

A BOOK OF  
JEWISH  
CONCEPTS

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to hasten his death by removing the pillows from under his head. Those present are expected to recite prayers and psalms instead of engaging in idle talk.

Since "there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20), a Jew is expected to make confession on his death-bed (Shabbath 32a). If unable to make a confession verbally, he is expected to do so mentally. A form of confession recorded in the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 6:2) reads: "May my death be an atonement for all the sins I have committed." Like Rabbi Akiva, who was martyred by the Romans in 135, a dying Jew departs with the *Shema* on his lips, uttering Israel's confession of faith: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

## PROSELYTES

## גֵּרִים

THE name *ger* (stranger) has come to mean in Hebrew a convert to Judaism who performs the duties and enjoys the privileges of a Jew. Anyone who has accepted Judaism out of inner conviction and without ulterior motives is called גֵּר צַדִּיק or גֵּר אֱמֶת (sincere, true proselyte), in contrast to גֵּרֵי אֲרִיזוֹת who, like the Samaritans (II Kings 17:25), have embraced Judaism through fear of punishment.

According to a rabbinic statement, the man who adopts Judaism to marry a Jewess, or because of love or fear of Jews, is not a genuine proselyte (Gerim 1:3). A true proselyte is like a born Jew . . . like a new-born infant (Mekhilta 12:49; Yevamoth 62a). In a letter to a proselyte, Maimonides writes: "All who adopt Judaism are Abraham's disciples. . . There is absolutely no difference between you and us."

There is also a partial proselyte, referred to as גֵּר תוֹשֵׁב (sojourning proselyte), who has not adopted Judaism in its entirety, but has agreed to observe the seven precepts imposed upon the descendants of Noah: abstinence from idolatry, murder, theft, blasphemy, incest, eating the flesh of a living animal, and the duty of promoting justice. He is regarded as an honest seeker after truth and, apart from ritual restrictions, he enjoys equal rights before the courts.

There are seemingly contrasting statements in talmudic literature concerning those who are admitted to full membership in the household of Israel. "A would-be proselyte is neither persuaded nor dissuaded. . . Proselytes are as hard on Israel as a sore on the skin. . .

If one sincerely wishes to adopt Judaism, welcome and befriend him; do not repel him" (Yevamoth 47b; 109b; Mekhilta 18:6). "If one comes to ask for admission to Israel, he is not received at once, but is asked: Do you not know that this nation is downtrodden and afflicted, subjected to many ills, liable to varied penalties for disobedience to the precepts of the Torah? . . . If he persists, he takes a ritual bath and submits to circumcision. . ." (Yevamoth 47a).

Both male and female applicants become proselytes by *tevilah* (immersion) in a *mikveh* or pool of running water. Upon emerging from the water they pronounce this blessing: "Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe who hast sanctified us with thy commandments, and commanded us about immersion." The reason that proselytes recite the benediction *after* the immersion, and not *before* the performance of this precept, is that prior to the immersion it does not apply to them. To be ritually *kasher* (fit for use), water of the *mikveh* has to come directly from a natural spring or a river.

Maimonides, replying to a question addressed to him by a proselyte, wrote: "You have asked about the prayers and benedictions, whether you should say *our God and God of our fathers*. . . You should pray like any Jew by birth. . . Any stranger who joins us till the end of time . . . is a disciple of our father Abraham and a member of his household. . . You are to say *our God and God of our fathers*, because Abraham is your father. . . You may certainly say in your prayers *who hast chosen us, who hast given us the Torah . . . and who hast separated us*, because God has indeed chosen you and separated you from the peoples and given you the Torah; for, the Torah is given alike to us and to the stranger, as it is written: One Torah and one judgment shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you (Numbers 15:16). . . Let not your lineage be light in your eyes. If our lineage is from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, your lineage is from God himself."

The Jewish system of morals attracted numerous converts during the Roman period. Many Romans attached themselves to Judaism with varying degrees of intensity. The greater number of "those who revered God" renounced polytheism and image worship, abstained from forbidden food, kept the Sabbath, and attended the synagogue on frequent occasions. Judaism acquired converts wherever Jews settled in the Diaspora. According to some, about two million Roman citizens had been converted to Judaism prior to the threat of the death penalty by the emperor Hadrian (117-138) and later Byzantine decrees, which forced the abandonment of proselytizing. There are in-

stances of wholesale conversion to Judaism by tribes, of which the Khazars of the eighth century are the most notable.

Though the adoption of Judaism by individuals has frequently resulted in great suffering, some have urged the recapture of the "mission of Judaism." The talmudic sages ascribed the sin of the molten calf in the wilderness to the influence of the Egyptian proselytes.

Judaism was a missionary religion when it was confronted with paganism, but its missionary activity was of a restricted character. All that Judaism was concerned with in its missionary work was to substitute the religion of humanity for the false gods and false morality of the pagan world. Judaism withdrew from the missionary field when paganism yielded to the two daughter faiths which shared in common many truths, religious and moral, with the mother faith.

According to rabbinic teaching, any person who regulates his life by the Seven Precepts of the Descendants of Noah, mentioned above, fulfills his immediate task as a co-worker with God. But higher in character must be the contribution of the son of Israel, who is charged with the duty to promote divine righteousness on earth. The Jew must be thoroughly obedient to the Torah in which is revealed the moral will of God.

Even though Judaism opens the door to proselytes, it must long remain the religion of a minority, keeping the great ideals before the eyes of mankind. Just because Judaism teaches that every good man, irrespective of his beliefs, is saved and has a share in the world to come, it follows that to be a good Jew signifies something ethically higher than being a good man. Jews must be prepared to defend their heritage at the cost of their lives, as in the past, and to sacrifice their material wealth. Many a potential martyr becomes indifferent to the ideals for which he would offer his life in time of persecution. The world has need of a minority of idealists, it has been asserted.

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## RAIN AND DEW

## גשם וטל

THE prayer for rain, solemnly recited on the eighth day of *Sukkoth* as part of the *Musaf* service, introduces the formula משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם (Thou causest the wind to blow and the rain to fall) which is inserted into the beginning of the *Amidah*, or silent devotion, during the period between *Sukkoth* and *Pesah*, when the rainy season in Eretz Yisrael arrives. The poems composed by Rabbi Elazar ha-Kallir of

the eighth century are chanted; they refer to the biblical miracles that were performed for Israel in connection with water that has a purifying significance. It reads in part:

Remember Abraham who followed thee like water,  
Whom thou didst bless like a tree planted near streams of water;  
Thou didst shield him, thou didst save him from fire and water. . .  
Remember Isaac whose birth was foretold over a little water;  
Thou didst tell his father to offer his blood like water. . .  
Remember Jacob who, staff in hand, crossed the Jordan's water. . .  
Thou didst promise to be with him through fire and water.  
Remember Moses in the ark of reeds drawn out of the water. . .  
He struck the rock and there gushed forth water. . .  
Remember the twelve tribes thou didst bring across the water;  
Thou didst sweeten for them the bitterness of the water. . .  
Turn to us, for our life is encircled by foes like water.

The prayer for dew, chanted on the first day of *Pesah* as part of the *Musaf* service, is a supplication for a season rich in fertility, when the plants in Eretz Yisrael are to be refreshed by the regular descent of dew during the hot period of the year.

Rabbi Elazar ha-Kallir's prayer-poem for dew is one of the most delightful of his numerous *piyyutim*. It conveys the hope for the fertilization of the earth and the restoration of Israel. It reads in part:

Let dew fall on the blessed land;  
Bless us with the gift of heaven;  
In the darkness let a light dawn  
For the people who follow thee.  
Let dew sweeten the mountains;  
Let thy chosen taste thy wealth;  
Free thy people from exile.  
That we may sing and exult.  
Let our barns be filled with grain;  
Renew our days as of old. . .  
Make us like a watered garden. . .

In the hot, dry months between May and September, the atmospheric vapor, condensed in small drops on cool areas between evening and morning, saves the vegetation of Israel. When cool breezes blow across from the Mediterranean, dew is precipitated.

The Bible employs dew to symbolize God's word which has a wonderful reviving power though it falls, like dew, gently and unheard (Deuteronomy 32:2). The freshness of youth, as well as the life-giv-

formed in the house of the bride months before the actual marriage took place in the home of the groom. Hence, two cups of wine are used in modern wedding ceremonies, one for *erusin* and one for *nissu'in*. The two celebrations are now separated only by the reading of the Aramaic *kethubbah*, the marriage contract specifying the mutual obligations between husband and wife (*Tosafoth*, Kethubboth 7b). The marriage contract, which used to be an important legal protection to the wife, is now used for the purpose of stressing the moral responsibility of the wedded pair: "Be my wife in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel. I will work for you; I will honor, support and maintain you, as it becomes Jewish husbands who work for their wives, honoring and supporting them faithfully. . ."

Since the fourteenth century it has been customary to have a rabbi perform the ceremony. The use of a wedding ring, symbolic of attachment and fidelity, dates from the seventh century. The custom of breaking a glass under the *huppah* is derived from the Talmud (Berakhoth 31a), where it is related that in the course of a wedding feast one of the rabbis broke a costly vase in order to curb the spirits of those present, warning them against excessive joy.

The formula used by the groom, placing the ring on the forefinger of the bride's right hand, is mentioned in the Talmud (Kiddushin 5b): "With this ring, you are wedded to me in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel." This alludes to the traditional interpretations of the Mosaic laws among the people of Israel (the regulations of *erusin* are not directly biblical). The seven benedictions, recited when ten men (*minyan*) are present, are quoted in the Talmud (Kethubboth 8a) as *birkath hathanim*. The fourth benediction refers to the perpetual renewal of the human being in the divine form. In the last three benedictions a prayer is uttered that God may comfort Zion, cause happiness to the young couple, and bring about complete exultation in restored Judea and Jerusalem. The marriage service thus combines individual with communal hopes.

Under the *huppah* (canopy), the bride is conducted three times round the groom as part of the wedding ceremony. This custom alludes to Jeremiah 31:21, where the prophet says that a woman encompasses and protects a man. Three times the word (I betroth you) occurs in Hosea 2:21-22, where God addresses his people: "I betroth you to myself forever; I betroth you to myself in righteousness and in justice, in love and in mercy; I betroth you to myself in faithfulness. . ."



THE act of taking a ritual bath in a *mikveh* (gathering of water) is called *tevilah* (immersion). A woman in the period of menstruation is regarded as unclean from the moment her menstrual flow begins. After the cessation of the menstrual flow, she counts seven days. At the end of seven days, at night, she performs the precept of *tevilah* by immersing herself in a *mikveh* that contains no less than forty *seahs* of water (about two hundred and forty gallons). The water of a *mikveh* has to come from a natural spring or a river; it entirely loses its effectiveness if it is poured into a vessel; it must be running, not drawn water contained in any kind of receptacle. A *mikveh* is constructed under the supervision of an authoritative rabbi who is known for his piety and learning. He is consulted also about the proper procedure of cleaning the *mikveh* when the water has been removed.

The three types of ritual washing (ablution) mentioned in biblical and talmudic literature are: 1) complete immersion (*tevilah*) in a natural water-source or in a specially constructed *mikveh*, prescribed for married women following their periods of menstruation or after childbirth as well as for proselytes (*gerim*) on being accepted into Judaism; 2) washing of the feet and hands, prescribed for the priests in the Temple service at Jerusalem; 3) washing of the hands (*netilath yadayim*) before sitting down to a meal and before prayer, upon rising from sleep and after the elimination of bodily wastes, also after being in proximity to a dead human body. Apart from ritual purification, the Jewish people have always regarded bathing and physical cleanliness as implicitly important because, as Hillel taught, the human body reflects the divine image of God. In honor of the approaching Sabbath, bathing on Fridays has ever been a universal Jewish custom. Ritual bathing, on the other hand, symbolizes spiritual purification, as well as *טהרת המשפחה* (purity of married life), and is not necessarily connected with physical cleanliness.

We are told in the Talmud that Rabbi Meir said: "Why did the Torah ordain that the uncleanness of menstruation should continue for seven days? Because, being in constant contact with his wife, a husband might develop a loathing towards her. The Torah therefore ordained: Let her be unclean, even after the least discharge of blood, for seven days, when intimate relations are forbidden, in order that, by being deprived of her intimacy for certain recurrent periods, she

should be beloved by her husband as at the time of her first entry into the bridal chamber" (Niddah 31b).

Maimonides finds a symbolical significance in *tevilah*: "The person who directs his heart to purify his soul from spiritual impurities, such as iniquitous thoughts and evil notions, becomes clean as soon as he determines in his heart to keep apart from these courses, and bathes his soul in the water of pure knowledge" (*Mikvaoth* 11:12).

