins différents mais qui mènent tous à la pratique de la justice et de la paix dans l'humanité tout entière. Nous restons proches de ceux qui ont fait un choix différent du nôtre et nous nous engageons à nous respecter mutuellement.

Non-Jewish families:

A member of our family chose to seek God in another way than ours. We all do our best to fulfil the will of God, sometimes taking different paths but all lead to the practice of justice and to peace for all humanity. We will remain close to those who have made a choice different from ours and we pledge to respect one another.

Les familles juives :

Nous accueillons avec joie les nouveaux venus. Ils seront à nos yeux, conformément à la tradition juive, égaux en tous points à ceux qui sont nés juifs, car il est écrit dans le midrash :

«Pourquoi la Tora a-t-elle été donnée dans le désert? Pour spécifier que le désert est ouvert à tous, et qu'ainsi les mots de la Tora sont disponibles pour tous. Que personne ne dise: "Je suis un fils de la Tora, car la Tora m'a été donnée à moi et à mes pères; mais vous et vos pères n'êtes pas des fils de la Tora: vos pères étaient des convertis. " C'est pourquoi il est écrit : "L'héritage de la maison de Jacob"¹⁵⁹, de tous ceux qui se rassemblent dans [la maison] de Jacob. »

¹⁵⁹ Deutéronome 33 :4.

The Jewish families:

We welcome newcomers. They will in our view, in accordance with Jewish tradition, be equal in all respects to those who were born Jews, for it is written in the Midrash:

"Why was the Torah given in the desert? To clarify that just as the desert is open to all, so the words of the Torah are available for all. Let no one say: "I am a son of the Torah because the Torah was given to me for me and my fathers, but you and your fathers are not the son of the Torah: your ancestors were converted. This is why it is written: "the legacy of the house of Jacob", of all who gather in [the house] of Jacob."

Les rabbins :

Vous portez à présent deux prénoms. L'un signifie que vous êtes toujours liés à ceux qui vous ont donné la vie. Le deuxième est un nom biblique. Il lie votre destin à celui du peuple d'Israël. Que ce nom soit pour vous une source de respect et d'honneur!

Nous nous réjouissons d'accueillir ceux qui, volontairement et fidèlement, rejoignent les rangs de notre peuple.

The rabbis:

You bear two names now. One means you are always linked to those who gave you life. The second is a biblical name. It binds your destiny to that of Israel. May this name be a source of respect and honour for you!

We are delighted to welcome those who voluntarily and faithfully join the ranks of our people.

Nous appelons maintenant la bénédiction de Dieu sur vous:

We now call God's blessing on you:

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ.
יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיְתַנְּנֶךָ.
יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ, וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

Que l'Éternel vous bénisse et qu'Il vous protège!

May the Lord bless you and protect you!

Que l'Éternel vous éclaire de Sa face et vous accorde Sa grâce !

May the Lord may shine the divine countenance on you and grant you God's mercy!

Que l'Éternel tourne Sa face vers vous et vous donne la paix !

May the Lord lift up God's face toward you and give you peace!

Toute l'assemblée prononce alors la bénédiction suivante:

The entire assembly then pronounces the following blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַחַיִּיבוּ וְהַיְמִינוּ וְהַגִּיעָנוּ לְיָמֵינוּ הַזֶּה.

Sois loué Éternel, notre Dieu, Roi de l'univers, qui nous as fait vivre, qui nous as maintenus debout et qui nous as permis d'atteindre ce moment.

Blessed is the Eternal, Our God, the God of all creation, who has blessed us with life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this moment.

