Let No Ger Spend the Night Outdoors

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The rabbis depict our forebears Abraham and Sarah spreading the knowledge of Hashem far and wide. Some formulations of this idea actually use the verb *gayyer* (=to convert).[2] Moreover, the Talmud ascribes to God, no less, the designation of the partriarchs as “those who first made Me known in the world” and to Israel the claim “we have made Thee known in the world”.[3] But why marshall texts to demonstrate the obvious: Torah and Talmud mostly[4] see Israel as having received the Torah that they might be its torch-bearers. Thus in rabbinic tradition welcoming *gere sedeq* (=righteous converts) into the covenant is deemed to be a misvah.[5] So *giyyoor* being a misvah *giyyoor* was sacrosanct. Or at least so we thought.

Then early last year news broke of men and women who had converted to Judaism under the auspices of respected Israeli rabbis and were now being declared gentiles. The initial perplexity that greeted the news turned into disbelief as reports began to speak of conversions anulled in the hundreds and thousands by Israel’s supreme rabbinic court. Eventually we managed to procure a copy of that court’s decision that allegedly set in motion the overturning of conversions. The following is the picture as it emerges from the pages of that document.

It all begins in Ashdod when a couple appears before the local rabbinic court seeking a divorce. The court informs the couple that it is impossible to get divorced unless one was first married. Jewish law, it explains, does not recognize marriage between a Jew and a gentile. And because the woman is a gentile, the

court does not look upon them as husband and wife. Having lived in the belief that she was Jewish ever since her conversion many years prior, the woman is flabbergasted. She appeals to the supreme rabbinic court in Jerusalem. On February 2nd, 2008, that august body issues its reasoned *pesaq* in a 53 page document that essentially upholds the Ashdod ruling.

The Beth Din's Pesaq of February 2008 (hereafter BDP) is problematic in at least three areas. First, it makes assertions that are inconsistent with the facts. For example, it states that all the *posqeem* (=halakhic decisors) throughout the generations have ruled conversion retroactively invalid if the convert fails to live up to his/her commitments. When we consult the *posqeem* - whether it be Rambam,[6] Tur,[7] or Shulhan Arukh[8] to mention three of the most eminent - we find them saying the exact opposite. Indeed, there seems to be only a single dissenting *rishon*, namely the author of Hagahot Mordecai.[9] Now in order to appreciate the Hagahot Mordecai's position we need to recall the talmudic passage from which he claims to derive the idea of retroactively invalid *giyyoor*. The Mishnah at Yebamoth 24b reads:

> A man who was alleged to have had relations with ... a non-Jewish woman and she later converted he shall not marry [the woman]. If, however, he married her they shall not be separated. If a man was alleged to have had relations with a married woman and she was subsequently divorced, then even if they went ahead and married they shall be separated.

The convert of this Mishnah is one whose motives for conversion cannot help but raise doubts. Nevertheless, in ruling that "if married they shall not be separated", the Mishnah implies the conversion to be valid. But can this implication be correct when it would seem to contradict another tannaic source? That is what the Gemara wants to know, and it begins by citing the counter source.

> Surely we have learnt in a Baraitha: Whether it is a man who converts for the sake of a woman or a woman for the sake of a man; whether the person converts for the sake of the royal table or to be employed by Solomon - none of these are converts according to R. Nehemiah. For R. Nehemiah would say: those who convert for fear of lions; those who convert on the prompting of a dream; those who converted in the days of Mordecai and Esther - none of these are converts ...

Inasmuch as he invalidates conversions undertaken for less than the purest motives, R. Nehemiah is irreconcilable with our Mishnah - or rather with the inference the Gemara had drawn from it. So ought that initial inference to be rejected? No, says the Gemara, because apropos of this very issue R. Yitzhak bar Shemuel bar Marta transmitted in the name of Rav that the law is KE-DIBRE HA-OMER (=according to the one who says) 'They are all converts' (Yeb. ibid.).

