

WHEN THE REBBE ASKS

The frequency of marriages between Jews and non-Jews has become a major challenge to those who take responsibility for thinking about the essentials of Jewish life and the core of what it means to be Jewish. Until recently, this conversation has oscillated between two options: either the non-Jewish spouse chooses to become a Jew (technically this is an intermarriage) or s/he doesn't (a mixed marriage). When the choice is made to become a Jew, the discussion again oscillates between two options: either the transition must include a commitment to **practice** the *mitzvot* by the standards of the officiating rabbi (strict) or the transition can be completed with a commitment to accepting the **principle** of "the yoke of the *mitzvot*," which takes into account a recognition of the minimum levels of observance that most of the Jewish partners practice (conversion "light").

What has complicated this duality in our time is the phenomenon of non-Jewish spouses who choose not to become Jews while simultaneously supporting and encouraging the Jewishness of their spouses and children. This was made clear to me when I visited the Regina Jewish community to celebrate the ordination of their rabbi. There, almost the entire Jewish leadership was married to non-Jews whose spouses, in turn, were full contributors to the community's life and supporters of their spouses' involvement, yet chose not to become Jews themselves.

Thus, while the immediate reason for the process that this book seeks to describe began with concerns raised by our teacher, Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi z"l, the issues it seeks to resolve are well known to all of us who have worked and continue to work in communities. It begins with the issue of what can and should be expected of people choosing Judaism and proceeds to propose a third option, that of the *Ger Toshav* (roughly speaking the "resident alien" in the U.S. or the Permanent Resident in Canada), an option which has been mostly dormant in Jewish life for nearly two millennia. And while, as you will see, Reb Zalman himself proposed the renewal of the *ger toshav*, he specifically excluded marriage. Many of the contributors, myself included, support sanctifying marriages between Jews and *Gerei Toshav* through some form of *chuppah* and *kiddushin*.

Further, we in Jewish Renewal are not the only ones to suggest the need for a new third option. There are several rabbis, including at least one in the Orthodox world, who either have proposed the renewed use of the category of the *ger toshav* or who are already using that category in their rabbinic lives. Therefore, we offer this book as a contribution to this discussion and invite the participation of members of all the current Jewish denominations and movements in this process.

What follows, then, begins with the concerns raised by our *Rebbe* about our own practices in Jewish Renewal surrounding conversion to Judaism. Next, we take the responsa of three rabbis as representative samples of the two approaches to choosing Judaism when there are only two options, namely whether acceptance of the *mitzvot* is in the particular or the general. We then review the category of *ger toshav* as expressed in the Talmud and the Rambam and conclude the first unit of this work with a discussion of a renewed use of the category of *ger toshav* for our time.

The second part of this book includes a sampling of *t'shuvot* / responsa written by some of ALEPH's rabbinical students during their senior seminar, "Issues in Integral Halachah," which touch on this subject. These include questions relating to a marriage between a *ger toshav* and a Jew by birth in a synagogue, how much of the service may a *ger toshav* on the way to becoming a *ger tzedek* lead, and issues around bar mitzvah of a child whose mother is not a

Jew or was converted by a rabbi known not to require immersion. A third section will deal with the three questions intentionally left unanswered at the end of the first part. These are the requirements for being considered a *ger toshav*, the rituals and ceremony for welcome, and the format for life cycle events that include a *ger toshav*.

There is one other issue that needs some explanation before beginning and that is why undertake this project. After all, since many rabbis already use the concept of *ger toshav*, what is gained by writing about it after the fact? Doesn't this project become simply an attempt to justify a practice begun without concern for rabbinic sanction and that many, if not most rabbis have unsuccessfully attempted to forbid? This question goes to the heart of the issue of rabbinic authority and merits consideration, for it exposes yet another duality whose resolution by a third option can ease a tension in Jewish life.

Until fairly recently as we Jews measure time, a person needing help in choosing between competing options would go to his or her rabbi for a ruling on which option was more in harmony with previous practice (i.e. *halachah*). Since the only other option in the case of the person not liking the rabbi's response was to seek the opinion of another rabbi, halachists focused on the obligation to accept the decision of the rabbi first consulted and forbade shopping for the decision one wanted. However, once Jews acquired citizenship in their countries of residence and Jewish communities ceased being semi-autonomous, the options changed. Jews no longer had an obligation to be halachically observant and could choose, as their alternative option, to ignore or even flaunt rabbinic opinion. If the prevailing rabbinic myth was that rabbis actually exercised coercive and prescriptive authority, and if that authority was now seen as restrictive and unresponsive to the massive changes taking place everywhere and not just in Jewish life, then rebellion against that authority and the halachic process itself makes sense.