Associated with the act of embracing Judaism is *tevilah* טבילת (גירות). The candidate, if a male, is first of all circumcised, and when the wound has healed, he is taken to the *mikveh*, in which he makes a complete immersion. The *tevilah* of a proselyte (גר), which must not be performed at night or on a holy day, is regarded as a bath of purification, designed to remove the uncleanness of heathenism. The immersion is always preceded by adequate instruction in religious doctrine and practice.

## TEVETH

## טבת

TEVETH, the tenth month of the Jewish calendar, consists of twenty-nine days. It occurs during December-January. The tenth day of *Teveh*, known as *Asarah b'Teveth*, commemorates the besieging of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 25:1). It has been observed as a fast day ever since.

## PURITY AND IMPURITY

## טהרה וטמאה

THE biblical laws of purity and impurity are not synonymous with the requirements of physical cleanliness, even though the two types sometimes coincide. The laws of cleanliness have been instinctively observed by religious Jews in their approach to God. Ritual defilement, for which purification was provided in Temple times, was restricted to certain acts and processes. Contact with a human corpse, for example, communicated defilement in the highest degree, and the method of purification is prescribed in the Torah as follows:

"Whoever touches the dead body of any human being shall be unclean for seven days; he shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and then he will be clean again. But if he fails to purify himself on the third and on the seventh day ...



he defiles the *mishkan* of the Lord, and shall be cut off from Israel" (Numbers 19:11-13).

Even the necessary handling of the ashes of the red heifer (פרה אדומה), used to cleanse from defilement by contact with the dead, rendered the priest unclean. "The priest shall then wash his garments and bathe his body in water. He remains unclean until the evening, and only afterwards may he return to the camp. . . He who has gathered up the ashes of the heifer shall also wash his garments and be unclean until evening" (19:7-10).

The mysterious significance of the *red heifer*, purifying the impure and rendering impure the pure (מטהרת את הטמאים ומטמאת את הטהורים), has not been explained, despite many attempts at symbolization. Rashi, commenting on Numbers 19:2, quotes a midrashic statement to the effect that the nations taunt Israel with regard to the paradoxical institution of the red heifer. For this reason, the Torah employs the term *hukkah* (statute), that is, a divine precept which must be observed even though it defies rational interpretation (*Pesikta, Parashath Parah*).

It has been conjectured that the use of a female, though sacrificial animals were usually males, symbolized the imparting of new life to those who had been defiled by contact with death. The color red, being the color of blood, may have been the token of life. The paschal lamb could be eaten on the first night of Passover only by those who had been purified from their defilement.

Hence, the Torah section on the red heifer is read on one of the Sabbaths that precede the festival of *Pesah*, referred to as the Sabbath of *Parashath Parah*. This commemorates the practices of purification that were observed by the Jewish people in ancient days, and at the same time it impresses on us the need of moral purification, which is the theme of the *Haftarah* from Ezekiel 36:16-38, recited on that distinguished Sabbath.

## TOHOROTH

## טהרות

THE sixth of the six divisions of the Mishnah is named *Tohoroth* (Purities) because it deals with ritual defilement and uncleanness. The name *Tohoroth* is euphemistic for uncleanness. This last division of the Mishnah, consisting of twelve tractates, has *Gemara* only on one tractate (*Niddah*).

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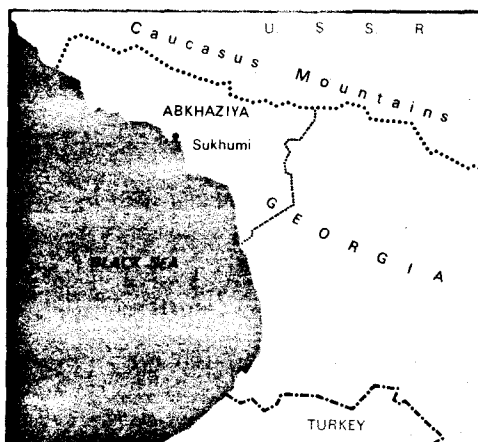
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**ABI ZIMRA, ISAAC MANDIL BEN ABRAHAM** (16th century), liturgical poet who lived in Algiers. His father Abraham b. Meir Abi Zimra came "from the bitter expulsion of 1492 to the city of Tlemcen" (Abraham Gavison, *Omer ha-Shikhah*, 1748, 134a). Abraham Gavison, who knew Isaac, called him "the great poet" (*ibid.*, 122b). Over 60 of Isaac's *piyyutim*, which were strongly influenced by Arabic poetry, are to be found in various manuscripts. Until recently, various communities in North Africa recited his poems. A complete edition of poems has been prepared by H. J. Schirmann.

**Bibliography:** Zunz, *Lit Poesie*, 535-6; Slouschz, in: *Reshumot*, 4 (1926), 25-27; Zulai, *ibid.*, 5 (1927), 444ff.; Davidson, *Ozar*, 4 (1933), 422.

[A.M.H.]

**ABKHAZ AUTONOMOUS SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC** (Rus., Abkhaziya), within the Georgian S.S.R., Transcaucasia, on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. Formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, Abkhaziya became a Russian protectorate in 1810. During the czarist regime, since it lay beyond the \*Pale of Settlement, Abkhaziya was



barred to Jews from European Russia. In 1846 Jewish artisans were given permission to live temporarily in Sukhum (now Sukhumi), the main city, and by 1897 there were 156 Jews. After the 1917 revolution the number of Jews in Abkhaziya increased considerably. The 1959 census recorded 3,332 Jews (0.8% of the total population), 3,124 living in urban, and 208 in rural, settlements. The majority were concentrated in Sukhumi and most of them were Georgian Jews (see \*Georgia). A new synagogue with accommodation for 500 congregants was built in 1960, and a congregation was reported active in 1963. See also \*Caucasus.

[Y.S.]

**ABLUTION** (Heb. טְבִילָה, "immersion"), act of washing performed to correct a condition of ritual impurity and restore the impure to a state of ritual purity. The ritually impure (or unclean) person is prohibited from performing certain functions and participating in certain rites. Ablution, following a withdrawal period and, in some cases, other special rituals, renders him again "clean" and permitted to perform those acts which his impurity had prevented. Ablution must not be confused with washing for the sake of cleanliness. This is evident from the requirement

that the body be entirely clean before ablution (Maim Yad, Mikva'ot 11:16), but there may nevertheless be some symbolic connection. The ablutions, as well as the impurities which they were deemed to remove, were decreed by biblical law, and understood by the rabbis in religious and not in hygienic or magical terms. This is shown by R. Johanan b. Zakkai's retort to his disciples who had questioned an explanation he gave to a non-Jew about ritual purity; "The dead do not contaminate and the water does not purify." It is a command (*gezeirah*) of God and we have no right to question it" (Num. R. 19:4).

Ablution is common to most ancient religions. Shintoists, Buddhists, and Hindus all recognize ablution as part of their ritual practice and there is ample evidence concerning its role in ancient Egypt and Greece (Herodotus 2:37; Hesiod, *Opera et Dies*, 722). Most ancient peoples held doctrines about ritual impurity and ablution was the most common method of purification. In varying forms ablution is important to Christianity and Islam as well; this is hardly surprising since they are both post-Judaic religions. In Jewish history there have been several sects that have laid great stress on the importance of ablution. The \*Essenes (Jos., Wars, 2:129, 149, 150) and the \*Qumran community (Zadokite Document, 10:10ff.; 11:18ff. and other DSS texts) both insisted on frequent ablutions as did the Hemerobaptists mentioned by the Church Fathers. The *tovelei shaharit* ("morning bathers") mentioned in *Tosefta Yadayim* 2:20 perhaps may be identified with the latter but more likely were an extreme group within the general Pharisaic tradition (Ber. 22a; Rashi, ad loc.).

In the Jewish tradition there are three types of ablution according to the type of impurity involved: complete immersion, immersion of hands and feet, and immersion of hands only.

**Complete Immersion.** In the first type of ablution the person or article to be purified must undergo total immersion in either *mayim hayyim* ("live water"), i.e., a spring, river, or sea, or a \**mikveh*, which is a body of water of at least 40 *se'ahs* (approx. 120 gallons) that has been brought together by natural means, not drawn. The person or article must be clean with nothing adhering (*hazizah*) to him or it, and must enter the water in such a manner that the water comes into contact with the entire area of the surface. According to law one such immersion is sufficient, but three have become customary. Total immersion is required for most cases of ritual impurity decreed in the Torah (see Purity and Impurity, Ritual). Immersions were required especially of the priests since they had to be in a state of purity in order to participate in the Temple service or eat of the "holy" things. The high priest immersed himself five times during the service of the Day of Atonement. Other individuals had to be ritually pure even to enter the Temple. However, it became customary among the Pharisees to maintain a state of purity at all times, a fact from which their Hebrew name *Perushim* ("separated ones") may have developed. (L. Finkelstein, *The Pharisees* (1962<sup>3</sup>), 76ff.; R. T. Herford, *The Pharisees* (1924), 31ff.).

Total immersion also came to form part of the ceremony of \*conversion to Judaism, although there is a difference of opinion concerning whether it is required for males in addition to circumcision, or in lieu of it (Yev. 46a). Since the destruction of the Temple, or shortly thereafter, the laws of impurity have been in abeyance. The reason is that the ashes of the \*red heifer, which are indispensable for the purification ritual, are no longer available. Thus, everybody is now considered ritually impure. The only immersions still prescribed are those of the \**niddah* and the proselyte, because these do not require the ashes of the red heifer and because the removal of the impurity concerned is necessary

also for other than purely sacral purposes (entry into the Temple area, eating of "holy" things). The *niddah* is thereby permitted to have sexual relations and the proselyte is endowed with the full status of the Jew.

In addition to the cases mentioned in the Bible, the rabbis ordained that after any seminal discharge, whether or not resulting from copulation, total immersion is required in order to be ritually pure again for prayer or study of the Torah. Since this was a rabbinical institution, immersion in drawn water or even pouring 9 *kav* (approx. 4½ gallons) of water over the body was considered sufficient. The ordinance was attributed to Ezra (BK 82a, b) but it did not find universal acceptance and was later officially abolished (Ber. 21b-22a; Maim. Yad, Keri'at Shema 4:8). Nevertheless, the pious still observe this ordinance. The observant also immerse themselves before the major festivals, particularly the Day of Atonement, and there are hasidic sects whose adherents immerse themselves on the eve of the Sabbath as well. The Reform movement, on the other hand, has entirely abolished the practice of ritual ablation. There was a custom in some communities to immerse the body after death in the *mikveh* as a final purification ritual. This practice was strongly discouraged by many rabbis, however, on the grounds that it discouraged women from attending the *mikveh*, when their attendance was required by biblical law. The most widespread custom is to wash the deceased with 9 *kav* of water.

The immersion of the *niddah* and the proselyte require *\*kavanah* ("intention") and the recitation of a benediction. The proselyte recites the benediction after the immersion because until then he cannot affirm the part which says "... God of our fathers ... who has commanded us." Ablution at the proper time is considered to be a *mitzvah* and may be performed even on the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement, and the Ninth of Av when bathing is otherwise forbidden. Except for the *niddah* and the woman after childbirth whose immersion should take place after nightfall, all other immersions take place during the day.

Vessels to be used for the preparation and consumption of food that are made of metal or glass (there is a difference of opinion concerning china and porcelain) and that are purchased from a non-Jew must be immersed in a *mikveh*

before use. This immersion is to remove the "impurity of the Gentiles" (a conception which was introduced, perhaps, to discourage assimilation), and is different from the process of ritual cleansing by which used vessels are cleansed to remove non-kosher food which might have penetrated their walls. This immersion is also accompanied by a benediction.

**Washing the Hands and Feet.** This second type of ablation was a requirement for the priests before participating in the Temple service. (Ex. 30: 17ff.).

**Washing the Hands.** This is by far the most widespread form of ablation. The method of washing is either by immersion up to the wrist or by pouring ½ *log* (approx. ½ pint) of water over both hands from a receptacle with a wide mouth, the lip of which must be undamaged. The water should be poured over the whole hand up to the wrist, but is effective as long as the fingers are washed up to the second joint. The hands must be clean and without anything adhering to them; rings must be removed so that the water can reach the entire surface area. The water should not be hot or discolored and it is customary to perform the act by pouring water over each hand three times (Sh. Ar., OH 159, 1960, 161). The handwashing ritual is commonly known as *netilat yadayim*, a term whose source is not entirely clear. It has been suggested that *netilah* means "taking" and thus the expression would be "taking water to the hands," but the rabbinic interpretation is "lifting of the hands" and is associated with Psalms 134:2.

