

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

COME AND GET IT

“You shall not see the donkey of your brother or his ox falling on the road and hide yourself from them; you shall surely stand them up with him.” (22:4)

The phone rang. A well-manicured hand stretched across a vast, sumptuous walnut and leather desk, selected one of several phones, and answered it.

“Speak.”

“Yes, Uh ... Yes, Uh. Is this Mr. Big?”

“That is what they call me...”

“Mr. Big — My name is Little. I need your help. I’ve heard you lend money to people. Do you think you could lend me, say, ten thousand dollars?”

Mr. Big listened. No one was more surprised than Mr. Little when, after a few minutes, he secured his loan.

“I can’t tell you how much this means to me, Mr. Big.”

“Just be here at my office tomorrow at 9 AM sharp.”

The following day came. 9 o’clock; 10 o’clock; 11 o’clock...

At 2 o’clock that afternoon the phone rang on the big walnut desk.

“Yes, Uh...Yes, Uh. Is this Mr. Big?”

“Little! Where were you this morning?”

“Look, I’m really sorry. Can I still get the loan?”

“Be here tomorrow morning at nine — without fail.”

“Yes, yes. Thank you so much. Tomorrow morning at nine. Without fail.”

The following day at 9 o’clock, Mr. Little was nowhere to be seen. Nor was he any more in evidence at 10, 11 or 12 o’clock. At 3 PM the phone rang. “Mr. Big. This is Little speaking. Is that loan still available?”

“Mr. Little, I just had a major sense of humor failure where you’re concerned.

Please don’t bother to ring me again. Good-bye.”

A Jew has a mitzvah to help someone load or unload his donkey (or his car) if it “fell by the road.” But the mitzvah is specifically to *help*. The Torah says “you shall surely stand them up *with him*.” With him. It doesn’t mean the owner of the donkey can say “Look chum. This is your mitzvah, okay? So I’ll just have a seat over here and order an iced lemonade while you deal with the donkey. After all it’s your mitzvah — not mine. Waiter!”

Similarly, when we pray for more spirituality in our lives, we must also

“The very least we must do is turn up at the office to get our free loan.”

make our own efforts to imbibe that spirituality. For example: When we pray every morning “*Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah*,” we are asking G-d to help us in our Torah studies. When we finish praying, then, shouldn’t we study some Torah? Wouldn’t that show we’re eager to receive the gift that we have just asked for?

When we pray for more spirituality in our lives, it will be given to us. But we must also make a little effort to receive this biggest of gifts.

The very least we must do is turn up at the office to get our free loan.

JUST FOR STARTERS

“When you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your G-d, will deliver them into your hand....” (21:10)

The Talmud states that a person’s *yetzer hara* (negative inclination) grows more powerful every day, and were it not for Hashem’s help he would succumb. Through natural means alone, we can never overcome our *yetzer hara*, and we would become discouraged and stop even trying to fight. Therefore the Torah tells us “*When you go out to war against your enemies*” — if you will only start to fight, only *go out to war* — you will be victorious, because “*Hashem your G-d will give them into your hand*” — you will receive Divine assistance to win the battle. As the Talmud states: “Someone who tries to purify himself receives help from above.”

DONKEY KONG

“Do not plow with an ox and a donkey together.” (22:17)

The ox represents the elevated part in each of us, our gazing heavenward, our desire to attain lofty spiritual goals. The donkey, on the other hand, is symbolic of everything physical, materialistic, and earth-bound. If we want to serve Hashem, to *plow* and labor in the field of spiritual elevation, we cannot hope to succeed if we are still yoked to the donkey within.

Sources:

Come And Get It - The Chafetz Chaim
Just For Starters - Talmud, Tractate Kidushin,
 Toras Moshe
Donkey Kong - Meor V'Shemesh

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah describes the only permissible way that a woman captured in battle may be married. In a case where a man is married to two wives, one whom he hates, and she bears a firstborn son, this son's right to inherit a double portion is protected against the father's desire to favor the child of the favored wife. The penalty for a rebellious son, who will inevitably degenerate into a monstrous criminal, is death by stoning. The body of a hanged man must not be left on the gallows overnight, because it had been the dwelling place of a soul which is holy. One who finds lost property has a responsibility to track down the owner and return it. Men are forbidden from wearing women's clothing and vice versa. A mother bird may not be taken together with her eggs; rather the mother must be sent away first. A fence must be built around the roof of a house to prevent people from falling. It is forbidden to plant a field with a mixture of seeds; or to plow using an ox and a donkey together; or to combine wool and linen in a garment. A four-cornered garment must have twisted threads — *tzitzis* — on its corners. Laws and penalties in regard to illicit relationships are detailed. When Israel goes to war, the camp must be governed by rules of spiritual purity. If as a result of the battle a slave escapes, he must not be returned to his master. Promiscuity is prohibited to men and women alike.