There is a third option between the extremes of a very conservative approach to the halachic process on the one hand, and ignoring it altogether by referencing our responses to new situations only in terms of intuitive ethics and personal understanding. As Rabbi Ethan Tucker pointed out, a vibrant halachic process must engage the issues concerning contemporary Jews regardless of their level of commitment to the process.¹ Further, there is ample precedent for rabbis to observe what others are doing as a major part of their own process for arriving at a decision or at least presenting the options. Rabbi Tucker shows that the traditional starting place for rabbinic discussion of popular practice is a belief that Jewish people primarily seek to do what is right. It, therefore, makes sense to place an existing practice within the flow of Jewish tradition and the halachic process whenever possible.

An important principle of Reb Zalman's Integral Halachah is "backward compatibility." This means that, to the extent possible, we try to harmonize new situations and even radically different practices with the flow of the halachic process. In so doing, we create an incremental development in which the new is viewed as a natural next step in the unfolding of Jewish tradition. This is especially important during a paradigm shift, such as the one we are experiencing now, and as happened previously in the Talmudic period when custom rooted in land and temple was replaced by scriptural "proofs" for developing practices.² Backward compatibility requires that we examine what the original practice was designed to achieve

¹ These lectures are available from the [Mechon Hadar website](#).

² For example, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner responded to a question asked of him at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly conference in 1990 as follows: "One hundred years from now we will be certain that naming ceremonies for girls were handed to Moses at Sinai."

spiritually and communally, ask whether that practice is still fulfilling its purpose(s) and, if not, what adjustments need to be made.³

There is yet another reason. In addition to backwards compatibility which maintains a connection between the present and our shared past, there is also the issue of looking ahead. Reb Zalman often cited what he had learned from Native Americans, that we need to think seven generations ahead when making choices today. As *Pirkei Avot* puts it, “What is the best quality to which a person should cling?...Rabbi Simeon said: One who considers the probable consequences.”⁴ The renewal of the *ger toshav* and the arguments that favor an increased openness to their participation in Jewish life carries with it the ongoing tension between loyalty to our tribal family and the equally pressing need to actualize our hopes for the world as expressed in so many of our prayers.⁵ We are seeing in the world today both a tightening of group identity leading to more exclusion and, at the same time, the need to be more open, particularly as we grapple with the effects of climate change which we can do only as a united humanity. The use of the halachic format encourages both backward compatibility and the effort to make visible the consequences of our current choices.

It is true that this process can lead to the conclusion that it is only through a radical break with the past and the introduction of something new that the issue under consideration can be resolved. Even this has precedent, as the well-known *cherem* of Rabbeinu Gershom demonstrates.⁶ However, it is also possible that the process of examination will manifest a range of opinions on a given issue; a range that has been reduced by the tendency of the codes to codify only one option. In being willing to discover and acknowledge multiplicity, we re-open the halachic process as one of discussion, evaluation, and re-evaluation, a process in which we all can participate and that requires only that we seek to respond to the new by referencing the call that brought us into being (i.e. Sinai) and the goal toward which we hope our present continues to guide us (i.e. messianic age).

³ For a fuller discussion of the principles of Integral Halachah and backwards compatibility, see [Integral Halachah: Transcending and Including](#) by Rabbis Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Daniel Siegel.

⁴ צָאוּ וּרְאוּ אֵיזוֹהֵי דְרָגָה יִשְׂרָהּ שֶׁיִּדְבַק בָּהּ הָאָדָם...רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמֵר, הָרוּאָה אֶת הַנּוֹלֵד (אבות ב:ט).

⁵ E.g. “*M’loch al kol ha’olam kulo*,” the first of the three paragraph which begin with the word “*Uv’chein*,” and the familiar second paragraph of the *Aleinu*.

⁶ Despite the fact that the Torah is clear that only the husband can write a bill of divorce (*get*) and that he can do so without the consent of his wife, our understanding is that Rabbeinu Gershom decreed that the divorce must be with the full consent of the wife and that the husband was forbidden to marry a second time until the divorce was implemented.

