

QUESTIONS CONCERNING PROSELYTES

QUESTION:

(1) Is it required by the Halachah to give a proselyte a new and a Jewish name, such as Abraham for men and Ruth for women, for example? (2) Is the acquiring of proselytes a *mitzvahl* In other words, is it our duty to seek and search for proselytes? (3) Which commandments have to be explained to the proselyte before he is accepted? (Asked by Rabbi Allen S. Mailer, Culver City, California.)

ANSWER:

THERE SEEMS to be no statement anywhere in the law requiring that the proselyte be given a new and a Jewish name. The laws covering proselytism are given in great detail, and if there were any such requirements, it would certainly be mentioned. Nevertheless, in spite of the law not seeming to require it, the giving of a Jewish name must have been a fairly widespread custom. There is the proselyte named Obadiah to whom Maimonides addressed his famous letter. It is highly unlikely that a Christian at baptism would have been given the name of one of the minor Hebrew prophets. This, then, was his new name. Also the *Tosfos* quotes (with respect) the opinion of "Abraham the proselyte" (*Kiddushin* 71b). So renaming the proselytes was not required but was frequently practiced.