

**Conversion to Judaism:
a Historical Analysis on How Stringencies Arose and Why**

Zane Barrios

Table of Contents

Abbreviations	3
1) Introduction.....	4
The Question of Conversion: Why the Stringencies?	4
Elaboration on the Question	5
An Outline of This Paper	6
Jewish Demographics Today	7
2) Sources & Methodology.....	9
Methodology/Theory.....	9
Sources Examined.....	13
Terminology.....	14
3) Historical Discussion of Conversion to Judaism	18
Tanakh and conversion	18
Late Antiquity and the Emergence of Rabbinic Literature	21
Diasporic Judaism.....	25
Early Modern — 1500-1700 C.E.	29
4) Modern History and Discussion of Conversion.....	32
Conversion to Judaism in Modernity.....	32
Creation of the State of Israel	36
5) Contemporary Context and Situation.....	40
Official Policy of the State of Israel	40
Alternative perspectives (rabbinical opponents).....	45
Non-Orthodox approaches	49
6) Conclusion and Analysis of Findings	54
What Has the Research Shown?.....	54
Consequences of the Findings	57
Appendices.....	60
Appendix A	61
Appendix B	62
Appendix C	63
Appendix D	65

Abbreviations

b. = Babylonian Talmud

t. = Tosefta

bar. = indication of a baraita

m. = Mishnah

midr. (+ biblical book) = Midrash (+ biblical book)

Bik. = *Bikkurim*

Ma'aś. Š. = *Ma'aser Sheni*

Meg. = *Megillah*

Yebam = *Yevamot*

Ker. = *Keritot*

Š.Ar. = *Shulchan Arukh*

1) Introduction

The Question of Conversion: Why the Stringencies?

If one is not born Jewish, then how can one become a Jew? Is expressing the wish to become Jewish enough to make it so, or should one undergo rigorous procedures? Different facets of Judaism have different answers to these questions, and it has been an important discussion in recent decades. Although the question of “who is a Jew?” may be considered trivial to some, in fact it has important political and social implication particularly in the state of Israel.

Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser sum it up in their work titled *Jews and Others: Non-Jewish Jews in Israel*:

The ‘who is a Jew?’ question is among the most persistent and hotly debated issues in Israel’s 60-year history. It pits the Orthodox (and many ‘traditional’ Jews) against those who tend towards more secular beliefs and practices. The Orthodox rabbinate accepts only the strictest standards for Jewishness—either a Jewish mother or [Orthodox] conversion.¹

This paper explores this debate surrounding conversion, focusing on the question: why has conversion to Judaism, as understood by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel, become so stringent? My hypothesis is that most of the modern stringencies for conversion to “Orthodox” (a term I will define shortly) Judaism are a result of politics in Israel, and not theology. This hypothesis will be tested by examining how conversions were conducted historically, and what the discourses on conversions were until now. This paper will then compare the historical narrative constructed with the modern-day procedure and narrative espoused by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel as to how conversions should be performed. Finally, this paper will seek to interpret why any changes shown came about politically, and not theologically.

¹ Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser, “Jews and Others: Non-Jewish Jews in Israel” in *Israel Affairs* 15, no. 1 (January 28, 2009), 53.

This paper makes frequent use of the word Orthodox, a term which did not exist in Judaism until modernity. To simplify the discussion, Orthodox here is defined as a strain of Judaism which not only accepts halakha as binding, immutable, and applicable to all Jews in all generations, but also engages with the modern world instead of shutting itself off.² This is the strain of Judaism presented as official by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel and its supporters, such as the Rabbinical Council of America and the Conference of European Rabbis.

Elaboration on the Question

In prior centuries, conversion to Judaism was not as rigid as the process currently espoused by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel. To understand why that is, it is important to delineate between when a stringency arises due to changes in theology and when a stringency arises due to the religio-political situation the religion finds itself in (the stringency precedes a change in theology). For example, to be recognized as Jewish by the Chief Rabbinate, the potential convert (during the conversion process) must accept all 613 of the commandments (mitzvot) and live by them. If the convert does not accept or keep the commandments, then the conversion could be seen as invalid. For the Chief Rabbinate, this cause for invalidation seems to be accepted, but this idea of invalidating conversions is a recent development.³ These are arguments that do not originate from the Mishnah or Gemara but are instead recent developments that I will demonstrate later as having arose from political tension; the repercussion could not have been made on theological grounds (as if that was the case, it would have been in place centuries ago).

² Rabbinical Council of America, "RCA Core Principles ", <https://rabbis.org/rca-core-principles/>.

³ Marc D. Angel, *Loving Truth and Peace: The Grand Religious Worldview of Rabbi Benzion Uziel* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1999) 163.

The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel possesses great power over how Judaism is expressed within Israel. For example, the Chief Rabbinate possesses a monopoly on marriage of Jews within the state of Israel. They likewise possess the ability to declare who is and who is not a Jew within the state of Israel. This jurisdiction the Rabbinate utilizes has created many opponents who attack the official policies of the Rabbinate, arguing that they are designed to control Jews within Israel. These opponents see also the increased stringencies for conversion as politically, not theologically, motivated. This is opposed to the Rabbinate and its supporters who would argue that the stringencies have clear theological groundings.

In light of this, I hope that by showing how stringencies on conversion are politically motivated (not theologically), that this paper can also be used to examine other religions under similar contexts in order to understand and explain why certain changes (especially those related to proselytism and conversion) occur, as well as to support a general argument of this paper that religion is intimately intertwined with culture and politics. Any major change in one will affect the other.

An Outline of This Paper

This work is divided into three sections. The first section outlines and clarifies the historical discussion of conversion to Judaism, starting with the Tanakh up until the early modern period. The second section examines conversion to Judaism in modernity and the impact of the creation of the state of Israel. The final sections traverse the contemporary context by examining the official conversion procedures outlined by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel, the alternative procedures provided by opponent rabbis within Israel and abroad, and the approach to conversion taken by other strains of Judaism such as Reform and Conservative.

Jewish Demographics Today

To put into scope the number of individuals affected by conversion policies, one can examine the demographics of Jews worldwide and how they are identified. Put simply, the majority of the world's Jewish population is roughly split between Israel and the United States. This tells us nothing about converts, because there is an inherent problem of identification when using demographic data. As the Jewish Databank states in their findings: "a major problem with Jewish population estimates produced by individual scholars or Jewish organizations is the lack of uniformity in definitional criteria."⁴ The survey thus outlines categories used to configure and define the contemporary Jewish population. The core Jewish population is made up of people born to Jewish parents who see Judaism as their means of identity, either as a religion or not. The next category includes the core Jewish population, in addition to those who either say they are partly Jewish, or those who say they are not Jewish but have at least one Jewish parent. The penultimate category is the enlarged Jewish population, which includes both previous categories as well as those who claim to have Jewish backgrounds, but have no Jewish parents, and those who are non-Jews but live in a Jewish household. The final category for defining the different Jewish groups is the Law of Return population which includes all previous groups.⁵ It is necessary to examine the demographics by population of the core Jewish population, the enlarged Jewish population, and the Law of Return population since these are the groups that this paper will be examining most frequently.

⁴ Sergio DellaPergola, "World Jewish Population, 2017," in *The American Jewish Year Book*, Volume 117 (2017), 306.

⁵ Ibid. 307

There are an estimated 14,511,100 people within the core Jewish population. When the enlarged Jewish population is included into the world total population, it becomes 23,499,200.⁶ Subtract this from the core Jewish population and the population with Jewish parents and it is 5,853,550. So roughly 5,853,550 people claim to have Jewish backgrounds, but have no Jewish parents, and those who are not Jewish but live in a Jewish household. If one compares this number to the world total of the core Jewish population of 14,511,100, it is almost 40% of that number. So, the enlarged Jewish population is quite large and is important to remember. The world population estimation for the Law of Return population is at 23,311,000.⁷

The importance of the inclusion of these demographics was ultimately to demonstrate not only the large number of converts, but to show world centers of Jewry. The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel possesses control in a country with almost half of the world's Jewish population. The other half is mostly in the United States with their leading bodies being those of the Rabbinical Council of America, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and the Union for Reform Judaism. The gap between the diaspora and Israel is large, and one which most of these organizations seek to repair. When one examines that a large percentage of the Jewish population (as shown above) is made up of converts and non-Jews in a Jewish household, one sees that the Chief Rabbinate will have difficulty bridging the gap if they continue with their rigid decision making, as they are pushing away large portions of the world Jewish demographic who are intrinsically tied to Judaism.

⁶ Ibid. 314

⁷ Ibid.

2) Sources & Methodology

Methodology/Theory

Methodology

In attempting to understand the current policies on conversion within the State of Israel, this paper uses comparative history and examines the religio-political circumstances of Jewish authorities and individuals within and outside Israel from antiquity to the present. The sources examined deal with the evolution of conversion to traditional Judaism, as well as the place and political situation of the Jewish people at the times of these evolutions. Since those who defend the contemporary stringencies of conversion to Judaism typically rely on religious texts to do so, this paper too uses theological texts. Next to this will be historical analyses in order to establish a timeline of the evolution of the conversion process. By using this method, this paper accounts for the political environment, as well as theological discussions from the Tannaic period (1st century CE) until the modern day.

It is difficult to find academic sources on the exact topic this paper seeks to examine. The majority of academic studies on conversion to Judaism focus usually on one or two of these four questions: 1) Questions regarding the historicity or accuracy of conversion accounts; 2) Questions regarding how the question of “who is Jew” has been approached over time; 3) Questions regarding whether or not Judaism was a missionary faith; or 4) Questions regarding the lives of converts and non-Jews within Jewish societies. I have yet to find a paper which examined all four together, as this paper intends to do. Another issue is that these works do not discuss how or why conversion has evolved the way it has. Overall, researchers are limited in their knowledge of historical conversions. Although many accounts of conversions exist and there are records of discussions amongst rabbis on the subject, there is a lack of testament to the

procedures undergone by converts themselves. Due to a lack of testament from the converts themselves, then, it is important to examine what is written in religious texts and engage with what the rabbis demand in terms of conversion. There is a worry that testaments in religious accounts cannot always be trusted, but there may lie some truth in that the outlines for conversion that these religious texts provide were probably followed by rabbis. It is just a question of which rulings and which books were more focused upon in which time periods.

From a theoretical perspective, this paper applies two types of categorization to religions and explains how religions will react as they shift from one category to another. The two categorization theories postulated by this paper are the “Core/Periphery” theory and the theory that religion may be classified as a “Religion in the Common Space” or as a “Religion of a Message”

Core/Periphery theory

In examining global structures, there is a theory amongst international political scholars called the Core-Periphery model for how the world governments interact. The theory can be defined as:

a spatial metaphor that describes and attempts to explain the structural relationship between the advanced or metropolitan ‘centre’ and a less developed ‘periphery’, either within a particular country, or (more commonly) as applied to the relationship between capitalist and developing societies.⁸

Simply put, Core nations hold a sort of political and economic power over the Periphery, which in turn makes the Periphery dependent on the Core. Applying this theory to religion, one receives a Core-Periphery model of religion which can be used to determine when religions will change and how they will react to their surrounding environments.

⁸ John Scott, "Core-periphery Model," *A Dictionary of Sociology*, 2014, *A Dictionary of Sociology*.

A “Core Religion” would be one which has involved itself in the local political system and into the lives of its adherents to a degree that it maintains strong control with some of its power even breaking into the secular sphere at times. A Core Religion would be centralized and would usually hold a stronger degree of power compared to its opponents, the Periphery Religions, usually delegating its power over them. It acts as if it is law. A good example of some Core Religions would be the Christianity of the Papacy in the Middle Ages. When the religion becomes pushed aside and into the Periphery, then it becomes a “Periphery Religion.” This paper postulates that if the shift from Core to Periphery occurs, then the religion will typically take up one of three options: 1) allowing itself to become enveloped into the Core Religion (converting to the Core Religion, or simply giving into the Core Religion and remaining powerless); 2) encouragement of extremism, or; 3) attempting to proliferate itself (spreading word and garnering converts). These three options are of course not only limited to religions experiencing the shift from Core to Periphery, as Core Religions may also express themselves in these ways if they are threatened or wish to extend their reach of power. Again, another example would be the Christianity of the Papacy in the Middle Ages which sought proselytism by force in foreign territories.