Taking any kind of interest for lending money to a Jew is forbidden. *Bnei Yisrael* are not to make vows even for a good cause. A worker may eat of the fruit he is harvesting, but not take it home with him. Divorce and re-marriage are legislated. A new husband is exempted from the army and stays at home the first year to make his wife happy until the relationship is cemented. Collateral on a loan may not include tools of labor, for this may prevent the debtor from earning a living. The penalty for kidnapping for profit is death. Removal of the signs of the disease *tzara'as* is forbidden. Even if a loan is overdue, the creditor must return the debtor's collateral every day if the debtor needs it. Workers' pay must not be delayed. The guilty may not be subjugated by punishing an innocent relative. Because of their vulnerability, proselytes and orphans have special rights of protection. The poor are to have a portion of the harvest. A court has the right to impose the punishment of lashes. An ox must not be muzzled in its threshing, but must be allowed to eat while it works. It is a mitzvah for a man to marry his brother's widow if the deceased left no offspring. Weights and measures must be accurate, and used with honesty. The Parsha concludes with the mitzvah to wipe out the name of Amalek, for in spite of knowing all that happened in Egypt, they ambushed the Jewish People after the Exodus.

HAFTORAH: YISHAYAHU 54:1-10

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General Editor:
Rabbi Moshe Newman
Editorial & Web Advisor:
Rabbi Reuven Lauffer
Associate Editors:
Rabbi Mordechai Becher,
Rabbi Reuven Subar
Contributing Writers:
Weekly Daf, Love of the Land:
Rav Mendel Weinbach
Insights, Overview, Haftorah:
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Web Production: **Eli Ballon, Michael Treblow**
Produced and Designed by the Office of Communications
Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director

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AN ORPHAN PRAYER

"Sing out O barren one, who has not given birth...for the children of the desolate outnumber the children of the inhabited." (54:1)

An old joke: "Rabbi. I prayed and prayed to G-d for something I really wanted, but my prayers weren't answered." "Yes, they were." said the Rabbi, "The answer was *no*."

Even when we think the answer to our prayers is "no," in reality, no prayer ever goes unanswered. Every prayer makes an impact in the higher

spiritual realms. When a prayer seems to have fallen by the way, we look at it as worthless, and yet it makes an awesome impact on the very fabric of reality. Far beyond our comprehension in the loftier spheres, that little prayer is moving worlds.

This is the meaning that lies behind the verse "Sing out O barren one, who has not given birth...for the children of the desolate outnumber the children of the inhabited." The children of the desolate, those "orphan" prayers are changing the universe beyond the limited view of our physical eyes.

• *Degel Machane Ephraim*

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED IN THE MEMORY OF
MR. ISADORE KAPLAN, OBM

לע"נ ר' ישראל אייזיק בן ר' שכנא הכהן ז"ל
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD

“He (Yaakov) dreamed and behold there was a ladder standing on the earth with its top reaching heaven, and behold, angels of G-d were going up and down on it.” (Bereishis 28:12)

Heaven is the abode of angels, so it would seem more logical for the angels in Yaakov’s prophetic dream to first descend and then ascend. This led our Sages to conclude that there were two sets of angels — those who had hitherto escorted Yaakov while he was in Eretz Yisrael, and those who were to become his escorts when he left the land on his way to the home of his uncle, Lavan.



The Eretz Yisrael angels don’t leave the Holy Land, so they went up the ladder back to Heaven, while the angels in charge of escorting outside of Eretz Yisrael came down to take over this responsibility.

The need for different angels may be understood in the light of our Sages’ statement (quoted by Rashi in Bereishis 18:2), that an angel is never charged with two different missions. Angelic protection in Eretz Yisrael is so distinct from that provided outside the land that it might have constituted assigning two different missions to the same angel.

• Bereishis Rabbah 68:12

BONUS QUESTION?

