



To: [parsha@groups.io](mailto:parsha@groups.io)  
From: [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com)

BS"D

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON YISRO - 5780

[parsha@groups.io](mailto:parsha@groups.io) / [www.parsha.net](http://www.parsha.net) - in our 25th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to [parsha+subscribe@groups.io](mailto:parsha+subscribe@groups.io) Please also copy me at [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com) A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net> It is also fully searchable.

---

Sponsored in memory of  
**Chaim Yissachar z"l ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov**

---

Dedicated for a refuah shleimah to **Yisrael Yaakov ben Rut**

---

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact [cshulman@parsha.net](mailto:cshulman@parsha.net)  
(proceeds to tzedaka)

---

from: [torahweb@torahweb.org](mailto:torahweb@torahweb.org) to: [weeklydt@torahweb.org](mailto:weeklydt@torahweb.org)

date: Feb 6, 2020, 9:53 PM

subject: Rabbi Benjamin Yudin - Keeping the Faith

**Rabbi Benjamin Yudin**

**Keeping the Faith**

"If only we had open miracles, if only we can see the hand of G-d." Too many individuals think that clearly supernatural phenomena and experiences would change their perspective on life and would bolster their religious observance. They would be set for life, having personally experienced and witnessed the supernatural.

Parshas Beshalach and the incredible miracle of kriyat Yam Suf, however, proves them wrong. We are taught that immediately after Bnei Yisrael sang (Shemos 15:18), "Hashem shall reign for all eternity" they traveled for three days in the desert but did not find water. They arrived at Marah but could not drink the waters of Marah as they were bitter. If we were writing the story, we would have thought that as challenging as the crisis seemed, they would have stayed as calm as possible, having personally experienced His benevolence. The same Hashem that provided water in Egypt when their masters only had blood, that spared them from all the other plagues, and three days earlier had performed the miraculous salvation on their behalf, would somehow rescue them from this situation as well. After all, we are taught that after seeing their former masters washed ashore in front of them, thereby alleviating their fears that the Egyptians had emerged from the waters just as they had, the Torah proclaims (Shemos 13:31), "They had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant."

Sadly, and unfortunately, a different reality presents itself. Rashi (15:25) teaches in the name of the Mechilta that instead of coming to Moshe and asking him to pray for water, they complained. What happened to their emunah? What is especially noteworthy, is the understanding of our Rabbis in the Talmud (Bava Kama 82a) that when the Torah records that they went three days without water, in addition to being understood literally the text is also to be understood to refer to Torah, that water is a metaphor for Torah

and their disconnect from Torah for three days weakened and diminished the charge of emunah they had recently acquired. The Talmud records that either the prophets that immediately succeeded Moshe, or, as the Rambam (Hilchot Tefillah 12:1) teaches, Moshe himself, instituted that the Torah be read/taught on Shabbos, Monday, and Thursday so that the Jewish people will not go three days without Torah. The Tikunei Zohar (Shemos 60a) teaches that Hashem, His Torah, and Israel are one and inseparable. Torah is the great connector. When the Jewish people are connected to Hashem through the Torah, then their emunah can uplift and sustain them. When, however, they are disconnected from Torah, miracles by themselves do not have a long-term effect.

Case in point; in Kings (I, chapter 19) we read of the miraculous descent of fire orchestrated by Eliyahu haNavi on Mount Carmel. We are taught that the many spectators who previously could not decide where their allegiance lay, either to Hashem or to Ba'al, responded to the fire by immediately bursting forth with, "Hashem, He is the G-d, Hashem He is the G-d", and they then slaughtering the four hundred and fifty false prophets of Ba'al. Sadly, they soon returned to their former ways. The exalting effect of miracles dissipates very quickly. The reason this is so is to restore man to his state of freedom of choice, free will.

The immediate proximity of the story of Marah and its bitter waters, placed between the splitting of the sea and their traveling to receive the Torah at Sinai, seems a bit out of place. Why record this incident altogether? I believe the Torah is teaching that to bolster and sustain the impact of miracles one needs the study of Torah. The study of Torah attaches the individual to G-d, which is in effect perpetuating the miraculous.

Miracles were most necessary. The Ramban explains regarding the first of the ten commandments, that Bnei Yisroel accepted Hashem as their G-d because they personally experienced through the miraculous events in Egypt that He is the Creator and Legislator. However, the effect of miracles dissipates very quickly.

In addition to literally imbibing godliness, the study of Torah maintains and sustains our emunah. We see how the prophecies of the Torah have come true, and it reinforces our belief that all the future prophecies will be fulfilled.

The Ohr Hachaim, at the beginning of Parshas Tetzaveh, cites the Zohar that we were redeemed from the three prior exiles of the Jewish people in the merit of the three Patriarchs. We will be redeemed from the fourth exile in the merit of Moshe, and this exile is so long because Moshe does not wish to redeem a people who are not involved in Torah study. We pray that the recent Siyum Hashas not only united so many Jews worldwide, rallying them around the accomplishment of completing Shas, but hopefully has also aroused many more to dedicate time and effort to the study of Torah, thereby enhancing their life and hastening the redemption.

Finally, in keeping with Tu B'shvat, this forthcoming Monday, the double miracle at Marah was that the bitter tree sweetened the bitter waters. The Mechilta teaches that the verb "vayorehu" - that Hashem showed Moshe a tree - was chosen instead of "vayarehu" because the former has the additional connotation of teaching and instruction. Hashem showed Moshe teachings of Torah that are compared to the tree that nourishes, and the teachings of Torah sweetened both the waters and the people who had become embittered. Tu B'shvat is not only a day to partake in the fruits of Eretz Yisrael and thank Hashem for the bounty of our blessed land, but it is also to appreciate the sanctity of the land which comes from its being the ideal place for the observance of Torah and mitzvot.

Copyright © 2020 by TorahWeb.org. All rights reserved.

To subscribe, unsubscribe, or for any other questions or issues, please contact us Weeklydt mailing list [Weeklydt@torahweb.org](mailto:Weeklydt@torahweb.org)  
[http://mail.torahweb.org/mailman/listinfo/weeklydt\\_torahweb.org](http://mail.torahweb.org/mailman/listinfo/weeklydt_torahweb.org)

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>  
to: ravfrand@torah.org  
date: Feb 13, 2020, 3:17 PM  
subject: Rav Frand - Midos Tovos Are The Key  
Parshas Yisro

### **Midos Tovos Are The Key**

The pasuk says, “Yisro, the minister of Midyan, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d did to Moshe and to Israel, His people – that Hashem took Israel out of Egypt.” [Shemos 18:1] Rashi teaches: Yisro had seven names – Reuel, Yeser, Yisro, Hovav, Heber, Keini, and Putiel. Rashi adds that he was called Yeser (meaning extra) because he caused one more passage of the Torah to be written. Which passage did he add to the Torah? The passage beginning “V’Ata Sechezeh” (and you shall see) [Shemos 18:21], in which he advises Moshe to seek out “men of means, G-d fearing people, men of truth, people who despise money” and to appoint them “leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, and leaders of tens” to judge the people at all times, thereby easing the burden on Moshe and on the people. (The previous procedure in which all questions and disputes came to Moshe caused long lines for the people and weariness on the part of their leader.)

Why does Rashi need to teach us that this is the parsha added to the Torah in Yisro’s honor? Is this not obvious? Even more to the point, “Yisro’s parsha” that he is responsible for adding to the Torah does not begin with the words “V’Ata Sechezeh,” which is his proposal for the solution to the problem. It begins several pesukim earlier when he first noticed the problem: “It was on the next day that Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood by Moshe from the morning until the evening. The father-in-law of Moshe saw everything that he was doing to the people, and he said, ‘What is this thing that you do to the people? Why do you sit alone with all the people standing by you from morning to evening?’” [Shemos 18:13-14].

Why does Rashi not say that the parsha that Yisro added to the Torah for which he is called Yeser is the parsha beginning with the words “The father-in-law of Moshe saw everything that he was doing to the people...”? Rav Meir Shapiro (who as we all know had a profound influence on Klal Yisrael by proposing the Daf Yomi system of Talmud study) says an interesting thought on this question: The reason the additional parsha which earned “Yeser” his name begins with Yisro’s proposal for a solution (rather than his recognition of the problem) is because criticism is never an addition. Anyone can criticize. Anyone can come along and say “That is not a good idea.” “What you are doing does not work. You are ruining yourself; you are ruining the people!” There are always people to say “It’s no good!” The addition, the “Yeser,” is when you give a creative idea of what should be done to solve the problem. That is why Rashi says the passage that Yisro added for which he was given an added name was the passage beginning with his solution: “V’Ata Sechezeh....”

This leads to a more fundamental question: Why did it take Yisro, who was a Gentile, and who had been a High Priest for Idolatry in Midyan – why did it take him to teach Klal Yisrael that they needed a judicial system of lower courts and medium courts and higher courts and a supreme court? Could we not have figured this out on our own?

The Ohr HaChaim haKadosh raises this question. He suggests that this is a statement to the Jewish people in all generations that there are among the nations of the world people who are very intelligent and to whom it we should listen. There is such a thing as a “very smart Gentile!”

There is a tendency in some parts of our society to think that Gentiles lack intelligence. That is not true. There have always been extremely bright Non-Jews. Galileo was a Gentile. Michelangelo was a Gentile. Benjamin Franklin was a Gentile. Thomas Jefferson was an extremely bright guy. He was a Gentile. Bill Gates is a Gentile. Steve Jobs was a Gentile. Steve Jobs changed the world. Warren Buffet – also a Gentile. He is the richest man in the world. These people are not stupid!