Washing the hands is a rabbinic ordinance to correct the condition of *tumat yadayim*, the impurity of the hands, which notion itself is of rabbinic origin. Among the biblical laws of purity washing the hands is mentioned only once (Lev. 15:11). According to one tradition "impurity of the hands" (and washing them as a means of purification) was instituted by King Solomon, while another has it that the disciples of Hillel and Shammai were responsible for it (Shab. 14a-b). It seems that the custom spread from the priests, who washed their hands before eating consecrated food, to the pious among the laity and finally became universal. The detailed regulations concerning "impurity of the hands" constitute one of the 18 ordinances adopted in accord with the opinion of the school of Shammai against



Figure 1. Detail from the *Barcelona Haggadah*, Spain, 14th century, illustrating washing of hands during the Passover *seder* ceremony. London, British Museum, ms. Add. 14761, fol. 19v.

the school of Hillel, and it met at first with considerable opposition. In order to establish the practice the rabbis warned of dire consequences for those who disregarded it, even going so far as to predict premature death (Shab. 62b; Sot. 4b). R. Akiva, who personally disapproved of the ordinance, nevertheless used the limited water allowed him in prison for this ablation rather than for drinking (Er. 21b). In the New Testament there are several references which suggest that Jesus and his disciples demonstrated their opposition to rabbinic authority by disregarding this ordinance. (Mark 7:1; Matt 15:1; Luke 11:37).



Figure 2. Detail from *Hamburg Miscellany*, Germany, c. 1427, shows a Jewess immersing herself in a *mikveh* before going to her husband. Hamburg. Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. Heb. 37, fol. 79v.

The washing of the hands most observed today is that required before eating bread, although according to rabbinic sources washing after the meal before grace is considered at least of equal importance. The reason given for this latter washing is to remove any salt adhering to the fingers which could cause serious injury to the eyes (Er. 17b). It is possible that these washings derive from contemporary Roman table manners, and there is also mention of washing between courses (*mayim emza'iyyim*, Hul. 105a).

In modern times, priests have their hands washed by the Levites before they perform the ceremony of the Priestly Blessing during public prayer services. The laver thus has become the heraldic symbol for the Levites and often appears on their tombstones. Washing the hands is required on many other occasions, some of which are motivated by hygienic considerations and others by superstitious beliefs. A list of occasions for washing the hands was compiled by Samson b. Zadok in the 13th century; they include immediately on rising from sleep (in order to drive the evil spirits away), before prayer, after leaving the toilet, after touching one's shoes or parts of the body usually covered,



Figure 3. Two-handed copper laver for washing of hands, Poland, 1661.

and after leaving a cemetery. (Tashbaz 276; Sh. Ar., OH 4:18).

The fact that ablation was so widespread in ancient religions and cultures makes it likely that the Jewish practice was influenced by contemporaneous cults. It is, however, difficult to ascertain the extent of this influence and it is possible that the rabbis were reacting against contemporary practices rather than imitating them. It is clear that, to the rabbis, the main purpose of any ablation was to become "holy" and the system they created was meant to keep the Jew conscious of this obligation. "'(God is the hope [Hebrew *'mikveh'*] of Israel)' (Jer. 17:13); just



Figure 4. Silver bowl and jug which were used for washing the hands of the priests. Germany, before 1810.

as the *mikveh* cleanses the impure so will God cleanse Israel" (Yom. 85b).

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# ENCYCLOPAEDIA JUDAICA



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Illumination derived from union with the Divine reaches its highest level in prophecy. Thus, Kook regarded prophecy as the ultimate religious goal.

See also \*Revelation.

[W.S.W.]

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**PROSBUL** (Heb. פְּרוֹסְבֻל or פְּרוֹסְבֻלָּה), a legal formula whereby a creditor could still claim his debts after the \*Sabbatical Year despite the biblical injunction against doing so (Deut. 15:2). The text of the prosbul reads, "I declare before you, so-and-so, the judges in such-and-such a place, that regarding any debt due to me, I may be able to recover any money owing to me from so-and-so at any time I shall desire." The prosbul was signed by witnesses or by the judges of the court before whom the declaration was made (Shev. 10:4, Git. 36a). The principle underlying the prosbul was based on the passage "and this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release that which he hath lent unto his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother . . . Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it; but whatsoever of thine is with thy brother thy hand shall release" (Deut. 15:2, 3). From this the law was deduced that the operation of the year of release did not affect debts of which the bonds had been delivered to the court (*bet din*) before the intervention of the Sabbatical Year (Shev. 10:2), since the Court was regarded as a corporate body to which the words "thy brother," suggesting an individual, did not apply. The court would therefore collect its debts after the Sabbatical Year (Yad, Shemittah ve-Yovel 9:15). Through a slight extension of this precedent, the prosbul was instituted, which in effect amounted to entrusting the court with the collection of the debt. Without actually handing over the bond to the court as previously required, the creditor could secure his debt against forfeiture by making the prescribed declaration.

The prosbul was instituted by Hillel. The Mishnah states that when he saw that the people refrained from giving loans one to another before the Sabbatical Year, thereby transgressing "Beware that there be not a base thought in thy heart," etc. (Deut. 15:9), he instituted the prosbul (Shev. 9:3). The Talmud therefore explained prosbul as *pruz buli u-buti*, meaning an advantage for both the rich and poor. It benefited the rich since it secured their loans, and the poor since it enabled them to borrow (Git. 37a). The word seems, however, to be an abbreviation of the Greek expression πρὸς βουλῇ βουλευτῶν meaning "before the assembly of counselors" (cf. \*Boule). The rabbis later

Prosbul written by Abraham Yeshayahu Karlitz ("Hazon Ish") in 1952, a year before his death. From S. Cohen, *Pe'er ha-Dor: Hayyei Hazon Ish*, Bene-Berak, 1969.

explained that Hillel only abrogated the Mosaic institution of the release of all debts every seventh year since the law of release itself was only of rabbinic authority during the Second Temple period when the Jubilee was not operative because the land was not fully occupied by Israel (Git. 36a-b). It was only permitted to write a prosbul when the debtor possessed some real property from which the debt could be collected. The rabbis were very lenient with this rule, however, and permitted the writing of a prosbul even when the debtor possessed a minute amount of land such as a flowerpot or the trunk of a tree. The creditor was also permitted temporarily to transfer to the debtor a small parcel of land so that the prosbul could be written (Shev. 10:6, 7; Git. 37a). An antedated prosbul was considered valid, but a postdated one was void (Shev. 10:5).

During the Hadrianic persecutions, all religious practices were forbidden on the penalty of death and it was hazardous to preserve a prosbul. The rabbis therefore ruled that a creditor could collect his debt even if he did not produce a prosbul since it was assumed that he previously wrote one, but had destroyed it out of fear (Ket. 9:9). This temporary provision later became the established law, and the creditor was believed when he alleged that he had lost his prosbul (Git. 37b; Sh. Ar., HM 67:33). Orphans were not required to execute one since they were considered wards of the court. Money owed to them was therefore automatically considered as being owed to the court (Git. 37a). The *amoraim* debated the virtue of Hillel's institution. Samuel declared that if he had the power he would abolish it, while R. Nahman held that even if no prosbul was actually written it should have been regarded as written. Samuel also maintained that only the leading courts of each generation could supervise the writing of a prosbul. Subsequent practice, however, entrusted all courts with this responsibility (Git. 36b; Isserles to Sh. Ar., HM 67:18). During the Middle Ages, the writing of prosbuls was widely disregarded since there was an opinion that the laws of the Sabbatical Years were no longer operative (Rema to Sh. Ar., HM 67:1 and commentaries). Nevertheless, meticulous individuals continued to write prosbuls even in modern times (e.g., *Pe'er ha-Dor: Hayyei Hazon Ish*, 2:245; see also \**Takkanot*; \**Usury*). [A.Ro.] and Gentiles").

**PROSELYTES.** There is ample evidence of a widespread conversion to Judaism during the period of the Second Temple, especially the latter part of the period, and the word *ger*, which in biblical times meant a stranger, or an alien, became synonymous with a proselyte (see "Strangers and Gentiles").

Among the notable converts to Judaism may be mentioned the royal family of \**Adiabene*, \**Aquila* and/or \**Onkelos*, \**Flavius Clemens*, the nephew of Vespasian, and Fulvia, wife of Saturninus, a Roman senator. Unique, as the only case of forced conversion in Judaism, was the mass conversion of the Edomites by John \**Hyrkanus*.

In addition to those outstanding figures, however, it is obvious that proselytism was widespread among the ordinary people. The statement of the New Testament that the Pharisees "compass sea and land to make one proselyte" (Matt. 23:15), suggesting a vigorous and active proselytization may possibly be an exaggeration, but on the other hand, the near pride which the rabbis took in the claim that some of their greatest figures were descended from proselytes (see below) point to an openhanded policy toward their acceptance. Such incidents as the different approach of Shammai and Hillel to the request to be taught the principles of Judaism by a potential proselyte (Shabb. 31a) and the incidental mention of "Judah the Ammonite proselyte" (Ber. 28a) point to the fact that the movement was not confined to the upper classes. In fact Josephus states explicitly that in his day the inhabitants of both Greek and barbarian cities evinced a great zeal for Judaism (Contra Ap. 2. 39).

It was during this period that the detailed laws governing the acceptance of proselytes were discussed and codified, and they have remained standard in Orthodox Judaism.

[Ed.]

**Laws of Conversion.** The procedure, established by the *tannaim*, according to which a non-Jew may be accepted into the Jewish faith, was elucidated as follows: "In our days, when a proselyte comes to be converted, we say to him: 'What is your objective? Is it not known to you that today the people of Israel are wretched, driven about, exiled, and in constant suffering?' If he says: 'I know of this and I do not have the merit,' we accept him immediately and we inform him of some of the lighter precepts and of some of the severer ones . . . we inform him of the chastisements for the transgression of these precepts . . . and we also inform him of the reward for observing these precepts . . . we should not overburden him nor be meticulous with him . . ." (Yev. 47a; cf. Ger. 1, in: M. Higger, *Sheva Massekhtot Ketannot* (1930), 68-69). This text refers to a person who converted through conviction. The *halakhah* also accepts a posteriori, proselytes who had converted in order to marry, to advance themselves, or out of fear (Yev. 24b, in the name of Rav, see TJ, Kid. 4:1, 65b-d; Maim. Yad, Issurei Bi'ah 13:17; Sh. Ar., YD 268:12). The acceptance of a proselyte "under the wings of the Divine Presence" is equivalent to Israel's entry into the covenant, i.e., with circumcision, immersion, and offering a sacrifice (Ger. 2:4, in: M. Higger; loc. cit. 72).

A proselyte had to sacrifice a burnt offering either of cattle or two young pigeons. R. Johanan b. Zakkai instituted that in those times when sacrifice was no longer possible, a proselyte was not obliged to set aside money for the sacrifice (Ker. 9a). Therefore, only circumcision and immersion remained. R. Eliezer and R. Joshua disagreed as to whether someone who immersed himself but was not circumcised or vice versa could be considered a proselyte. According to R. Eliezer, he is a proselyte, even if he performed only one of these commandments. R. Joshua, however, maintained that immersion was indispensable. The halakhic conclusion is that "he is not a proselyte unless he has both been circumcised and has immersed himself" (Yev. 46). The act of conversion must take place before a *bet din*, consisting of three members; a conversion carried out by the proselyte when alone is invalid (Yev. 46b-47a). There is a suggestion that the three members of the *bet din* must be witnesses only to his acceptance of the precepts but not to the immersion. Maimonides, however, decided (Yad, Issurei Bi'ah 13:7), that a proselyte who immersed himself in the presence of two members only is not a proselyte. The schools of Shammai and Hillel differed on the issue of a proselyte who had already been circumcised at the time of

his conversion: "Bet Shammai states: 'One must draw from him the blood of circumcision'; Bet Hillel states: 'One need not draw the blood of circumcision from him'" (Tosef., Shab. 15:9; TB, Shab. 135a). Most of the rabbinic authorities decide in favor of Bet Shammai (Tos. to Shab. 135a; Maim. Yad, Issurei Bi'ah 14:5; Sh. Ar., YD 268:1), and "who hast sanctified us with Thy commandments and hast commanded us to circumcise proselytes and to draw from them the blood of the covenant" (Shab. 137b) is said in the circumcision benediction of proselytes.

