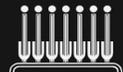




Good Shabbos SYDENHAM!

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12 May 2018 Parshas Behar-Bechukosai 27 Iyar 5778

Jews By Choice?

by: Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Are converts looked down upon in Judaism? Is conversion to our faith frowned upon? To be sure, I have been privy to plenty of disparaging remarks over the years - ironically, often made by people who themselves are far from religiously observant. "A leopard doesn't change its spots," is one of the milder ones I've heard. But, never mind what certain individual Jews may say. What does Judaism say?

No one forced him or her into it. If anything, those electing to join the Jewish faith are aware of something called Anti-Semitism. Do they need it in their lives? Are they suicidal, or just plain stupid? Why would anyone in their right mind go looking for tzoris?! Says the Midrash, one who does make that conscious, deliberate choice to embrace the G-d of Abraham despite the unique unpopularity of the Children of Abraham, is someone worthy of G-d's special love. A Jew by choice is a Jew indeed.

The simple answer is that the classic, age-old definition of a Jew has always been "one born of a Jewish mother or one who has converted to Judaism according to Halacha." So, provided the conversion process was supervised and performed by a valid, authentic Rabbinic body, a convert is just as Jewish as any born Jew. Those who would look down upon converts should remember that some of our greatest Torah sages were descended from converts, including the legendary Rabbi Akiva.

There remains a difficult passage in the Talmud (Yevamos 47b) that begs some elucidation. "Converts are as difficult for Israel as a blight!" - Not a very flattering depiction. A simple explanation might be that when converts are insincere and they are not really committed to living a full Jewish life - perhaps they converted for ulterior motives, like to marry a Jew - then their failure to observe the commandments brings disrepute to Judaism and may have a negative ripple effect on other Jews.

Furthermore, the Midrash contends that a genuine convert is more precious in G-d's eyes than one who was born Jewish. Why? Because one born of a Jewish mother had no choice in the matter. If your mother is Jewish, you are Jewish. Period. You cannot surrender your birthright. Like it or not, it is a biological and spiritual fact of life. You can attempt to convert out of the Jewish faith but Judaism does not recognize such artificial alterations. A Jew is a Jew is a Jew. If you were born a Jew, you will die a Jew.

But there is also an alternative interpretation. Some understand the suggestion that converts are a blight upon Israel to mean that they give born Jews a bad name. Why? Because all too often converts are more zealous than any other Jews in their commitment to the faith. Have we not seen converts who are more frum and more passionate about Judaism than most born Jews? A blight upon Israel would then mean that their deeper commitment and zealotry puts us to shame.

This week, we read the Tochecha - the Rebuke. A series of dire warnings to the Jewish people not to stray from G-d's ways and the curses that will befall us if we should, they are always read shortly

But a convert did not have to become Jewish.

What's Nu?!

The Barmy Boy Tomer Meir

Mazal Tov to Idan & Hayley and grandparents Avraham & Bracha Meir.

Calendar

Shabbos Mevordim Sivan Mdad: Tuesday 05:21:06

- ◆ Shacharis: 8:30 am; Shtibl: 8:45 am
- ◆ Welcome back to our Guest Chazan, *Oshy Tugendhaft*, in honour of his old friend, Hymie Sacks.
- ◆ Brocha in the Seeff Hall sponsored in honour of *Tomer Meir's* Bar Mitzvah and in honour of *Hymie Sacks' 90th* birthday.
- ◆ *Sushi & Black Label Farbrengen* with a report back from Rebbetzin Estee Stern & her ladies from the JWRP Israel Tour.
- ◆ Mincha: 4:55 pm
- ◆ Pirkei Avos: Chapter 5
- ◆ Shabbos ends: 6:04 pm
- ◆ Mincha next week: 5:25 pm
- ◆ *Yom Yerushalayim*: Saturday night and Sunday

Ladies Shavuot Shiur
with Rebbetzin Estee Stern
"A Romantic Relationship - G-d & the Jewish People"
This Sunday morning 9am
Sydenham Community Centre
Coffee, tea and refreshments

- ◆ *Nathan Fine* of I.deal Furnishers at Midway Mall, Bramley Gardens wishes all congregants a Good Shabbos. Call 011-887-5456/082-854-5706. **Furniture, Bedding & Appliances.**
- ◆ *Vehicles wanted. Any make, any condition. Best prices. Phone ARNOLD ORKIN 082 823 7826*
- ◆ Acknowledgements: Chabad.org,
- ◆ Please take Good Shabbos Sydenham home if you will only carry it within the Eiruv.