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh says that by including this passage in the Torah, the Ribono shel Olam was making a statement: “...And you will be for me a Segulah (treasure) from all the nations...” [Shemos 19:5] (a pasuk from this week’s parsha). This is not because you are so smart! We were not chosen for being smart. The introduction to Kabalas HaTorah (receiving the Ten Commandments) is that Hashem did not pick us for our brains; He picked us because He loved our Patriarchs – Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. He did not love them because they were geniuses, but because they were good people. They were ba’alei midos (people with outstanding personal character traits).

To emphasize this idea, the preamble to Kabalas HaTorah is the story of the Gentile who was able to find the flaws in the process and suggest corrective measures. It was not by merit of “Jewish brains” that we were given the Torah, it was by merit of the righteousness of our forefathers.

Yisro illustrates for us that sometimes it is worthwhile for us to turn to the wise men of the nations of the world regarding good ideas and creative thinking.

Rabbeinu Bechaye writes in Sefer Shemos: Come and see the great status of character traits. For the great men of the Torah, such as Noach, Avraham, Yaakov, Moshe and others were never praised for their intelligence and wisdom. The Torah never praises their genius. They are always praised in terms of their midos tovos (positive character traits). This teaches that the main thing is not wisdom, but integrity and righteousness. That is our claim to fame. We were chosen because we come from good stock, not because we come from smart stock.

That is why the parsha is “parshas Yisro” – the whole judicial system comes from a Gentile. It is because Gentiles are smart. They are very smart. There have always been smart Gentiles. Brains are not our claim to fame. We are the “Am Segulah” (G-d’s treasured nation) because of the integrity and righteousness of our patriarchs. So says the holy Ohr HaChaim.

### **Go IN Peace or TO Peace?**

After Yisro proposes his court system of graduated levels, he tells Moshe Rabbeinu: “They shall judge the people at all times, and they shall bring every major matter to you, and every minor matter they shall judge, and it will ease from upon you, and they shall bear with you. If you do this thing – and G-d will command you – then you will be able to endure, and this entire people, as well, shall arrive at its destination in peace.” [Shemos 18:22-23] The Chofetz Chaim asks a very interesting question in Parshas Shemos. The above cited expression “shall arrive at its destination in peace” (al mekomo yavo b’shalom) is a very peculiar one. Earlier, in Parshas Shemos, when Moshe took leave of Yisro in Midyan (to go to Egypt on his Divine mission) the pasuk states that Yisro told Moshe “Lech l’Shalom” (literally, go to peace) [Shemos 4:18]. The Talmud on the last Daf of Tractate Brochos [64a] remarks that when someone bids their friend goodbye, he should not say “Lech b’Shalom” (go in peace); rather he should say “Lech l’Shalom” (go to peace). The Gemara cites as a proof text the fact that Yisro told Moshe “Lech l’Shalom” and his mission was successful, whereas King Dovid told his son Avshalom “Lech b’Shalom” and he wound up being killed.

There is only one occasion in life where we tell a person “Lech b’Shalom” and that is at his funeral.

The Chofetz Chaim asks: The same Yisro who told Moshe in Shemos 4:18 “Lech l’Shalom” says in our parsha [Shemos 18:23] “al mekomo yavo b’Shalom.” How do we explain this?

He analyzes the matter as follows: What does “Shalom” mean, and why do we say that l’Shalom is good and b’Shalom is not good? The Maharal in Nesivos Olam explains that Shalom means perfection (from the expression shalem – completeness). As long as a person is alive in this world, he has not reached perfection. The bracha we give another person when we part from his company is “Lech l’Shalom” – meaning, you should meet your perfection, your shleimus. You are not done yet! There is only one occasion when we can say “Lech b’Shalom” (go in peace) – because when a person is already dead, he is as complete as he is ever going to be. We then tell him,

“Lech b’Shalom” – go with the “completeness” you already reached; we hope you have reached perfection in your life.

The Chofetz Chaim, quoting Kabbalistic sources, writes that if a person leaves this world and has not paid back all his debts, he needs to return to this world as a “gilgul” (transmigrated soul). That means if someone dies owing money to people, the first thing he should do in his will is to instruct his heirs to take care of all his unpaid debts. Someone who has not paid up all his debts will need to come back to this world to repay them.

Sometimes, the Chofetz Chaim writes, someone does not return as a person but as a horse or a mule or a squirrel or worse. I am always hesitant to talk about soul transmigration – but there is such a concept in Judaism. In Europe, there was an incident where a person bought a healthy horse and he worked with his horse for a couple of weeks. Suddenly, the horse dropped dead. The owner of this “healthy horse” went to a Kabbalist who told him that the soul of this horse owed him money in a previous life. He came back through the mechanism of “gilgul” in the form of a horse. He worked for this person to whom he owed money for two weeks, he paid off his debt, and then he was allowed to return to the world of the souls.

The Chofetz Chaim says, when Yisro saw the people standing in front of Moshe waiting for their Din Torah, he was worried that the long queues would frustrate people. Rather than waiting seven hours in line to resolve their Din Torah (monetary case), they would give up and go home – leaving their Din Torah unresolved and thereby perhaps leaving a debt they owed their fellow man unpaid. When Yisro saw that, he worried that the ultimate outcome would be that people would leave this world with unpaid debts, and the consequences of that are grave. Therefore, Yisro told Moshe he must ensure that everyone will have a proper Din Torah and a proper resolution to their monetary disputes. Someone who is “Chayav” will know he needs to pay and will take care of his debt while he is still alive. Someone who is “Patur” can rest assured that his debt has been paid. The upshot of all this will be “al mekomo yavo b’Shalom” – every one (in their proper time) will leave this world b’Shleimus, with perfection.

That is why Yisro used this expression. He was not talking about “in this world b’Shalom.” In this world it is “l’Shalom.” However, if someone leaves this world owing different people money, it is not going to be “b’Shalom.” This was the impetus behind Yisro’s plan of how important it is to solve this issue so that people leave this world “b’Shalom.” That is what Yisro was saying the second time in Shemos 18:23.

The takeaway lesson for us is “Pay your debts.” People borrow money, they sometimes do not pay them back. People buy on credit, they owe merchants, they do not pay them. People owe caterers. People owe schools. They owe tuition. This is also a debt. We are not talking about great righteousness. We are talking about simple justice. We must pay off our debts.

Then, when they say the “Kel Maleh” (prayer for the departed) for us, after 120 years, they can recite in truth “VaYanuch al Miskavo b’Shalom” (he will rest on his resting place in peace), and let us say Amen. It will be b’Shleimus. We have completed our mission, we do not owe any debts, and we can rest in peace in Gan Eden.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD

[dhoffman@torah.org](mailto:dhoffman@torah.org)

This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit [www.yadyechiel.org](http://www.yadyechiel.org) for further information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc.

2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209

(410) 602-1350 <http://www.torah.org/learn@torah.org>

4/22/12 InnerNet: Jewish CyberMag

[www.innemetorg.il/printArticle.php?id=231](http://www.innemetorg.il/printArticle.php?id=231)

**Sabbath: Day of Eternity**

**by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan**

*Reprinted with permission from "Sabbath: Day of Eternity." Published by NCSY / Orthodox Union.*

**Sabbath Rest**

Many of us realize the importance of the Sabbath, but have confused ideas about how to celebrate it. After all, rest has many connotations. For some, it may mean a relaxing game of golf. For others, it may be an afternoon watching television. Others may think of rest as reading a good book, painting a picture, or writing a poem. Somehow, these ideas do not seem to fit the Jewish idea of Shabbos.

The Sabbath is supposed to remind us of the drama of G-d’s creation of the world. But exactly how does this work? How does the Sabbath bring us to recall this?

There is another thing about the Sabbath that many of us seem to find difficult to understand. There is a whole body of Jewish law--halacha--surrounding the Sabbath. This consists of a set of very stringent rules. They comprise two major tracts of the Talmud, Shabbos and Eruvin, and include almost 200 chapters in the Shulchan Aruch, the unabridged code of Jewish Law.

Most of us are hardly aware that this body of law exists. If we are aware of some rules, we do not understand them at all. Because of this lack of understanding, we often fail to observe these rules completely.

If we think of the Sabbath as a "day of rest" from a hard week's work, then these rules do not make any sense at all. These rules involve ritual laws. Many things are forbidden even where no physical effort is involved. It is not only forbidden to make a bonfire, it is even forbidden to throw the smallest stick into a flame. One may not pluck a single blade of grass, write down a telephone number, or put a pot on the stove to boil, even though none of these things involve much physical effort. We are told that riding a car is "work," even though walking certainly involves more effort. In the Torah, we find an account of a man found gathering some sticks on the Sabbath. (1) He was not working very hard, but was found guilty of breaking the Sabbath and therefore punished by death.

What does all this mean? Why are we forbidden to do so many things even when little or no physical work is involved?

It is obvious that the restrictions of Shabbos are not directed at physical work, but rather some form of ritual work. Clearly, we must delve further into the Sabbath and fathom its meaning. The Torah calls the Sabbath an everlasting sign between G-d and Israel. (2) The Sabbath involves both G-d and the Jewish people. In order to understand its rules, we must look more deeply into both of these ideas.

**G-d's Rest**

As we discussed earlier, the concept of the Sabbath is intimately bound to the concept of G-d’s rest after the act of creation. Before we can hope to understand the Sabbath, we must first understand the meaning and significance of G-d’s rest. But this itself presents some difficulties.

What does the Torah mean when it says that G-d rested? Was He tired? Had He worked too hard? Was Creation an exhausting task? Is the Torah so naive that it looks at G-d in such anthropomorphic and human terms? Does it really assume that G-d needed a rest after six days of hard work, just like any other laborer?