A proselyte must observe all the precepts that bind Jews. The statement: "There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger that dwelleth amongst you" (Ex. 12:49), which refers to the paschal lamb, the sages interpreted to mean that the stranger (proselyte) was the equal of the citizen concerning all the precepts of the Torah (Mekh. Pisha, 15). They tried to equalize the status of the proselyte and that of the Jew; certain differences stemming from the origin of the convert, however, remained. According to an anonymous Mishnah, a proselyte may not confess himself after taking out the tithes since the statement occurs in the confession "the land which Thou hast given to us"; nor does he read the section on the first fruits, where the statement is: "which the Lord hath sworn unto our fathers to give unto us." The proselyte, praying by himself must say: "the God of the Fathers of Israel"; in the synagogue he says: "the God of your Fathers" (Ma'as. Sh. 5:14; Bik. 1:4). According to one tradition, R. Judah permitted a proselyte to read the section on the first fruits, claiming that Abraham was the father of the whole world (TJ, Bik. 1:4, 64a; but in Tosef., Bik. 1:2 this permission is only extended to the Kenites). The Palestinian *amoraim*, R. Joshua b. Levi and R. Avihu, agreed with R. Judah. The authorities (particularly R. Samson in his commentary to *Bikkurim* (*ibid.*), and Maimonides in his letter to Obadiah the Proselyte, below) in permitting a proselyte to say "the God of our Fathers" in the prayers based themselves on the same rationale.

A proselyte terminates all former family ties upon conversion and "is considered a newly born child." His Jewish name is not associated with that of his father and he is referred to as "the son of Abraham (our father)." Later, it became the custom to name the proselyte himself after the first Jew who knew his Creator "Abraham the son of Abraham." According to the letter of the law, a proselyte may marry his relatives. The sages, however, decreed against this "So that they should not say: 'We have come from a greater sanctity to a lesser sanctity'" (Yev. 22a, Yad, Issurei Bi'ah 14:12). The disqualifications pertaining to testimony of relatives in judicial cases of family members do not apply to the proselyte; his relatives also may not inherit from him. If no heirs were born to him after his conversion, his property and his possessions are considered not to belong to anyone, and whoever takes hold of them becomes their owner (BB 3:3, 4:9; Git. 39a; Yad, Zekhi'ah u-Mattanah 1:6).

A proselyte may marry a Jewish woman, even the daughter of a \*priest (Kid. 73a; Yad, Issurei Bi'ah 19:11; Sh. Ar., EH 7:22). A female proselyte, however, cannot marry a kohen, unless she was converted during childhood, not later than the age of three years and one day (Yev. 60b; Kid. 78a). R. Yose permits the marriage of the daughter of a male or female proselyte to a kohen; R. Eliezer b. Jacob, however, disputes the matter. The statement "From the day of the destruction of the Temple, the kohanim have preserved their dignity and followed the opinion of R. Eliezer b. Jacob" shows that tradition tended toward the latter's opinion. The *amoraim*, however, decided that he be followed only in those cases where the marriage has not yet



taken place. If a female proselyte is already married to a kohen, she is not bound to leave him (Kid. 4:7; TB, Kid. 78b; Yad, Issurei Bi'ah 19:12). A proselyte may also marry a \*mamzer ("bastard"). According to some opinions, the permission may extend over ten generations, while others claim it should be only until his heathen origin is forgotten (Kid. 72b, 75a).

A proselyte cannot be appointed to any public office. The rabbis based their decision on the verse: "Thou shalt appoint over thee a king from among thy brothers—appointments shall be only from among thy brothers." This injunction does not apply to a proselyte whose mother or father are of Jewish origin (Yev. 45b; Kid. 76b; Tos. Sot. 41b, Yad, Melakhim 1:4). A proselyte may not hold the office of judge in a criminal court; he may act as such in a civil court (Sanh. 36b) and also judge a fellow proselyte, even in a criminal law case (Rashi to Yev. 102a). Unless one of his parents was born Jewish, most authorities bar a proselyte from acting as judge even in a civil court (Alfasi on Sanh. 4:2, Yad, Sanh. 2:9, 11:11). Others are of the opinion that even in a civil court he can only judge a fellow proselyte (Tos. Yev. 45b; RaShBA on Yev. 102a).

**Appreciation of the Proselyte.** In the Talmud and the Midrashim, as well as in other contemporary literature, the accepted attitude toward proselytes is usually positive. There is, however, strong evidence in rabbinic sources that some authorities were opposed to the concept of conversion and proselytes. Those scholars who ignore or obliterate such evidence cannot be justified. The differences in outlook found in rabbinic sources can partly be explained by disparities in character and temperament. However, the deciding factors were usually contemporary conditions and the personal experiences of the rabbis. R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, who was under ban, objected to the acceptance of proselytes (Eccles. R. 1:8). When \*Aquila the Proselyte wondered and asked: "Is this all the love which the Lord hath given unto the proselyte, as it is written 'and He loveth the stranger to give him bread and clothing?'" R. Eliezer was angry with him, but R. Joshua comforted him, saying: "Bread means Torah . . . clothing means the *tallit*: the man who is worthy to have the Torah, will also acquire its precepts; his daughters may marry into the priesthood and their grandsons will sacrifice burnt offerings on the altar." (Gen. R. 70:5). It is possible that R. Eliezer's negative attitude may have been influenced by his contacts with the first Christians. He may have seen that many of the new heretics were proselytes who had relapsed and it is only concerning these that he said, "They revert to their evil ways" (BM 59b). The same R. Eliezer also states: "When a person comes to you in sincerity to be converted, do not reject him, but on the contrary encourage him" (Mekh. Amalek 3). From his time, proselytes out of conviction were mentioned in the benediction for the righteous and the pious in the *Amidah* (Meg. 17b). The bitter experience of Jews with proselytes in times of war and revolt influenced the negative attitude to conversion. Proselytes and their offspring became renegades, often slandering their new religion and denouncing the Jewish community and its leaders to the foreign rulers. In Josephus there is a description of Hellenist proselytes who apostatized and returned to their evil ways (Jos., Apion 2:123). Reference to the situation which existed after the destruction of the Temple and the abortive revolt which followed it is made in the *baraita* statement: "Insincere proselytes who wear *tefillin* on the heads and on their arms, *zizit* in their clothes, and who fix *mezuzot* on their doors—when the war of Gog and Magog will come . . . each one of them will remove the precepts from himself and go on his way. . . ." (Av. Zar. 3b). At the time of the revolt of Bar Kokhba the expression

"they impede the arrival of the Messiah" (Nid. 13b), referred to such proselytes. At the same epoch, R. Nehemiah taught: a proselyte who converted in order to marry or converted to enjoy the royal table or to become a servant of Solomon, proselytes who converted from fear of the lions (see: II Kings 17:24–28), proselytes who converted because of a dream, or the proselytes of Mordecai and Esther, are not acceptable as proselytes, unless they convert themselves (as) at the present time (Yev. 24b), i.e., by conviction in times of political decline, oppressions, persecutions, and lack of any material benefit. R. Simeon b. Yohai, upon seeing Judah b. Gerim ("a son of proselytes"), who was responsible for the rabbi's criticism of the Romans reaching the ears of the rulers, said: "Is this one still in the world!" and set his eyes upon him, turning him into a heap of bones (Shab. 33b–34a). This experience throws light on the commentary of R. Simeon: "Those who feared the Lord were a hindrance to Israel . . . the best of the gentiles, you should put to death . . ." (Mekh. Va-Yehi 2). His real opinions, however, found expression in the commentary (Mekh. Nezikim (Mishpatim) 18): "It is said—'And those that are beloved by Him are compared to the sun when it rises in all its strength'; Now who is greater—he who loves the king or he whom the king loves? One must say—he whom the king loves, as the verse says: 'and He loves the stranger [proselyte]'"; the statement of R. Hiyya: "Do not have any faith in a proselyte until 24 generations have passed because the inherent evil is still within him" (Mid. Ruth Zuta on 1:12); and other statements of *amoraim* who despised proselytes: "Proselytes are as hard for Israel [to endure] as a sore" (Yev. 47b) were prompted by the bad experiences Jews had with proselytes who had turned national or religious recreants. To these the rabbis referred: "The proselytes who left Egypt with Moses, made it [the Golden Calf] and said to Israel: These are your gods" (Ex. R. 42:6). The rabbis distinguished between three categories of proselytes: "Proselytes are of three types: There are some like Abraham our Father, some like Hamor, and some that are like heathens in all respects" (SER 27). In the teachings of the *amoraim* the basic tone is that of the tannaitic statement: "Proselytes are beloved; in every place He considers them as part of Israel" (Mekh. *ibid.*). They too made efforts "not to close the door before the proselytes who may come" (*ibid.*). In the third century, R. Johanan and R. Eleazar separately deduced from different verses that "the Holy One, Blessed be He, exiled Israel among the nations only in order to increase their numbers with the addition of proselytes" (Pes. 87b). R. Eleazar also said: "Whoever befriends a proselyte is considered as if he created him" (Gen. R. 84:4). There are numerous other statements which praise proselytes (e.g., Tanh. Lekh Lekha 6; Num. R. 8:9; Mid. Ps. 146:8). A tendency to increase the honor of the proselytes and to glorify conversion can perhaps be found in the tradition which traces the origins of such great personalities as R. Meir, R. Akiva, Shemaiah, and Avtalyon to proselytes. They were descendants of such wicked men as Sisera, Sennacherib, Haman, and Nero (Git. 56a, 57b; Sanh. 96b). The name of R. Akiva's father does not appear explicitly in the Talmud, but *Dikdukei Soferim*, *ibid.*, 9 (1878), 283 and also Maimonides' introduction to *Mishneh Torah* relate that Joseph, the father of R. Akiva, was a proselyte by conviction. The last of the Babylonian *amoraim*, R. Ashi, said that the destiny of the proselytes had also been determined at Mount Sinai (Shab. 146a). Most of the rabbis of the Talmud observed the tradition: "When a proselyte comes to be converted, one receives him with an open hand so as to bring him under the wings of the Divine Presence" (SER 7; Lev. R. 2:9).

**Post Talmudic.** During the following era the propo-

nents of the two ruling monotheistic religions—in contrast to polytheism—regarded abandonment of their faith and transfer to another religion as a capital offense. The canons of the Church forbade proselytism and Christian rulers fiercely opposed any tendency to adopt Jewish religious customs. The number of proselytes diminished in Christian countries, and those who endangered their lives by adherence to Israel were generally compelled to flee to lands beyond the bounds of the rule of the Church.

At the commencement of this period, however, during the period of transition from polytheism to belief in One God, Judaism also succeeded in winning the hearts of the upper classes of two peoples, as formerly occurred with the kingdom of \*Adiabene. In the fifth century the kings of \*Himyar in southern Arabia adopted Judaism, and in the first half of the eighth century the upper classes of the \*Khazars. There is no information about Muslim proselytes, but the adoption of Judaism by Christians in Muslim countries was not forbidden, and even common. The sources chiefly mention Christian male and female slaves in the houses of Jews whose owners were enjoined by Jewish law to circumcise them and have them undergo ritual immersion. The *geonim* \*Sar Shalom and \*Zemah Zedek b. Isaac were asked about a "gentile woman slave who was conversant with the idolatry of the Christians and was compelled to undergo ritual immersion by her owner," and about "a slave woman who says I am a Jewess, but acts in all respects like a gentile" (*Ozar ha-Ge'onim*, Yev. 114). They also mention that there are some slaves "who become proselytes immediately and some eventually. Some of these do not want to convert at all; most are such and do not convert but there are some who say: 'Wait until we see your laws and learn them, and we shall convert . . .'" (*ibid.*, 199). It may be assumed that many of these slaves became assimilated into the Jewish community. Sometimes Jews became over-intimate with women slaves and had them undergo ritual immersion for the purpose of proselytism; their children were regarded as full-fledged proselytes. The best known of these cases concerns the Exilarch \*Bustanai b. Haninai (*ibid.*, 39–43, 173).

Besides such converts, there were also proselytes from conviction in Christian countries who voluntarily adopted Judaism out of love for Jewish law and about whom only fragmentary information has been preserved. Such proselytes were mainly members of the Christian clergy, whom theological study, and especially comparison of the New Testament with its roots in the Old, brought to Judaism. After becoming proselytes some even attempted to win over souls for their new religion. \*Bodo-Eleazar, court deacon of Louis the Pious in the ninth century, escaped to Muslim Spain and wrote sharp polemics attacking Christianity (B. Blumenkranz, in: *RHPR*, 34 (1954), 401–13). In 1012 the priest Vicilinus in Mainz became a proselyte, and he, too, wrote works to prove from the Bible the correctness of his course and the truth of the religion of Israel. Some scholars consider that his action was the cause of the expulsion of the Jews from Mainz by Emperor Henry II (Aronius, *Regesten*, nos. 144, 147). From about the same period record has been preserved about a wealthy Christian woman of distinguished family who became a proselyte, settled in Narbonne, and married R. David, a member of the family of the *nasi* \*Todros.

