

The Book of Ruth and Why We Should Proselytize

Rabbi Michael Ungar

Tikkun Leyl Shavuot – 5782

Number 15:15-16

טו הַקְהָל, חֻקָּה אַחַת לָכֶם וְלִגֵּר הַגֵּר: חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם, כַּכֶּם כִּגֵּר יִהְיֶה לְפָנַי יְהוָה.

15 As for the congregation, there shall be one statute both for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you, a statute for ever throughout your generations; as ye are, so shall the stranger be before the LORD.

טז תּוֹרָה אַחַת וּמִשְׁפָּט אֶחָד, יִהְיֶה לָכֶם, וְלִגֵּר, הַגֵּר אִתְּכֶם.

16 One law and one ordinance shall be both for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you.

Ruth 1:11-18

יא וַתֹּאמֶר נָעֲמִי שׁוּבוּנָה בָּנֹתַי, לָמָּה תִלְכַּנָּה עִמִּי: הֲעוֹד-לִי בָּנִים בְּמִעֵי, וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְאִנָּשִׁים.

11 And Naomi said: 'Turn back, my daughters; why will ye go with me? have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

יב שׁוּבוּנָה בָּנֹתַי יִלְכְּנָה, כִּי זָקֵנָתִי מִהָיִית לְאִישׁ: כִּי אֲמַרְתִּי, יֵשׁ-לִי תַקְוָה--גַּם הָיִיתִי הַלַּיְלָה לְאִישׁ, וְגַם יִלְדֹתִי בָּנִים.

12 Turn back, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say: I have hope, should I even have an husband to-night, and also bear sons;

יג הֲלֵהוּ תִשְׁבְּרֵנָה, עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ, הֲלֵהוּ תִעְגְּנָה, לְבָלְתִי לָכֶם? נָא, מִיָּד יִגְדְּלוּ בָנֵיכֶם, וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לָכֶם לְאִנָּשִׁים: כִּי גִדְּלוּ, יִגְדְּלוּ, וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לָכֶם לְאִנָּשִׁים: כִּי גִדְּלוּ, יִגְדְּלוּ, וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לָכֶם לְאִנָּשִׁים.

13 would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye shut yourselves off for them and have no husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your

הַיּוֹת לְאִישׁ; אֶל בְּנֹתַי, כִּי-מֵר-לִי
 מְאֹד מְכֹם--כִּי-יִצְאָה בִּי,
 יָד-יְהוָה.

sakes, for the hand of the LORD is gone
 forth against me.'

יָד וַתִּשָּׂנֵה קוֹלָן, וַתִּבְכְּינָה עוֹד;
 וַתִּשָּׁק עֲרַפָּה לְחֻמוֹתֶיהָ, וְרוּת
 דָּבְקָה בָּהּ.

14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept
 again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law;
 but Ruth cleaved unto her.

טו וַתֹּאמֶר, הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבֻמְתִּי,
 אֶל-עַמָּהּ, וְאֶל-אֱלֹהֶיהָ; שׁוּבִי,
 אַחֲרַי יְבֻמְתִּי.

15 And she said: 'Behold, thy sister-in-law is
 gone back unto her people, and unto her
 god; return thou after thy sister-in-law.'

טז וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אֶל-תַּפְגַּעֵי-בִי,
 לְעִזְבֹךָ לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרַיִךְ: כִּי
 אֶל-אֲשֶׁר יִתְלַכִּי אֵלָיךָ, וּבֵאֲשֶׁר
 תִּלְיַנִּי אֶלְיִן--עִמָּךְ עַמִּי, וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ
 אֱלֹהֵי.

16 And Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave
 thee, and to return from following after thee;
 for whither thou goest, I will go; and where
 thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall
 be my people, and thy God my God;

יז בֵּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת, וְשָׁם
 אֶקָּבֵר; כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי, וְכֹה
 יוֹסִיף--כִּי הַמּוֹת, יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי
 וּבֵינֶךָ.

17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there
 will I be buried; the LORD do so to me, and
 more also, if aught but death part thee and
 me.'