Now Rav (d. around 250) having bestraddled the tannaic and amoraic eras, is allowed to dispute a tanna[10] - a licence not granted other amoraim. However, it is not on the strength of his quasi-tannaic status that Rav rules here at Yeb. 24b, but rather does he side with the anonymous tanna who disagreed with R. Nehemiah and "says 'They are all converts'". Hence the Gemara's original inference is vindicated; for though it places our Mishnah at odds with R. Nehemiah, it keeps it in line with the tanna cited and seconded by Rav. And it is the decision of Rav (which the Gemara identifies as consistent with the Mishnah) that post talmudic halakhists follow almost to a man. But as noted earlier, there is a dissenter: Hagahot Mordecai.

> Although the Talmud rules there [at Yeb. 24b] that they are all full proselytes, we could say that it refers only to cases where we see them rectifying their ways even if their initial motive was marriage etc. ...[11] I prefer this interpretation to the alternative which would posit an amora [i.e. Rav] ruling not in accordance with the baraitha of R. Nehemiah. Moreover, the undisputed baraitha [cited Yeb. ibid.] that says no converts were accepted in the days of David and Solomon [for fear of ulterior motives] supports us.[12] What I have written here is my own opinion, not what I received from my teachers; and my understanding should not be relied upon.

One has to wonder whether Hagahot Mordecai had the words KE-DIBRE HA-OMER in his copy of the Talmud. Be that as may, there is nothing anomalous about a halakhist relying upon a variant reading of the Talmud. Similarly, halakhists will occasionally argue for following a *da'at yaheed* (=minority opinion). However, what is so disconcerting about BDP is its insistence that the exceptional view of Hagahot Mordecai is shared by all *posqeem* throughout the generations.[13]

The second bone we have to pick with BDP is over its *ad hominem* slurs. Stooping to the level of personal attacks is usually a sign of desperation. How else to explain its ploy of declaring venerable members of named Israeli judiciaries to be *resha'eem*? And classifying people *resha'eem* is tantamount to impugning their credentials to act as witnesses - and by analogy also as judges.[14] The prohibition to accept the testimony of a *rasha'* is derived from Scripture, as explained by the Talmud and conveniently codified by Rambam:

> "*Resha'eem* [=unjust *or* guilty persons; felons] are disqualified from giving testimony as it says [Exod 23:1] 'You shall not make common cause with a *rasha'* to be a witness of *hamas.* Tradition understands this scripture to be saying 'Do not let a *rasha'* be a witness'." (*Yad*, Edut 10:1)

Proclaiming a dayyan (= judge of a rabbinic court; plural: dayyaneem) a *rasha'* is a grave matter and one would expect to learn which court of law convicted him and on what count. Instead BDP arrogates to itself the authority of ruling fellow dayyaneem *resha'eem* without even hearing the men's defence. If that were not egregious enough, the primary charge it cites against the dayyaneem rests on the following circular reasoning. Conversion requires a beth din (see Yeb.46b). Since they are *resha'eem*, their court is no court, and consequently the people they convert remain gentiles. The Torah pronounces a curse on anyone who leads a blind person astray (Deut 27:18 cf. Lev 19:14). In making the people they convert believe themselves to have become Jews when in fact they are still gentiles, they are guilty of the sin of leading the blind astray.[15] Hence such dayyaneem fall into the category of *resha'eem*.

Additional charges bandied about by BDP include: 1) forgery, 2) heresy and 3) brazenly disparaging Torah. The forgery charge alleges that the *rasha'* judge signed conversion certificates presided over by dayyaneem other than himself. Now these types of certificates begin with the formulaic opening *be-mothab telatha ka-hada* (= the three of us sat in judgment etc.) - because it is the same three judges who form the converting beth din that also go on to sign the certificate. Needless to say, a judge who did not personally sit on the court cannot lawfully put his name to such a document. But that, alleges BDP, is precisely what the 'delinquent' dayyan went and did. If true, nobody would dispute the impropriety of such behavior. However, the Talmud lays down a principle *sheluho shel adam ke-motho.*[16] Of course misvot *she-begufo* i.e. duties that demand personal involvement cannot be deputized; and signing a document that claims

its signatories were party to the transaction described in that document is surely such a duty. Yet it is conceivable that a senior judge might, albeit mistakenly, think of his trusted juniors as emissaries. Furthermore, unlike a bill of divorce or even a marriage contract, a *giyyoor* certificate has no halakhic function whatsoever. It is granted merely to serve the convert as ready proof in the future when facing bureaucracies and the like. All in all then, the forgery indictment seems a stretch.