Religion in the Common Space and Religion of a Message

The next theory of categorization postulated by this paper is the theory that religions may be identified as a “Religion in the Common Space” or as a “Religion of a Message.” This paper defines Religion in the Common Space as a religion which places itself in a distinct setting in the world (Israel for the Jews or Rome for the Roman Pagans) and contains a distinct culture (including language (such as a religious language), writing system, rituals, and/or way of living)

which sets it apart from its neighbors who are outside of this created common space. Judaism, Shinto, Hindu religions, and Zoroastrianism would fit into this category. There is no distinction of whether or not these religions allow people to join their common space. Religion of a Message is defined by this paper as a religion which bases itself not in a particular setting but identifies as a wide-reaching community drawn together by faith, practice, and/or principles (i.e. a message). Religions of a Message would include Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. This is not to claim that Religions in the Common Space do not possess a message. For example, piety and faith are often considered virtues in much of Jewish religious theology and literature. It is just that the Religion in the Common Space sees importance in the community and its place of origin, the language it spoke, and the cultural practices it employed and retained. Religion of a Message may be concerned with where their faith originated, but they focus mainly on a message or goal which unites all cultures and languages under a large roof. Christianity may have begun with Jesus in Roman occupied Israel or Paul in the Roman Empire, but the message of Christianity has been spread worldwide and translated into many languages.

This combined theory can be used to answer the question of why some religions are open to converts and others are not. This theory argues that the categories above can be used to determine the likelihood of a religion being successful at proselytism, as well as how much the religion may focus on proselytism. In the course of this paper, Judaism over time will be categorized depending on its circumstances in the time period it is being examined in. The categories Judaism finds itself in will ultimately assist in finding the answer as to why changes to the conversion process were made.

Sources Examined

Sources such as the *Tanakh*, *Mishnah*, *Gemara*, and the *Shulchan Arukh* provide insight into most halakhic decision making for mainstream Orthodoxy including conversion. Midrash Rabbah also provides anecdotes useful in the examination of conversion. This paper also incorporates the positions of rabbis such as Rabbis Nathan Cardozo, Elliot Cosgrove, and Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel by analyzing their writings and public statements on conversion. This is due to the fact that these rabbis possess modern commentary as to how conversions should be done and were debating rabbis whose opinions influenced the stringent conversion policies that are in place today. Nathan Cardozo is an influential rabbi known for his criticism of the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel. Cardozo is a critic of the modern procedures and has written on the subject of how conversions are theologically possible and how this theological nature of conversion conflicts with the normative conversion procedures today. Elliot Cosgrove, a Conservative rabbi of one of the largest and most influential synagogues in the United States- The Park Avenue Synagogue in New York City- provides a critique of the Chief Rabbinate's procedures for conversion by drawing on historical evidence in his arguments. Finally, Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Mandate of Palestine/Israel from 1939 to 1953. Rabbi Uziel was a major halakhic authority, writing of problems facing modern Judaism such as conversion to Judaism, women's roles in Jewish law, and the foundations of what the modern State of Israel should look like from a theological perspective.⁹

This paper benefits from many scholarly works that provide overviews of historical analyses on the process of conversion to Judaism and how it has changed over time. Authors

⁹ Marc D. Angel, *Loving Truth and Peace: The Grand Religious Worldview of Rabbi Benzion Uziel*, (Northvale, Jason Aronson Inc., 1999), xxiii.

such as Shaye D. Cohen, Gary Porton, Christine Hayes, and Hayim Donin provide important insight in that all of them approach Judaism from a historical perspective. They write on the topic of conversion to Judaism from the existence of Ancient Israel to modern day. Their works will be extremely valuable in the examination of the problem posed by this paper. Finally, this paper uses articles regarding religion related politics in Israel, and interviews from contemporary Rabbis concerned about the issues that conversion creates in the Israeli context.

Together, the sources gathered represent theological primary sources, compilations by historians or anthropologists, research by scholars of Jewish Studies who seek what is written in the religious texts, articles related to the present-day issues caused by the conversion process, and works of contemporary rabbinical scholars regarding the issue. There is also some inclusion of theological discussion in defense of the raised stringencies for conversion to Orthodox Judaism, as well as arguments supporting the political reasoning behind stringent conversions.

Terminology

Terminology is a perennial problem when examining the topic of conversion to Judaism. As previously mentioned, when using the term Orthodoxy, this paper will be referring to the modern interpretation of normative Jewish practice espoused by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel. Thus, when this paper refers to the modern-day requirements for conversion to Judaism, it is referring to the conversion requirements/curriculum put forth by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel and by those organizations who recognize the institution, such as the Rabbinical council of America and the Conference of European Rabbis.¹⁰

¹⁰ Cnaan Liphshiz, "Israel's Chief Rabbinate 'Cements Monopoly Over Conversions' After Deal With European Orthodox Rabbis," <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/israel-s-chief-rabbinate-cements-monopoly-over-conversions-after-europe-deal-1.6695727?=&ts=1549985771837>, (Nov. 27, 2018).

From a historical perspective it is important to differentiate between *Israelites* (followers of the Ancient Israelite Religion) and *Jews* (followers of post-Rabbinic Judaism). Some sources, such as the Mishnah, were written by Israelites. Sources such as the Babylonian Talmud were written by Jews. The Mishnah is very focused on an ethnic interpretation of Judaism, whereas the Babylonian Talmud recognizes a diaspora.¹¹ Knowing this will assist tremendously when examining Mishnaic and Talmudic sources, as it will make it easier to identify how conversion changed when one saw the shift from Israelite religion to Judaism.

Finally, it is nearly impossible to reconstruct the daily lives of Jews from late antiquity to even the 18th century. Scholars do not have the source material to determine normative Jewish practice, whether it be the Israelites or Jews from a few centuries ago.¹² What scholars do have are rabbinic texts and religious writings about what the general practitioners should or should not do, but a rabbi's ideas of how a community should run does not mean the community they were in operated in that ideal manner. Quoting from Porton and applying his words to the issue:

For the most part, [rabbis] had few sources of coercion through which they could put their views and opinions into effect. It is unclear if the rabbis could enforce their points of view among the common people... Therefore, while we know the rabbinic opinions recorded in the various rabbinic texts, we do not know what the common people accepted or did.¹³

Applied to the topic of conversion, knowledge gaps are unavoidable. Many documents on conversion are limited to: "a good, God-fearing soul [had] come to the seat of Rabbenu Menachem, where he adopted the Jewish religion and the name Mevorakh."¹⁴ Perhaps the documents include the date of the conversion and which rabbis proceeded over the process, but

¹¹ Ibid. 1-14

¹² Ibid. 11

¹³ Ibid. 11

¹⁴ Alexander Scheiber, "A Letter of Recommendation on Behalf of the Proselyte Mevorakh from the Geniza," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 47 (1980): 492.

that tells one nothing of the process of conversion itself. Throughout history, few rabbis have recorded the process for conversion, perhaps due to fear that such documents would be proof of proselytism which was illegal in many Christian and Muslim areas throughout history.¹⁵ Discovery could have put not only rabbis, but the community and the converts, in danger. Thus, this paper will need to rely on those religious sources to understand what the conversion procedures were in the past. Assuming what is written within the religious texts was somewhat followed throughout Jewish history, then it is the best option to use due to the fact that the religious texts are some of the only sources on this topic that scholars possess. Also, one cannot get anywhere in research by claiming that it is impossible to proceed without knowing for sure what was actually done historically in these communities.

Another important topic is dogma and objectivity in Judaism. Judaism does not have a rigid dogma that must be believed or accepted to be Jewish. To be a Jew, for Orthodoxy, is to live by the Torah, but the Torah can be vague when it provides instruction. The Mishnah and Talmud are used to delineate what is meant in the Tanakh when something is commanded. This is facilitated through rabbinic debate in which there usually arise several solutions and it is up to each individual Jew to determine which opinion or solution to follow. An excellent example of this can be seen in the debate of whether or not one has an obligation to become inebriated during the holiday of Purim (a festive Jewish holiday celebrating the story of the Book of Esther), a festival in which many do become inebriated. Within the Talmud, the first opinion presented was by the Talmud:

“Rava said: A person is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim until he does not know between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordecai” (*b.Meg.7b*)...
 “Rabba and Rabbi Zeira prepared a Purim feast with each other, they became intoxicated. Rabba arose and slaughtered Rabbi Zeira. The next day, Rabba asked

¹⁵ Avraham (Rami) Reiner, “‘Tough are Gerim’: Conversion to Judaism in Medieval Europe.” *Havruta – A Journal of Jewish Conversation* 1, no. 1 (July 1, 2008).

the Lord for Mercy, and revived him. The next year, Rabba said to Rabbi Zeira: Let the Master come and let us prepare a Purim feast with each other. He said to him: Miracles do not happen each and every hour” (*b.Meg.7b*).¹⁶

Here it is shown two opinions on the same subject. Many Jews choose to follow the ruling of Ravi and ignore the warnings of the other rabbis. This allowance of individual decision making makes marking dogma to Judaism difficult. This is brought up because it an issue in tackling the problem this paper seeks to answer. It is difficult to say that the conversion process today is not theologically allowable given that in the religious texts the process is less stringent. The modern-day normative practice has been built up on different rabbinical halakhic decisions than those accepted in the past. Judaism is thus flexible and does not remain static, as each generation can focus on whatever rabbinical opinions they deem correct. This paper’s job is not to claim that the opinions chosen are wrong, but to see what is actually said in the key religious texts regarding conversion, compare it to historical conversion processes, and see what is done today and what is used to defend what is done today as far as conversions.

¹⁶ *b.Meg.7b*

3) Historical Discussion of Conversion to Judaism

Tanakh and conversion

Tanakh

Conversion is sparsely mentioned in the Tanakh, thus making it difficult to find an actual conversion procedure. What one gains from the Tanakh in terms of a procedure are that: 1) the potential convert must be circumcised if male, as it states in Exodus 12:48:

If a stranger who dwells with you would offer the passover to the Lord, all his males must be circumcised; he shall then be admitted to offer it; he shall then be a citizen of the country. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it.¹⁷

2) The potential convert must keep the covenant God has enjoined upon the Jewish people, as it states in Isaiah 56:3 and 56:6-7:

(3) Let not the foreigner say, who has attached himself to the Lord, “The Lord will keep me apart from His people”... (6) As for the foreigners that who attach themselves to the Lord, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants – all who keep the sabbath and do not profane it, and all who hold steadfast to My covenant – (7) I will bring them to My sacred mount and let them rejoice in My house of prayer...¹⁸

3) The potential convert must declare the Israelite people as their own, as cited in Ruth 1:16-17:

(16) But Ruth replied, “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. (17) Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you.”¹⁹

Examination of Conversion in Context of the Tanakh

Conversion in the biblical period cannot be understood in the way that some understand it today. For the Ancient Israelites, conversion was not so much a theological choice, but a national

¹⁷ *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, (Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 139.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 976

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 1742

one. Shaye D. Cohen writes in his work *Conversion to Judaism in Historical Perspective: From Biblical Israel to Post-Biblical Judaism*:

Conversion to Judaism had a national aspect in addition to the religious. By accepting the faith of Abraham and the Law of Moses, the convert also became part of the people and history of Israel. This shift in national identity was unusual in antiquity, because most ancient societies... were loathe to share their citizenship and gods with outsiders. ... The preexilic portions of the Bible do not have a word for “convert” because the notion of conversion did not exist yet. Pious pagans like Jethro and Rahab might be so impressed by the power of the God of Israel that they sing His praises, but they do not convert.²⁰

This provides context to what was observed in the biblical verses. The biblical explanation is not one of a Jewish conversion ceremony, but of an Israelite conversion ceremony. This recalls the distinction made earlier regarding the distinction between Israelite religion and Judaism. In light of this distinction, it appears that the Israelite religion had a quick and easy conversion process if one was allowed. The converts of ancient Israel were considered converts in that they lived and acted like Israelites, but they were not Israelites. They would not say “God of our Fathers” in prayer, and could not refer to Israel as the land given to them by God.²¹ This is due to the fact that, as explained by Cohen above, the Israelites were still an ethnic group who were less concerned with a religious identity, but concerned with an identity of place and nationality.

According to scholars, it is not until the 6th century B.C.E. that the Israelite/Jewish God develops from being a “God of a nation and a land” into “the God of a nation and a religion.”²² This development was extremely important, not only in terms of what it would mean for conversion, but what it would mean for Judaism as a whole. It was ultimately exile and the creation of the diaspora that led to this development. With the Israelites no longer existing only within Israel, away from the subsequently built Second Temple (516 century B.C.E.), theology

²⁰ Ibid. 32-34

²¹ Ibid. 33

²² Ibid. 35

needed to be developed to accommodate a people who were spread out and not just in one place. Cohen states that it is around this time that we begin to receive descriptions that appear to resemble contemporary conversion to Judaism. Cohen explains that in the book of Judith, dated around 550-160 BCE, there is an account of an Ammonite general converting to Judaism through acceptance of God and circumcision.²³ One may also examine the Maccabean period (2nd century B.C.E. to 1st century C.E.) and find that there were a few accounts of the Maccabees encouraging large gentile populations to convert (usually under threat of death). These accounts and historical data begin to make the Judaism of that time appear as a religion similar to what one may call a missionizing religion.²⁴ Judaism was evolving from a national faith into a missionizing world movement. Although besides circumcision, no formal ritual remains in place and there are no formal procedures for women in this period. Discussion of female conversion rituals do not appear until later rabbinic literature, such as the Gemara.

