
THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF GERIM TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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What is it that compels a non-Jew to join the ranks of the Jewish People? After all, the media takes a joyride by demonizing Israel and the Jewish nation. Why make a conscious decision to become a Jew?

Many teachings found in our writings actually marvel at the qualities it takes to make such a bold step. Nowhere in Chassidic discourses can we find the abundance of material addressing this idea as in the writings of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov.

Rebbe Nachman lived in an era which saw the Partition of Poland and the transfer of over 1,000,000 Jews to the Czar of Russia's authority. The overt anti-Semitism that led the Czar to form committee after committee to suppress and even eradicate the Jews from his domain created some of the worst decrees the Jews have suffered under during their long exile. Yet, during his lifetime, Rebbe Nachman was witness to many, many *gerim* who longed for, and accepted, the lot of the Jews. We thus find that many of his lessons focus upon the significance of *gerim* and their contributions to the Jewish Nation as individuals, and the important role they play in hastening the end of the exile and the revelation of God's kingship throughout the world!

The following is a brief summary of one of these ideas, culled from *Likutey Moharan II*, Lesson #5.

Faith is the most important thing of all. Each person must search himself to see whether his faith is complete, and he must constantly strengthen himself in faith.

This is part of the first section of this lesson that details the centrality of faith in our lives. Rebbe Nachman then speaks about strengthening faith and how one can restore and elevate that faith if he has fallen from it.

When a person falls from faith and even a wordless cry does not help, then he needs to cry out from the very depths of his heart, as in “From the depths I cried out to You, O God!” (Psalms 130:1)—that is, from the depths of the heart. Through this outcry, profound advice is revealed by which each person knows what he needs to do. In turn, faith grows and is rectified, and healing, ancestral merit and prayer are all rectified as well.

The growth of faith is expressed by the phrase “And Your faith in the nights.” (Psalms 92:3) In other words, as the night is pushed off more and more and the light of day draws nearer, faith grows greater and greater—until, in the light of day, faith reaches its fullest dimensions, as in “They are new every morning; great is Your faith.” (Lamentations 3:23) It is then, in the light of day, that healing sprouts, as expressed in the verse “Then your light will burst forth as the dawn, and your healing will quickly sprout.” (Isaiah 58:8). Similarly, through the revelation of counsel and advice—which is also associated with the revelation of light from within the darkness—faith also grows; and faith is the single most important factor in healing.

Rebbe Nachman then describes what happens when one’s faith slackens. A brief introduction to this concept is that all the universes were created through faith, as described in Psalm 33:4, “All His works are with faith.” Thus, faith is inherent in every part of Creation, waiting to be released and to merge into the person’s makeup so that the person will turn to God and serve Him.

As a result of the collapse of holy faith, false beliefs are created and strengthened. Conversely, when holy faith is elevated and rectified, false beliefs are thereby weakened and they fall. Then the idolatrous nations abandon their false beliefs; they turn to our holy faith and gerim are made. This sometimes manifests itself in the form of potential gerim—that is, even though some of these gentiles do not actually complete their geirus, nevertheless, they recognize God in their own place and they know and believe that there is One Primordial God. Other times, however, actual gerim are made.

The truth about God is found in every facet and in every place in the world—it is, after all, the world He created and He permeates every nook and cranny. Therefore, if we believe in God, we will find the truth about Him, and though we cannot see God, our faith in Him allows us

to recognize the truth about God. Thus, when our faith is strong, we take the blemished faith, the false faith and the misplaced faith, and we return them to the realm of true faith. The greater the degree of blemish in our faith — when we realize how much we blemished our faith, this realization becomes the catalyst in our return to the true faith. The greater the blemish, the greater the recognition of God — to the point of actual *geirus*.

Still, Rebbe Nachman teaches, in the early days of their *geirus*, these *gerim* are difficult and detrimental to the Jewish people, because they instill pride and arrogance into our nation. How is that? Because God instilled His Divine presence and pride into the Jews. (See Rashi on Numbers 11:20.) When our faith collapses, and we fall away from God, then we bring that sanctity and pride into other worlds; when people become *gerim*, they restore that fallen pride to the Jews! However, having spent so much time within the realms of those distant from true faith, that pride requires a rectification period.

Rebbe Nachman continues:

As a result of the pride and arrogance that enter the Jewish people along with these gerim, the false leaders of the generation — who arrogantly lord it over the generation with no mandate whatsoever — wield “the sword of pride,” for their rank was not given to them from Heaven at all. (See Deuteronomy 33:29.)¹⁶¹ These leaders even possess the power to punish those who are unwilling to submit themselves to their rule. In truth, though, what they do is not really “punishment,” but “abuse,” because they are in fact nothing more than outright assailants, and they receive all their power through “the sword of pride.”