Dr. Watstein stood alone in the mahogany study. “Have you misplaced the inspector’s report?” asked world famous detective Sherlock Holmes as he entered the room. “You’ll find it on the floor by the window, behind the curtain,” said Sherlock.

Watstein gasped, walked to the window and pushed back the curtain. On the floor lay his missing stack of papers. “How could you possibly have known all that? I don’t even remember putting them there!” he said.

“If you remember correctly,” said Sherlock, “you promised me last week you would bring the report this morning. But when I entered the room, you were looking about. Why were the papers not on my desk, I wondered.”

“What did you conclude?” asked Watstein.

“It’s windy today. Assuming that the window was open, it would have been too windy for you to put the report on the desk without the wind scattering it about. You would then go to close the window, only to discover — undoubtedly with some frustration — that you need two hands to do so. Then — perhaps not even fully aware of what you yourself were doing — you may have put down the papers in the most convenient place, on the floor. There, the curtain might easily conceal them. You then would struggle with the stubborn window, close it, and walk away; by the time you remembered the papers, you might have completely forgotten where they were. Sometimes our hands act as if they belong to others,” said Sherlock.

“Speaking of subconscious actions,” said Watstein, “can you explain the verse about the *forgotten bundle*? If a person owns a field and forgets a bundle of produce during the harvest, the Torah requires him to leave the bundle for poor people to take. If the owner does this, the verse promises him: *Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in all the work of your hands.* (Bamidbar 24:19)

“Shouldn’t a charitable person deserve G-d’s blessing?” asked Sherlock.

“It’s Rashi’s comment that’s difficult. Rashi says: *From here it can be derived that if a coin falls from a person’s hand, and a poor person finds it and spends it, the loser receives a (heavenly) blessing.* (Rashi *ibid.*)

“A novel idea, indeed,” said Sherlock.

“Indeed! How can Rashi compare losing a coin to leaving a bundle in the field? The field-owner, although at first he forgets a bundle, but at the end he *remembers* it. He then leaves it for the poor. This is a *conscious* decision on his part, and for this he deserves a blessing. A person who loses a coin, on the other hand, has no *chance* of retrieving it. He wants to find it, but doesn’t know where to look! How, then, does Rashi see from the words *Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in the work of your hands* that if a coin falls from a person’s hand, and a poor person finds it, that the loser becomes a winner?

“Sometimes,” said Sherlock, “our hands act as if they belong to others.”

answer on page eight

WEEKLY DAF

PESACHIM 16 - 22

A FORBIDDEN FAVOR

Just as a Jew is forbidden to transgress the commands of the Torah, so too is he forbidden to assist someone else in sinning. This is the meaning of the passage: “You shall not place a stumbling block before a blind person.” (*Vayikra 19:14*)

This extends also to assisting a non-Jew transgress one of the commandments given to all mankind (the Seven Noachide Laws). Therefore, Rabbi Nassan informs us, it is forbidden to hand a non-Jew a limb which was removed from an animal while the animal was still alive for the purpose of eating it, because this too is considered placing an obstacle in the path of one blind to his obligation.

The following is inferred from this statement: If not for the fact that the Jew is an accomplice to a forbidden act, it would be permissible for him to sell or give such a limb to a non-Jew, even though the Jew is thus deriving benefit from something the Torah has forbidden him to eat. There is, in fact, a consensus of the Sages that one may derive benefit from such a limb, such as feeding it to his dog.

Tosefos raises a problem regarding this deduction: Who owns the forbidden limb, the Jew or the non-Jew? It is clear from the *gemara* (*Mesechta Avoda Zara 6b*) that it belongs to the non-Jew, since Rabbi Nassan speaks of “handing” it to a non-Jew rather than “giving” it. “Giving” it would have implied a transfer of ownership. If the Jew is neither selling nor giving it to the non-Jew, what possible benefit does he derive which allows us to make the above inference, namely that deriving benefit from this forbidden food is permissible?

Tosefos’ resolution is that we must compare his handing the limb to the non-Jew to a situation in which he receives payment in exchange for handing the limb. If it is forbidden to sell to the non-Jew (or present it as a gift, since every gift is viewed in law as a virtual sale, because it is offered either as payment for a gift received or as an invitation for a return gift), then it should also be forbidden to simply perform the service of handing it to him, since this would give him the benefit of the non-Jew being beholden to him for doing him this favor.