Summary

What was examined in the Tanakh seems clear, yet vague. Conversion appeared simple, but the convert did not seem to be accepted as an Israelite given their inability to refer to the patriarchs and the land as their own. Applying the theory of this paper to Israelite religion, it appears to be a *Core Religion in the Common Space*. The Israelites occupied their own territory, had religious laws governing those territories, and joining the religion was synonymous with joining the kingdom. Thus, Israelite religion was a Core Religion in that it was the majority faith, and it exerted pressure over minority presences in the area to the point that with the Maccabees there are even forced conversions. Israelite religion is a religion in the common space due to the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. 36

fact that it, again, is located in a specific territory, identifies with its own language and culture, and does not seek to spread outside of its territories. Given it is a Core Religion, it had no need to proselytize. Core religions, this paper theorizes, generally only proselytize or convert those outside the faith in order to retain power or exert pressure over its expanse. As seen with the Maccabees, conversion was used most likely as a way to create more soldiers for their ever-expanding military.²⁵ Likewise, the writings of the Tanakh indicate that conversion was like a citizenship test- a way to designate who was in the group and who was not. Thus, Core Religions are less interested in conversion for the sake of conversion but are more interested in the benefits to be gained through conversion. That is why it will be shown that when a Core Religion deals with converts, it usually appears less open and warmhearted than when a Periphery Religion deals with converts.

Late Antiquity and the Emergence of Rabbinic Literature

Emergence of Rabbinic Literature

Post-exile, one could argue Judaism developed out of Israelite religion. Earlier, had elaborated that the Maccabees adopted missionizing tactics which also served as a form of expansion, utilizing simple procedures in order to allow quick conversions.²⁶ However, once one delves into Rabbinic Judaism, those institutions for conversion and the policy of seeking out converts becomes sparse. Judaism was missionizing, but the missions tell this paper nothing of the process other than that it was simple. Simple in that marriage to a Jew, acceptance of monotheism, and circumcision seemed to play key roles in the process. The formal conversion

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Shaye Cohen, "Was Judaism in Antiquity a Missionary Religion?" In *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation, and Accommodation: Past Traditions, Current Issues and Future Prospects*, ed. Menachem Mor (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992), 14.

process begins to take shape with the appearance of rabbinic literature. In 70 C.E., the Second Temple was destroyed. Around 135 C.E., the Bar Kokhba revolt failed.²⁷ These two political issues threatened the people of Israel as well as their faith. This paper thus analyzes that political turmoil, when violent, tends to make a group weary of outsiders, and that is what occurred with the rabbis.

Mishnah

The Mishnah is the first major rabbinical work dedicated to the oral tradition. It was written during the Roman occupation after the destruction of the Second Temple. It was undertaken by rabbis (the tannaim) who feared the loss of the oral tradition, not only due to threat by the Romans, but also because the oral tradition had become too large to memorize. The Mishnah gives only a few guidelines as to what the conversion process should entail. The Mishnah is only ever concerned with legal issues; one never receives a precise outline for the conversion process. The requirements that are listed are vague. The Hillelites commented that converts are circumcised. A quote from tractate Keritot 2:1 suggests converts also need to make a blood offering in order to make atonement so as to be able to eat the sacrificial meat. This could mean that converts were not considered completely Jewish until the blood offering was made. What is found more frequently in the Mishnah is the discussion of converts as a subclass within Israelite culture.²⁸ The convert is a class just above the freed slave, which is at the bottom of the social structure. The low status of converts could be attributed to their previous identity as gentiles. Indeed, it is understood that the convert in Mishnah is not regarded as the same as an

²⁷ Shaye D. Cohen, "Conversion to Judaism in Historical Perspective: From Biblical Israel to Post-Biblical Judaism," *Conservative Judaism* 36, no. 4 (1983): 39.

²⁸ Gary G. Porton, *The Stranger Within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994), 18.

Israelite. They are Jewish, but in the Mishnah, they cannot be held to the same legal freedoms that native born Israelites possess. One example elaborated on in the Mishnah in Bikkurim 1:4 and Ma'aser Sheni 5:13-14 is that the convert cannot refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as his or her ancestors. Likewise, the convert cannot say that Israel is his or her inheritance. The convert is also not referred to as being a part of the congregation of God. As the Mishnah states in Yevamot 8:2, one who has been castrated or receives injury via crushing cannot enter the congregation of God. The Mishnah thus limits their potential spouses to converts or freed slaves (two of the lowest classes). Logically, it can be deduced that the Sages of the Mishnah also believed converts and freed slaves could not enter the congregation of God.²⁹ It is also worth mentioning that in 14 percent of all mentions of converts in the Mishnah, they are put together with the freed slave.³⁰

Examination of Conversion in the Mishnaic Context

These class structures the Mishnah wished to build and maintain affected many legal situations of the convert's life. The convert was not considered a gentile but was not a full Israelite either. A convert could not marry a male Kohen.³¹ If the convert's entire family converts with them and the convert dies, their family is not able to inherit their properties.³² There are also many complexities if the convert seeks to marry an Israelite.³³ The Mishnah, being written in a time of political instability in which Judaism was on the threshold of becoming a Periphery Religion, was an attempt by the rabbis to keep Judaism's place as a Core Religion. Mimicking

²⁹ See Appendix B for all passages used from the Mishnah.

³⁰ Gary G. Porton, *The Stranger Within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994), 29.

³¹ Ibid. 19

³² Ibid. 21

³³ Ibid. 26-27

the ideas of the Tanakh, the sages of the Mishnah sought to emphasize Israelite uniqueness over gentiles and order society based around this concept.³⁴ If one was to convert, it was like being granted a citizenship, and, like all citizens, they needed a societal role and rules to follow.³⁵ As with the Israelites of the Tanakh, this case emphasizes the civil above the spiritual, and so far this emphasis appears to take place any time Judaism occupies a dominant role in society.

Summary

The Israelite religion of the Mishnah still occupied the category of *Core Religion in the Common Space*, but it was under threat. Roman occupation and destruction of the Second Temple pushed the publication of Mishnah out of fear that Jewish law would be lost. This paper theorizes that the Mishnah was used to retain the Israelite religion's Core presence within Judea. The hierarchies created within the Mishnah are present to emphasize the Israelites within its borders over outside entities. Thus, proselytism does not seem to have occurred in this time period, but the conversion process was still simple from what is gathered in the texts. There is still an attitude that the convert is not completely the same as the Israelite, but that is natural given that it was the also the assumption of the Tanakh. One does not begin to see open attitudes towards converts, as well as an actual conversion procedure, until the rabbis of the Gemara begin writing their works.

³⁴ Ibid. 17

³⁵ Shaye D. Cohen, "Conversion to Judaism in Historical Perspective: From Biblical Israel to Post-Biblical Judaism," *Conservative Judaism* 36, no. 4 (1983): 32-33.

Diasporic Judaism

Introduction to Gemara

The rabbis of the Babylonian Gemara found themselves in the peculiar situation of no longer residing within Israel and, instead, found themselves within Babylonia. Needing to adapt halakha to their situation, they compiled the Babylonian Gemara. The Babylonian Gemara was combined with the books of the Mishnah to create the *Talmud Bavli*. There was also a Talmud compiled in this period in Jerusalem, labelled the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, but it is not relevant to this paper as it did not contain much discussion on converts or conversion. This paper theorizes that conversion was not discussed in the Talmud Yerushalmi because the sages who compiled it still resided within Jerusalem. These sages did not experience being a part of the diaspora, and therefore still looked at Judaism through an ethnic lens even though the Temple was destroyed. The scholars in both Babylonia and Jerusalem were in contact, so there is no confusion that the sages of the Bavli deliberately sought to write a different text than the Yerushalmi.³⁶ This is because the Babylonian community needed to apply halakha to the diaspora. There is a reason Jacob Neusner has a work titled *The Yerushalmi — the Talmud of the Land of Israel*. The Yerushalmi quotes tractates of Mishnah focused on the legalities of living within the land of Israel, whereas the Bavli considers that less important.³⁷ This was due to the aforementioned shift from the civil to the spiritual. The rabbis of the diaspora were seeking to redefine what a Jew was and how a Jew could identify themselves outside the land of Israel. That meant adopting a new religious style, and one which would ultimately have different attitudes towards converts than the Mishnah or Tanakh.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ David C. Kraemer, *The Mind of the Talmud: An Intellectual History of the Bavli* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 16-20.

Gemara & Midrash

A formalized process for conversion is elaborated upon within tractate Yevamot of the Talmud Bavli. The process can be broken down into an examination of the convert and his motives, instruction in some of the mitzvot and what is to be expected from being a Jew, circumcision if the convert still wishes to convert, immersion in a mikvah, and then further instruction.³⁸ After this process, the convert is considered to be like an Israelite in all respects. One important passage here states that the convert should not be dissuaded too heavily. Thus, a rabbi cannot push away a convert and tell them “No, you cannot convert.” This contradicts what is done today where a potential convert is turned away three times. The Talmud also makes clear that once one is converted, they cannot become a gentile again. Even if they behave like a gentile, they remain Jewish, and even if the convert attempts to marry a Jewish woman after becoming an apostate Jew, the marriage is still valid.³⁹ Again, this is contrary to the modern practice of annulling conversions.

The Midrash also holds the convert in a positive light- stating that the closest humans may come to creating another creature is through conversion. It states that, if one converts a gentile, then it is as if they created him or her. The Midrash elaborates that Abraham and Sarah busied themselves with converting gentiles in Haran and that Abraham converted the men and Sarah the women.⁴⁰ A woman being allowed to preside over the entire conversion process is also unique compared to what is practiced today. Furthermore, the Midrash placed great emphasis on Ruth and her conversion, using her words and interactions with Naomi to justify the

³⁸ Shaye D. Cohen, “The Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41, no. 2 (1990), 181-185.

³⁹ See Appendix C for passages used from Talmud.

⁴⁰ *Midr. Gen.* 39:14.

conversion methods put in place by the Talmud.⁴¹ Like the Talmud, the Midrash stresses the importance of Ruth and her relation to the Davidic line- the messianic line.

Examination of Conversion in the Diasporic Context

The Talmudic and Midrashic view of the convert is positive and definitive compared to the Mishnah. The Talmudic and Midrashic sages are more concerned with the spiritual, not the civil. This is because the Talmud Bavli arose in the diaspora, and the Midrash was influenced by the Talmud Bavli. The sages of the Mishnah were recording an oral tradition concerned with running a kingdom and with living day to day life in the land of Israel with a Temple and Sanhedrin. The sages of the Talmud Bavli and Midrash, unable to interpret many Mishnaic laws literally and unable to apply the Yerushalmi Talmud to their situation, as they no longer lived in Israel, needed new interpretations to make the oral law applicable to diasporic Judaism. The Mishnah interpreted the convert not as a religious cohabitant but as a citizen who had a place. The convert was expected just to provide payment or an offering to the priests, be circumcised, and affirm their belief in the one God.⁴² With the Talmud Bavli, the conversion process is revised, and, in place of the priest, one finds rabbinic supervision and a religious court.⁴³ The convert is to be instructed on a few topics, circumcised with witnesses, and immersed in a ritual bath. By comparing the Talmudic period (4th-6th century C.E.) with the period that the Mishnah records (2nd century B.C.E.-1st century C.E.), it is likely that political circumstances provoked the use of a court because these communities in exile relied on local religious courts. Applying the theory of this paper, Jews in the Periphery sought power through strengthening their identity and

⁴¹ *Midr. Ruth. 2:22.*

⁴² Joshua Kulp, "The Participation of a Court in the Jewish Conversion Process," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 3 (2004), 438.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 439.

gathering converts. Conversion thus became viewed as creating an identity with a worldwide movement whose identifying factor was belief in the one God of Israel.

Summary

The Judaism found in Babylonia in the 6th century C.E. is a *Periphery Religion in the Common Space*. The Babylonian Jews lost the Core power that they had had over the inhabitants of Israel before the destruction of the First Temple. By the time the Mishnah was compiled, during the Roman occupation, the Jews of Babylonia felt alienated in that the Mishnah did not appear fully applicable to those in the diaspora. The Mishnah, after all, reflected a Core Religion in an Israel with a Temple, and the Babylonian Jews were part of a Periphery Religion in Babylonia without a Temple. The Talmud Yerushalmi was also reflecting a Core Religion without the Temple, so the Talmud Bavli was a Periphery response to it. The Periphery response included rabbis who formulated religious legislation to allow themselves to become more authoritative in their communities. The rabbis of the Talmud Bavli also sought to make the convert like a Jew in every respect and not part of some sub class, as well as create a more spiritual and welcoming conversion procedure. This can be observed as a move done not only to deal with the intermarriage of Jews and Babylonians, but also to deal with the fact that Judaism was seeking to create more Jews in Babylonia. This can be seen as an effort to become a Core Religion again, but this time within the diaspora. The more Jews there were in Babylonia, the more power the rabbis and their schools would possess, not only over Babylonia's Core Religion, but also over the Core Judaism in Jerusalem.

