

Conversion and Kevod Habriyot

Sources based largely on Shiurim by Rabbi Dov Linzer

I. Attitudes During Conversion

1. Bavli, Yebamot, 47a-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 desiring to become 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 yet am unworthy', he is accepted immediately.

He is not, however, to be persuaded or dissuaded too much. If he accepted, he is circumcised forthwith.

As soon as he is healed arrangements are made for his immediate immersion...

We said, 'If a man desires to become a proselyte . . . he is to be addressed as follows: "What reason have you for desiring to become a proselyte . . ." and he is made acquainted with some of the minor, and with some of the major commandments'. What is the reason? — In order that if he desire to withdraw let him do so; for R. Helbo said: Proselytes are as hard for Israel [to endure] as a sore, because it is written in Scripture: "And the proselyte shall join himself with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob."...

'He is not, however, to be persuaded, or dissuaded too much'. R. Eleazar said: What is the Scriptural proof? — It is written, And when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking unto her.

'If he accepted, he is circumcised forthwith'. What is the reason? — The performance of a commandment must not in any way be delayed.

2. Encyclopedia Talmudit, vol. 6, "Gerut"

Accepting converts. It is a mitzvah on *beit din* to accept a non-Jew who comes to convert and to convert him according to the law [1]. There are some Rishonim who include in the mitzvah to "Love the *ger*," even the mitzvah of accepting prospective converts to bring them under the wings of the Shekhina [3]. Since through this acceptance [of Judaism] he is converting, he is thus in the category of "And you shall love the *ger*." [4]

[1] *Zohar HaRakiya* of Rashbatz, positive mitzvot 40, based on Yevamot 47b, "We do not delay the performance of a commandment."

[3] Azharot of R"l Abarceloni, Mitzvah of Loving the *Ger*.

[4] R. Yerucham Perla, in his commentary of Sefer HaMitzvot of Rav Sadya Gaon, positive mitzvah 19.

3. Mesekhet Gerim, 1:1

When he immerses and comes up from his immersion, they say to him words of praise, words of consolation: "To Whom did you cleave? Praised are you – [you have cleaved] to the One Who spoke and the World came into being, blessed be He. For the World was created only for the sake of Israel, and none are called children of God other than Israel, and all those things we said to you were only to increase your reward.

תלמוד בבלי, יבמות, מז. – מז.:

תנו רבנן: גר שבא להתגייר בזמן הזה, אומרים לו: מה ראית שבאת להתגייר? אי אתה יודע שישראל בזמן הזה דוויים, דחופים, סחופים ומטורפין, ויסורין באין עליהם? אם אומר: יודע אני ואיני כדאי, מקבלין אותו מיד...

ואין מרבין עליו, ואין מדקדקין עליו. קיבל, מלין אותו מיד...

נתרפא מטבלין אותו מיד....

אמר ר' מר: גר שבא להתגייר, אומרים לו: מה ראית שבאת להתגייר? ומודיעים אותו מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות. מ"ט? דאי פריש נפרוש, דא"ר חלבו: קשים גרים לישראל כספחת. דכתיב: ונלוה הגר עליהם ונספחו על בית יעקב...

ואין מרבין עליו, ואין מדקדקין עליו. אמר רבי אלעזר: מאי קראה? דכתיב: ותרא כי מתאמצת היא ללכת אתה ותחזל לדבר אליה...

קיבל, מלין אותו מיד. מ"ט? שהויי מצוה לא משהינן

אנציקלופדיה תלמודית כרך ו, גרות

קבלת גרים. מצוה על בית דין לקבל גוי שבא להתגייר ולגיירו כדון[1]. ויש מן הראשונים שכלל במצות עשה של אהבת הגר אף המצוה של קבלת גרים להכניסם תחת כנפי השכינה[3], שכיון שעל ידי קבלה זו הוא מתגייר הרי זה בכלל ואהבתם את הגר[4]

1. זוהר הרקיע לרשב"ץ עשין מ, ע"פ יבמות מז ב שהויי מצוה לא משהינן.

3. אזהרות הר"י אלברצלוני, עשה של אהבת הגר.

4. ר"י פרלא בפ"י למהמ"צ של רס"ג עשה יט.

מסכתות קטנות מסכת גרים פרק א הל' א'

טבל ועלה אומרין לו דברים טובים דברים של נחומים, במי נדבקת, אשריך, במי שאמר והיה העולם ברוך הוא, שלא נברא העולם אלא בשביל ישראל, ולא נקראו בני ישראל למקום אלא ישראל, ואין חביבין לפני המקום אלא ישראל, וכל אותם הדברים שאמרנו לך, לא אמרנו אלא להרבות שכרך.

II. Attitudes After Conversion

4. Leviticus 19

33. And if a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not wrong him.
34. But the stranger who dwells with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.

5. Babil, Baba Mezia (58b)

Mishnah. Just as there is overreaching in buying and selling, so is there wrong done by words. One must not ask another, 'What is the price of this article?' if he has no intention of buying. If a man was a repentant [sinner], one must not say to him, 'Remember your former deeds.' If he was a son of proselytes one must not taunt him, 'remember the deeds of your ancestors,' because it is written, "Thou shalt neither wrong a stranger, nor oppress him."

Gemara... If he is a proselyte and comes to study the Torah, one must not say to him, 'Shall the mouth that ate unclean and forbidden food, abominable and creeping things, come to study the Torah which was uttered by the mouth of Omnipotence!'

6. Rambam, Laws of Sale, 14:15

Whosoever afflicts a *ger*, whether monetarily or whether through words, transgresses three prohibitions, as it says, "And the *ger* you shall not afflict" – this refers to afflicting with words. "And you shall not oppress him" – this is overcharging with money. Behold you have learned that whoever afflicts a *ger* has transgressed three prohibitions, "You shall not afflict one man his neighbor," and for "You shall not afflict one man his brother," and for "And the *ger* you shall not afflict."

7. Deuteronomy 10

17. For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God: mighty and awesome, which favors no person, nor takes bribes; 18. He executes the judgment of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and garment. 19. Love you therefore the stranger; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

8. Rambam, Laws of Character Traits, 6:4

To love the *ger* who has come and entered under the wings of the Shekhina is two mitzvot. One because he is included in the category of "your neighbor," and one because he is a *ger* and the Torah says, "And you shall love the *ger*." (Deut. 10:19). God commands to love the *ger* just as He commands to love Himself, as it says, "And you shall love the Lord your God." God Himself loves converts, as it says, "And He loves the *ger*."