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Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues¹⁶⁰

Admission to Judaism

קבלת גרים

וּבְנֵי הַנֶּכֶר הַנְּלוּיִם עַל־יְהוָה לְשָׂרְתוֹ וּלְאַהֲבָה אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה לְהִיוֹת לוֹ לְעֹבְדִים כָּל־שָׁמֵר שְׁבֹת
מִחֻלּוֹ וּמִחֻזְקִים בְּבְרִיתִי: וְהִבְיֵאוּתִים אֶל־הַר קֹדֶשׁי וְשִׁמְחָתִים בְּבֵית תְּפִלָּתי עוֹלֵתֵיהֶם
וְזִבְחֵיהֶם לְרִצּוֹן עַל־מִזְבְּחִי כִּי בֵיתִי בֵּית־תְּפִלָּה יִקְרָא לְכָל־הָעַמִּים:

And the foreigners who join with the Lord to serve Him and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, everyone who observes the Sabbath from profaning it and who holds fast to My covenant. I will bring them to My holy mount, and I will cause them to rejoice in My house of prayer, their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be acceptable upon My altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

The Rabbi welcomes the proselyte

בְּרוּךְ הַבָּא / בְּרוּכָה הַבָּאָה בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה. בֵּרְכֵנוּכֶם מִבֵּית יְהוָה.

Blessed be you who come in the name of God. Here, in God's house, may you be blessed.

The Rabbi asks the proselyte:

Do you sincerely affirm the Jewish faith?

Do you of your own free will choose to enter the eternal Covenant between the God of Israel and the House of Israel?

Do you pledge your loyalty to the Jewish faith and the Jewish people in all circumstances?

Do you promise to be the best of your ability to practice Judaism in your personal life and to participate actively in the life of the Jewish community?

[If you should be blessed with children, do you promise to raise them as Jews?]

A scroll is taken out of the Ark and handed to the proselyte, who declares:

I solemnly declare before Gods that I will strive to carry out faithfully the duties and responsibilities which have now been placed upon me as a Jew. I pray for strength so to honour my commitment that I may bring credit to the Jewish people, blessing to humanity, and glory to God's name. To all those present, who represent the House of Israel, I say:

עֲמִד עִמִּי, וְאֵלֶיךָ אֶלְהֵי.

¹⁶⁰ Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues. *Siddur Lev Chadash* (London 1995) 593-594

Your people shall be My people, and your God my God.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד.
**Hear, O Israel: The Eternal One is our God;
the Eternal God is One.**

וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ.

And you shall love the Eternal One, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might.

We welcome you into our community, saying:

(in the case of a man)

You are our brother.

אַחֵינוּ אַתָּה.

(in the case of a woman)

You are our sister.

אַחֹתנוּ אַתָּה.

כִּי לֶקַח טוֹב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם, תּוֹרַתִי אֶל־תַּעֲזוּבוּ. עֵץ־חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחְזִיקִים בָּהּ, וְתוֹמְכֶיהָ מְאֹשֶׁר. דְּרָכֶיהָ
דְּרָכֵי־נֵעָם, וְכָל־נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם.

Behold, a good doctrine has been given to you: do not forsake it. It is a tree of life for those who hold it fast, and all who cling to it find happiness. Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.

The scroll is replaced in the Ark, which is closed; then the Rabbi says to the proselyte:

מִי שֶׁבֵרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה, רֵבֶקָה, רָחֵל וְלֵאָה, הוּא יְבָרַךְ [אֶת אַחֵינוּ
זֶה אֲשֶׁר בָּא] [אֶת אַחֹתנוּ זֹאת אֲשֶׁר בָּאָה] לַחֲסוֹת תַּחַת כַּנְּפֵיו, וְיִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ/שְׁמָהּ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
בֶּן/בַּת אַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה.

May the One who blessed our ancestors – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah – bless this our brother/sister who has come to take refuge under the wings of the Eternal One; and let his/her name in Israel be..... son/ daughter of Abraham and Sarah.

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ.

יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּתְנַבֵּךְ.

יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם.

May God bless you and keep you. May God look kindly upon you, and be gracious to you. May God reach out to you in tenderness, and give you peace.

* * * * *

Movement for Reform Judaism

Service from Siddur *Seder Ha-Tefilot*, Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship published in 1977

1977

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SERVICE UPON ADMISSION TO THE JEWISH FAITH

Psalm 15 (page 422) and Psalm 121 (page 540)

To be recited by the convert

My God, the father of all mankind, accept the offering of my heart at this solemn time. I have chosen to enter the family of Israel. I stand in Your presence as a member of Your people and ask for Your blessing. Help me to follow the teachings of Judaism, to live a Jewish life and to be part of Israel's destiny. Give me the strength and courage to share its dangers and difficulties as well as its responsibilities and opportunities. I thank You for this moment and all the future offers me. Be the light which guides me through my life. May my words and actions earn Your blessing; may they bring honour to Israel; may they make Your name holy in the world.

Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל • יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד :

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your might.

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ • בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ
וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ :

Prayer by the Rabbi

For a man

Almighty God, we welcome into our community our brother
.....
whose name shall be called in Israel.....
Care for him and hear his prayer for he has been called to serve

For a woman

Almighty God, we welcome into our community our sister
.....
whose name shall be called in Israel.....
Care for her and hear her prayer for she has been called to serve

Reform Movement US

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GIYUR SERVICE IN THE SYNAGOGUE

*(A rabbinical beit din or a rabbi and two devoted
synagogue members should be present.)*

(Rabbi's remarks.)

RABBI

Blessed are you who בְּרוּכִים הַבָּאִים בְּשֵׁם
come here in God's name. יי

We bless you in God's בְּרַכּוּכֶם מִבֵּית יי
name.

At this sacred and joyous moment, we renew the
Covenant at Sinai between God and the people of
Israel, recalling the words of the prophet Isaiah:
"Strangers shall join them, and shall cleave to the
House of Israel" (Isaiah 14:1).

O God, we thank You for Your many blessings.
We thank You for the truth You have revealed to all
humanity. Above all, we thank You for the gift of

ק"ג - ד"ד
Rabbi's manual
(1982)

198

עמך עמי ואלהיך אלהי

(Ruth 1:16)

GIYUR

201 *Giyur Service in the Synagogue*

1. Do you choose to enter the eternal covenant between God and the people Israel and to become a Jew of your own free will?
2. Do you accept Judaism to the exclusion of all other religious faiths and practices?
3. Do you pledge your loyalty to Judaism and to the Jewish people under all circumstances?
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. Do you commit yourself to the pursuit of Torah and Jewish knowledge?
6. If you should be blessed with children, do you promise to raise them as Jews?

(Or the following affirmation might be made by the ger/giyoret:)

Of my own free will, I choose to enter the eternal Covenant between God and the people of Israel and to become a Jew. I accept Judaism to the exclusion of all other religious faiths and practices. Under all circumstances I will be loyal to the Jewish people and to Judaism. I promise to establish a Jewish home

203 *Giyur Service in the Synagogue*

Behold, I have given you a good doctrine— My Torah: do not forsake it. It is a tree of life to those who hold it fast, and all who cling to it find happiness. Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace. (From Psalm 119)

כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם,
תורתִי אל-מעֹזְבוֹ.
עֵץ-חַיִּים הִיא
למִחְיֵי־חַיִּים בָּהּ, וְחַמְדָּהּ
מֵאֲשֶׁר.
דְּרָכֶיהָ דְרָכֵי-נֹעַם, וְכָל-
נְחִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם.

I am a Jew because my faith demands of me no abdication of the mind.

I am a Jew because my faith requires of me all the devotion of my heart.

I am a Jew because in every place where suffering weeps, I weep.

I am a Jew because at every time when despair cries out, I hope.

I am a Jew because the word of the people Israel is the oldest and the newest.

I am a Jew because the promise of Israel is the universal promise.

Giyur Service in the Synagogue 200

Torah, which has ever been a light for our path. We recall with reverence and gratitude all those descendants of Abraham and Sarah who have been faithful to You, and those who, of their own choice, have sought to serve You through the faith and people of Israel.

O God, grant Your loving favor to _____ as in this holy place we welcome him/her into Jewish life. Knowing well the history of our martyrdom in years past, (name) has chosen to join himself/herself to our people's faith. We open our hearts to him/her. Strengthen _____ in his/her resolve. Help him/her to live in fidelity to the decision he/she has made, and to the promise he/she is about to utter. May he/she always find satisfaction and joy in the fulfillment of Your sacred *mitzvot*. Grant him/her many years of strength and happiness as a worthy member of our congregation. We praise You, O God, in whose presence is the fullness of joy. Amen.

