

Avi Sagi and Zvi Zohar, 'The Halakhic Ritual of Giyyur and its Symbolic Meaning', *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 9, 1, 1995. pp. 1-13.

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## The Halakhic Ritual of Giyyur and its Symbolic Meaning

### Introduction

Of all Judaic rituals, that of giyyur ('conversion') is arguably the most radical: it turns a Gentile into a Jew - once and for all and irrevocably. **1** The very possibility of such a transformation seems prima facia anomalous, according to Jewish tradition, which regards Jewishness as an ascriptive status entered through birth to a Jewish mother. Choice of religion in no way affects that status: a Jew who has converted to (e.g.) Islam remains nevertheless a Jew, according to Judaic normative tradition (halakha). What is the internal logic of the ritual of giyyur, which seems to enable a Gentile to acquire an 'ascribed' identity? It is to that question, and others deriving from it, that we address ourselves herein .

Interpretation of a ritual such as giyyur is linked to broad issues of anthropology, religion and culture: the relation of 'nature' and 'culture' in the construction of group boundaries; the tension between ethnicity and religion; the interrelation of individual identity and membership in a collective. However, in this article we the focus upon a close reading of primary halakhic texts as a key to the explication of meaning within the Judaic tradition .

Judaic tradition itself is multi-faceted. Here, we analyze one cultural strand, that of halakha, i.e., the genre of religious texts devoted to discussion and definition of the norms governing Jewish praxis. Halakha, as a cultural tradition, has a history of its own, which simultaneously reflects and creates the development of Judaism over the ages. Thus, any halakhic text can validly be read in context of the historical and social conditions characterizing the Jewish community at the time of the text's composition **2** . In this article, however, our concern is not with the historical development of Jewish notions of conversion. Rather, we suggest that, taken as a whole, the corpus of halakhic texts from late antiquity to the present can be seen to express no more than two basic conceptions of the meaning of giyyur. In a major sense, then, our method in this paper is

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phenomenological rather than historical; our 'given' is a cultural corpus, and our goal is the explication of implicit meaning .

The- structure of this article is as follows: First, we analyze how halakhic tradition understands the nature of giyyur, whose very possibility seems anomalous. In the second section, we show how the conversion ritual reflects that nature. Finally, we discuss the implications of the various ways in which conversion is understood, for the broader issue of how halakhic authorities conceptualized Jewish identity. An underlying assumption of this article is, obviously, that halakhic ritual is not merely a formal set of authoritatively ordained acts, but reflects the rabbi's deepest perceptions of Judaic beliefs and concepts .

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### **Jewishness as a 'fact' of birth**

According to halakha, a person's Jewishness is an unalterable fact. A Jew who renounces Judaism or who joins another religion, remains a Jew nevertheless, in the eyes of halakha. Moreover, if a Jewess converted out of the faith, and then conceived and gave birth, her offspring, and all subsequent generations through the female line, are Jews **3** . In other words, being a Jew is not at all dependent upon personal consciousness or commitment. i.e., whether a person regards herself as Jewish or observes the Jewish religion. Indeed, the converse is also true: if a non-Jew acknowledges the Sinaitic revelation and observes the Jewish religion, he is not thereby considered a Jew according to halakha **4** . It is thus apparent that the halakhic criterion for Jewishness is one of kinship: any person whose mother was Jewish is once and for all a Jew .

Following this logic, it would appear reasonable to assume that any person whose mother is not Jewish is once and for all a Gentile. In other words, conversion to Judaism should be impossible. In fact, of course, this is not so; it is quite possible for a non-Jew to become Jewish, through a ritual outlined in halakhic sources. After conversion, such a person is irrevocably Jewish, however she subsequently conducts herself **5**.

