

Pennsylvania Biennial
Shabbat Text Study
Words of the Ger

I On my first Shabbat at the minyan, I'd been too nervous to accept an eagerly offered *aliyah*. A year later, I was the *shaliach tzibur*. After a struggle that had begun years before, the prayers of my chosen people were finally mine: I was at ease in Zion.

...In short, I had a sublimely Protestant conversion. When once I'd discovered Jewish teaching, prayer, and *halakhah*, I rejected one set of beliefs and metaphors for another on the basis of my own personal religious inclinations.

Only after years of living as a Jew do I feel that I've made a Jewish conversion. Perhaps this process is a necessary one; but it means that the convert's road is filled with pitfalls. I left a tradition which damned me for doing so, and whose observances had left some emotional residue nonetheless in the person I am.

Would Judaism ever feel as familiar to me as the religion I'd left? I knew I was unwilling to phrase religious questions in Christian terms, but would I ever master the Jewish idiom? feeling within me a Jewish *neshama* guaranteed only a vague recognition of my own language, not control over grammar and syntax. In addressing *Avinu Malkeynu* (Our Father, Our King), how would I know that I wasn't addressing the God of my childhood--whom I'd disavowed? How would I heal the split between my two selves--pre and post conversion?

Gail Berkeley, "A Convert's Road to
Prayer"

Four Centuries of Women's Spirituality, p.223

II

Psalm XXXVI
A Psalm Touching Genealogy

Not sole was I born, but entire genesis;
For to the fathers that begat me, this
Body is residence. Corpuscular,
They dwell in my veins, they eavesdrop at my ear.
They circle, as with Torahs, round my skull.
In exit and in entrance all day pull
The latches of my heart, descent, and rise--
And there look generations through my eyes.

A.M. Klein

III

“Meet more Jews,” he says
When that’s the last thing I would do
I understand your God and laws
But I’m scared to death of you.

The Jewish God and thought made flesh
Gazing into my eyes
Thinking, “There is a gentile
A group which we despise.”

Thinking, “What right have you to gain
A sacred past and plan?
It is the Jews who bring the
Gifts of chosenness to man!”

Yet still your flesh is almost mine
Your heart is as mine too
Within my self all parts don’t fit
Why should they all with you?
Barbara Jackson

IV

SARAH

I wandered
with soul thirsting
and heart bursting...
looking...
for a city to build my home.

I wandered
through a desert filled...
with mirages
wells that were empty
a chatter and clicking of mouths
dry and swollen...

Where is the city?
I want to build my home. (Over)
I wandered
tired and discouraged
eyes red with tears and despair
feet broken and swollen
a heart heavy with yearning
I walked through pages of faith and God
and yet where is the city?
I want to build my home.

I wandered restless
without the comfort of home and nest
empty and without hope.
My soul from a cavern place
cried out...
echoing
screaming
pleading
for the city to build my home.

God in mercy and love
led me to Jerusalem
took me from my wandering
in the desert of my own emptiness
and gently placed me
in the city
a place that was always my home.

From, *Embracing the Covenant*, p. 57-58