Of course not. The Bible itself says (Isaiah 40:28), "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The L-rd, the everlasting G-d, Creator of the wide world, grows neither weary nor faint." G-d did not rest because He was tired or overworked. Even creating a universe is not hard work for G-d. Our sages teach us that it involved less effort than to pronounce a single letter. (3)

G-d rested in another sense. He rested when He stopped creating--when He no longer interfered with His world. This gives us an insight into the Torah’s definition of Sabbath rest. We rest in a Sabbath sense when we no longer

interfere with the world. In this way, we emulate G-d's rest on the Sabbath, when He stopped interfering with His world. During the six days of Creation, G-d asserted His mastery over the universe by actively changing it. On the Sabbath, He "rested" by no longer asserting this mastery. We emulate G-d by relinquishing our mastery over the world on the Sabbath.

We now have a new understanding of work that makes the entire concept of the Sabbath make sense. This is our definition:

Work, in the Sabbath sense, is an act that shows man's mastery over the world by means of his intelligence and skill. (4) We now also have a definition of rest:

Rest, in Sabbath sense, is not interfering with nature nor exhibiting mastery over it. It is a state of peace between man and nature.

We can now understand the Sabbath ritual. We must leave nature untouched. We must not demonstrate our mastery over nature, nor change it in any way. We must not intervene in the natural process. Any change or interference, no matter how trivial or small is a violation of this rest. Heavy work and physical labor, such as plowing and building, are still work in this sense. But it also includes many things that require no effort at all--things like lighting a match, plucking a rose, or frying an egg. These may not require much effort, but they are symbols of man's dominance over nature.

The Sabbath is much more than a mere "day of rest" from a hard week's work. It is a symbol of our belief in G-d's creation. On Sabbath, the process of creation stopped completely. We emulate G-d's rest with our Sabbath. Therefore, even the most trivial act of interference with creation can be considered work and a violation of the Sabbath.

### **The Day of Eternity**

The Sabbath is called both holy and blessed. This is intimately tied to the Sabbath of creation and to the concept of rest. The Fourth Commandment thus reads (Exodus 20:11): "For in six days, G-d made heaven, earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, G-d blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

To understand the deeper significance of the Sabbath, we must first understand the Sabbath of creation. Why did G-d rest after six days? Why did G-d set aside a day when He specifically stopped working? This becomes even more puzzling when we look at the account of creation. As we go through the six days, we find that each one brings a higher level of creation. First there is inert matter, then plants, then animals, and finally man. We would expect the seventh day to continue this sequence and produce something even higher. Instead, we find nothing...

We can understand this in terms of a Midrash. (5) In the account of creation, the Torah says (Genesis 2:2), "G-d finished on the seventh day." The Midrash asks an obvious question. If G-d rested on the seventh day, how could He have finished on the very same day? If He did nothing on the Sabbath, then obviously, He finished on the sixth day. The Midrash gives us a most profound answer. It says that on the Sabbath, G-d created Rest.

In order to understand this, we must introduce a still more fundamental concept: The more something resembles G-d, the closer it is and the more it partakes of Him. Indeed, the ultimate purpose of Judaism is such an emulation of G-d. (6) G-d dwells in Eternity, in a realm beyond change and time. He Himself told His prophet (Malachi 3:6), "I am G-d, I do not change," (7) Serenity and tranquillity are therefore an imitation of G-d's attributes. On the Seventh Day, G-d added this dimension of tranquillity and harmony to the world. It was no longer in a process of change, and therefore was able to partake of G-d's serenity. As such, it became holy and blessed. (8) The Sabbath thus became the day of eternity. In this way, the world was then able to partake of G-d's timelessness.

In a sense, G-d descended to the world on the Sabbath of creation. It is interesting to note that the word Shabbos is related to the Hebrew word "Sheves", to dwell. On the Sabbath, G-d made the world His dwelling place. The Sabbath thus brought about an integral harmony between G-d and His world. Rather than continuing to change the universe, G-d brought it into harmony with Himself.

The Zohar, the Kaballah, tells us that the mystery of the Sabbath is Unity. (9) On the Sabbath, G-d created Harmony between Himself and the universe. When man observes the Sabbath, he too partakes of G-d's eternity. He enters into a state of harmony with both G-d and the world. Man is then in a state of peace with all creation. This immediately explains why the concept of peace is so important on the Sabbath. One of the most common Sabbath greetings is Shabbat Shalom--Sabbath peace, for the main idea of the Sabbath is peace; not just peace between man and his fellow, but peace between man and all creation.

### **To Become a Human Being**

This also gives us a deeper insight into how the Sabbath recalls the Exodus from Egypt. Both symbolize freedom. All week long, man lacks a certain freedom. He is bound to the material world and is a slave to its pressures. He may show his dominance over nature by taking bread from the ground, but this is also part of the curse (Genesis 3:19), "By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread." Man's act of asserting his dominance over nature makes him a slave to it.

On the Sabbath, man is freed from this slavery. He can exist in harmony with his world and need no longer battle it. All week long, man is ruled by his need to dominate the world. People are usually defined by their occupations. One is a plumber, another a nurse, or a brickmason, or a writer or a housewife. A man's occupation is, in fact, the way in which he exercises his dominance over nature. But somehow, his most basic humanity is submerged by his occupation. On the Sabbath, all this is changed. Every person is a king or queen, ruling his own destiny. He is no longer defined by his occupation. He is a human being--in the fullest sense of the word.

You can also be a Jew...

More than at any other time, the Jew can live as a Jew on the Sabbath. He divorces himself from everything else in the world and turns to G-d. He looks into the window of Eternity and feels the closeness of G-d.

The main Sabbath ritual is negative action. One observes the Sabbath by not doing. As long as one does not do any of the forbidden categories of work, he is actually fulfilling the Mitzvah of keeping the Sabbath. (10) One can therefore observe the Mitzvah of keeping the Sabbath literally every second of the day, even while sleeping. All that is required is that one not do any work. The Sabbath is unique in this respect giving a person the opportunity to be totally immersed in a Mitzvah for an entire day, without any positive effort on his part.

It is told that the Hasidic leader, the Lentcher Rebbe, once said, "The Succah is one Mitzvah into which you can enter even with your boots." When Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak of

Pshiska, known as the "Holy Jew," heard this, he remarked, "You can walk out of the Succah--but you spend every instant immersed in the Sabbath."

The unique aspect of the Sabbath is the fact that through it we can partake of G-d without any positive effort. All we must do is refrain from work, and G-d does the rest. (11) In a sense, this is what the Torah means when it says (Exodus 31:13), "You shall keep My Sabbaths...that you may know that I am G-d, Who makes you holy." At all other times, one must strive to make himself holy, by doing the various commandments. But on the Sabbath, one need only refrain from doing--and G-d does the rest. It is then He who is the One making the person holy. (12)

The Midrash tells us that all the days were paired off except the Sabbath. Sunday was paired with Monday, Tuesday with Wednesday, and Thursday with Friday. Only the Sabbath was left without a mate. When the Sabbath complained, G-d proclaimed that the Jewish people would be his mate. (13) On the Sabbath, you can be a Jew in the fullest sense of the word. Every second of the day can infuse yourself with the unique closeness to G-d that is the essence of Judaism.

### **When All Will Be Sabbath**

The great hope of the Jewish people is the Messianic Age which will be followed by a time of universal harmony. It will be a time when man will

learn to live at peace, both with his fellows and with nature. It will mark the end of all war, injustice and exploitation.

In the Talmud the Messianic Age is called Yom SheKulo Shabbos--the day when all will be Sabbath. (14) As the Bible describes it (Micah 4:4), "Every man will sit under his vine and beneath his fig tree, and none will make them afraid." The coming of the Messiah will herald the greatest revolution in the history of mankind. It will mark the ultimate triumph of man over evil.

One of the great problems with revolutions is that they usually fail. The new regime is usually as corrupt as the old one. The revolutionaries know what they wish to destroy, but they most often have no idea with what they wish to replace it. They never have a chance to really get the feel of the new order. Then, when they finally seize power, they are too busy with the details of administration.

The Sabbath is a rehearsal for revolution. On every Sabbath, we partake of the Future world--of the peace and harmony of the Messianic Age. The Jew who keeps Shabbos knows the meaning of true harmony and tranquillity. He knows how to use it and how to elevate himself with it. When the Messianic revolution comes, he will not be unprepared. By observing the Sabbath, he will be ready for the Day When All is Sabbath.

The Sabbath keeps us aware of our final goal in life. It is very easy to become engulfed in the worldly. The Sabbath constantly reminds us of a higher reality. (15) The Shabbos teaches us to plan ahead. Everything we eat must be prepared beforehand. The same is true of Eternity. When speaking of the Future Reward the Talmud says, "He who prepares on Friday, will eat on the Sabbath." (16)

Every time we prepare for the Sabbath, we are also reminding ourselves to prepare for the World When All is Sabbath. We remind ourselves that our stay in this world is but a preparation for something much more lofty. The Torah calls Shabbos (Exodus. 31:17), "an eternal sign." The author of Reshis Chochmah writes that this means that it is a "sign of Eternity." On Shabbos, the door opens a crack, and we see a spark of the Eternal. We feel a breeze blowing from the Future World When All is Sabbath. The Shabbos feeling is a sign of the Future, when man and G-d will be in total harmony. (17)

The Fourth commandment tells us to "Remember the Sabbath." Remember...