III. Orientations Towards the Institution of Gerut in the Community

9. Mekhilta of R. Yishmael, Parsha 18

Beloved are the converts, for in every place God commands regarding them, "You shall not oppress the *ger*," (Ex. 23:9), "You shall not afflict the *ger*," (Deut. 10:19), "You shall love the *ger*," (Ex. 23:9), "And you know the soul of the *ger*." (*ibid.*)

R. Eliezer said, "A *ger*, because his backsliding is bad, therefore the verse warns regarding him in many places."

ויקרא פרק יט

(לג) וכי יגור אתך גר בארצכם לא תונו אתו: (לד) כאזרח מכם יהיה לכם הגר הגר אתכם ואהבת לו כמוך כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים אני ה' א-להיכם:

בבלי מסכת בבא מציעא (נח):

משנה. כשם שאונאה במקח וממכר כך אונאה בדברים. לא יאמר לו בכמה חפץ זה והוא אינו רוצה ליקח. אם היה בעל תשובה לא יאמר לו זכור מעשיך הראשונים, אם הוא בן גרים לא יאמר לו זכור מעשה אבותיך, שנאמר +שמות כ"ב+ וגר לא תונה ולא תלחצנו.

גמ' ... אם היה גר ובא ללמוד תורה אל יאמר לו פה שאכל נבילות וטריפות, שקצים ורמשים בא ללמוד תורה שנאמרה מפי הגבורה

רמב"ם הלכות מכירה פרק יד הלכה טו

כל המאנה את הגר בין בממון בין בדברים עובר בשלשה לאוין. שנאמר וגר לא תונה זה הונית דברים. ולא תלחצנו זה הונית ממון, הא למדת שכל המאנה את הגר עובר בשלשה לאוין משום לא תונו איש את עמיתו, ומשום אל תונו איש את אחיו, ומשום וגר לא תונה.

דברים פרק י

(יז) כי ה' א-להיכם הוא א-להי האלהים וא-דני האדנים האל הגדל הגבר והנורא אשר לא ישא פנים ולא יקח שחד: (יח) עשה משפט יתום ואלמנה ואהב גר לתת לו לחם ושמלה: (יט) ואהבתם את הגר כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים:

רמב"ם הלכות דעות פרק ו הלכה ד

אהבת הגר שבא ונכנס תחת כנפי השכינה שתי מצות עשה, אחת מפני שהוא בכלל ריעים ואחת מפני שהוא גר והתורה אמרה ואהבתם את הגר, צוה על אהבת הגר כמו שצוה על אהבת עצמו שנאמר ואהבת את ה' אלהיך, הקב"ה עצמו אוהב גרים שנאמר ואוהב גר.

מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל פרשה יח

חביבין הגרים שבכל מקום הוא מזהיר עליהם +שמות כג ט+ וגר לא תלחץ, וגר לא תונה +דברים י יט+ ואהבתם את הגר, +שמות כג ט+ ואתם ידעתם את נפש הגר.

רבי אליעזר אומר, גר לפי שטיאורו רע לפיכך מזהיר עליו הכתוב במקומות הרבה.

R. Shimon ben Yoachi said, "Behold the verse says, "And those who love Him are like the sun that comes out in its strength," (Jud. 5:31). Now, who is greater – one who loves the king, or one who the king loves? It is obviously one who the king loves, and it says, "And He loves the *ger*." (Deut 10:18).

Beloved are the *gerim* for in every place does He describe them like He does Israel. The Children of Israel are called servants [to God]... and the *gerim* are called servants [to God]... Israel are call attendants [to God]... and *gerim* are called attendants [to God]... The Children of Israel are called beloved [by God]... and *gerim* are called beloved [by God]... It says regarding Israel "a covenant"... and it says regarding *gerim* a covenant... It says regarding Israel, [that they find] desire [by God]... and it says regarding *gerim* desire... It says regarding Israel that [God] watches [them]... and it says regarding *gerim* that [God] watches [them].

10. Midrash Tehillim, Psalm 146

[8] "God watches the stranger". Greatly does God love the convert. To what can this be compared? To a king who had a flock of sheep which, every day, would go out and graze in the field and come back in the evening. One time a deer entered among the sheep, it went out with the rams and the ewes and would graze with them. It would come in with the flock, and when the flock would go out to graze it would go out with it.

People said to the king, "The deer is going with the sheep and grazing with them, every day it goes out and comes in with them." The king loved the deer greatly. When he would go out to the field, he would command the shepherd saying, "Watch over the deer closely that no one should hit it." And when the deer would come back with the sheep, he would command his close friend regarding it, saying: "Give it food so that it may eat and drink." And he would love the deer greatly.

The shepherd said to him, "My master, the King, how many rams do you have? How many male-goats? How many ewes? How many kid goats? And you do not command me at all regarding them. But when it comes to this deer, every day you command me regarding it!

He said to him, sheep – this is their way, to go out and graze. But deer – they usually live in the wilderness, it is not its way to enter into a settled area where there are people living. And yet, this deer came and dwelled amongst us. Should we not owe it a debt of gratitude to it that it left the large, wide wilderness, the place with deer and mountain goats graze, and it abandoned them and came to us? Therefore we must owe it a debt of gratitude.

So says God: "I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the convert, for he has left his family and his father's house and come to me. Therefore I command you, "You shall love the *ger*", "The *ger* you shall not oppress". Thus it says, "God watches the *ger*."

11. Ruth. Chapter 2

10. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, seeing that I am a stranger?

11. And Boaz answered and said to her, It has been fully told to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband; and how you have left your father and your mother, and the land of your birth, and have come to a people which you did not know before. 12. The Lord will recompense your work, and a full reward shall be given to you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר, הרי הוא אומר +שופטים ה לא+ ואוהביו כצאת השמש בגבורתו, וכי מי גדול מי שאוהב את המלך או מי שהמלך אוהבו, הוי אומר מי שהמלך אוהבו, שנאמר +דברים י יח+ ואוהב גר.

חביבין הגרים שבכל מקום הוא מכנן כישראל; נקראו בני ישראל עבדים... ונקראו גרים עבדים... נקראו ישראל משרתים... ונקראו הגרים משרתים... נקראו בני ישראל אוהבים... ונקראו הגרים אוהבים... נאמר בישראל ברית... ונאמר בגרים ברית... נאמר בישראל רצון... ונאמר בגרים רצון... נאמר בישראל שמירה... ונאמר בגרים שמירה...

