



**Partners In Torah**  
**San Diego-Los Angeles**  
**Study Guide**

***Parshat Vayikra***

***תשפ"ג***

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***Partners Detroit***

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## *Partners In Torah*

### *Mission Statement:*

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

*Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.*

**Welcome.**

**Thank you for coming.**

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.**

## תשפ"ג Acharei Mot - Kedoshim

The famous, oft-quoted, verse, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," is found in this week's portion (Leviticus 19:18).

(יח) לא תקום וְלֹא תִטֹּר אֶת בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי יְדֹוֹד

18) *You shall not take revenge, and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; **you shall love your fellow as yourself**, I am Hashem.*

Maimonides (ספר המצות mitzvah #206) explains this mitzvah as follows:

מצוה ר"ו - היא שצונו לאהוב קצתנו את קצתנו כמו שנאהב עצמנו ושתהיה חמלתי ואהבתי לאחי כחמלתי ואהבתי לעצמי בממונו וגופו וכל מה שיהיה ברשותו או ירצה אותו וכל מה שארצה לעצמי ארצה לו כמוהו וכל מה שאשנא לעצמי או למי שידבק בי אשנא לו כמוהו והוא אמרו ית' ואהבת לרעך כמוך

*Hashem has commanded us to love our fellow Jew the way we love ourselves. This means that the same care and love that I have for myself, I should have for my fellow. This applies to his money, or his possessions. Also, I should want for him the very same good that I want for myself, and those things that I and those close to me despise, I should despise for him also.*

This concept serves as the foundation of the Torah, as we see from this story with Hillel the Elder (Talmud Tractate Shabbat 31a):

מעשה בנכרי אחד שבא לפני שמאי אמר לו גיירני על מנת שתלמדני כל התורה כולה כשאני עומד על רגל אחת דחפו באמת הבנין שבידו בא לפני הלל גייריה אמר לו דעלך סני לחברך לא תעביד זו היא כל התורה כולה ואידך פירושה הוא זיל גמור

*A gentile approached Shammai the Elder and asked him to convert him to Judaism on the condition that Shammai teach him the entire Torah while he stood on one foot. Shammai rejected him because the Torah is both lengthy and difficult, and this person was looking for shortcuts. He was clearly not realistic about the commitment necessary to be a proper Jew, and was thus not a serious prospect for conversion.*

*He then went to Hillel the Elder and asked him to convert him while he stood on one foot. Hillel the Elder, who was impressed with his zeal and sincerity in having made the condition that he did, converted him. Hillel realized that this man understood that a proper religion would have one prevalent theme underlying all of its commandments. If this theme was reasonable, the religion built on that foundation would also be reasonable. First, Hillel's candidate wanted to hear Judaism's central theme, and then, if he liked it, he would proceed to learn about the rest of the religion. Hillel taught him that the fundamental principal in our Torah: "What you dislike, do not do to your friend. **This is the entire Torah. The rest of it explains this concept.** Go and learn it!"*

The goal of the Torah and all its mitzvot is to refine us and make us into perfect human beings, as the Midrash teaches us:

מדרש רבה בראשית - פרשה מד פסקה א

רב אמר לא נתנו המצות אלא לצרף בהן את הבריות

*Rav said, "The mitzvot were given only to refine the human being."*

This refinement of one's character is most evident in his dealings with others.

The Chiddushei Ha-Rim, Rabbi Isaac Meir Alter (d. 1866), interestingly observes that the Torah actually says, "*Love your fellow as yourself.*" But Hillel didn't tell him that he had to love his fellow; all that he told him was not to hurt him, something far easier than loving him as yourself! Why did Hillel the Elder change the message?

The Chiddushei Ha-Rim explains that the maximum level of sensitivity and care for another that a gentile can reach is not to hurt or cause him pain. "Don't do something hurtful to him, because just as you don't enjoy being hurt, he doesn't either." The next level, however, *to love someone else as you love yourself*, is possible only with one Jew to another. The Torah is teaching us that, as Jews, we have an obligation to love our fellow Jew as we love ourselves.