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Numbers 15:32 ff.
2. Exodus 31:17, Cf. Eruvin 96a.
3. That is, the physical world was created with the Hebrew letter "Heh", the easiest letter to pronounce. Berashis Rabbah 12:2, Etz Yosef ad loc. See also Minachos 29b, Rashi on Genesis. 2:4; Mechilta on Ex. 20:11.
4. Dayan I. Grunfeld, The Sabbath (Feldheim, NY, 5720), p. 19. Cf. Shabbos 12:1 (102b) according to Magid Mishneh on Yad, Shabbos 9:13. Also see Maleches Shleimah on Shabbos 1:1.
5. Berashis Rabbah 10:10, Rashi on Genesis 2:2.
6. Derech HaShem 1:2:2, Cf. Sotah 14a, Maharsha ad loc.
7. Yad, Yesodey HaTorah 1:12, Moreh Nevuchim 1:11.
8. Sefer Baal Shem Tov, Berashis 82; Magid Devarav LeYaakov 135; Maor VaShemesh on Exodus 31:16. Cf. Sefer HaChinuch 32.
9. Zohar 2:135b.
10. Cf. Makkos 3:15 (23b).
11. Ohr HaChaim on Exodus 31:16.
12. B'nai Yesasechar 4:1.
13. Maor VaShemesh loc. cit.
14. Tamid 7:4.
15. Sefer HaChinuch 32; Ephodi on Moreh Nevuchim 2:31, Derech HaShem 4:7:2.
16. Avodah Zarah 3a, See Akedas Yitzchok 55 (201b).
17. Reshis Chochmah, Shaar HaKedushah 3 (New York, 5728) p. 131a.

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com  
from: Destiny Foundation/**Rabbi Berel Wein** <info@jewishdestiny.com>  
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

#### **Weekly Parsha YITRO**

##### **Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

We once again see in this week's Torah reading the Torah's penchant to use outsiders and their ideas to advance the welfare of the Jewish People. After the granting of the Torah on Sinai, Moshe attempts to institute a one-man – himself – system of justice for the Jewish people. In theory, this is the ideal system, for everyone would wish to be heard and judged by Moshe. There cannot be anyone better or wiser to hear disputes and render clarifications of Torah ordinances and values than Moshe Rabbeinu. Yet, like many, if not even the greatest ideas in theory, do not usually work out in practice in the messy world of everyday human behavior and life.

It is the complete outsider, Yitro, who immediately grasps the danger to the people and to Moshe that is inherent in his role as the sole judge of the Jews. Yitro cautions Moshe that under such a system, Moshe and the people will wither away because of the impossible physical, emotional and organizational strain. Yitro proposes an alternate system of justice, more bureaucratic and cumbersome but infinitely more workable than the one Moses proposed. And Heaven agrees with the outsider, and Yitro's proposal becomes the accepted norm for justice for that generation of Jewish people. Moshe himself agrees with the wisdom of Yitro's words. The fact that Yitro is a complete outsider in Jewish society of that time in no way disqualifies his observations and suggestions.

Generally, people ignore and even resent the comments and opinions of outsiders on internal or domestic matters. What can an outsider possibly know about how we should behave or how we should run our home, business or society? Yet, as the professional fields of counselling in all sectors and disciplines in our society continue to grow and expand, we are witness to the value of outside guidance. It is their 'outsiderness' that provides a perspective that the person or society cannot achieve by itself. The rabbis of the Talmud phrased it succinctly and correctly: "A prison inmate cannot free himself by himself from his incarceration." As it was in the case of Yitro, it is the outsider – oftentimes the ultimate outsider – who may be the key to progress and who offers a better perspective on the challenges facing us. We should never deliberately close our ears to what is being said about us or to advice given, even if it is not requested.

The great unmatched humility of Moshe allowed him not only to accept the words and advice of Yitro, but also to cherish them, and even openly credit Yitro for his insight and wisdom, Moshe will say to Yitro later in the Torah, "you have been to us our guide and eyes," Only outsiders can free us from the bonds of our own self-imposed subjectivity. This is one of the great subliminal teachings that fill the Torah and instruct us about life. Shabbat shalom

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com

subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

#### **Psalm 105: Our Ties to the Land of Israel**

##### **Rav Kook Torah**

After King David brought the Holy Ark to Jerusalem, he commanded the Levites to play their lyres and harps and sing God's praises. He instructed them to thank God for His many kindnesses, including the special gift of Eretz Yisrael:

"[God] established it to Jacob as a statute, an eternal covenant to Israel, saying: To each of you I give the land of Canaan, the portion of your inheritance." (Psalms 105:10-11; I Chronicles 16:17-18)

The Hebrew text contains a grammatical difficulty not apparent in the translation. The verse opens with God's promise to give each individual (אִישׁ, in the singular) a portion of the Land of Israel. But the verse concludes by referring to the Land of Israel as אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, using the plural 'you' - your collective inheritance.

Why this switch from singular to plural?

Two Connections

Rav Kook explained that we connect to the Land of Israel on two levels. Our first connection is through the ties that connect the Jewish people as a whole to the Land of Israel. This is an eternal bond for all generations.

But there exists an additional layer: the special connection between each individual Jew and the Land of Israel. There is a distinct match between each individual - according to his or her unique talents and soul-qualities - and Eretz Yisrael. This is our special portion in the Land.

In a 1906 letter, Rav Kook discussed the nature of this personal connection to Eretz Yisrael. The special distinction of Jerusalem, the great mitzvah to live there and develop the city, is well known. But if this is the case, why do we find lofty tzaddikim who chose to live in other cities in Israel? Why don't they all make their home in Jerusalem?

Rav Kook answered that every location in Israel has its own unique holiness. As an example, Rav Kook noted some of the special spiritual qualities of Jaffa (where he then served as chief rabbi): the place where the prophet Jonah visited, and its role in the construction of Solomon's Temple. "Jerusalem is highly cherished, its holiness is an overall holiness, and its settlement takes precedence [over other places in the Land of Israel]. Nevertheless, each tzaddik perceived in his distinct inner soul that he belongs to the particular holiness associated with a certain location; so he established his residence there."

Rav Kook added that this was certainly true for the various tribes of Israel. Each tribe was prophetically assigned an area in Eretz Yisrael that corresponded to its own unique spiritual qualities.

Of course, our special ties to the Land of Israel do not have to be expressed geographically. We may find our connection to Eretz Yisrael in a particular sphere of occupation, building up the Land in some material or spiritual fashion.

Specific Connection and Eternal Ties

This is the meaning of David's command. The verse starts with the individual level: "to each of you I give the Land." It then adds the national level: "the portion of your [collective] inheritance." Our bonds to the Land of Israel include own personal connection to the Land as well as the nation's eternal ties.

This double connection is also reflected in the phrase *חֵקֶל נַחֲלֵיְכֶם*, "the portion of your inheritance." This phrase appears to be self-contradictory, for *chevel* means a set, measured area of land, while the word *nachalah* indicates an eternal inheritance for all times. Is our inheritance both measured and boundless?

In fact, our ties to Eretz Yisrael encompass both aspects. We have a specific portion in the Land, our *chevel*, according to our unique soul-qualities. And we share eternal binds to the Land, our *nachalah*, as members of the Jewish people, party to God's "eternal covenant with Israel."

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

**Shema Yisrael Torah Network**

**Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Yisro**

**פרשת יתרו תשפ**

וישמע יתרו ... את כל אשר עשה

**Yisro heard... everything that G-D did to Moshe and Yisrael, his people. (18:1)**

Was Yisro the only one who heard about Hashem's wondrous miracles on behalf of the Jews? *Shamu anim yirgazun...* "Nations heard, they were anguished" (*Shemos* 15:14). The entire world heard, but only Yisro responded actively to the message. He came to join the Jews, realizing that the deities he had worshipped until now were a sham. We all hear, but

we do not all *listen*. The sound enters our ears, but not our brain. Hearing without cognitive processing does not relay the message, leaving the person as if he had never even heard.

*Horav Chaim Vital, zl*, writes that the *remach*, 248 organs of the body serve as the *levush* (literally garment), covering, mantle, for the 248 spiritual organs (each corresponding to a specific *mitzvas asei*, positive commandment). When one is missing the performance of a specific *mitzvah*, the concomitant *mitzvah* will likewise be absent from his cumulative *mitzvos*. One who lacks an organ is sadly deficient in the functioning of that organ. It is not his fault, but it still does not make him whole. In the spiritual realm, one's body can be sorely lacking due to the multiple *mitzvos* in which he is deficient. Hashem responds to this situation, *Shimu u'sechi nafshechem*: "Listen, and revive your souls" (*Yeshayah* 55:3). Hashem says, "If a person falls from a roof, his entire body will suffer. The physician will patch him up with band-aids all over his body. I am not like the mortal physician," (says Hashem). Each person has 248 organs, among them the ear. The entire body may be (spiritually) soiled with sin; yet, if the ear listens (to the word of Hashem), it will catalyze the revival of the body. This is what occurred concerning Yisro, who had spent his life worshipping every deity until he "listened." His listening spurred his spiritual metamorphosis, catalyzing him ultimately to convert.

When the ear listens, it will provide the therapeutic effect vital for the healing process of the entire body to occur. One who listens well to *mussar*, reproof, will change his ways and transform his life. This is what is meant by, "Listen, and revive your souls."

We attend a speech on a topic that addresses the need to refine our ethical behavior, our religious commitment, and, at the end of the session, we pat ourselves on the back and proceed to continue along our merry way as we did earlier. *Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*, relates the story of the new *oleh*, émigré, to *Eretz Yisrael*, who, during his first *Shabbos* in the Holy Land, climbed a fig tree that was not his and plucked figs to his stomach's content and ate them. Not only did he steal the figs, he climbed a tree and harvested some of its fruit, an act of desecrating *Shabbos*.

