



The Scoop Behind Converts

What influences conversion to Judaism, the embrace of its beliefs, practices and identity?

With respect to Sarah nursing Yitzchak, the Midrash (Breishis Rabba 53:9) relates that Sarah was flowing with milk and noblewomen would have their children nurse from her... The Pesikta Rabasi (44, see Tosafos to Avoda Zara 10b and Yoreh Deah 81:7) says that those who convert to Judaism are descended from the infants who merited to taste Sarah's milk.

The Chofetz Chaim would say in the name of the known *ger tzedek*, R' Avraham ben Avraham (1705-1749), that at Matan Torah Hashem went around to each nation, but none wanted to accept the Torah (see Devarim 33:2, Rashi). That is, most of the people didn't want to receive it, but there were those who did. These are the source of the souls of converts. Tangentially, the Sefer Chassidim (233) writes that since *kol Yisrael areivim zeh la'zeh*, all Jews are guarantors for one another (Shavuos 39a), if one Jew had protested, the Torah wouldn't have been given.

The Rema Mipano (Asara Maamaros, Maamar Eim Kol Chai, 3:6) tells us that through the *kavanos ha'yechudim* of Avraham and Sarah, they brought near all the souls that in the future would convert, just as we are taught that Avraham converted the men and Sarah the women.

The Midrash Talpiyos (1645-1729) cites (Anaf Ha'zivug) from the Eimek Hamelech (a student of the Shela) that if a non-Jewish woman thinks of a Jew during relations with her non-Jewish husband, that child will later convert

to Judaism.

In the sefer Teshuvos Baalai Hatosafos (1:19) the following is quoted from R' Yehuda Hachassid: The Gemara (Yevamos 62a) says that Moshiach will arrive once all the souls are vacated from *guf*. *Guf* is the name of the chamber in heaven that separates between the Shechina and the malachim. It contains the souls created during the six days of creation. These souls lie in wait to be placed in newly formed bodies (Yevamos 63b, Rashi s.v. *guf*). The malach appointed over pregnancy takes it from that chamber and puts it into the mother's stomach. Sometimes he makes a "mistake" and puts a soul fitting to be a Jew into the stomach of a non-Jew. That soul becomes a convert (cited in Otzar Plaos Hatorah, Shemos, p. 607 and Devarim, p. 398).

Here are some additional, fascinating insights regarding converts:

1) The Ohr Hachaim (Devarim 21:11-14) writes in the name of the Zohar Chodosh (Balak, p. 88a) that with the sin of Adam many precious souls fell into the hands of the Satan (see Eruvin 18b). These are souls of converts to Judaism.

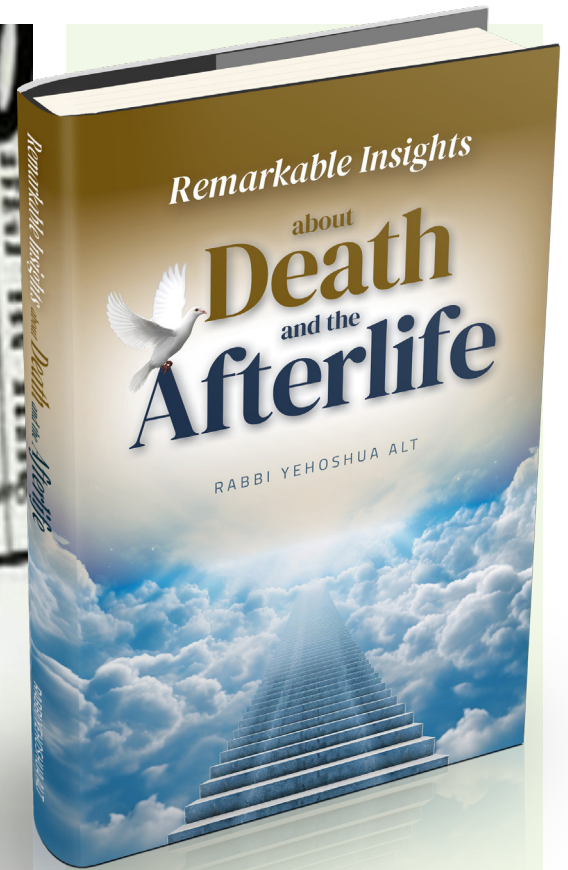
2) The Chida (Midbar Kedaimos, Maareches gimmel, 3) tells us that one who converts was also at Har Sinai when we received the Torah. This is alluded to in the phrase *ger she'nisgayer k'katan she'nolad dami* (Yevamos 22a), a *ger* that converts is like a newborn baby, as it doesn't say *goy she'nisgayer*, a non-Jew that converts.

3) The bracha a convert recites on immersing in a mikva is unlike other

brachos, as it is not *oveir la'asiyasan*, recited before the act is done. This is because he can't say *v'tziyanu*, Hashem commanded him, since at that point he is still a non-Jew. He therefore says the bracha afterwards (Pesachim 7b, Tosafos s.v. *al*).

4) There is a disagreement as to whether a convert can say the bracha of *she'asani ger*, having made me a convert (not *shelo asani goy*) – Darkei Moshe 46:3, Magen Avraham 46:10, Biur HaGra, s.v. *va'afilu*, Mishna Brura 46:18. In explaining the Rema, who says a convert can say it, the Taz (Orach Chaim 46:5) writes that *ger she'nisgayer k'katan she'nolad dami*, and when one converts, he is like a different entity (Yevamos 23a). Since it is as if he is created anew, he can recite this bracha, although he was physically born a non-Jew.

5) The question is asked whether a convert can recite Kaddish for his father, who was not Jewish. R' Ovadia Yosef (Yechaveh Daas 6:60) writes that he can. R' Aharon Walkin (1867-1942), a student of the Netziv and R' Yitzchak Elchonon Spector, tells us in Shu"t Zekan Aharon that it is surely permitted and maybe even an obligation for a convert to say Kaddish *l'ilui nishmas* his father, who was not Jewish (see the Rambam in Hilchos Mamrim 5:11). Nevertheless, he concludes for various reasons that it is better for the son who is a convert to just learn or say Tehillim for the benefit of the soul of his father, and also at times daven for the *amud* and recite Kaddish in a way that it is not obvious that he is doing it for his father.



RABBI YEHOShUA ALT

The newly released book "Remarkable Insights about Death and the Afterlife" is now available (as a paperback, hardcover and digitised version) for purchase and delivery on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0CNNDCMNC> or Purchase it at <https://amzn.to/3eyh5xP>, or by sending an email to yalt3285@gmail.com. This extensive and thought-provoking book addresses these questions and many more, providing transformative insights. With a collection comprising over 70 meticulously crafted essays, it eloquently articulates the Torah's viewpoint regarding death and the afterlife.

This work stands as an invaluable resource, facilitating readers in acquiring a deeper comprehension of this vital subject. It makes a great gift for friends, relatives, business associates and learning partners.

Some of the questions discussed in this book are the following.

- What is the ultimate way to elevate the soul of one's parents?
- How does the death process rectify a person's soul?
- What profound life lessons can we learn from gravestones?
- In what ways can the concept of reincarnation help us better understand life?
- What is the idea behind davening at gravesites?
- What will happen at the Resurrection of the Dead?

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