

TORAH & HORAAH



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Dear Reader,

Our article this week focusses on the obligation to love the ger. Rabbi Eliezer points out (*Bava Metiza* 59) that this obligation, whether in the positive form of loving the ger or in the negative form of avoiding his hurt and injury, is mentioned in the Torah more times than any other mitzvah, including Shabbos and idolatry. Why is this mitzvah so important, that it should occur more than any other?

Although the Sages understand the instruction as referring to the religious convert – one who joins the Jewish faith from outside – commentators point out that the simple meaning of the verse refers to a stranger. We are instructed to love the stranger, just as we were strangers in the land of Egypt. *Sefer Ha-Chinuch* (431) highlights this meaning: “We must learn from this precious mitzvah to pity those who are strangers in the land... as we see that the Torah obligates us to have compassion on those who require our assistance. With these dispositions we

This week’s article discusses the mitzvah to love the convert. What is the nature of this love, and how is it distinct from the general obligation to love our fellow Jew? Is there a mitzvah to accept converts, based on this special love? And does our love of a convert give him precedence in charity donations and other social matters? We will address these questions, and more, in this week’s article.

This week’s Q & A addresses the question of wearing one’s tzitzis out.

Loving the Convert

In Parashas Eikev the verse instructs us to “love the ger” (*Devarim* 10:19). This is understood as reference to the convert to Judaism: Beyond the general instruction to love all fellow Jews, we have a special obligation to love the convert.

Indeed, this is not the only place in the Torah where the special relationship with the convert is noted. In thirty-six instances the Torah notes the obligation to love the convert or to refrain from causing him any anguish or pain (see *Bava Metzia* 59b).

This seems to be difficult. If we are in any case instructed to love our fellow-Jew—as the Torah states, “love your fellow-Jew as yourself” (*Vayikra* 19:18)—why is there a need to instruct us to love the convert? Is the instruction not redundant, since after conversion the convert is as much a Jew as any other?

Commentaries give different answers to this question. The Ibn Ezra explains it is because a convert generally has a weaker social status. This makes him more vulnerable to the pitfalls inherent to any society, and there is therefore a need to reinforce our care for him. The *Sefer Hachinuch* (431) also states that the reason the Torah adds a specific prohibition is the difficulty encountered



merit compassion from Hashem, and Divine blessings will fall upon us.”

It is difficult to feel love and compassion for the stranger. A person is naturally close to himself, and to those who similar to him, such as family and associates. Those who are by nature far, strangers and foreigners, do not appeal to our human instinct of love and compassion.

Moreover, the stranger is often in a position of weakness, and it is the way of the strong to oppress the weak – as we know only too well from our troubled exile among the nations.

To counter the tendency to dislike and to oppress the stranger, the Torah instructs us to love him, and even to ensure that we do not oppress him.

The obligation to love the stranger is closely related to the concept of *achdus*, unity. The virtue of unity is of course contingent on there being diversity among particular individuals: Without diversity, the achievement of unity is merely uniformity, which is the very opposite of unity.

The virtue of unity is thus true only true within a diverse group that includes a range of different individuals: When different people unite under a single purpose, this is a true achievement of unity.

In instructing us to love the stranger, the Torah brings us closer to the unity that

by a convert who left his natural surroundings to join a foreign nation.

These explanations square well with the reason the Torah gives for the instruction to love the convert: Since you were strangers in the land of Egypt. The Rambam (*Aseh 207*), by contrast, notes the respect the convert deserves for the effort he made in accepting Hashem’s Torah—something that a Jew by birth did not exert. As we will discuss below, he goes so far as to compare the love of a *ger* to love of Hashem Himself.

In the current article we will reflect on the mitzvah to love the convert. What is the nature of this mitzvah of love? Does the mitzvah to love the convert also include an obligation to accept converts? And does the mitzvah give a convert preference in charity donations? These questions, among others, are discussed below.

