

בא

THE RIGHTEOUS CONVERT — THE *EIREV RAV*

When *Klal Yisrael* left *Mitzraim*, the *pasuk* relates;

והמשים עלו בני ישראל מארץ מצרים

...and the children of Israel went up armed, out of the land of Egypt (*Shemos* 13:18).

Rashi (*ibid.*) explains that the word “*chamushim*” — “armed” — indicates that only one out of every five Jews was worthy of redemption, and that the other unworthy eighty percent perished in *Mitzraim* (*Zohar*, *ibid.*). The Maharal (*ibid.*) expands on this by pointing out that the Torah employs the unusual expression of “*vechamushim alu*” instead of the seemingly more logical expression of “*vechamushim halchu*” to stress that only twenty percent actually left *Mitzraim*. Hashem is only interested in the very best; the inferior Jews were unworthy of miracles. According to one opinion, only one Jew out of five hundred thousand actually left *Mitzraim* (*Mechilta*, *ibid.*).

Mitzraim is referred to as the “*kur habarzeil*” — “Iron Furnace” (*Devarim* 4:20) (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 48). Rashi (*Devarim* 4:20) explains this as a gold-refining oven. *Klal Yisrael* was Hashem’s valuable gold in *Olom Hazeh*, and the purpose of *galus Mitzraim* was to refine *Klal Yisrael* to the highest degree of purity. As a result of this refining process, only the purest Jews were found to be worthy of redemption, of becoming the “*Am Chavivin*” — “Beloved Nation” (*Targum Yerushalmi*, *ibid.*).

It is thus puzzling to discover that although eighty percent of the Jews were unqualified to leave *Mitzraim*, there were a great number of gentiles who were permitted to participate in the miracles of redemption.

וגם ערב רב עלה אתם

And also a mixed multitude went up with them (*Shemos* 12:38).

The *Targum Yonasan* (*ibid.*) numbers them at 240,000. The *eirev rav* consisted of the intelligentsia of Egypt, the magicians and the charmers. They opposed Moshe and Hashem at first but with each succeeding *makah* they learned about and understood the greatness of Hashem. For the Torah clearly states that one of the purposes of the *makos* was to educate the Egyptians (*Ibn Ezra*, *Shemos* 7:5).

וידעו מצרים כי אני ה'

“And the Egyptians shall know that I am Hashem...” (*Shemos* 7:5).

בעבור תדע כי אין כמני בכל הארץ

“So that you will know that there is none like Me in all the earth” (*Shemos* 9:14).

The majority of the Egyptians did not learn the lesson, but those who did, came to appreciate Hashem to such an extent that they wished to join with *Klal Yisrael*. At first Hashem opposed their acceptance, but on Moshe *Rabbeinu's* insistence Hashem relented. Moshe saw that each miracle was studied by these magicians and charmers, and that they had developed a deep understanding of and appreciation for Hashem (*Zohar, Ki Sisa* 32:1).

Rashi (*Shemos* 12:38) identifies them as

תערובת אומות של גרים

A mixture of nations of strangers.

The Berliner and Rav Kook editions of old “*girsas'os*” of Rashi add the word “*shenisgairu*” — “who converted” at the end of the sentence. It would now read:

תערובת אומות של גרים שנתגיירו

a mixture of nations of strangers who converted.

The *Midrash Rabbah* (*Shemos* 18:10) points out that the *eirev rav* were considered the “*hachsheirim shebemiztraim*” — “pure ones of Mitzraim”.

The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 13*) states that we find the appellation “*Yehudi*” in *Nach* only three times: once for Mordechai (*Ester* 2:5); once for Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah (*Daniel* 3:12); and once for Basya the daughter of Pharaoh (*Divrei Hayamim* I 4:18). This title is given only to those

ואמאי קרי ליה יהודי? על שום שכפר בע"ז, שכל הכופר בע"ז נקרא יהודי

Who rejected idolatry, for those who reject idolatry are called “*Yehudi*.”

The daughter of Pharaoh renounced her idolatrous background, and embraced *Klal Yisrael*, by converting.

The *Gemara* (*Yoma* 59*) teaches an important Aggadic principle:

ילמד סתום מן המפורש

Learn about what is hidden, from what is revealed.

Chazal discussed the narrative of a single Egyptian convert (Basya) who rejected idolatry and embraced Hashem. We are able to extrapolate this teaching onto the history of the other Egyptian converts, the *eirev rav*, about whom *Chazal* did not directly reveal their intentions.

The *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 87:) reveals that:

לא הגלה הק' ברוך הוא את ישראל לבין האומות, אלא כדי שיתוספו אליהם גרים

Hashem exiled Israel among the nations, in order to gain converts.

