

**RRA GUIDELINES ON GIYYUR**  
**Adopted at RRA Convention, March 17, 2009**

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**BACKGROUND**

The first RRA Guidelines on Conversion were adopted by the Association in 1979. A committee chaired by Rabbi Dennis C. Sasso produced the document adopted at the RRA Convention that year.

In the intervening years the RRA has grown considerably and the demography of the North American Jewish community has changed in many ways. There was a need for more detailed and expanded conversion guidelines.

In 2006, a committee including Rabbis Ron Aigen, Stephen Booth-Nadav, Seth Riemer and Elyse Goldstein prepared an initial draft of new Guidelines on *Giyyur*. After review and discussion by the RRA Board, a revised draft was prepared by Rabbi Richard Hirsh with the assistance of Rabbi Brant Rosen.

A draft of proposed new Guidelines on *Giyyur* was brought by the RRA Board for discussion at the 2008 RRA Convention. Based on the convention conversation and subsequent additional feedback from RRA members, the RRA Board authorized dividing the proposed Guidelines into three sections: the Guidelines themselves, an appendix of values and concepts related to *giyyur*, and an *aytza tova* internal document for RRA members with suggested practices for consideration by Reconstructionist rabbis.

The Guidelines below, with the appendix on values and concepts, were adopted March 17, 2009, at the RRA Convention. The *aytza tova* document as approved by the RRA Board in conjunction with these Guidelines is available at the members section of the RRA website, [www.therra.org](http://www.therra.org).

The Board of the RRA extends its appreciation to the members of the RRA who created the original “1979 Guidelines on Conversion” and to the many members of the RRA whose input, suggestions and insights helped shape the “2009 Guidelines on *Giyyur*” that we hope will serve the North American Jewish community.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Reconstructionist rabbis welcome those who show interest in becoming part of the Jewish people. These Guidelines reflect Reconstructionist perspectives on the norms, recommendations and expectations for *giyyur* (conversion) that maintain continuity with tradition while also being responsive to contemporary circumstances.

There are many ways in which Reconstructionist rabbis can help those who choose to become Jews to make decisions about and choices from the deep, rich and diverse opportunities in Jewish tradition. Since these are guidelines, not rules, the question of what is “required” for a Reconstructionist conversion is better framed as a question about what rituals we recommend and endorse as norms for *giyyur*. As members of a rabbinic community, we expect each other to be informed and guided by our consensus positions, and for those positions to influence our professional decisions when working with potential *gerim* (converts).

Each Reconstructionist rabbi requires certain educational and ritual standards as a condition of *giyyur*. Such standards should be explained early in the relationship between a rabbi and a potential *ger/gioret*. These include *limud*, *kabbalat Torah* and *kabbalat mitzva*, *mikveh*, *brit mila* (or *hatafat dam brit*), and *bet din*.

The mitzvah of *haknusat hager* is a rabbinic responsibility. Full-time congregational rabbis should not accept fees for teaching a potential *ger* or for serving on a *bet din* for *giyyur*. However, a rabbi can suggest that a *ger/gioret* perform an act of *tzedaka* in return for the rabbi’s participation on a *bet din*. This does not preclude a community from compensating members of its *bet din*. The direct expenses involved, such as the *mikveh* fee, can be borne by the convert, but “nothing should be allowed that would even hint of any motive for the conversion other than its being done *l’shem shamayim*” (RRA Code of Ethics, 2007). Community “Introduction to Judaism” courses do often require a fee.

### **A. Pathways to Jewish Life**

Some people develop an initial interest in *giyyur* as part of a spiritual search for a meaningful approach to God, serious religious practice, and religious community. They may have read something about Judaism, or perhaps had close friends who are actively Jewish and are open about sharing their tradition. They may be spiritual seekers in search of a set of beliefs about spiritual and religious issues. They may be people disenchanted with or distant from the faith tradition in which they were raised. They may be exploring a variety of religious traditions including Judaism.

Some people express an initial interest in considering *giyyur* in the context of being in a serious, committed or partnered relationship with someone Jewish. While outside of such a relationship the idea of converting to Judaism might not have arisen, it becomes something to be considered because of the implications for the religious practice that will characterize the home, what the religious identity of any children will be and in cases

where marriage or a commitment ceremony is anticipated, what kind of ceremony will take place.