• *Pesachim 22b*

LITTLE WORD WITH A BIG MEANING

A powerful dilemma faced the Sage Shimon the Amsonite. He had made a lifelong project of interpreting the word “es” every time it appeared in the Torah. Even though it often seemed superfluous, he would find some way of explaining how it came to include something not explicitly mentioned in the passage in which this word appeared.

Then he came to the passage in which this word “es” precedes the command “You shall fear Hashem your G-d.” (*Devarim 10:20*) What could this “es” possibly include, he asked, since nothing could be equated to Hashem and included with Him as an object of fear? He therefore decided to abandon his approach: “But Rebbie,” asked his distraught disciple, “what will happen to all the interpretations you made until now on the word ‘es’?”

“Just as I received Heavenly reward for the *drisha* (the interpretation),” replied the Sage, “so shall I receive this reward for the *prisha* (the abandonment of this approach).”

Maharsha explains this cryptic response as follows: This Sage’s objective in offering interpretations for every “es” in the Torah was to honor Hashem and His Torah by demonstrating that there was not a single superfluous word in the Torah. Since his purpose was to thus honor Hashem, he felt that he would achieve that same goal by avoiding any interpretation which might cause anyone to be included in the same category with Hashem.

But, asks Maharsha, why did this Sage not reach the same impasse in an earlier passage in which the word “es” precedes the command of “You shall love Hashem, your G-d?” (*Devarim 6:5*)

This was a surmountable challenge, explains Maharsha, because it is conceivable that the “es” here teaches to include loving a Torah scholar, which could be equated to love of Hashem. But fear of Hashem, which stems from fear of retribution, could hardly be extended to any mortal, even Torah scholars.

Rabbi Akiva, however, did interpret the “es” in regard to Torah scholars, not from the point of view of fear of retribution, but rather of respect. He saw this not as a slight to the honor of Hashem, but as a tribute to the Torah scholars who learn Hashem’s Torah.

• *Pesachim 22b*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why must a woman captured in war spend a month mourning the loss of her family in her captor's house?
2. What fraction of the inheritance does a first-born receive if he has a) one brother? b) two brothers?
3. What will become of a *ben sorer u'moreh* if his parents don't bring him to court?
4. Why is it a degradation to Hashem to hang a criminal's body on the gallows overnight?
5. What do you do if you find a lost object that costs money to maintain?
6. Why does the Torah forbid wearing the clothing of the opposite gender?
7. Why does the Torah link the mitzvah of sending away the mother-bird with the mitzvah of making a railing on the roof of your house?
8. When is it permitted to wear wool and linen?
9. What three things happen to a man who falsely slanders his bride?
10. Although the Egyptians enslaved the Jewish People, the Torah allows marriage with their third-generation converts. Why?
11. Why is it worse to cause someone to sin than to kill him?
12. If one charges interest to his fellow Jew, how many commandments has he transgressed?
13. What is the groom's special obligation to his bride during their first year together?
14. When is a groom required to fight in a non-obligatory war?
15. What type of object may one not take as collateral?
16. "Remember what Hashem did to Miriam." To what event does the Torah refer?
17. If a poor person finds money, the one who lost it receives a blessing. From where do we derive this?
18. Who is primarily obligated to perform *yibum*?
19. Which two people in this week's Parsha are required to speak in *Lashon Hakodesh*.
20. How does the Torah describe those who cheat in business?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 21:13 - So her captor will find her unattractive.
2. 21:17 - a) 2/3 b) 1/2
3. 21:22 - He will eventually rob and kill to support his physical indulgences.
4. 21:23 - Because humans are made in Hashem's image; and because the Jewish People are Hashem's children.
5. 22:2 - Sell it, and save the money until you find the owner.
6. 22:5 - It leads to immorality.
7. 22:8 - To teach that one mitzvah leads to another, and to prosperity.
8. 22:12 - Wool *tzitzis* on a linen garment.
9. 22:18 - He receives lashes, pays a fine of 100 silver *selah*, and may never divorce her against her will.
10. 23:8 - Because they hosted Yaakov and his family during the famine.
11. 23:9 - Murder takes away life in this world, while causing someone to sin takes away his life in the World to Come.
12. 23:21 - Three; two negative commandments and a positive commandment.
13. 24:5 - To gladden her.
14. 24:5 - When he remarries his ex-wife.
15. 24:6 - Utensils used to prepare food.
16. 24:9 - Hashem punishing Miriam with *tzara'as* for speaking *lashon harah*.
17. 24:19 - From the mitzvah to leave the "forgotten bundle" for the poor.
18. 25:6 - The eldest brother.
19. 25:8 - The *yavam* (brother-in-law) and the *yavamah* (his childless brother's widow).
20. 25:16 - "An abomination (*to'evah*) to Hashem."

