

A LITTLE BIT GOES A LONG WAY

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

In this weeks parsha of Ki Saitzay we are told which nations have restrictions on their marrying into the Kahal (marrying a daughter of a Kohen, Levi or Yisroel) even after having gone through the conversion process. They will be full-fledged Jews in all ways with the exception of this marriage-related restriction.

There are different laws for different nations. The vast majority can convert and be part of the Kahal.

Mitzrayim and Edom are restricted until the third generation. If one converts, he can only marry another convert. Any child born from that union, the second generation, has the same restriction and again, can only marry a convert. A child born from that union, the third generation from the original convert, is permitted to marry into the Kahal.

"An Ammonite or a Moabite cannot enter the Kahal of Hashem... forever. [23:4] Their restriction goes far past that of Mitzrayim and Edom.

Why is that? What terrible acts were performed that became part of their spiritual DNA passed down generation to generation, restricting them from ever marrying into the Kahal Hashem?

"For they did not meet you with bread and water on the way as you left Mitzrayim [Egypt] and because they hired Bilaam the son of B'or to curse you. [23:5]"

That seems a bit strange. Hiring Bilaam to curse and destroy us is certainly grounds for such a harsh restriction. But not offering us food and water? They simply held back a chessed [act of kindness]! Furthermore, why was that reason cited first, the implication being that it was the primary factor?

The Be'er Yosef writes that the passuk [verse] is explaining why their restriction is much greater than that of the Mitzrim [Egyptians]. Rashi in his comments about the Mitzrim writes: Even though they threw your male infants into the river, they hosted you in your time of need. [23:8]

With all of the atrocities that the Mitzrim committed during our period of slavery, they had hosted and fed Yaakov and his family during the seven years of famine. There was some kindness that they had shown to Bnei Yisroel [the Children of Israel]. They were therefore permitted to enter the Kahal after three generations.

From this we can now understand Amon and Moab. Had they done any kindness to Bnei Yisroel, that would have negated to a certain degree even the fact that they had hired Bilaam to destroy us. Had they offered us food and water that would have mitigated their restriction.

The passuk is telling us that since they didn't even do that small kindness, they will therefore receive the full brunt of their having hired Bilaam to destroy us--they will be eternally barred from the Kahal.

From this we can see the power of even small acts and how Hashem takes everything into consideration.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski tells the story of a scoffer who told Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev that he could prove the Torah to be wrong. "It says in the Shema prayer," he told him, "that if we sin Hashem will get angry and punish us. I am a serious sinner, yet I am wealthy and happy!"

Rav Levi Yitzchak lovingly replied, "My son, for you to know this, you must have read the Shema. You should know that the reward for reciting Shema even a single time is so great that all the wealth in the world may not be enough to compensate for it!"

Rabbi Twerski also tells of a young man in Kiev who found that in Czarist Russia, a Jew had no chance for success. He therefore adopted a non-Jewish identity that even included working and eating on Yom Kippur. He was then able to advance to a prestigious position in the government.

One day the body of a man washed ashore. There was no way of determining his identity but by the virtue of the fact that he was wearing tzitzis (a four-cornered garment with strings) he was recognized as a Jew and was given a Jewish burial.

When this young man heard of this, he thought that although he didn't want his Judaism to stand in the way of his success, ultimately he too would want a Jewish burial. He therefore began to wear tzitzis--this would not divulge his identity in his lifetime but would ensure him a Jewish burial at the time when advancement would no longer be an issue.

Once he began to observe this single mitzvah, subtle changes began to take place. He fasted on Yom Kippur and found an excuse to miss work on that holy day. He began to avoid non-kosher food and gradually became observant of those mitzvos that could be performed without revealing his Jewish identity. Eventually he quit his position in government and became totally observant.

My wife attended a shiur last night and afterwards shared it with me. One of the messages conveyed was that during this time when there seems to be an absence of heavenly compassion to Bnei Yisroel, we must do our utmost to show compassion and kindness. That is a way to 'jump-start' compassion from Hashem as He mirrors our actions.

One mitzvah, one act of kindness--every little bit counts in a big way...

Good Shabbos,
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