



## Talmud Tales – Session 17 – On One Foot

### **BT Shabbat 31a**

Our Rabbis taught: A certain non-Jew once came before Shammai and asked him, ‘How many Torahs do you have?’ ‘Two,’ he replied: ‘the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.’ ‘I believe you with respect to the Written, but not with respect to the Oral Torah; make me a convert on condition that you teach me the Written Torah [only].’

[But] he scolded and repulsed him in anger. When he went before Hillel, he accepted him as a convert. On the first day, he taught him, ‘alef, bet, gimmel, dalet’; the following day he reversed [them] to him. ‘But yesterday you did not teach them to me thus,’ he protested. ‘Must you then not rely upon me? Then rely upon me with respect to the Oral [Torah] too.’

On another occasion it happened that a certain non-Jew came before Shammai and said to him, ‘Make me a convert, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.’ Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder's cubit that was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him, ‘What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, the rest is the commentary; go and learn it.’

On another occasion it happened that a certain non-Jew was passing behind a beit midrash, when he heard the voice of a teacher reciting, “And these are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an ephod” (Ex. 28:4) He said, ‘For whom are these?’

‘For the High Priest,’ he was told. Then the non-Jew said to himself, ‘I will go and become a convert, that I may be appointed a High Priest.’ So he went before Shammai and said to him, ‘Make me a convert on condition that you appoint me a High Priest.’ But he repulsed him with the builder's cubit which was in his hand.

He then went before Hillel, who made him a convert. He said to him, ‘Can any man be made a king but he who knows the arts of government? Go and study the arts of government!’ He went and read. When he came to, “and the stranger that comes near [the sanctuary] shall be put to death” (Num 1:51) he asked him, ‘To whom does this verse apply?’ ‘Even to David King, of Israel,’ was the answer. Thereupon that convert reasoned within himself *a fortiori*: if Israel, who are called sons of the Omnipresent (Deut. 14:11), and who in His love for them He designated them, “Israel is my son, my firstborn” (Ex. 4:22) yet it is written of them, ‘and the stranger that comes near shall be put to death’: how much more so a mere convert, who comes with his staff and wallet!

Then he went before Shammai and said to him. ‘Am I then eligible to be a High Priest; is it not written in the Torah, ‘and the stranger that comes near shall be put to death?’ He went before Hillel and said to him, ‘O gentle Hillel; blessings rest on your head for bringing me under the wings of the Shechinah!’

Some time later the three met in one place; they said, Shammai's impatience sought to drive us from the world, but Hillel's gentleness brought us under the wings of the Shechinah.