We tend to think of *ואהבת לרעך כמוך* - loving your fellow as yourself - as the ultimate level that a Jew can reach. There is, however, an even greater level, also mentioned in this week's portion (Leviticus 19:33,34):

(לג) וְכִי יִגּוּר אֶתְךָ גֵר בְּאַרְצְכֶם לֹא תוֹנוּ אֹתוֹ  
(לד) כְּאֶזְרַח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לְכֶם הַגֵּר הַגֵּר אֶתְכֶם וְאַהֲבַתְתֶּם לוֹ כְּמוֹךָ כִּי  
גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי יְדֹד אֱלֹקֵיכֶם

33) *When a proselyte (ger) dwells among you in your land, do not taunt him. 34) The ger who dwells with you shall be like a native among you, **and you shall love him like yourself**, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt, I am Hashem your G-d.*

Rabbi Eliezer Hagadol quoted in Talmud Bava Metzia 59b says that the Torah warns us to love and not offend or oppress the ger a total of 36 different times.

In Deuteronomy 19:9, the Torah commands us to love the ger— ואהבתם את הגר. This is the Torah's 207<sup>th</sup> positive commandment according to Maimonides' method of counting, and this is what he says about it.

**רמצוה ר"ז - היא שצונו לאהוב את הגרים והוא אמרו ית' ואהבתם את הגר ואע"פ שהוא נכנס בזה עם ישראל באמרו ואהבת לרעך כמוך שזה הגר גר צדק אבל מפני שנכנס בתורתנו הוסיף האל אהבה וייחד לו מצוה נוספת כמו שעשה באזהרה באונאתו שאמר ולא תונו איש את עמיתו ואמר וגר לא תונה והתבאר מלשון הגמרא בבא מציעא שחייבין על אונאת הגר משום לא תונו איש את עמיתו ומשום וגר לא תונה כן גם כן אנו חייבין באהבתו משום ואהבת לרעך ומשום ואהבתם את הגר וזה מבואר אין ספק בו ואיני יודע אדם ממי שמנה המצות שסכל זה וברוב המדרשות בארו שהאל צונו על הגר כמו שצונו על עצמו אמר ואהבת את ה' אלהיך ואמר ואהבתם את הגר**

*In mitzvah #207 Hashem commanded us to love the convert, as it is stated in the verse - ואהבתם את הגר – and you should love the convert. Even though he is already included in the Jewish nation about which it says “love thy fellow as yourself,” since he has converted and is a member of the Jewish nation, **since this person has chosen to join the Jewish nation**, Hashem has bestowed upon him additional love, and has added an extra mitzvah to love him...*

*Most of the commentaries explain that Hashem commanded us to love the gerim the same way He commanded us to love Him. The basis for this is that Hashem used the very same words in the directive. “ואהבת את ה' אלקיך” and “ואהבתם את הגר”.*

So, to love your fellow Jew like yourself fulfills one mitzvah. But to love a *ger* like yourself, fulfills two.

Maimonides makes it clear that the reason that the *ger* obtains an extra measure of love is because he has **chosen** to join the Jewish nation. This is stated very clearly in the words of Rabbeinu Yona in the *Shaarei Teshuva* (3:49).

ובכמה מקומות הזהירה התורה על אונאת הגר, מפני אשר שכח  
עמו ובית אביו ובא לחסות תחת כנפי השכינה

*In many places the Torah has warned us not to afflict a ger because he has forgotten his nation, his father and mother's house, and has come to dwell under the wings of Hashem's divine presence.*

This is why Hashem professes His love for a *ger*. In the verse just before commanding us to love the *ger*, Hashem says “ואהב גר” that He loves the *ger*. According to Reish Lakish in the Midrash, a *ger* is even more beloved to Hashem than the Jewish people.

א"ל ר"ש בן לקיש חביב הגר לפני הקב"ה מן אותן אוכלוסין שעמדו  
על הר סיני למה שכל אותן אוכלוסין אלולי שראו הקולות והלפידים  
וברקים וההרים רועשים וקול שופרות לא קבלו עליהם מלכות שמים וזה  
לא ראה אחד מכולם ובא ומשלים עצמו להקב"ה וקבל עליו עול מלכות  
שמים יש חביב מזה

*Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said, “The ger is more precious to Hashem than the multitudes who stood at Mount Sinai. Why? For all of those who stood at Mount Sinai, had they not seen the torches and lightning, heard the thunder, felt the mountain tremble, and heard the sounds of the Shofar (that scared the wits*