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### **The two concepts of the nature of conversion according to halakhic tradition**

How is it possible for a person whose mother is non-Jewish to become a Jew? How is it possible that a process whose source is in an individual's personal volition and whose expression is ceremonial leads to membership in a kinship-based community? Two main avenues of response to

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these questions are found in the halakhic tradition, and are concisely formulated by Rabbi Jacob Fink <sup>6</sup>:

What is a convert? Is he someone who becomes a Jew, and consequently is obligated to observe the Jewish religion? Or, to the contrary, is he someone who commits himself to observe the Jewish religion, and consequently becomes a Jew? <sup>7</sup> .

According to the first option, conversion is a process through which a Gentile joins the Jewish kinship; a result of this is, that all obligations which apply to kinship members apply also to her. According to the second option, the order of entailment is vice-versa: a Gentile joins the Jewish religion, and this entails his acceptance into the Jewish community. The issue is not one of sophistry, nor of formal precedence. Rather, each option expresses a radically different concept of the Jewish collective, which we shall discuss in the final section of this paper. For reasons which shall become apparent, we begin with the second option raised by R. Fink .

### **1) Commitment to the Jewish religion as constitutive of conversion**

According to this view, the crucial element in the conversion process is the self-commitment of the convert to the Jewish religion, that is, to the commandments of Torah. As formulated by Rabbi Mordekhai Jaffe <sup>8</sup> :

It is reasonable that when a person converts and accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah and commandments, and the yoke of Heaven, then most certainly he is imbued with a heavenly spirit, a new spirit, a holy spirit, a new soul, and becomes a different person. He is as one who is created and born on that day <sup>9</sup> .

In other words, acceptance of Torah generates an ontological change in the spiritual identity of the convert. Accordingly, acceptance of the commandments is considered as "[T]he very essence of conversion, so that if he did not accept upon himself Torah and commandments, it is as if he did not accept upon himself to become a Jew, and no conversion has taken place" <sup>10</sup> .

The internal logic of this position lead certain rabbis in modern times to an emphasis on the convert's subjective intent to observe the commandments after her conversion; intent to join the Jewish kinship per se is of no significance or validity. The first halakhist to state such a position was Rabbi Yitzhak Schmelkes <sup>11</sup> who determined in 1876 that "If he converts, but does not commit

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himself to observe the Sabbath and the commandments as required by law, he is not a Jew"<sup>12</sup> .

Rabbi Jacob Breisch<sup>13</sup> stresses, with regard to such a prospective convert :

Even if we were to believe her, that she sincerely intends to become a Jewess, she wants at most to be a Jewess by nationality, without observance of the laws of the Sabbath...and other commandments...such a conversion is invalid even ex post facto<sup>14</sup>

On this view, a sharp dichotomy seems to exist between two sources of Jewishness. A person born to a Jewish mother is a Jew by kinship; a convert is a Jew by religion. Such a dichotomy can be validated from a strictly formal perspective; two different but sufficient conditions can lead to the same result. Substantively, however, such a situation is problematic, since two apparently incompatible modes of Jewish identity seem to co-exist side by side: one based on kinship, the other on commitment to halakhic praxis. Rabbis who hold this view would respond, that the notion of Jewishness as determined by birth is misleading. In fact, the Jewishness of a person born to a Jewess also derives from commitment to Torah -- the original commitment of all Jews to the Sinaitic covenant. On this view, that collective commitment was the constitutive event which created the Jewish people *ad novum*, and halakha, in its definition of Jewish identity, relates only to the Jewish collective as so constituted. As Sa'adia Gaon<sup>15</sup> put it: '[F]or our collective, that of Bnei Israel, is a collective solely through its laws'<sup>16</sup> . Ultimately, then, Jewish kinship derives from commitment to Torah, and the ground of a convert's Jewishness and that of a Jew 'by birth' are one and the same .