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

Honoring parents and sending away the mother bird are two commandments which the Torah equates regarding their reward: "In order that He will bestow good upon you, and long life...." (Devarim 22:6) Why should sending away a bird, a simple act, share the status of a very difficult mitzvah, honoring parents? What is the connection between these two mitzvos?

When a person approaches a bird's nest to take the young, the mother bird could easily fly to safety. But instead, she stays by the nest in order to protect her young, putting herself in danger. To capture her in this position would be to take advantage of her self-sacrifice for her young. Therefore, the Torah forbids us to capture her thus, and instead requires us to send her away. Surely, then, we must honor our parents, who sacrifice so much for us.

• Based on Oznaim L'Torah

“ASK THE RABBI” receives many questions regarding conversion to Judaism. The following are some sample questions we have received:

Jim from Roberts, Washington <613@usa.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
If a Gentile feels compelled to Torah observance, is this inappropriate because he is not Jewish and without the leadership (or at least advice) of a local rabbi? Should this person be encouraged only to follow the Noachide laws, or to consider conversion?

Rick email@withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
My name is Rick, and I'm 16 (very soon to be 17) years old. I have studied Judaism through books, the help of my Jewish neighbors and I manage to attend shul every so often. Soon, I'll be entering the Air Force. I have wanted to convert for three years, and want to get converted before I enter the service. I want my belief and religion to be official. I don't want to die (G-d forbid) in combat without having my spiritual belief official. What should I do, and how should I go about it? Shalom.

Christoph M. Kubiak <cmk17358@cca.munet.edu> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
Shalom Rebbe. What are the writings in the Torah or Midrashim concerning the treatment of converts from a rabbinical perspective and from the community's perspective? I know a guy who wants to convert, and I am curious what ceremonies or rules that apply to his conversion. Will he be a True Jew and will his children? I don't know this kind of stuff so I want to help him find out. He has studied Torah for many years so he is sure that Hashem guides him this way for a good reason.

Mark Zuckerbraun <markz@mmailgw.idsnet.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I know that Orthodox conversions typically require about two years' time to be complete. I had heard that there were some Orthodox rabbis who have converted people in less than this time, sometimes in only ten days! Therefore, my question is, if such a conversion would normally be considered invalid, but three truly Orthodox rabbis ruled the conversion to be valid and signed the certificates, would that in and of itself be enough to allow the conversion to be considered valid by Am Yisrael?

John Ross, Kadena Air Base, U.S. <rossj@kic.or.jp> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I'm interested in becoming a ger (convert to Judaism). However, I'm in the US Air Force and so can't have a beard. Plus, my fiancée and I honestly do not know if we could be faithful to all the requirements. Are both of those requirements necessary before any Beit Din would recognize me as Torah observant (and thus eligible to become a ger)?

Nicole Blake from Woodbridge, Ontario <blake1@direct.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I am a 17 yr. old African-American Christian girl. I recently started to read the Bible, and I've had deep thoughts of converting to the Jewish religion. Although I have a lot of friends that are Jewish, I've never shared my thoughts of converting with them, because I'm afraid that I won't be accepted by the Jewish community because I'm black. Can you please help me to make the right decision of converting, by telling me how I too can be a faithful believer in Judaism?

Name@Withheld from Florida wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I'm having a problem with my daughter-in-law who converted to Judaism and has a son, and now can't accept the fact she can't celebrate Xmas. What do you do?

Name@Withheld from UK wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I am an English girl who would like to convert to Orthodox Judaism (I have already converted to Reform Judaism). I would be grateful if you could tell me the best way of going about this, and which authorities are halachically acceptable.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Each of the above individuals has already received a personal reply from “ASK-THE-RABBI.” Each reply is different and attempts to address each person's specific situation. What follows is a general essay on conversion which answers some of the above questions. The following essay was not sent to the above individuals.