The Maharsha (*ibid.*) explains that exile was never intended as a punishment for *Klal Yisrael*, for Hashem always had other recourses for punishment. The rationale for exile had always been to “spread the faith among the idolaters.” It is obvious that one of the intentions of the *galus Mitzraim* was to collect these lofty Egyptian souls and incorporate them into the mainstream of

Klal Yisrael. Although eighty percent of *Klal Yisrael* were unworthy of redemption, the *eirev rav* were determined to be pure enough to be included in the great miracles.

As meritorious as the *eirev rav* might have been, the *Zohar* repeatedly considers them a weak link of *Klal Yisrael*. They are blamed for the sin of the *eigel*, and all the woes which resulted from it (*Zohar, Beshalach* 13:18). As a consequence of the sin of the *eigel* they were segregated from the rest of *Klal Yisrael*; they were no longer protected by the Clouds of Glory, they were no longer included in the manna (except for handouts from *Klal Yisrael*), and they were not permitted to participate in the building of the *Mishkan* (*Zohar, Ki Sisa* 32:1). Rashi points out that the *eirev rav* were consistently the rabble-rousers and trouble-makers of the *midbar* (Rashi, *Shemos* 34:1). They were the “*asafsuf*” who mourned for the delicacies of Mitzraim (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 11:4).

Evidently, the *eirev rav* had proven themselves in the *kur habarzeil* of Mitzraim, by observing the great acts of Hashem, and hence recognizing His greatness [unlike the Jews who remained behind]; but they failed the stress test of the *midbar*. The strains of the desert were formidable; life in a nomadic tent city, with absolutely no conventional amenities and an intense, closely scrutinized relationship with Hashem (see p. 317) proved too overwhelming for the *eirev rav*. The seed of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov were barely able to endure the rigorous trials of the *midbar*; the intelligentsia of Egypt could not cope at all.

The *Gemara (Bava Metzia* 59:) teaches that a *geir* “has a strong inclination to evil.” Since his original character is bad (*ibid.*), a stressful situation might cause him to relapse. Rashi (*Horayos* 13•) compares the latent evil character of the *geir* to the destructive nature of a mouse, who delights in doing mischief just for the sake of it. Hence, it is not surprising that when Moshe *Rabbeinu* failed to reappear on time, the stress of the situation caused the *eirev rav* to revert back to their original character. The strain and tension of the moment so completely overwhelmed them that they relapsed back into the behavior with which they were most familiar — idolatry.

The apparent dispute between Hashem and Moshe *Rabbeinu* regarding the acceptability of the *Eirev rav* revolves around a very central issue (*Zohar, Ki Sisa* 32:1). Moshe *Rabbeinu* felt that only their present conduct should be considered; at that point in time the *eirev rav* had done *teshuvah* and desired to embrace Hashem. Hashem, on the other hand, was able to discern the deepest inclinations of their hearts, and knew that they could not pass the stress test of the *midbar*. Therefore, at first, Hashem opted to reject them. The reason Moshe *Rabbeinu's* view prevailed is that in the absolute sense of justice, consideration had to be given to the present.

[A similar debate took place at the determination of the fate of Yishmael, the son of Hagar. The angels wanted to destroy Yishmael because he would prove to be a threat to *Klal Yisrael* in the future. Hashem, however, ruled “where he is now” (*Bereishis* 21:17); at the present time Yishmael was not evil, so no harm could be inflicted upon him (see *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeitzei* 5).]

According to the above-quoted passage in the *Zohar*, the sinners among the Jews in every generation have been descendants of the *eirev rav*. Although the *eirev rav's* subsequent association with *Klal Yisrael* has only been marked by disaster, since they were considered *kasheirim* — worthy people — at the time of *Yetzias Mitzraim* — they were accepted. This is only the tip of the iceberg of a remarkable phenomenon. Throughout history, Hashem invited

various prominent, and previously wicked individuals to join *Klal Yisrael*. The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 96:) itemizes:

Naaman was a *geir toshav*, Nevuzaradan was a *ger tzedek*, the children of Sisera learned Torah in Yerushalayim, the children of Sancheriv taught Torah in public, . . . the children of Haman learned Torah in B'nei Brak. Hashem even wanted the children of the "wicked one" (Nevuchadnetzar) to come to the *Shechinah*, but the Angels protested.

Two points are evident. No matter how wicked one might be, there is always room for repentance. Repentance can demolish the greatest barriers, and bring the reformed sinner under the wings of the *Shechinah*. The second and perhaps more profound thought is that accomplished people are endowed with "*ko'ach elyon*" — "superior powers" — which may be used for good or evil. All the individuals itemized above, possessed this "superior power," and Hashem desired to bring these "powers" to the benefit of his people. Through *teshuvah*,

the evil was removed from these individuals, and they were healed from their evil As far as Nevuchadnetzer was concerned it was not possible to heal him (Maharal, *Chidushei Aggados, Sanhedrin* 96:).