Rabbis are also frequently approached to facilitate the formal entry into the Jewish people of children brought into Jewish families through adoption or third-party birth.

Regardless of how one's journey to Judaism begins, rabbis are called upon to provide guidance to those interested in considering Judaism as their spiritual home and the Jewish people as their religious community.

### **B. Jewish Identity and Status**

“Jewish identity” is a fluid term, subject to differing interpretations, standards and expectations. Because conversion involves taking on Jewish identity, it is helpful at the outset to make a distinction between the terms “identity” and “status.” “Identity” refers to the ways in which individuals choose to identify themselves (for example, “I am Jewish”). In the case of a child, it is the way in which parent/s identify the child, as in “my/our child is Jewish.”

“Status” is an affirmation of “identity” by a community, group, people or some other form of collectivity. For example: “In our congregation, community or movement, we recognize you as being Jewish,” or, conversely, “In our congregation, community or movement, we do not recognize your claim to Jewish identity.”

Conversion to Judaism involves both identity and status. One takes on a Jewish identity by entering into the historical story of the Jewish people as one's own and by living in and through the cultural-religious categories of Judaism. But *gerim* also have a need for recognition as Jews by choice by the Jewish community. Rabbis play a key role in guiding people considering *giyyur* through the instruction and rituals that will enable them both to become Jewish and to be recognized as Jewish.

## **II. ADULT CONVERSION**

The concept and process of conversion to Judaism evolved over a considerable period of time during the second Temple period and into the early rabbinic period. The standards, ritual requirements and affirmations of faith and practice that define *giyyur* in traditional Judaism were not normative until the early centuries of the Common Era. Although *midrash* often portrays Ruth as “the first convert” and speaks of Abraham and Sarah “converting” people to monotheism, these are better understood as retrojected myths, not as actual examples of conversion.

From a Reconstructionist perspective, choosing Jewish identity is not so much an acceptance of faith as it is an act akin to taking on citizenship. This “citizenship” is cultural-religious rather than national-political, and therefore conversion entails becoming familiar with the story of the Jewish people — its history, holidays and heroes; its values, beliefs and practices; and its religious vocabulary.

In a citizenship model, one is asked to affirm allegiance — for example, to the United States of America. One is not, however, required to affirm allegiance to a specific political party, to define oneself as a liberal or conservative, or to have to a specific interpretation of the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. Similarly, conversion to Judaism from a Reconstructionist perspective offers one a series of choices — about conceptions of God and of spirituality, about degrees of Shabbat and holiday observances, about *kashrut*, prayer, and other categories.

As Reconstructionist rabbis, we ask of those seeking to convert an active engagement with the major categories of Jewish life. But we also recognize the validity of choices people make within those categories. Our focus is on the thoughtfulness with which they make these choices.

### **III. PREPARATION FOR GIYYUR**

#### **A. Academic Preparation**

Prospective *gerim* should have the opportunity to study Judaism in some depth and gain a sense of Jewish literacy. This can include knowledge of Jewish history; of fundamental ideas and values as well as diverse approaches to them; an understanding of the Jewish calendar, and the holidays; Shabbat and Yom Tov observances; *tefila*; *kashrut*; the *Humash*, *TaNakh* and *Siddur*, and some familiarity with the classic categories of Jewish literature (Mishna, Gemara, Midrash, Codes, Commentaries). A reading knowledge of *siddur* Hebrew provides access to Jewish liturgy.

Jewish communities often sponsor “Introduction to Judaism” courses. Many rabbis encourage people to enroll in such courses, and often provide supplemental individualized instruction and counseling. Other rabbis offer their own introductory courses and/or provide individualized instruction.

A period of one year of study (and other preparation) is recommended as a minimum. In cases where a person may already have experience with Jewish tradition and/or some knowledge of Judaism (such as often occurs with someone married to a Jew), a shorter period of formal preparation may be appropriate.

Under certain circumstances, it may be appropriate to abbreviate the period of study and proceed with the conversion, even if the prospective *ger/gioret* has not yet achieved the level of knowledge and experience we would normally require.

