

PERSONAL JOURNAL FOR JEWS-BY-CHOICE

Name of Congregation: Temple Solel
Address: 6805 East McDonald Drive
Paradise Valley, AZ 85253
Phone Number: (602) 991-7414
Number of Members: 840 families
UAHC Region: Pacific Southwest Council
Rabbis: Maynard Bell
Alan Berlin
Outreach Chair: Hannah Toporek

Brief Description: The journal exists in two versions. Version I is a one page list of “Thought Starters” for journal entries, and is given to the new Jew-by-Choice with a blank diary-style journal book. It can be used when the recipient does not have the opportunity to be involved in a post-conversion group. Version II is a pre-printed journal with a “Thought Starter” at the top of each page. This version can be used in conjunction with a pre- or post-conversion group. The “Thought Starters” are suggestions provided as a means to help the writer get started.

Program Goal: The potential or new Jew-by-Choice has many social, spiritual and emotional issues to sort out. In addition to sharing the process in meetings with rabbis, writing down thoughts and feelings can help to clarify the issues and events of the conversion process. The journal also provides a tangible way of reflecting upon and evaluating the journey.

Target Population: New Jews-by-Choice; prospective converts

Total Cost of Program: \$5.00 to \$10.00 per person (for journals and copying)

Source of Funding: Annual Outreach budget

Logistics: Version I—blank journal, copies of
welcome letter and one page list.
Version II—copies of preprinted journal and
spiral binding.

Instructions to the Facilitator: When using the journal in conjunction with a pre- or post-conversion group, use the “Thought Starters” to stimulate discussion, or send the journal (as a whole, or a few pages at a time) home with participants to use at their leisure. Possibly provide time to share entries if group members wish to do so.

Evaluation of Program: The group facilitator can include evaluation of the journal in the general group evaluation (sample enclosed). For Version I, a letter can be sent to the recipient of the journal asking general follow-up questions as well as eliciting feedback on the journal (sample enclosed).

Follow-up: The group facilitator should contact past group participants 6-8 weeks

following the final meeting and periodically as needed thereafter. The rabbi or Outreach Chair who distributed the Version I journal should contact participants by a letter or phone call at least twice during the following year.

Cover:

JOURNAL NOTEBOOK COVER TITLE:

***A PERSONAL JOURNAL
FOR
JEWS-BY-CHOICE***

Page one:

**WELCOME LETTER
(to appear as the first page of the journal notebook)**

Shalom and welcome to the Jewish Community! You have made a choice to become a part of the Jewish tradition and we rejoice with you!

You are beginning a new phase of your personal journey. Keeping a journal can help you understand your feelings as you proceed through your first years as a Jew. The following "Thought Starters" have been prepared to help guide you through many aspects of your decision. Each of the suggested journal entries covers a particular topic. Of course, you may add your personal thoughts to the samples provided, or choose a subject of your own. As you write in your journal, questions may develop to which you do not have answers. You are encouraged to use those opportunities to find answers, and in turn, to grow in Jewish knowledge and experience.

This is a special gift for you. Our hope is that this journal will aid you in clarifying your spiritual journey. In the years to come, you will be able to look back and see how your feelings and experiences have changed or remained the same.

B'Shalom,

(signature)

THOUGHT STARTERS (each underlined title and bulleted item should appear on the top of a blank page in the notebook)

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

1. *Thought Starters: Describe your religious background and upbringing, what affect you think it had on your decision to explore Judaism/convert, and how it still affects you. Think of something positive you bring with you as a result of this background. Describe your reasons for exploring Judaism/converting.*

Date:

CONVERSION AND FAMILY

2. *Thought Starters: Describe some positive and negative experiences you've had resulting from exploring Judaism/converting (with your parents and siblings; and with your spouse and your spouse's family, if applicable). Also, describe how your journey has affected your relationship with your children (if applicable). Then relate how you've handled these situations, and what you might do differently if these situations arise again in the future.*

Date:

BUMPS IN THE ROAD

3. *Thought Starters: Describe some positive and negative experiences you've had on your journey (excluding family, including those within the Jewish community). Again, relate how you've handled these situations, and what you might do differently in the future*

Date:

HOW I FIT IN

4. *Thought Starters: Describe how you see yourself integrating into Jewish life, and into the Jewish community. Is there anything you would change? How would you go about making this change?*

Date:

DIFFICULT AND EMOTIONAL QUESTIONS

5. *Thought Starters: What are your feelings about the Holocaust? What are your feelings about Israel?*

Date:

IT IS OKAY TO QUESTION

6. *Thought Starters: Describe any religious issues or questions you have. What resources are available for use in resolving these issues? Is time itself one of the resources?*

Date:

PERSONAL PRACTICE AND MEANING

7. *Thought Starters: How do you see Judaism affecting and enriching your life? Are there rituals or traditions that you do not participate in now that you would like to add to your life in the future?*

Date:

THE CONVERSION PROCESS

8. *Thought Starters: Describe your feelings during the conversion process. (What were you excited about? What were your fears, your expectations?) Describe your experience with the conversion class. What were your feelings during the conversion ceremony? How do you feel now that the formal process is over?*

Date: **SECTION 2 OF NOTEBOOK: TITLE PAGE**

LIVING IN “JEWISH TIME”

A Journey Through the Hebrew Calendar

SHABBAT

9. *Thought Starters: Describe your Shabbat experiences and your Shabbat goals.*

Date:

DAYS OF AWE: Rosh Hashanah

10. *Thought Starters: Describe your experience with Rosh Hashanah this year. Did you understand the meaning of the holiday? How were services? Describe your thoughts during the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.*

Date:

DAYS OF AWE: Yom Kippur

11. *Thought Starters: Describe your experiences with Yom Kippur this year. Did you understand the meaning of the holiday? How were services? Was this your first year fasting?*

Date:

SUKKOT

12. *Thought Starters: Describe your experience with Sukkot this year. Did you eat in a*

sukkah? Would building a sukkah be a part of your practice in the future? Are there other ways in which you can relate to Sukkot (such as shaking a lulav and etrog)?

Date:

SIMCHAT TORAH

13. *Thought Starters: Describe your experience with Simchat Torah this year. Did you attend services? Did you dance with the Torah?*

Date: CHANUKAH

14. *Thought Starters: Describe any traditions you participated in which enhanced your experience (such as lighting candles, eating latkes, etc). Describe any mixed emotions you might be having at this time of year.*

Date:

TU B'SHEVAT

15. *Thought Starters: Did you attend a seder? Did you commemorate the day by planting a tree or by having one planted in Israel?*

Date:

PURIM

16. *Thought Starters: Did you understand the meaning of the holiday? Describe any traditions you participated in which enhanced your experience (such as attending the Megillah reading, shaking a grogger, etc)*

Date:

PESACH

17. *Thought Starters: Describe any traditions you participated in which enhanced your Passover experience (such as attending a seder, refraining from eating leavened items, etc).*

Date:

YOM HASHOAH YOM HA'ATZMAUT

18. *Thought Starters: Did you understand the significance of these holidays? Describe any special activities you may have participated in to commemorate these days.*

Date:

SHAVUOT

19. *Thought Starters: Did you attend a study session or a service? Did you feel this to be*

a special season in regards to choosing Judaism?

Date: **SECTION 3 OF NOTEBOOK: TITLE PAGE**

MAZEL TOV!
It has been a year.
Let's see where your journey has led you.....

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAST YEAR

20. *Describe your best Jewish moment this year.*

Date:

21. *How do you see yourself having grown spiritually?*

Date:

22. *Describe how you see yourself integrating into Jewish life, and into the Jewish community. Is there anything you would change? How would you go about making the change?*

Date:

23. *What are your goals for the upcoming year?*

Date:

“NEW BEGINNINGS” SURVEY

Name (optional) _____

Honesty-please!

1. What resources were the most helpful?
2. Did you find Jewish humor to be an enjoyable peek into the psyche and culture of the Jewish people?
3. Which topic did you enjoy discussing the most?
4. Which topic would you like to have spent more time discussing?

5. What topic was the most difficult to discuss?
6. Was the time the group was held convenient for you? Would another time have been more convenient? Please explain.
7. What topic was not covered, that you would have like to discuss? Please explain.
8. In what ways do you think the “New Beginnings” program could be improved? Please explain.
9. What other programs would you like to see Temple Solel offer?
10. Were the journal entries helpful to you? Did you feel keeping a journal was worthwhile?

Please share any additional comments:

THANK YOU!!

EVALUATION LETTER

DATE

Dear.....

We have been thinking of you and hope this letter finds you in good health and spirits!

Some time ago, you received a copy of the “Personal Journal for Jews-by-Choice.” We hope that the journal has been worthwhile and helpful to you. Enclosed is a questionnaire about the journal and a stamped return envelope. If you could take a few minutes to answer the questionnaire, we would greatly appreciate it!

Please remember that we are here to answer your questions and to support you. Do not hesitate to contact us if you need anything at all. The temple’s number is 991-7417. My home number is... I look forward to hearing from you again!

Best wishes for a sweet new year,

Hannah Toporek
Temple Solel Outreach

QUESTIONNAIRE

A Personal Journal for Jews-by-Choice

Did you find keeping a journal helpful?

Were you able to find the time to write?

Has looking back at earlier entries given you insight into your journey?

Would you recommend keeping a journal to other potential Jews-by-Choice?