Yisro, who merited having his descendants serve as judges in the *Lishkas Hagazis* — Hall of Hewn Stones (*Sotah* 11•), Rachav (*Megillah* 14:; *Yehoshua* 6:25), and the *Gevonim* (*Yehoshua* 9:15) are additional examples of *geirim* embraced by *Klal Yisrael*. The Maharal further elaborates on this concept in Tractate *Zevachim* (116•). Each nation of the world is identified by particular qualities, and it is impossible for a member of one nation to transfer his membership to another nation. The quantifiable singularity of each individual nation is expressed in the uniqueness of each of its members. *Klal Yisrael*, by virtue of special holiness, are not mere members of the human race, but are separated from, and not included among, the other nations. Hence, when a gentile undergoes *geirus*, he steps up to a higher level of purity, to the universal truth which seeks to encompass the whole of humanity within itself.

It is now imperative to examine the case of an aspiring *geir* who was rejected by our *Avos*. Timna, the concubine of Elifaz (*Bereishis* 36:12), first implored Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov to be accepted into *Klal Yisrael* (*Sanhedrin* 99:). She, a princess of the *Chori* nation, was drawn to the concept of "fear of Heaven," an attitude displayed by the house of Avraham (Rashi *ibid.*). They rejected her, because they perceived a flaw in her character, one which would have been detrimental to the development of *Klal Yisrael* in its infancy. They feared that this shortcoming would take root and perhaps stymie the maturation of the developing nation.

The *Torah Temimah* (*Bereishis* 36:12) suggests that Timna's flaw was that she insisted on entering *Klal Yisrael* in her capacity as a princess. One may not become a *geir* with the ulterior motive of maintaining authority over *Klal Yisrael* (Rambam, *Hilchos Isurei Biah* 13:14). They felt that she should have been content to enter *Klal Yisrael* as a simple citizen. This is difficult to accept in light of the fact that Helena, Queen of Adiabene (about 30 C.E.) was permitted to convert to Judaism (Josephus, *Antiquities* 20:17-19) and still maintain her royal position (*Bava Basra* 11•; *Yerushalmi Pe'ah* 1:1; *Yoma* 3:10; *Nazir* 3:6). Nevertheless, the *Avos* felt that during the embryonic stages of nationhood, Timna had to be rejected due to her possible insincerity (*Torah Temimah, Bereishis* 36:12).

Timna, however, was intent upon joining with the family of Avraham in order to align herself with holiness. She did not understand the distinction between Yaakov and Eisav, and so she pleaded with Elifaz (son of Eisav): “If I am unworthy to become your wife, would that I might become your concubine” (Rashi, *Bereishis* 36:12). She said, “it is better that I be a hand-maiden to this nation, rather than be a princess to any other nation” (*Sanhedrin* 99:).

The *Avos* were then blamed by Heaven for not accepting her under the “wings of the *Shechinah*” (Rashi, *ibid.*). All doubts aside, any eager prospective *geir* should have been welcomed into *Klal Yisrael*. As a Heavenly retribution for the questionable judgment of the *Avos*, it was determined that the singular, interminable enemy of *Klal Yisrael*, Amaleik, be descended from Timna (*Sanhedrin* 99:).

Rus, the great, great . . . grandmother of David *Hamelech*, was a member of the royal house of Moav (*Yevamos* 77•). It was imperative that she join *Klal Yisrael* in order to aid them in fulfilling their destiny with the input of her special gifts. If it were not for her, the Davidic dynasty would never have existed.

There is an injunction against admitting a male member of Ammon or Moav into *Klal Yisrael* (*Devarim* 23:4; *Yevamos* 73•). Since they were cousins of *Klal Yisrael* they were expected to demonstrate feelings of kinship. Instead, they betrayed *Klal Yisrael*. They did not greet *Klal Yisrael* with food and drink after the hurried exodus from Mitzraim — instead they hired Bilaam to curse the beleaguered refugees (see *Vayikra Rabbah* 34:8). The onus for a display of hospitality on such a large scale lies with the men of a nation rather than with their women; for it is the style of behavior to be expected of males. The Torah did not expect females to go out and greet an approaching nation. Therefore, the females of Ammon and Moav are permitted to convert to Judaism (*Yevamos* 76:).

The inherent national characteristic of Ammon and Moav is *achzarus* — cruelty and mercilessness. Their heartless act toward *Klal Yisrael* was a manifestation of their general demeanor. This *midah* — attribute — the Maharal (*Netzach Yisrael* 32) explains, is primarily exhibited by the males of these nations. The females, on the other hand, exhibit a far more diluted form of *achzarus*.