Early Modern — 1500-1700 C.E.

Shulchan Arukh

By the 1500's, Jews were able to disperse even further away from the land of their origin. The diaspora was no longer dependent on Israel, and, though it remained a land for future generations to return to with the coming of the Messiah, it was no longer the center of Judaism. Jews had entered Europe long before 1500. They had migrated into the Iberian Peninsula- with some entering Spain, and others moving from Italy into the Germanic territories.⁴⁴ With this large diaspora and the inability to teach the common populace halakha, Jews needed a consolidation of religious law for practical living. Joseph Karo provided this when he wrote the Shulchan Arukh in 1563 in Safed. It was a book which took the enormous plethora of books of the Talmud Bavli and shortened them into a comprehensive guide, so as to help Jews understand how to live without having to sift through tractates of rabbinical discourse. From then on, the Shulchan Arukh became the basis for the protocols of conversion.

The Shulchan Arukh takes the procedure of the Talmud Bavli and refines it. The witnesses in the Shulchan Arukh are defined as three who are fitting to judge. The judges are presumed to be rabbis or two Shabbat observant Jewish men with one rabbi. The circumcision must occur with blessings, and the immersion must take place in front of the aforementioned judges. The Shulchan Arukh also addresses the question of motivation for conversion- a point that the Talmud Bavli does not address in significant detail. Specifically, the convert, according to the Shulchan Arukh, should not be motivated by marriage, wealth, or power. If these are motivating factors, then the judges should discourage the conversion. The convert also needs to

⁴⁴ Michael Brenner, *A Short History of the Jews*, trans. Jeremiah Riemer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 83-97.

be informed of the yoke of the Torah, all of the mitzvot, and all of the repercussions of breaking the mitzvot.⁴⁵ This adds an additional layer of obligation to the conversion process.

Examination of Conversion in the Early Modern Context

These new stringencies must be understood in a particular historic context. By the Early Modern period, decades of persecution had put an end to proselytism, and Jews were no longer focused on including outsiders in their diaspora. Rather, they sought to insulate and strengthen the communities they had left. For the Jewish communities in the Islamic world, the Pact of Umar (circa 644 CE) made it clear that all non-Muslims were not to proselytize within Islamic Kingdoms.⁴⁶ Christianity in Europe applied similar rules to non-Christians. Jews in Medieval Europe faced pogroms, expulsion, and forced conversions. Conversion was not an escape either; even willing Jewish converts to Christianity were treated coldly and with suspicion.⁴⁸ A Jewish convert to Christianity wrote on Jewish hesitance to attempt proselytism. They wrote that: “Jews don’t dare to convert others ;... in Holland however, where almost all religions have the highest degree of freedom, there they often dare, although only clandestinely, to accept proselytes.”⁴⁹ Even in the kingdoms with the highest religious freedoms, Jews were still extremely hesitant to reach out to potential converts.

⁴⁵ *Š. Ar. YD* 268:3-12.

⁴⁶ Paul H. Jan, "Medieval Sourcebook: Pact of Umar, 7th Century?" <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/pact-umar.asp>, (1996).

⁴⁷ "Pact of Umar" <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/view/10.1093/acref/9780195125580.001.0001/acref-9780195125580-e-1803>, (2003).

⁴⁸ Elisheva Carlebach, “Ich Will Dich Nach Holland Schicken...” Amsterdam and the Reversion to Judaism of German Jewish Converts,” in *Secret Conversions to Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Netherlands: Brill, 2004), 52.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 54.

The degree of hostility which was directed towards Jews in this time also encouraged a coldness towards outsiders in Jewish communities. In *'Tough are Gerim: Conversion to Judaism in Medieval Europe*, Rami Reiner claims that proselytes to Judaism were usually treated with the same coldness that Christians showed to Jewish proselytes to Christianity. He outlines debates between rabbis over whether or not proselytes should refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as their ancestors and the land of Israel as their inheritance. Likewise, he demonstrates that many great rabbis of this time period, such as Rashi and Rabbenu Tam, were very unwelcoming to converts. In some cases, Rashi and Rabbenu Tam would say that proselytes possessed no legal rights within the halakhic system, thus creating a wide divide between natural born Jews and converts.⁵⁰

Summary

If the Talmud Bavli was the work of rabbis attempting to reconcile becoming a Periphery Religion in a foreign land, then the Shulchan Arukh was the work of a rabbi attempting to reconcile becoming a Periphery Religion in a hostile land. As a reminder, this paper states that, if a religion becomes a Periphery Religion, it will react in one of three ways. The first option, conversion to the Core Religion or complacency to their situation, was taken up by many Jews in Islamic and Christian territories. In Babylonia and under Roman occupation, each people was allotted their own gods,⁵¹ so it did not matter that Jews within Babylonia or within Rome worshipped their own God. For Christians and Muslims, this made far less sense. People within a Christian or Islamic kingdom needed to adhere to their respective God, and, if they did not, there

⁵⁰ Avraham (Rami) Reiner, "'Tough are Gerim: Conversion to Judaism in Medieval Europe,'" https://hartman.org.il/Blogs_View.asp?Article_Id=157&Cat_Id=275&Cat_Type, (July 1, 2008).

⁵¹ Shaye D. Cohen, "Conversion to Judaism in Historical Perspective: From Biblical Israel to Post-Biblical Judaism," *Conservative Judaism* 36, no. 4 (1983).

were potential penalties. This meant that Jews could no longer seek a way to leave the Periphery as they did within Babylonia and needed to focus on keeping their communities together.

Therefore, the Shulchan Arukh reflects a Judaism weary of outsiders, which is why it possesses stricter conversion procedures.

4) **Modern History and Discussion of Conversion**

Conversion to Judaism in Modernity

Conversion in Modernity: What is Known

Conversion became less stringent again as Jews became integrated into European society, and laws prohibiting Jews from proselytism were nullified. Before Modernity, one can assume that rabbis were extremely hesitant to convert strangers, but, in Modernity, one finds rabbis allowing many more conversions than in previous centuries. More important for this paper is that these conversions appear simpler than they were in previous centuries. Though there is not a plethora of source material on the topic of conversion in Modernity, this paper does employ two examples of conversion occurring in Europe before 1948. One case takes place in Vienna, and another in San Nicandro Garganico in Italy.

Anna Staudacher writes in her work *Conversion to Judaism: Proselytism and Reconversion in Vienna (1868-1914)* that when a law was passed allowing freedom of choice of religion in Austria in 1869, Vienna saw a surge of conversions to Judaism.⁵² Staudacher claims that a majority of these converts were the destitute and immigrants who sought conversion to Judaism in hopes of receiving work or marriage which are motives that the Shulchan Arukh

⁵² Anna L. Staudacher "La conversion au judaïsme : prosélytes et reconvertis à Vienne (1868-1914)," *Histoire, économie & société* 4 (December 2014): 110-29.

would look down upon.⁵³ Another important group Staudacher mentions were returnees to Judaism.⁵⁴ To allow this large group to enter into the community, conversion procedures became simpler.

The second proof of less stringent procedures takes place in 1938 in the case of the conversion of the town San Nicandro Garganico in Fascist Italy. The conversion of 74 Christians to Judaism began with Donato Manduzio in the small town of San Nicandro Garganico. Manduzio received a copy of the Old Testament from a travelling priest translated into the local vernacular. Entranced with the writings, he began preaching to the villagers about the oneness of God and of all the things this God did for the lost people of Israel. He and the villagers did not know that Jews still existed. The villagers, usually unable to understand scripture because Catholic services were conducted in Latin,⁵⁵ were amazed to hear these stories. The villagers began taking up Jewish rituals such as observing Shabbat. On learning that Jews still existed,⁵⁶ Manduzio reached out to the Chief Rabbi of Rome in order to inquire about conversion for him and his followers. The rabbi responded, warning Manduzio of the threats towards Jews, and proposed that Manduzio and his followers take time to reconsider. Manduzio persisted, and a Jewish emissary, Joel Sisilla, came to San Nicandro Garganico in April of 1938. When Joel arrived, Manduzio and his followers took Hebrew names, kippot and tallitot were distributed, and a day for circumcision (to finalize the conversion) was set in October, only six months after the first meeting. Due to the war, however, the 74 of them had to wait to be converted in an inauguration ceremony years after the war had ended.⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ P. Lapide, "A TALE OF TWO VILLAGES: SAN NICANDRO REVISITED," *Judaism* 11, no. 1 (1962): 17.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 18

⁵⁷ Ibid. 19-26.

Examination of Conversion in the Context of Modernity in Europe

These examples provide evidence that conversion was made less stringent in Modernity. With regards to Staudacher's work, this paper assumes that the returnees to Judaism included those who had had a Jewish family history, but their family had converted to Christianity a century or so beforehand (either forcefully or not). To account for all these returnees to Judaism, and to solve the influx of potential converts, this paper theorizes that rabbis tried to ease the plight of converts. What Staudacher suggests in her work is that it was simple to convert to Judaism in Vienna at that time, providing further evidence for this paper's argument.⁵⁸

With the case of San Nicandro Garganico, one also finds an extremely simple conversion process. The converts of San Nicandro Garganico only made contact with an emissary once, and during that one meeting were given tallitot, kippot, and Hebrew names. Nowadays, Hebrew names are granted during the actual conversion. The emissary scheduled the conversion for only six months later, a very short time span compared to the present day. One could assume that the rabbi was assured of their sincerity given the precarious situation of Jews in 1938, but this paper assumes otherwise. Emancipation had allowed the Italian Jewish community to flourish. Shira Klein states in her book *Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism*: "a sure sign of Italian Jews' well-being in the country was that they hardly left it. Although there was massive emigration from Europe between the 1880s and 1920s, Italy's Jews preferred to stay put."⁵⁹ Jews were not the targets of Fascist Italy until the racial laws of 1938 were instituted. In fact, before these laws were instituted, some Jews were supporters of the Italian Fascist Party. Many Jews during World

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Shira Klein, *Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 33.

War I actually sided with the nationalist right and became patriots for Italy.⁶⁰ During the beginning of Fascist Italy in 1922, Jews represented 0.3% of all party members, “triple the proportion of Jews in the population.”⁶¹ The development of antisemitism as a national policy was a rapid development which Italian Jewish communities did not expect. The rabbis at the time only began to be weary of conversion closer to the institution of the racial policies. The Chief Rabbi was suspicious of Manduzio’s first attempts to communicate, and the rabbi even suggested that they not convert given sudden political circumstances. Nonetheless, he still decided to allow them to convert because these antisemitic developments were recent.

Summary

Following the general theory of this paper, Judaism remained a *Periphery Religion in the Common Space* during Modernity. Judaism, however, reacted to being in the Periphery in many different ways. Some Jews reacted by joining the Core Christianity, or by making their religion seem more like the Core.⁶²⁶³ Some Jews reacted by becoming open to simple conversions for large groups, as appears to be the case in Vienna and San Nicandro Garganico. Both groups attempted to reconcile Judaism’s place as a Periphery Religion in Europe in Modernity. The case of conversion in Vienna illustrates how Periphery Religions can attract the downtrodden of society. The poor and the immigrants in Vienna sought conversion to Judaism because Periphery Religions are typically more beneficial to the disadvantaged. For instance, an immigrant looking for work or meaningful connections is going to have difficulty finding these in a church with

⁶⁰ Ibid. 39-40

⁶¹ Ibid. 44

⁶² The Reform movement attempted to change Jewish practice to mimic some Protestant Christian practices at that time. The introduction of sermons to Judaism, change of dress, and allowance of secular subjects into their curriculum were all part of these attempts.

⁶³ Michael Brenner, *A Short History of the Jews*, trans. Jeremiah Riemer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 202-203.

thousands of members who have established social groups, and who are unable to relate to the immigrant. The immigrant would have more success joining a smaller minority religion where there is a tighter community and members who can relate to the immigrant. Therefore, there was an influx of potential converts to Judaism. Rabbis reacted to this influx positively and converted individuals without qualms. This was done not only to assist returnees to Judaism, but to assist all those in a similar position to Jews at that time. Hence, the conversion procedure was made simpler.