## 2) **Entering the Jewish Kinship as constitutive of conversion**

On this view, conversion is a process through which a Gentile enters the Jewish kinship; conversion for a Gentile is analogous, in a strong sense, to biological birth as a Jew. The Talmud itself states: 'A Gentile who has converted is like a new born child'<sup>17</sup> . Post-Talmudic rabbis stressed that this dictum should be understood in a quasi-physical sense. Thus, in the thirteenth century a great halakhic scholar writes: '[A] Gentile who has converted ... is as one born of Jewish seed'<sup>18</sup> . Similarly, Rabbi Israel Isserlein<sup>19</sup> writes: 'A Gentile... when he converts, becomes a different physis'<sup>20</sup> .

In contrast to the previous view, which interpreted conversion as a metaphorical, spiritual rebirth, this view sees conversion as an ontological change of the convert's physical identity. While the first view regards commitment as generating Jewishness, this view sees the convert's new 'physical' birth as generating obligation to Torah. As Rabbi Nathan ben Joseph<sup>21</sup> writes :

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One who converts is immediately bound by all the prohibitions of the Torah, without having personally taken such an obligation upon himself; rather, according to the Law, any person who is a Jew is thereby obligated by all the prohibitions and positive commandments of the Torah<sup>22</sup>.

Similarly, Rabbi S. Israeli<sup>23</sup> writes :

The entire content of conversion is, joining the Jewish people... therefore, when a Gentile from an alien people joins the Jewish people, he is thereby included, ipso facto, in the recipients of the Torah at Sinai, just as a child born to a Jewess is obligated by that event<sup>24</sup>.

On this view, Torah does not constitute the Jewish collective. Rather, the pre-existing 'natural' collective, grounded in birth and kinship, is recognized by the Law as an autonomous entity, partner to the Sinaitic Covenant. Thus, no dichotomy exists between two sources of Jewishness, for both a convert and a person born to a Jewish mother are Jews by (physical) birth.

### **The conversion ritual**

In the present section of our paper, we shall discuss the ways in which the conversion ritual reflects the nature of conversion .

The basic description of the conversion ritual is found in the Babylonian Talmud (Yebamot 47 a-b):

Our Rabbis taught: If, at the present time, a man desires to become a proselyte, he is to be addressed as follows: "what reason have you for coming to be a proselyte; do you not know that Israel at the present time are persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed, and overcome by afflictions ?" If he replies: "I know, and I am unworthy [but nevertheless desire to convert], he is accepted forthwith. He is informed about some of the minor and some of the major commandments. And He is informed of the sin [of the neglect of the commandments] of Gleanings, of the Forgotten Sheaf, of the Corner, and of the Poor Man's Tithe. He is also told

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of the punishment for the transgression of the commandments. And, he is informed thus: "Be it known to you, that before you came to this situation, if you ate [forbidden] suet you were not punishable by Karet [extinction by Heaven]; if you profaned the Sabbath, you were not punishable by stoning; but now [after conversion], if you should eat suet, you will be punished by Karet, and if you profane the Sabbath, you will be punished by stoning." Just as they inform him of the punishments for [transgressing] the commandments, they inform him of the reward for observance]. They say to him: "Know, that the world to come is made only for Israel; but at the present time Israel cannot receive much reward, nor much punishment." They do not talk to him at length, nor do they go into detail. If he agrees [or: accepts,] they circumcise him immediately. If some of the [fore]skin remained, invalidating the circumcision, he is circumcised again. When he heals, they immerse him immediately. And two scholars stand there, and inform him about some of the minor and some of the major commandments. when he emerges from the immersion, he is like an Israelite in all respects .

