

אמר הקב"ר... וכן פתח משה לדבר עם פרעה כשאמר לו: אלהי העברים שלחני אליה, רצונו לומר: אלהי אברהם יצחק ויעקב מפני שהיה אברהם מפרסם אצל האמות, וכי התחבר אליהם דבר האלהים והנהיג אותם ועשה להם נפלאות, ולא אמר: אלהי השמים והארץ שלחני אליה. ולא: בוראי ובוראה, וכן פתח אלהים דבריו אל המון ישראל: "אנכי יי אלהיה אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים", ולא אמר: "אני בורא העולם ובוראכם: אמר הכוזרי: אם כן אני רואה שתורתכם אינה נתונה כי אם לכם: אמר הקב"ר: כן הוא, וכל הנלוג אלינו מן האמות בפרט נגיעהו מן הטובה אשר ייטיב הבורא אלינו. ואלו היה חיוב התורה מפני שבראנו היה שנה, כי הכל בריאותו. אך התורה מפני שהוציאנו ממצרים, והתחברות כבודו אלינו, מפני שאנחנו נקראים הסגלה מבני אדם.

The Rabbi said...in the same strain spoke Moses to Pharaoh, when he told him: 'The God of the Hebrews sent me to thee,' viz. the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For Abraham was well known to the nations, who also knew that the divine spirit was in contact with the patriarchs, cared for them, and performed miracles for them. He did not say: 'The God of heaven and earth,' nor 'my Creator and thine sent me.' In the same way God commenced His speech to the assembled people of Israel: 'I am the God whom you worship, who has led you out of the land of Egypt,' but He did not say: 'I am the Creator of the world and your Creator.'... Al Khazari asked "If this be so, then your belief is confined to yourselves?" The Rabbi answered "Yes; but any Gentile who joins us unconditionally shares our good fortune. If the Law were binding on us only because God created us, everyone would be equal, since He created them all. But the Law was given to us because He led us out of Egypt, and remained attached to us, because we are the pick of mankind."

A discussion on Being Chosen and conversion based on The Kuzari 1: 25-27

Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What is the difference between the idea of Hashem who took us out of Egypt and Him being the one who created us?
- What does this source mean for when we talk about equality in the world?
- What opinion does this source give over on conversion?
- What are your thoughts on the phrase 'הַסְּגֵלָה מִבְּנֵי אָדָם' (The pick of mankind)

Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Does being the chosen nation make us inherently racist?
- Why do you think it is so hard to convert to Judaism?
- Should we be making Orthodox conversion more accessible?

Some Personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- If you were not Jewish/Found out you needed to convert at your age, would you choose to?
- Should we, as a community, be doing more to help those who are converting as a community?
- What are your thoughts on being Hashem's chosen nation, and how does this fit in with your modern life?

Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Kol Dodi Dofek on Conversion:

A gentile who wishes to join the nation must take upon himself both covenants. He places himself in the ambit of Jewish fate and sanctifies himself for the acceptance of the Jewish destiny. The act of conversion involves associating oneself as a member of the people of the Covenants of Egypt and of Sinai. Keep this important principle in mind: there is no such thing as partial conversion. One cannot omit one *iota* of either of these two Covenants. Total devotion to the Jewish people — as a nation that God took to Himself in Egypt, with all its tribulations, suffering, responsibilities, and actions; and as a holy people that is itself consecrated, heart and soul, to the God of Israel and His halakhic and moral demands — is the absolute foundation of Judaism and hence is also the basis of conversion.

Megillat Rut1:7

וַתֵּצֵא מִן־הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הִיתָה־שָׁמָּה וְשָׁתִי כְלִיתָיָה עִמָּה וַתִּלְכְּנָה בְּדֶרֶךְ לָשׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה

Accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living; and they set out on the road back to the land of Judah.

Rut Rabbah 2:12

וַתִּלְכְּנָה, הֵיוּ עֲסוּקוֹת בְּהִלְכוֹת גְּרִים

"And they set out on the road": they were focused on the ways (*telakhnah* is connected to *hilkhot* from the root *halakh*) of conversion.

Mesechet Sotah Daf 12b

וַתֵּרֵד בַּת פַּרְעֹה לְרַחוּץ עַל הַיָּאֵר אֶ"ר יוֹחָנָן מִשׁוֹם ר' שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחִי מִלְמַד שִׁירְדָה לְרַחוּץ מִגְּלוּלֵי אֲבִיהָ

The verse states: "And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe [*lirhotz*] in the river" ([Exodus 2:5](#)). Rabbi Yoḥanan says in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai: This teaches that she came down to the river to cleanse herself from the impurity of her father's idols, as she was immersing herself as part of the conversion process.

A Related Story - The Lonely Convert by Aliza Elisheva Garvin

Before I converted, people tried to dissuade me. "It's expensive to keep kosher," and "It's hard being Jewish" were the top arguments I heard. "Why are you doing this?" was another question people asked frequently. I was committed to complete my conversion no matter what people said. For me, there was just no other option to live a life of meaning and closeness to God. A year and a half after I converted and became an Orthodox Jew, I still feel the same conviction towards being Jewish. But, as some people warned, this road has not been easy.

What has been the hardest part about being a convert? Well, it's not keeping kosher. I have the luxury and privilege of living in New York City where kosher groceries, products, and restaurants are abundant. Modesty? Not a problem. I joyfully took on that mitzvah. Shabbat? It's my ultimate spiritual cornerstone to Jewish life. Don't get me wrong; some mitzvot are challenging and there is always room to learn and grow. I am no tzadiket; I'm not perfect. I took on the whole Torah to the best of my ability and by no means do I have any regrets.

Some converts, myself included, can lose their entire family because of this enormous change. It's not that you can't join family gatherings anymore where treif food is served or where other discomforts or compromising situations can arise. Sometimes a convert's family of origin, like my own, can take their child's conversion offensively. Some gentile parents may cut their Jewish convert children off, leaving the convert to fend for themselves, hoping they'll decide to renounce Judaism and return to their families. For me, renouncing Judaism to get my family back never was, nor ever will be an option. I wouldn't be able to live with myself. It would be dishonest of me. For me, the hardest part of being a convert is the loneliness.

How many times does the Torah need to remind the Jewish people to love the convert? I now understand why the Hebrew word for a convert is "ger", which means "stranger." You may God forbid remain unmarried and your Shabbat invites may dwindle after you leave the safety net of seminary or yeshiva. You can observe Judaism and feel close to God, yet close to no one.

Here is my request to the Jewish community: Please make the extra effort to love a convert, to help them feel welcome in your communities and shuls. If they have gone through an Orthodox conversion, their rabbis have already asked them plenty of questions. Don't feel it is your duty to have them repeatedly undergo the process of conversion. Please don't treat a convert like a second-class citizen. We are 100% Jewish like you are.

Some Interactive Resources:

Instagram: Ilana (@jewishbychoice) <https://www.instagram.com/jewishbychoice/?hl=en>

Video: Converting to Judaism <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7obs7JwscC4>

Article: Have you embraced a convert today? <https://www.aish.com/jw/s/Have-You-Embraced-a-Convert-Today.html>

Video: Different Strokes on Conversion <https://www.aish.com/jt/Jtube-Different-Strokes-Conversion.html>