On another note, this chapter tells us a lot regarding the nature of Periphery Religions. Periphery Religions possess amazing outreach and are attractive to the poor and less fortunate of society. This is because Periphery Religions provide communal support that are usually unavailable in Core Religions. Core Religions usually possess weaker communal support systems because the number of members is so large and because most of the members are not in need of strong communal support due to pre-built social networks. All of this is why Periphery Religions succeed more at proselytism than Core Religions do.

Creation of the State of Israel

The Law of Return and Conversion

Following World War II, conversion was not an immediate concern of world Jewry. When the State of Israel was established, the Law of Return was drafted. Unlike the draft of the Law of Return used today, this first draft did not define who a Jew was. Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser specify in their quote provided earlier⁶⁴ that the question of “who is a Jew” has

⁶⁴ See page 3.

been one of extreme importance in modern Israeli political and religious debate.⁶⁵ The reason for this is because the Law of Return created a lot of issues when it was first drafted in 1950. The Law of Return is a law which allows all Jews to have the right to Israeli citizenship, granted they move to Israel.⁶⁶ However, the original drafters did not define who a Jew was, and opted to leave the definition open.⁶⁷ This was due to the fact that creating a definition would have been unconscionable given the time period, as it was only 5 years after the Holocaust. Many Jews after the Holocaust had nowhere to go. Jews returning to their home countries would find their properties sold and their former neighbors unwelcoming. The drafters of the Law of Return needed to make it easy for people who wished to come to the poor and conflict-ridden country which was the State of Israel.⁶⁸ The drafters of the Law of Return also could not define Jews as those who were halakhically Jewish, as non-halakhic Jews were also persecuted during the Holocaust. These included patrilineal Jews or those with attachments to Judaism. Anyone coming to Israel under this draft of the Law of Return, regardless of halakhic status, was to be recognized as a Jew by the state. Due to this leniency, the Law faced hurdles over time. One incident occurred in 1958, in which the National Religious Party left the leading coalition on the grounds that the law was against halakha. Eventually, the Knesset finally settled on a solution after years of discussion and debate.⁶⁹ In 1970, an amendment was made that recognized a Jew as one with either a Jewish mother or someone having undergone a recognized conversion.⁷⁰ The law also allowed for non-Jewish relatives of Jews to come as well in order to encourage families to move together. Under the new draft, one may receive Israeli citizenship through the Law of

⁶⁵ Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser, "Jews and Others: Non-Jewish Jews in Israel" in *Israel Affairs* 15, no. 1 (January 28, 2009), 53.

⁶⁶ See Appendix A for the Law of Return in its entirety.

⁶⁷ Asher Cohen, "Jews and Others: Non-Jewish Jews in Israel," (January 28, 2009), 53.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 53-54

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 55

Return as the child of a Jewish father, as a convert from a non-recognized rabbi, or as the spouse of a Jew, but one could not be registered as a Jew by the state unless they were recognized as Jewish by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel. Thus, the law continues to create problems to this day. One important problem, which Cohen and Susser identify, is the growing number of “Non-Jewish Jews.”⁷¹ These are individuals who are not registered as Jews when they move to Israel using the Law of Return, but who identify as Jews and start Jewish families. Cohen and Susser claim that when the Law of Return’s amendment was drafted in 1970, no one anticipated that there would be a massive influx in immigration to Israel by non-Jewish Jews.⁷²

Examination of Religion and Politics in the Context of the Founding of the State of Israel

The amendment to the Law of Return, and the importance of the question of “who is a Jew,” came about after the religious took their place in the Core of the State of Israel. The National Religious Party, after much debate, “simply received authority over the Ministry of the Interior and the directives it issued were altered to fit the Orthodox views of the new religious minister.”⁷³ The National Religious Party eventually proposed criteria which ultimately limited Jews to just those with Jewish mothers, or those who converted under Orthodox auspices.⁷⁴ The proposition by the National Religious Party also allowed non-Jewish spouses to come to Israel, but they would not be recognized as Jewish. These criteria were accepted by the Knesset. The reason for the allowance of non-Jewish family members was due to a worry that Jews would not immigrate if they could not bring along their non-Jewish family members.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ibid. 56

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid. 54

⁷⁴ Ibid. 55

⁷⁵ Ibid. 56

Summary

As the National Religious Party was given more support, the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel became more powerful. The power to decide who is a Jew and who is not within the state of Israel was assigned to the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel. The Judaism of the state of Israel was undergoing a transition- it was shedding its historical category of a *Periphery Religion in the Common Space* and was becoming a *Core Religion in the Common Space*. This paper claims that the political situations that led to Judaism becoming a Core Religion in the State of Israel have caused today's conversion policy to be so stringent. Even in the late 1950's, before the amendment to the Law of Return, conversion procedures were less stringent than they are today with some rabbis, such as Benzion Uziel, arguing for a simpler process. Other rabbis, such as Isaac Kook, took a different approach, arguing for the stringent procedure one sees today. In the next section, this paper will present Uziel's opinion as coming from a Periphery perspective, while Kook and his colleagues advocated a different opinion from a Core perspective. The rabbis who took on these Core views possessed a mindset similar to the Israelite religious authorities of the Mishnah. They seemed concerned with what it means to live within the state of Israel and how to go about governing the Jews that lived within its Core religious sphere. The shift from a Periphery to a Core perspective occurred due to the fear of the non-Jewish Jews mentioned earlier. The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel perceived this group as a threat, fearing that they would marry Jews and have children. This fear still exists today. The logic of their argument is this: Within a few generations, these non-Jewish Jews will intermarry with the halakhically Jewish population. As these couples have children, they will create generations of people who consider themselves Jewish, but who are not recognized as Jewish by

the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel. The Chief Rabbinate worries, as a Core entity, that this will breed greater opposition to their position and power.

5) Contemporary Context and Situation

Official Policy of the State of Israel

Israeli Chief Rabbinic Positions on Conversion

The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel has seated many rabbis who have attempted to answer the question “who is a Jew?” The first Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, Rabbi Benzion Uziel, had very lenient opinions regarding conversion. However, Uziel’s prescribed conversion procedures did not gain support. After Uziel’s passing, his more stringent successors gained power and support, and it was ultimately their conversion procedures which were accepted by supporters of the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel. These stringent rabbis inspired the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel’s position today regarding conversion.

Before Uziel clarified his opinions on conversion, his Ashkenazi colleague, Rabbi Isaac Kook, was already tackling the topic. Rabbi Kook ruled that children converts must be raised completely observant,⁷⁶ and elaborated in responsum that no conversion is valid unless the potential convert follows Torah law to the teeth. When asked about the Talmudic ruling of Yevamot 24b, which validates conversions even if the convert possessed ulterior motives, he stated that “this ruling is only applicable if the would-be convert – although coming to convert for an ulterior motive – expressed full intention to accept [all] the commandments.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Marc D. Angel, *Loving Truth and Peace: The Grand Religious Worldview of Rabbi Benzion Uziel* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1999) 161.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 162

Rabbi Uziel clarified his opinions on conversion when he was Chief Rabbi of the British Mandate of Palestine. Uziel claimed that it is preferable that a potential convert commits to following the mitzvot and observing Shabbat, but he conceded that “we live in a time when intermarriage among Jews and non-Jews is common in civil courts. We are then faced with the responsibility of performing a conversion for the sake of freeing the Jewish partner from the sin of intermarriage.”⁷⁸ Uziel allowed for human rationality and insight to devise strategies for realistic problems. He even went so far as to state that the beit din was “morally obligated”⁷⁹ to perform the conversion of a non-Jewish spouse. His reasoning was that, if the couple came to the halakhic authorities to avoid transgression, then it is a sin both upon the rabbis and the couple if the rabbis refuse to convert the non-Jewish spouse. For Uziel, conversion did not necessarily mean undertaking every mitzvah. Uziel followed Yevamot 47a and b. Uziel stated, according to those Talmudic rulings, that the potential convert only needed to be informed of the core beliefs of Judaism, some of the lenient and stringent mitzvot, the rewards if the mitzvot are upheld, and the punishments if they are transgressed. He emphasized that the potential convert does not be taught everything immediately, as it says in the Talmudic procedure, and that the potential convert should not be forced to observe every single mitzvah right after conversion.⁸⁰ The potential convert should only accept a few mitzvot at first, convert, and then eventually take upon themselves more mitzvot as they live Jewish lives. Even if a potential convert explicitly states that they will not keep the mitzvot, Uziel explains that it is still permitted to accept them, especially if it will prevent the sin of intermarriage.⁸¹ This is extremely lenient, and it is not a position that many rabbis agree with today. This is because Uziel provided these interpretations

⁷⁸ Marc D. Angel, *Loving Truth and Peace: The Grand Religious Worldview of Rabbi Benzion Uziel*, 164.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 166

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 168

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 169

when he was the Chief Rabbi of the British Mandate of Palestine. Since he was the Chief Rabbi of the British Mandate of Palestine, his opinion is coming from a Periphery perspective. Natalie Fisher explains that his position as the Chief Rabbi before the founding of the State of Israel meant that his rulings were not considered “‘Zionistic’ in nature but rather as a continuation of the... rabbinical welcoming attitude towards non-Jews wishing to convert.”⁸² The Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, Rabbi Herzog, was much more successful in spreading his interpretations on conversion, as Herzog provided discussion on conversion after the founding of the State of Israel. Therefore, Herzog’s view towards conversion was regarded as Zionistic in nature and was more widely accepted.

Rabbi Herzog was slightly more lenient than Kook in matters regarding conversion, but more stringent than his fellow Chief Rabbi Benzion Uziel.⁸³ Herzog placed immigrants with non-Jewish spouses into two categories: couples fleeing to Israel to escape persecution and couples coming freely to Israel for idealistic reasons.⁸⁴ He believed that candidates coming to Israel for idealistic reasons were better candidates because they had chosen to come to Israel to live as Jews instead of being forced. Herzog also emphasized that each rabbi still needed to examine each candidate to determine whether they were sincerely converting in order to fulfill all of the mitzvot or not. Observing Shabbat, keeping kosher, adhering to family purity laws, and modesty were a must.⁸⁵ Herzog’s rulings ultimately influenced the conversion policy of the Chief Rabbinate that is in effect today.

⁸² Netanel Fisher, “‘Israeli’ Halakha: The Chief Rabbinate’s Conversion-To-Judaism Policy 1948–2018,” *Modern Judaism - A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 39, no. 1 (2019): 68.

⁸³ There are always two Chief Rabbis of the State of Israel- an Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi and a Sephardic Chief Rabbi. Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog was the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of the British Mandate of Palestine and of Israel at the same time that Rabbi Benzion Uziel was the Sephardic Chief Rabbi.

⁸⁴ Marc D. Angel, *Loving Truth and Peace: The Grand Religious Worldview of Rabbi Benzion Uziel*, 163.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

The current procedure used by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel is a bureaucratic and non-personal process. The procedure involves a *beit din* of three male rabbis or, in some cases, one male rabbi and two male Shabbat observant Jews. The potential convert can expect to undergo one to two years of studying- learning the mitzvot and their application in daily life. During this time, the rabbis examine how the potential convert lives and make sure that the potential convert is dedicated to the mitzvot in all aspects of their life. After this period of study, the potential convert is quizzed, immersed in a mikvah overseen by the *beit din*, and, if the potential convert is male, he is circumcised. If he was circumcised prior to the conversion process, a *hatafat dam brit* is performed, in which they draw blood from the place of circumcision. The quizzing is rigorous, but it is a way for the court to ascertain how the potential convert lives as a Jew. In a sense, this is necessary, as, usually, these courts are working with multiple converts at a time. These courts cannot afford to get to know every candidate personally. Here is an example of a quizzing session:

Reuven (the court representative): Do you do kiddush and Havdalah?

Sveta: Yes, and I also light candles and go to synagogue.

R: When did you light candles this past Shabbat?

S: 7:20 p.m.

R: When does Shabbat end?

S: 8:15 p.m.

R: How did you know this?

S: I checked it on the Internet.

R: Tell me how you do Havdalah.

S: I hold and light the candle, fill up a glass of wine, and let it pour over a bit.

R: How long does it take you?

S: Five minutes and then I say the blessing.

R: Before or after the meal?

S: After.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Michael Kravel-Tovi, "Rite of passing: Bureaucratic encounters, dramaturgy, and Jewish conversion in Israel," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 2 (May 2012): 378-379.

These questions may seem intrusive, but to the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel, they are necessary.

Elaboration

With the history of the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel, the transition from leniency to stringency can be easily traced. Uziel's approach on how conversions should be performed was ultimately rejected by rabbis, such as Herzog, who sought to use conversion to filter who was coming to the Holy Land. It is important to understand these developments because there are some who believe that this stringent approach has always been held by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel. Some also believe that practices such as annulments of conversions have always taken place in an historical context. However, the research shows that that assumption is not the case, and that these developments are very recent.