This passage was accepted by all post-Talmudic halakhists as authoritative. However, not all of its details were considered to be necessary components whose absence rendered conversion invalid. In our book-length study [25](#), we found that the correct strategy for analyzing halakhic views of the conversion ritual is to identify which components each view regards as necessary for the ritual to be efficacious. In the following we will follow that strategy

The Talmud itself presents only two substantive and one procedural element as necessary for a valid conversion. The substantive requirements are, circumcision and immersion [26](#) . For a woman, only immersion is required. The procedural condition is, that the immersion occur in the presence of three men, who constitute a valid court, according to halakha [27](#) . Accordingly, if a male Gentile was circumcised for the purpose of conversion, and was immersed in the presence of three men, he thereby became a Jew. His conversion is valid, even if all other elements described in the lengthy citation (above) were not performed

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This view of the necessary ceremonial components is held by all post Talmudic halakhists until the 12th century, and by many subsequent authorities. A classic formulation of this view is found in Maimonides' Code [28](#) :

A proselyte who ... was circumcised and immersed in the presence of three laymen is a proselyte. Even if it is known that he converted for some ulterior motive, once he has been circumcised and immersed he has left the status of a non-Jew... even if he recanted, and worshipped idols, he is a Jewish apostate; if he betroths a Jewish woman according to halakhic procedure - they are betrothed; and an article he lost must be returned to him as to any other Jew. Having immersed, he is a Jew [29](#) .

According to this view, commitment to observe the commandments of Torah is not a necessary component of a valid conversion ritual; similarly, subsequent non-compliance with even the most basic tenets of Judaism (such as idolatry) in no way detracts from the convert's Jewishness. The necessary components are those which are performed upon the convert's body .

Sometime in the 12th century in Ashkenaz [30](#) , a third substantive component -- entitled Qabbalat Mitzvot -- was cited by certain halakhists (known as 'Masters of the Tosafot') as necessary [31](#) . According to this view, a valid conversion consists of Qabbalat Mitzvot, circumcision and immersion. The presence of the court is necessary only during Qabbalat Mitzvot .

The specific content of this new component was not defined by those who first proposed it. Subsequently, scholars who adopted this view interpreted it's meaning in a variety of ways, of which we shall cite several :

- 1) Nachmanides [32](#) explained it's meaning as 'a commitment of the proselyte, in the presence of the court, to circumcise and to immerse himself' [33](#)
- 2) Rabbi Meir Posner [34](#) explained it's meaning as a declaration by the proselyte that she desires to convert [35](#) .
- 3) Rabbi Shlomo Lifshitz [36](#) interpreted it as desire, on the part of the proselyte, to join the Jewish people and religion. Such desire could be expressed either verbally or by the very act of immersion [37](#) .
- 4) Rabbi Moshe Ha-Cohen [38](#) interpreted it as a recognition, on the part of the convert, that after conversion he will be liable to punishment if he transgresses the norms of halakha; such recognition can be valid

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even if the convert does not intend, in fact, to observe those norms <sup>39</sup>

- 5) Some rabbis in modern times, since 1876, interpreted the requirement of Qabbalat Mitzvot as a commitment of the convert to observe the norms of halakha. Of these, some thought that it is enough if she intended to observe them according to her own personal understanding of their content<sup>40</sup>. The majority, however, thought that to be insufficient, and required intent to observe all halakhic norms according to Orthodox canon<sup>41</sup>.

Above, we noted that a conversion ritual focussed on circumcision and immersion regards rituals performed upon the convert's body as the core of conversion. Does the addition of this third component reflect a change in that focus ?

It seems that the answer to this question depends upon which interpretation of Qabbalat Mitzvot is adopted. Thus, according to the first two options cited, no such change is entailed, since the content of this new component relates to the act of conversion itself, while retaining the 'classic' focus on the physis. In contrast, the fifth option seems to reflect a notion of conversion, in which conscious commitment to Torah is central. Indeed, several rabbis who hold this fifth interpretation state outright that such commitment is 'the essence of conversion', while circumcision and immersion are merely formal requirements <sup>42</sup>.

The view, according to which commitment to observe the norms of halakha is both a necessary component of the conversion ritual and its essence, is consonant with the concept of conversion as a metaphorical, spiritual rebirth in which a person joins the Jewish religion, and this entails his acceptance into the Jewish community .