We want to communicate that *gerim* are becoming part of the Jewish people, and adopting Judaism, not that they are joining the Reconstructionist movement or converting to “Reconstructionist Judaism.” In some instances, after conversation with a potential *ger/gioret*, we may realize that they would be better served by being referred to a rabbinic colleague in a different denomination. Prospective *gerim* should be encouraged to attend a variety of synagogues or other communities for Shabbat services in order to experience

diverse styles and approaches, and to encourage familiarity and comfort in more than one denominational setting.

### **B. Spiritual Preparation**

Since Judaism is the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people one criterion for *giyyur* is a personal connection and commitment to a serious engagement with Jewish religious concepts and categories. We do not expect *gerim* to declare fidelity to a specific form of Jewish religious faith, or to accept one conception of God in particular from among the many choices that can be found in Jewish tradition. We do want people who choose Judaism to engage seriously with religious and theological issues, and to be challenged to reflect on the range of approaches to God, and to work on cultivating a sense of personal Jewish spiritual identity. Prospective *gerim* can keep a spiritual diary or journal for reflection.

We encourage prospective *gerim* to develop a personal spiritual practice. They should be encouraged to explore a variety of practices that can include (but are not limited to) daily prayer, meditation, recitation of *brachot*, regular giving of *tzedaka*, the observance of Shabbat and some connection with *kashrut*.

### **C. Preparation for Life in Community**

Since Jewish identity is best nurtured, developed and expressed in the context of Jewish community, potential *gerim* should be directed where possible toward several Jewish communities that they might explore and/or participate in as part of the *giyyur* process.

If a potential *ger/gioret* is working with a congregational rabbi, the rabbi's synagogue often becomes the primary community through which acculturation into the Jewish community is supported. Other people may work with rabbis who are serving on a college campus, as chaplains, as educators, or in some other setting, and they may find a different Jewish community in which to participate as they prepare for *giyyur*.

The issue of "membership" in a congregation before one has completed the process of conversion is complex and sensitive. Where *giyyur* takes place through a synagogue community, potential *gerim* may feel awkward or pressured if membership is conferred upon them before the conversion process is complete. We strongly discourage congregations from requiring potential converts to join, either through complimentary membership or at the regular membership fees. Those preparing for conversion should of course be welcomed to attend and, where appropriate, to participate in community activities, *tefila*, and study. We do encourage offering initial complimentary or reduced-fee memberships at the time of the actual conversion.

#### **IV. RITUALS OF GIYYUR**

##### **A. *Tevila***

We endorse *tevila* as a norm. Immersion with the accompanying *berakhot* is an important and significant ritual of *giyyur*. When a *mikveh* is available, that is the preferred place for *tevila* to occur, circumstances permitting. If a natural body of water is used, appropriate care should be taken to preserve privacy and modesty.

##### **B. *Brit Mila and Hatafat Dam Brit***

We endorse *brit mila* as a norm for *giyyur*, or *hatafat dam brit* for a prospective *ger* who has been circumcised. *Brit mila* with the accompanying *berakhot* is an important symbol of the communal and covenantal nature of Jewish identity. The rabbi should explain in general terms how the procedure is done, although the physician and/or *mohel* involved will provide the details. When a rabbi requires *brit mila* or *hatafat dam brit* for *giyyur*, this should be made clear at the outset so that potential problems can be avoided later on.

We recognize that there may be emotional, psychological and medical concerns about adult circumcision. When such concerns arise, we should be responsive and respectful, and provide information and explanations that might alleviate the anxiety. A discussion with a *mohel* or *mohelet* may be helpful in this regard.

##### **C. *Bet Din***

We endorse having a *bet din* as a formal communal point of entry, with the members representing the Jewish community and offering welcome. The *bet din* should preferably consist of three rabbis. The sponsoring rabbi is normally the *rosh bet din*. A cantor, Jewish educator or other knowledgeable Jewish professional may serve in place of a rabbi if two other rabbis are not available. In some situations, a rabbi may choose to include appropriate Jewish laypeople. They should be chosen carefully and should understand the importance of confidentiality.