The heresy charge (levelled originally by the Ashdod court but cited approvingly by BDP) is even more baffling. The actual term used is *epiqoros* - which in popular parlance is generic for heretic. The Talmud, however, defines the epithet more narrowly. The tenth chapter of Mishnah Sanhedrin[17] lists reprobates who forfeit their share in the world to come. One of them is the *epiqoros*. And it is in the course of expounding the Mishnah that the Gemara records the following definitions.

> Rav and R. Haninah both say he [the *epiqoros*] is somebody who insults a Torah scholar. R. Yohanan and R. Yehoshua b. Levi say he is somebody who insults his fellow in the presence of a Torah scholar. Now those who classify the *epiqoros* as somebody who insults his fellow in the presence of a Torah scholar, the one who insults the scholar himself they classify as *megalleh paneem ba-torah shelo ka-halakhah* (= a brazen disparager of Torah). But for those who define *epiqoros* as one who insults the scholar himself, what kind of person is the *megalleh paneem ba-torah*? He is somebody like Manasseh son of Hezekiah[18] (San. 99b).

Since BDP does not elaborate, one cannot be sure which definition of *epiqoros* it has in mind. On reflection, though, it is probably the vernacular meaning since it would be rich beyond belief for BDP to accuse another of disparaging a Torah scholar! More substantively, what is the point of BDP branding the dayyan of its disfavor an *epiqoros*?

It will be recalled that, based on Exodus 23:1, *resha'eem* are disqualified from giving testimony. Besides *rasha',* Exodus 23:1 contains another operative word: *hamas*.[19] The Talmud (San. 27a) records a dispute between Abayye and Rava as to whether or not *hamas* modifies *rasha'*. Rava holds that the word *hamas* modifies *rasha'*; hence anti-social behavior is prerequisite for witness disqualification. For Abayye, on the other hand, even non-*hamas* wrongdoing (e.g. ritual delinquency that is a matter between a person and God), is sufficient to lose

a witness his credibility. Thus Abbaye would disqualify not only a *mumar le-te'avon*[20] but also a *mumar le-hakh'ees*. But even according to Abbaye a person is disqualified to testify by virtue of wrong action. Yes; wrong action, not unorthodox thought. Yet Rambam, writes:

> "Informers and *epiqorseen* ... [21] the Sages had no need to name in their list of people unfit to give evidence because they listed only Jewish miscreants. But such rebellious infidels are worse than idolaters..." (*Yad* Edut 11:10)

There is nothing odd about the inclusion of informers because their guilt *yesh bo ma'aseh* (=involves action)[22] and is consequently ascertainable (and where appropriate punishable) by a human tribunal. But the appearance of heretics, whose fate the Mishnah leaves to divine judgment, is striking.[23] Nevertheless, by means of an ingenious *a fortiori* argument of Rambam's own devising, heresy is made a crime for courts to discover and to act upon - in this case invalidating the testimony of such that are found to be heretics.

By dragging in heretics Rambam breaks new ground. Magistrates on the watch for heresy are a far cry from the Talmud's standards of objectivity, and, what is more, seem dangerously close to the murky realm of inquisitions and thought police. So the question is, Why would Rambam have introduced this drastic innovation? We know it was not conformity to the Talmud that impelled him, because the Talmud never mentions heretics in connection with testimony. Moreover, as we saw, Rambam makes no secret of the fact that heretics transpired as a result of his own extrapolation. Something other than the Talmud, then, must have impelled Rambam to bring up heretics. In any event, once *epiqorseen* are blacklisted and Rambam's ruling is adopted by later codes, declaring someone an *epiqoros* immediately impugns his eligibility to testify or to adjudicate. Hence, in levelling its heresy charge, BDP aims to undermine the authority of its targeted beth din.