מדרש תהלים (בוכר) מזמור קמו

[ח] ה' שומר את גרים. הרבה הקב"ה אוהב את הגרים למה"ד למלך שהיתה לו צאן. והיתה יוצאה ורועה בשדה ונכנסת בערב בכל יום, פעם אחד נכנס צבי עם הצאן הלך לו אצל העוזים והרחלים, והיה רועה עמהן, נכנס עמה יוצאת לרעות יצא עמה

אמרו למלך הצבי הולכה עם הצאן ורועה עמהן בכל יום יוצא ונכנס עמהן, היה המלך אוהב לצבי ביותר, בזמן שהוא יוצא לשדה מצוה לרועה ואומר לו הזהר בצבי הזה לא יכהו אדם, וכשהיה נכנס עם הצאן היה מצוה אוהבו עליו תנו לו שיאכל וישתה, והיה אוהב הצבי ביותר

אמר ליה הרועה אדוני המלך כמה תישים וכמה עוזים וכמה רחלים וכמה גדיים יש לך, ואין אתה מזהירני ואל הצבי בכל יום אתה מצוני עליו

אמר ליה הצאן כך דרכה לרעות, אבל הצביים במדבר הן יושבין, אין דרכן ליכנס לשוב אצל בני אדם, וזה הצבי נכנס וישב אצלנו, לא נחזיק לו טובה שעזב המדבר הגדול הרחב, מקום שהצביים והאילות רועות, והניח אותן ובא אצלנו, לכן אנו צריכין להחזיק לו טובה, כך אמר הקב"ה טובה גדולה צריך אני להחזיק לגר, שהניח משפחתו ובית אביו ובא אלי, לכן אני מצוה עליו ואהבתם את הגר (דברים יט), וגר לא תונה וגו' (שמות כב כ), לכן נאמר ה' שומר את גרים.

רות פרק ב

(ו) ותפל על פניה ותשתחו ארצה ותאמר אלו מדוע מצאתי חן בעיניך להפירני ואנכי נכריה: (יא) וינען בעז ויאמר לה הגד הגד לי כל אשר עשית את חמותך אחרי מות אישך ותעזבי אביו ואמו וארץ מולדתך ותלכי אל עם אשר לא ידעת תמול שלשום: (יב) ישלם הי פולך ותיהי משפחתך שלמה מעם הי אלהי

12. Bavli, Pesachim 87b

R. Eleazar also said: The Holy One, blessed be He, did not exile Israel among the nations save in order that proselytes might join them, for it is said: "And I will sow her unto Me in the land;" surely a man sows a se'ah in order to harvest many kor! While R. Johanan deduced it from this: "And I will have compassion upon her that hath not obtained compassion."

13. Bavli, Yevamot 109b

That 'those who receive proselytes', [bring evil upon themselves, is deduced] in accordance with [a statement of] R. Helbo. For R. Helbo stated: Proselytes are hurtful to Israel as a sore on the skin.

14. Rashi, Niddah 13b, s.v. kisapachat

As a sore – because it says regarding converts, "And the convert will adhere to them, and they will attach themselves (*vi'nispechu*) to the House of Jacob," (Isa. 14). This is a language of a sore (*sapachat*) – because they are not knowledgeable regarding *mitzvot* and they bring punishment [on the Jewish people]. In addition, it is possible that Jews will learn from their actions – this in the name of my teacher.

15. Tosafot, Kiddushin 70b, s.v. Kashin

Gerim are as difficult [as a sore] – Rashi explains because they are not knowledgeable regarding *mitzvot* and they bring punishment, and also because Jews learn from their actions...

Others explain that they are as difficult as a sore because since God warned regarding the proper treatment of them in 24 places, not to oppress them, [we are bound to sin, since] it is impossible never to cause them suffering...

However, Rabbi Avraham the *ger* explained that because *gerim* are knowledgeable in *mitzvot* are scrupulous regarding them, they are difficult to Israel like a sore, because as a result of this [their scrupulousness], God remembers the sins of Israel when they do not do His will...

R"Y explains that they are difficult (as a sore) because they have become totally intermixed in Israel, and the Shekhina does not rest its presence except on families of pure lineage...

16. Aseh LiKha Rav, 1:23

Rabbi Chaim David HaLevi, Chief Rabbi Tel-Aviv-Yafo

Question: The issue of conversion is a matter of debate between the sages of this generation. There are rabbis and rabbinical courts whose attitude is inclined to be lenient regarding conversion. And, in opposition, there are rabbi and rabbinical courts which are very strict, and distance themselves as much as possible from conversion, and heap many difficulties on those who come to convert. What is the opinion of the Torah? Is conversion an obligation [on the court] or is it at their discretion?

Answer. The attitudes of the sages of Israel regarding conversion differ from one extreme to the other, not only in this generation, but already from the times of the Tana'im, the Sages of the Mishna. In the Torah we are exhorted regarding the love of converts and their honor in 36 places, and some say in 46 places. There are those of the Sages of the Mishna that interpret this positively, and there are those who interpret it negatively – that it is because of the likelihood of their backsliding (*Mechilta*). From then until now this debate has continued, for pro and for con.

This debate exists not only on the conceptual plane alone, but also on the practical plane... The halakhic takeaway is that regarding conversion it is all

תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים (פז):

ואמר רבי אלעזר לא הגלה הקדוש ברוך הוא את ישראל לבין האומות אלא כדי שיתוספו עליהם גרים שנאמר +הושע ב+ וזרעתיה לי בארץ כלום אדם זורע סאה אלא להכניס כמה כורין ורבי יוחנן אמר מהכא +הושע ב+ ורחמתי את לא רחמה

תלמוד בבלי מסכת יבמות דף קט עמוד ב

דא"ר יצחק מאי דכתיב רע ירוע כי ערב זר רעה אחר רעה תבא למקבלי גרים ולערבי שלציון ולתוקע עצמו לדבר הלכה מקבלי גרים כר' חלבו דאמר ר' חלבו קשים גרים לישראל כספחת בעור

רש"י מסכת נדה דף יג עמוד ב

כספחת - דכתיב בגרים (ישעיהו יד) ונלוה הגר עליהם ונספחו על בית יעקב לשון ספחת שקשים לישראל כספחת שאין בקיאים במצות ומביאין פורענות ועוד שמא למדים ישראל ממעשיהן מפי מורי הזקן

תוספות מסכת קידושין דף ע עמוד ב

קשים גרים - פ' בקונטרס לפי שאינם בקיאים במצות ומביאים פורענות ועוד שמלמדים את ישראל ממעשיהם וכו'...

ויש מפרשים דקשין גרים לישראל כספחת לפי שהזהיר הקב"ה עליהם בכ"ד מקומות שלא להונות אותם ואי אפשר שלא יצטערו...

וה"ר אברהם גר פירש לפי שהגריין בקיאין במצות ומדקדקין בהם קשים הם לישראל כספחת דמתוך כן הקב"ה מזכיר עונותיהם של ישראל כשאין עושין רצונו...

ור"י פירש דלפיכך קשים שנטמעו בישראל ואין השכינה שורה אלא על משפחה מיוחסת...