Another Jew was walking by wrapped in his *Tallis*, having just concluded *davening*. He took in the whole scene. He called out to the man, "Do you realize how many prohibitions you have just transgressed? *Shabbos*, stealing, eating unchecked figs (they could be infested with bugs, prohibited for his consumption)." The *oleh* continued eating, ignoring the rebuke that was directed at him. The man said, "*Eretz Yisrael* is so wonderful. I could never have done this in the Diaspora. Here I am able to eat sweet figs and listen to words of Torah to accompany my meal." This man heard the rebuke, but did not listen to it. To him, it was words of Torah.

*Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl, Slutzker Rav*, moved to *Eretz Yisrael* and became the *Rosh Yeshivah* of Eitz Chaim Yeshivah. He lived in Batei Brode (a section of Yerushalayim) near *Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, Mashgiach* of Eitz Chaim. *Rav Aryeh* would teach a class to the congregants of the shul nightly before *Maariv*. *Rav Isser Zalmen*, who had been *Rav Aryeh's Rebbe* in Slutzk, had no problem imbibing his student's lecture.

One week, one of the women who listened to his nightly *shiur* (it was not so common for women to attend evening services and listen to the proceeding class) asked if *Rav Aryeh* could speak the following week prior to the end of *Shabbos* on the imperative of honoring one's wife. Apparently, her husband left much to be desired in his manner of treating her. She felt that requesting her husband to cease denigrating and humiliating her would not be as effective as a public class on the topic. This way, her husband would not feel singled out and might adjust his behavior on his own.

*Rav Aryeh* obliged, and that week he spoke of the importance of treating one's wife with the utmost respect. He focused on the dictum, "He loves her as he loves himself, and honors her even more than he honors himself." *Rav Isser Zalman* came early to the *shiur* and listened intently taking in every word. Following *Maariv*, the venerable *Rosh Yeshivah* approached his *Mashgiach* and said, "Thank you so much. I am certain that you were speaking to me. It is appropriate that you brought up the issue.

After all, when one is engaged all day with male students, upon coming home, he often forgets to honor his wife properly.”

When *Rav Aryeh* heard his *Rebbe* thank him, he became anxious: “No, *Rebbe*. In no way was my intention to address the *Rebbe*.” *Rav Aryeh* was speaking to the recalcitrant husband (who probably did not hear what he was saying), but *Rav Isser Zalmen* thought that it was meant for him. This is the meaning of *shemiyah*, listening.

לא יהיה לך

### **You shall not recognize the gods of others in My Presence. (20:3)**

The prohibition against having any other gods is quite simple: A Jew believes only in Hashem as the Only Source of anything in his life. To ascribe power of any form to any other entity is pure idol worship. The *Sefer HaChinuch* considers this the *ikar gadol*, great/primary principle concerning upon which all the *mitzvos* are dependent. As *Chazal (Sifri, Parashas Re'eh 11:28)* state: “Whoever concedes to *avodah zarah*, idol worship, it is as if he has denied the entire Torah.” Essentially, a Jew by his very faith in Hashem must be totally committed only to Hashem, realizing and acknowledging that at no moment of his existence may he think that he can “go it alone”, without Hashem as his driving power source. For a Jew to say that he requires no help from Hashem is absolute *kefirah*, heresy.

Another aspect of our self-delusion is common. When we think about it, we subtly and inadvertently deny Hashem’s powers every moment of our lives. *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, presents a simple, common situation. A person prays to Hashem for success in a given endeavor: a *refuah sheleimah*; to be cured of an illness; a *shidduch*, matrimonial match for a child; or financial undertaking. After much prayer, he receives a positive Heavenly response. All goes well. He is now in the clear, home free. He feels great. Everything has worked out. He is in seventh heaven, jumping for joy. Now what? When someone asks him, “How’s everything?” his reply is: *Ani k’var b’seder*, “I am all fine” or “I am good, I have nothing to worry about (any more).” At this point, he is expressing that he no longer needs Hashem. The Almighty “came through” for him. Now everything is on the up and up. It is at this point that he could lose it all. Why? Because he forgot about Hashem. Nothing is sustained unless Hashem sustains it; nothing lasts unless the Almighty wills it.

In his commentary to the words, *Va’ta’amod mi’ledes*, “And she ceased giving birth” (*Bereishis 29:35*) *Ibn Ezra* alludes to this idea. He explains that *Leah Imeinu* ceased to have children after *Yehudah* was born because she intimated that she no longer needed children. She was one of *Yaakov’s* four wives, and she already had four sons. (There were initially supposed to be twelve. Thus, she felt that she had already received her quota.)

A similar idea applies to the *Shunamis*, mother of *Chavakuk*, whom the *Navi Elisha* blessed that she would have a child. Once she gave birth to the child, she stopped visiting the *Navi* until the child died, and she needed a miracle to bring him back.

*Rav Zilberstein* posits that this happens more than we care to acknowledge. We are in need of a Heavenly blessing. An individual prays and prays, pleads and beseeches Hashem until that moment that He responds affirmatively. Then, suddenly, he stops praying. His request was fulfilled. What should he pray for now that Hashem has fulfilled his request?

“I need nothing. It is all good in my life” is a statement that presents the speaker as a devout Jew who refuses to impose more on Hashem than is necessary. He asked. He was answered. He is now happy. Why bother Hashem? He is in error. It is never a bother for Hashem. On the other hand, his attitude indicates that all is well, when, in fact, it could change at any time. The only endeavor that can avert disaster is *tefillah*, prayer. We convince ourselves that all is well, not thinking that all is well only when Hashem wills it so. The *Brisker Rav, zl*, would constantly repeat the *pasuk*, *Lishiyuascha kivinu kol ha’yom*, “For Your salvation we hope all day” (*Shemoneh Esrai*). This was his way of reiterating his constant belief in Hashem as the only Source of salvation.

כבד את אביך ואת אמך

### **Honor your father and your mother. (20:12)**

The *Sefer Hachinuch* explains that the *shoresh*, root, of the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av v’Eim*, honoring parents, is a sense of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, to those who have acted kindly towards him. One who is a *kafui tov*, ingrate, is a *naval*, abominable person. He acts as if his benefactor, in this case his parents, are strangers to him. He quickly ignores the fact that his parents are the reason that he is here altogether. For this alone, he should honor them. One who does not honor his parents will soon present a similar attitude toward his Father in Heaven.

One has a relationship with his parents that is unlike any other relationship, because parents are his reason for being. They are a part of him, as he carries their DNA. Having said this, when a person has a low self-esteem or is just not happy with himself/herself, it might be reflected in the many ways he/she treats his/her parents. If parents are a part of a person, and that person has negative feelings about himself, these feelings will similarly be manifest towards his parents. The inverse is the intense love one develops for parents as the product of the positive feelings he has for himself/herself.

While honoring parents is (should be) a given, it becomes especially difficult when parents age, or become infirm, physically or emotionally. It requires extraordinary patience, commitment, love and extreme dedication to execute this *mitzvah* to the fullest extent when conditions such as age, infirmity, and cognitive impairment prevail. Some do what they “must” and, when relieved of their “turn,” breathe a sigh of relief and run. Others cherish every moment that they have with their parent(s) and consider it prime time. Both types should be aware that their own children are watching. So is their Heavenly Father.

We would do well to consider – over and over again – another aspect of parents: Parents never give up hope on their child – regardless of age and circumstance. Parents never forget about their child, because one does not forget about himself. The following incredible story underscores this verity.

It was October of 1973; the *Yom Kippur* war had broken out. *Horav Yisrael Lau, Shlita*, then chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, sought an opportunity to alleviate to some degree the sad state of those young soldiers who had been wounded, and were suffering both physically and emotionally. He was told that the best place for him was the hospital, which meant working round the clock to address the needs of the wounded and tend to various crises that arose from their traumas. Some soldiers were hanging onto life by a thread. *Rav Lau’s* presence and ability to talk to the soldiers could make a major difference in their attitude and willingness to fight for life.

*Rav Lau* immediately acted on the advice and proceeded to the local hospital, prepared to do whatever was asked of him. It happened to be that this hospital was a burn unit that cared for those who had been wounded in explosions and fires, and those whose bodies had been critically burned. The pain that these brave men sustained was beyond description. The screams that one heard from the rooms was something out of a bitter nightmare. The *Rav* went from room to room, bed to bed, offering whatever hope and solace he could provide. Alas, it was insufficient to assuage the terrible suffering these men were experiencing.

At the end of his visit, he entered a room where two physicians, a nurse and a middle-aged woman stood around the bed of a soldier who was yelling uncontrollably. The two doctors and the nurse were in the midst of speaking with the young man’s mother. *Rav Lau* entered and immediately asked what he could do. The doctor replied that the soldier had been burned from head to toe. “There is nothing we can do for him. We keep on raising his morphine level to give him some relief. Nothing. We have been unsuccessful in our attempts to calm him down.” *Rav Lau* whispered into the soldier’s ear; perhaps his soothing words would help. Nothing. “Try to sleep,” he said, “so that you will not feel the pain.” Once again the response

was continued screaming. Seeing that he could do nothing, the *Rav* left to stop by another room.

To hear a young, fellow Jew screaming loudly in response to excruciating pain is a devastating, emotionally painful experience. *Rav* Lau was shaken, his heart pounding, due to his feelings for the soldier and his inability to help him in any way. He paced back and forth, thinking to himself, “What can I do? What can be done to help this young man who had yet to commence the long road to recovery?”

