

## Introduction

### 1. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 30:10

To what may Abraham be compared? To a king's friend, who saw the king walking in dark streets. The friend spotted this and began illuminating the path, from his window. The king looked and saw him and said, "Rather than shine for me from a window, come shine before me!" So Gd said to Abraham, "Rather than shine for Me in Mesopotamia and her surroundings, come shine before Me in Israel!"

### 2. Talmud, Pesachim 87b

Israel was exiled among the nations only so that converts would be added to them.

### 3. Rabbi Joseph Karo (16<sup>th</sup> century Israel), Beit Yosef Choshen Mishpat 1

Rabbeinu Nisim explained that we accept converts today, even though conversion is uncommon, because bringing a person beneath the shelter of the *Shechinah* is greater than the more common financial cases.

### 4. Rabbi Chaim Amsalam (21<sup>st</sup> century Israel), newspaper interview

Gd forbid, I do not intend to relinquish any element of the conversion process! I only say that the convert's expressed desire to give his life for the sanctity of the nation and the land demonstrates that he wishes to be part of the Jewish nation, which is part of the conversion process in the *beit din*. The converts from the former USSR do this, when they desire to enter the IDF...

### 5. Rabbi Shlomo Rosenfeld (21<sup>st</sup> century Israel), Techumin 17

Mixed couples are arriving [in Israel], the Jewish partner having met the non-Jewish partner outside Israel due to assimilation, willingly or out of ignorance [of Judaism]. At some point they decided to build their future in Israel. With the opening of the Iron Curtain from Eastern Europe, and the ingathering of Jewish exiles from Ethiopia and other exiles, the stream of arrivals has increased, and a not-insignificant percentage of them are of mixed marriages, or are descendants of Jews. Conservative estimates put it tens of thousands of cases. This complex situation is intensifying, in addition to the reality that almost all of them qualify legally to become citizens. These circumstances demand that we relate to conversion within the framework of "It is a time to act for G-d."

### 6. Rabbi Dovid Bass (21<sup>st</sup> century Israel), Tzohar 30

If *chiloni* and *dati* Jews will become separate nations, in terms of the possibility of marriage between them, then it is hard to see how the Jewish nation will succeed in surviving over time. Therefore, conversion is not only the human need of the many new arrivals, but also a first-degree national interest, for our survival.

### 7. Talmud, Yevamot 47b

When a convert comes to convert, we say to him, "What did you see, such that you came to convert?" And we inform him of some of the lighter and heavier commandments. Why? So that if he will leave, he will leave [now], for Rabbi Chelbo said: Converts are as hard for Israel as a scab.

### 8. Zev Chafets, *The Sy Empire*, New York Times Oct. 14, 2007

In school, though, the SY kids mixed with other children, not only J-Dubs but also gentiles. The gentiles posed the gravest concern. Friendships with them developed, love affairs sprouted. There were intermarriages. Some Christian partners even volunteered to convert to Judaism.

Enter the rabbis with their Edict, in 1935. They wanted to build an iron wall of self-separation around the community. They couldn't do this the Hassidic way, dressing the men in costumes of ancient design, physically segregating women and making sure that children received nothing in the way of useful secular education. After all, the Syrian men couldn't be expected to make money if they looked like figures from 18th-century Poland. And so the rabbis turned to the heart of the matter: matrimony. Most American Jewish communities in those days (and many today) viewed intermarriage as a taboo. Conversion, however, was a loophole. The Edict intended to close that loophole. It proclaimed, "No male or female member of our community has the right to intermarry with non-Jews; this law covers conversion, which we consider to be fictitious and valueless."

#### Conversion seems to be a mitzvah?

##### 9. Talmud, Shabbat 137b

One who circumcises converts says, "You are blessed, G-d, our G-d, universal monarch, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding circumcision."

##### 10. Talmud, Yevamot 47b

If he accepts, we circumcise him immediately. Why? We do not delay a mitzvah.

##### 11. Talmud, Kiddushin 62a-b

One who tells a woman, "Marry me, effective when I convert," "when you convert," "when I am freed," "when you are freed," "after your husband dies," "after your sister dies," "after your *yavam* performs *chalitzah*" – she is not betrothed.

I understand all of the cases, as they are not in his control, but conversion is in his control! No; conversion is not in his control; as Rabbi Chiya bar Abba cited Rabbi Yochanan: Conversion requires a court of three judges, as it is written... and who says the three will agree to convert him?

##### 12. Maimonides, Laws of Blessings 11:7

There is no mitzvah for which we recite a blessing after it is fulfilled, other than immersion for the convert, for he cannot yet say, "He has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us," for he has not yet been sanctified and commanded, pre-immersion...

##### 13. Raavad, Baalei haNefesh, end of Shaar haTevilah

We bless "on the immersion of converts" before immersion, as with all commandments. And if you will ask, when was the court commanded, it is from "the souls they made in Charan."

##### 14. Talmud, Pesachim 87b

Israel was exiled among the nations only so that converts would be added to them.

#### Where in the 613?

##### 15. Maimonides (12<sup>th</sup> century Egypt), Book of the Commandments, Commandment 207

In the 207<sup>th</sup> commandment G-d commanded us to love converts, as He said, "And you shall love the stranger." Even though the convert is included with all Jews in "And you shall love your neighbour as yourself," as a righteous convert, still, because he has entered our Torah G-d added love for him and designated an additional commandment, just as He added a prohibition against abusing him...

##### 16. Maimonides (12<sup>th</sup> century Egypt), Laws of Personalities 6:4

There are two commandments regarding loving the convert who has come beneath the shelter of the Shechinah. One is within the circle of compatriots, and one is because he is a convert...

### 17. Sefer haChinuch, Mitzvah 431

Among the roots of this mitzvah is the fact that G-d selected Israel to be a holy nation for Him, and He desired to give them merit. Therefore He guided them and commanded them regarding graciousness and mercy, and He commanded them to be crowned with every desirable and precious trait, earning favour in the eyes of all who see them, who would say, "This is a nation of G-d." And how pleasant and desirable it is, to be kind and helpful to one who has left his nation and family, to shelter with another nation due to love for it and a desire for truth and a hatred of falsehood!

### 18. Talmud, Yoma 86a

"And you shall love HaShem your Gd" – You shall cause the Name of Heaven to be beloved, via your actions. You should read and study and serve sages, and your interaction with others should be gentle. What will people say of such a person? "Fortunate is his parent who taught him Torah, fortunate is his mentor who taught him Torah. Woe to those who have not studied Torah. He studied Torah, and see how pleasant are his ways, how refined are his deeds!" Regarding him it is written, "And He said to me: You are My servant, Israel, from whom I will be glorified."

### 19. Midrash, Sifri Devarim 32

"And you shall love Hashem your Gd" – Make Him beloved to people, as did Avraham your ancestor, as it says, "and the souls they made in Charan." If every human being would gather together to create a single gnat and implant in it a soul, they could not do so! But this teaches that our ancestor Avraham converted them, bringing them beneath the shelter of the Shechinah.

### If there is a mitzvah, why are we reluctant to pursue converts?

20. R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Minchat Shlomo 1:35:3

Even according to those who convert them, the judges violate *lifnei iver*...

21. R' Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook, Daat Kohen 154

Further, those who accept them violate *lifnei iver* no matter what... If they are converts, they are liable for the entire Torah, and the judges are making them stumble in this and making them liable for violation of biblical prohibitions...