The Rambam’s Love of the Convert

In his letter to Obadiah the convert (*Shut Harambam 293*), the Rambam opens with words of praise that are generally not found in his other writings: “I received the question of the master Obadiah, the wise and learned convert, may Hashem reward him for his work, may a perfect recompense be bestowed upon him by the G-d of Israel, under whose wings he has sought cover.”

The Rambam was asked by Obadiah if he may say the words, “the G-d of our fathers” in his prayers, and therefore avoid the shame of being different. The Rambam replied that a convert may use the same text as everyone else.

While the Mishnah (*Bikkurim 1:4*) writes that the convert cannot use the same liturgy as the born Jew when bringing Bikkurim (a ruling also mentioned in the *Tosefta 1:2*), the Rambam prefers the ruling of the Yerushalmi (*Bikkurim 1:4*), which cites rules that the convert may mention “our forefathers,” for Avraham Avinu is the father of all converts. The Rambam rules this in his Mishnah Torah (*Bikkurim 4:3*), and writes the same answer to Obadiah the convert.

After ruling that the convert may pray with the same words as a Jew by birth, the Rambam concludes with the following: “Do not consider your origin inferior. While we are the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, you derive from Him through

whose word the world was created.”

In another letter to Obadiah, Rambam reveals the core of our relationship with converts: a relationship of love. He explains that the obligation that the Torah has placed upon us concerning converts is great: “With respect to father and mother, we have been commanded to honor and to be in awe, and with respect to prophets, to obey them, and it is possible for one to honor, hold in awe, and obey one whom one does not love. But with respect to converts, we have been commanded to love, something which is given over to the heart.” He adds that the obligation to love the convert is parallel to the instruction to love Hashem, and adds that even Hashem loves the convert, as it says, “and loves the convert, in giving him food and clothing” (*Devorim 10:18*).

The comparison of love of the convert with the love of Hashem, which the Rambam repeats elsewhere (see also *Hilchos De’os 6:4*), is striking. What is so special about the love of the convert? Indeed, how is the love of the convert different from the love that we are commanded concerning every Jew?

Two Forms of Love

Commenting on the mitzvah to “love your neighbor as yourself,” the Ramban writes that the obligation cannot be understood as literal. It is impossible for a person to love another to the degree that he loves himself. Rather, the intention of the instruction is that a person should act towards his fellow with love, just as he acts towards himself: “The instruction of the Torah is to love one’s fellow in every matter, just as he loves himself with all goodness.”

The Ramban proceeds to base this understanding on the wording of the verse: “It is possible that since the verse says ‘to your neighbor’ (*lere’acha*) ... to make the love of both comparable in his mind. For sometimes one loves his neighbor with the things that are known to enhance his material happiness, but not with wisdom and similar qualities.” He explains that the expression of love for others should not be tinged with the jealousy often present between neighbors, and that a person “should not limit his love.”

The distinction made by the Ramban can help us understand Rambam’s statements concerning love of the convert. The scriptural command to love one’s neighbor expresses an obligation to act

Scripture presents as the ultimate goal of humanity: The unity of different and diverse groups and individuals under the single purpose of serving Hashem.

Today, there is no shortage of ‘others’ within any given community. Whatever group we might belong to, we will always find a wealth of other groups and factions, of individuals with different customs and different outlooks.

Whether or not these are the ‘strangers’ that the Torah refers to, they are ‘strangers’ to us – and without doubt we are instructed to love them as neighbors, as ‘strangers,’ or as both.

If we should still ask: Why is this mitzvah mentioned by the Torah more than every other? Perhaps the answer lies in the human achievement of closeness to God Himself. The ability to love God, to draw close to Him and to cleave to Him, is contingent on our ability to draw close to and to love the stranger. For God, even more than the stranger, is ‘Other’ to man.

It is in this light that Rabbi Akiva taught that the instruction “love you neighbor as yourself,” which likewise reflects the human ability to extend self-love to others besides oneself, is a “great principle of Torah.” Could it be that the Torah’s urging to love the ‘other’ is a principle more difficult, but still greater?

with love, but does not describe an instruction to love with one's heart—for it is impossible to love another as one loves oneself. Concerning a convert, however, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky (*Emes Le'Yaakov, Vayikra 19:17*) pointed out that the verse uses a different expression: not love “to the convert,” but love “of the convert” (*es hager*). One must love the convert in the full sense of the word: not merely a love expressed in deed, but a profound love of the heart.