*out of them) they would not have accepted the Torah. But the Ger saw none of that yet still came and surrendered himself to Hashem by accepting the yoke of heaven upon himself. Is there anything more precious than that?*

Ruth, King David's grandmother, is the paradigm of a *ger*. She was the daughter of Eglon, king of Moav, and left everything behind to join the Jewish nation. When collecting wheat in Boaz's field, Boaz noticed her modesty and special character, and commended her for becoming a *ger*, telling her (Ruth 2:12):

יב) יְשֵׁלֶם יְדֹד פְּעֻלָּךְ וַיְתִי מִשְׁכָּרְתְּךָ שְׂלָמָה מֵעַם יְדֹד אֱלֹהֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בָּאת לְחַסוֹת תַּחַת כְּנָפָיו

*12) May Hashem reward your deed, **and may your payment be full from Hashem, the G-d of Israel, under Whose wings you have come to seek refuge.***

The Vilna Gaon explains why Ruth's payment from Hashem would be full as opposed to that of a regular Jewish person.

A servant is not entitled to pay from his master because he is his master's property. Everything the servant has, including the work that he generates, belongs to his master. Therefore, since Hashem took us out of Egypt to be his servants, we are not entitled to payment in this world for our deeds. Whereas Ruth, who was not taken out of Egypt, isn't automatically a servant of Hashem. On the contrary, she voluntarily made herself Hashem's servant. Therefore, she is able to ask for reward for her deeds.

The Radvaz in his book *מצודות דוד* - a commentary on the 613 mitzvot, cites a third reason that gerim are entitled to extra love:



Who were the very first *gerim*? Our Sages teach us that they were Avraham and Sarah. They were the first ones to tear themselves away from the prevalent idol worship of their times and dedicate themselves to serving Hashem. They also went on a campaign to convert the rest of the world to belief in Hashem and bring them under the wings of Hashem's divine presence. The Torah teaches us that they were very successful:

וע"ד הסוד דע כי נשמות הגרים כולם ניציצות מנשמתו של אברהם אבינו שהיה אב לגרים. ובמה שנתעסק בחייו, נשמתו עסוקה אחר מותו. והוא נקרא "אוהבו של מקום". שנאמר "זרע אברהם אוהבי". וכיון שיש בגר זוהר מאותה נשמה טהורה עליונה צוה הכתוב לאהוב אותו אהבה יתירה נוסף על אהבת כל ישראל, מדה כנגד מדה.

*Based on the Kabbalah, the souls of all gerim are sparks from Avraham Avinu's soul, since he was the father of all gerim. And what Avraham was involved with during his lifetime, his soul is involved with after his passing. Avraham was called "Hashem's beloved one" by the prophet Issiah (41:8). Therefore, since the soul of every ger has some of Avraham Avinu's soul, Hashem commanded us to love him more than a regular Jew, measure for measure.*

This is why Avraham and Sarah are considered the father and mother of all *gerim* until the end of time. Hence, when a *ger* is called to the Torah, he is called by his chosen name with the epithet "the son of Avraham (our forefather)." And a woman is designated by her chosen name plus "the daughter of Sarah."

Until now, we have discussed the great merit of a *ger* for having chosen to join the Jewish people and how his great display of love for Hashem should inspire us to love him. The Torah states a second reason why we have to be especially careful with a *ger's* feelings.

The Torah teaches us (Exodus 23:9):

וְגֵר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתֶּם יְדַעְתֶּם אֶת נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי גֵרִים הֵיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם

*9) Do not oppress a ger; you know the ger's feelings, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

This is one of the many verses that caution us to treat a *ger* with respect and care because we ourselves were strangers in Egypt, and we know how difficult it is to be a stranger in a foreign land. A *ger* naturally feels like an outsider and, to feel accepted, needs to feel warmth and acceptance from those in the inner circle.

In this vein, we find many verses that put the *ger* together with the orphan and widow, people who are also vulnerable. Because it seems to be a natural tendency to shun or reject a foreigner, the *ger* is going to have a difficult time breaking in and becoming mainstreamed.

