

kol chovevei TORAH

PARSHA PONDERINGS

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God's Special Love For the Convert

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If a thief robs by violence, swears falsely and then confesses his guilt, the Torah tells us that he is liable to return the value of the object plus an additional one-fifth to the plaintiff. (Numbers 5:6, 7) If, however, the plaintiff dies leaving no relatives, the money is returned to the Priest, the emissary of God. In the words of the Torah, "if the person has no kinsmen to whom restitution may be made for the guilt, the restitution for guilt which is made shall be the Lord's, even the Priest." (Numbers 5:8)

An obvious question emerges: Is it possible that the plaintiff does not have any relatives? In the words of the great Rashi, "is there anyone in Israel who has no next of kin...or distant relation going back to Yaakov (Jacob)?" Rashi concludes that the text, therefore, must refer to a *ger*, a proselyte, who has died leaving no next of kin among the Jewish people. If the *ger* passes away, the law is that the money must be restored to the kohen.

In order to understand this idea, the special relationship between God and the proselyte must be examined. Nechama Leibowitz points out the following Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 8:2), "Proselytes are what they are, not by virtue of a family title, but simply through their own free will they have come to love God. He [God] therefore, responds by loving them, as it is written 'the Lord loves the righteous.'" (Psalms 146:8) For the Midrash, the righteous are converts for whom God feels a special love. Having accepted God

through their own volition, God, in return, feels a unique love for them.

Hence, in our text, theft against a *ger* results in payment to God, as God is the closest kin of the convert. The money is then given to the kohen, God's emissary.

It is often the case in our community that the convert is mistreated and not embraced equally in the fold. Here the Torah is teaching that the *ger*, far from being cast aside, is the most important. Being especially loved by God, we in that same spirit should have special love for them.

No wonder this law is always read close to the holiday of Shavuot. Shavuot celebrates God's giving of the Torah. The law of *gezel ha-ger* (stealing from a proselyte) reminds us that the Torah was given to all Jews - including converts.

Shavuot also features the reading of Megillat Rut, the Scroll of Ruth. Ruth is the convert par excellence. Not coincidentally, from her the Messiah will one day come, teaching once again that while we may be holy, the convert is the holy of holies.

