

THE HONEST RUTH, SESSION 2: RUTH'S OATH



RUTH'S OATH

כי אל-אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אֵלַי
וּבְאֲשֶׁר תֵּלִינִי אֵלַי
עַמִּי עַמִּי וְאֵלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי
בְּאֲשֶׁר תִּמְוָתִי אֲמוֹת וְשֵׁם אֲקַבֵּר
כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְיָ לִי וְכֹה לִסְיָ
כִּי הַמָּוֶת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ:

Where you go, I will go;
And where you lodge, I will lodge;
Your people shall be my people, and your God my God;
Where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried.
Adonai do so to me, and more also,
if even death parts me from you.

(Ruth 1:16-17)

AS CONVERSION

From here our Rabbis of blessed memory derived that if a [prospective] proselyte comes to convert, we inform them of some of the punishments [for violating the commandments] so that if they decide to renege [from the intention to convert], they can renege. For out of the words of Ruth, we can infer what Naomi said to her. (Rashi on Ruth 1:16)

Ruth said: “Do not coax me to leave you, to turn from following you, for I desire to become a proselyte.”

Said Naomi: “We are commanded to keep the Sabbaths and holidays, not to walk more than two thousand cubits.”

Said Ruth: “Where you go I will go.”

Said Naomi: “We are commanded not to spend the night together with non-Jews.”

Said Ruth: “Where you lodge I will lodge.”

Said Naomi: “We are commanded to keep 613 commandments.”

Said Ruth: “That which your people keep, that I shall keep, as though they had been my people before this.”

Said Naomi: “We are commanded not to worship idolatry.”

Said Ruth: “Your God is my God.”

Said Naomi: “We have four methods of capital punishment for the guilty – stoning, burning with fire, death by the sword, and hanging upon the gallows.”

Said Ruth: “To whatever death you are subject I shall be subject.”

Said Naomi: “We have two cemeteries.”

Said Ruth: “There shall I be buried. And do not continue to speak any further. May Adonai do thus unto me and more if [even] death will separate me from you.”¹

(Aramaic Targum; based on BT Yevamot 47b.)

CONVERSION OF YITRO

Torah:

וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה לִקְרֹאת חֹתְנֹו וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וַיִּשְׁק-לוֹ וַיִּשְׂאֵלוּ אִישׁ-לְרֵעֵהוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וַיִּבְּאוּ הָאֵהָלָה: ח וַיִּסְפַּר מֹשֶׁה לְחֹתְנֹו אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְיָ לְפָרְעֹה וּלְמִצְרַיִם עַל אֹדֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל-הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר מָצְאתֶם בְּדַרְדָּרֵי וַיִּצְלָם יְיָ: ט וַיַּחַד יִתְרוֹ עַל כָּל-הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה יְיָ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֲצִילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם: י וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרֹדֶף יְיָ אֲשֶׁר הֲצִיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פָּרְעֹה אֲשֶׁר הֲצִיל אֶת-הָעָם מִתַּחַת יַד-מִצְרַיִם: יא עַתָּה יִדְעָתִי כִּי-גָדוֹל יְיָ מִכָּל-הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי בִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ עָלֵיהֶם:

Moshe went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed low and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent. Moshe then recounted to his father-in-law everything Adonai had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardships that had

1. Samson H. Levey, *Aramaic Targum to Ruth* (Hebrew Union College 1934).

befallen them on the way, and how Adonai had delivered them.

Yitro rejoiced over all the kindness that Adonai had shown Israel when delivering them from the Egyptians. “Blessed be Adonai,” Yitro said, “who delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. **Now I know that Adonai is greater than all gods**, yes, by the result of their very schemes against [the people].” (Exodus 18:7-11)

Talmud:

כתנאי וישמע יתרו כהן מדין מה שמועה שמע ובא ונתגייר ר' יהושע אומר מלחמת עמלק שמע שהרי כתיב בצדו ויחלש יהושע את עמלק ואת עמו לפי חרב.

[The Gemara is discussing a disagreement about what motivated Yitro to convert.] “Now Yitro, the priest of Midian, Moshe’s father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moshe and for Israel his people, how Adonai had brought Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 18:1).” What tidings did he hear that **he came and converted**? Rabbi Yehoshua says: He heard about the war with Amalek, as it is written about just before the verses that state that Yitro came: “And Yehoshua weakened Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword (Exodus 17:13).” (BT Zevachim 166a.)