SYDENHAM SHUL PRESENTS

SHAVUOT DINNER

3 COURSE CHICKEN DINNER BY BRIOCHE



GUEST SPEAKER

HOWARD FELDMAN

Writer, Speaker, Radio Personality

Life in a Post-Humour World
Why Can't We Laugh at Ourselves?

Saturday Night 19 May, 7 PM
Seeff Hall

Cost: Adults R250. Children under 12, R100
RSVP: www.sydenhamshul.co.za or 011 640 5021



TIKKUN LAYL - Late Night Learning Programme

Sleepless in Sydenham!

10:30PM

"JEWISH MEDIA: RELIGIOUS, RESPONSIBLE, OR RELEVANT?"
Can Jewish Media Be Good? Can Good Media be Jewish?

A Panel Discussion featuring:
Howard Sackstein, Chairman, S A Jewish Report
David Saks, Editor, Jewish Affairs
Howard Feldman, Breakfast Show Host, Chai FM
Rabbi Yossy Goldman, Sydenham Shul



12:00am

J.C. IN THE TALMUD?
Origins of Christianity
Rabbi Yehuda Stern



1:00am

Did ALL the Nations Really say NO to the Ten Commandments?
Rabbi Eliezer Auerbach, Lecturer in Talmud at Yeshiva College & Mesivta Shaarei Torah



2:00am

HOW TO CREATE A RELIGION 101:
Who wrote the Torah? Hashem or Fred, the charismatic cultist?
Dani Kedar



2:45am

HOW ODD OF G-D TO CHOOSE THE JEWS!
No, not odd, the Jews chose G-d! WHICH WAS IT?
Rabbi Levi Ulman



3:30am

LIFE IN OUTER SPACE: A Torah Perspective
Rabbi Mendel Teitelbaum



4:15 am

OPEN MIC! CLOSING SESSION
Refreshments throughout the night. Cheese Cake and Blintzes in the wee hours.



before Shavuot, the Season of the Giving of the Torah. That moment at the mountain, when we stood at Sinai and experienced the great Revelation and the Ten Commandments was the moment when we became constitutionally enfranchised as a nation. Shavuot marks the day when we were transformed from a family - children of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah - to a nation. That is the day we all converted to Judaism. We all became Jews at Sinai. This is one of the reasons why we read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot, as she is the paradigm of the righteous, sincere convert.

So, every year at this time we read the sobering Rebuke to prepare us for the reliving of the historic event when we, too, became “converts,” so that we should enter into our covenant with G-d sincerely and genuinely, in reverence and in awe.

May all of us, those born or those who have become, be true Jews who will be true to our faith, our Torah and our tradition. May we accept the Torah anew with the passion and zeal of one who has just made that momentous choice, the choice to become a Jew.

Parsha Pointers

*Behar-Bechukosai: Artscroll pg 696;
Living Torah pg 630*

On the mountain of Sinai, G-d communicates to Moses the laws of the Sabbatical year: every seventh year, all work on the land should cease, and its produce becomes free for the taking for all, man and beast.

Seven Sabbatical cycles are followed by a fiftieth year— the Jubilee year, on which work on the land ceases, all indentured servants are set free, and all ancestral estates in the Holy Land that have been sold revert to their original owners. Additional laws governing the sale of lands, and the prohibitions against fraud and usury, are also given.

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G-d promises that if the people of Israel will keep His commandments, they will enjoy material prosperity and dwell secure in their homeland. But He also delivers a harsh “rebuke,” warning of the exile, persecution and other evils that will befall them if they abandon their covenant with Him. Nevertheless, “Even when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away; nor will I ever abhor them, to destroy them and to break My covenant with them; for I am the L-rd their G-d.”

The Parshah concludes with the rules on how to calculate the values of different types of pledges made to G-d.

Punishments or Gifts?

For years I perceived G-d as an
onlooker in my life
By Gittle Gesina

So, we answer the soul’s call. We learn about our roots, about the heritage bequeathed to us by our ancestors, and we make the transition to the religious way of life. We begin to observe Shabbat, keep kosher, adhere to the modest style of dress and participate in the numerous practices of the holidays.