The concept of conversion to Judaism as essentially a change in religious consciousness expressed in commitment to halakhic praxis first appears, as we noted above, in a responsum dated 1876. Subsequently it has greatly gained in vogue amongst halakhic authors. It is interesting, to say the least, to note the parallel with the Christian-Protestant concept of conversion to Christianity, as explicated for example by A.D. Nock in his well-known work 'Conversion' <sup>43</sup>. Both claim that conversion is first and foremost a psychological act, in which a person's religious mind-state changes deeply and he recognizes the truth of his new religion. For Protestant Christianity this recognition finds expression in adoption of Christian faith, while for the above-mentioned halakhists it is expressed in adoption of halakhic praxis. Indeed, in recent literature on conversion it is claimed that 'conversion is essentially theological and spiritual' <sup>44</sup>. According to this view, a



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radical change in a person's belief-system and in her subjective identity are the necessary and constitutive core of conversion [45](#).

However, our findings indicate that the internalization of such a notion of conversion by Jewish authors is a modern phenomenon; elsewhere we argue that this is best understood as a move to delegitimize alternate concepts of Jewish identity current in modern times [46](#). In contrast, the concept of conversion as a physical rebirth into the Jewish kinship is that which has informed the 'classic' notion of conversion to Judaism since Talmudic times. Obligation to religious praxis derives from this kinship, as all obligations which apply to kinship members now apply also to the convert.

Classic views of the conversion ritual are consonant with the concept of conversion as a physical rebirth in which a person joins the Jewish kinship, and hold acts performed upon the convert's body as central. We now turn to the analysis of conversion and the conversion ritual according to this concept./... .

### **Conversion as Birth**

Classic halakhic sources view conversion as birth, in a very realistic sense. As noted above, the Talmud states outright that 'A Gentile who has converted is like a new born child' [47](#). This determination has radical implications: all kinship ties which existed prior conversion are erased, according to halakha. Thus, the rabbis understood Torah to permit the marriage of a convert to her ('former') father or brother, if he too converted [48](#). Although relatives' testimony is halakhically not acceptable, if three brothers convert, two may bear witness on behalf of the third in a Jewish court, for they are no longer brothers [49](#). If a father and son convert, the son does not inherit upon the older man's decease, for they are no longer related [50](#).

It is hard to overemphasize the radical significance of these laws, for they challenge the most basic foundation of the social order and of morality, i.e., the notion of family ties grounded in blood relations. In other words, conversion involves a re-constitution of human reality, negating original biological identity and substituting for it a new physical identity through a 'new birth.'

Halakhic sources interpret the two core components of conversion, circumcision and immersion, as stages in a process of that change in identity. In other cultures, circumcision is a component of an ordeal of initiation, analogous to scarification, beatings, and so forth. According to some authors, these should be understood as a deliberate attempt to induce pain, serving two functions: the heightening of self-awareness and the sacrifice of part of the convert's self [51](#).

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Analysis of Jewish normative tradition does not support such an interpretation of circumcision in the context of giyyur. Indeed, halakha permits complete elimination of pain during circumcision, by anesthetic means. Rather, in the ritual of Giyyur, circumcision is understood as the symbolic disattachment of the individual's physis from his previous, Gentile identity <sup>52</sup>. After circumcision, the proselyte is considered to be in an interim position, no longer Gentile but not yet Jew <sup>53</sup>.

Immersion is understood as the proselyte's birth into Jewishness. The Talmud <sup>54</sup> states 'when he emerges from the immersion, he is like an Israelite in all respects'. Rabbi 'Amram Gaon <sup>55</sup> explains that immersion is required in order to bring the proselyte to a state in which 'his conception and birth are in holiness' <sup>56</sup>. A clear explication of the symbolic significance of the conversion ritual as a whole is provided by Rabbi Joseph Engel <sup>57</sup>, who writes :

Conversion consists of two stages: removal of Gentilehood, and reception of Jewishness. And there is an interim reality between these two, as the Talmud writes (Sanhedrin 58b): "He has emerged from Gentilehood, but has not yet entered the collective of Israel". And this is the significance of the circumcision and the immersion of a proselyte, i.e., the detachment of the foreskin removes the Gentilehood, and the immersion bestows Jewishness <sup>58</sup>.

