

THE HONEST RUTH, SESSION 3: STRANGERS, GLEANINGS

THE QUALITY OF BEING A STRANGER

וַיִּקָּם אַבְרָהָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי-חֵת לֵאמֹר: גֵּר-וְתוֹשֵׁב אָנֹכִי עִמָּכֶם תְּנוּ לִי אַחְזַת-קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם וְאֶקְבְּרָה מֵתִי מִלִּפְנֵי:

Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, “I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may bury my dead.” (Genesis 23:3-4)

וְהָאָרֶץ לֹא תִמָּכַר לְצַמְתוֹת כִּי-לִי הָאָרֶץ כִּי-גֵרִים וְתוֹשְׁבִים אַתֶּם עִמָּדִי:

But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me. (Leviticus 25:23)

שְׁמַעַה-תִּפְלְתִי | יי וְשִׁוְעָתִי | הַאֲזִינָה אֶל-דְּמַעְתִּי אֶל-תִּחְרֹשׁ כִּי גֵר אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ תוֹשֵׁב כְּכֹל-אַבוֹתַי:

Hear my prayer, Adonai;
give ear to my cry;
do not disregard my tears;
for like all my forebears
I am an alien, resident with You. (Psalm 39:13)

THE TREATMENT OF STRANGERS

וְגֵר לֹא תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: כָּל אֲלֻמְנָה וְיִתוּם לֹא תַעֲנוּן: אִם עֲנָה תַעֲנֶנָּה אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם צַעַק וְצַעַק אֵלַי שְׁמַע אֲשַׁמַּע צַעֲקוֹתוֹ: וְחָרָה אַפִּי וְחָרַגְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּחָרֵב וְהָיוּ נְשִׁיכֶם אֲלֻמְנוֹת וּבְנֵיכֶם יִתְּמִים:

You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress them, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans. (Exodus 22:20-23)

וְכִי יָגוּר אִתְּךָ גֵּר בְּאֶרְצְכֶם לֹא תוֹנוּ אֹתוֹ: כְּאֶזְרַח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לְכֶם הַגֵּר הַגֵּר אֶתְכֶם וְאַהֲבַת לוֹ כְּמוֹךְ כִּי גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I, Adonai, am your God. (Leviticus 19:33-34)

תּוֹרַה אַחַת יִהְיֶה לְאִזְרַח וְלִגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם:

There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you. (Exodus 12:49)

אָרוּר מְשִׁיבָה עוֹר בְּדַרְדָּר וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן: אָרוּר מְטֵה מִשְׁפָּט גֵּר יְתוֹם וְאַלְמָנָה וְאָמַר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן:

Cursed be the one who misdirects a blind person on his/her way. – And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be the one who subverts the rights of the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. – And all the people shall say, Amen. (Deuteronomy 27:18-19)

RABBINIC DEFINITION OF GER TOSHAV

אֵי זֶה הוּא גֵּר תוֹשֵׁב זֶה עִפּו"ם שֶׁקִּבֵּל עָלָיו שְׁלֵא יַעֲבֹד עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה עִם שְׂאֵר הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁנִּצְטוּוּ בְּנֵי נֹחַ וְלֹא מִלְּא טָבַל הָרִי זֶה מִקְבָּלִין אוֹתוֹ וְהוּא מִחֲסִידֵי אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם. וְלָמָּה נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ תוֹשֵׁב לְפִי שֶׁמִּתֵּר לָנוּ לְהוֹשִׁיבוֹ בְּיַמֵּינוּ בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמוֹ שֶׁבְּאֶרְנוּ בְּהִלְכוֹת עִפּו"ם: וְאִין מִקְבָּלִין גֵּר תוֹשֵׁב אֶלָּא בְּזִמַּן שֶׁהַיּוֹבֵל נוֹהֵג. אֲבָל בְּזִמַּן הַזֶּה אֶפְלוּ קִבֵּל עָלָיו כָּל הַתּוֹרָה כְּלָה חוּץ מִדְּקָדוּק אֶחָד אִין מִקְבָּלִין אוֹתוֹ:

What is meant by a resident alien? A gentile who makes a commitment not to worship false deities and to observe the other [six] universal laws commanded to Noah's descendants. He does not circumcise himself or immerse. We accept this commitment and he is considered one of the pious gentiles. Why is he called a resident? Because we are permitted to allow him to dwell among us in Eretz Yisrael, as explained elsewhere. We accept resident aliens only during the era when the Jubilee year is observed. In the present era, even if a gentile makes a commitment to observe the entire Torah with the exception of one minor point, that person is not accepted. (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, *Isurei Biah* 14:7-8.)



