

## IDENTITY

# Jewish Perspectives on Being a Newcomer

Contributed by [Repair the World](#)

Source: <http://weprepair.org/>

Source 1: Babylonian Talmud

Context: The Babylonian Talmud is a collection of Jewish stories, laws and debates grounded in the Bible and other Jewish texts. It was compiled in the fifth century in modern-day Iraq, but many portions of it are much older. Here, the Talmud quotes and comments on a passage from a second-century text called the Mishnah. The Mishnah asks, "How long must a person live in a city to be counted among the people of that city?", and presents the response, "Twelve months. If a person bought a house, he is immediately considered a to be a person of that city." This prompts the Talmud to dive deeper and to consider what specific communal obligations a person takes on, depending on how long they have lived in the city.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Bava Batra 8a

*When a person comes to live in a city, in thirty days, that person becomes obligated to contribute to the soup kitchen; in three months, to the communal charity fund; in six months, to the clothing fund; in nine months, to the burial fund; and in twelve months, for contributing to the upkeep of the city walls.*

Guiding Questions:

- This text envisions newcomers slowly easing their way into communal obligations. Why might this be so?
- Do you agree with the list of obligations outlined here? What would you add or subtract from this list?
- What do you understand to be the rationale behind the prioritization of needs outlined in this text? Why do you think that new residents might take on these responsibilities in this order?
- Given these obligations, at what point in time does a newcomer move from being a newcomer to a "resident"? Do you agree with this timeline?
- What else does it take to become a member of the community besides contributing in the ways outlined in this text? Is contributing to these funds sufficient?

Source 2: Jewish Encyclopedia

Jewish Encyclopedia, "Hospitality: Duty of Guest" (citations omitted and formatting adjusted)

The guest [in Jewish tradition] was [instructed] to show his gratitude to the host in various ways. . . . :

- While the host was to break bread first, the guest was expected to pronounce grace after the meal, in which he included a special blessing for the host...
- The guest was expected to leave some of the food on his dish, to show that he had more than enough.

If, however, the host asked him to finish his portion, it was not necessary for him to leave any.

- It was the duty of the guest to comply with all the requests of the host.
- He might not give of his meal to the son or to the daughter or to the servant of the host without the host's permission.

Guiding Questions:

- What responsibilities does this text put on guests? What other responsibilities do you think guests have in general?
- The phrase "being hospitable" most often refers to a host's responsibilities. How does it feel to put parallel responsibilities on the guest?
- When you're serving as a host, what makes for an ideal guest? What makes someone a bad guest?
- To what extent are people moving into a new neighborhood "guests"?
- How might the traditional Jewish responsibilities of guests be similar to or different from the responsibilities of someone moving into a new community?
- Does it matter how long a newcomer intends to live in the neighborhood? Does it matter if they're renting or if they've bought a place to live?

Closing Questions (for the full group):

- What came up for you and your partner while reading these sources?

- When a person moves to a new neighborhood, for how long are they a “guest”? Can they ever fully become a “host”?
- What types of communal obligations does a guest/newcomer have? What types of communal obligations does a host/resident have?
- What are the steps or stages of transitions from guest to host, newcomer to resident, if the shift is even possible?