(Questions are directed to ger/giyoret by rabbi [and members of beit din].)

Giyur Service in the Synagogue 202

and to participate actively in the life of the synagogue and of the Jewish community. I commit myself to the pursuit of Torah and Jewish knowledge. (If I should be blessed with children, I promise to raise them as Jews.)

(Reading by ger/giyoret.)

The Torah of God is perfect, reviving the soul; the teaching of God is sure, making wise the simple.

תּוֹרַת יְיָ תְּמִימָה,
מְשִׁיבַת נַפְשׁ;
עֲדוּת יְיָ נֶאֱמָנָה,
מְחַכְמַת פְּתִי;

The precepts of God are right, delighting the mind; the *mitzvah* of God is clear, giving light to the eyes.

פְּקוּדֵי יְיָ יִשְׂרָיִם,
מְשַׂמְחֵי לֵב;
מִצְוַת יְיָ בְּרָה, מְאִירַת
עֵינָיִם;

The word of God is pure, enduring forever; the judgments of God are true, and altogether just.

יְרֵאת יְיָ טְהוֹרָה, עוֹמֶדֶת
לְעַד;
מִשְׁפָּטֵי יְיָ אֱמֶת, צְדָקוֹ
יִתְרוֹ.

(Psalm 19)

RABBI

_____, you stand before the open Ark and before the commanding presence of the Torah, the Jewish people's most cherished treasure. It has led us on the way and guided us ever since we received it at Sinai. It has been carried during the times of our greatest rejoicing, and when we fled from burning synagogues and villages.

I place the Torah in your arms. Take it to your heart as you now recite the *Shema*, the words on the lips of the Jew until the moment of death, the affirmation that has sustained the Jewish people in life since our beginnings.

(The candidate recites Shema and Ve-ahavta:)

Hear, O Israel: Adonai is our God, Adonai is one. **שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל: יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְיָ אֶחָד!**

Shema Yisra-eil: Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad!

Be mindful of all my **אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי**
mitzvot, and do them: so **אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם**
shall you consecrate **לְהֵיוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים. אֲנִי**
yourselves to your God. **יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.**
I, Adonai, am your
God who led you out of
Egypt to be your God; I,
Adonai, am your God.

Ve-ahavta eit Ado-nai E-lo-he-cha, be-chol
le-va-ve-cha, u-ve-chol naf-she-cha, u-ve-chol
me-o-de-cha.

Ve-ha-yu ha-de-va-rim ha-ei-leh, a-she-ri a-no-chi
me-tsa-ve-cha ha-yom, al le-va-ve-cha.

Ve-shi-nan-tam le-va-ne-cha, ve-di-bar-ta bam
be-shiv-te-cha be-vei-te-cha
u-ve-lech-te-cha va-de-rech,
u-ve-shoch-be-cha u-ve-ku-me-cha.

U-ke-shar-tam le-ot al ya-de-cha,
ve-ha-yu le-to-ta-fot bein ei-ne-cha.
U-che-tav-tam al me-zu-zot bei-te-cha
u-vish-a-re-cha.

I am a Jew because, for Israel, the world is not completed; we are completing it.

I am a Jew because, for Israel, humanity is not created; we are creating it.

I am a Jew because Israel places humanity and its unity above the nations and above Israel itself.

I am a Jew because, above humanity, image of the divine Unity, Israel places the unity which is divine. (After Edmond Fleg)

Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to return from following after you. For wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried." (Ruth 1:16, :17)

וְתֹאמֶר רוּת: אֵל-תְּפַנְעֵי-בִי לְעֹזְבִי, לְשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרָי, כִּי אֶל-אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אֵלָּה, וּבְאֲשֶׁר תִּלְוִי אִלַּי. עִמָּךְ עִמִּי וְאִלְהֵיךְ אֵלֹהֵי. בְּאֲשֶׁר תִּמְוֹת אֲמוֹת וְשָׁם אֶקְבֹּר.

Ve-ahavta

You shall love Adonai your God with all your mind, with all your strength, with all your being.

Set these words, which I command you this day, upon your heart. Teach them faithfully to your children; speak of them in your home and on your way, when you lie down and when you rise up.