The classic halakhic model of conversion is thus, that conversion is a ritual process in which a person's physical identity is remade. It is important to emphasize, that this model does not posit the subjective theological and /or spiritual transformation of the convert as the core of conversion. Rather, the ritual of giyyur is posited as an 'objective' ontological transformation of the individual's body, and a radical repositioning of that body in a totally new kinship matrix. On this view, spiritual re-orientation should follow upon this change of kinship, for all persons born as Jews should recognize the obligatory force of the Sinaitic covenant .

How should one explain the difference between this halakhic model of conversion and the model explicated in recent writing on the phenomenon of conversion ? Most probably, this difference should be seen as stemming from contrasting paradigms of community. Christianity and Islam are confessional communities, constituted by commitment to certain beliefs and practices. Therefore, joining these communities entails first and foremost subjective commitment flowing from psycho-spiritual transformation. Jewishness, in contrast, is constituted by kinship; a person's beliefs or practices do not determine whether or not she is a Jew. Appropriately, joining the Jewish community involves, first and foremost, a transformation of the kinship matrix through symbolic 'bodily' re-birth <sup>59</sup>.

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Rather than comparing giyyur with conversion a-la-Christianity and Islam, a more fruitful comparative perspective can be obtained by viewing it through the perspective of the structure of rites des passage, as analyzed by Van Gennep, Eliade and Turner. Typically, a rite de passage consists of three stages, which Van Gennep dubbed: preliminal, liminal, and post-liminal. In the preliminal stage, the individual is divested of his extant identity; in the post-liminal phase he is invested with a new identity. During the liminal phase, he is 'betwixt and between', 'neither here nor there'. As we have seen, the major halakhic tradition portrays giyyur as consisting of three stages :

- a) Erasure of Gentilehood, through circumcision ;
- b) Neutral identity, neither Gentile nor Jew ;
- c) Birth into Jewishness, through immersion .

The nature of giyyur as a rite de passage from Gentilehood to Jewishness is quite obvious .

Nevertheless, certain salient differences should be noted <sup>60</sup> . In many rites of passage, the interim 'liminal' phase is of central importance, during which crucial rituals are performed. In contrast, this phase has no importance according to halakha, and entails no ritual events; rather, it exists only as a by-product of the separateness of the former and following stages. In addition, rites of passage are frequently public events in which many participate, while halakhic conversion is a secluded ritual, attended only by the three man court and the proselyte himself<sup>61</sup> . Nevertheless, the deep similarity of halakhic conversion and rites des passage indicates that Judaism here shares in basic human symbolic-spiritual structures. Halakha accepts these structures, casting them in the specific ritual language of Torah ./... .