##### **D. Ritual**

Some form of liturgical/ritual ceremony should take place. During the actual conversion ceremony, the Jewish name the person has chosen is bestowed. An RRA *giyyur* certificate should be presented along with a letter on the rabbi's stationery documenting the conversion. The RRA's "*Giyur Information*" form (see Appendix 2) should be given to the convert as well and the rabbi should keep a copy. Copies of all documentation should be sent to the RRA office for permanent files.

## **E. Jewish Names**

*Gerim* traditionally take the patronymic and matronymic *Avraham avinu v'Sara imenu*. Many Reconstructionist rabbis and *gerim* simply use *ben* or *bat Avraham v'Sara* in all settings where the Jewish name would be used. Some Reconstructionist rabbis may suggest using *avinu* and *imenu* for conversion certificates and other documentation.

Some *gerim* may suggest wanting to use names other than *Avraham* and *Sara* as the patronymic/matronymic. They may prefer to choose or suggest the names of two other biblical or Jewish figures. Some may choose to use the names of two men or two women. When rabbis are opposed to the use of names other than *Avraham* and *Sara*, they should indicate that early in the process.

Some *gerim* report feeling that using the names of “Jewish parents” is a rejection or an act of disrespect regarding their own parents and they have asked to take as their Jewish patronymic and matronymic the names of their parents. This is a sensitive pastoral issue to be discussed. We endorse as a norm taking on the names of symbolic Jewish parents for occasions known as *d'var she-bi-kedusha*, such as being called for an *aliya*, recording one's name on a *ketuba* or *get* or making an inscription on a *matzeva*.

## **V. CONVERSION OF CHILDREN**

### **I. Introduction**

The Jewish status of an adopted child with a non-Jewish biological mother, or of a child born via a non-Jewish gestational carrier/surrogate, is traditionally established through the conversion of the child. Within the Jewish community opinions differ about the traditional requirement of *giyyur* in these cases. Many adoptive Jewish parents support *giyyur* of adopted children as an acknowledgment that families created through adoption are different from families created through childbirth. Some parents may object to the idea of requiring conversion for a child who, they believe, deserves recognition as a Jew by virtue of being their child.

The rituals of *giyyur* can be seen as a way of honoring the different journey to Jewish identity taken by the adopted child. Having a different journey does not mean having a less meaningful or significant one. *Tevila*, in particular, is a traditional ritual of transition that can serve as an affirmation of the bond between child and parent/s.

In terms of identity and status, *giyyur* ensures a wider circle of acceptance of the child's Jewish identity, reflecting the Reconstructionist commitment to Jewish peoplehood and to *k'lal Yisrael*. We endorse as a norm *lehatkhila* the rituals of *giyyur* (including a *bet din*) for adopted children who are born of a non-Jewish biological mother or children born via gestational carrier/surrogate.

Some adopted children never have a formal conversion in infancy or early childhood but are raised with an exclusively Jewish religious identity. When such individuals continue to identify as Jews later in life *b'diavad* we recognize their Jewish status without requiring any subsequent rituals of conversion. In individual cases a person could of course voluntarily choose some ritual of affirmation and/or formal conversion. (For a discussion of “affirmation” see Section VI below.)

## **II. *Tevila* and *Brit Mila***

We endorse as norms the rituals of *tevila* and *brit mila* (or *hatafat dam brit*). Rabbis may suggest or support exceptions based on the age of a child or adult involved as well as other conditions or circumstances.

Since the visit to the *mikveh* should occur only when the child is old enough to manage the brief immersion, the steps of *giyyur* for an infant or young child may be spread over a period of time. *Brit mila* might occur early on with the *mikveh* following a few months later, and a public naming ceremony at yet another time (the naming can also be done at the time of the *mikveh*).

With an adoption of a boy past infancy, circumcision may require a hospital setting. The circumcision would normally be performed by the physician and a *mohel* would complete the *brit milah* with *hatafat dam brit*. Some hospitals permit the *mohel* or *mohelet* to participate in the procedure itself, in which case *hatafat dam brit* is not necessary.

Depending on the age of an adopted boy, medical, psychological and emotional issues will need to be addressed in considering circumcision and *hatafat dam brit*. Reconstructionist rabbis may have differing opinions or requirements, depending on the age of the child and the circumstances of the family. We should give particular attention to what will help to establish a Jewish identity, and what might be counterproductive.