One remarkable case of proselytism in the Middle Ages concerns the Norman proselyte \*Obadiah (c. 1100), a member of a noble family of Oppido in Lucano, southern Italy. The events that befell him are known from a number of fragments preserved in the Cairo \**Genizah*. This proselyte left notes in which he introduces himself by his gentile name Johannes and relates first concerning "the

archbishop Andreas, chief priest of the province of Bari . . . in [whose] heart God placed love of the Torah of Moses. He left his land and priesthood, and all his glory, went to the province of Castantinia and circumcised himself. Troubles and evils befell him. He arose and fled for his life because the uncircumcised sought to kill him, and God delivered him from their hands. . . . strangers arose after him, saw his deeds, and acted as he had done, and they too entered the covenant of the Living God. This man then went to Egypt and dwelt there until his death. The name of the king of Egypt at that time was Al-Mustanzir . . ." News of the action of Andreas, bishop of Bari from 1062 to 1078, spread throughout Greece and Italy and reached the ears of Johannes while he was a youth. In the first year of his entering the priesthood he had a dream which influenced him to follow in the path of Andreas. In 1102 he was circumcised and began to observe the Sabbath and the festivals, and even wrote pamphlets calling upon all religious people to return to the religion of Israel. The authorities, however, imprisoned him and threatened to kill him unless he repented of his deeds. He succeeded in escaping, arrived in Baghdad, and dwelt in "the home of Isaac b. Moses, head of the Academy." He also visited Jewish communities in Syria, Erez Israel, and Egypt, and wrote the events of his life.

There were also proselytes who remained in Christian countries and apparently succeeded in concealing themselves from the vigilance of the Church by roaming from one country to another. There is also mention of a proselyte family at the time of Jacob \*Tam which originated in Hungary and was living in northern France or Germany. The father, Abraham the proselyte, interpreted the rabbinic dictum "Proselytes are as hard for Israel [to endure] as a sore" (Yev. 47b) in favor of proselytes: because they are meticulous in observing the precepts they are hard for the Jews since they recall their iniquities. He and his two sons Isaac and Joseph, engaged in biblical interpretation, taking issue with Christian exegesis, and also criticizing the Gospels and the Christian prayers. A pupil of Jacob Tam, \*Moses b. Abraham of Pontoise, tells of a proselyte who used to study "Bible and Mishnah day and night." Six *piyyutim* composed by the *paytan* Josephiah the proselyte who lived in France in the 12th century are known (Zunz, *Lit Poesie*, 469). Toward the end of the 12th century a proselyte living in Wuerzburg who knew "the language of the priests" (i.e., Latin) but not Hebrew made a copy of the Pentateuch for his own use from "a rejected book belonging to priests." R. Joel permitted this proselyte to act as reader for the congregation.

A talmudist who was a proselyte by conviction sent halakhic queries to \*Maimonides, who addressed him in respectful terms: "Master and teacher, the intelligent and enlightened Obadiah, the righteous proselyte," and wrote to him, "You are a great scholar and possess an understanding mind, for you have understood the issues and known the right way." In his letters to this proselyte, Maimonides expresses high appreciation of proselytism and the proselyte: he permits him to pray:

. . . as every native Israelite prays and recites blessings . . . anyone who becomes a proselyte throughout the generations and anyone who unifies the Name of the Holy One as it is written in the Torah is a pupil of our father Abraham and all of them are members of his household . . . hence you may say, Our God, and the God of our fathers; for Abraham, peace be upon him, is your father . . . for since you have entered beneath the wings of the Divine Presence and attached yourself to Him, there is no difference between us and you. . . . You certainly recite the blessings: Who has chosen us; Who has given us; Who has caused us to inherit; and Who has separated us. For the Creator has already chosen you and has separated

you from the nations and has given you the Torah, as the Torah was given to us and to proselytes. . . . Further, do not belittle your lineage: if we trace our descent to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, your connection is with Him by Whose word the universe came into being.

(Resp. Rambam (ed. Freimann), no. 42). Concerning the vexations and humiliating words violently addressed to this proselyte by certain Jews, Maimonides writes to him:

Toward father and mother we are commanded honor and reverence, toward the prophets to obey them, but toward proselytes we are commanded to have great love in our inmost hearts. . . . God, in His glory, loves proselytes. . . . A man who left his father and birthplace and the realm of his people at a time when they are powerful, who understood with his insight, and who attached himself to this nation which today is a despised people, the slave of rulers, and recognized and knew that their religion is true and righteous. . . . and pursued God . . . and entered beneath the wings of the Divine Presence . . . the Lord does not call you fool [Heb. *kesil*], but intelligent [*maskil*] and understanding, wise and walking correctly, a pupil of Abraham our father . . .

(*ibid.*, no. 369). There were proselytes who suffered martyrdom (*\*Kiddush ha-Shem*) and even those who became proselytes with this intention. Among those who suffered martyrdom during the massacres of the First Crusade in 1096 was a man whose "mother was not Jewish"; before his martyrdom he said: "hitherto you have scorned me." In 1264 the burning took place at Augsburg of "Abraham, son of Abraham our Father, of Ishpurk, who rejected the gods of the nations, broke the heads of the idols . . . and was tormented with severe tortures." This proselyte had conducted a campaign for Judaism among the Christians and attacked the symbols of Christianity. Elegies on his death were written by the great scholars of the generation; *\*Mordecai b. Hillel ha-Kohen* described how the man became a proselyte: "And Abraham journeyed, reaching the Hebrew religion, attached himself to the house of Jacob and cut his foreskin," and related that the words spoken by the proselyte in public against his former religion were the cause of his being burned at the stake: "when he proclaimed his ideas . . . in the town, he was taken to the stake." Another elegist spoke of his courage during his life and at his death: "He walked in purity and broke images . . . he revealed the glory of the Creator to the nations, denying belief in the crucified one; to martyrdom he walked like a bridegroom to the bride." In 1270 Abraham b. Abraham of France was burned in Wiesenburg. He was a respected monk and fled from his country after he became a proselyte: "he rejected images and came to take refuge in the shadow of the wings of the Living God." In 1275 it was noted that a monk, Robert of Reading, became a proselyte in England.

It is difficult to ascertain with certainty the extent of proselytism in the Middle Ages. The historical sources mention isolated cases only. However, the fact that such cases recurred in every generation, as well as the preachings and admonitions by the heads of Church against *\*Judaizing* and the many regulations and decrees they issued to prevent this danger, testifies to the persistence of the phenomenon, at least to a limited extent. Some scholars regard proselytism as being of quantitative significance also during the Middle Ages and explain the marked anthropological differences between the various Jewish communities, and the resemblance of every community to the ethnic type of its environment, as being due in great measure to the inflow of external ethnic elements which continued at least throughout the first half of the Middle Ages.

With the decline in the number of proselytes by conviction, the fundamental attitude of the medieval Jewish scholars toward proselytism as a phenomenon of profound

religious significance did not change, and some of them continued to consider that the purpose of Israel's dispersion among the nations was to gain proselytes. *\*Moses b. Jacob of Coucy* (mid-13th century) explains to his contemporaries that they must act uprightly toward gentiles since "so long as they [i.e., Jews] act deceitfully toward them, who will attach themselves to them?" (*Semag*, Asayin 74). *\*Isaiah b. Mali di Trani* the Younger permits the teaching of the books of the Prophets and the Hagiographa to gentiles, because he regards them as consolation spoken to Israel, "and as a result he [the gentile] may mend his ways" (*Shiltei Gibborim*, Av. Zar., ch. 1).

**In Modern Times.** The Jewish attitude to proselytism at the beginning of the modern period was inclined to be negative; aspirations to win over people of other faiths to Judaism dwindled. However, the *\*bet din* has no authority to repudiate proselytes wishing to convert despite the admonitions concerning the gravity of such a step; the *\*Shulhan Arukh* and the other *posekim* of the period left the laws concerning proselytism in force, but examination of the texts reveals, and at times it is even expressly stated, that it was only a formal duty to accept proselytes, and, indeed, attempts at active conversion were infrequent. However, isolated cases of conversion continued to occur. Proselytes were associated with the Hebrew press in *\*Amsterdam*, in various cities in Germany, in *\*Constantinople* and *\*Salonika* (see A. Yaari, in: KS, 13 (1936/37), 243-8). A Christian who visited Jerusalem in 1494-96 relates that he found there two monks "who had three years before gone over from the Christian faith to the Jewish religion" (*Die Pilgerfahrt des Ritters Arnold von Harfi* (ed. by E. V. Groote (1860), 187). On the other hand, there is no real evidence to indicate attempts at actual conversion or proselytizing activity in the "Jewish heresy" (see *\*Judaizers*) that was reported in the Orthodox Church in the principality of Moscow at the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th century.

R. Solomon *\*Luria* warned against receiving proselytes, and the Jewish councils of Lithuania and Moravia even threatened to impose severe penalties on anyone who began to proselytize or gave protection to converts. The reason for this in part stemmed from the fear of the consequences and dangers this activity entailed, since it was severely prohibited by the authorities. The Jewish communities in Poland and Lithuania were more than once obliged to clear themselves of the charge of proselytizing, and it is not always clear whether this was the result of a false accusation by agitators or of the prevalent public opinion in regard to actual occurrences.

When Lutheranism began to spread in Poland in the 16th century, many who inclined to "reforms" were accused by the Catholics of "Judaizing." In 1539 an old woman of 80, Catherine *\*Weigel*, the wife of a citizen of Cracow, was burned at the stake for having embraced Judaism; the clarification of her case took ten years. Before she perished she said: "God had neither wife nor son . . . we are His children and all who walk in His ways are His children." Jews were falsely accused of smuggling proselytes into Turkey, and an official investigation of this matter took place in Lithuania causing great harm to the Jews of that country. Nevertheless, it appears that most Jews not only refrained outwardly from engaging in proselytizing activities as the result of external pressures and penalties, but the attitude of Judaism itself in that period formed an important factor. The Jews increasingly withdrew from the outside world; the difference between Judaism and the other faiths was regarded as an inherent, radical distinction between two unbridgeable worlds with scarcely any points of contact. The general tendency of that entire period is

expressed in the words of Solomon Luria: "Would that the seed of Israel continue to stand fast and hold its own among the nations throughout the days of our exile and no stranger be added to us who is not of our nation."

With the relative toleration that began to prevail in the ruling circles and among intellectuals in the 17th century, especially in Western Europe, the negative attitude to Christianity among Jews diminished. There was a growing tendency not to regard Christianity as an idolatrous religion but to look upon its adherents as Noachides (see \*Noachide Laws) who are absolved from the belief in absolute monotheism. Such a view left no room for conversion efforts to bring Christians under the wings of the *Shekhinah*. This abandonment of conversionary activity on the part of Jews was thus given a theoretical, intellectual basis. However, individual proselytes continued to find their way to Judaism by their own inner conviction. At the end of the 16th century a pious Christian who embraced Judaism on his own initiative is known (see \*Germanus, Moses). In 1716 two Christian women were put to death in \*Dubno because they became Jews; in 1738 the naval officer Alexander \*Voznitzin was publicly burned to death in Russia for having become a Jew, together with the Jew, Baruch b. Leib, who persuaded him to take this step. The memory of the "*Ger Zedek* of Vilna," Count Valentine \*Potocki, who was allegedly burned in Vilna in 1746, is preserved in popular folklore. Another notable 18th-century proselyte was the English politician Lord George \*Gordon.

The Enlightenment strengthened this inclination to religious contraction. The slogan of religious toleration discouraged propaganda activities among the different faiths. The *maskilim* pointed with pride to the resemblance between the principles of Enlightenment and the aims of Judaism—which, in their opinion, were tolerance. Emphasis on Jewish tolerance and abandonment of all active proselytizing became a fixed principle in modern Jewish \*apologetics. This apologetical attitude even influenced study of the past, and historical accounts tended to ignore that active Jewish proselytizing had occurred, as if Judaism had never desired to make converts. There was no change from the psychological point of view in the self-defensive attitude of Judaism even after it had been granted a status of juridical equality with the other religions of the state. Even though no legal obstacles now prevent proselytizing little attempt has been made to propagate conversion.

A certain number of proselytes came from the sects of the Sabbath Observers in Russia (see \*Judaizers; \*Somrei Sabat), who adopted a number of Jewish customs and finally went over to Judaism completely. Others embraced Judaism because of an experience or religious conviction, but chiefly it was the result of unhampered social contacts that ended with intermarriage (see also \*San Nicandro).

[EH/Ed.]