The related aspersion *megalleh paneem ba-torah shelo ka-halakhah* (again, borrowed and endorsed by BDP p.4) is meant to inculpate the dayyan in question with insulting scholars (rather than imitating Manasseh - see San. 99b cited above).[24] If you ask 'which scholars? What insult?' BDP has its answer pat. We have already met BDP's assertion that 'all the *posqeem* throughout the generations have ruled conversion retroactively invalid if the convert fails to live up to his/her commitments'. That being BDP's premise, it follows as night follows

day, that to flout such a unanimous ruling of halakhists down the ages is nothing short of brazen effrontery.

Finally, BDP's gravest imputation of all: the 'rogue' beth din failed to elicit *qabbalat misvot*[25] from those it purported to convert. Now *qabbalat misvot* is an integral component of *giyyoor* and in the opinion of many *posqeem* it is also a *sine qua non*. That any beth din could skip *qabbalat misvot* seems incredible. Yet that is what happened according to the allegation repeated over and over in BDP.[26]

POSTSCRIPT

What are we supposed to make of this document and its extraordinary contentions? Manifestly the 53 page screed is animated by more than sober halakhic logic; dare one say by something akin to polemical zeal? But whereas the written word has a life of its own and must be judged on its merits, people should always be given the benefit of the doubt. Indeed, because of the imperative to judge men charitably,[27] one wants to try and extenuate that zeal. Clues within BDP suggest that recent tendencies towards a politicization of *giyyoor* may have raised its authors' hackles.[28]

For there is no denying the attempt in certain quarters to fuse the ideas of nationality and divinity in a manner redolent of the old Baalism. What follows is an example of this phenomenon.

> From the Rambam's words we learn that candidates for conversion must express their wish to join, simultaneously, both the people of Israel and its Torah. 'Entering the covenant' [in Rambam's formulation, *Issure Bi'ah* 13:4] refers to the congregation of Israel that consists of children of the covenant. 'Taking shelter under the Shekhinah's wings' [Rambam's formulation ibid.] means living as a member of the Jewish religion ... The requirement to express this twofold identification with the Jewish nation as well as with its God and Torah, was learnt by our sages of blessed memory from Ruth the Moabitess. When seeking to impress her mother-in-law Naomi of her [Ruth's] spiritual and practical preparedness to cast her lot with Judaism, Ruth speaks the words "... Your people is my people and your God is my God". The equal emphasis on the people and its God as the objects of [the convert's] adoptive identity clearly demonstrates that the religion and the nationhood are a single indivisible entity in Judaism ... Clearly, then, already in such an early era [as Ruth's],

> conversion was conceived of as a procedure simultaneously both religious and national, whose elements are inseperable." (*Mi Hu Yehudi?* by Avner Shaki, vol. 2 Jerusalem 1978 p. 343).

Shaki's enunciation of the nation-divinity amalgam would not merit citation were it not that he invokes Scripture, Sages and Maimonides in support. But seeing that he does, it behooves us to examine these sources' alleged espousal of 'Shakian dualism'. Ruth's "Your people" we shall consider shortly. As for the unsubstantiated claim that the sages deduced from Ruth "a twofold identification with the Jewish nation as well as with its God and Torah" we are unable to comment upon, since no source is indicated.[29] Rambam certainly mentions covenant: "Similarly throughout the generations, when a non-Jew wishes to enter the covenant and take shelter under the Shekhinah's wings...". The only question is whether Rambam was using the phrase 'entering the covenant' as shorthand for joining the polity of the children of the covenant. Rambam's classic commentators refer us to a baraitha in Keritot that mandates all subsequent conversions to reenact, as it were, the conversion leading up to the Sinai/Horeb covenant.[30]

> *Ribbi* [Judah the Partriach] says as with your forefathers so with [proselytes] throughout your generations. Just as your forefathers did not enter into the [Sinaitic] covenant except through circumcision, immersion and propitiation by means of blood [sacrifice] neither shall they enter the covenant except through circumcision, immersion and propitiation by means of blood [sacrifice] (Ker. 9a).