## **III. Hebrew Names**

When choosing a Jewish name for the child, the patronymic and/or matronymic should be based on the Jewish names of the parents involved. Parents should be aware of the tradition of adult converts using the patronymic *Avraham [avinu]* and the matronymic *Sarah [imenu]*, and that some traditional positions that endorse the same procedure for children who are converted.

## **VI. AFFIRMATION**

In increasing numbers we encounter people who have some potential but ambiguous claim to Jewish identity. As an example, someone born Jewish may have adopted and lived another religious identity without formally rejecting her or his Jewish identity, but now wants to identify only as a Jew. Or someone born of a Jewish parent but not raised in any religious tradition may want to identify as a Jew in an active way. In such cases, conversion may not be a meaningful or appropriate paradigm.



An alternative to conversion in such cases is a ceremony or ritual of affirmation. Depending on a person's Jewish knowledge, her or his degree of active participation in Jewish life, and other factors, some formal process of Jewish education may be suggested by a rabbi prior to an affirmation ceremony.

Jews who convert to another religion and subsequently choose to return do not require a formal conversion back into Judaism, although some rabbinic authorities believe that an appearance before a *bet din* in which one renounces another faith and declares loyalty to Judaism is required. Some opinions hold that *tevila* is required. In this situation, a ceremony or ritual of affirmation might be appropriate.

## **VII. RECOGNITION OF CONVERSIONS**

A. RRA members recognize conversions supervised by other RRA colleagues.

B. In the spirit of *k'lal yisrael* and *ahavat yisrael*, we recognize and accept conversions supervised by rabbis who are members of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), and the Rabbinical Assembly (RA). Reconstructionist rabbis may also recognize other conversions as legitimate when there was substantial Jewish education and ritual and ceremonial/liturgical marking of the conversion.

C. The recognition of conversions in Israel is a complicated as well as a fluid issue. Conversions completed outside the State of Israel are recognized at the present time (2009) for civil purposes such as immigration and citizenship but not for purposes of *ishut*, which are determined by religious authorities.

Practical implications for a particular *ger/gioret* should be explained.

## **VIII. CONCLUSION**

We affirm the spirit of the talmudic statement that “the righteous of the peoples of the world have a share in the world to come” and conversion to Judaism is not a requirement for salvation. Judaism is also a rich spiritual and cultural tradition that provides a sacred path for life's journey. We welcome those who choose to join the Jewish people through conversion and find their place in Judaism's sacred story. Conversion is a process that goes beyond the actual rituals and ceremony of *giyyur*.

Our responsibility as rabbis is to help those who seek out Judaism to learn about it and, for those who choose conversion, to continue to support them as they find their place in the Jewish community.

## **APPENDIX 1: VALUES AND CONCEPTS RELATED TO GIYYUR**

### ***Am Yisrael / Jewish Peoplehood***

Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan articulated the path of Jewish identity as one that moves from *belonging* to *behaving* to *believing*. As Reconstructionist rabbis, we understand Jewish identity to begin with a sense of belonging to and being a part of the Jewish people. Our participation in the cultural, religious and spiritual traditions of Jewish civilization leads us to engage with Jewish ritual and ethical behavior, as well as with Jewish spiritual practice. Our commitment to the goals of godliness leads us into the search for and faith in the reality of divinity.

### ***K'lal Yisrael / The Jewish Community***

Jewish peoplehood is lived out in various patterns of behavior and belief, religious as well as secular, ethnic as well as cultural. Transcending differences is the unifying concept of *k'lal Yisrael*, the worldwide Jewish people. As Reconstructionist rabbis, we seek to balance our particular practices and perspectives with our awareness of and responsibility to the larger Jewish community. We recognize that we are welcoming converts into the life of the Jewish people — past, present and future.

### ***Brit / Covenant***

Jews are part of the covenantal community of the Jewish people. As the Bible tells the story, the Jewish people is not a natural, geographic, ethnic or national people like some of its early contemporaries, such as the Egyptians, the Babylonians or the Canaanites. The story of the Jewish people begins instead with the Torah's depiction of God's call to Abraham to leave behind his old identity and embark on a journey toward a new identity based on a covenantal relationship with God. By the second book of the Torah, the Israelite people had begun to emerge as a community, one whose identity was created through entering into a covenant — a covenant based on principles of *tzedek* and *chesed* — both with one another and with God.