## NOTES

1. The term giyyur is usually translated as 'conversion'. In the course of this paper it should become apparent to the reader, that this translation is problematic. Nevertheless, we do employ the term 'conversion' -- for the sake of convenience.
2. Indeed, we ourselves have employed such a method in our recent paper 'Giyyur, Jewish Identity and Modernization: An Analysis of Halakhic Sources', *Modern Judaism* 15,1 (1995), 49-68 .
- 3 Cf. Rabbi Joseph Caro (16th century major codifier of halakha) (Shulkhan 'Arukh - Even ha-Ezer, 44:9. See also Solomon ben Shim'on Duran (Algiers, 1400-1467), *Responsa*, #89 .
- 4 Cf. Y. Shilat (ed.), *Iggerot ha-Rambam (Epistles of Maimonides)*, Vol. 1 ,Jerusalem 1987, p. 214 .
- 5 Cf. Babylonian Talmud, Yebamot 47b .
6. Israel, 20th century .
7. J. Fink, 'Judaism and Conversion' (Hebrew), *No'am* 14 (1971), p. 17 .
8. Central Europe, 1530-1612 .
9. M. Jaffe, *Levush - 'Ateret Zahav*, Jerusalem 1968, #269:1 .
- 10 . Rabbi Bezalel Zolty (Israel, 20th century), 'On the Laws of Accepting Converts', (Hebrew), *Torah she-Be'alpeh* 13, Jerusalem 1971, p.39 .
11. Poland 1828 - 1906 .
12. Y. Schmelkes, *Responsa Beit Yitzhak*, part 1, Lvov, 1901, #100:9, 13 .
13. Zurich, 1896-1976 .
- 14 J. Breisch, *Responsa Helkat Ya'akov*, part 1, Jerusalem 1951, #13:1. A radical expression of the necessity of total subjective faith commitment on the part of the convert is found in the writings of Rabbi A.I. Karelitz (Israel, 20th century). Cf. his magnum opus *Hazon Ish*, Bnei Braq, 1962, *Yoreh De'ah* #119:2 .
- 15 . Baghdad, 9th century
16. Sa'adia Gaon, *Kitab al-Mukhtar fi-l-Imanat wa-l-I'tiqadat*, ed. J. Qappah, Jerusalem, 1970, p. 132. My translation (Z.Z )
- 17 . Yebamot 22a .
- 18 . *Responsa* attributed to Nachmanides #224, published in *Collected responsa of Solomon ben Adret*, Jerusalem 1990. Compare: Rabbi Binyamin Zeev (Greece, 16th century), *Responsa*, Jerusalem 1959, #368 .

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19. Austria, 15th century .
- 20 R. Isserlein, *Terumat ha-Deshen*, Tel Aviv 1958, II, #29
21. A disciple of Nachmanides, Spain, 13th century .
22. Quoted by Rabbi B. Ashkenazi, *Shitta Mequbetsset*, Tel Aviv, 1960, *Nedarim* 17a .
23. Israel, 20th century .
24. Rabbi S. Israeli, 'The content and significance of the dictum "A Gentile who has converted is like a new born child" ', (Hebrew), in *Torah she-Be'alpeh* 29, Jerusalem 1988, p.26. Compare also: Rabbi S. Goren (a former Chief Rabbi of Israel, 20th century), in *Shana b' Shana*, 1983, p.150; Rabbi E. Baqshi-Doron (a former Chief Rabbi of Israel), *Responsa Binyan Av*, Jerusalem 1982, #22 .
- 25 A. Sagi and Z. Zohar, *Conversion and Jewish Identity*, (Hebrew), Bialik Institute Press, Jerusalem, 1994 .
- 26 Immersion must take place in a mikveh (ritual bath)
- 27 Thus, the Talmud emends the text cited above so as to read 'And three scholars stand there .
28. 12th century, Egypt .
- 29 Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, *Laws of Forbidden Unions*, 13:17 .
- 30 The Hebrew term for North-Central Europe .
- 31 Cf. *Tosafot*, *Yebamot* 45b, s.v. *Mi Lo Tavla* .
- 32 Spain, 1194-1270 .
33. *Nachmanides*, *Talmudic Novellae* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1964, *Yebamot* 45b, s.v. *Mi Lo Tavla* .
- 34 Poland, d. 1807 .
- 35 R. M .Posner, *Responsa Beit Meir*, Jerusalem 1976, #12 .
- 36 Warsaw, 1765-1839 .
- 37 R. S. Lifshitz, *Responsa Hemdat Shlomo*, Jerusalem, 1968, #29:22 .
- 38 Jerba and Israel, 20th century .
- 39 Rabbi Moshe HaCohen, *Responsa VehHeshiv Moshe*, Jerusalem 1968, #50-51 .
- 40 Cf. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, *Responsa Iggerot Moshe*, New York, 1946, *Yoreh De'ah*, #160 .
- 41 Cf. Rabbi Yitzhak Schmelkes (Lvov, 1828-1906), *Responsa Beit Yitzhak*, part 2, Lvov 1901, #100; Rabbi Jacob Breisch (Zurich, 1896-1976) *Responsa Helqat Ya'akov*, Jerusalem 1951, #13 .
- 42 Cf. Rabbi Bezalel Zolty, 'On the Laws concerning Acceptance of Proselytes'(Hebrew), *Torah she-Be'alpeh* 13, 1971, p.39; Rabbi Shear-Yashuv Cohen, 'A convert who reverted to Gentile behaviour and does not observe the halakha', *Torah she-be'alpeh* 29, 1988, pp. 37-38 .