The covenant Rambam alludes to is the very one under discussion in Keritot; which, in turn, is the Torah's covenant mediated by Moses between God and the people who were to become the covenantal community. In other words, the pledge made at Sinai as understood by tradition was to God rather than to a group of human beings. Hence, the proselyte's entering into the covenant, modelled on the Sinai prototype, is about the neophyte's commitment to God rather than to a group that Shaki calls 'children of the covenant'.

Needless to say, among Jews who take their faith seriously, equating a person's political choices with his/her choice to 'enter under the shekhinah's wings' must seem to border on the sacriligious. Without belittling one iota tribal

and national allegiances, they are surely of a different order from the plighting of one's troth to Hashem. Moreover, the Talmud categorically forbids associating the Name of Heaven with anything else.[31] Hence the extreme unease that attempts such as Shaki's to politicize *giyyoor* engender in the bosom of many a Torah-oriented Jew who ponders Scriptures such as 2Kgs 17:26-28.

> It was reported to the king of Assyria saying 'The peoples that you deported and settled in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land and he sent among them lions that are devouring them because they know not the law of the god of the land'. The king of Assyria gave orders that one of the priests who had been deported from there should be sent back in order to teach them the law of the god of the land. So one of the priests who had been exiled from Samaria came back and dwelt in Bethel and taught them how to fear Hashem.

Two irreconcilable voices speak to us in these verses. The first is the voice of paganism whose gods are territorial, each presiding over his/her national borders. Then in verse 28 we hear the Torah's voice, that instead of the idolatrous 'god of the land', speaks of fearing Hashem. A closely related pagan concept to the territorial, is the national god that is essentially an apotheosis of a people and its collective identity and aspirations. Naomi recognizes the nation-god nexus of Moabite religion when she says to Ruth 'Behold your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods' (Ruth 1:15). Perhaps Ruth was projecting some such Moabite territorial theology onto Hashem when she responded 'Your people shall be my people and your God my God' (v. 16).[32]

But even if one shares BDP's dismay at the way politics has come to invade and dilute *giyyoor* (and other aspects of religion), it is quite another proposition to condone the methodology it employs to counter the lamentable trend (assuming such trends to be BDP's driving gripe). Besides, even a cause worthy in the abstract, has to yield if it leads to real people suffering. This was the way of our Sages who opened a back-door for *gereem gerureem* when conventional *giyyoor* was inapplicable.[33] They even offered a halfway conversion whereby a person attained the status of *ger toshav* (as distinct from *ger sedeq*). *Ger toshav* is not a mere synonym for Noahide. No. The *ger toshav* formally forswore idolatry and accepted faith in Hashem and belief in revelation.[34] Withal, never did the Sages say let idolaters stew in their idolatry. Today, when the *ger toshav* option has fallen into desuetude, extra vigilance is called for.

Not so much in order to catch and keep out ‘rotten apples’ (though that too), but to ensure that no seeker after Hashem is left out in the cold.

[1] See Job 31:32, and especially its midrashic interpretations (e.g. Exod. Rab. 19:4).

[2] See, for example, Targum Yonathan to Gen 12:5.

[3] Men.53a.

[4] The word ‘mostly’ is used advisedly because some - notably priests whose status was inherited - seem to have conceived of Jewishness as also being hereditary. The Talmud suggests that there were priests who looked askance upon both converts and conversion (see Mihnah Rosh Hash. 1:7; Yom. 71b et al).

[5] Yeb. 47b.

[6] *Issure Bi‘ah* 13:17.

[7] Yore De‘ah 268 end.

[8] Yore De‘ah 268:12.

[9] The author of the glosses known as Hagahot Mordecai remains elusive. R. Hayim Yoseph Daveed Azulai (HYDA d.1806) surmizes that he lived a century or so after R. Mordecai b. Hillel ha-Kohen (d. 1298) whose work he glossates.

[10] See Erub. 50b, Ket. 8a, Git. 38b, San. 83b.