INTRODUCTION

For several years, our Rebbe Zalman Schachter-Shalomi z"l, had been expressing concerns about the way in which rabbis with Jewish Renewal *s'micha* approach the process of becoming Jewish. For the most part, he worried that we do not ask enough of our converts. During 2009 and 2010, Reb Zalman spoke in various venues about his concerns, gave over his own beliefs about what might be done, suggested correctives to the problems he perceived, and shared his thinking, while also encouraging his *talmidim* to continue to study the question. This book represents a response based on the study undertaken by Reb Zalman's *talmidim* and their *talmidim*.¹

Reb Zalman spoke to three issues:

1. What expectations for Jewish observance should be made of those who choose to become Jewish? Within this question are issues for the person choosing Judaism while living in a family that isn't also making this choice.
2. How to honour those in our communities who have come to affiliate with and feel a sense of belonging, while maintaining a commitment to some faith traditions and spiritual practices other than Judaism. In other words, people who are supportive of a particular Jewish community without wanting to become *gerei tzedek* themselves.
3. That full initiation into Judaism is an issue not only for the individual and the local community, but also for the broader entity of *Klal Yisrael*. Within this question is the consideration of Jewish Renewal's reputation vis a vis the other progressive streams of Judaism, as well as its relationship to Orthodoxy. Also within this question is an inherent tension between creating genuinely welcoming communities while still maintaining a distinction between those who are Jewish by birth or choice and those who are not.²

Reb Zalman was acutely sensitive to the dilemma for rabbis posed by the people who choose to affiliate with our Jewish communities while not being Jewish themselves. He was clear that not all of these people should be encouraged or even invited to convert. Yet he felt for the difficulties this dilemma created for rabbis. Speaking directly to this, he said,

If you couldn't feel that dilemma for yourselves and depended on my response, where would I stand? I know what the ideal should be in *Yiddishkeit*. And, I also have compassion for people who come to me....

For the most part, rabbis thought of intermarriage only as a bleeding-off; what they didn't see was the coming-in. There are mothers who decide that they can't be Jews themselves but they have helped their children become Jews from the moment they gave them over for the *bris*. I feel all this. And the question is, how do we deal with this new reality?

¹ These conversations began during a talk he gave to the students of the ALEPH Ordination program on 10 January, 2009. They continued with individuals, on the OHALAH email list, and then with a small group convened by R. Daniel Siegel to hear his concerns, clarify the issues, pursue a course of study, and develop a response.

² This summary of the primary issues is based on an exchange between R. Zalman and R. Jan Salzman, as well as on the first session of the study group.

Reb Zalman did not believe that we should be converting everyone who wasn't Jewish in our communities. To this he said,

I've begged people to start thinking of what Jean Houston calls the psychosemitic souls – those souls that feel that they belong, who are affiliates. They love our music and our jokes, and they are good *gerei toshav*. But it's a sin to try and make someone who is only meant to be a *ger toshav* into a *ger tzedek*. It's an impossible situation for them....

As *gerei toshav* they can join us at the Chinese restaurant on Christmas Eve, do all those nice ethnic things that we do, and come to *shul*. I've given out the *p'sak* and I hold to it: people who are serious about learning Judaism as *gerei toshav* can be called as *maftir* to the Torah, after the seven *kru'im* (the seven required *aliyot* that would be given only to Jews by birth and *gerei tzedek*). Other than for turf reasons, that should satisfy even Orthodox Jews.

So Reb Zalman suggested that we more fully develop the category of the *Ger Toshav*, the “other” who dwells with us and who supports our Judaism in a wholehearted way. Some of the people who come to us, once introduced to this idea, find that it is a good fit; others may then go on and make the transition to *ger tzedek* through a *beit din*, willingly going through the process to do so. Reb Zalman also introduced a third category into this work that he suggested could be used in our individual communities and would be understood not to transfer into the broader *Klal Yisrael*. He suggested that, “This could take the form of a *shtar giyur*, which is a document of that particular community and spells out the limitations of this conversion.” This is addressed elsewhere in this volume.

According to a conversation between Rabbi Jan Salzman and Reb Zalman, at the core of his concerns was the impact for children that is created through families of converts. Who knows what paths our children or grandchildren might take, relative to the path of being a member of *Klal Yisrael*? The situation with the Orthodox and their acceptance of “legitimate” conversions is a part of this; but he expressed concern about something deeper, and that has to do with granting conversion to someone who will not live as a *mikabayl ol mitzvot*, e.g., who does not keep kosher, engage in daily *davennen*, or have a practice of regular Torah learning. In other words, what value does an initiation into becoming a Jew have if the individual does not live in the rhythm and pace of the tradition?