CONVERSION OF RACHAV

Torah:

וְהָמָּה טָרִם וְשָׁכְבוּ וְהָיָא עֲלֵתָהּ עֲלֵיהֶם עַל-הַגֵּג: וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-הָאֲנָשִׁים יְדַעְתִּי כִּי-נָתַן יְיָ לָכֶם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וְכִי-נִפְלָה אֵימַתְכֶם עָלֵינוּ וְכִי נִמְגְּו כָּל-יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵיכֶם: כִּי שָׁמַעְנוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-הוֹבִישׁ יְיָ אֶת-מִי ים-סוּף מִפְּנֵיכֶם בְּצִאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם וְאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם לְשֵׁנֵי מַלְכֵי הָאֲמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן לְסִיחֹן וְלַעֹוג אֲשֶׁר הִחְרַמְתֶּם אוֹתָם: וְנִשְׁמַע וַיִּמַּס לְבַבְנוּ וְלֹא-קָמָה עוֹד רוּחַ בְּאִישׁ מִפְּנֵיכֶם כִּי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהִים בְּשָׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל-הָאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת:

[The Israelite men she was hiding] had not yet gone to sleep when she came up to them on the roof. She said to the men, “I know that Adonai has given the country to you, because dread of you has fallen upon us, and all the inhabitants of the land are quaking before you. For we have heard how Adonai dried up the waters of the Sea of Reeds for you when you left Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings across the Jordan, whom you doomed. When we heard about it, we lost heart, and no man had any more spirit left because of you; for **Adonai your God is the only God in heaven above and on earth below**. [Joshua 2:8-11]

Talmud:

רבי יהודה אומר: אף חולדה הנביאה מבני בניה של רחב הזונה היתה... דאיגיירא ונסבה יהושע.

Rabbi Yehudah says: “Even Chuldah the prophetess was among the descendants of Rachav the prostitute. She converted and Yehoshua married her.” (BT Megillah 14b)

CONVERSION OF NA'AMAN

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was important to his lord and high in his favor, for through him Adonai had granted victory to Aram. But the man, though a great warrior, was a leper.

Once, when the Arameans were out raiding, they carried off a young girl from the land of Israel, and she became an attendant to Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "I wish Master could come before the prophet in Samaria; he would cure him of his leprosy."

[Naaman] went and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, "Go to the king of Israel, and I will send along a letter." He set out, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

He brought the letter to the king of Israel. It read: "Now, when this letter reaches you, know that I have sent my courtier Naaman to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he rent his clothes and cried, "Am I God, to deal death or give life, that this fellow writes to me to cure a man of leprosy? Just see for yourselves that he is seeking a pretext against me!"

When Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, he sent a message to the king: "Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come to me, and he will learn that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and halted at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go and bathe seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean."

But Naaman was angered and walked away. "I thought," he said, "he would surely come out to me, and would stand and invoke Adonai his God by name, and would wave his hand toward the spot, and cure the affected part. Are not the Amanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? I could bathe in them and be clean!" And he stalked off in a rage.

But his servants came forward and spoke to him. "Sir," they said, "if the prophet told you to do something difficult, would you not do it? How much more when he has only said to you, 'Bathe and be clean.'"

So he went down and immersed himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had bidden; and his flesh became like a little boy's, and he was clean. Returning with his entire retinue to the man of God, he stood before him and exclaimed, "**Now I know that there is no God in the whole world except in Israel!** So please accept a gift from your servant."

But he replied, "As Adonai lives, whom I serve, I will not accept anything." He pressed him to accept, but he refused. And Naaman said, "Then at least let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for **your servant will never again offer up burnt offering or sacrifice to any god, except Adonai.** (II Kings 5:1-17)

RABBINIC CONVERSION

Talmud (BT Keritot 9a) lays out three requirements for conversion:

- (1) Circumcision (*brit milah* or *hatafat dam brit*) for men.
- (2) Immersion in a *mikveh*.
- (3) A Temple offering (deferred until the Temple is rebuilt).

According to Talmud, when a person comes to the Beit Din to begin the process of converting, the judges say, “What did you see that motivates you to convert? Don’t you know that the Jewish people at the present time are anguished, suppressed, despised, and harassed, and hardships are frequently visited upon them? If the person says: I know, and although I am unworthy of joining the Jewish people and sharing in their sorrow, I nevertheless desire to do so. Then the court accepts the person immediately to begin the conversion process. And the judges of the court inform them of some of the lenient *mitzvot* and some of the stringent *mitzvot*, and they inform them of the sin of neglecting the *mitzvah* to allow the poor to take gleanings, forgotten sheaves, and produce in the corner of one’s field, and about the poor person’s tithe. And they inform them of the punishment for transgressing the *mitzvot*. [BT Yevamot 47a.]

They also inform the person of the rewards of following the *mitzvot*. Then circumcision is done, if the person is male. [See, however, the evolving issues of conversion for transgender people.] At the time of the immersion in the *mikveh*, the judges again describe the *mitzvot*, both the easy ones and the difficult ones.

