



THE שבוע MATTERS

לע"נ ברוך בענדיט וברכה גרוס ע"ה
by Mr. & Mrs. Duvy Gross

שבת קודש פרשת שמיני | מסכת יבמות דף מ"ז

INSIGHTS FROM OUR CHABUROS

Discouraging a Convert

תנו רבנן גר שבא להתגייר בזמן הזה אומרים לו מה ראית שבאת להתגייר? אי אתה יודע שישראל בזמן הזה דרורים דחופים וכו'.

Rashi explains that Yisro came to greet Moshe and the Jews in the desert (Shemos 18:1) because he had heard about the splitting of the Yam Suf and of the battle against Amalek. Later (v. 7) when Yisro arrived, Moshe bowed and kissed him as he greeted him. Although this story is quite touching, it is uncharacteristic for the Torah to tell us the particulars of such an episode. It is normal for relatives to greet each other warmly, and it is also expected that Moshe would extend hospitality to Yisro. What is the point of this event? The Midrash here is even more puzzling, for it tells us that Hashem had to command Moshe to greet Yisro. Would this not have been natural for Moshe to do? The Gemara (Yevamos 47a) teaches us that if a gentile comes to convert, we must discourage him and ask him, "Why do you want to convert? Don't you realize that the Jews today are abandoned and oppressed? We are suffering and rejected. Why do you want to join our ranks?" Furthermore, the Gemara also tells us (ibid. 24b) that in the time of the Moshiach, we will no longer accept converts at all, because we will have to suspect that their motives will not be sincere. As Rashi there explains, we only accept converts when the Jews are in a state of suffering, and even this acceptance is done reluctantly. However, when the Moshiach comes and our condition will be one of prominence, and we will therefore no longer accept converts. With this in mind, we can now appreciate the events episode between Moshe and Yisro. Yisro was motivated to come after hearing about the splitting of the sea and the miraculous victory over Amalek. There was reason to believe that accepting a convert at this point should have been discouraged, if not outright prohibited, because the Jews clearly had the upper hand. It is at times such as these that we suspect that the motives of a convert are not sincerely aimed at accepting Hashem, as we find concerning the period of the Moshiach. Perhaps the convert is coming out of fear, or out of a desire to be part of our successes. It was for this reason that Moshe was not sure as to whether to encourage the gesture of Yisro, who was coming to convert. Hashem specifically commanded Moshe to go out and greet Yisro, thus indicating that his conversion was to be allowed, because the motives of Yisro were indeed for the sake of Heaven. Any other gentile who would come to convert would have been pushed away. Because circumstances of success for the Jewish nation were so prevalent at that moment, anyone coming to join their ranks would have to be suspected of ulterior motives rather than having a sincere desire to worship Hashem.

לע"נ מרדכי שלמה בן שמואל

STORIES OFF THE DAF

"And There I Will be Buried..."

ושם אקבר

The Ben Ish Chai, zt"l, observed that when Naomi told Ruth that there are death penalties for transgressors whose crimes were warned against and witnessed, Ruth said, "Where you will die, I will die." This was her way of saying that she was confident that she would never commit a capital crime. But when Naomi told her, as we find on today's daf, that there are two types of cemeteries under the auspices of the Beis Din for the burial of various capital offenders, Ruth answered differently. Instead of declaring again that she would never commit a severe enough sin to require burial in such a cemetery, she merely said with resignation, "There I will be buried." We are left with the question: did Ruth trust in her own righteousness or not? The Ben Ish Chai answers this with a story: One hot summer day, two students were sitting outdoors with their Rav. As the day progressed, the sun shone ever brighter, and its glare and dusty heat infiltrated their shady nook. The students started to feel as though they were slowly being raked over coals, so they naturally begged their Rav to move. "Please, Rebbe, we can't stand the terrible heat any more!" The Rav turned to one of them and asked, "You can't stand this insignificant heat? And what will you do to counter the heat of Gehinom, my son?" The first student answered blithely, "Oh, I am not worried about Gehinom! As your student, I trust that I will be spared such a fate. Surely I will sit in paradise!" The Rav, however, didn't approve of this flippant answer. When he asked the second student the same question, the other boy responded in a different fashion. "If my sins cause me to fall into Gehinom, what can I do? At the very least, I hope that I can mitigate the fires of Gehinom by accepting this discomfort now as atonement for my sins." The Rav approved of this answer, since it showed that, unlike the first student, the second student didn't trust in his own righteousness. The Ben Ish Chai concluded, "These two answers parallel Ruth's statements. At the outset, she answered like the foolish student who trusted in his own righteousness. But in the end, she answered with humility like the second, wiser, student. Likewise, we should never feel smugly assured of our righteousness!"

PARSHA CONNECTION

In this week's daf, the Gemara discusses גרים and the process of conversion, as well as the fact that we do not necessarily benefit from having גרים. It's interesting to note that the פסחים דף פז ע"ב says that Jews were sent into exile in order to attract converts. (We obviously need to distinguish between wanted and unwanted גרים). The four main exiles are referenced in this week's Parsha, based on a fascinating Midrash. The Midrash asks why in this week's Parsha does the Torah list the four animals that only have one kosher sign in four separate verses, while פרשת ראה the Torah lists the Camel, Rabbit and Hare all in one verse. The Midrash in one of its answers explains that each of the four animals represent an exile, and the ones who chew their cud represent a follow up exile, except the pig which doesn't chew its cud, and is therefore the final exile. Hopefully we will all witness this IYH shortly!