Question: What is gained by the rabbinic move to reinterpret *ger*, “stranger,” as someone who has converted to Judaism? What is lost?



A *ger toshav* today is a person who is already a *Ben/Bat No'ach*. It makes little difference for which of the three possible reasons this is true, though in most cases it would likely be either because these seven *mitzvot* make sense or out of a general sense that the essence of morality is inherent in creation by some sort of divine will. For a number of possible reasons, this person is drawn into a deep connection with Judaism, most likely through an intimate relationship, but not exclusively so.

This person comes to respect the Torah and see in it a source of meaning for one's life and also adopts other, specifically Jewish practices such as observing holidays or attending synagogue. Such persons can be welcomed into our communities and families through some form of initiation ritual, allowing us to bring *k'dushah* to their marriages and to honour their passing through burial in our cemeteries. (From “Renewing Ger Toshav: Opening the Gates that More May Enter to Praise God,” by Rabbi Daniel Siegel, with Rabbis Lori Schaller and Oren Steinitz, Aleph Canada.)



Jean-François Millet, "The Gleaners" (1853)

GLEANNING

בְּקַצְרְכֶם אֶת קַצִּיר אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פְּאֵת שְׂדֶךְ לִקְצֹר וְלִקַּט קַצִּירְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט: וְכִרְמֶךָ לֹא תַעֲוֹלֵל וּפְרֹט כִּרְמֶךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעֵנִי וְלִגֵּר תַּעֲזֹב אֹתָם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the corners of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am Adonai your God. (Leviticus 19:9-10)

כִּי תִקְצֹר קַצִּירְךָ בְּשֵׂדֶךָ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ: עֹמֵר בְּשֵׂדֶךָ לֹא תָשׁוּב לְקַחְתּוֹ לִגֵּר לִיתּוֹם וְלְאַלְמָנָה יִהְיֶה לְמַעַן יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ: כִּי תַחֲבֹט זֵיתְךָ לֹא תִפְאַר אַחֲרָיֶךָ לִגֵּר לִיתּוֹם וְלְאַלְמָנָה יִהְיֶה: כִּי תִבְצֹר כִּרְמֶךָ לֹא תַעֲוֹלֵל אַחֲרָיֶךָ לִגֵּר לִיתּוֹם וְלְאַלְמָנָה יִהְיֶה: וְזָכַרְתָּ: כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל כֵּן אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה:

When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the orphan, and the widow – in order that Adonai your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. Always remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment. (Deuteronomy 24:19-22)

Chapter 2

1. Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.

2. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor. And she said to her, Go, my daughter.

3. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to a part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was a relative of Elimelech.

4. And, behold, Boaz came from Beth-Lehem, and said to the reapers, Adonai be with you. And they answered him, Adonai bless you.

5. Then said Boaz to his servant who was set over the reapers, Whose maiden is this?

6. And the servant who was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabite maiden who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab;

7. And she said, I beg you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves; so she came, and she has continued from morning until now, scarcely spending any time in the hut.

8. Then said Boaz to Ruth, Do you not hear, my daughter? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go away from here, but stay here close to my maidens;

9. Let your eyes be on the field that they reap, and go after them; have I not charged the young men not to touch you? and when you are thirsty, go to the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

10. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, seeing that I am a stranger?

11. And Boaz answered and said to her, It has been fully told to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband; and how you have left your father and your mother, and the land of your birth, and have come to a people which you did not know before.

12. Adonai will recompense your work, and a full

reward shall be given to you by Adonai God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

13. Then she said, Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not one of your maidservants.

14. And at the mealtime Boaz said to her Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers; and he passed to her parched grain, and she ate, and was satisfied, and left.

15. And when she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not;

16. And let fall also some of the handfuls on purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

17. So she gleaned in the field until the evening, and she beat out what she had gleaned; and it was about an ephah of barley.

18. And she took it up, and went into the city; and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned; and she brought out and gave to her what she had left over after being satisfied.

19. And her mother-in-law said to her, Where have you gleaned today? and where have you worked? blessed is he who took notice of you. And she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz.

20. And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he by Adonai, who has not abandoned his loving kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said to her, The man is a relative of ours, one of our close relatives.

21. And Ruth the Moabite said, He also said to me, You shall keep close to my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.

22. And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maidens, that you should not be molested in any other field.

23. So she kept close to the maidens of Boaz to glean to the end of the barley harvest and of the wheat harvest; and lived with her mother-in-law.