Why these developments took place is clear. This transition from leniency to stringency was not the only transition occurring. The major transition occurring was a shift in Judaism from a Periphery Religion to a Core Religion. The rabbis that came after Uziel and who challenged Uziel's opinions were taking part in this transition. Israel was again a Jewish land and with that came the realization of several things. One was that Israel should be a religious land built on religious law. Another was the realization that the rabbis would have to adapt themselves to deal with minority religions and non-Jews coming into a country. Historically, Jews had always been the minority Periphery. Now that Jews were the Core in Israel, new challenges arose as rabbis had to learn how to deal with the complexities of managing a majority religion in a country. This paper theorizes that in attempting to manage religious life, implement religious law, and govern Jewish individuals, the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel became bureaucratic and less

focused on spiritual definitions of who a Jew was. When Judaism is in the Core it becomes focused less on a spiritual identity and instead focuses on the Israelite classification. When Judaism is in the Periphery it becomes more focused on spirituality and spiritual identification.

Alternative perspectives (rabbinical opponents)

Opponent Rabbis

Not all Orthodox rabbis agree on these stringent codes, and there are a rabbis who have been very vocal in their stance against the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel. These opponents view the Chief Rabbinate as a bureaucratic political force unconcerned with halakha. One example they use to prove this is the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel's acceptance of the conversion of Ivanka Trump. Most rabbis in support of the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel's opinion of what the conversion process should look like would all agree that a female convert must cover her hair if she is married. Ivanka does not do this. Furthermore, her conversion was performed by a rabbi whose credentials for supervising conversions were under review by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel, as it suspected him of being too lenient. Once news was released of his conversion of Ivanka Trump, the Chief Rabbinate decided it would work to change how conversions would be recognized outside the State of Israel. It announced "According to the new proposed plan ... her conversion will be certified without the need for additional checks."⁸⁷ This paper assumes her acceptance by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel was due to the fact that if the Chief Rabbinate hadn't done so, it would have looked bad for the state itself.

⁸⁷ "Is Ivanka Trump Really Jewish?," <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340,L-4913277,00.html>, (January 26, 2017).

Rabbi Nathan Cardozo, an Orthodox rabbi who lives in Jerusalem, argues that the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel is only seeking to satisfy its own self-interest. He argues that the Chief Rabbinate, while acting as if it wishes to protect the Jewish community, is harming it. In Cardozo's article *Conversion: An Open Letter to Israel's Chief Rabbis*, he summarizes that due to the Chief Rabbinate's inability to welcome converts and to welcome them quickly, the Chief Rabbinate has created a problem which will eventually undermine the existence of the Jewish state. He explains the problem he sees:

Nearly 400,000 Russian legal residents of Jewish descent, but who are halachically not Jewish, could unwittingly bring an end to the Jewish State within the next fifty to a hundred years, once their non-Jewish children marry into Jewish families. While it is true that if their sons marry Jewish women their children will be Jewish, this is far from a healthy option. The conversion issue is not just a halachic problem, but also a sociological one. It is highly undesirable for so many people of Jewish descent to ultimately remain non-Jews, especially in Israel. It will create serious social difficulties, including discrimination and feelings of rejection, which can easily undermine a society that is already dealing with enough problems.⁸⁸

Cardozo suggests that in this case, the existence of the Jewish state and its protection is a mitzvah higher than any individual case of conversion, and therefore a lenient approach should be taken. Non-halakhic Jews who identify as Jewish should be encouraged to convert. Cardozo suggests converting the potential convert after instructing them only a little bit, and to make the potential convert feel at home in the community. This, he says, is what will encourage them to learn more about the mitzvot and become more observant. He sees conversion as a spiritual transformation, and that what is important is that the convert *feels* Jewish.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Nathan L. Cardozo, "Conversion: An Open Letter to Israel's Chief Rabbis," <https://www.cardozoacademy.org/thoughts-to-ponder/conversion-an-open-letter-to-israels-chief-rabbis/>, (June 7, 2018).

⁸⁹ Nathan L. Cardozo, "Conversion is Not About Halacha," <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/conversion-is-not-about-halacha-2/>, (October 3, 2018).

Rabbi Chuck Davidson, an Orthodox rabbi who occasionally writes blog posts on *The Times of Israel*, also criticizes the modern-day conversion policy espoused by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel. He views the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel, and proponents of their procedures for conversion, as corrupt and supportive of an abusive system. The Chief Rabbinate, according to Chuck Davidson, bends halakha to fit its needs in order to stay in power and to remain a Core political influence in the state.

Davidson claims that:

There are those within the Chief Rabbinate who argue that without centralization the converts will be hurt, because some rabbis/communities may not accept the converts of other rabbis/communities. This is, however, a disingenuous concern, to say the least. Until the Chief Rabbinate began their centralization efforts, there was no such thing as rejecting the Jewishness of the converts of ANY Orthodox conversion court. Regarding the converts of non-Orthodox courts, there is a degree of disagreement in the Halakhic literature, but there is no such disagreement about an Orthodox court. It is the Chief Rabbinate itself which worked hard to introduce a Reform into 2,000 years of Halakhic precedent, while masquerading as Orthodox rabbis. And, ironically, the Chief Rabbinate's attempted Reform backfired and came back as a boomerang to their very own court. Today, there are numerous Orthodox rabbis and communities throughout the world who do not accept as Jewish those converted through none other than the Chief Rabbinate.⁹⁰

His solution is to go back to a literal understanding of the Mishnah and Talmud- what appears in Yevamot 47a and b. He believes that the conversion process today differs a lot from how it was originally done. He makes a valid argument based on the observations this paper has made of the historical procedures. Few would object to calling the conversion procedure of the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel an extremely rigid interpretation of halakha.

Rabbi Shraga Bar-On, in his article titled *Adapt Conversion to Today's Judaism*, sees the realistic problems that people within Israel are facing. Rabbi Bar-On even argues that most

⁹⁰ Chuck Davidson, "The perversion of conversion: Freundel as a symptom," <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-perversion-of-conversion-freundel-as-a-symptom/>, (May 14, 2015).

conversion applicants are simply lying with regards to how observant they are. They learn the steps, they know the mitzvot, and use their knowledge to pass the examinations conducted by the beit din, but ultimately have no intention of living a Jewish lifestyle. The current system, Bar-On thinks, is a joke. It is so politicized and distant from potential converts that it harms earnest converts that wish to honestly live a Jewish lifestyle, and it benefits those who have money and can lie their way through the conversion courts.⁹¹

Examination Under the Lens of the Theory

The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel alienates itself from these opponent rabbis. As rabbis get pushed aside for not associating under the directives of the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel, they formulate their own methods to undermine the Chief Rabbinate. It could be understood through the Core/Periphery model of this paper that if political tensions have eased, then one would generally expect more lenient conversion procedures. However, the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel and the rabbis who support it argue that the atmosphere is not safe- they are under threat of secularism, and the Chief Rabbinate fears a loss of power. The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel wishes to retain place as head of the Core Religion. Conversion, like marriages, are just one of the ways that the Chief Rabbinate can internalize its power within the system and ensure its survival. As a Core entity, it pushes away rabbis who do not see the need for such an internalization. These Periphery rabbis stand up to the Chief Rabbinate by issuing less stringent conversions.

⁹¹ Shraga Bar-On, "Adapt Conversion to Today's Judaism," https://hartman.org.il/Blogs_View.asp?Article_Id=1466&Cat_Id=275&Cat_Type=Blogs, (February 11, 2014).

Summary

This paper sees the issue outlined above as a continuation of problems which have existed since the creation of the State of Israel. Historically, Jews in the Periphery did not have unified practices with regards to some halakha. It varied from region to region. Some communities would follow a certain style of dress, and others not. Some communities would place a great emphasis on one holiday and others not. This historically extended into halakha and allowed a platform of debate between rabbis. These debates, or clashes between communities with regards to practice, would lead to the development of a text between the two rabbis which could be read and studied so as to obtain some knowledge on what the better practice was. In Israel however, many Jews of different backgrounds and communities are now vying for power. The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel only represents the ideology of a specific group which has its own rulings and ideology. These rulings, which historically would have been left up for debate, are now authoritative and unreconcilable for Jews who have dissenting views. Therefore, the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel pushes these dissenting rabbis into the Periphery. This creates a state wherein Judaism is at once a Core Religion and a Periphery Religion. These opponent rabbis seek to gather support and undermine the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel in an attempt to pull themselves out of the Periphery.

Non-Orthodox approaches

Unsurprisingly, non-Orthodox branches of Judaism are also highly critical of the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel. The two majority branches of Judaism which exist in America are the Reform and Conservative (or Masorti) movements. These two movements perform their own conversions and have their own criteria. Their conversions are recognized by neither the

Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel nor by Orthodox rabbis in general. This is because they consider the procedures used as being against halakha, or they question the qualifications of those overseeing the conversions. Though these two movements do not adhere as tightly to halakha as Orthodoxy does, they play a role in this paper's theory. This is because these movements are typically operating outside of the state of Israel. This means they do not experience Core Religious tensions, and instead are in the Periphery in typically Christian states. This Periphery atmosphere, combined with the fact that Liberal Judaism adopted features similar to Christian practices early on in its history, such as sermons and using the local vernacular in service, makes conversion to Judaism simple and appealing.

Reform

Reform Judaism, the largest of the three movements in the United States, does not clearly state their prescribed conversion procedures on their website.⁹² This is because the Reform movement typically leaves it up for each individual rabbi to decide how the conversion should go. However, there are many similarities in practice amongst many of the rabbis in the movement. Rabbi Alex Lilienthal wrote in response to a question regarding Reform's conversion requirements that:

What is necessary to convert to Judaism may vary in detail from rabbi to rabbi, but a period of study is central to the conversion process. This study would not only familiarize the prospective convert with the basic beliefs and practices of Judaism, but it would also help the individual integrate into the actual community. I find it very important that the person do the studying (and the internal growing) while participating in the actual life of a Jewish community. This will allow many things to become second nature to the individual. Once this slowly happens, it will be possible to assess how far the conversion has really gone. There is nothing miraculous here, simply an educational process that every rabbi needs to evaluate until his or her subjective criteria are met. Then there are of course ritual aspects to formalize matters which I would strongly encourage that they be done. In the

⁹² The website can be viewed at <https://reformjudaism.org/>.

Reform rabbinate, the requirement of ritual bath and circumcision will vary from rabbi to rabbi.⁹³

Most, if not all, Reform rabbis agree that a timeline of learning must take place, whether it be for a year or less. The mainstream opinion is that potential converts should study for a year. As far as circumcision and a mikvah, those are personal decisions to be made either by the individual rabbi, or by the potential convert. There have been people converted under Reform rabbinical supervision who did not get circumcised, and there are people who did not immerse in a mikvah. As far as a beit din, Reform defines a beit din as consisting of three bar/bat mitzvah Jewish adults with at least one rabbi. This is against the mainstream Orthodox definition of a beit din. Another requirement which differentiates Orthodoxy and Reform is the hatafat dam brit.⁹⁴ Reform rabbis, most of the time, do not require a hatafat dam brit if the individual has already been circumcised prior to conversion.⁹⁵ Orthodoxy would argue a hatafat dam brit is mandatory. Finally, Reform differs from Orthodoxy theologically in that Reform converts are not asked to accept upon themselves the yoke of the commandments and to observe them all, but they are told to live a Jewish life and to raise their children Jewish.

Conservative/Masorti

Conservative (Masorti) Judaism's website also provides no specific conversion requirements.⁹⁶ However, several documents have been published by Conservative and Masorti synagogues which outline the process. This paper will utilize a conversion outline published by the Masorti synagogue Beth Shoshanna, located in the Netherlands. The approach of the outline

⁹³ "What is required to convert to Judaism?," <https://reformjudaism.org/ask-rabbi-topic/what-required-convert-judaism>.

⁹⁴ See page 43.

⁹⁵ "Reform Conversion," https://www.interfaithfamily.com/religious_life/conversion/reform_conversion/.

⁹⁶ The website for Conservative Judaism in the U.S. can be viewed at <https://uscj.org/>.

seems more in line with mainstream Orthodoxy in that circumcision, acceptance of all the commandments, immersion in a mikvah, and meetings with the beit din are non-negotiable.⁹⁷ Conservatives maintain that a convert should accept the yoke of the commandments, unlike Reform, but do not expect converts to go above and beyond what average Jews practice, unlike the Orthodox. Conservative converts will not have their conversions questioned if they fail to observe certain mitzvot. Conservative congregations typically define as beit din as three rabbis, or sometimes as one rabbi with two observant Jewish males (and sometimes women depending on the community). Circumcision or hatafat dam brit and mikvah are mandatory for a Conservative conversion. The Conservative movement usually accepts Reform converts so long as they performed circumcision or hatafat dam brit, were accepted by a Reform beit din, and immersed in a mikvah.