161. The full verse in Deuteronomy reads, “Happy are you, Israel. Who is like you, a people delivered by God, the Shield of your help and the Sword of your grandeur? Your enemies will try to deceive you, but you will trample their haughty ones.” With this proof-text, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov shows the connection between grandeur/pride (*ga'avah*) and the sword. Depending on who wields the “sword of *ga'avah*,” it is either the holy pride/grandeur that comes with being a member of the Jewish people, or it is the pride/haughtiness of the unworthy leaders’ self-aggrandizement. By way of explanation, the sword of pride comes from God but was “taken captive” by those whose faith fell. That’s how it ended up with the *gerim* who, when they came to true faith, brought it with them into the Jewish nation. Since it was blemished, it ends up with blemished people, the false leaders.

As a result of the arrogance of these false leaders of the generation, sexual lust overtakes the world, God forbid. This, in turn, leads to the intentional wasting of seed, God forbid, which is described by the phrase “his flesh was sealed over (הִחַתְּמָהוּ) because of his discharge” (Leviticus 15:3)—since sexual lust is the seal (חֹתֶם) of the Other Side, which is placed upon a person so that he will not be able to escape from it. Indeed, it is impossible to escape from it except through the power of the defenders of the generation—these are the tzaddikim and the devout ones of the generation who are called “the defenders of the land.” These “defenders of the land” wage a great war against this sin, and they elevate “his flesh was sealed over” to “the seal of holiness.” This “seal of holiness” corresponds, as is known, to the tefilin, which embody and manifest the radiance of the mind [and its ability] to know and to make known the presence of God in the world.

As the Rebbe explains, the main rectification of the mind is commensurate with the decree that a person breaks his sexual lust. This means that when immoral thoughts furiously assail a person and he is liable to come, God forbid, to nocturnal emission—but instead, he determinedly prevails to break and to banish these thoughts, and to draw holy thoughts upon himself—then he rises from the impure state described by the phrase “his flesh was sealed over” to the state of the *tefilin*, a state in which the mind glows and radiates with the knowledge and perception of Godliness. Each person must receive from these “defenders of the land” the power to prevail over his immoral thoughts and to transform them into intellectual holiness.

We see from this lesson that the *geirus* process is a very difficult one, but, when someone does complete the *geirus* process, when he strengthens his faith and makes a conscious decision to accept true faith in God, then, despite his or her difficulties and the battles yet to be won by the *ger*, the person has begun a whole new process in the revelation of Godliness throughout himself, as well as for others. As Rebbe Nachman teaches elsewhere (*Likutey Moharan* I, 17:6-7), when blemished faith begins its return to its source, anything that is attached to it will also be returned and elevated to that source!

This will also explain our Sages’ teaching (*Kiddushin* 70b), “*Gerim* are as difficult for the Jewish Nation as *sapachas*.” The obvious question

is: are our Sages trying to draw in *gerim* and make them feel comfortable, or are they intending to reject them? With Rebbe Nachman's explanation that when *gerim* are drawn to Judaism they bring with them their non-Jewish lifestyles and the fallen pride of God that empowers false leaders and immorality, then, "Yes," the initial *geirus* brings with it harmful implications. With time, when the *gerim* remain steadfast in their new found faith, they eventually bring about greater revelations of God in this world.

This is what the *Zohar* teaches: when Jethro came to the Jews in the desert and expressed his desire for *geirus*, then the Name of God became exalted in all the universes (*Zohar* II, 69a). The reason is that Jethro was a priest of all the idolatrous religions in Midian. This put him deep into the netherworlds of idolatry and paganism, but when he said, "Now I know that God is greater than all gods..." (Exodus 18:11) he thereby proclaimed God from His exalted level down to the lowest level!

As explained by Rabbi Avraham the Ger, the main reason why *gerim* are considered "difficult" is really a simple one. When one completes his *geirus*, his acceptance of Torah and *mitzvos* are so absolute and unbending that he puts to shame the Jew who may not be so demanding of himself in observance! This slackening of the Jew's faith and devotions is compared to idolatry,¹⁶² which arouses God's anger and leads to harsh decrees. (See Deuteronomy 11:16-17.) By extension, this means that the *gerim's* contribution to the Nation is one of mitigating God's [harsh] decrees, because once they pass the initial period of "difficulty" and become integrated into the community, their faith shines and illumines all the worlds and fills them with His light!

162. The Baal Shem Tov remarked that the minute a person veers away from faith that is considered idolatry, so laziness in observance of the *mitzvos* is comparable to idolatry. (*Degel Machaneh Ephraim, Parshas Kedoshim; Me'or Einayim, Parshas Re'eh*)