Bind them as a sign upon your hand; let them be a symbol before your eyes; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house, and on your gates.

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ. וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם, עַל-לִבְּךָ. וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ, וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ, וּבְלִקְחֶךָ בְּהַרְדֵּךְ, וּבְשֹׁכְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ. וְקִשַּׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ, וְהָיוּ לְטַטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ. וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתְךָ, וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ. לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם כְּכָל-מִצְוֹתַי, וְהֵייתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים לְאֱלֹהֵיכֶם. אֲנִי יְיָ

* * * * *

Conservative Movement

1.

Our God and God of our ancestors, You called Abraham and Sarah to make Your sovereignty known to all humanity. You summoned Moses to teach Torah, thus bringing all humanity, both near and far, closer to You. We now ask You to grant blessing to _____, who stands before the ark of Your Torah. (He / She) stands before Your ark as the people of Israel stood at Sinai, choosing to accept Your sovereignty and the *mitzvot* of Your Torah with love.

May _____ now live as a true and righteous member of Your people Israel, embracing the heritage of our past, sharing both the burdens and the joys of our present, and anticipating the glory of our redemption. Adonai, God of Israel, spread over _____ Your shelter of peace. Grant (him / her) the treasures of Your blessings in a life of Torah and *ma'asim tovim*, good deeds. And let us say: Amen.

גירורת / J-21

A welcoming ceremony

■ *The formal requirements of conversion—ברית-טבילה or ברית רם, רטפת רם, טבילה מרילה במקודה כשר these three procedures are sufficient to meet the halakhic requirements of conversion, some public acknowledgment may also be in order. Such a ceremony may take place at a regular synagogue service, such as a Shabbat evening or morning service, or quite appropriately, during the first day of Shavuot, when the book of Ruth is read. Alternatively, the appropriate מרי שברך may be recited when the Jew by Choice is first given an עלילה to the Torah. Other colleagues have chosen to hold a more private ceremony involving only invited family and friends. However the ceremony is scheduled, it should take place before an עלילה ארון קודש or during an עלילה to the Torah. The rabbi may modify or adapt this ceremony as circumstances require and may certainly omit it without halakhic consequence.*

[Begin with either one of the following prayers:]

גירורת / J-20

קריאת שם

In casting your destiny with the Jewish people, you have chosen a Hebrew name. With this name, you shall be linked to the Jewish people wherever you are, during this lifetime and beyond. We declare your name to be:

_____ (בַּת / בֶּן) אַבְרָהָם אֶבְרָתָה אֶמְנוֹה

May this name bring respect to you and honor to the Jewish people.

_____, our people have always pursued the truth, allowing Torah to guide us through history, from our first encounter with God to this very day. We take its teachings to heart, and recall on this day ancient words recited by a woman whom we have honored throughout the ages, a woman who is also the Bible's model Jew by Choice:

2.

At this sacred and joyous moment, we recall the covenant established at Sinai between God and the people Israel and we recall the words of Your prophet: "Others shall join them and cleave to the House of Israel" [Isaiah 14:1].

Our God and God of our ancestors, we thank You for Your many blessings. We thank You for the gift of Your Torah, that has always been a light on our path, enhancing our life with meaning and helping us reflect the divine image in which we are created. We recall with reverence and gratitude all those descendants of Abraham and Sarah who faithfully served You, and those who, by their own choice, embraced a life of Torah and *mitzvos*, thereby accepting the destiny of the Jewish people.

We ask You to grant Your blessings to _____, who now stands before the ark of Your Torah. (He / She) stands before Your ark, as the people Israel stood at Sinai, choosing to accept Your sovereignty and the *mitzvos* of Your Torah with love. Strengthen _____ in (his / her) resolve. Help (him / her) to live in fidelity to the decision (he / she) has made. May _____ always find satisfaction and joy in the fulfillment of Your sacred *mitzvos*. Grant (him / her) strength and happiness as a full member of the Jewish people. We praise You, God, in whose Presence is the fullness of joy. And let us say: Amen.

