

# The Weekly Daf



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Yevamot 20 - 26

Week of 11 17 Tevet 5760 / 20 - 26 December 1999

Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

## Taking Things Literally

A purely literal reading of the Torah can sometimes be misleading. The classic example in regard to a *mitzvah* is the Torah command for the brother of a man who died childless to perform *yibum*

says the Torah (*Devarim 25:6*)

involved in *yibum* to name their first-born son after his deceased uncle.

This however,

*Bereishet 48:6*) obviously refers to inheritance rather than to the given name, so too *yibum* refer to inheritance. The passage should then be understood in this way: The oldest of the surviving brothers has the prime responsibility for performing *yibum*, and if he or any of the other brothers in the event that he refuses

Reflecting upon this radically non-literal interpretation, the Sage Rava commented that this is an exception to the general rule of Biblical interpretation that requires us to apply the literal interpretation of a passage in addition to any other interpretations that it communicates. This is the one instance, he notes, where the literal interpretation is completely abandoned.

It is this statement of Rava that led some commentaries to an interesting conclusion regarding another *mitzvah*

*Vayikra 19:14*), and our Sages interpret this as a ban

on giving bad advice or assisting someone in violating Torah law. This interpretation of the Oral Law was not accepted by the Kuttim who adhered to the Written Law only. They understood this literally as a ban on placing a stone in the path of a blind man (*Rashi, Mesechta Chullin 3a*). What about us do we include this literal interpretation in the Torah ban along with the other aforementioned ones, or do we consider it to be completely abandoned?

Two sides of the case are presented in the discussion of this matter, both in the Minchat Chinuch (*Mitzvah 232*) and the Ohr Somayach in his Meshech Chochma commentary on the Torah.

*Yevamot 24a*

## Perversion of Conversion

If someone converts to Judaism out of a fear of lions, the Sages differ as to whether that conversion is valid. Although Rabbi Nechemia disqualifies any conversion not purely motivated by a desire to be Jewish, the halacha follows the opposing view which rules that even such a conversion is valid.

Who are these mysterious converts out of fear of lions?

Rashi refers us to the Kuttim, who King Sancherib of Assyria brought from their native land to *Eretz Yisrael* to replace the ten tribes he exiled to their land. After settling in the cities of Samaria and continuing their idolatrous ways, they were attacked by lions sent by Heaven. When they complained to the king, he sent them one of the exiled *kohanim* to teach them the ways of Hashem, and they converted to Judaism (*Melachim II 17:24-28*).

Tosefot rejects this explanation, because the conversion of the Kuttim was not only improperly motivated but also a sham.

*ibid. 17:3*

*gemara* refers, Tosefot concludes, were those who out of fear of lions made a genuine conversion.

There is a dispute in *Mesechta Chullin (3b)*

there is a consensus, based on the above passage, that their initial conversion was a sham since they continued worshipping their idols. The opinion that they were genuine converts is based on a tradition that after becoming familiar with Judaism, they made a genuine conversion and abandoned idol worship. This explains why we find the Kuttim mentioned in *mishnayot* as Jews. But even according to this view, there were problems with these converts, beginning with their degeneration into rejecting the Oral Law and culminating with the discovery that they were secretly worshipping idols which led to their being totally discredited as Jews. The *gemara* in *Mesechta Chullin (6a)* reports that when Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi, two of the leading Sages in the post-Mishnaic era,

*Yevamot 24b*

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