



See and Believe

Parshas Dvarim

Allen, a young Mexican came to Israel alone, at the age of 16, even though he was not Jewish. He had one desire- to study Torah. His family life was dysfunctional and so he decided to come to Israel and explore Judaism. He enrolled in a Yeshiva in Jerusalem. He found a study partner and delved into the world of Torah; no one knew about his past. Over time, the fact that he had not yet converted bothered him, and he decided to take the final step.

The Yeshiva faculty was astounded to discover that this young scholar was not Jewish. They did not know what do to, and sent him to my father, Rabbi Yisrael Grossman, to find a solution to his problem.

Allen sat in the living room and my father tried to dissuade him from his decision, as prescribed by Jewish law, but he stood fast in his desire to lead a Jewish life. He told my father that he had been studying Judaism for seven years, and he now feels he is ready to convert and complete the process. My father was not convinced, and Allan continued with a scholarly discourse on Torah themes. Then he began to weep, saying: "I wish to become a Jew, to observe the commandments, to be close to G-d." my mother was in the kitchen and did not intervene until she saw Allan's tears. "Why are you crying?" she inquired. He told her his story. My mother, who was deeply moved by his plight, turned to my father: "How can you not accept him? He will be a true convert."

Hearing my mother's words and witnessing Allen's resolution, my father took Allen to a religious court, where he was finally converted. The veteran residents of the neighborhood still remember to excite in which Allen recited the blessings after the conversion. He was given a Jewish name: Aharon.

In our weekly Parsha, Moshe admonishes the Jewish people: " And in the desert, where you have seen how the Lord, your G-d, has carried you as a man carries his son, all the way that you have gone, until you have come to this place. But regarding this matter, you do not believe the Lord, your God."¹ The simple meaning of the verses is that Moshe is reproving the Jews for lack of belief even though G-d had cared for them so closely.

Rabbi Tzvi Elimemelch of Dionv, in his book "Bnei Yissachar" reads the verse differently. Belief pertains to the ethereal, to things that are not graspable. The Jews had a first-hand encounter with G-d throughout their entire stay in the desert, and therefore belief was not the issue. Rabbi Tzvi Elimemelch explains that a Jew is nothing without belief, without a connection to G-d. They should have added belief, beyond the experience of a direct encounter with G-d, for a Jew cannot truly live without belief.

When we sat *Shivah* and mourned for my mother, a person I did not know came to console us. He sat and wiped his tears. We did not recognize him, and he told us his story. "Do you remember the convert your parents helped? I am him. From the day I converted they stood by me. They found a wife for me, helped finance my wedding and stood by me as I established my home, finding a place for me to live. How shall I not cry?" We too were very emotional. The force of belief and the knowledge of one's creator – have brought another family under the wings of Judaism.

¹ Dvarim 1: 31-32.