

OVERVIEW of the Daf

1) Conversion (cont.)

The Gemara concludes citing a Baraisa that presents some of the halachos related to conversion.

Different points taught in the Baraisa are clarified.

R' Chiya bar Abba in the name of R' Yochanan rules that a person must bring proof of his conversion whether he is in Eretz Yisroel or out of Eretz Yisroel.

2) An individual who claims to have converted

A Baraisa teaches that only a conversion before Beis Din is valid but if someone claims to have converted by himself it is not a valid claim. A related incident is presented.

The Baraisa's ruling concerning a father's ability to identify the status of his children is examined, and several different explanations are presented.

The Gemara rules that once a man identifies himself as an idolater he is not believed concerning the status of his children.

3) The procedure for accepting converts

A Baraisa describes in detail the procedure that must be followed to accept converts.

The reason potential converts are deterred from converting is explained.

The rationale behind teaching certain mitzvos is explained.

R' Elazar cites a source for the Baraisa's ruling that the Beis Din should not be overly strict with a potential convert.

Matters mentioned in the Baraisa related to the circumcision and immersion are explained.

The Gemara elaborates on the last few statements of the Baraisa.

The inference of the Baraisa that a freed slave must accept the mitzvos when he is immersed is challenged from a second Baraisa.

R' Sheishes resolves the contradiction by distinguishing between the position of R' Shimon ben Elazar and Rabanan. ■

REVIEW and Remember

1. Why would one think that converts should not be accepted in Eretz Yisroel?

2. What is a potential convert told to deter him from converting?

3. Why is the potential convert informed of the mitzvos related to giving agricultural gifts to the poor?

4. Is it possible to reverse a successful conversion?

Distinctive INSIGHT

Discouraging a convert

תנו רבנן גר שבא להתגייר בזמן הזה אומרים לו מה ראית שבאת להתגייר?
 אי אתה יודע שישראל בזמן הזה דוויים 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 to 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. ■

HALACHAH 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. תוס' 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 משו"ת מחנה חיים

6. ע"ע ספר גירות כהלכתה פ"א הל' ו' וז' ■

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!" ■