עשה לך רב, א:כ"ג

רב חיים דוד הלוי, רב הראשי, תל-אביב, יפו

שאלה: ענין הגיור שנוי במחלוקת חכמי הדור. יש רבנים ובתי דין שדעתם נוטה להקל בגיור. לעומתם יש רבנים ובתי-דין המחמירים בכך ביותר, מתרחקים ככל האפשר מגיור, ומערימים קשיים רבים על הבאים להתגייר. מה היא דעת תורה, האם גיור הוא מצוה או רשות?

תשובה. יחסם של חכמי ישראל לגיור שונה מן הקצה אל הקצה, לא בדורנו בלבד, אלא כבר מתקופת התנאים חכמי המשנה. בתורה הוזכרו על אהבת הגרים וכבודם בשלשים וששה מקומות, ויש אומרים במ"ו מקומות. ויש מחכמי המשנה שדרשו זאת לשבח, ויש שדרשו לגנאי מפני שסורם רע (מכילתא משפטים פרשה י"ח). ומאז ועד עתה נמשך אותו ויכוח לחיוב ולשלילה.

אותו ויכוח נמצא לא בשטח הרעיוני בלבד אלא גם

according to the assessment of the judge. The impression of the rabbinical court regarding the person standing in front of them and his intentions is the determining factor... every judge and his approach, every judge and his impressions.

Based on the above, I will now respond to the second question, whether conversion is an obligation [of the court] or a matter of discretion. Behold, in the Torah it does not say in any place that there is a mitzvah to accept converts... But from the Gemara (Yevamot 47b) it appears that it is a mitzvah, for we teach there that after he has accepted the mitzvot you immerse him immediately, and the Gemara explains that this is because we do not delay a mitzvah. From there we see that accepting converts is a mitzvah. There are those who count it in the list of the Torah mitzvot, although it is not stated explicitly (and there are those who say it is a rabbinic mitzvah). Nevertheless, there is a place to ask why this is not written as an explicit mitzvah in the Torah...

However, because the Torah did not write it explicitly, it has hinted that it is not an obligatory mitzvah regardless of circumstances, and not every time that a non-Jew comes to convert is the rabbinical judge obligated to convert him... Rather, every judge and religious leader in his generation has been given the discretion to decide according to his judgment, whether to be more lenient (than the normal standards) or whether to be more strict. More strict – like Ezra the Scribe did... And more lenient –like Hillel acted...

I should mention in closing that both the courts that are lenient regarding conversion and those which are strict – they are all acting with the intent to serve God properly, and they are acting according to their understanding and their conscience.

IV. Fundamental Halakhah

17. Shulkhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, 268

[2] When one comes to convert, three people say to him: What prompted you to come and convert? Or, don't you know that at this point in time Israel is pushed, oppressed, (hopeless and oppressed from, "Why are your stalwarts swept away"[Jeremiah 46:15]?) and insane and tormented ones come upon them? If he (the prospective convert) says, "I know, yet still I am not worthy to join them," accept him immediately.

Inform him of the principles of the faith, of the unity of God, of the prohibitions against idolatry, and go on at length with him about this. Also, instruct him a bit in a few of the less strenuous mitzvot and a few of the more serious mitzvot, about a few of the punishments (for transgressing) the mitzvot, and say to him, "When you first came to learn this, if you ate (forbidden fats) you would not be punished by being cut off. If you desecrated Shabbat, you would not be stoned, and now if you eat (forbidden) fats, you will be cut off, and if you desecrate Shabbat, you will be stoned. Do not expound on this at too great a length.

In as much as you have informed him about the punishments (for the transgressing) of the commandments, so too should you inform him of the rewards of (following) the mitzvot, that in the doing of these mitzvot he will merit life in the world to come, and that there is no such thing as a complete saint except for one who has wisdom and that does these commandments and knows them. Say to him, "As for the world to come, it is not hidden, rather it is for the righteous ones, that is, Israel, and that those who see Israel in sadness in this world, they will see goodness for them (in the world to come), for they are not able to receive the majority of their goodness in this world as idolaters lest they become haughty and they make a mistake and they lose their reward in the world to come. The Holy One, blessed be He, does not bring them most of the calamities in order that they are not destroyed, rather all of the idolaters are destroyed, and they are standing. Expound at length upon this in order to make the words attractive.

If he accepts, circumcise him immediately. Wait until he heals completely and

בשטח המעשי... המסקנא ההלכתית היה שבעניני גיור הכל לפי ראות עיני הדיין. התרשמות בית-הדין ביחס למעומד ולכונותיו היא הקובעת... כל דיין וגישתו, כל דיין והתרשמותו.

ומתוך הנ"ל אבוא להשיב על השאלה השניה, אם הגיור הוא מצוה או רשות. הנה בחזרה לא נאמרה בשום מקום מצות קבלת גרים... אבל מדברי הגמרא (יבמות מ:ז) נראה שהיא מצוה, שכן שנינו שאחרי שקיבל עליו מצוות מטבילין אותו מיד, ופירשה הגמרא, מדוע מיד כדי שלא להשהות המצוה, ומכאן שקבלת גרים מצוה היא. ויש שמנו אותה בכלל מצוות התורה אף שלא נאמר בפירוש (וי"א שהיא מצוה דרבנן). עכ"פ יש מקום לשאלה מדוע לא נכתבה כמצוה מפורשת בתורה...

אך כיון שלא כתבה אותה בפירוש, רמזה שאין היא מצוה מחוייבת עכ"פ, ולא בכל פעם שיבא גוי להתגייר, כבר חלה חובה על הדיין לקבלו... אלא מסרה לכל דיין ומנהיג בדורו להחליט כראות עיניו בין לקולא בין להומרא: להומרא: כפי שנהג עזרא הסופר... ולקולא, כפי שנהג הלל...

אציין לבסוף, שגם בתי-דין המקילים בגיור, וגם המחמירים, כולם כונתם לשם שמים, ופועלים לפי הבנתם ומצפונם הטהור.

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה סימן רסח

[ב] כשבא להתגייר אומרים לו מה ראית שבאת להתגייר או אתה יודע שישאל בוזן הזה דחופים סחופים (פי' אבודים וסחופים מן מדוע נסחף אביריך) ומטורפים ויסורים באים עליהם אם אמר יודע אני ואיני כדאי להתחבר עמהם מקבלין אותו מיד.

ומודיעים אותו עיקרי הדת שהוא יחוד ה' ואיסור עבודת כוכבים ומאריכין עמו בדבר זה ומודיעים אותו מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות ומודיעים אותו מקצת עונשין של מצות שאומרים לו קודם שבאת למדה זו אכלת חלב אי אתה ענוש כרת חללת שבת אי אתה חייב סקילה ועכשיו אכלת חלב אתה ענוש כרת חללת שבת אתה חייב סקילה ואין מרבין עליו ואין מדקדקין עליו.