[11] These words of the Hagahot imply that if the convert’s subsequent behavior does not exhibit “rectitude of ways”, then the conversion is retroactively null and void.

[12] Since it does not address the *be-de‘abad* (=post factum) situation, it is unclear how the David-Solomon baraitha supports R. Nehemia. On the contrary, had the David-Solomon baraitha emanated from the school of R. Nehemiah we know how it would have been worded. For at Yeb. 76a-b we learn the reason converts were not accepted in the halcyon days of David and his son “because their motive is likely to have been the royal table”. And

conversion undertaken with an eye on the royal board is invalidated by R. Nehemia even *be-de'abad* : "whether the person converts for the sake of the royal table or to be employed by Solomon - none of these are converts".

[13] More than a century ago when R. Yitzhak Schmelkes chose to follow the Hagahot Mordecai he did not dissimulate his own predilection for the tentative proposal of Hagahot Mordecai. Rather did R. Schmelkes opt for full disclosure: "Although he [Hagahot Mordecai] wrote that his understanding was not to be relied on, we rely upon his understanding" *(Beth Yitzhak* vol. Yore De'ah responsum 100 [p.86]).

[14] Actually a judge's moral qualifications are spelled out in the Torah (see Exod 18:21; Deut 1:13, 16:18). Nevertheless for a ruling to be anulled on grounds of the judge's unfitness, there would have to be evidence of *resha'* .

[15] BDP devotes five pages (7-12) to *lifne ivver* (= the sin of misleading the blind).

[16] Literally 'one's proxy is like oneself'. As a legal concept it means that a person can appoint a *shaliah* (=proxy) to deputize on his/her behalf in carrying out non-personal duties. The Talmud provides numerous examples such as priests offering sacrifices on behalf of the laity; tithing; effecting betrothal by conveying the medium of betrothal from a man to his destined bride; most familiar, perhaps, is the *shaliah sibboor* or precentor who recites the prayers on behalf of the congregation (see Qid. 41b-42a et al.).

[17] In many editions it appears as the eleventh chapter.

[18] Described earlier on San. 99b as a man who would use his sermons to mock Torah: Did Moses have nothing better to write than 'Lotan's sister was Timna' (Gen 36:22)? or 'Timna was a concubine to Eliphaz' (Gen 36:12)? or 'Reuben went in harvest time and found mandrakes' (Gen 30:14)?

[19] *Hamas* is often translated violence. Rabbinic sources render some occurrences of *hamas* 'robbery' or 'armed robbery' (see Targums and Rashi to Gen 6:13). At San. 27a the *rasha'* of *hamas* is defined as someone who in the act of transgressing misvot causes material harm also to fellow humans - which definition embraces also venal folks who will do anything for lucre.

[20] Literally 'a renegade out of expediency [or for pleasure]' e.g. a person who eats non-kosher food because it is cheaper than kosher (see Rashi San. 27a s.v. *h"g mumar okhel nevelot le-te'avon*).

[21] In many printed editions the text continues “and *mumar*s”. Others omit *mumar*s (see *Lehem Mishneh* ad loc.). The *editio princeps* (Rome 1480) instead of *mumar*s has “sectarians *(minin*) and apostates (*meshumadin*).

[22] Or at least treacherous speech. While some reckon speech as ‘action’, according to all tannaim wrong thought is outside the purview of the courts (see San. 65a-b et al).

[23] Especially when we recall Rambam’s own definitions of *epiqorseen* as persons guilty not of wrong speech but of heterodox opinions (even if they happen to verbalize those opinions). “There are three that are called *epiqorseen:* 1) the person who denies prophecy and the possibility of knowledge reaching the human heart from the Creator; 2) one who denies the prophecy of Moses our teacher; 3) one who says the Creator has no knowledge of the affairs of man. Each of these is an *epiqoros*” (*Yad*, Teshubah 3:8 and see Kesef Mishneh’s comment ad loc.).