Reb Zalman could see that there is room for *chesed* /flexibility in this, relative to the integrity of a family, so that having two parents in a home that are both following the Jewish path can be important to the integrity of that household. But he felt less flexible if the individual seeking to be initiated into Judaism were in a situation where the other partner is not Jewish. For this, he thought the *ger toshav* status might be more appropriate.

This brings us to the next consideration: that of the expectations a Jewish Renewal Rabbi should have of a convert, which is a way of also clarifying the difference between the *ger toshav* and the *ger tzedek*. He began this discussion by saying that,

I've seen people who come to be part of the *beit din* but did not bring a *tallit katan* for the man to put on when he comes out of the *mikveh*. Do you really mean for the person to become a *ger tzedek*? Then this is the way you do it! But if that's not the level of that person's readiness, then what s/he wants is to be just like we are – bad Jews! If so, then don't let them become *gerei tzedek* when they should be *gerei toshav*. If someone comes out of the *mikveh* and has now accepted *ol malchut shamayim* and yet doesn't put on *t'fillin* the first day – then what did that ceremony do?

This raises the question of whether we can expect more from a *ger tzedek* than from a Jew by birth or even from ourselves as rabbis. Reb Zalman believed that we can expect more from the *ger tzedek* than perhaps we even expect of ourselves. A *ger tzedek* says the *v'ahavta* and agrees with it, including the part that refers to putting on *t'fillin*! Reb Zalman believed it was essential for *gerei tzedek* to know and be able to do the following:

- a basic commitment to kashrut, both classical and eco-;
- to keep Shabbos and the holy days;
- to light candles / put on *t'fillin*;
- to pray every day;
- to study Torah regularly;
- to have a sense of belonging to *Klal Yisrael*; and
- to commit to a life of *g'millut chasadim* / of good works in relation to others.

Reb Zalman suggested that by renewing the category of *ger toshav*, something like a “resident alien” (in the U.S.) or “permanent resident” (in Canada), which classical halachic literature limited to the Land of Israel and therefore effectively discontinued, might serve as an appropriate intermediate status. And as mentioned above, he also floated the possibility of a third category, between *ger tzedek* and *ger toshav*, a conversion whose validity would be limited to a particular community.

Reb Zalman also saw the necessity for learning among those we would formally designate as *gerei toshav*: “I envision that they would have a learning period in which we would offer them basic teachings and skills and, when they are ready, invite them to immerse in a *mikveh* in order to accept upon themselves *ol malchut shamayim* / the yoke of heaven (as opposed to to *kabbalat ol mitzvot* which is necessary for a *ger tzedek*). The practical implications of the acceptance of *ol malchut shamayim* would include the following:

- being called to the Torah for an *aliyah* after the required seven are called on Shabbat;
- reciting the blessing in the same way the Reconstructionists do³;
- wearing *tallit* and *t'fillin*;
- encouraging them to participate in the public liturgy in a way that also opens the possibility of a private prayer practice.

³ Using *אשר קרבנו* instead of *אשר בהר בנו*.

However, they would not be required to follow the laws of kashrut, Shabbat and holy days nor could they marry a Jew.

“On the other hand, by offering the option of *get toshav*, we are helping a larger group of people who want to share prayer and celebration with us as affiliates and allowing them to do so at the level of commitment they are seeking. By opening up to them in a way that is different, more amenable, less demanding and less demeaning than the people of Chabad or the *B'nai No'ach* of Vendyl Jones,⁴ we offer them the prayer and community they desire and we will be able to count on their support for the work that we need to do.

The third issue raised is the question of how Renewal conversions are seen by the broader Jewish community. Reb Zalman felt strongly that our conversions should certainly be accepted among the progressive streams of Judaism, eg. Reform and Reconstructionist. But he also felt that Renewal converts should feel comfortable anywhere in the broader Jewish world, including among the Conservative and Orthodox. “I hope that our people will be very careful in their deliberations, so that we will not be responsible for a split into two groups. My commitment is to *Klal Yisra'el* and I believe that, ultimately, *giyur* should not be within a particular congregation but valid in *Klal Yisra'el*. It therefore demands great circumspection. We are all fully aware of the difficulties put in our path by the *Charedim* who do not even recognize *giyur* by the Orthodox in the United States. But it's also necessary that we remain accessible and compatible to modern liberal Orthodox and other denominations.”