וכשם שמודיעים אותו עונשין של מצות כך מודיעים אותו שכרן של מצות ומודיעים אותו שבעשיית מצות אלו יזכה לחיי העוה"ב ושאלו שום צדיק גמור אלא בעל החכמה שעושה מצות אלו ויודעים ואומרים לו הוי יודע שהעולם הבא אינו צפון אלא לצדיקים והם ישראל וזה שתראה ישראל בצער בעולם הזה טובה היא צפונה להם שאינם יכולים לקבל רוב טובה בעוה"ז כעובדי כוכבים שמא ירום לבם ויתעו ויפסידו שכר עולם הבא ואין הקב"ה מביא עליהם רוב פורענות כדי שלא יאבדו אלא כל העובדי כוכבים כלים והם עומדים ומאריכין בדבר זה כדי לחבבן.

אם קבל מלין אותו מיד וממתינים לו עד שיתרפא

afterwards dunk him (in the mikveh), and he should have no clothing or barrier between him and the water. Three people stand behind him and inform him of a few of the less strenuous and a few of the more serious mitzvot a second time and he stands in the water.

If the convert is a woman, women sit her down in the water up to her neck and the rabbinic judges remain outside and inform her of a few of the less strenuous and more serious mitzvot while she sits in the water and afterwards she submerges in front of them and they return there and leave in order that they do not see her while she is getting out of the water.

And then comes the blessing over immersion after the convert gets out of the water, and because he immersed, behold, he's an Israelite! And if he returns to his original state, he's an apostate of Israel. If he effects kiddushin (Sanctifies his wife in marriage), his marriage remains valid.

[3] All aspects of the convert, whether to tell him the mitzvot so that he may accept them, whether the circumcision, or whether the immersion – all must be in front of [a court of] three who are valid to judge, and in the day. However, that is only *ab initio*, but *post facto*, if one is circumcised or immerses only in front of two, or at night... he is a full convert, and can marry a Jewish woman. The only exception is the acceptance of the mitzvot, which is invalid if not done during the day and with [a court of] three. And according to Rif and Rambam, even *post facto* if one immersed or was circumcised in front of two or at night, it is invalid...

[7] If a non-Jewish minor has a father, he may convert him, and if he does not have a father and he comes to convert, or his mother brings him to convert, a bet din (i.e. religious court) converts him since it is to his advantage and we do things that are beneficial for someone even without that person's knowledge.

Either a minor whose father converted him or he was converted by a bet din, he may reject the conversion when he matures and his legal status is not like a yisrael mumar (i.e. a Jew who converts out of Judaism), but rather like a non-Jew.

[8] When is this? When he did not continue in Jewish ways after growing up. If he did continue in Jewish ways, he can no longer protest.

[12] When a convert comes to convert, we check into him... and if no ulterior motive was found, we inform him of the weight of the yoke of the Torah and the difficulty involved for the common people in its fulfillment, so that he will withdraw. And if he accepts and does not withdraw, and we see that he is coming out of love, then we accept him. And if we did not check into him, or if we did not inform him of the reward of the mitzvot and the punishment [for their transgression], and he was circumcised and immersed in front of three common people, then he is a convert. Even if it was known that he was converting for an ulterior motive, as long as he was circumcised and immersed, he is no longer a non-Jew. We do, however, remain wary of him until his righteousness can be determined. And even if he went back [to his old ways] and worshipped idols, behold he is like a Jew who has committed apostasy, and a marriage that he enters into is valid.

18. Beit Yosef, Yoreh Deah, 268

Know that the fact they did not accept converts neither in the days of David nor Shlomo appears also in the second chapter of Yevamot and as Tosafot wrote there, in the case in the second chapter of Shabbat of a prospective convert who came before Hillel and said, convert me on condition that I be the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) – Hillel was sure that that his ultimate intention was for the sake of Heaven. So, too, the case in the chapter Hatekhelet of a prospective convert who came before Rabbi and said, convert me on condition that I will be married to that student. From here we learn that everything is according to the view of that conversion court.

רפואה שלימה ואח"כ מטבילין אותו טבילה הוגנת בלא חציצה (וי"א שיגלח שערתו ויטול צפרני ידיו ורגליו קודם טבילה) (טור ורי"ף ורא"ש) ושלשה (תלמידי חכמים) (ג"ז טור) עומדים על גביו ומודיעים אותו מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות פעם שניה והוא עומד במים.

ואם היתה אשה נשים מושבות אותה במים עד צוארה והדיינים מבחוץ ומודיעין אותה מקצת מצות קלות וחמורו' והיא יושבת במים ואח"כ טובלת בפניהם והם מחזירים פניהם ויוצאים כדי שלא יראו אותה כשתעלה מהמים.

ויברך על הטבילה אחר שיעלה מן המים וכיון שטבל הרי הוא כישראל שאם חזר לסורו הרי הוא כישראל מומר שאם קדש קדושו קדושו:

[ג] כל ענייני הגר, בין הודיעו המצות לקבלם בין המילה בין הטבילה, צריך שיהיו בג' הכשרים לדון, וביום. מיהו דוקא לכתחלה, אבל בדיעבד אם לא מל או טבל אלא בפני ב' ובליה... הוי גר ומותר בישראלית, חוץ מקבלת המצות שמעכתת אם אינה ביום ובשלשה. ולהרי"ף ולהרמב"ם, אפילו בדיעבד שטבל או מל בפני שנים או בליה, מעכב...

[ז] עובד כוכבים קטן, אם יש לו אב -- יכול לגייר אותו. ואם אין לו אב ובא להתגייר או אמו מביאתו להתגייר -- בית דין מגיירין אותו, שזכות הוא לו וזכין לאדם שלא בפניו.

בין קטן שגיירו אביו בין שגיירוהו ב"ד -- יכול למחות משיגדיל, ואין דינו כישראל מומר אלא כעובד כוכבים:

[ח] במה דברים אמורים? כשלא נהג מנהג יהדות משהגדיל. אבל נהג מנהג יהדות משהגדיל -- שוב אינו יכול למחות:

[יב] כשיבא הגר להתגייר, בודקים אחריו... ואם לא נמצאת להם עילה מודיעים להם כובד עול התורה וטורה שיש בעשייתה על עמי הארצות, כדי שיפרשו. אם קיבלו ולא פירשו, וראו אותם שחזרו מאהבה, מקבלים אותם. ואם לא בדקו אחריו, או שלא הודיעוהו שכר המצות ועונשו, ומל וטבל בפני ג' הדיוטות, ה"ז גר אפ"י נודע שבשביל דבר הוא מתגייר, הואיל ומל וטבל יצא מכלל העובדי כוכבים, וחוששים לו עד שחתברר צדקתו; ואפילו חזר ועבד עבודת כוכבים, הרי הוא כישראל מומר שקדושו קדושו.