The reason for this pattern is that these two nations do not have a national mother figure. They are descended from the two daughters of Lot, who trapped their father in an illicit affair (*Bereishis* 19:37, 38). The national parents of these nations are a father and his daughter, to be distinguished from a man and a woman. A daughter is, in effect, diminutive, overshadowed — even nullified in the presence of her father. In the case of these two nations, Lot is the father figure, but a powerful mother figure is lacking. Hence, the Maharal explains, the females of Ammon and Moav have only a weakened and diluted form of *achzarus*, the national trait inherited from her.

Klal Yisrael is marked by the national traits of mercy, bashfulness and kindness which are an inheritance from the *Avos* (*Yevamos* 49•; see Maharal, *Chidushei Aggados Yevamos* 79•). The establishment of a monarchy within *Klal Yisrael* mandated a measure of *achzarus*. A good mother must sometimes be “cruel” to her child, as a good doctor must sometimes be “cruel” to his patient; so too a good king must sometimes be “cruel” to his subjects. *Klal Yisrael* did not inherently possess this quality, and so it had to be imported from the outside. The *Yad Hashem*

saw to it that Rus, the great-grandmother of David *Hamelech* would introduce this trait, in its mildest form, into the Davidic royal family.

Hashem promised Avraham that he would be the source of universal blessing.

ונברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה

“Through you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (*Bereishis* 12:3).

The *Gemara* (*Yevamos* 63•) interprets the root of ונברכו as ברך (blessed), to also mean “graft.”

Hashem said to Avraham: “I have two boughs I wish to graft onto you: Rus the Moabite and Na’amah the Ammonite.”

In order to realize the blessing, Avraham had to accept the graft. Obviously, in order to achieve their full perfection, the seed of Avraham had to be supplemented with the positive attributes of other nations.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Bikkurim* 4:3) underlines just how implicit the institution of *geirus* is to the success of *Klal Yisrael*. The very name of our founding father, Avram, was changed by Hashem to Avraham, in order to incorporate this very essential truth:

אב המון גוים נתתיך

“I have made you the father of a multitude of nations” (*Bereishis* 17:5).

Just as *Klal Yisrael* was elevated from the family of nations to a higher level of holiness due to the virtues of our fore-fathers, so too, the nations are able to elevate themselves to become joined with us, through *geirus*. The universal blessing bestowed upon Avraham can now be interpreted as:

“All the families of the earth shall be grafted upon you” (*Bereishis* 12:3).

What Hashem actually assured Avraham was that all the families of the earth will wish to become part of his nation. This is an underlying, latent, universal truth of which the nations may not consciously be aware; it is nevertheless realized by the select few who do undergo *geirus* (see *Igeres Harambam* to Reb Ovadiah *Geir Tzedek*).

This concept of longing to join with *Klal Yisrael* is perhaps most poignantly illustrated by Bilaam *Harasha* in his fervent cry:

תמת נפשי מות ישרים, ותהי אהריתי כמוהו

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his! (*Bamidbar* 23:10).

In his heart of hearts he longed to join with *Klal Yisrael*; he wanted nothing more than to become a Jew. However, the evil within him was just too overwhelming, and would not allow him to make the transition. As the *Gemara* (*Gittin* 57•) informs us, even in the netherworld of *Geihinom*, where the universal truths are clearly evident to everyone, and Bilaam declares that *Am Yisrael* is the most significant of *Olom Hazeh*, his inherent evil still forces him to advocate enmity towards *Klal Yisrael*.

Considering all the aforementioned information, it is necessary to ponder an uncomfortable, and perhaps even painful question. It is obvious that Hashem is only interested in the best. In Mitzraim only the top twenty percent were worthy of redemption; *Chazal* tell us that these same statistics will be applicable in the time of *Mashiach* (*Sanhedrin* 111•). In addition, all indications

are that Hashem is also interested in the best among the nations. The fundamental question which must be addressed is, how far must *Klal Yisrael* exert itself in *kiruv richokim*? Must we go out to the ramparts and drag back each and every descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, willingly or unwillingly? Should we confine ourselves just to those who come seeking our help? Are we responsible to disseminate religious information to those ignorant of and indifferent to our ways, in the hope of possibly interesting them in *teshuvah*?

However, the definitive *p'sak* from the majority of halachic authorities, past and present, is that we must do everything in our power to save a fellow Jew from *Shemad* (spiritual death).

We must be faithful to the guiding principle of “*Kol Yisrael areivim zeh lezeh*” — “all Jews are responsible for each other” (*Shevuos* 39•).

aA