



# Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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## Light Insight

### *Come And Get It*

**T**he phone rang. A well-manicured hand stretched across a vast, sumptuous walnut and leather desk, selected one of several phones, and answered it.

“Speak.”

“Yes, Uh ... Yes, Uh. Is this Mr. Big?”

“That is what they call me...”

“Mr. Big — My name is Little. I need your help. I’ve heard you lend money to people. Do you think you could lend me, say, ten thousand dollars?”

Mr. Big listened. No one was more surprised than Mr. Little when, after a few minutes, he secured his loan.

“I can’t tell you how much this means to me, Mr. Big.”

“Just be here at my office tomorrow at 9 AM sharp.”

The following day came. 9 o’clock; 10 o’clock; 11 o’clock...

At 2 o’clock that afternoon the phone rang on the big walnut desk.

“Yes, Uh...Yes, Uh. Is this Mr. Big?”

“Little! Where were you this morning?”

“Look, I’m really sorry. Can I still get the loan?”

“Be here tomorrow morning at nine — without fail.”

“Yes, yes. Thank you so much. Tomorrow morning at nine. Without fail.”

The following day at 9 o’clock, Mr. Little was nowhere to be seen. Nor was he any more in evidence at 10, 11 or 12 o’clock. At

3 PM the phone rang. “Mr. Big. This is Little speaking. Is that loan still available?”

“Mr. Little, I just had a major sense of humor failure where you’re concerned. Good-bye.”

A Jew is obligated by the Torah to help someone load or unload his donkey (or his car, etc.) if it “fell by the road.” But the mitzvah is specifically *to help*. The Torah says “you shall surely stand them up *with him*.” With him. It doesn’t mean the owner of the donkey can say “Look chum. This is your obligation, okay? So I’ll just have a seat over here and order an iced lemonade while you deal with the donkey. After all it’s your obligation — not mine.

Similarly, when we pray for more spirituality in our lives, we must also make our own efforts to imbibe that spirituality.

We have to show up at the office to get our free loan.

## LOVE of the LAND

*Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel*

### *Rishon L’ziyon*

**E**stablished by Russian Zionists in 1882 not far from what was to become Tel Aviv, its name was taken from the words of the

prophet Isaiah, “The first (*rishon*) in Zion (*l’ziyon*) they will be...and I will make them a harbinger of good tidings for Jerusalem.”

The Carmel Wine Cellars were established here in 1887 through the generosity of Baron Rothschild and served as an important factor in the development of the agricultural settlement into a major urban center.

## Response Line

Jim Roberts wrote:

*If a Gentile feels compelled to Torah observance, is this inappropriate because he is not Jewish and certainly not without the leadership (or at least advice) of a local rabbi? Should this person be encouraged only to follow the Noahide laws, or to consider conversion?*

Dear Jim,

Before the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai there was no strict legal definition of a Jew, because the law had not yet been given. This means that the people who came to Mt. Sinai were not Jews (in a legal sense) yet. In fact, the Revelation at Mt. Sinai can be viewed as a mass conversion to Judaism of millions of descendants of Abraham. In this sense, every Jew is descended from a convert; some go back to Sinai, and some later in history.

The idea of conversion after Mt. Sinai is mentioned in the Torah itself and we are exhorted more than thirty times (!) not to oppress a convert. We derive our obligation to welcome a convert from one of the most famous converts in history, Yitro, the father-in-law of Moses. As the Midrash quotes Moses as saying, "I am the one who drew Yitro near and did not reject him. You also, when a person comes to convert and does this for the sake of Heaven, draw him near and do not reject him."

What does the conversion process involve? It requires that the non-Jew

go through a re-enactment of the revelation at Mt. Sinai.

As Maimonides writes:

"The Israelites entered into the covenant with three things; circumcision, immersion, and sacrifices. Circumcision was performed in Egypt. Immersion (purification) was performed in the desert before the giving of the Torah. And at this time sacrifices were also brought. So too for all generations, a gentile who wishes to enter into the covenant, to find shelter under the wings of the Divine Presence and to accept upon himself the yoke of Torah, requires circumcision, immersion and acceptance of a sacrifice (at the time of the Holy Temple)."

There are three basic components to the contemporary conversion process: Circumcision (for males), immersion in a mikveh and as Maimonides mentions, the acceptance of the "yoke of Torah." This is just like the Jews at Sinai who unconditionally accepted all the commandment when they said "We will do and we will listen." All the above must be done in the presence of a Beit Din (Jewish court) because they are the representatives of Moses, the lawgiver.

If any one of the above three things is omitted, the conversion is invalid. A convert to Judaism must be prepared to accept all the commandments of the Torah without exception. If there is no acceptance of the commandments, even if three Orthodox Rabbis rule that the person is Jewish, he is not Jewish. Without acceptance of the Torah's commandments, the conversion would just be a sham.

Once a person sincerely converts to Judaism, they are 100% Jewish, and we are obligated to love, welcome and accept them into our people. When they recite the prayers, they refer to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs as "our fathers" and "our mothers." At the Passover Seder they say "G-d took our fathers out of Egypt." They are full-fledged members of the Community of Israel.

In general, we do not encourage someone to convert. There are two reasons for this:

First of all, we believe that when a gentile keeps the seven Noahide laws, he merits a portion in the World-to-Come, and therefore there is no imperative for him to become Jewish. If, like the Christians and Moslems, we believed that those of other religions are condemned to damnation, then we also would desire to convert people. However, we believe that a person can be completely righteous and merit the World-to-Come without conversion, by adhering to the basic moral laws revealed to Noah. Therefore we feel no compulsion to convert others, unless they show a desire to convert.

Secondly, since sincerity is one of the criteria for conversion, one way in which we can determine that the candidate is sincere is by discouraging him from converting. If he persists and does so for the love of Judaism, then we accept him with open arms.

It's interesting to note that some of our most famous scholars were converts, or descendants of converts. Rabbi Akiva was the son of Yosef the righteous convert. The Talmud states that some of the greatest rabbis were descendants of Haman! The standard Aramaic translation of the Torah was written by a convert, Onkelos.