**Recent Trends.** Whereas in some countries of the Diaspora, particularly England and South Africa, there was a distinct tendency to adopt more stringent regulations for the acceptance of proselytes in the Orthodox community, it was generally appreciated that a greater leniency could be permitted in the State of Israel, since the prospective proselytes, most of whom were either partners in, or the children of, mixed marriages, would become much more integrated in the Jewish people than would be likely in the Diaspora. Despite this the rabbinical authorities were slow to alleviate the difficulties in the way of applicants for proselytization. They normally insisted on a year's postponement of consideration after making application, and on the ability and undertaking of the candidate to adhere to the requirements of Orthodox Judaism. From 1948 to 1968,

2,288 proselytes were accepted by the rabbinical courts of Israel, out of a total of 4,010 who applied. A tendency toward leniency became more pronounced at the beginning of the 1970s as a result of two factors. One was the expectation of an increased immigration from Soviet Russia where, owing to prevailing circumstances, intermarriage had taken place on an unprecedented scale; and the other was the situation created by the amendment to the Law of Return adopted by the Knesset in 1970. Two provisions made the need for an acceleration of proselytization urgent. The first was that the law was extended to include the partners, children, and grandchildren of mixed marriages who were not Jews according to *halakhah*, and the second that, whereas in Israel only those converted in accordance with *halakhah* were registered as Jews, in the case of immigrants, conversion by Reform and Conservative rabbis was accepted by the civil authorities for these immigrants to be registered as Jews. The resulting anomaly, that these non-Orthodox proselytes were regarded as Jews by the civil authorities while their conversion was not accepted by the Orthodox rabbinate, which was the only legal body determining personal status, had to be reduced as much as possible. In 1971 the Ministry for Religious Affairs, for the first time, established schools for prospective proselytes in Israel, at the Orthodox kibbutzim of \*Sa'ad and \*Lavi, where candidates may undergo an intensive course in Judaism.

There have also been a number of instances of the conversion of Muslims to Judaism (see A. Rotem, in: *Mahanayim*, no. 92 (1964), 159).

In 1955 a World Union for the Propagation of Judaism was established in the belief that the time had come for Jews to undertake conversionist activity, and it published a brochure, *Jedion*. There was, however, little response to this suggestion from the public, and some of the steps taken in that direction, particularly among the \*Chuetas, proved abortive.

See also \*Jew.

[L.I.R.]

**In the U.S.** In 17th-century colonial America Jewish slaveholders, following ancient custom, converted their slaves to Judaism. A number of Negro Jewish congregations in the United States are made up, in part, of the descendants of these early proselytes. During the first quarter of the 18th century a community of German Baptists, in what is now Schaefferstown, Pennsylvania, voluntarily "Judaized." They observed dietary laws and the Sabbath, built a "schul" and a home for their *hazzan* from rough logs, and in 1732 laid out a cemetery. The community lasted from about 1720 to 1745. The cemetery—now destroyed—was still intact in 1885; the home of the *hazzan* still stood in 1926 but was destroyed later. Whether or not these "Judaizers" actually became Jewish proselytes is uncertain.

The earliest well-known U.S. proselyte was a Quaker, Warder \*Cresson, who became U.S. consul in Jerusalem in 1844. There, in 1848, he converted and assumed the name of Michael Cresson Boaz Israel. His American wife divorced him and he then married a Palestinian Jewess. He was a prominent member of the Jerusalem Sephardi community and is buried on the Mount of Olives.

The first incorporated Jewish missionary society in modern times, the United Israel World Union (U.I.W.U.), was established in New York City in 1944 by the journalist David Horowitz. Groups of U.I.W.U. proselytes have their own congregations in Wilbur, West Virginia, and West Olive, Michigan. Another such missionary society, the Jewish Information Society of America, was founded in Chicago in 1962. U.S. Reform Judaism has maintained that Jews have an obligation to teach their religion to all

mankind and to attract like-minded non-Jews into the Jewish community. This theoretical determination was followed by the establishment in 1951 of a Committee on the Unaffiliated, by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, to develop "practical means for extending the influence and acceptance of the Jewish religion." The Conservative rabbinate declined to undertake such efforts, although it accepted prospective converts. The Orthodox remained extremely reluctant to accept converts, making stringent demands of all prospective candidates.

Reports from 785 U.S. congregational rabbis in 1954 regarding conversions to Judaism in the United States showed that approximately 3,000 persons were then being converted annually to Judaism. The number increased yearly. In 95% of the conversions, an impending or existing marriage to a Jew was involved; female proselytes outnumbered males five to one. [D.M.E.]

**Non-Orthodox Views.** Reform rabbis have insisted upon a training in Judaism and the reading of books as prerequisites for conversion. However, in conflict with the traditional Jewish attitude they have stressed the importance of the declaration of faith by the convert, disregarding the ritual aspects of conversion to Judaism (*tevilah*, and in the case of male converts, circumcision). In 1892 the Central Conference of American Rabbis (C.C.A.R.) decided that any Reform rabbi in conjunction with two colleagues could accept as a convert any person without any initiatory rite, and also published manuals for guiding their rabbis in regard to conversion. Nor did Reform follow the *halakhah* with regard to children—children of converted parents born prior to their conversion are considered Jews if the parents declare they will raise them as Jews. With regard to children of school age their confirmation at the end of their schooling is considered the ceremony of their official entry into Judaism. Children past confirmation age are considered adults, and have to undergo instruction prior to conversion.

The Conservative movement has always officially upheld the *halakhah* as regards the ceremonies of conversion. They demand that three rabbis be present, but they emphasize the preparation of the proselyte in Jewish sources and texts on Jewish history and customs. In 1970 the Rabbinical Assembly committee on Jewish Law and standards reaffirmed that its members "may not conduct a conversion *ab initio* without *tevilah*." [Ed.]

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**PROSKAUER, JOSEPH MEYER** (1877–1971), U.S. lawyer and community leader. Proskauer, who was born in Mobile, Alabama, was a partner in the law firm Elkus,

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Gleason, and Proskauer from 1903 to 1923, then served as judge in the Appellate Division of the First Department of the Supreme Court of New York (1923–30). A close associate of Alfred E. Smith, whom he first met through his political activities for the Citizens Union in New York, Proskauer served with Belle \*Moskowitz and Robert \*Moses on the non-Tammany faction of the "War Board" which helped Smith plan his gubernatorial campaigns, and later worked closely with Smith in his 1928 presidential campaign. In 1935 Proskauer served on the New York City Charter Revision Commission.

Early in the Nazi regime, he joined the \*American Jewish Committee. He became its president in 1943 on the platform "Statement of Views with Respect to the Present Situation in Jewish Life," prepared by him, Irving \*Lehman, Samuel I. \*Rosenman, and George Z. \*Medalie, which proposed free Jewish immigration into Palestine and an international trusteeship status but opposed a Jewish state. From October 1947, however, the committee publicly supported creation of a Jewish state in the form proposed by the UN Special Commission on Palestine. Proskauer led it in the thrust for a Jewish state. Elected essentially as an anti-Zionist, his 1948 presidential address, "Our Duty as Americans—Our Responsibility as Jews," marked his complete commitment to political Zionism. The desire to find a common Jewish front on settlement of the Palestine question and the need for continued support from the U.S. Jewish community for the committee's primary interest in Jewish defense probably contributed to Proskauer's change of direction. In his *Segment of My Times* (1950), he describes his pre-1943 anti-Zionist stand as based on instinctive opposition to a state identified with a religion; once he began to study the problem as committee president, he found that the U.S. form of national allegiance he was committed to could not apply in Eastern Europe, where Jews were accorded only partial rights. He thus came to believe that a state in which they could be free was essential. Proskauer remained committee president until 1949. He had served as consultant to the U.S. delegation to the 1945 UN Conference in San Francisco. Proskauer returned to private law practice as senior member of Proskauer, Rose, Goetz, and Mendelsohn. He was chairman of the New York State Crime Commission in 1951–53 and also served as director of the National Refugee Service.

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**PROSKUROV** (today **Khmelnitoki**), city in Kamenets-Podolski oblast, Ukrainian S.S.R. In 1765 there were 750 Jews in the city who paid poll tax; by 1847 the number had risen to 3,107. With the expansion of the city toward the end of the 19th century, the Jewish population increased, reaching 11,411 (50% of the total population) in 1897. With the retreat of Ukrainian troops before the Red Army in February 1919, Proskurov suffered one of the most vicious pogroms of the civil war period. Units of local Communist forces, both Ukrainians and Jews, rebelled and attempted to gain control of the railroad station. On the failure of the attempt, Semosenko, hetman of the Ukrainian troops stationed in the city, gave orders to slaughter all the Jews. On February 15th Semosenko's forces marched into the city, methodically killing every Jew they could find. A local priest who begged the soldiers to stop was killed at the door of his own church. Three and a half hours after the soldiers had entered the city, a telegraphed order came from headquarters, calling a halt to the slaughter, but by then 1,500 people had been murdered and thousands injured. Despite the demands made by representatives of the Jewish community to the \*Petlyura government, Semosenko was

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# ENCYCLOPAEDIA JUDAICA



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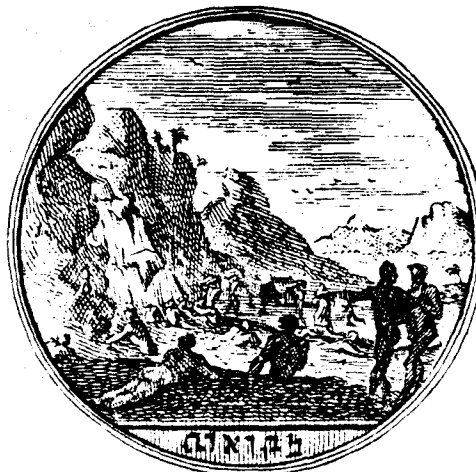
The yeshivah of Mikulov was renowned, and many well-known rabbis held office in the town; nearly all of them were simultaneously chief rabbis of Moravia (see \*Moravia). The scholar Abraham \*Trebitsch lived in Mikulov and Aloys and Joseph von Sonnenfels were natives of the town.

In 1936 a Moravian Jewish museum was founded in Mikulov; it was transferred to Brno at the time of the Sudeten crisis, and from there to the Central Jewish Museum in Prague. The community dispersed at this time; many of its members were deported to the Nazi extermination camps from Brno in 1941 and 1942. It was not reestablished after World War II. The synagogue was demolished as a public hazard in 1950.

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**MIKVA'OT** (מִקְוֹת; "Ritual Baths"), the sixth tractate in the order of the *Tohorot* in the Mishnah and the Tosefta. The tractate consists of ten chapters and deals wholly with the details of the \*mikveh. Chapter 1 classifies *mikva'ot* according to the grade of their purity and purifying effect, from ponds or ditches containing less than 40 *se'ah* (c. 750 liters; see \*Weights and Measures) and therefore invalid, to those of the highest grade, consisting of *mayim hayyim* ("pure spring water"). Chapter 2 discusses cases of "doubtful impurity" (e.g., if a person is not sure whether he has immersed properly or whether the *mikveh* was ritually fit), and then deals with the problem of *mayim she'uvim* ("drawn water"). Chapters 3 and 4 continue with various aspects of *mayim she'uvim*, e.g., how a *mikveh* invalidated by *mayim she'uvim* can be made ritually fit, or how to direct rainwater from a roof into a *mikveh* without letting the water pass through a "vessel" in order to prevent the water's becoming *mayim she'uvim*. Chapter 5 deals mainly with the fitness of springs, rivers, and seas as *mikva'ot*. Chapter 6 is concerned with the question of a body of water linked with a *mikveh*, or two *mikva'ot* connected so that the water of the one "touches" the water of the other (*hashakah*), which is of great significance in the construction of the modern *mikveh*. Chapter 7 discusses the minimal requirement of 40 *se'ah*, especially whether snow, ice, etc. may complete that measure. Chapter 8 first deals with the halakhic difference between *mikva'ot* of the Holy Land and those of other countries; it then discusses problems touching on seminal issue and menstruation. Chapter 9 discusses the problem of *haziqah* ("interposition"). Chapter 10 deals with vessels or any other artifact requiring purification in a *mikveh*.

All the Tosefta manuscripts of *Mikva'ot* contain seven chapters, but the printed one contains eight chapters. The Tosefta quotes traditions about queries raised by the inhabitants of Asia (Ezion-Geber, on the shore of the Red



Engraving for the tractate *Mikva'ot*, showing immersion in a natural pool, from a title page of the Hebrew-Latin Mishnah illustrated by Mich. Richey. Amsterdam, 1700-04, Jerusalem, J.N.U.L.

festivals (4:6); about R. Gamaliel and Onkelos the Proselyte bathing in the sea at Ashkelon (6:3); and about discussions which took place among 32 scholars in Lydda (7(8):11). Although there is no Babylonian or Jerusalem Talmud on *Mikva'ot*, several of its Mishnayot are explained in the Babylonian Talmud; for example, Mishnah 4:1 is explained in *Shabbat* 16b, Mishnah 7:2 in *Yevamot* 82b and *Zevahim* 22a, Mishnah 7:4 in *Shabbat* 144b, Mishnah 8:4 in *Hullin* 24b, Mishnah 9:1 in *Shabbat* 57a, and Mishnah 9:5 and 6 in *Shabbat* 114a. This tractate was translated into English by H. Danby (1933) and The Soncino Press (1948).