⁴ See <http://noahide.net>. The site originally listed here, <http://www.bnainoah.net/VJRI/whoisvendyl.html>, no longer exists.

APPENDICES

I. This is an [edited] text of the session which Reb Zalman had with ALEPH ordination students on 10 January 2009 as provided by R. Rachel Barenblatt:

During the question and answer time, the following discussion took place:

Question: We speak about the priority of healing the planet and the people who inhabit it. And you mention the end of triumphalism, supercessionism. But in our individual communities, and in what's happening with our *Yiddishkeit*, we have half of our people marrying people who aren't Jewish! And that creates a different dynamic. Something about integrity and also something about healing the fractures in our families. Could you speak to that? It's the great dilemma I bump into. I want to welcome people, heal them, make my community inclusive – and yet there has to be integrity. That's not triumphalism, but where's the balance?

Reb Zalman: Did you get the feel of that dilemma? [Response: Yes.] Then you are worthy to be rabbis!

If you couldn't feel that dilemma for yourselves and depended on my response, where would I stand? I know what the ideal should be in *Yiddishkeit*. And, I also have compassion for people who come to me.

I want to tell you something: we don't learn kabbalah for nothing. There is such a thing as reincarnation. So many people suffered and died because of Hitler and the gas chambers. Now there are a lot of *n'shamot* who have come back already – some as Jews, some as non-Jews. For the most part, rabbis thought of intermarriage only as a bleeding-off; what they didn't see was the coming-in. There are mothers who decide that they can't be Jews themselves but they have helped their children become Jews from the moment they gave them over for the *bris*. I feel all this. And the question is, how do we deal with this new reality? The answer is, no-answer. The answer is the pain. The answer is the longing. It's like dragging down a new way of looking at what it means to constitute a Jewish people that is helpful to the healing of the planet! If we solve that question we are doing our job. And that's a painful process. That's why I wanted to give you a hug.

Question: In my community I don't ask. By really welcoming people, letting them come and do and participate, Jewish or not, working with the Jewish Outreach Institute, allows people to come and say, "You know – I want to learn more!" And now I'm sitting on ten *batei din* a year. Maybe that is an answer.

Reb Zalman: My first response is to say, “Yes.” And then I want to also say, “No.” Don’t get so eager to convert people. I’ve begged people to start thinking of what Jean Houston calls the psychosemitic souls – those souls that feel that they belong, who are affiliates. They love our music and our jokes, and they are good *gerei toshav*. But it’s a sin to try and take someone who is only meant to be a *ger toshav* and make him or her into a *ger tzedek*. It’s an impossible situation for them. I’ve seen people who come to be part of the *beit din* but did not bring a *tallit katan* for the man to put on when he comes out of the *mikveh*. Do you really mean for the person to become a *ger tzedek*? Then this is the way you do it! But if that’s not the level of that person’s readiness, then what s/he wants to be just like we are – bad Jews! If so, then don’t let them become *gerei tzedek* when they should be *gerei toshav*. As *gerei toshav* they can join us at the Chinese restaurant on Christmas Eve, do all those nice ethnic things that we do, and come to shul. I’ve given out the *p’sak* and I hold to it: people who are serious about learning Judaism as *gerei toshav* can be called as *maftir* to the Torah, after the seven *kru’im* (the seven required aliyot that would be given only to Jews by birth and *gerei tzedek*). Other than for turf reasons, that should satisfy even Orthodox Jews.

Question: You write that we shouldn’t push *gerim* to convert. But you also talk about *Klal Yisrael*. Even among our teachers, there are those who are not going to conduct a wedding service if one person is not a Jew – even if he’s a *ger toshav*, it won’t happen! So that friction...

Reb Zalman: I am not saying that *gerei toshav* should get married to Jews. There are certain things that have to do with *ziga*. The last time I spoke to the people during the program on homosexual marriages and what one can do with them, I dealt with similar issues of what is marriageable and what is not marriageable.⁵ When it comes to *yichus*, to allow people to get married across the board in *Yiddishkeit*, I feel it is important not to put *mamzerut* or other things that make people ineligible to marry in the way. In every egalitarian *k’tubah* I write out, the *shtar kidushin* and *nisu’in* which I require lists five conditions under which marriage never took place – this is important stuff!⁶ Here I’m pretty strict because I want to make sure that every Jew will recognize these marriages. I also give them a regular, traditional *k’tubah*, because sometimes they have to show them to other people or in Israel. I want to help them out; and I can tell you about the pain of someone who says, “I want to be a Jew but my husband doesn’t want to be a Jew.” What should I do? If I take that person and convert them, then they live in sin. What goodness will I do for them if the husband is not in the same situation. So the best thing I can do is to show so much *kiruv*, so much love to that person! But I will not go through with the *gerut*.