Since Judaism is both a culture and a religious tradition, defining Jewish identity is challenging. Throughout the generations of the Jewish people, the primary answer to the question of “who is a Jew” has been “one born into the Jewish people.” This corresponds to the ethnic/belonging piece of Jewish identity. Since the rabbinic period, another answer has been “one who converts to Judaism.” The answer to the question “who is a Jew” has been “one who lives in covenant with God through the Torah tradition.” This corresponds to the religion/behaving and believing piece of Jewish identity. Jews seek to bring godliness into the world through covenantal relationships of love and justice, both with other Jews and with humanity at large.

### ***Keiruv / Reaching Out and Responding***

One of our primary responsibilities as contemporary rabbis is to reach out to those who express interest in Judaism and to respond in a welcoming and inviting way that will encourage further exploration and study. In light of changing demographics in the Jewish community, where intermarriage has brought an increasing number of non-Jews into the Jewish community, we have new opportunities to share the richness of Jewish tradition as a spiritual and communal path worthy of consideration.

***B'nei Noach / Universalism***

The monotheism of Judaism is the foundation of the implicit universalism in the biblical affirmation that all human beings are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, as vessels of divinity. As Reconstructionist rabbis, we recognize and affirm that there are many paths to the Holy One — no one has to become Jewish in order to “have salvation.” Judaism is the way in which Jews seek to live out the implications of their covenantal relationships with each other and with God. Other religious traditions embody their own understandings of how to live in holy relationships with other people and with God. We seek to communicate our commitment to Judaism and our belief in its vibrancy and vitality on their own terms, in contrast to but not in competition with other faiths.

***Hakhnasat HaGer / Welcoming the Convert***

While no one has to convert to Judaism, those who choose to do so are to be warmly welcomed. Because we understand Judaism to be a culture and a civilization, we see conversion primarily as joining the Jewish people, embracing its history and tradition, and finding one's place in the sacred Jewish narrative. We thus recognize that both before and after an actual conversion ceremony, we have an ongoing obligation to help those who have converted to Judaism to find their place in the Jewish community.

***Sh'lom Bayit / Wholeness in the Home***

There are many paths to conversion. When a couple has chosen to establish a Jewish home and, if raising children, to raise them as Jews, sharing the same religious identity among all family members can be a source of solidarity and sharing. We should also be alert to issues of *sh'lom bayit* in the family from which a convert comes, recognizing that choosing Judaism may disrupt the peace of that home. We should provide whatever assistance and support we can to help restore relationships that may become disrupted.

***Torah, Avoda and G'milut Chasadim / Learning, Doing and Helping***

We want those choosing Judaism to engage in serious, lifelong Jewish learning. We want those choosing Judaism to engage in meaningful Jewish observances. We want those choosing Judaism to engage in acts that help to bring all people closer to justice, kindness and compassion.

***Halakha, Mitzvah and Minhag / Jewish Law, Commandment and Custom***

We understand Judaism to be a humanly created and continually evolving religious civilization. The teachings and practices of prior generations—particularly as embodied in the halakhic traditions—inform and influence our positions, policies and procedures. But we also recognize that contemporary Jewish life presents many challenges and opportunities that traditional texts, teachings and interpretations could not have anticipated. Many of the issues we face as Reconstructionist rabbis call for innovation, creativity and change beyond what *halakha* prescribes or permits.

*Mitzvah* (with its correlative implication of a *Metzaveh*, or commander) has traditionally meant “obligation.” While the *mitzvot* may not be from God at Sinai, they do speak with the voice of the generations of the Jewish people. *Mitzvot* are those acts that Jews should consider seriously as

personal practices. *Mitzvot* come to us as imperatives based on the wisdom, sanctity and meaning they embody. Following a Hasidic Midrash that understands *mitzvah* as meaning that which “connects” or “binds” us, we can also understand *mitzvot* as those Jewish practices which serve to connect us—to God, to one another, to our ancestors, and to the Earth. (In Aramaic, the root means “to join, to attach.”)