The requirement of study and practice leading up to conversion is post-Talmudic, arising probably in medieval times.

KARAITE CONVERSION

Karaite Judaism did not accept converts for centuries. In 2007 it reversed this position and began to allow for conversion, laying out three requirements:

- (1) One year of learning.
- (2) Circumcision for men.
- (3) Recitation of Ruth’s vow.

VOCABULARY

Ger (גֵּר) (m) or *giyoret* (גִּיּוֹרֵת) (f) – Biblically meaning a stranger or guest; Rabbinically meaning a convert. In the Karaite world, a *ger/gyoret* is a candidate for conversion, but the term is dropped when the conversion is complete.

Ger tzedek (גֵּר צְדִיק) – specifically a convert to Judaism, in contrast with *ger toshav* (גֵּר תּוֹשָׁב), a “resident alien,” who lives peaceably among the Jews without the intention of converting. (See Rabbi Daniel Siegel’s work expanding the framework of *ger toshav* to describe non-Jewish partners and synagogue members who are part of the Jewish community without becoming Jewish.)

Giyur (גִּיּוּר, לְהִתְגַּיֵּר) – the process of conversion

וַיֹּאמֶר אַחָאָב מֶלֶךְ-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יְהוֹשָׁפָט מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה הֲתֵלֵךְ עִמִּי רָמֹת גִּלְעָד וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כָּמוֹנִי כָמוֹךָ וְכַעֲמֶךָ עִמִּי וְעַמֶּךָ בְּמִלְחָמָה:

Ahab, King of Israel, said to Yehoshafat, King of Judah, “Will you go with me to Ramot Gil’ad?” And he answered him, “I am as you are; *my People are as your People*, and we are with you in war.” (II Chronicles 18:3)



וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-יְהוֹשָׁפָט הֲתֵלֵךְ אִתִּי לְמִלְחָמָה רָמֹת גִּלְעָד וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹשָׁפָט אֶל-מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּמוֹנִי כָמוֹךָ כְּעַמִּי כְּעַמֶּךָ כְּסוּסֵיךָ:

And [King Ahab] said to Jehoshaphat, “Will you come with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?” Jehoshaphat answered the king of Israel, “I am as you are; my people are as your people, my horses are as your horses.” (I Kings 22:4)



וַיִּלְכָּד וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶל-יְהוֹשָׁפָט מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב פָּשַׁע בִּי הֲתֵלֵךְ אִתִּי אֶל-מוֹאָב לְמִלְחָמָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱלֶה כָּמוֹנִי כָמוֹךָ כְּעַמִּי כְּעַמֶּךָ כְּסוּסֵיךָ כְּסוּסֵי:

At the same time, [King Jehoram] sent this message to King Jehoshaphat of Judah: “The king of Moab has rebelled against me; will you come with me to make war on Moab?” He replied, “I will go. I am as you are; my people are as your people, my horses are as your horses.” (II Kings 3:7)



וַיַּעַן אִתִּי אֶת-הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר חַי-יְהוָה וְחַי אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי אִם-בְּמִקּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יְהִי-שָׁם אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ אִם-לְמָוֶת אִם-לְחַיִּים כִּי-שָׁם יְהִי עַבְדְּךָ:

Itai replied to the [exiled King David] saying, “As YHWH lives and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king is, I shall be, whether for death or life, there your servant shall be.” (II Samuel 15:21)

2. See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Ruth on the Royal Way,” in *Reading Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of their Stories* (Schocken 2002).



כִּי זֹאת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר אֶכְרַת אֶת-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים הָהֵם נֶאֱמַר-יְהוָה נָתַתִּי אֶת-תּוֹרָתִי בְּקִרְבָּם וְעַל-לִבָּם אֶכְתְּבֶנָּה וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וְהֵמָּה יִהְיוּ-לִי לְעָם:

This is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days – thus says YHWH. I have given my Torah into their midst and have written it upon their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my People. (Jeremiah 31:33)



הִנְנִי מְקַבְּצֶם מִכָּל-הָאָרְצוֹת אֲשֶׁר הִדַּחְתִּים שָׁם בְּאַפִּי וּבְחַמְתִּי וּבְקֶצֶף גָּדוֹל וְהִשְׁבַּתִּים אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וְהִשְׁבַּתִּים לְבֵטַח: וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לְאֱלֹהִים:

See, I will gather them from all the lands to which I have banished them in My anger and wrath, and in great rage; and I will bring them back to this place and let them dwell secure. They shall be My people, and I will be their God. (Jeremiah 32:37-38)

RUTH'S OATH AS MARRIAGE OR FAMILY FORMATION

Or something like it? We will come back to this in Week 4... :-)