Ten minutes passed, and *Rav* Lau realized that it had suddenly become quiet. No screams were coming from the soldier’s room. He stopped pacing, owning up to the realization that if the screaming had suddenly ceased, something terrible must have happened. He ran to the room, tears flowing freely from his eyes. As a *Rav*, he would don his “other hat” and pay his final respects to this brave young man.

The *Rav* went to the room and walked in to find the soldier sleeping peacefully with his mother sitting next to his bed. *Rav* Lau was incredulous, and it was quite obvious. “What happened?” he asked. “I was here fifteen minutes ago and your son was hysterical. How did this radical change take place?”

“*Rav* Lau,” the mother began, “my son was burned from head to toe, from top to bottom. Everywhere his skin is raw. During the entire time that he was screaming, I kept looking, searching for one spot, anything that was left unburned. Finally, I found a small spot behind his knee, about three inches in diameter, that I could put my finger on. I began to caress this spot and gently whisper to him, ‘It is okay. Mommy is here. Mommy will not leave you.’ I kept repeating this litany, as I continued to smooth his unburned skin. Before long, my son stopped crying and fell asleep.”

An incredible story. Now for the postscript, and its connection to the concept of *Kibbud Av v’Eim*. Years later, *Rav* Lau would relate the story and add his own observation concerning a major verity in life (one which I feel we ignore more often than we care to admit): “Who was the one to give solace to the soldier? Who was the one to be able to quiet him down and help him forget about his pain? His mother. Not the doctor, not the nurse, not his friend, not even the *Rav*. It was his mother, whose entire goal in life was to care for her child and love him unequivocally. Someone like that who really, really cares never gives up. She will search and search (in every nook and cranny) until she finds that one clear, unburned spot for her to caress and give comfort.”

As I prefaced the story, parents never give up on us. They always find a way to reach out and give comfort and hope. Why should we do the opposite?

..

### *Va’ani Tefillah*

**רצה ד' אלקינו בעמך ישראל ובתפלתם – Retzei Hashem Elokeinu b’amcha Yisrael u’visfilasam.**

**Be favorable Hashem, our G-d, toward Your People, *Yisrael*, and their prayer.**

Following immediately after the *tefillah/brachah* of *Shomea Tefillah*, in which we ask Hashem to accept our prayers, is the *tefillah* of *Retzei*. While on the surface *Retzei* appears to be very similar to *shomea tefillah*, it is obviously formulated to express a new idea. *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, observes that in the previous blessing, we ask Hashem to accept *Tefillas Amcha Yisrael*, the prayers of Your nation, *Yisrael*. Now we ask that Hashem listen to *Amcha Yisrael u’visfilasam*, Your nation *Yisrael* and its prayers. Notably, the primary focus is on the acceptance of the nation, as opposed to its prayers. Thus, the *tefillah* of *Retzei* asks Hashem to accept *Klal Yisrael* in its mission of instilling *Kiddush Hashem* in the world. We do not ask Hashem to give us something. All we ask is for the opportunity to spread His glory successfully. Instead of being a *mekabel*, recipient, we ask to be a *maspiah*, giver, to sanctify His Name in the world. *Rav* Schwab, thus distinguishes between the previous *tefillah*, whose focus is a reference to *tefillah* (service of the heart), and this prayer, which is *b’chol nafshechem*,

with all our *nefesh/soul*, referring to our giving to make an imprint on the world in His honor.

*Dedicated in loving memory of our dear mother and grandmother,  
לאה בת רפאל הכהן ז"ל נפטרה ז"ו שבט תשע - Leona Genshaft  
by her family Neil and Marie Genshaft Isaac and Naomi  
Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved  
prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

from: Project Genesis <genesis@torah.org>

reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org

to: weekly-halacha@torah.org

date: Feb 12, 2020, 4:05 PM

subject: Weekly Halacha - Berachah Rish

***Weekly Halacha :: Parshas Yisro***

***Berachah Rishonah: Which One?***

***Rabbi Doniel Neustadt***

*Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya*

The berachah rishonah for many of the foods listed below is problematic, so we have attempted to present a clear decision for each one based on the views of the majority of the contemporary poskim. Many, but not all, of the decisions follow the rulings of the venerable halachic authority, Harav S.Z. Auerbach z”l.

Many facts must be ascertained before determining the correct berachah rishonah for a given food: What is the nature of the plant or tree from which it is derived? What is the exact make-up of each of its components? What manufacturing processes were used? Based on all of the data available, the poskim have rendered the following decisions(1):

#### LIST OF FOODS

Apple kugel: Mezonos. [In the unusual case that the flour is added just to “bind” the apple mixture but not to enhance its taste, ha-eitz is recited.]

Applesauce: Commercially produced applesauce in which the apples are reduced to a nearly liquid state – shehakol. Home made applesauce which is usually lumpy and contains small pieces of the apple – ha-eitz.(2)

Blackberry: Ha-eitz. It grows on a tree which stays alive throughout the winter months and reaches a height of well over ten inches.(3)

Blueberry: Ha-eitz. See Blackberry.

Breadsticks: When eaten as a snack – mezonos.(4) When many breadsticks are eaten at one sitting, or when eaten as part of a meal, netilas yadayim and ha-motzi may be required.(5)

Challah kugel: Mezonos.(6) If the individual pieces of challah are bigger than a k’zayis (approximately 1 oz.), netilas yadayim and ha-motzi are required.(7)

Cheesecake: Mezonos. If the dough is meant to merely hold the cheese filling together, only shehakol is recited.

Chocolate-covered nut or raisin: This is a “combination food,” generally eaten because the two items complement each other’s taste. According to some poskim, both shehakol and ha-eitz(8) are recited.(9) [Individuals who regard either the chocolate or the raisin as merely an “enhancer” to the “main” food, should recite the blessing on the main food.] Other poskim maintain that only the blessing over the majority ingredient is recited.(10) Still other poskim suggest that only ha-eitz should be said. (11)

Chocolate-covered orange peels: Shehakol.(12)

Corn chips: Shehakol. Corn chips are produced from corn meal.

Cranberry: Ha-adamah.(13) Cranberries grow on a bush which does not reach a height of ten inches.

Felafel balls: Shehakol.(14)

Fried fish (or schnitzel): If the fish is dipped in a thin coating of flour – shehakol. If it is dipped in a thick coating [e.g. fish sticks] – mezonos.(15)

Fruit cocktail(16): Recite the blessing over the fruit that constitutes the majority of the mixture.(17)

Fruit salad (large chunks of fruit): Separate blessings of ha-eitz and ha-adamah are required.

Halvah: Shehakol.(18)  
Ice cream cone: If the cone serves as a cup to hold the ice cream, only a shehakol over the ice cream is required. If the cone is eaten for its own taste (e.g., a sugar cone), a mezonos is recited over the cone and a shehakol over the ice cream.(19)  
Licorice: Shehakol.(20)  
Mashed potatoes: Ha-adamah. Instant mashed potatoes are also ha-adamah.(21)  
Matzah brei: When deep-fried – mezonos. If it was pan-fried, it should be eaten only during a meal when ha-motzi is made over bread.(22)  
Meatballs (small) and spaghetti: When eaten together in one spoonful – mezonos.  
Onion rings: Mezonos. Generally fried in batter made from grain flour.(23)  
If it was fried without flour – ha-adamah.  
Papaya: Ha-adamah.(24)  
Peanut butter (crunchy or plain): When eaten alone – shehakol.(25) When spread on bread or a cracker, no blessing is recited over the peanut butter.  
Popcorn: Ha-adamah.(26)  
Potato chips: Ha-adamah.(27)  
Potato kugel or latke: Ha-adamah. If the potatoes are blended into a liquid state and are no longer recognizable as potatoes, several poskim maintain that a shehakol is recited.(28)  
Pringles: Ha-adamah.(29) Some poskim maintain that a shehakol is recited.(30)  
Raspberry: The poskim debate whether its blessing is ha-eitz(31) or ha-adamah.(32) Because of the doubt, ha-adamah is preferable.(33)  
Rhubarb: Ha-adamah.(34)  
Rice cakes: Most contemporary poskim agree that the correct blessing is ha-adamah,(35) while a minority tends to rule that the correct blessing is mezonos.(36)  
Tomato juice: Shehakol.(37)  
Sabra: Ha-eitz.(38)  
Strawberry: Ha-adamah.(39)  
Stuffed cabbage: The cabbage, meat and rice are usually eaten together in one spoonful. Only one blessing is recited – over the majority ingredient.(40)  
Vegetable salad with croutons: Mezonos and ha-adamah are required, even though the croutons are merely “enhancers” for the salad.(41) It is preferable to have another mezonos food item available and recite the blessing over it.

**FOOTNOTES:**

- 1 We have previously dealt with the proper berachos for breakfast cereals; see *The Weekly Halachah Discussion*, pgs. 159-169.
- 2 Based on *Mishnah Berurah* 202:40 and 42 and *Minchas Shelomo* 1:91-3. One who recites ha-eitz on all kinds of applesauce has valid sources upon which to rely; see *Yabia Omer* 7:29 and *Pischei Halachah*, pgs. 170-171.
- 3 *Igros Moshe O.C.* 1:85; *Vesein Berachah*, pg. 396; *Vezev ha-Berachah*, pg. 372. Wild blackberries or blueberries, which grow on bushes that do not reach a height of ten inches, require a ha-adamah. But often, these berries are infested with worms and require careful inspection. Commercially sold berries are grown on trees, not on low bushes.
- 4 *Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Vesein Berachah, pg. 468 and Vezev ha-Berachah, pg. 21). Same rule applies to melba toast, bagel chips and pita chips; ibid.*
- 5 See details in *The Weekly Halachah Discussion*, pgs. 479-481.
- 6 *Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Vesein Berachah, pg. 474).*
- 7 See *Vezev ha-Berachah*, pg. 27.
- 8 First the shehakol on a bit of chocolate, with specific intention not to exempt the fruit, then the ha-eitz over the fruit.
- 9 *Igros Moshe O.C.* 3:31.
- 10 *Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Vesein Berachah, pg. 417); Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Vezev ha-Berachah, pg. 97). When in doubt which ingredient is the majority, recite a shehakol; ibid.*
- 11 *Mekor ha-Berachah* 22.
- 12 *Mishnah Berurah* 202:39.
- 13 *Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Vesein Berachah, pg. 394).*
- 14 *Yabia Omer* 7:29 (addendum); *Vezev ha-Berachah*, pgs. 249 and 369.