בית יוסף יורה דעה סימן רסח

דע דהא דלא קיבלו גרים לא בימי דוד ולא בימי שלמה איתא נמי בפרק שני דיבמות (שם) וכתבו שם התוספות (ד"ה לא) וההיא דפרק שני דשבת (לא). דאתא לקמיה דהלל ואמר גיירני על מנת ליעשות כהן גדול בטוח היה דסופו לעשות לשם שמים וכן הדיא דהתכלת (מנחות מד). דאתא לקמיה דרבי ואמר גיירני על מנת שאנשא לאותו תלמיד עכ"ל ומכאן יש ללמוד דהכל לפי ראות עיני בית דין.

FINAL REPORT OF THE GPS REVIEW COMMITTEE June 29, 2015

THE GPS REVIEW COMMITTEE: FORMATION, MEMBERS, DIRECTIVES, AND GOALS

Formation and Members

In January 2007, the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) and its affiliated Beth Din of America launched the "North American Regional Network of Conversion Courts," commonly referred to as the "GPS (Gairus Policies and Standards) Network." The network is comprised of 12 Regional Conversion Courts, referred to also as Beth Din or *Bet Din* (s.) or *Barei Din* (pl.), administered by a national GPS office.

By 2013, more than 1,000 individuals had successfully converted through GPS-approved *Barei Din*. Over the course of the six years of the GPS Network's functioning, the RCA office received periodic complaints from conversion candidates and sponsoring rabbis, which is not unexpected given the number of conversion candidates and the nature of the process, but was nonetheless disappointing. These matters were addressed by the Director of the National GPS System, the GPS Committee, and RCA leadership. In response to these complaints, the Executive Committee of the RCA mandated a review of the GPS system. Following the arrest of Rabbi Barry Freundel, the then *Av Bet Din* of the GPS-approved *Bet Din* in Washington, DC, many converts wrote in a variety of online fora, as well as in communications to the RCA, about issues they experienced in their conversion processes. It quickly became clear to the RCA that the review of the GPS needed to address the complexities of the conversion experiences of the converts and the scope of the GPS Review Committee's mandate was expanded.

On October 29, 2014, the RCA announced the establishment of a committee to review the GPS Network. The Review Committee was comprised of men and women, participants in the conversion process; *Doyyanim*, mental health professionals, and rabbinic leaders. The members of the GPS Review Committee are:

- Mrs. Evelyn Fruchter, a convert to Judaism and an attorney specializing in litigation;
 - Rabbi Shmuel Goldin (chair), Honorary President of the RCA and Rabbi of Ahavath Torah, Englewood, NJ;
 - Mrs. Abby Lerner, educator and teacher of family purity laws;
 - Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, Rabbi of Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun, New York, NY;
 - Mrs. Bethany Mandel, a convert to Judaism, former staff member at Commentary Magazine, and freelance writer who recently authored a column entitled, "A Convert's Bill of Rights";
 - Rabbi Yona Reiss, *Av Bet Din*, Chicago Rabbinical Council; *Doyyan*, Beth Din of America, and Chairman, GPS;
 - Ms. Bracha Rutner, *Yoetzet Halachah* (advisor in Jewish family purity laws) for the Riverdale, NY and Washington, DC communities;
 - Mrs. Shana Yocheved Schacter, CSW, a psychotherapist in private practice;
 - Rabbi Yaakov Shulman, Rabbi of Congregation Talmud Torah, Brooklyn, NY, and *Doyyan*, GPS *Bet Din*, Brooklyn;
 - Rabbi Adam Starr, Rabbi of Young Israel of Toco Hills, Atlanta, GA; *Doyyan*, GPS *Bet Din*, Atlanta;
 - Rabbi Kaiman Topp, Rabbi of Beth Jacob Congregation, Los Angeles, CA.
- Rabbi Mark Dratch, RCA Executive Vice President, and Rabbi Reuven Trauburks, RCA Israel Representative, have provided input and professional support to the GPS Review Committee's efforts.

Review Committee Directive

At the establishment of the GPS Review Committee in October, 2014, RCA President Leonard Matanky outlined the directives, assumptions, and charge of the committee.

While there were those who expressed opposition to the entire notion of a centralized system of conversion courts calling for a return to conversions done by local rabbis, the RCA affirms the value of its centralized system of Regional Courts for Conversion, the GPS system. In particular:

1. The RCA affirms the fundamental value of the GPS system, whose standards in *halachah* are in accordance with the most widely accepted views of our *Poskim*. A conversion completed through this system grants the convert the assurance that the conversion will be the most widely accepted both in North America and by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel.
2. The RCA affirms the *halachic* standards of the GPS system.
3. While the Freundel arrest is an unmitigated tragedy and gives urgency to this review, the GPS system includes many people who have worked appropriately including rabbis, administrators, teachers, and mentors. These people are not to be judged unfairly due to the criminal activity of one.
4. While affirming the strengths of the GPS, the GPS is acknowledged to have weaknesses, as does any system. Some of these are due to the nature of a centralized system and some are due to the delivery of the services.
5. The RCA is committed to improving the GPS system by both making it more efficient and by improving the experience of the convert.

Goals

The goals of this GPS Review are to:

1. Study the experiences of converts and their sensitivities and to make recommendations that will improve their experience while maintaining the *halachic* demands that conversion entails.
2. Make recommendations that will make the GPS more user-friendly and transparent for applicants, conversion candidates, and the community.
3. Recommend a safe grievance procedure.
4. Identify the successes and weaknesses of GPS.
5. Make recommendations to improve the organizational structure of the GPS Network in order to improve consistency amongst the different *Batei Din*.

REVIEW PROCESS

The GPS Review Committee's mandate was to evaluate the entire system in order to identify best practices, understand the delivery of services from all perspectives, and make recommendations for establishing the "gold standard" of services that are professional, respectful, and spiritually engaging. The GPS Review Committee paid attention to both the issues and systems it found deficient, as well as on those areas it found to be appropriate and effective.

Appreciating that converts are the experts of their experiences and have much to offer in helping understand the experience of conversion, much of the Review Committee's focus was on gathering information from them on how the GPS *Batei Din* can make their experience more comfortable and meaningful. Although the GPS Review Committee found, as a result of its research, that many aspects of the GPS process are working, the GPS Review Committee identified systemic and procedural issues that must be addressed.

