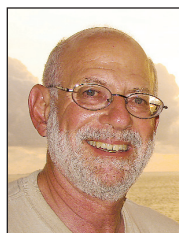


DEBATABLE Should Reform Jews Actively Invite Conversion?

→ YES

Rabbi Stephen Einstein

While I fervently believe that we should open our synagogue doors to all who wish to enter and respect them as they are, for those who might be considering conversion, we need to say: *We are honored to have you join the Jewish people.*



Consider: When non-Jews attend services, rear Jewish children, and clearly enjoy being part of the Jewish community, what is the message they are sending out? They're saying, in every way but in words, "I love Judaism." Why shouldn't we acknowledge their declarations of love and respond, "You do so many things here with such enjoyment; why not make your Judaism official? We would be happy to celebrate this with you."

We are honored to have you join the Jewish people.

Some Reform Jews are reluctant to invite others to convert because they feel that the very invitation implies that there's something wrong with a person who is not Jewish—the sense we get when missionaries come knocking at our door telling us we're going down the wrong path. However, Judaism rejects the notion that those of other religious faiths are unloved by God and not "saved." Rather, our tradition asserts that "the righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come." Clearly, you don't have to be Jewish... but, on the other hand, you can be!

So, if you have a relative who does not follow any other belief system, reach out and let your dear one know that the welcome mat is out.

And if you are a member of a synagogue and you are not Jewish, then there is nothing more that you have to do. We are honored that you are a part of the congregation. However, if you have ever considered formally becoming Jewish, there is no better time to start than the present.

Rabbi Stephen Einstein is one of the rabbis at Congregation B'nai Tzedek, Fountain Valley, CA and co-chair of the URJ-CCAR Commission on Outreach and Membership.

Rabbi Rosalin Mandelberg

NO ←



The first "conversion" to Judaism is often attributed to the Moabite, Ruth. Following her husband's untimely death, Ruth beseeches her beloved mother-in-law, Naomi, to let her live as a member of the Jewish people, with all its responsibilities and privileges: *"For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God"* (1:16-17).

We love you for who you are, as you are...

Ruth teaches us much about what it means to choose to live a Jewish life. The Judaism she experienced through her husband's family is so compelling, she determines that no other faith, people, or path makes sense for her. She becomes a Jew simply by virtue of being a Jew.

It is not uncommon for Jews-by-choice to call their conversion a "homecoming"—the fulfillment of their destinies from the happenstances of their birth to the persons they were always meant to be.

For this reason, I am uncomfortable with actively seeking conversion to Judaism. To me, the best way to promote Jewish life is to live it fully, joyfully, and lovingly. In my experience, modeling the best our people has to offer through vibrant services, programs, and community; encouraging every family member to take part in our holiday and lifecycle observances; and welcoming those who do choose Judaism publicly have all proven to be the best ways of engaging both Jews and non-Jews alike.

People's identities and faiths are highly personal, evolving at different times and seasons of their lives. Let us be respectful and say, "We love you for who you are as you are, for all that you bring, teach us, and struggle with." And in those instances when an individual has all but made the declaration of heart, mind, and spirit to become a Jew, a spiritual leader knows when and how to talk about the formalities.

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NEXT DEBATABLE: Should Reform Jews Consider Cremation?