- 15 *Consensus of several contemporary poskim, quoted in Vezev ha-Berachah, pg. 110. See Pischei Halachah, pgs. 234-238, and Yalkut Yosef 13:1 for dissenting opinions.*
- 16 Or a fruit salad in which the fruit is cut up into small pieces and eaten together in one spoonful.
- 17 *Mishnah Berurah* 212:1. Different kinds of ha-eitz fruits (e.g., apples and oranges) combine to form a majority of ha-eitz, and vice versa (*Vezev ha-Berachah*, pg. 94, quoting *Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav Y.S. Elyashiv*).
- 18 *Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Vesein Berachah, pg. 415).*
- 19 *Igros Moshe O.C.* 4:43; *Vezev ha-Berachah*, pg. 234.
- 20 *Vezev ha-Berachah*, pgs. 110 and 251; *Pischei Halachah*, pg. 276.
- 21 *Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Vesein Berachah, pg. 407). Vezev ha-Berachah, pg. 239, however, questions this ruling.*
- 22 *Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Vesein Berachah, pg. 475).*
- 23 *Pischei Halachah*, pg. 163; *Vesein Berachah*, pg. 79.
- 24 *Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Vezev ha-Berachah, pg. 375, note 66); Yechaveh Da'as* 4:52; *Vesein Berachah*, pgs. 395 and 422; *Pischei Halachah*, pg. 155.
- 25 *Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Vesein Berachah, pg. 410, and in Vezev ha-Berachah, pg. 372, note 10).*
- 26 *Vezev ha-Berachah*, pg. 102, quoting several poskim.
- 27 *Igros Moshe Y.D.* 4:48-5.
- 28 See *Vesein Berachah*, pg. 407 and *Vezev ha-Berachah*, pg. 239.
- 29 *Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Vesein Berachah, pg. 407); Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Vezev ha-Berachah, pg. 239).*
- 30 *Vezev ha-Berachah*, pg. 365.
- 31 *Mishnah Berurah* 303:1; *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 303:5; *Pischei Halachah*, pg. 154.
- 32 *Taz* 304:8; *Ketzos ha-Shulchan* 49:6.
- 33 *Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Vesein Berachah, pg. 396).*
- 34 *Vesein Berachah*, pg. 396; *Vezev ha-Berachah*, pg. 370.
- 35 *Ohr l'Tziyon* 14:21; *Harav S.Z. Auerbach, Harav C.P. Scheinberg, Harav M. Shternbuch, quoted in Vezev ha-Berachah, pg. 108 and in Vesein Berachah, pg. 520).*
- 36 *Harav Y.S. Elyashiv, ibid.; Pischei Halachah*, pg. 286.
- 37 *Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Vesein Berachah, pg. 429); Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (Vezev ha-Berachah, pg. 374, note 45).*
- 38 *Yechaveh Da'as* 2:21.
- 39 *Igros Moshe O.C.* 1:86.
- 40 *Vesein Berachah*, pg. 68; *Pischei Halachah*, pg. 108; *Vezev ha-Berachah*, pg. 366. The same rule applies to a goulash made from meat and vegetables.
- 41 Based on *Mishnah Berurah* 212:5; *Vesein Berachah*, pg. 60. *Weekly-Halacha, Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Torah.org. Rabbi Neustadt is Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights. He may be reached at 216-321-4635 or at jsgross@core.com. Weekly Halacha © 2019 by Torah.org.*

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com  
from: Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>  
to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com

**How Does Someone Convert to Judaism?**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

When our ancestors accepted responsibility to observe the Torah, they did so by performing bris milah, immersing in a mikveh, and offering a korban. In the same way, a non-Jew who chooses to join the Jewish people is entering the same covenant and must follow a similar procedure (Kerisus 9a).

The privilege of becoming a geir tzedek comes with very exact and exacting guidelines. On a technical level, the geir is accepting responsibility to perform mitzvos. Through the geirus procedure, he creates an obligation upon himself to observe mitzvos (Birchas Shmuel, Kiddushin #15).

**DEFINITION OF A JEW**

To the non-Jewish or non-observant world, the definition of a Jew is based on sociological criteria. But to the Torah Jew, the definition of a Jew is someone who is a member of a people who are obligated to fulfill all of the Torah's commandments. For this reason, it is axiomatic that no one can become Jewish without first accepting the responsibility to observe mitzvos (kabbalas mitzvos). This concept, so obvious to the Torah Jew, is almost never appreciated by the non-observant. Someone who does not (yet) observe mitzvos himself usually does not appreciate why observing mitzvos is imperative to becoming Jewish. This is why a not-yet-observant Jew often finds our requirements for giyur to be “unrealistic” or even “intolerant.” However, in reality, attempting to bend the Torah's rules reflects intolerance, or, more exactly, a lack of

understanding. The Torah Jew realizes that the basic requirement for becoming a Jew is accepting Hashem's commandments, since a Jew is, by definition, someone who is committed to leading his life in its every detail according to the laws of the Torah.

#### DISCOURAGE CONVERTS

As we all know, when someone requests to be converted to Judaism, we discourage him. As the Gemara (Yevamos 47a) says, if a potential convert comes, we ask him, "Why do you want to convert? Don't you know that Jews are persecuted and dishonored? Constant suffering is their lot! Why do you want to join such a people?" Why do we discourage a sincere non-Jew from joining Jewish ranks? Shouldn't we encourage someone to undertake such a noble endeavor?

The reason is that, even if the potential convert is sincerely motivated, we still want to ascertain that he or she can persevere to keep the mitzvos, even under adversity. Although we can never be certain what the future will bring, by making the path to conversion difficult, we are helping the potential convert who might later regret his conversion, when the going gets rough. Because of this rationale, some batei din deliberately make it difficult for a potential convert, as a method of discouraging him. As the Gemara explains, we tell him, "Until now you received no punishment if you did not keep kosher. There was no punishment if you failed to observe Shabbos. If you become Jewish, you will receive very severe punishments for not keeping kosher or Shabbos!" (Yevamos 47a)

I have used a different method of discouragement, by informing potential converts of the seven mitzvos bnei Noach. In so doing, I point out that they can merit olam haba without becoming obligated to keep all the Torah's mitzvos. In this way, I hope to make them responsible, moral non-Jews, without their becoming Jewish.

I once met a woman who was enthusiastically interested in becoming Jewish. Although she was living in a town with no Jewish community – she was keeping a kosher home! After I explained the mitzvos of bnei Noach to her, she insisted that this was not enough for her. She wanted to be fully Jewish.

Because of her enthusiasm, I expected to hear from her again. I was wrong. Perhaps her tremendous enthusiasm petered out. Alternatively, and more likely, she found a different way to consider herself Jewish, either on the basis of her grandfather's Judaism, or a "conversion" that was more "flexible."

Had we accepted her for conversion immediately, she would have become a sinning Jew, instead of a very observant non-Jew, which is what she is now. These are the exact issues that Chazal were concerned about. Therefore, they told us to make it difficult for someone to become Jewish, to see whether his or her commitment survives adversity. It was better that this woman's enthusiasm waned before she became Jewish than after she became Jewish and had no way out.

The following story from my personal experience is unfortunately very common. A gentle woman, eager to marry an observant Jewish man, agreed to fulfill all the mitzvos as a requirement for her conversion. (As we will point out shortly, this is not a recommended procedure.) Although she seemed initially very excited about observing mitzvos, with time she began to lose interest. In the end, she gave up observance completely. The unfortunate result is that she is now a chotei Yisrael (a Jew who sins).

#### MOTIVATION FOR CONVERTING

We must ascertain that the proposed convert wants to become Jewish for the correct reasons. If we discern or suspect that there is an ulterior reason to convert, we do not accept the potential convert, even if he is committed to observing all the mitzvos.

For this reason, converts are not accepted at times when there is political, financial, or social gain in being Jewish. For example, no converts were accepted in the days of Mordechai and Esther, nor in the times of Dovid and Shelomoh, nor will geirim be accepted in the era of the Moshiach. During such times, we suspect that the convert is somewhat motivated by the financial or political advantages in being Jewish (Yevamos 24b). This applies even if we are certain that he will observe all the mitzvos.

Despite this rule, unlearned Jews created "batei din" during the reign of Dovid HaMelech and accepted converts against the wishes of the beis din hagadol (Rambam, Hilchos Issurei Bi'ah 13:15). There is much literature on whether these geirim are accepted, but, if indeed their conversion was sincere and afterward it is obvious that this is true, they will be accepted.

The Rambam explains that the "non-Jewish" wives that Shlomoh married were really insincere converts. In his words, "In the days of Shlomoh, converts were not accepted by the official batei din... however, Shlomoh converted women and married them... and it was known that they converted for ulterior reasons and not through the official batei din. For this reason, the pasuk refers to them as non-Jews... furthermore, the end bears out that they worshipped idols and built altars to them" (Rambam, Hilchos Issurei Bi'ah 13:15-16).