These are the kinds of things that you have to think about.

Question: Would you clarify what you meant about coming out of the *mikveh* with *tallit katan*?

⁵ Reb Zalman is referring to a session at an earlier OHALAH conference. To follow this in context, read Eyal’s piece with Reb Zalman’s postscript and the transcript of that session which I’m going to attach to an e version of Eyal’s book.

⁶ See the life cycle templates of Reb Zalman which are posted [here](#).

Reb Zalman: If someone comes out of the *mikveh* and has now accepted *ol malchut shamayim* and yet doesn't put on *t'fillin* the first day – then what did that ceremony do?

Question: But many of us are rabbis who don't lay *t'fillin* every day. Can we expect something of a *ger* that we don't expect of ourselves?

Reb Zalman: Of a *ger tzedek*, yes. He says the *v'ahavta* and he agrees [including the part that refers to putting on *t'fillin*!] That some of you don't put on *t'fillin* is your business, and I hope you understand that you're going to be in trouble if you don't have a daily practice of some sort. The form of that practice is up to you, but requirements that are *d'oraita* that a person recites as a great watchword of our faith, as it were, and then does not actually do them...I've been involved with some good people who have told me all kinds of beautiful ideas, but the next Shabbos they didn't do anything Shabbosdik! So let's not be silly about that.

In the time of the *beit ha-mikdash* there were many people in the Roman empire who were God-believers but didn't become Jews. They participated with us. I don't think that when they say that Nero's wife became a Jewess that she actually had *glatt kosher* food in her kitchen! I believe that she was the kind of Jewess who was like an affiliate. The other gods didn't mean anything to her. But *mitzvos* is another kind of thing.

II. Here is the text of the conversation between R. Zalman and R. Jan Salzman as she shared on the OHALAH list, 10 May 2010:

It is essential to hear the words of Reb Zalman, who called me after the initial request for ideas went out on our list. He asked that I summarize our conversation with you, and share his concerns regarding this work. (What follows are my notes from that conversation. The ideas, as I recorded them, are his, though I have written them up in a descriptive manner.)

As he has written elsewhere, and in his instructions to us when we have gathered together with him, he is not so interested in us producing converts, because of the cosmic (Jan's descriptive word here) implications about welcoming interested individuals into the tribe and because of the way that activities like this can reflect back at Renewal. Rather, he has suggested that we more fully develop the category of the *Ger Toshav* / the other who dwells with us, and who supports our Judaism in a wholehearted way. Some of the people who come to us, once introduced to this idea, find that it is a good fit; others may then go on and make the transition to *ger tzedek* through a *beit din*, willingly going through the arduous process to do so.

He also wants to introduce a third category into this work which grows out of his concerns, and which will be presented as a proposal to a VAAD for its consideration (more on this at a later date).

At the core of his concerns is the impact for children that are created through families of converts. Who knows what paths our children or grandchildren might take, relative to the path of being a member of *klal Yisrael*? The situation with the Orthodox and their acceptance of "legitimate" conversions is a part of this; but he expressed concern about something deeper, and that has to do with granting conversion to

someone who will not live as a *mikabayl ol mitzvot*, e.g., who does not keep kosher, engage in daily *davennnen*, or have a practice of regular Torah learning. In other words, what value does an initiation into becoming a Jew have if the individual does not live in the rhythm and pace of the tradition?

Reb Zalman can see that there is room for *chesed* /flexibility in this, relative to the integrity of a family, so that having two parents in a home that are both following the Jewish path can be important to the integrity of that household. But he feels less flexible if the individual seeks to be initiated into Judaism in a situation where the other partner is not Jewish. For this, he thinks the *ger toshav* status is more appropriate.

Other questions that Reb Zalman raised for us to consider: what are the parameters around conversion that ALEPH-ordained Rabbis need to consider? Are there some basic criteria for our work with those seeking conversion? What is the integral halachic position in the 21st century? Do we 'accept' other affiliation's converts, and do we expect reciprocity from the other flavours of Judaism? What are the core texts that the people with whom we work should become acquainted?