Before the giving of the Torah there was no strict legal definition of a Jew, because the law had not yet been given. This means that the people who came to Mt. Sinai were not Jews (in a legal sense) yet. In fact, the Revelation at Mt. Sinai can be viewed as a mass conversion to Judaism of millions of descendants of Abraham. In this sense, every Jew is descended from a convert; some go back to Sinai, and some later in history.

The idea of conversion after Mt. Sinai is mentioned in the Torah itself and we are exhorted more than thirty times (!) not to oppress a convert. For instance, “And when a convert lives amongst you in your land do not oppress him. The convert shall be like one of your citizens and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt...” (Leviticus 19:33-34)

We derive our obligation to welcome a convert from one of the most famous converts in history, Yitro, the

father-in-law of Moses. As the Midrash states: "I am the One who drew Yitro near and did not reject him. You also, when a person comes to convert and does this for the sake of Heaven, draw him near and do not reject him."

What does the conversion process involve? It requires that the non-Jew go through a re-enactment of the revelation at Mt. Sinai. As Maimonides writes: "The Israelites entered into the covenant with three things; circumcision, immersion, and sacrifices. Circumcision was performed in Egypt, as it is written *'and all uncircumcised (males) shall not eat of it (the paschal lamb).'*' Immersion (purification) was performed in the desert before the giving of the Torah, as it is written *'and you shall sanctify yourselves today and tomorrow.'* And at this time sacrifices were also brought...So too for all generations, a gentile who wishes to enter into the covenant, to find shelter under the wings of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) and to accept upon himself the yoke of Torah, requires circumcision, immersion and acceptance of a sacrifice (at the time of the Temple)."

There are three basic components to the contemporary conversion process: Circumcision (for males), immersion in a *mikveh* and as Maimonides mentions, the acceptance of the "yoke of Torah." This is just like the Jews at Sinai who unconditionally accepted all the commandment when they said "We will do and we will listen." All the above must be done in the presence of a *Beit Din* (Jewish court) because they are the representatives of Moses, the lawgiver.

If any one of the above three things is omitted, the conversion is invalid. A convert to Judaism must be prepared to accept all the commandments of the Torah without exception. If there is no acceptance of the commandments, even if three Orthodox Rabbis rule that the person is Jewish, he is *not* Jewish. Without acceptance of the Torah's commandments, the conversion would just be a sham.

Once a person sincerely converts to Judaism, they are

100% Jewish, and we are obligated to love, welcome and accept them into our people. When they recite the prayers, they refer to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs as "*our fathers*" and "*our mothers.*" At the Passover Seder they say "G-d took *our fathers* out of Egypt." They are full-fledged members of the Community of Israel.

In general, we do not encourage someone to convert. There are two reasons for this:

First of all, we believe that when a gentile keeps the seven Noachide laws, he merits a portion in the World-to-Come, and therefore there is no imperative for him to become Jewish. If, like the Christians and Moslems, we believed that those of other religions are condemned to damnation, then we also would desire to convert people. However, we believe that a person can be completely righteous and merit the World-to-Come without conversion, by adhering to the basic moral laws revealed to Noach. Therefore we feel no compulsion to convert others, unless they show a desire to convert.

Secondly, since sincerity is one of the criteria for conversion, one way in which we can determine that the candidate is sincere is by discouraging him from converting. If he persists and does so for the love of Judaism, then we accept him with open arms.

It's interesting to note that some of our most famous scholars were converts, or descendants of converts. Rabbi Akiva was the son of Yosef the *ger tzedek*, the righteous convert. The Talmud states that some of the greatest rabbis were descendants of Haman! The standard Aramaic translation of the Torah that is printed in most Chumashim was written by a convert, Onkelos.

Sources:

- *Yalkut Shimoni Yitro 268*
- *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Forbidden Relationships, 13:1-4*
- *Tractate Sanhedrin 66b*

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Sherlock (Ohrnet Balak):

I enjoyed (as always) the Sherlock Holmes section, and would like to tell you about an interesting alternative explanation (that I heard) for Rashi's comment that Bilaam's statement was self-indicting: Balak offered Bilaam honor (which is taken literally, instead of meaning money), and Bilaam replied that "Even if you offered me all your silver and gold...." The word "even" implies that Bilaam considered the money an even greater reward than honor. Thus Bilaam's statement

could read: "Not only will I refuse to do this for honor, but even if you offered me all the gold, I still would not transgress Hashem's word..." placing money above honor, and giving a little insight into Bilaam's perspective. Thank you for the fascinating DTs! Keep them coming!