Because of this rule, we do not accept someone who is converting because he or she wants to marry someone who is Jewish, even if the convert is absolutely willing to observe all the mitzvos (Yevamos 24b). I have seen numerous instances of non-Jews who converted primarily for marriage and who agreed to keep all the mitzvos at the time of the conversion. Even in the instances where mitzvos were indeed observed initially, I

have seen very few situations where mitzvos were still being observed a few years (or even months) later.

#### GEIRUS WITH IMPROPER MOTIVATION

What is the halachic status of someone who went through the geirus process for the wrong reasons; for example, they converted because they wanted to marry someone? If the convert followed all the procedures, including full acceptance of all the mitzvos, the conversion is valid, even though we disapprove of what was done. If the convert remains faithful to Jewish observance, we will treat him with all the respect due to a Jew. However, before reaching a decision as to his status, the beis din waits a while, to see whether the convert is indeed fully committed to living a Jewish life (Rambam, Issurei Bi'ah 13:15-18).

However, someone who is not committed to mitzvah observance and just goes through the procedures has not become Jewish at all.

Jim was interested in "converting to Judaism" because his wife was Jewish, and not because he was interested in observing mitzvos. At first, he went to a Rav who explained that he must observe all the mitzvos, and certainly they must live within a frum community. This was not what Jim had in mind, so he went shopping for a "rabbi" who would meet his standards. Who would believe that there is any validity to this conversion?

#### CONVERSION PROCESS

How does a non-Jew become Jewish? As mentioned above, Klal Yisrael joined Hashem's covenant with three steps: bris milah (for males), immersion in a mikveh, and offering a korban (Kerisus 9a). Since no korbanos are brought today, the convert becomes a geir without fulfilling this mitzvah. (We derive from a pasuk that geirim are accepted even in generations that do not have a Beis HaMikdash.) However, when the Beis HaMikdash is iy'h rebuilt, every geir will be required to offer a korban olah which is completely burnt on the mizbei'ach (Rambam, Hilchos Issurei Bi'ah 13:5). Those who have already become geirim will become obligated to bring this korban at that time. Besides these three steps, the convert must accept all the mitzvos, just as the Jews originally took upon themselves the responsibility to observe all the mitzvos.

Preferably, each step in the geirus procedure should be witnessed by a beis din. Some poskim contend that the bris and tevilah are valid even if not witnessed by a beis din. But all poskim agree that if the kabbalas (accepting) mitzvos does not take place in the presence of a beis din, the conversion is invalid (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 268:3). Thus, a minimal requirement for proper giyur (conversion) is that the geir's commitment to observe all the mitzvos and practices of a Jew be made in the presence of a kosher beis din. Any "conversion" with no commitment to mitzvos is, by definition, invalid and without any halachic foundation.

Unfortunately, some well-intentioned converts have been misled by people purporting to be batei din for geirus. I know of more than one situation in which people underwent four different conversion procedures, until they performed a geirus in the presence of a kosher beis din with proper kabbalas mitzvos!

#### KABBALAS MITZVOS

As mentioned above, kabbalas mitzvos is a verbalized acceptance to observe all the Torah's mitzvos. We do not accept a convert who states that he is accepting all the mitzvos of the Torah except for one (Bechoros 30b). Rav Moshe Feinstein discusses a woman who was interested in converting and was willing to fulfill all the mitzvos, except the requirements to dress in a halachically tzenuah manner. Rav Moshe rules that it is questionable if her geirus is valid (Shu"t Igros Moshe Yoreh Deah 3:106).

If the potential convert states that he/she accepts responsibility to fulfill all the mitzvos, we usually assume that the geirus is valid. However, what is the halacha if a person declares that he accepts the mitzvos, but his behavior indicates the opposite? For example, what happens if the convert eats non-kosher food or desecrates Shabbos immediately following his conversion procedure? Is he considered Jewish?

Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that, when it is clear that the person never intended to observe mitzvos, the conversion is invalid. The person remains a non-Jew, since he never undertook kabbalas mitzvos, which is the most important component of geirus (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 1:157; 3:106).

#### BEIS DIN

As mentioned before, conversion is an act that requires a proper beis din, meaning minimally, three fully observant male Jews.

Since a beis din cannot perform a legal function at night or on Shabbos or Yom Tov, conversions cannot be performed at these times (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 268:4).

#### CHILD CONVERSION

Until now we have discussed the conversion of adults. A child can also be converted to Judaism (Kesubos 11a). There are two common reasons why this is done: either when the child's parents are converting to Judaism, or when a non-Jewish child is adopted by Jewish parents.

The conversion of a child involves an interesting question. As we explained above, the convert's acceptance of the mitzvos is the main factor that makes him into a Jew.

However, since a child is too young to assume legal obligations and responsibilities, how can his conversion be valid when it is without a legal acceptance of mitzvos? The answer is that we know that children can be converted from the historical precedent of Sinai, where the Jewish people accepted the Torah and mitzvos. Among them were thousands of children who also joined the covenant and became part of klal Yisrael. When these children became adults, they became responsible to keep mitzvos (Tosafos, Sanhedrin 68b). Thus, in the case of giyur katan, the geirus process consists of bris milah and immersion in a mikvah.

There is, however, a qualitative difference between a child who becomes part of the covenant together with his parents and an adopted child who is becoming Jewish without his birth parents. In the former case the parent assumes responsibility for the child's decision (Kesubos 11a; Rashi, Yevamos 48a s.v. eved), whereas an adoptive parent cannot assume this role in the conversion process. Instead, the beis din supervising the geirus acts as the child's surrogate parents and assumes responsibility for his geirus. This same approach is used if a child comes of his own volition and requests to be converted (Mordechai, Yevamos 4:40).

#### CAN THE CHILD REJECT THIS DECISION?

Yes. If the child convert decides upon reaching maturity that he does not want to be Jewish, he invalidates his conversion and reverts to being a gentile. The age at which a child can make this decision is when he or she becomes obligated to observe mitzvos, twelve for a girl and thirteen for a boy (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 1:162).

#### CAN HE CHANGE HIS MIND LATER IN LIFE?

No. Once the child achieves maturity and is living an observant lifestyle, this is considered an acceptance of the conversion that cannot be rejected afterwards.

#### WHAT IF THE CHILD CONVERT WAS UNAWARE THAT HE WAS A GEIR AND DID NOT KNOW THAT HE HAD THE OPTION?

Rav Moshe Feinstein discusses the case of a couple that adopted a non-Jewish child but did not want to tell him that he was adopted. (Not telling the child he is adopted may be inadvisable for psychological reasons, but this is an article on halacha, not psychology.)

Rav Moshe raises the following halachic reason why the parents should tell the child that he is a convert. Assuming that the child knows he is a child convert, he has the option to accept or reject his Judaism when turning bar mitzvah (or bas mitzvah for a girl), which is a time that the parents have much influence on their child. Subsequent to this time, he cannot opt out of Judaism. However, if he does not discover that he is a convert until he becomes an adult, he would have the option at that time to accept or reject his Judaism, and the parents have limited influence on his decision.

#### WHAT IF THE CHILD WANTS TO BE A NON-OBSERVANT JEW?

What is the halacha if the child at age thirteen wants to be Jewish, but does not want to be observant?

There is a dispute among poskim whether this constitutes a rejection of one's conversion. Some contend that not observing mitzvos is not the same as rejecting conversion; the conversion is only undone if the child does not want to be Jewish. Others contend that not observing mitzvos is considered an abandonment of one's being Jewish.

Many years ago I asked my rebbe, Rav Yaakov Kulefsky zt"l, about the following situation. A boy underwent a giyur katan and was raised by non-observant "traditional" parents who kept a kosher home but did not observe Shabbos. The boy wanted to be Jewish without being observant, just like his adoptive parents. The family wanted to celebrate his bar mitzvah in an Orthodox shul and have the boy "lein" the Torah. Was this permitted or was the boy considered non-Jewish?

Rav Kulefsky, zt"l, paskined that the boy could "lein" and was considered halachically Jewish. Other poskim disagree, contending that being halachically Jewish requires acknowledging the mitzvos we must perform. Someone who rejects the mitzvos thereby rejects the concept of being Jewish.

#### GEIRIM ARE SPECIAL

If a potential geir persists in his determination to join the Jewish people, the beis din will usually recommend a program whereby he can learn about Judaism and set him on track for giyur. A geir tzedek should be treated with tremendous love and respect. Indeed, the Torah gives us a special mitzvah to "Love the Geir," and we daven for them daily in our Shmoneh Esrei!

Throughout the years, I have met many sincere geirim and have been truly impressed by their dedication to Torah and mitzvos. Hearing about the journey to find truth that brought them to Judaism is usually fascinating. What would cause a gentile to join the Jewish people, risk confronting the brunt of anti-Semitism, while at the same time being uncertain that Jews will accept him? Sincere converts are drawn by the truth of Torah and a desire to be part of the Chosen People. They know that they can follow the will of Hashem by doing seven mitzvos, but they insist on choosing an all-encompassing Torah lifestyle.

One sincere young woman, of Oriental background, stood firmly before the Beis Din.

"Why would you want this?" questioned the Rav.

"Because it is truth and gives my life meaning."

"There are many rules to follow," he cautioned.

"I know. I have been following them meticulously for two years," was the immediate reply. "I identify with the Jews."

After further questioning, the beis din authorized her geirus, offering her two dates convenient for them. She chose the earlier one, so she could keep one extra Shabbos. We should learn from the geir to observe our mitzvos every day with tremendous excitement – just as if we had received them for the first time!