[24] Both the long form *megalleh paneem ba-torah shelo ka-halakhah* and the short *megalleh paneem ba-torah* occur at San. 99b and are used there interchangeably, as we saw. At Avot 3:11 most MSS have the short form whereas printed editions typically the long. Incidentally, the dispute over the definition of *megalleh paneem* seems not to have been resolved; hardly surprising seeing that there are no ramifications for earthly bate din. Thus Rashi explains the *megalleh paneem* of Avot with reference to Manasseh, while Rambam identifies the *megalleh* as one who brazenly and ostentatiously defies Torah.

[25] Literally: acceptance of misvot. The requirement for the prospective *ger* to express his/her acceptance after being apprised of the liabilities as well as the privileges inherent in Judaism is laid down in the baraitha.“They acquaint him with some of the easier misvot and some of the heavier misvot; they acquaint him with the sin of [neglecting] to leave behind for the poor fallen or forgotten sheaves or the ‘corner’ and of [neglecting] to give the tithe of the poor. Furthermore... they say to him ‘hitherto if you ate suet you were not liable for *kareth*; if you desecrated the Sabbath you were not liable for *seqilah* but henceforth you will be liable’... And just as they acquaint him with the punishments for [breaking] misvot similarly do they acquaint him with their [the misvot’s] rewards. They say to him ‘Know that the world-to-come is reserved for the righteous, but Israel at present is unable to receive (*le-qabbel*) either great good or great travail’. They do not burden him with more [words] or with stringencies. If he ACCEPTS, he is circumcised forthwith...” (Yeb. 47a-

b).

[26] “The woman bringing the appeal did not accept observance of misvot” (p.1); “qabbalat misvot did not occur in the case of the appellant” (p.3); “an additional transgression is their declaring a non-Jew who did not accept to observe the misvot of Hashem’s Torah... to be a Jew” (p.7) etc.

[27] Avot 1:6.

[28] E.g. “The conversion of [a certain] deaf-mute will not bring her to a state of misvah observance... The only possible consequence of the conversion would be a social one - something that neither constitutes conversion nor bestows any *zekhut* (=spiritual advantage)...” (p.19); “There is certainly no misvah upon a beth din or any other Israelite to make efforts to bring non-Jews into the Israelite fold [sic] - *a fortiori* when the person’s only attachment will be of a national kind and not an attachment to the God of Israel and the Torah of Israel.” (p.20); “Despite what was said, national or social goals must not be recognized ... they see themselves belonging to the Jewish people only in the national-social sense without any inward religious connection ...” (p.21) etc.

[29] If anything, the Talmud would seem to invest Ruth’s ostensibly national ‘Your people' clause with religious significance. “She [Naomi] said to her ...‘We have 613 commandments’. She [Ruth] replied ‘Your people is my people...’” (Yeb. 47b).

[30] Rabbinic sources typically consider the Hebrews to have had the status of Noahides prior to the giving of the Torah (see, for example, Rashi at San. 82a “It was prior to Sinai that Moses had married Jethro’s daughter, all at that time having the status of Noahides. When the Torah was given they all, she [Jethro’s daughter] as well as proselytes of the mixed multitude included, entered into full *misvah*-hood”).

[31] Suk. 45b, San. 63a.

[32] Boaz, while applauding both, separates her commitment to God (Ruth 2:12) from her national and familial loyalties (v. 11). Moreover, the distinctive phrase *la-hasot tahat kenafaim* (taking refuge *or* shelter under wings) Scripture uses exclusively of the relationship between an individual and Hashem (cf. Ps 36:8, 57:2, 91:4).

[33] See Yeb. 79a, Avod Zar. 3b, 24a; Yerushalmi Qid. 65c, San. 23d.

[34] “The person who accepts them [the seven misvot] is called a *ger toshav* ; but the acceptance must be solemnized in the presence of three *haberim* [that constitute a beth din]. Whoever accepts the seven misvot and is careful to keep them behold he is of the pious among the nations and has a share in the world-to-come. That is provided he accepts them and does them because Hashem commanded them in the Torah...” (*Yad*, Melakim 8:10-11; cf. *Issure Bi‘ah* 14:7).