The Surveys

In order to obtain a full and accurate picture of the experiences of conversion candidates, a professional survey was conducted by Avraham Y. HaCohen, a consultant to non-profits. Avraham Y. HaCohen has advised a diverse group of non-profit organizations and philanthropies in hundreds of existing projects and new initiatives in the field of health, social welfare, education, and culture. His expertise is in the area of planning, evaluation, and implementation of management, operations, program, budget, and financing.

The GPS Review Committee had input on the survey questions and the survey was conducted by Avraham Y. HaCohen. The completed surveys were seen only by Avraham Y. HaCohen in order to ensure safety and anonymity of the respondents. The survey data presented to the RCA was presented anonymously, without any attributions to those who completed the surveys.

Two Surveys were conducted by Avraham Y. HaCohen:

1. A survey of converts, present conversion candidates, and candidates who chose not to complete their conversion with the GPS *Bet Din*.
2. A survey of Sponsoring Rabbis.

The rates of response were twice as high as the target norm for e-surveys, a range of 24.8 - 26%.

	Population (potential respondents)	Sample (actual respondents)
Conversion Participants	835	439 (52.6%)
Sponsoring Rabbis	216	107 (49.5%)

Survey of Converts and Conversion Candidates

The survey was sent to 835 people who had registered as conversion candidates with the RCA, including those who had completed their conversions, those in the process of converting, and those who chose not to complete their conversion with a GPS *Bet Din*. 439 completed the survey, including 307 who had completed their conversion, 105 who were in the process, and 27 who had decided to not complete with a GPS *Bet Din*. The experiences of people

who may have participated in the conversion process but who never registered with the RCA are not accounted for by the data presented below.

A 27 page summary of the survey results was submitted to the Review Committee along with a full report of the data.

The following is a selection of data from the summary report:

- 78% of conversion participants in the RCA-Beth Din of America network are women.
- The peak years for entering the conversion process are the ages 20-29, which represent 45% of the sample. In the decade thereafter, 30-39, the number drops to 27%. These two age groups encompass 70% of all conversion candidates. Only 12% of respondents entered the conversion process in the age range of 40-49.
- Participants were asked to indicate the factor(s) that prompted their interest in conversion. The most oft-cited factor (80% of respondents) was a "spiritual-intellectual search."
- 45% of all respondents said they have "Jewish ancestry." Although the survey did not ask them to define that term, they were asked whether they considered themselves Jewish while growing up, and 70% of that group answered in the affirmative.
- 94% of all respondents stated that their reason for selecting the RCA Beth Din to convert them to Judaism was the desire for a "recognized, Orthodox conversion." A number of respondents noted their understanding that RCA conversions are recognized by the State of Israel. 20% of respondents noted that the RCA had been recommended to them as reliable.
- A little less than one-third of those entering the RCA conversion process had previously begun or completed a conversion with another organization. 48% of those were Conservative; 13% Reform; and another 7% indicated that their conversion was "non-Orthodox." 32% of those who had begun or completed a conversion before entering the RCA conversion process (47 people) had previously begun or completed a conversion under Orthodox auspices.
- Although there may have been a certain level of uncertainty about aspects of the process, the majority of potential converts found their Sponsoring Rabbi to be accessible to guide them and that they were able to have an open and honest dialogue with him during the course of learning and preparation for conversion ("Completely" – 72%; "Somewhat" – 20%). A minority of respondents (8%) found themselves with a Sponsoring Rabbi whom they felt was unavailable to provide the necessary guidance and with whom they did not feel comfortable speaking openly.
- Participants were queried as to whether, if they experienced discomfort during the conversion process, they felt there was someone to whom they could comfortably turn to help them: 72% said yes; 28% said no.
- Three-quarters of respondents would say that their Sponsoring Rabbi did a good job "preparing them for the social, emotional, spiritual, financial and other challenges they might face as a convert to Judaism" (Very much so – 38%; Pretty well – 36%).
- The fact that fully 76% of participants expected to have a continuing relationship with their Sponsoring Rabbi following the conversion process matches up quite closely to the data cited above about the quality of the relationship between the parties, i.e. if the relationship was

marked by accessibility and open dialogue during the course of learning and preparation for conversion.

- When asked to characterize the administration and proceedings of the Regional Conversion Court, 75% of participants replied "Professional." The other quarter of the respondents did not share that positive assessment and either said that it was "Somewhat lacking in professionalism" (16%) or "Unprofessional" (9%).
- Understanding that *Halachah* requires ritual immersion to be without clothes, did you feel this aspect of the conversion experience was handled sufficiently modestly?
 - o Yes 85%
 - o Only somewhat 9%
 - o Not really 3%
 - o Not at all 3%
- Again, given that *Halachah* requires ritual immersion to be without clothing and, although shielded from view, with three rabbis in close proximity, which of the following best describes your recollection of the experience?

Responses:

 - o The moment was filled with holiness and excitement that left little room for anything else. 57%
 - o It was a sanctified moment, but I definitely felt some discomfort. 29%
 - o It was awkward and uncomfortable, but I accepted that as a price I had to pay. 12%
 - o I felt resentful but did not express it. 2%
 - o I felt resentful and expressed it at the time. 1 person
- The survey also asked "To what degree did you experience any of the following feelings in your discussions with the Conversion Court?" and received the following responses:

Answer Options	A great deal	Some	A little	Not at all	Do not recall
Welcome	53%	24%	13%	9%	1%
Empathy	39%	26%	16%	16%	3%
Encouragement	41%	26%	15%	15%	1%
Support	37%	27%	21%	14%	1%
Respect	58%	20%	12%	9%	1%
Being judged critically	22%	22%	20%	34%	2%
Powerlessness	27%	16%	19%	36%	3%

Vulnerability	28%	21%	20%	28%	3%
Unreasonable demands	10%	9%	18%	58%	5%

There are, in these responses, sometimes upwards of 100 people out of 400 surveyed, and sometimes more, who carry with them a view that the *Bet Din* is “lacking in professionalism” and have experienced feelings such as “being judged critically,” “powerlessness,” and “unreasonable demands.” The GPS system needs to address these concerns.

Focus Groups

In the survey of conversions participations, an offer to participate in focus groups was made. 175 people expressed an interest in these groups. In order to assist the GPS Review Committee in its analysis, five focus groups were conducted. Each group had about ten participants. Three groups were conducted in New York, one in Washington, and one in Montreal. Each group had 2 facilitators, a male and a female. The facilitators were:

- Mrs. Valerie Caminsky, Montreal, Canada;
- Rabbi Mark Dratch, Executive Vice President, RCA;
- Mrs. Abby Lerner, educator and teacher of family purity laws;
- Ms. Barcha Rubner, Yoetzer-Halokhah (advisor in family purity laws) for the Rivardale, New York and Washington, DC communities;
- Mrs. Shana Yocheved Schacter, CSM, a psychotherapist in private practice;
- Rabbi Neal Turk, *Yoshev Rosh* Conversion Bet Din of Bergen County, New Jersey;
- Rabbi Michael Whitman, Rabbi of Adath Israel Poale Zedek, *Yoshev Rosh* of Conversion Bet Din, Montreal, Canada.