In this, the love of the convert is comparable to love of Hashem, for which the Pasuk uses the same terminology: “You shall love (*es*) Hashem, your G-d.” Just as there is an obligation to love Hashem, which the Rambam describes as attaining closeness with and knowledge of G-d (*Hilchos De'os, Chap. 2*)—so we are instructed to love the convert. We must value his sacrifice. We are obligated to embrace his entry beneath the wings of the Shechinah, and our hearts must be full of love towards him.

Thus, in his letter to Obadiah the convert, Rambam writes that whereas one is not obligated to love one's father and mother, one is obligated to love the convert. The love towards a Jew can be expressed in deeds; but the love of the convert must find expression in the depths of the heart. They are different forms of love. The Rambam concludes that only the latter is comparable to the love of Hashem.

Order of Saving Lives

The Mishnah in *Horios* (Chap. 3) teaches us the order of priority in which lives are to be saved. In a situation where several lives are in danger, and a person is able to save only some of those endangered, to whom should he give preference? The Mishnah writes that “a Kohen comes before a Levi, a Levi before a Yisrael, a Yisrael before

a *mamzer*, a *mamzer* before a *nessin*, a *nessin* over a convert, and a convert over a freed slave.” The Mishnah concludes that this order is applied only when they are equal. However, when one is a Torah scholar, and the other is not, then even a *mamzer* who is a scholar takes precedence over an ignorant Kohen.

The order given by the Mishnah seems difficult. If there is a mitzvah to love the convert, a love that goes beyond that of regular Jews, how can it be that the convert is lower in the order of rescue than regular Jews?

However, based on our explanation above, there is no contradiction. The convert has made a special sacrifice. His journey into the Jewish people is unique, and for this we are commanded to love him with a special love. But this does bring him to the highest level in the Jewish nation. While there might be good reason to love a certain Yisrael more than a certain Kohen, the Kohen retains his hierarchical advantage, and must be saved first.

All Jews form the limbs of a single body. Yet, this does not mean that there are no distinctions between one limb and another, and for this purpose the convert (who is also disqualified from being a king, for instance) is not at the top of the ladder. Our obligation is to love the convert, with a degree of affection reserved for him alone. But this does not give him preference in saving his life.

Charity Donations

Concerning preference for business dealings, Rabbi Eliyahu Kushlevsky (*Davar Shebeminyan, mitzvah 207*) wrote that one should prefer a convert over a born Jew.

Discussing a case in which both a Jew by birth

and a convert require a specific item that a person can give as a gift, or a case in which a person has a choice of who to conduct his business dealings with, Rabbi Kushlevsky writes that the convert should be preferred. Although we are obligated to love all Jews, the obligation to love the convert is doubled, giving him preference over his Jewish brethren.

Rabbi Kushlevsky proceeds to cite an example of this in the tale of Ruth, where we find that Boaz preferred Ruth the convert to Jewish poor. However, this rationale would apparently apply even to the question of whom to save first—while the Mishnah, as cited above, teaches that for saving lives the convert is not the first priority.

It seems then that the Jew by birth, who is given preference concerning sustaining life, is also given preference concerning donations, gifts, and business dealings. Moreover, this is stated in the words of Rambam (*Matnos Aniyim* 8:17) and Shulchan Aruch (*Yoreh De'ah* 251:9), who rule as follows: “If several poor people are before him, or several captives, and there is insufficient funding to sustain, clothe, or redeem all of them, a Kohen precedes a Levi, a Levi precedes a Yisrael, a Yisrael precedes a *chalal* ... and a *nessin* precedes a convert.”

The same order of preference will presumably apply to all other forms of giving, for which preference is given to born Jews (unlike the above ruling of *Davar Shebeminyan*). We are obligated to love the convert, and to refrain from causing him pain and anguish. However, this does not mean that when giving charity money, the convert takes precedence over others.