Hashem addressed this issue when He said (Deuteronomy 10:18,19):

עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט יְתוּם וְאַלְמָנָה וְאַהֲבַגְר לְתַת לוֹ לֶחֶם וְשִׂמְלָה  
(יט) וְאַהֲבַתֶּם אֶת הַגֵּר כִּי גֵרִים הֵיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

*18) He carries out the judgment of orphan and widow, and loves the ger to give him bread and garment. 19) You shall love the ger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

Hashem loves the *ger* and will take care of his needs, but we also need to love the *ger* and treat him like ourselves, as Maimonides explained about a fellow Jew.

This gives us another formidable reason to admire and love a *ger*. He knew before his conversion that he would encounter resistance and rejection. He knew that he may have difficulty finding a job or a wife, yet he overcame it and went through with it anyway. Think about how it felt to be a stranger in Egypt. This is why we must do our part to mitigate the difficulties and accept him with love and “love him like ourselves” and do for him the very things we would do for ourselves.

Rashi’s comment on our being strangers in Egypt is: מום שבך – אל תאמר לחברך – “For a flaw that you yourself have, don’t criticize others.” Or as we say, “People in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.”

The Chatam Sofer explains the depth of this comment.

Perhaps one will say that we should not accept converts to Judaism. After all, they worshiped idols! How can they possibly break away from their past to cling to Hashem? The answer is that when we were in Egypt, we also worshiped idols, and we shouldn’t criticize others for a flaw that we ourselves had. And, just like we were able to leave it behind us, so too will they.

What was the process? How did we transform ourselves? Maimonides writes:

רמב"ם יד החזקה הלכות איסורי ביאה פרק יג  
 (א) בשלשה דברים נכנסו ישראל לברית במילה וטבילה וקרבת  
 (ב) מילה היתה במצרים שנאמר וכל ערל לא יאכל בו מל אותם  
 משה רבינו שכולם ביטלו ברית מילה במצרים חוץ משבט לוי ועל זה  
 נאמר ובריתך ינצורו  
 (ג) וטבילה היתה במדבר קודם מתן תורה שנאמר וקדשתם היום  
 ומחר וכבסו שמלותם וקרבת שנאמר וישלח את נערי בני ישראל ויעלו  
 עולות ע"י כל ישראל הקריבום  
 (ד) וכן לדורות כשירצה העכו"ם להכנס לברית ולהסתופף תחת  
 כנפי השכינה ויקבל עליו עול תורה צריך מילה וטבילה והרצאת קרבן  
 ואם נקבה היא טבילה וקרבת שנאמר ככם כגר מה אתם במילה וטבילה  
 והרצאת קרבן אף הגר לדורות במילה וטבילה והרצאת קרבן

*1) There were three components to the covenant that the Jewish people entered with Hashem. (i) Milah, circumcision, (ii) immersion in a mikvah, and (iii) A sacrifice.*

*Milah took place in Egypt before they brought the Pesach offering, immersion in the mikvah took place before they received the Torah on Sinai, and the sacrifices took place at Mount Sinai.*

*4) And so it is for all generations. A gentile who wishes to enter the covenant with Hashem and seek refuge under the wings of Hashem's divine presence by accepting the yoke of Torah upon himself must first be circumcised, immerse in a mikvah, and bring a sacrifice. A woman needs only immersion and a sacrifice. When the Holy Temple will be rebuilt, they will then bring a sacrifice.*

A gentile who has undergone a proper conversion is like a newborn baby. He has created himself anew and now has a Jewish soul. This is not a metaphor. It has deep *halachik* implications.

For example, Maimonides writes:

רמב"ם יד החזקה הלכות איסורי ביאה פרק יד

(יא) עכו"ם שנתגייר ועבד שנשתחרר הרי הוא כקטן שנולד וכל שאר בשר שהיו לו כשהוא עכו"ם או כשהוא עבד אינן שאר בשר

11) *A gentile who has converted is permitted to marry relatives who he was forbidden to marry prior to his conversion.*

This is why strictly keeping the laws of the conversion process is so crucial. To accomplish the re-creation of a person, instructions must be fully and exactly followed. Hashem bestows the new soul only when all the necessary pieces are in place.

This gives us yet another reason to admire and love a *ger*. He has successfully re-created himself. What a major accomplishment!

The Torah's laws regarding a *ger* give us an insight into what a *ger* has experienced and what challenges he faces. To help him in his transition, Hashem has given the Jewish nation many instructions on how to treat him. We must follow Hashem's instructions and do our part to love and help him – just like ourselves.