**Bibliography:** H. Albeck, *Shishah Sidrei Mishnah, Seder Tohorot* (1959), 337-9. [A.Z.E.]

**MIKVEH** (Heb. מִקְוֶה; "a collection [of water]"), a pool or bath of clear water, immersion in which renders ritually clean a person who has become ritually unclean through contact with the dead (Num. 19) or any other defiling object, or through an unclean flux from the body (Lev. 15) and especially a menstruant (see \*Ablution; Purity and Impurity, Ritual). It is similarly used for vessels (Num. 31:22-23). At the present day the chief use of the *mikveh* is for the menstruant (see \*Niddah), since the laws of ritual impurity no longer apply after the destruction of the Temple. Nevertheless, since according to the *halakhah* the contracting of marital relations while the wife is in the state of *niddah* is a particularly severe offense, punishable by \**karet*, and according to one opinion in the Talmud (not, however, accepted as *halakhah*), that a child born of such a union is a \**mamzer*, the rabbis insisted on the meticulous adherence to the laws of immersion in a *mikveh* before his mother could resume marital relations. They are also obligatory for the immersion of proselytes, as part of the ceremony of \*conversion. In addition immersion in the *mikveh* is still practiced by various groups as an aid to spirituality, particularly on the eve of the Sabbath and festivals, especially the Day of Atonement (see \*Ablution) and the custom still obtains, in accordance with Numbers 31:22-23 to immerse new vessels and utensils purchased from non-Jews.

It is emphasized that the purpose of immersion is not physical, but spiritual, cleanliness. Maimonides concludes his codification of the laws of the *mikveh* with the following



Figure 1. Photograph and schematic plan of the southern mikveh at Masada, built strictly according to ritual requirements. 1. plastered conduit. 2. pool for collecting rainwater. 3. the actual mikveh, connected to 2. by a pipe. 4. pool for washing hands and feet before entering the mikveh. Courtesy Y. Yadin, Jerusalem.

It is plain that the laws about immersion as a means of freeing oneself from uncleanness are decrees laid down by Scripture and not matters about which human understanding is capable of forming a judgment; for behold, they are included among the divine statutes. Now 'uncleanness' is not mud or filth which water can remove, but is a matter of scriptural decree and dependent on the intention of the heart. Therefore the Sages have said, 'If a man immerses himself, but without special intention, it is as though he has not immersed himself at all.'

Nevertheless we may find some indication [for the moral basis] of this: Just as one who sets his heart on becoming clean becomes clean as soon as he has immersed himself, although nothing new has befallen his body, so, too, one who sets his heart on cleansing himself from the uncleannesses that beset men's souls—namely, wrongful thoughts and false convictions—becomes clean as soon as he consents in his heart to shun those counsels and brings his soul into the waters of pure reason. Behold, Scriptures say, 'And I will sprinkle clean water upon you and ye shall be clean; from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols will I cleanse you [Ezek. 36:25]' (Yad, Mikva'ot 11:12).

Although Maimonides in this passage states that lack of intention invalidates the act under all circumstances, a view which is found in the Tosefta (Hag. 3:2), the *halakhah*, as in fact codified by him (Yad, *ibid.* 1:8), is that the need for intention applies only for the purpose of eating holy things, such as *\*ma'aser* and *\*terumah*. For a menstruant, and before eating ordinary food, though intention is desirable in the first instance, its lack does not invalidate the immersion. The importance of intention in the laws of ritual impurity is further illustrated by the fact that the rabbis permitted fig cakes which had been hidden in water—an action that would normally make the food susceptible to uncleanness—because they had been put there in order to hide them and not in order to wet them (Makhsh. 1:6). This stress on intention passed from Judaism into Islam. "Purity is the half of faith" is a saying attributed to Muhammad himself and in general the laws of uncleanness in

Islam bear a striking resemblance to those of Judaism (*Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. *Tahara*).

According to biblical law any collection of water, drawn or otherwise, is suitable for a mikveh as long as it contains enough for a person to immerse himself (Yad, *ibid.* 4:1). The rabbis, however, enacted that only water which has not been drawn, i.e., has not been in a vessel or receptacle, may be used; and they further established that the minimum quantity for immersion is that which is contained in a square cubit to the height of three cubits. A mikveh containing less than this amount (which they estimated to be a volume of 40 *se'ah*, being between 250–1,000 liters according to various calculations) becomes invalid should three *log* of drawn water fall into it or be added. However, if the mikveh contains more than this amount it can never become invalid no matter how much drawn water is added. These laws are the basis for the various ways of constructing the mikveh (see below). To them a whole talmudic tractate, *\*Mikva'ot*, is devoted, and Maimonides assigns them a whole treatise of the same name. The laws can be conveniently divided into two parts, the construction of the mikveh itself, and the water which renders it valid or invalid.

The mikveh is valid, however built, providing that it has not been prefabricated and brought and installed on the site, since in that case it constitutes a "vessel" which renders the water in it "drawn water" (*\*mayim she'uvin*; Mik. 4:1). It may be hewn out of the rock or built in or put on the ground, and any material is suitable. It must be watertight, since leakage invalidates it. It must contain a minimum of 40 *se'ah* of valid water, and, although it was originally laid down that its height must be 47 in. (120 cm.)

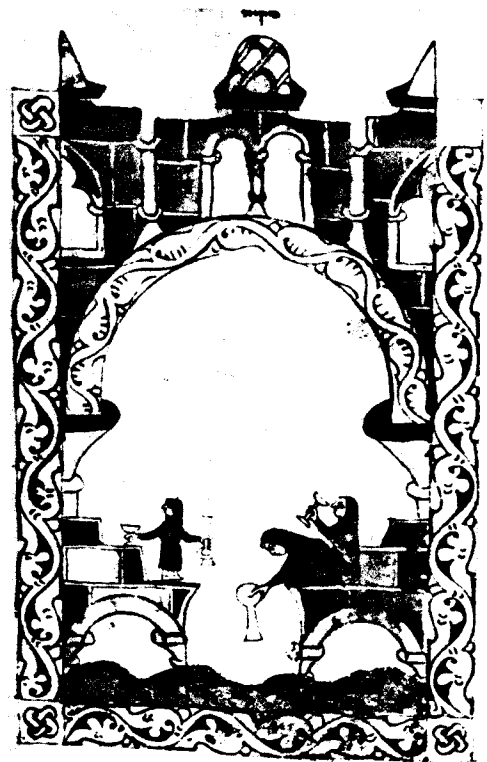


Figure 2. Women immersing food utensils in a mikveh in an illustration from a 14th-century *Haggadah* from Spain. London, British Museum, Or. Ms. 2737, 90a.



to enable a person standing in it to be completely immersed (Sifra 6:3), even though he has to bend his knees (Sifra 6:3) it was later laid down that providing there is the necessary minimum quantity of water, immersion is valid while lying down.

**The Water.** All natural spring water, providing it is clean and has not been discolored by any admixtures is valid for a *mikveh*. With regard to rainwater, which is ideal for a *mikveh*, and melted snow and ice (even if manufactured from "drawn" water) which are also valid, care must be taken to ensure that the water flows freely and is not rendered invalid by the flow into it being stopped, thus turning it into "drawn water." In addition the water must not reach the *mikveh* through vessels made of metal or other materials which are susceptible to ritual uncleanness. This is avoided by attaching the pipes and other accessories to the ground, by virtue of which they cease to have the status of "vessels." Similarly the *mikveh* is emptied from above by hand, by vacuum, or by electric or automatic pumps. The emptying through a hole in the bottom is forbidden since the plug may be regarded as a "vessel" as well as giving rise to the possibility of a leakage.

There is, however, one regulation with regard to the *mikveh* which considerably eases the problems of assuring a supply of valid water. Once it possesses the minimum quantity of 40 *se'ah* of valid water even though "someone draws water in a jug and throws it into the *mikveh* all day long, all the water is valid." In addition "if there is an upper *mikveh* containing 40 *se'ah* of valid water, and someone puts drawn water in the upper *mikveh*, thus increasing its volume, and 40 *se'ah* of it flows into the lower pool, that lower pool is a valid *mikveh*" (Yad, Mikva'ot 4:6). It is thus possible to exploit limitless quantities of valid water.

**Various Forms of Mikveh.** The above regulations determine the various kinds of *mikveh* which are in use. In



Figure 4. A medieval *mikveh* uncovered during excavations in Cologne, Germany, 1956-57. From Z. Asaria, *Die Juden in Koeln*, Cologne, 1959.

rare cases where there is a plentiful supply of valid water, spring or rain- (or sea-) water which can constantly replenish the *mikveh*, the only desiderata which have to be complied with are to ensure that the water does not become invalidated by the construction of the *mikveh*, rendering it a "vessel" or by going through metal pipes which are not sunk in the ground, as detailed above.

Since, however, *mikva'ot* are usually constructed in urban and other settlements where such supplies are not freely available, the technological and halakhic solution of the valid *mikveh* depends essentially upon constructing a *mikveh* with valid water and replenishing it with invalid water, taking advantage of the fact that the addition of this water to an originally valid one does not invalidate it.

The following are among the systems used:

1. The basic *mikveh* consists of the minimum valid

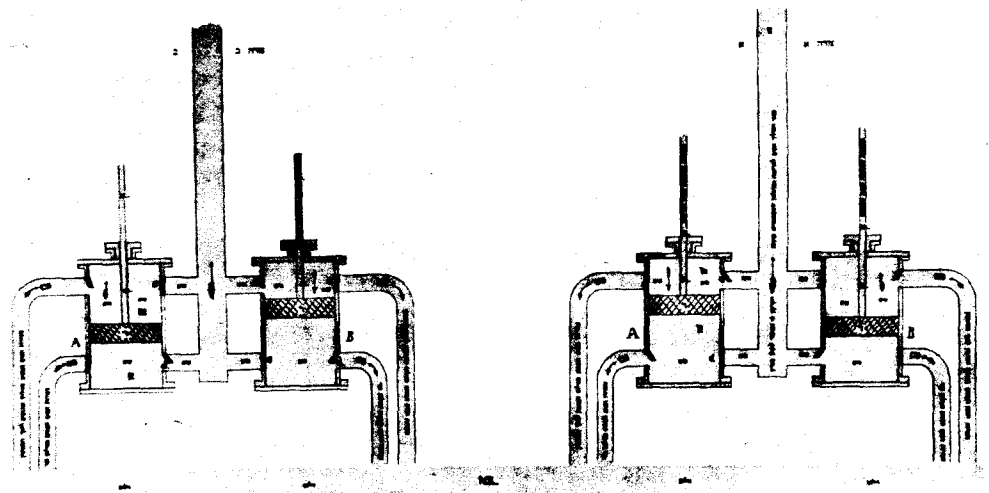


Figure 3. Plan of a Cairo *mikveh* pumping system enabling water to enter from the Nile in a continuous flow. From Raphael Aaron b. Simeon, *U-mi-Zur Devash*, Jerusalem, 1912.

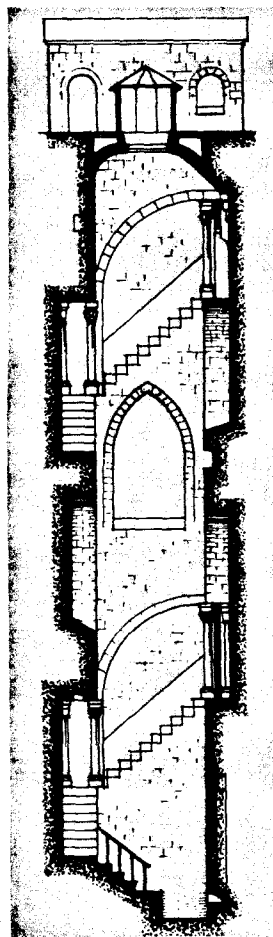


Figure 5. Cross section drawing of the medieval mikveh of Friedburg, Germany, dug more than 60 ft. (18 m.) below ground. Courtesy J. Schoenberger, Jerusalem.

amount of 40 *se'ah* of rainwater. To this rainwater, ordinary water may subsequently be added through a trough which is absorbent, dug in the ground, or one made of lean concrete at least three handbreadths (c. 30 cm.) long, and one wide. Through this device the added water is regarded as coming from the ground and not through a "vessel." The resultant mixture of both types of water passes into the mikveh through a hole in the dividing wall. Since the added water is regarded as "seeding" the original valid water, it is called the *ozar zeri'ah* ("store for seeding").