Sponsoring Rabbi Survey

The survey was sent to 216 rabbis who had served as sponsoring rabbis. 107 responded to the survey, representing 49.5%.

A 17 page survey report was submitted to the Review Committee along with a full report of the data.

The following are some excerpts of this report, in the words of the survey professional:

- More than one-third of those who serve as Sponsoring Rabbis in the RCA’s Conversion Network are not actually members of the RCA.
- Conversion candidates in the New York City Beth Din are spread among a larger pool of Sponsoring Rabbis. In that region, almost half of the rabbis have guided no more than one or two candidates. In all the other regions, the weight shifts to a smaller group of rabbis who have managed at least 5-10 conversion cases or more.
- Source material to guide the candidate’s learning has been an issue. 38% of the Sponsoring Rabbi respondents report they did not have a curriculum designed for that purpose.
- A strong plurality of Sponsoring Rabbis is of the opinion that there should be some manner of formal follow-up with converts after a GPS conversion.
- More than 90% of Sponsoring Rabbis see assistance in the convert’s integration into the community as one of the responsibilities of their role. Yet, with regard to their own follow-up after the conversion, there was a clear “disconnect” between the perception of the rabbis and that reported by the converts themselves.

- While a majority of respondents chose positive attributes to describe the *Doyyamim’s* demeanor in meeting with conversion candidates, none of those characterizations exceeded 74%.
- There is a strong norm of rabbis’ satisfaction with the performance of the New York City *Bet Din*. In stark contrast is the assessment of the Other Regional *Batei Din*, in which fully one-third of Sponsoring Rabbis express dissatisfaction with their functioning.
- Though mandated by “GPS Protocols,” only 41% of Sponsoring Rabbis submitted a report on the convert’s progress one year after conversion.
- In cases where a Sponsoring Rabbi may have felt frustration with the *Bet Din* during the conversion process of one of his candidates, the most frequently mentioned causes were administrative issues, unclear meeting outcomes, and excessive demands of the candidate.
- 18% of Sponsoring Rabbis say they have had at least one candidate whom they felt should have been approved for conversion but the *Bet Din* did not accept. 81% of those rabbis refused to accept the ruling as final and, instead, referred the candidate to a non-GPS *Bet Din*.
- Although there is some level of interest in the idea of a national ombudsman to handle disagreements between Sponsoring Rabbis and the *Batei Din*, most rabbis were not enthusiastic about the concept as a solution to the issues they had raised.
- When queried as to the nature of assistance they may have received from the National GPS Office, only half of the sample chose to respond. And among those who did reply, 31% indicated they had no connection with the National GPS Office, only with the Regional *Bet Din*.

Survey of RCA Rabbis

In addition to the two surveys conducted by Avraham Y. HaCohen, a much briefer survey was conducted by the RCA of its members. 173 rabbis responded and reported that:

- 73% have been involved in some way in working with or assisting candidates in the process of conversion.
- 51.4% use GPS *Batei Din* exclusively; 34.6% use both GPS and non-GPS *Batei Din*.
- Of those that do not use GPS *Batei Din* exclusively,
 - 54.2% refer to another standing *Bet Din*
 - 18.6% create their own ad hoc *Bet Din*
 - 30.5% report using a combination of the above

RECOMMENDATIONS: OVERVIEW

These following recommendations build on those initially developed as part of the establishment of the GPS Network.

At the time of the establishment of the GPS system, attention was paid primarily to the development of *Batei Din* that would function according to standardized *halachic* procedures. Primary concerns included the essential requirement of conversion candidates' full observance of Jewish law at the time of the conversion, as well as with their expectation and commitment to continue to live as observant Jews. The emphasis in establishing this system was to maintain a high quality of the conversions in order to assure that they would be widely recognized...

The emphasis of the RCA in establishing these *Batei Din* was thus primarily on the *halachic* practices of the *Batei Din* and not on the experiences of the converts. It was assumed at the time that the experiences of converts, their training, their spiritual and religious development, their emotional process and comfort would be tended to by their Sponsoring Rabbis who had much experience in these areas.

The collection of data from the surveys, from input of those involved in conversion preparation as teachers and sponsoring rabbis, as well as from the collective experience of the Review Committee members, have made apparent, however, that the RCA must not limit its attention to *halachic* details, but to the many areas and aspects of the complexity of the total conversion experience for conversion candidates including emotional, spiritual, social issues, power dynamics, and other factors. While many converts felt satisfied with the process of conversion, a significant minority felt vulnerable, unduly stressed, and sometimes even resentful of the process. These recommendations expand the attention that must be given to the quality of the experiences of converts.

In general, the Review Committee identified the following areas that require attention.

- Professionalism
This includes such things as efficient and timely communication; respect for timeliness and punctuality of appointments and appreciation of the financial and professional consequences of meetings on converts; communication and cooperation between the *Bet Din* and sponsoring rabbi.
- Transparency of Expectations
This includes upfront information regarding the length of the conversion process; financial obligations; curriculum; demands on convert in terms of knowledge, economic and life-style expectations post-conversion.
- Sensitivity to Candidates
This includes awareness of the vulnerability and scrutiny felt by many conversion candidates; respect for their life-changing commitment; appreciation of the life experiences of those who were raised as Jews; sensitivity to the emotional, psychological, personal, and economic stresses experienced by conversion candidates.

- RCA/GPS Website
This includes the need to enhance the website by updating it to include detailed information as to what to expect in the process, including what to learn, how to find a sponsoring rabbi and a list of what can be expected of him, meetings—how many and how often, a general time line, description of *teivilah, milah*, what the meetings with the *Bet Din* will be like, booklists, resource lists of websites for learning and for conversion support, description of fees. Each local *Bet Din*

should have a full website with all the standard info as well as specific local info including the names of all the *Doyyanim*.

- Establishing a process to receive concerns and complaints and a mechanism to address them.
- Sponsoring Rabbis
There is need for more direction and training for Sponsoring Rabbis in the education of conversion candidates and in understanding the emotional process for the convert.
- *Doyyanim*
There is need to review the selection, training, and continuing education of *Doyyanim*.
- National GPS Oversight
The position of GPS Director must become a full time position in order to provide him with sufficient time and resources to better ensure that all protocols and policies of GPS are followed by the individual *Batei Din* and Sponsoring Rabbis.
- Support for converts, during and after the process.