- A. Ziskind, Cape Town SA <az@uctvms.uct.ac.za>

Re: Yiddle Riddle (OhrNet Beha'aloscha):

You asked a riddle regarding a person performing two identical acts, the first time it's a mitzvah and the second time it's a sin: Here's another answer: It's a *mitzvah* to circumcise an eight-day old baby, even on Shabbat. However, if a baby is nine days old or older, it is forbidden to circumcise him on Shabbat. So, if on Shabbat a person circumcises an eight-day old baby and then a nine-day old baby, the first one would be a mitzvah and the second one would be a sin. Looking forward to more riddles.

- Ravi Shahr <ravis@writemail.com>

THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING BUTTONS

The dedicated special-ed teacher was exasperated. Every day she would welcome her favorite special-needs pupil, and notice that the child was missing buttons. Blouse buttons, coat buttons... Poor child, she thought. Not enough that the child has speech problems and learning problems, but why can't her mother at least send her to school looking neat and normal? I must bring up this problem with the school social worker and school psychologist, she reasoned.

Meanwhile, back home, the child's mother was exasperated. Every day she would see her child getting off the school bus looking "undone." Missing buttons: Sleeve buttons, coat buttons... What on earth do they do in that kindergarten? Climb trees? Do army drills? Why can't they send her home looking neat and normal? I must be more assertive, she thought.

There is a third side to this story: The child's side. When no one was looking, especially on the bus on the way to

school, she would amuse herself by turning buttons around and around, pluck them off, and later, quietly, flush them down the toilet. In the afternoons she would love to watch her mother sewing, and sewing and sewing... It took the mother, and all kinds of experts, over a year to solve this mystery, while the "slow learner" was having a jolly good time!

• Concept based on "The Other Side of the Story" by Yehudis Samet, ArtScroll Series

Do you have a story to share?

Were you ever in a situation with potential to judge negatively, but there really was a valid explanation? Has a friend or a relative ever told you how they were in such a situation? Share your stories with us for inclusion in future columns of *The Other Side of the Story*. To submit your story, send it to <info@ohr.org.il> or write to Ohrnet POB 18103 Jerusalem or Fax 02-581-2890.

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week we asked: Which weekly Torah portion don't we read this year?

Answer: Parshat Vayelech. In the year 5757, Parshat Vayelech was read before Rosh Hashana (25 Elul 5757). The next reading of Parshat Vayelech is in 5759, just after Rosh Hashana (6 Tishri 5759). In 5758 it is not read at all.

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BONUS ANSWER!

"The verse states," said Sherlox, "Hashem will bless you in all the work of your hands. Why does the verse distinguish between you and your hands?"

"What do you mean?" asked Watstein.

"Why doesn't the verse simply say Hashem will bless all the work of your hands? That would have been more concise; and indeed, the Torah uses that very same phrase later: And to bless all the work of your hands (28:12).

"Continue," said Watstein.

"By saying that Hashem will bless you for the work of

your hands, it implies that you, yourself, will receive a blessing for something that your hands did."

"I see," said Watstein. "By the seemingly extra phraseology, the verse distinguishes between you and your actions. It's as if the verse is saying: You will receive a blessing even for those of your actions in which you yourself took no true part in. Hence, you are blessed even when a coin falls from your hand and a poor person finds it!"

• Based on Taz Created by Reuven Subar

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

| | | | | | | |
|-------|---|-------|--------------------|--|-----|------------------------|
| 21:18 | RAMBAN Gluttony and Rebellion | 25:17 | Remembering Amalek | SEFER HACHINUCH In this Parsha there are 27 Positive Commandments and 47 Negative Commandments | 550 | Unnatural Combinations |
| 21:22 | Hanging | | SFORNO | | 552 | Marriage |
| 22:6 | Reason for Mitzvos | 21:16 | The Birthright | 533 | 561 | Ingratitude |
| 23:10 | Wartime Morality | 21:23 | Hanging | | 579 | Divorce |
| 23:20 | Usury | 22:7 | Torah Ecology | 545 | 599 | Filial Responsibility |
| 24:9 | Lashon Harah | 23:20 | Kindliness | | | |