Examination of Conversion within Reform and Conservative Movements

To note, Conservative and Reform rabbis accept conversions performed under Orthodox auspices. This is because conversion has not undergone the changes that allowed Orthodoxy to develop such a stringent approach to conversion (the Periphery to Core shift). Of course, Conservative and Reform movements would accept Orthodox conversions, as it proves the dedication of the potential convert. One can usually find acceptance when moving from stringent to lenient movements. The opposite is not true. Orthodoxy accepts neither Reform nor Conservative conversions as halakhically valid on the grounds that 1) they may not have been performed correctly, 2) the credentials of the rabbinic courts are questionable, as Orthodoxy does

⁹⁷ "Gioer Syllabus," <http://bethshoshanna.nl.server3.starhosting.nl/GioerSyllabus-BethShoshanna.pdf>, (January, 2019).

not usually recognize rabbinical certifications of rabbis from other movements, and they could argue that those on the beit din were not Shabbat observant Jews, or 3) the convert did not fully accept all 613 mitzvot, integrate them into their lives, and strive to fulfill every one of them.

Summary

Reform and Conservative Judaism, under the contexts of previous observations, are Periphery Religions that chose to reconcile their place within the Periphery by attempting to become more like the Core Religion Christianity. This is shown to be the case because these two movements are extremely appealing to potential converts in Europe and the US. This is because they lack elements of Orthodox Judaism one may consider foreign such as the place of women in Orthodoxy, dress, or modest conduct. Moreover, Reform will actually encourage conversions in some cases. Reform Jews may not be on the streets trying to spread the word of Reform Judaism, but they do make it very clear that they want to welcome all potential converts. Surprisingly, if one looks at the website for Reform Judaism,⁹⁸ one can find a link for conversion at the bottom of the front page. This is unlike websites from other Jewish movements, as conversion is not advertised. This is a strong indication of just how different the same religion can be depending on whether it finds itself in the Core or in the Periphery.

⁹⁸ <https://reformjudaism.org/>

6) Conclusion and Analysis of Findings

What Has the Research Shown?

This paper has not only outlined the unprecedented stringencies that the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel has placed on conversion but has also explained that the modern conversion procedures do not entirely match the procedures outlined by the Talmud Bavli. The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel annuls conversions, strips Orthodox rabbis of their abilities to convert individuals, and attempts to dictate how conversions to Judaism will occur worldwide. In doing this, it is separating itself from the entities examined throughout the history of Judaism. There are Chief Rabbinate authorities who retain authority in certain countries, but the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel is attempting to undermine those authorities. The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel seeks to be a source of authority for world Jewry. It attempts to influence the practices and qualifications of rabbis in the United States (especially those on the Rabbinical Council of America) and of rabbis in Europe (especially those on the Conference of European Rabbis). A good example of this attempt to project power could be seen when the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel declared the popular Roman Jewish dish, *carciofi alla giudia*, as *treif*.⁹⁹ They attempted to act as an authority above the Chief Rabbinate of Rome. This is unprecedented when compared to the historical context, as are the extremely stringent conversion procedures they are attempting to push on all communities worldwide. This leads to the next finding of this paper, the answer to the question this paper sought to answer.

The hypothesis of this paper was that the procedures for conversion to Judaism became stringent as a result of increasing political tension and control within the religious sphere of the state of Israel. In applying the Core/Periphery theory of religion to my research, I can see

⁹⁹ Davide Lerner, "Different Artichokes for Different Folks?," <https://www.haaretz.com/food/.premium-artichoke-war-intensifies-as-rome-jews-insist-their-dish-is-kosher-1.5979149> (April 8, 2018).

religion and political/cultural development not as separate one-dimensional entities, but as constantly changing agents which are intertwined and inseparable. All international and national politics are, therefore, influenced by religious Core and Periphery interplay. However, attempting to ascertain when a religion becomes a Core or Periphery can be difficult.¹⁰⁰ Sometimes a religion can be both a Core and a Periphery as can be seen with the Judaism of the Chief Rabbinate compared with the other currents of Judaism within Israel such as Reform. However, once a religion is identified as a Core or a Periphery, one can determine how a religion will react to specific policies or atmospheres. For example, with the Babylonian Exile, Judaism shifted into the Periphery. As stated in the beginning of this paper, Periphery Religions react to being in the Periphery in one of three ways. Jews in Babylonia either conformed to the Core Religion or they proselytized. During the Roman occupation, Jews went into an imperial Periphery. Within Roman Judea they were a Core, but they were dictated by Rome whose religion was throughout the empire a Core. The reaction to occupation this time included extremism (with the Bar Kokhba Revolt), religious zealotry to strengthen the Core Judaism of Israel against an imperial Core Roman religion, and proselytism. During Roman occupation one also sees another feature of Periphery Religions, namely, their ability to spawn new movements.¹⁰¹ If the religion from which the new movement springs is a Religion in the Common Space, one can usually expect the movement to become a Religion of a Message. This is what was seen with the development of Christianity. Judaism did not merge with its offshoot and persisted on in the imperial Periphery.

¹⁰⁰ There will be plans to elaborate even further into all the intricacies of the Core/Periphery religious model, as well as the intricacies of the differences between Religions in the Common Spaces and Religions of a Message (and what it all entails) in a later work.

¹⁰¹ This is something that was not outlined previously in this paper, but will be something gone into more in depth in the aforementioned later work.

In Christian Europe, proselytism was no longer viable due to persecution, therefore communities typically conformed to their situation and became insular. It was not until the political developments of modernity that one sees conversion become open and lenient, but this development does not last due to World War II. With the creation of the State of Israel, the return of Judaism to a Core position can be defined as an intense relief due to historic persecution. Therefore, religious authorities are terrified to lose that Core position. Due to the threats to the State of Israel from its neighbors and inhabitants, as well as the threats opponent Jewish movements pose to the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel, one sees the Chief Rabbinate attempting to extend its power and influence wherever it can. The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel is hesitant of strangers coming in who may undermine the Chief Rabbinate's position, are threatened by the population of non-Jewish Jews mentioned earlier, and seek the support of foreign rabbinical groups for legitimization. These conditions create the ideal Core reaction to make conversion stringent. By making conversion stringent, the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel can: 1) control who is identified as Jewish in Israel (and in some cases worldwide) and who not; 2) decide who is Jewish in the context of marriage so as to prevent marriages they see as harmful to their power (i.e. a non-recognized female convert marries a Jew in Israel and has a child. The Rabbinate would not recognize the child as Jewish, and in doing so would create resentment which would lead to the family's willingness to seek other halakhic authorities to give their support to); 3) extend its influence over foreign rabbis by determining which rabbis provide valid conversions recognized in the state of Israel (this would obviously affect how foreign rabbis perform conversions because if they do not adhere to the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel's standards, conversion candidates will look for another rabbi who is recognized by the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel), and; 4) allow themselves the ability to annul

conversions, so that if a rabbi is in opposition to the Chief Rabbinate itself, the Chief Rabbinate can threaten an annulment of any conversions they had performed.

All of these benefits the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel provides itself are necessary for a retention of power as a Core and for their goal to create a one, unified, Judaism under their guidance. If it did not exercise power in this way, its Core would fall apart and be replaced with another Jewish Core movement, and the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel does not want that. In the general theme of this paper, it is theorized that Religions in the Common Space are less successful at proselytizing than Religions of a Message given Religions in the Common Space focus on a specific people and place. Core Religions, likewise, are less successful at proselytizing than Periphery Religions. For the Chief Rabbinate, being both a Core Religion and a Religion in the Common Space makes the Judaism they espouse unappealing. It usually only appeals to those seeking to enter the country and marry a Jew. The Judaism of the Periphery is much more successful and actively encourages mixed couples to convert the non-Jewish partner (especially in Reform). The Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel's stance is a reaction to the leniency of its opponents. So, one can see from many different angles how political and cultural developments have affected the religion in context of conversion and vice versa.

Consequences of the Findings

History has shown that changes to conversion methods occur frequently and it is always due to whether the religion is a Core or Periphery, which is an unstable factor. Due to the nature of the theory, one can predict a few things. One is that eventually, as political tensions decrease or as the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel compromises with its opponents (or all its

opponents give into the Chief Rabbinate), conversion will become more lenient, and the theology will shift to reflect that. Another prediction is that tension will remain, and the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel's policies will further worsen the growing number of people and rabbis who stand against it. This event could lead to the collapse of the Core of the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel and the creation of a new Core under a different facet of Judaism. Another prediction is that another Core may develop in a foreign country in retaliation to the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel, pushing its Core power on foreign Jews as the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel does. This can already be seen with the divide between Jews in the United States (most of which are Reform or Conservative) and Jews in Israel. The Reform and Conservative movements of the United States are both very large and seek to build a Core within the United States. Neither follow the views of the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel, nor can they be influenced by them.

Therefore, if the Chief Rabbinate of the State of Israel wishes to retain its Core, this paper suggests that a good step would be cooperation with the Judaism of the Periphery and to attempt to merge opinions. Efforts should be made to bring the Periphery into the Core. If compromises are not made, not only will the Chief Rabbinate be under threat, but their goal of a unified Judaism will be as well.

Finally, there is another consequence of these findings. This consequence is not related to the question this paper sought to answer, but is important nonetheless. This consequence is related to conversion to religions as a whole. In the discussion of conversion to religions and proselytism, some slip into the mode of thinking that "if religion X converts more people than religion Y, and is very successful, then X must be a better (and hold more truth) than Y." This is a misconception that some people have. A Christian may think Christianity is the correct faith,

and that the number of adherents it possesses is proof alone. This is not the case. In applying the theories this paper postulates, one can categorize religions to explain why some do better at conversion than others and to explain how some religions succeed where others fail. Today, most of the major religions are Religions of a Message. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and new age movements are all Religions of a Message. Religions that are Peripheries are also extremely successful at proselytism. Pentecostal Christianity in Latin America (a Periphery), has been extremely successful when compared to its opponent Catholic movement (the Core).¹⁰² The consequence implied is simply that the failure of Hindu religions, Judaism, or Shinto to acquire as many followers as Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism is not because the former three are inherently wrong, but because they were not built for proselytism. The former three are Religions in the Common Space, and the latter three are Religions of a Message. The former three all started as a Core Religion, and the latter three usually developed out of the Core Religion in the Common Space as a Periphery or developed inside the Periphery itself (not branching off of anything). *Periphery Religions of a Message* are always going to be more successful at proselytizing than *Core Religions in the Common Space*.

¹⁰² Waldo César, "From Babel to Pentecost: A Socio-Historical-Theological Study of the Growth of Pentecostalism," in *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, edited by Ruth Marshall-Fratani and André Corten (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 26-28.

Appendices

Appendix A

The Law of Return With Its Amendments

1. Every Jew has the right to come to this country as an Oleh ([immigrant]).
2.
 - a) Aliyah shall be by Oleh's visa.
 - b) An Oleh's visa shall be granted to every Jew who has expressed his desire to settle in Israel, unless the Minister of the Interior is satisfied that the applicant –
 1. is engaged in an activity directed against the Jewish people; or
 2. is likely to endanger public health or the security of the State; or
 3. is a person with a criminal past, likely to endanger public welfare.
3.
 - a) A Jew who has come to Israel and subsequent to his arrival has expressed his desire to settle in Israel may, while still in Israel, receive an Oleh's certificate.
 - b) The restrictions specified in section 2 (b) shall apply also to the grant of an Oleh's certificate; but a person shall not be regarded as endangering public health on account of an illness contracted after his arrival in Israel.
4. Every Jew who has immigrated into this country before the coming into force of this Law, and every Jew who was born in this country, whether before or after the coming into force of this Law, shall be deemed to be a person who has come to this country as an Oleh under this Law.
 - a) *Rights of Family Members:*
 1. The rights of a Jew under this Law and the rights of an Oleh under the Nationality Law, 5710 – 1950, as well as the rights of an Oleh under any other enactment, are also vested in a child and grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew, except for a person who has been a Jew and has voluntarily changed his religion.
 2. It shall be immaterial whether or not a Jew by whose right a right under subsection (a) is claimed is still alive and whether or not he has immigrated to Israel.
 3. The restrictions and conditions prescribed in respect of a Jew or an Oleh by or under this Law or by the enactments referred to in subsection (a) shall also apply to a person who claims a right under subsection (a).
 - b) *Definition:* For the purposes of this Law, "Jew" means a person who was born of a Jewish mother or has become converted to Judaism and who is not a member of another religion.
5. The Minister of the Interior is charged with the implementation of this Law and may make regulations as to any matter relating to such implementation and also as to the grant of Oleh's visas and Oleh's certificates to minors up to the age of 18 years. Regulations for the purposes of sections 4A and 4B require the approval of the Constitution, Legislation and Judicial Committee of the Knesset.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ "The Law of Return," The State of Israel, <https://knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/return.htm>, (April 7, 2019).