יח וַתֵּרָא, כִּי-מְתַאַמְצֶת הִיא
 לָלֶכֶת אִתָּהּ; וַתַּחֲדֹל, לְדַבֵּר
 אֵלֶיהָ.

18 And when she saw that she was
 steadfastly minded to go with her, she left
 off speaking unto her.

Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 6, 32a

Dearer to God than all the Israelites who stood at Mt Sinai is the convert. Had the Israelites not witnessed the lightning, thunder, and trembling mountain, and had they not listened to the sounds of the shofar, they would not have

accepted the Torah. But the convert, who did not see or hear any of these things, surrendered to God and accepted the yoke of Heaven. Can anyone be dearer to God than that?

Gerim 1:1

One who is about to become a proselyte is not received at once. Rather, he is asked: “What has induced you to convert? Do you not know that this nation is downtrodden more than all other nations?”

Ruth Rabbah 2:1

Rabbi Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of Rabbi Yudah b. R. Hanina: Three times the Bible says “Return” [in the case of Ruth], for the three times one must discourage him who seeks to become a proselyte; but if he continues to press to be received, then he is received. But Rabbi Isaac said [quoting Job 31:32]: “The stranger [proselyte] did not lodge in the street.” Always discourage with the left hand and draw near with the right.

Yorah Deah 268

Seif 1 – A convert who enters the congregation of Jews is obligated first for circumcision. If he was circumcised when he was a non-Jew (or he was born circumcised), it is necessary to take from him a drop of the blood of the covenant, but one does not bless over him. If his penis has been cut off, [the requirement of] his circumcision does not hinder him from converting to Judaism – it is enough for him to dunk. (If he immersed prior to circumcision, it is effective, because post facto it is considered immersion, and some say that it is not a valid immersion).

Seif 2 - When one comes to convert, three people say to him: What prompted you to come and convert? Or, don't you know that at this point in time Israel is pushed, oppressed, (hopeless and oppressed from, “Why are your stalwarts swept away”[Jeremiah 46:15]?) and insane and tormented ones come upon them? If he (the prospective convert) says, “I know, yet still I am not worthy to join them,” accept him immediately and inform him of the principles of the

faith, of the unity of God, of the prohibitions against idolatry, and go on at length with him about this. Also, instruct him a bit in a few of the less strenuous mitzvot and a few of the more serious mitzvot, about a few of the punishments (for transgressing) the mitzvot, and say to him, “When you first came to learn this, if you ate (forbidden fats) you would not be punished by being cut off. If you desecrated Shabbat, you would not be stoned, and now if you eat (forbidden) fats, you will be cut off, and if you desecrate Shabbat, you will be stoned. Do not expound on this at too great a length, and in as much as you have informed him about the punishments (for the transgressing) of the commandments, so too should you inform him of the rewards of (following) the mitzvot, that in the doing of these mitzvot he will merit life in the world to come, and that there is no such thing as a complete saint except for one who has wisdom and that does these commandments and knows them. Say to him, “As for the world to come, it is not hidden, rather it is for the righteous ones, that is, Israel, and that those who see Israel in sadness in this world, they will see goodness for them (in the world to come), for they are not able to receive the majority of their goodness in this world as idolaters lest they shoot them and they make a mistake and they lose their reward in the world to come. The Holy One, blessed be He, does not bring them most of the calamities in order that they are not destroyed, rather all of the idolaters are tools (of God), and they are standing. Expound at length upon this in order to make the words attractive. If he accepts, circumcise him immediately. Wait until he heals completely and afterwards dunk him (in the mikveh), and he should have no clothing or barrier between him and the water. Three people stand behind him and inform him of a few of the less strenuous and a few of the more serious mitzvot a second time and he stands in the water. If the convert is a woman, women sit her down in the water up to her neck and the rabbinic judges remain outside and inform her of a few of the less strenuous and more serious mitzvot while she sits in the water and afterwards she submerges in front of them and they return and leaves in order that they do not see her while she is getting out of the water. And then comes the blessing over immersion after the convert gets out of the water, and because he immersed, behold, he’s an Israelite! And if he returns to his original state, he’s an apostate of Israel. If he becomes holy, he remains holy.