Accepting Converts

Is there a mitzvah to accept converts?

The Torah mentions no such mitzvah. However, in discussing the judicial process of accepting converts the Gemara (*Yevamos* 47b) states that “one does not delay a mitzvah.” This implies that accepting converts does fulfill a mitzvah—a point made by the *Rashbatz* (*Zohar Harakia*). If no mitzvah is mentioned by the Torah, which mitzvah does the Gemara refer to?

Several approaches are suggested to this question (see *Mishnah Halachos*, Vol. 16, *Yoreh De'ah* 92; *Sefas Emes*, *Shabbos* 147b; Glosses of Rav Yosef Engel, *Yevamos* *ibid*; commentary of Rabbi Yehudah Perlow to *Rasag*, end of *mitzvah* 19). In fact, the *Mishnah Halachos* writes that there is no mitzvah to accept converts, and the mitzvah refers to those incumbent on the convert himself, once he converts. Since he cannot do this alone, we must assist him in doing so as quickly as possible. This seems to be the case since the Gemara (*ibid* 48b) states that the reason why *geirim* have many difficulties after converting is because they tarried in converting.

However, an approach mentioned by Ri Albargaloni (cited by Rabbi Perlow) is that the acceptance of converts who truly desire to become part of the Jewish nation and keep the Torah is a mitzvah upon Jews, and is included in the obligation to love the convert.

However, no one maintains that there is a mitzvah to seek converts.

Conclusion

The sensitivity with which the Torah approaches the *ger*—the stranger who has become a part of the Jewish people, leaving his home environment—is indicative of the society that the Torah wishes to create.

Those who are weak and vulnerable—the convert,

the orphan and the widow—are consistently singled out for preferential treatment, for special attention and for love.

While it is important to understand the halachic boundaries of this love, what it obligates and what

it does not obligate, the fundamental principle is key: We need to be sensitive to and aware of the weaker elements of our own society, to those whose social status places them at special risk of oppression and strife—and know how to show them our love and offer them our assistance.

Halachic Responsa to Questions that have been asked on our website dinonline.org



The Question:

I see many Yeshiva boys wearing their Tzitzis out, whereas many other frum Jews wear them in. Is there an obligation to have your Tzitzis out? Is somebody who doesn't do this violating something?



Answer:

It is virtuous (certainly for somebody from an Ashkenaz background) to wear one's Tzitzis out, but this is not a full obligation.

Best wishes.



Sources:

The Torah refers to “seeing and remembering the mitzvos of Hashem” by means of the Tzitzis, indicating that they should be worn out – as they surely were when attached to one's regular four-cornered garments. However, the wording clearly refers to the techeles, and Chazal also refer to seeing the techeles and not to the white strings of Tzitzis. Therefore, the matter of wearing Tzitzis in or out is apparently optional.

Yet, the Shulchan Aruch writes that one should wear the Tzitzis over his other garments so that he can constantly see them and be reminded of the mitzvos (Orach Chaim **8:11**), and the Mishnah Berurah (**8:26**) strongly objected to those who tucked the fringes of their Tzitzis into their pants, writing that doing so is a denigration of the mitzvos. He compares the Tzitzis to an autographed gift from a king which the recipient would surely want to wear in the most visible manner. This is also ruled by the Shulchan Aruch Ha-Rav (**8:18**) concerning the fringes themselves.

Yet, the Arizal would wear his Tzitzis under his other garments, and latter commentaries (including first and foremost Rabbi Chaim Vital; see Peri Etz Chaim, Tzitzis **1**) explain why this is required based on Kaballah. This is the custom of most Sephardi Jews today.

Moreover, there are testimonies of a number of great luminaries who wore their Tzitzis tucked in, and Rabbi Gustman zt”l used to say that all the great luminaries of pre-war Vilna used to do so.

Thus, although it has become the general custom of Benei Torah to wear their Tzitzis out, this is not a full obligation, and there remain many important Torah scholars, both Sephardi and Ashkenazi, who don't wear their Tzitzis out.