

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
RESOLUTION
GUIDELINES ON CONVERSION
1979

1. INTRODUCTION

We understand conversion to be a process, the goal of which is a wholehearted and informed acceptance of Judaism for its own sake. We consider the formal adoption of Judaism by a person who has been born a non-Jew to be a decision which is to be accorded respect and a process to be invested with seriousness of purpose and dignity.

The preparation, counseling and final ceremonies should give expression to the fact that even though conversion to Judaism is primarily a religious act, its dimensions and consequences are more encompassing. A person seeking to become a Jew should be sensitized to the realization and manifest an awareness that there is involved also an act of incorporation into a people whose civilizational values are now entrusted to him/her to internalize and express in attitude and practice.

We deem it the responsibility of Jewish congregations and of the Jewish community at large to welcome warmly into their midst, and involve in all their activities, persons who have converted to Judaism.

1. CONVERSION FOR THE SAKE OF MARRIAGE

We recognize that the decision to convert is in each case unique and involves a multitude of feelings, influences, motivations and purposes. We deem marriage to a Jewish partner to be a justifiable and commendable initial reason for conversion. It must be, of course, evident that the candidate, after proper instruction and counseling, freely chooses to become a Jew. Conversions for the sake of marriage may serve to strengthen the marital relationship (Sh'lom Bayit) and can also serve to enrich Judaism and enlarge the Jewish people. A significant number of converts, through marriage, have become truly dedicated Jews (Gerei Tzedek).

1. OUTREACH TO CONVERTS

Every possible outreach effort should be made to incorporate warmly into the Jewish community those people interested in conversion to Judaism, especially non-Jewish spouses of Jews.

1. PROCESS OF PREPARATION

- A. The duration of the process of preparing a candidate for conversion will be at the sponsoring rabbi's discretion. It is suggested that it last between six months and a year, affording the candidate the opportunity of both theoretical Jewish learning and the personal experience of a major portion of the Jewish calendar cycle.
- B. The learning process should include both group instruction (where possible) and individual tutorials and counseling. Additional participation in adult education programs should be encouraged, as well as attendance at services and participation in other areas of Jewish communal, religious and cultural life.
- C. When the prospective convert is married to or contemplating marriage to a Jew, the Jewish partner should also participate in the preparation process.
- D. The role of the rabbi in the conversion process should not be limited to the

transmission of information, but should take into account the varied emotional needs on the part of the convert and his/her Jewish spouse or friend and their respective family relations.

5. PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

- A. We endorse T'vilah (ritual immersion) as an initiatory rite, for both men and women proselytes.
- B. Non-circumcised male proselytes should be circumcised L'ot B'rit if there is no extraordinary physical or emotional hazard.
- C. The practice of Hatafat Dam B'rit (symbolic circumcision on already circumcised males) will be at the discretion of the sponsoring rabbi.
- D. The proselyte should be encouraged to make a tzedakah offering to a Jewish cause, in keeping with an ancient Jewish custom (cf. Gerim 2:5)
- E. The Beit Din should consist of three adult Jews, of which at least one should be a rabbi. Male and female alike may serve in a Reconstructionist Beit Din.
- F. The function of the Beit Din will not be primarily to put the candidate through a "dissertation defense" type of examination, but to elicit from him/her thoughts and feelings, to discuss areas of concern and interest, offer encouragement and counsel, and reiterate the responsibilities of involvement with the Jewish people and Judaism. The Beit Din experience should be warm and memorable.
- G. A religious ceremony of acceptance of Judaism should be celebrated following the completion of ritual requirements and the Beit Din session. These have been usually private ceremonies, but some may wish to consider a group and/or public ceremony of conversion. Such a religious service would emphasize the covenantal link established mutually between the convert and the Jewish People, and it would have the additional positive function of sensitizing the community to the need to welcome and support the convert (Hakhnasat Hager). Certain holidays such as Hanukkah, Shavuot, Simhat Torah lend themselves particularly to such a ceremony.
- H. The ceremony should include a "Declaration of Acceptance of Judaism" on

the part of the convert. The ritual may be enriched with appropriate selections from classic or contemporary Jewish sources. The rabbi or a member of the congregation may wish to address the candidate, who, in turn, might want to make a personal statement.

- IX. A Hebrew name is to be selected by the convert, followed by the expression: "ben/bat Avraham avinu v'Sarah imenu."
- X. A document, signed by the three members of the Beit Din, officially certifying the conversion, should be given to the convert, and copies kept in congregational and the Movement's records. It is suggested that copies be also kept in the personal records of the rabbis.

11. GENERAL REMARKS

- A. The convert is to be considered a full Jew, with all the privileges and

responsibilities this identity entails.

- B. Since Reconstructionism does not consider applicable the division of Jews

into the categories of Kohen, Levi and Yisrael, laws pertaining to prohibited marriages between converts and the priestly class are not binding.

C. In the spirit of K'lal Yisrael, the Reconstructionist Movement recognizes

conversions performed under the sponsorship of bona fide rabbis or movements within the Jewish community, whether or not similar conditions as those upheld by the Reconstructionist rabbi or Movement were required.

D. If one parent is Jewish, either mother or father, the offspring is to be

regarded as Jewish and should undergo the rites prescribed by our tradition (B'rit Milah for boys, or a covenantal naming ceremony for girls); but no special conversion procedure is required.