2. In a second system the added drawn water is not previously mixed with the rainwater, as in the previous case, but flows directly onto the basic rainwater mikveh through an aperture in the wall of the mikveh, the diameter of which must be "the size of the spout of a water bottle" (c. 2 in.; 5-6 cm., Mik. 6: 7). This method is called *ozar haskalah* ("the store produced by contact"). Both the above methods, though they answer the halakhic needs, have their disadvantages in operation and in maintenance, particularly through the exhaustion of the rainwater and the stagnation of the standing water. The other systems are aimed at overcoming these drawbacks.

3. The "*dut*," a cistern or tank built into the ground to store rainwater. When changing the water in the mikveh, it is filled each time with at least 21 *se'ah* of rainwater from

the cistern and water is then added from the "store for seeding" by conduction. The water in the mikveh is brought into contact with the "contact store" by the method mentioned above. Though indeed this method overcomes the many shortcomings and halakhic problems, it nevertheless requires an extensive area for the cistern, and large areas of roof and pipes for filling with considerable amounts of rainwater in the winter.

4. Both a "store for seeding" and a "contact store" are built on each side of the mikveh. Each store has an aperture connecting its water with that of the mikveh.

5. A single "store" consisting of both "seeding" and "contacting."

6. A "store" upon a "store." A "contact store" is built on two stories joined by an aperture with the diameter of "the spout of a bottle." The water of the mikveh is validated by means of the hole in the party wall between the mikveh and the upper "store."

7. A "contact store" under the floor of the mikveh, connected by means of a hole the size of "the spout of a water bottle."

The mikva'ot of Jerusalem as well as the oldest mikva'ot in other towns of Erez Israel are built in general by the method of the "contact store" as well as by the "store of seeding." In the new settlements and elsewhere the mikva'ot are built in the main only by the method of the "store of seeding" (a system approved by Rabbi A. I. Karelitz, the "Hazon Ish"). Latterly mikva'ot have been built by the method of two "stores."

In recent years vast improvements have been made in the hygienic and other aspects of the mikveh. An early enactment, attributed to Ezra, that a woman must wash her hair before immersing herself (BK 82a) may be provided for by the now universal custom of having baths as an adjunct to mikva'ot, the use of which is an essential preliminary to entering the mikveh, and especially in the United States they are provided with hairdressing salons and even beauty parlors.



Figure 6. Mikveh in the basement of the 18th-century synagogue of Carpentras, France. Photo F. Meyer, Carpentras.

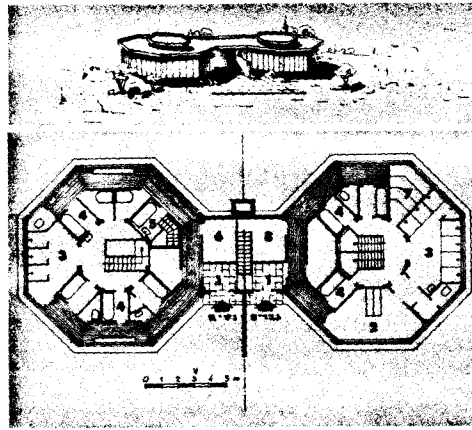
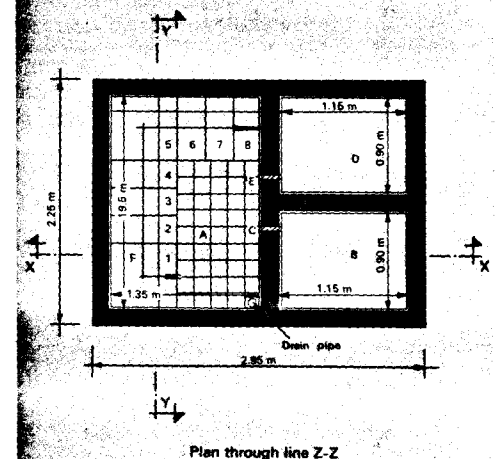
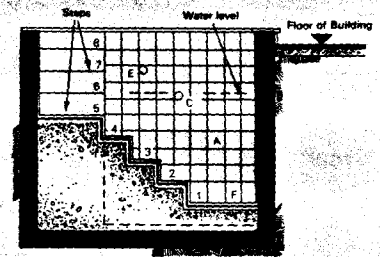
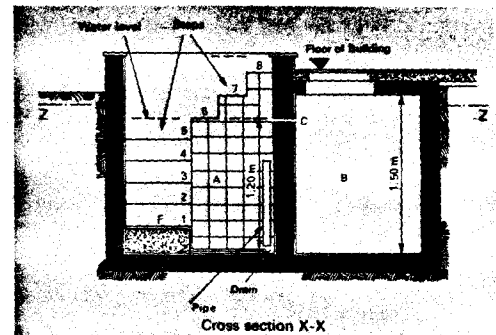


Figure 7. Plan (above) and architect's drawing of a *mikveh* for Ashdod, Israel. Men's facilities are on the right, women's on the left. 1. entry, 2. dining room, 3. showers, 4. baths, 5. private *mikveh*, 6. powder room, 7. steam room, 8. storage area and passage to boiler room. Courtesy J. Schoenberger, Jerusalem.

As will have been seen the regulations for constructing the *mikveh* are complicated and its construction requires a considerable knowledge of technology combined with strict adherence to the *halakhah*, and it should be built only after consultation with, and under the supervision of, accepted rabbinic authorities. Nevertheless in order to increase the use of this essential requirement of traditional Judaism, a book has been published which consists almost entirely of instructions for making a valid "Do it yourself" *mikveh* (see D. Miller in bibl.).

**History.** Data is lacking for a historical account of *mikveh*, particularly with regard to its construction and development in ancient times. There is scant information about the *mikveh* for priests—the Sea of Solomon in the first Temple. The few references in the Bible (I Kings 7:23f.; II Chron. 4:2f.) are insufficient to cast light on the enigma of this huge *mikveh* containing, according to the rabbis, the volume of 150 *mikva'ot* (ER. 14a), on its construction and functions. There is more information about the period of the Second Temple, when, in its closing years, even the common people were particular about the laws of cleanness, as is seen by the fact that (Jos., Ant. 18:38) when Herod founded Tiberias he was obliged to supply its inhabitants with many benefits to induce them to stay in the locality, since it was built on ancient tombs and the people avoided "uncleanness breaking through."

Certain districts of Jerusalem were planned *ab initio* in conformity with the requirements of the laws of cleanness and of the *mikva'ot*, practiced in the city. The unclean walked in the "current," i.e., in the middle of the road or the bridge, and the clean on the sidewalks (Shek. 8:1). The obligation of purification in a *mikveh* before entering the area of the Temple was recognized even by foreign kings who ruled in Jerusalem (Jos., Ant. 12:145). The crowds of festival pilgrims were in need of many valid *mikva'ot* before entering Jerusalem. According to the *halakhah* all the *mikva'ot* of Erez Israel were clean, even in the towns with mixed populations (Mik. 8:1). The *bet din* would appoint special supervisors to examine the construction, the validity, the measurements, and the cleanliness of the *mikva'ot* (Tosef., Shek. 1:2) which also served the crowds of pilgrims who streamed to Jerusalem for the festivals. The paucity of the rainfall of Erez Israel on the one hand, and the punctiliousness of Torah in matters of uncleanness with



- A — Mikveh
- B — Ozer Hashakah
- C — Aperture connecting Ozer Hashakah with Mikveh
- D — Ozer Zari'ah
- E — Aperture connecting Ozer Zari'ah with Mikveh
- F — "Nanos"—a step for short people to stand on while basking in Mikveh

Figure 8. *Mikveh* designed according to halakhic principles. Courtesy J. Schoenberger, Jerusalem.

the precepts of washing and bathing on the other, required the overseeing of economy in rainwaters. They utilized water in caves (Zav., end and Bertinoro thereto), springs, and rivers in building *mikva'ot* (Mik. 1:4; et al.). In Jerusalem there was the pool of Siloam popularly called to this day "the *mikveh* of the high priest Ishmael." There is also mention of the "trough of Jehu" whose location is unknown (Yev. 15a). The multitude of *mikva'ot* gave rise to new halakhic problems, which were sometimes brought before the supreme legislative body to the Chamber of Hewn Stone (Eduy. 7:4). There were many *mikva'ot* on the Temple Mount, one in the chamber of lepers situated in the northwest corner of the court of women (Mid. 2:5). In the view of the rabbis it served not only for the cleansing of lepers, but for anyone entering the court (Yoma 30b). Even during the fratricidal war on the Temple Mount the laws of ritual immersion were strictly adhered to (Jos., Wars, 4:205). The Temple itself contained pools in various places for the priests to bathe (Commentary to Tam. 26b), even in the vaults beneath the court (Tam. 1:1). The high priest had special *mikva'ot* in the Temple, two of which are mentioned in the Mishnah; one above the water gate in the south of the court (Mid. 1:4), and one on the roof of the Parva chamber (Mid. 5:3), apparently to the north of the court (Moses Hefez, *Hanukkat ha-Bayit* (Venice, 1696) no. 27) for immersion in the holy place on the Day of Atonement. There was an additional place for immersion on the Mount of Olives (Par. 3:7), which was connected with the burning of the \*red heifer. A special ramp led to it from the Temple Mount, which was built as an arched way over another arched way to avoid uncleanness from a grave in the depths below. The requirements of the *halakhah* for the purification of the high priest in a *mikveh* were much more stringent than those for ordinary priests and the people. In the period being dealt with of the return to Zion and the Second Temple, important changes occurred in the country in physical habits of hygiene—washing in a bath for pleasure—and this also affected problems of bathing in a *mikveh*. The many sources in both Talmuds testify to these customs from abroad which had no small influence on the *halakhah*.

Archaeological remains of the Second Temple period—such as the *mikva'ot* in Masada, in Maon (Nirim), and in \*Herodium—prove that the *mikveh* of today has indeed remained faithful to its prototype of the time of the Mishnah and the Talmud. From Israel the *halakhah* of the *mikveh* and its construction spread to Europe, first and foremost to Italy. Eleazar b. Yose taught a *halakhah* on the topic of cleanness in Rome and his colleagues agreed with it (Tosef., Nid. 7:1). The close connection between Italy and Germany through the medium of the scholars of Alsace and the communities of Spire, Worms, and Mainz brought the spread of the *halakhah* of Erez Israel and their *mikva'ot* were built according to the traditional format. In the Middle Ages the *mikveh* constituted civically an integral part of the Jewish center and synagogue, not merely in Byzantine Israel (Huldah, Maon-Nirim, etc.) but also in Italy, Germany, Bohemia, Lithuania, Poland, and other places. The most ancient remnants of *mikva'ot* in Germany have been uncovered in Cologne from 1170, Spire 1200, Friedberg 1260, Offburg 1351, in Andernach, too, in the 14th century. The most typical is in Worms—a subterranean building with 19 steps descending to the entrance hall and then another 11 steps to the *mikveh* itself. A similar *mikveh* exists in Cairo and in the vault of the Tiferet Israel synagogue in Jerusalem. In Europe the architectural lines were influenced by the environment and by the builders who were generally not Jews (who had no entry to the trade guilds). The architectural and other details of their

construction are remarkable by their precision—the outer and inner ornamentation, the capitals of the pillars, beautiful inscriptions, etc.; a mixture of oriental and European elements created architectural solutions for the special problems of building the *mikveh*. In place of Roman modes, the Gothic and Baroque left their mark on the outer and inner style.

In many instances the *mikva'ot* of the Middle Ages served as bathhouses because of the order forbidding Jews to wash in the rivers together with Christians.

The views of the halakhic authorities in all generations differed with reference to many details of the *mikveh*. From this stemmed the great difference in the ways of building and in the systems of installation. Modern technology demands solutions of many problems, such as the permissibility of the use of reinforced concrete, porous concrete for the trough of validation, floor tiles to prevent leaking of the water. In every generation the authorities of each generation have delved deeply into the sources of the *halakhah* and its reasons, and from them have come to clear decisions for the planner and builder, leaving extensive scope for his imagination and his ability to coordinate *halakhah* with technology.

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[D.Ko./Ed.]

**MIKVEH ISRAEL** (Heb. מִקְוֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל), Israel agricultural school, E. of Tel Aviv-Jaffa. Established in 1870, it is the oldest Jewish rural community in Erez Israel. The school was founded by the \*Alliance Israélite Universelle on the initiative of Charles \*Netter, who visited the country for the



Figure 1. Entrance to the Mikveh Israel agricultural school. Courtesy Government Press Office, Tel Aviv.