MUSSAR FROM THE DAF

Finding Favor
in One's Eyes

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

This Gemara explains that when somebody wants to convert we inform the potential convert that the Jews are anguished, suppressed, despised, and harassed, and hardships are frequently visited upon them. If he then says "I Know..." we accept him.

Is the point of asking him this question a halacha related to conversion specifically or is there a lesson in this halacha for every Jew? Let's first look at another halacha. What is the problem with Chanifa? Rav Yerucham Levovitz explains that the yesod of the issur of being mechanif (flattering) a rasha is that at the root of this action is the flatter's need for approval. This need for approval can push one so far to give kavod even to a rasha.

Rav Wolbe explains that this need for approval could possibly lead a person to act in ways which are contrary to the ways of the Torah all so that one doesn't look bad in the eyes of another. However, if a person has an inner confidence of what is right and wrong, he won't be swayed in order to gain favor in the eyes of others. This, says Rav Wolbe is the yesod of the Chazal in our Gemara. Chazal wanted to see if the potential Ger understands what Klal Yisroel is all about. Do they realize the value of the Torah and how precious it is? Are they willing to forgo the approval of others and make life decisions based on what is right?

If one realizes how chashuv they are, they won't feel any need to find favor in others eyes. And the more that one fulfills Torah and Mitzvos, the more one feels the greatness within one's self.

POINT TO PONDER

The Gemara says that if a non Jew comes to convert we must tell him about various Mitzvos including lenient ones. (קלות). It's easy to understand how difficult Mitzvos may discourage a potential convert, but why tell him about the easy ones?

Response to last week's Point to Ponder:

The Gemara recounts an incident whereby רב אשי asked two אמוראים to immerse his slave in a Mikva and ensure that he doesn't become a free Jew in the process. He warned them that if they are not careful and the slave becomes a free man, he (רב אשי) would hold them responsible. How would we assess the damages in such a case? What is the definition of their responsibility?

The consensus of most Rishonim is that they would have to pay for causing a loss to a fellow Jew. This is based on a Gemara in מסכת גיטין דף מא ע"א which discusses various opinions regarding damages which are not visible. For example, bread on Passover, whereby the bread itself wasn't changed or damaged in any way, but not selling it to a non-Jew prior to Passover, resulted in a total loss. See (דעה סימן רסז סעיף י"ח), for more details.

HALACHA HIGHLIGHT

Teaching Torah to a
Potential Convert

ומודיעין אותו מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות

We inform him [the potential convert] some of the easy mitzvos and some of the weighty mitzvos

The Gemara¹ relates that a non-Jew approached Hillel and asked to be converted on condition that he should serve as Kohen Gadol. Hillel converted him and as he continued his studies he came to the verse that disqualifies a convert from serving as Kohen Gadol. He realized the folly of his request. Rav Shmuel Eidels², the Maharsha, explains that in reality the potential convert was studying these verses before he converted and he realized before that he would not serve as Kohen Gadol. Otherwise, the conversion would be invalid since it was done for ulterior motives. Concerning the question of how could Hillel have taught the potential convert Torah if it is prohibited to teach a non-Jew Torah, Maharsha answers that the restriction does not apply to a potential convert.

Rav Akiva Eiger³ addressed the question of teaching Torah to a potential convert and noted that Tosafos⁴ asks Maharsha's initial question and answers that Hillel saw that although for the moment his intention for converting was in order to be Kohen Gadol, Hillel knew that eventually he would have a change of heart and his motives would become sincere. This approach indicates that the incident should be understood according to the simple presentation, and the potential convert was not taught Torah until after his conversion. Accordingly, Rav Akiva Eiger concludes that it is difficult to be lenient on this matter.

Rav Akiva Eiger's conclusion can be challenged from our Gemara that relates that the potential convert was taught some of the easy mitzvos and some of the weighty mitzvos so that he can decide whether he wants to go forward with the conversion. This clearly states that potential converts can study Torah. Rav Ovadiah Yosef⁵ suggests that this halacha does not refute Rav Akiva Eiger because there is no choice but to teach some halacha so that he will be able to make a decision concerning his possible conversion⁶.

1. גמ' שבת לא
2. מהרש"א שם ד"ה אמר ליה מקרא
3. שו"ת רעק"א סי' מ"א
4. תו"ס לעיל כד: ד"ה לא בימי דוד
5. שו"ת יביע אומר ח"ב יו"ד סי' י"ז אות ה' וע"ש שמביא עוד תירץ לקושיא זו משר"ת מחנה חיים
6. ע"ע ספר גירות בהלכתה פ"א הל' ו' ח'

ר' יוסף שמואל Shelly Mermelstien לע"נ Yevamos has been dedicated in שמעלקא ב"ר יצחק מערמעלשטיין ז"ל. For more points to ponder by Rabbi Yechiel Grunhaus, or insights by Rabbi Gutterman, please visit our website, dafaweek.org, or download the app

To share an insight from your Chabura please email info@dafaweek.org
The shavua matters is published by the Daf a week program under the rabbinical guidance of Harav Meir Stern shlita and Harav Shmuel Kamenetsky shlita

To sponsor a publication, please contact Rabbi Zacharia Adler, Executive Director at info@dafaweek.org or call 507-daf-week. Sponsorship for one week is \$72

Sections reprinted with permission from the Chicago Torah Center