Yet something is amiss. The baggage of the past doesn’t seem to allow us to fully embrace the new life. Fears, anxieties and worries do not leave us so readily, even though we seem to be doing all the right things. Without attempting to make this essay dramatic, I would like to share my insight, which has shed more light on and deepened my relationship with my Creator.

I started to believe in G-d in my adolescence. My adherence to Jewish practices steadily increased from age 16, and at 20, I undertook complete observance. I started to fulfill the commandments to the best of my knowledge and abilities. All seemed appropriate on the outside. What was on the inside? What about my personal, intimate relationship with G-d?

I read numerous accounts on how one is to experience G-d’s love and care, and I understood intellectually that He is always with us. The subconscious message, however, was different. I perceived G-d as an onlooker to my life. He was dispassionately watching from above as I struggled through the daily challenges, waiting for me to slip in order to shoot down the punishment. I con-

stantly feared something terrible happening if I let down my guard. I could not rely on anything because it could be taken away as a reprimand or a reminder not to be too cocky. Not only that, but G-d could inflict pain on me at His whim.

On the outside, intellectually, I accepted the Jewish view of G-d as benevolent, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in kindness and truth. On the inside, subconsciously, my old view persisted.

During one of my journaling excursions, I attempted to uncover the reasons for my fear of punishment and my shame for thinking that I deserved it. I realized that I was under the heavy influence of pagan ideology, which was further reinforced by the autocratic adult rule during my upbringing. Going against the established practices was wrong, and pain and suffering were self-inflicted by my own disobedience and willfulness. Comfort was possible only if I dutifully complied with the expectations of me.

To my surprise and relief, I was finally able to reconcile this subconscious indoctrination from childhood with my struggles as an adult.

When people refer to negative occurrences in life as punishments, they operate along materialistic guidelines. According to this view, the “bad” thing is anything which stands in the way of a person’s experiencing the pleasures and comforts of life. Losing a job means that there will be less money to get things one wants to have, to do the things one wants to do. An illness spells pain. There is frustration with not being able to enjoy sports, or even to do simple chores at one’s will. There seems to be no answer as to why bad things happen— natural calamities, wars, death. One draws the conclusion that it must be that G-d is a cruel G-d, quick to punishment. This view fills one with anxiety and dread of the future. If it is good now, it means that it will get bad at some point.

The spiritual approach offers another explanation to life’s seemingly painful events. The underlying principle of creation is that G-d made this world for the purpose of serving Him with complete devotion and self-abandonment, making this material existence into a dwelling place for Him. He is the Creator, and He causes everything to run according to His will. With every-

thing that happens to us, whether good or bad, we can learn how to serve Him a little better, how to draw down His presence a little closer. The challenges set in front of us are never greater than we what can handle. G-d is not only behind us, encouraging and cheering as we muster the strength to keep going, but He is beside us, breathing energy into us, and carrying us in His arms when we are unable to walk by ourselves. He is not out to break us, but to make us.

Losing a job, becoming ill or any other calamity one can think of are not punishments. At first, they cause us to reach deeper and deeper into our own resources, until we realize that we can’t do it without Him. From that, the realization that nothing is possible without Him begins to infiltrate our minds and hearts, changing our frame of reference on the world from self-centered to G-d-centered, exactly as He wants it to be. I cannot perceive a source of greater comfort and security.

In the course of my religious journey, I heard these explanations, read them, even spoke about them myself, but they never became a reality for me until I put them against my old, deeply rooted beliefs, which were the cause of all the fear, anxiety and shame. Now, the process of shaking off the distorted childhood views and turning around to face mature reality is just beginning to take place. This slow and gentle process— as it infuses my soul with insights, inspiration, gratitude and humbleness— enables me to proclaim that everything will only get better from now on.

Live & Laugh

A passenger in a taxi tapped the driver on the shoulder to ask him something. The driver screamed and lost control of the cab, nearly hit a bus and drove up over the curb, stopping inches from a large window. For a few moments everything was silent in the cab.

Then the driver quietly said, “Please don’t do that! You scared the daylight out of me.”

The passenger, who was also frightened, apologized and said he didn’t realize a tap on the shoulder could startle someone so much— to which the driver replied, “It’s really not your fault. Today is my first day driving a cab. I’ve been driving a hearse for 25 years.”