Avi Sagi and Zvi Zohar, 'The Halakhic Ritual of Giyyur and its Symbolic Meaning', *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 9, 1, 1995. pp. 1-13.

43 A.D. Nock, *Conversion*, Oxford, 1933 .

44 Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, New-Haven, 1993,  
p.10. The emphasis is ours .

45 See also M. Heirich, 'Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories about Religious Conversion', *American Journal of Sociology* ,(1977) 83:3pp. 653-680; R. Travisano, 'Alternation and Conversion on Qualitatively Different Transformations', in: G.P. Stone and M. Garvern (eds.), *Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction*, Waltham, 1970, pp. 594-606; G.K. Nelson, *Cults, New Religions and Religious Creativity*, London 1987, ch. 9 and passim .

46 Cf. our paper 'Giyyur, Jewish Identity and Modernization', *Modern Judaism* 15/1 (February 1995)

.47 Above, note 17 .

48 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Forbidden Unions, 14:11ff .

49 Ibid., Laws of Testimony, 13:2 .

50I bid., Laws of Possession and Bequest, 1:6 .

51 See Alan Morinis, 'The Ritual Experience: Pain and the Transformation of Consciousness in Ordeals of Initiation', *Ethos* 13 (1985), pp. 150 – 173

52 Cf. Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra (Egypt and Israel, 16th century) *Responsa Radbaz*, Jerusalem 1972, part 3, #479; Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger (Germany, 19th century), *Responsa Binyan Zion*, Jerusalem 1989, part 1, #91 .

53 Ibid.; cf. also Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg (Israel, 20th century) *Responsa Tzitz Eliezer*, part 10, Jerusalem 1970, #25, who writes: "Such a person's status is sui generis - he is no longer included among the Gentiles, but has not yet reached the status of Israelite....he is like a fetus, about to be born ."

54 cited above, note 5 .

55 Baghdad, 9th century .

56 Cf. *Otzar ha-Geonim*, ed. B.M. Levin, Haifa 1928, Tractate Yebamot #11. And compare Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret (Spain, 1235-1310), *Novellae of Rashba*, Jerusalem 1975, Tractate Yebamot 47b, s.v. 'Nitrapeh .'

57 Poland, 1859-1920 .

58 Rabbi J. Engel, *Hosen Yoseph*, Jerusalem 1976, p .34 .

Avi Sagi and Zvi Zohar, 'The Halakhic Ritual of Giyyur and its Symbolic Meaning', *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 9, 1, 1995. pp. 1-13.

59 Close reading of the frequently-quoted article 'On Conversion' by rabbi A. Lichtenstein (Tradition 23, 1988, pp. 1-18), who posits a psycho-spiritualistic view of conversion to Judaism, reveals that he approaches his topic after having been crucially influenced by Nock .

60 We thank Professor Shlomo Deshen of Tel-Aviv University for encouraging us to point out these differences .

61 It is obvious that this interpretation of conversion is geared to a male proselyte. A woman's conversion is efficated by immersion alone. The analysis of female conversion ritual requires a complex discussion, beyond the scope of this article. We essay such an analysis in our book (above, note 25), chapter 14 .