

## *“Nobody Ever Asked!”*

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*“The stranger who resides among you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love such a person as yourself for you were once strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Lev. 19:33-34)*

Albert Einstein, it is reported, once said he was sorry he had been born a Jew because he was denied the opportunity and personal satisfaction of independently choosing Judaism. What a great privilege it is to share our love of Judaism and enthusiasm for Jewish life and to be open about how positively another person might feel about Jewish life. Considering to become a Jew by choice does not mean leaving one's family behind, erasing childhood memories, or magically changing into a totally different person. Some people study for months only to decide that it is not for them. Nor should conversion ever be foisted upon those who adhere to other religious traditions. But ultimately, it is something for many who live among us to think about....

With the warmth of summer finally upon us, I had a rush of phone calls from people who are interested in “choosing Judaism.” Each year 8-12 people study with me and consider conversion to Judaism. It is time consuming, but truly sacred time with people who are on a spiritual quest; no two are alike. This is a well kept secret. They are men and women...and a teen here or there; they are single, married, young and old. They come from a variety of faith backgrounds and from no faith; some are atheists and others are lapsed Christians; one, a Mormon, another of Chinese cultural extraction...even one who is sure that he is a descendant of Marranos. Some are married to non-Jews. Some have considered this for many years; others come anxiously to talk to a rabbi for the very first time.

A young man recently called and told me that his good friend's wife, whom he assumed was Jewish, recently expressed interest. She told him, “No one ever asked!” No one ever mentioned it to me!” My door is always open to those who wish to explore and more than that, there are endless opportunities to find an entry point this season: Try... “A Taste of Judaism: Are You Curious?” Try... “Hebrew Crash Course: Learn to Read Hebrew in Just 5 Mornings!” Try... “Shabbat Services (we have a special Learner's Service to help you along), or weekly Torah Study, or any one of a myriad of gateway opportunities to begin to engage in meaningful Jewish learning and Jewish life.

Throughout a course of study in the Hamptons or NYC, people meet with me every few weeks in open-ended discussions of their readings and videos. Actual conversations take place, most often during a Shabbat Morning Service, and yes they've gotten wet in the *mikveh*, too. They then participate fully in the life of our congregation and community.

Life and relationships present all of us with challenges, all the more so when there are cross-cultural and interfaith dynamics. If you, or someone you know and love, might be interested in talking about Judaism or choosing Judaism, please do not hesitate to call or send an e mail.

Working with people who wish to participate in Judaism is one of the most moving and sacred tasks a rabbi is involved in. To introduce people to the possibilities

for fulfillment that result from living a meaningful Jewish life is an honor. The Jewish Center of the Hamptons welcomes all newcomers with open arms, for in a free and open society we are all Jews by choice.

Our tradition tells us that God loves converts. We won't come seeking anyone out, but our doors and our hearts are always open wide to all who wish to explore the world through Jewish eyes and engage in exploring our sacred Jewish journey.

Amidst the flyers on JCOH programs are several small pamphlets of various colors. Though I've never actually seen anyone take one, they are among our most frequently taken materials.

The blue pamphlet, "Becoming a Jew," helps people understand the basics of conversion to Judaism which is so often misunderstood-especially by Jews. The pink one, "Inviting Someone You Love to Become a Jew," makes it clear that modern Jews welcome those who seek to convert. Our doors are wide open as this path leads to a gentle, nurturing process. The purple brochure, "Intermarried? Reform Judaism Welcomes You," acknowledges the special challenges posed by different religious traditions and cultures. While each interfaith love story is unique, many share common themes and concerns. And the green pamphlet, "When a Family Member Converts: Questions and Answers about Conversion to Judaism," addresses some questions on the mind of relatives of someone who has expressed an interest in converting to Judaism. Shabbat Evening and Morning Learner Services with commentary and explanations are available from the JCOH. They are wonderful vehicles to help anyone and everyone gain a comfort level with our Services and the Jewish way of prayer and spirituality. Feel free to share these with those who are considering a Jewish journey!