*Minhag* informs both our rabbinic determinations and the recommendations we make to those choosing conversion. Cultures create continuity through the conservation of consensus. We see in *minhag* a communal perspective that asks more of us than just personal preference, but also a creative perspective that allows for and encourages a diversity of ways in which Jewish tradition can be lived. We encourage those choosing Judaism to embrace as fully as possible the *minhagim* of the Jewish people.

### ***Kabbalat Ol Malkhut Shamayim / The Jewish Spiritual Path***

Conversion to Judaism includes entering into a serious spiritual conversation in which differing conceptions of God are explored. Our hope is that those choosing Judaism will find a meaningful way to enter into relationship with God/godliness. Our responsibility is to represent the diverse Jewish approaches to God, to teach wherein they may differ from those found in other faith traditions, and to help guide people toward Jewish beliefs they may embrace.

### ***Kabbalat Ol Mitzvot / Creating a Personal Jewish Spiritual Practice***

Conversion to Judaism also includes creating a personal spiritual practice. This has traditionally included observance of Jewish ritual, including Shabbat and the *chagim*, as well as prayer, meditation, reflection, Torah study and some form of *kashrut*. Our responsibility is to explain the range of ritual and other practices from which those choosing Judaism can create a meaningful personal spiritual practice.

### ***Keva and Kavana / Precision and Intent***

We recognize the value of maintaining a core of consensus around our work with those choosing Judaism. The norms (*keva*) articulated in these guidelines reflect our collegial commitments to each other and toward those we bring into the Jewish people. We also recognize the importance of honoring the intent behind our norms (*kavana*) and understand that each rabbi seeks the best ways to meet the needs of those converting.

### ***Ivrit / Hebrew***

We want those choosing Judaism to understand key Jewish concepts in their Hebrew context (e.g., “*tzedaka*,” rather than “charity”). The Hebrew language is the primary vehicle for Jewish texts and prayers. Acquiring a basic reading knowledge of Hebrew is essential for entering fully into Jewish religious life. Insofar as Hebrew is the primary language of the State of Israel, it helps to connect those joining the Jewish people with the contemporary Jewish experience.

***Eretz Yisrael and Medinat Yisrael / The Land and the State of Israel***

*Eretz Yisrael* has been and remains central to the experience of the Jewish people, and is explicit in the biblical understandings of the covenant of the Jewish people. We want those choosing Judaism to understand the significance of *Medinat Yisrael* for contemporary Jewish life — both in terms of the safety and security of the Jewish people and in terms of Judaism as a civilization lived most fully. The diversity of political, cultural and religious views openly expressed in Israel and found within American Jewry regarding the state of Israel should be shared with those choosing Judaism.

***Kedusha / Holiness***

The Torah calls upon the Jewish people to strive toward holiness (*kedoshim t'hiyu*). Holiness is found in the quest to distinguish our lives according to some higher good and in consequence of the obligation to act toward others in ways equal to how we hope others will act toward us. *Kedusha* includes a sense of distinctiveness — understood both as elevating the mundane to the sacred and of transforming the profane into the holy.

Striving toward holiness is our obligation, the response we make to the gift of being created *b'tzelem Elohim*: “Just as God is gracious and compassionate, so should you be compassionate; just as God is righteous, so you should be righteous.” (*Sifrei Deuteronomy, Ekev*).

**APPENDIX 2**

**Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association**  
**1299 Church Road, Wyncote, Pennsylvania 19095**  
**215 576 5210 [www.therra.org](http://www.therra.org)**

**RECORD OF CONVERSION**

This is to document the conversion to Judaism and joining of the community of the Jewish people by:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Jewish name: \_\_\_\_\_

whose current address is:

\_\_\_\_\_

and participated in the following as part of the conversion process:

(please check and complete all sections that apply)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Torah study under the direction of Rabbi \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ immersion in a *mikveh*, that took place on \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_ *hatafat dam brit*, that took place on \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_ *mila l'shem gerut*, that took place on \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_ meeting with a *bet din* consisting of the following members:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

that took place on: (date) \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_ ritual/ceremony of conversion on (date) \_\_\_\_\_

at \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information/rituals:

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Signature of Rabbi

Date