Appendix B

Quotes Used From Mishnah

for [the convert] is unable to say [in the Biblical recitation] “[the land] that God swore to our fathers to give to us.” ... And when he prays by himself, he says [in place of, “the God of our fathers”] “the God of the fathers of Israel.” And when he is in the synagogue, he says “the God of your fathers.”¹⁰⁴

“Just as You have sworn to our forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey” so that You will give taste to the fruit... From this they said, Israelites and bastards confess, but not converts and not freed slaves, for they do not have a portion in the land.¹⁰⁵

A man whose testicles were wounded and one whose member was cut off are permitted [to marry] a convert or a freed maidservant. They are only forbidden to enter into the congregation [of Israel] as it is said, “One injured by crushing or whose flow is cut off may not enter the congregation of God” (Devarim 23:2).¹⁰⁶

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov says: A convert [has the status of] a *Mechusar Kapparah* (one who has purified himself via immersion but who still needs to bring a sacrifice before eating sacrificial meat) until the blood has been sprinkled [on the altar] for him.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ m. *Bik.* 1:4

¹⁰⁵ m. *Ma'aš.* Š. 5:13-14.

¹⁰⁶ m. *Yebam.* 8:2.

¹⁰⁷ m. *Ker.* 2.1.

Appendix C

Quotes Used From Talmud

With regard to a potential convert who comes to a court in order to convert... when the Jews are in exile, the judges of the court say to him: What did you see that motivated you to come to convert? Don't you know that the Jewish people at the present time are anguished, suppressed, despised, and harassed, and hardships are frequently visited upon them? If he says: I know, and although I am unworthy of joining the Jewish people and sharing in their sorrow, I nevertheless desire to do so, then the court accepts him immediately to begin the conversion process... And the judges of the court inform him of some of the lenient mitzvot and some of the stringent mitzvot, and they inform him of the sin of neglecting the mitzva to allow the poor to take gleanings, forgotten sheaves, and produce in the corner of one's field, and about the poor man's tithe. And they inform him of the punishment for transgressing the mitzvot, as follows: They say to him: Be aware that before you came to this status and converted, had you eaten forbidden fat, you would not be punished by karet, and had you profaned Shabbat, you would not be punished by stoning, since these prohibitions do not apply to gentiles. But now, once converted, if you have eaten forbidden fat you are punished... and if you have profaned Shabbat, you are punished by stoning... And just as they inform him about the punishment for transgressing the mitzvot, so too, they inform him about the reward granted for fulfilling them.¹⁰⁸

And they do not overwhelm him with threats, and they are not exacting with him about the details of the mitzvot... If he accepts upon himself all of these ramifications, then they circumcise him immediately... When he is healed from the circumcision, they immerse him immediately, and two Torah scholars stand over him at the time of his immersion and inform him of some of the lenient mitzvot and some of the stringent mitzvot. Once he has immersed and emerged, he is like a born Jew in every sense... And anything that interposes between one's body and the water of the ritual bath with regard to immersion of a ritually impure person, in a manner that would invalidate the immersion, also interposes and invalidates the immersion for a convert.¹⁰⁹

the court should not overly dissuade the convert from converting. Rabbi Elazar said: What is the verse from which this ruling is derived? As it is written: "And when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking with her" (Ruth 1:18). When Naomi set out to return to Eretz Yisrael, Ruth insisted on joining her. The Gemara understands this to mean that Ruth wished to convert. Naomi attempted to dissuade her, but Ruth persisted. The verse states that once Naomi saw Ruth's resolve to convert, she desisted from her attempts to

¹⁰⁸ b. *Yebam.* 47a.

¹⁰⁹ b. *Yebam.* 47b.

dissuade her. The Gemara infers from here that the same approach should be taken by a court in all cases of conversion.¹¹⁰

If he accepts upon himself all of these ramifications, then they circumcise him immediately [because] we do not delay the performance of a mitzva... When he is healed from the circumcision, they immerse him immediately [in a mikvah before three Torah scholars]... Once he has immersed and emerged he is a Jew in every sense. The Gemara asks: With regard to what halakha is this said? It is that if he reverts back to behaving as a gentile, he nevertheless remains Jewish, and so if he betroths a Jewish woman, although he is considered to be an apostate Jew, his betrothal is a valid betrothal.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Appendix D

Bibliography

- Angel, Marc D. *Loving Truth and Peace: The Grand Religious Worldview of Rabbi Benzion Uziel*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1999.
- Bamberger, Bernard Jacob. *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period*. New York: Ktav, 1968.
- Bar-On, Shraga. "Adapt Conversion to Today's Judaism." Shalom Hartman Institute. https://hartman.org.il/Blogs_View.asp?Article_Id=1466&Cat_Id=275&Cat_Type=Blogs.
- Brenner, Michael. *A Short History of the Jews*. Translated by Jeremiah Riemer. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- César, Waldo. "From Babel to Pentecost: A Socio-Historical-Theological Study of the Growth of Pentecostalism." in *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, edited by Ruth Marshall-Fratani and André Corten, 22-40. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Cardozo, Nathan L. "Conversion: An Open Letter to Israel's Chief Rabbis." David Cardozo Academy. Last modified June 7, 2018. <https://www.cardozoacademy.org/thoughts-to-ponder/conversion-an-open-letter-to-israels-chief-rabbis/>.
- Cardozo, Nathan L. "Conversion is Not About Halacha." Times of Israel. 2018. <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/conversion-is-not-about-halacha-2/>.
- Cohen, Asher, and Bernard Susser. "Jews and Others: Non-Jewish Jews in Israel." *Israel Affairs* 15, no. 1 (January 28, 2009): 52-65.
- Cohen, Shaye. "Can a Convert to Judaism say 'God of our Fathers'." *Judaism* 40, no. 4 (1991): 419-28. https://www.academia.edu/36175851/Shaye_J.D._Cohen_Can_a_Convert_to_Judaism_say_God_of_our_Fathers_Judaism_40_4_Autumn_1991_419-428.
- Cohen, Shaye. "Conversion to Judaism in Historical Perspective: From Biblical Israel to Post-Biblical Judaism." *Conservative Judaism* 36, no. 4 (1983): 31-45. https://www.academia.edu/36175828/Shaye_J.D._Cohen_Conversion_to_Judaism_in_Historical_Perspective_From_Biblical_Israel_to_Post-Biblical_Judaism_Conservative_Judaism_36_4_Summer_1983_31-45.
- Cohen, Shaye. "The Rabbinic Conversion Ceremony." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41, no. 2 (1990): 177-203. https://www.academia.edu/36175612/Shaye_J.D._Cohen_The_Rabbinic_Conversion_Ceremony_Journal_of_Jewish_Studies_41_2_Autumn_1990_177-203.

- Cohen, Shaye. "Was Judaism in Antiquity a Missionary Religion?" In *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation, and Accommodation: Past Traditions, Current Issues and Future Prospects*, edited by Menachem Mor, 14-23. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992.
https://www.academia.edu/36174984/Shaye_J.D._Cohen_Was_Judaism_in_Antiquity_a_Missionary_Religion_in_Menahem_Mor_ed._Jewish_Assimilation_Acculturation_and_Accommodation_Lanham_MD_University_Press_of_A.
- Collins, John J. *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*. New York: Crossroad, 1983.
- Cosgrove, Elliot. "Mikveh Can Solve Conversion Problem." *The New York Jewish Week*.
<https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/mikveh-can-solve-conversion-problem/>.
- Davidson, Chuck. "Conversion and Rabbinic incompetence – A Response to Rabbi Chaim Navon." *The Times of Israel*. <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/conversion-and-rabbinic-incompetence-a-response-to-rabbi-chaim-navon/>.
- Davidson, Chuck. "The perversion of conversion: Freundel as a symptom." *The Times of Israel*. Last modified May 14, 2015. <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-perversion-of-conversion-freundel-as-a-symptom/>.
- Dimitrovsky, Haim Z., and Lou H. Silberman. "Talmud and Midrash." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Last modified May 21, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Talmud#ref=ref24372>.
- Donin, Hayim H. *To Be A Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life*. N.p.: Basic Books, 1972.
- Farkash, Tali. "European conversions to get uniform procedures." *Ynet News*.
<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4881031,00.html>.
- Fisher, Netanel. "'Israeli' Halakha: The Chief Rabbinate's Conversion-To-Judaism Policy 1948–2018." *Modern Judaism – A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 39, no. 1 (2019): 61-92.
- Frankel, Zechariah. *Mevo ha-Yerushalmi*. Breslau, 1870. Repr. Jerusalem, 1967.
- "Gioer Syllabus." Masorti Joodse Gemeente Beth Shoshanna. Last modified January , 2019.
<http://bethshoshanna.nl.server3.starhosting.nl/GioerSyllabus-BethShoshanna.pdf>.
- "Is Ivanka Trump Really Jewish?." *YNET News*. Last modified January 26, 2017.
<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4913277,00.html>.
- ITIM. "Proof of Judaism." <https://www.itim.org.il/en/proof-of-judaism/>.

- Jan, Paul H. "Medieval Sourcebook: Pact of Umar, 7th Century?." Fordham University. Last modified , 1996. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/pact-umar.asp>.
- JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003.
- Klein, Shira. *Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Kraemer, David C. *The Mind of the Talmud: An Intellectual History of the Bavli*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Kravel-Tovi, Michal. "Rite of passing: Bureaucratic encounters, dramaturgy, and Jewish conversion in Israel." *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 2 (May 2012): 371-88.
- Kravel-Tovi, Michal. "Shouldering the Weight of the State: Religious Zionist Citizenship, National Responsibility, and Jewish Conversion in Israel." *PoLAR* 41, no. S1 (September 17, 2018): 35-50. <https://anthrosource-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/doi/10.1111/plar.12252>.
- Kulp, Joshua. "The Participation of a Court in the Jewish Conversion Process." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 3 (2004): 437-70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1455649>.
- Lapide, P. "A TALE OF TWO VILLAGES: SAN NICANDRO REVISITED." *Judaism* 11, no. 1 (1962): 14-26.
- Lerner, Davide. "Diff'rent Artichokes for Diff'rent Folks?." Haaretz. Last modified April 8, 2018. <https://www.haaretz.com/food/.premium-artichoke-war-intensifies-as-rome-jews-insist-their-dish-is-kosher-1.5979149>.
- Liphshiz, Cnaan. "Israel's Chief Rabbinate 'Cements Monopoly Over Conversions' After Deal With European Orthodox Rabbis ." Haaretz. <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/israel-s-chief-rabbinate-cements-monopoly-over-conversions-after-europe-deal-1.6695727?=&ts= 1549985771837>.
- Mulsow, Martin, and Richard Henry Popkin. *Secret Conversions to Judaism in Early Modern Europe*. Brill's Studies in Intellectual History. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- "Pact of Umar." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by Esposito, John L.: Oxford University Press, 2003. <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/view/10.1093/acref/9780195125580.001.0001/acref-9780195125580-e-1803>.
- Porton, Gary G. *The Stranger Within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

"Reform Conversion." InterfaithFamily.

https://www.interfaithfamily.com/religious_life/conversion/reform_conversion/.

Reiner, Avraham (Rami). "'Tough are Gerim': Conversion to Judaism in Medieval Europe." *Havruta – A Journal of Jewish Conversation* 1, no. 1 (July 1, 2008): 54-62.

https://hartman.org.il/Blogs_View.asp?Article_Id=157&Cat_Id=275&Cat_Type=.

Scheiber, Alexander. "A Letter of Recommendation on Behalf of the Proselyte Mevorakh from the Geniza." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 47 (1980): 491-94. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3622368>.

Scott, John. "Core-periphery Model." *A Dictionary of Sociology*, 2014, A Dictionary of Sociology.

Sergio DellaPergola. "World Jewish Population, 2017," in Arnold Dashefsky and Ira M. Sheskin. (Editors) *The American Jewish Year Book*, 2017, Volume 117 (2017) (Dordrecht: Springer) pp. 297- 380.

Staudacher, Anna L. "La conversion au judaïsme: prosélytes et reconvertis à Vienne (1868-1914)." *Histoire, économie & société* 4 (December 2014): 110-29.

<https://www.cairn.info/revue-histoire-economie-et-societe-2014-4-page-110.htm?contenu=resume>.

Steinsaltz, Adin E. "The William Davidson Talmud." William Davidson Foundation. 2003.

<https://www.sefaria.org/william-davidson-talmud>.

The State of Israel. "The Law of Return." Accessed April 7, 2019.

<https://knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/return.htm>.

"What is required to convert to Judaism?." ReformJudaism.org. <https://reformjudaism.org/ask-rabbi-topic/what-required-convert-judaism>.