J-23 / גיראת

גיראת / J-22

וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל-לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל-
נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדֶךָ. וְדִוְיֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר
אָנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ דַּיּוֹם, עַל-לִבְּךָ. וְשִׁנְתָתָם לְבַנְיֶיךָ,
וּדְבָרָתְךָ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ, וּבְלִצְתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ,
וּבְשִׁבְתְּךָ וּבְקוּמָתְךָ. וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדֶךָ, וְדִוְיֵי
לְטַטְפֹת בֵּיז עֵינֶיךָ. וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל-מַזוֹזֹת בְּיַתְּךָ
וּכְשִׁעְרֶיךָ.

Love Adonai your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might. And these words which I command you this day you shall take to heart. You shall diligently teach them to your children. You shall recite them at home and away, morning and night. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, they shall be a reminder above your eyes, and you shall inscribe them upon the doorposts of your homes and upon your gates. [Deuteronomy 6:4-9]

[The rabbi may now read the גִּירוּת and continue as follows:]

וְהָאִמֵּר רֹוּת: אֵל-תִּפְגַּעֲנֵי-בִי לְעֻזְבֶּךָ לְשׁוֹב
מֵאֲחֵרֶיךָ, כִּי אֵל-אֲשֶׁר תִּלְכִּי אֵלַי, וּבְאֲשֶׁר תִּלְכִּי
אֵלַי, עִמָּךְ עִמִּי, וְאֵלֶיךָ אֵלַי. כִּי אֲשֶׁר תִּמְוֹתֵי
אֲמוֹת, וְשֵׁם אֲקַבֵּר; כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה
יִסִּיף, כִּי הַמְּוֹת גְּפֹרִיד בִּינִי וּבִינֶךָ.

And Ruth said: Do not urge me to leave you, to turn away from joining you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people and your God, my God. Where you die will I die and there will I be buried. I vow before God that nothing but death could part me from you. [Ruth 1:16-17]

■ *After the naming, the rabbi may want to deliver a brief תּוֹרַה רַבֵּר. Upon concluding, the rabbi asks the Jew by Choice to open the קוּדֶשׁ document, and recite the Shema.*

THE SHEMA

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד.

Hear, O Israel:

Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.

כָּרוֹךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מְלֻכּוֹתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

We praise God's glorious sovereignty
throughout all time.

May God who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, bless _____ (ben / bat) Avraham Avinu v'Sarah Imeinu who, in search of Your shelter of peace, has come to participate in the destiny of the people Israel. May (he / she) be counted among the righteous Jews by Choice who are devoted to the God of our ancestors. May the *Kadosh Barukh Hu* protect and deliver (him / her) from all trouble and distress, bringing blessing and success to all (his / her) worthy endeavors, together with our fellow Jews everywhere. And let us say: Amen.

[The ceremony concludes with a presentation of the תעודת גיררות and a light repast in honor of the Jew by Choice.]

■ *As a final act of welcome, the rabbi should make every effort to link the Jew by Choice to a synagogue and to make such arrangements which will allow the Jew by Choice to continue Jewish education through a local Adult Education program such as an Adult Bar and Bat Mitzvah Class.*

גיררות / J-27

מי שברך
FOR THE NEWLY CONVERTED

For a male

מי שברך אבותינו אברהם יצחק ויעקב, שרה ורבקה רחל ולאה, הוא יברך את-אחינו _____ בן אברהם אבינו ושרה אמונו כבואו לחסות תחת פנפי השכינה ולהסתפח פנתלת ישראל ובהמונתו על גרי האצק בתוך עם אליה אברהם. יהי רצון שיעצלים בדרך ויראה ברכה בכל-מעשה ידיו, ונאמר אמן.

For a female

מי שברך אבותינו אברהם יצחק ויעקב, שרה ורבקה רחל ולאה, הוא יברך את-אחותנו _____ פת אברהם אבינו ושרה אמונו כבואה לחסות תחת פנפי השכינה ולהסתפח פנתלת ישראל ובהמונתה על גרי האצק בתוך עם אליה אברהם. יהי רצון שתצלים בדרך ותראה ברכה בכל-מעשה ידיה, ונאמר אמן.

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גיררות / J-26