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רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר אין עושין נפשות לצדיקים דבריהם הן הן זכרון ירושלמי שקלים פ"ב ה"ה

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 25, 2008

Abraham Geiger - SR"Y or Z"L?

On finding out that his friend Zunz had started to keep Kosher:

Abraham Geiger, who wrote with dismay to his friend Leopold Zunz upon learning that Zunz and his wife had decided to keep a kosher home:

"I must confess to you that, though I cannot subscribe to all his assertions...I still love Holdheim most sincerely. I love him because I can recognize the zeal of his honest conviction...And to think that you, with all your mental vigor, should suddenly become impervious to all this pulsating intellectual life, that you should have come to conceive of the past as not just the history of the development of thought but as the standard to be applied to our present intellectual endeavors!...

"And then came the news about your private life. It was said that you suddenly decided to keep a strictly kosher home and everything that goes with it. Certainly, I would...see nothing unusual or strange in your conduct if you had thought it the advisable thing to do under the given circumstances out of consideration for your position as head of the Seminary. But it was said that you did this...out of principle...I must admit that I cannot see that at all." Letter of Abraham Geiger to Leopold Zunz, 19 March 1845, in Wiener, *Abraham Geiger*, 114.

Apparently, he even considered converting to Christianity at one point:

Since my thirteenth year, when I obtained enlightened religious insight and became accustomed to view the position of a Jewish theologian only in terms of its bothersome aspects, since then I firmly decided to become an orientalist, a decision I had to hide from my family; in Heidelberg, where I spent the summer of 1829, I distanced myself altogether from theology. Thanks be to the counsel of providence, which changed my intention and advised me to withdraw from the barren desert of Arabia and which led me to the happy kingdom of philosophy and religious activity! But suppose I would have not been able to decide to become a theologian; suppose the difficulties would have weighed too heavily in my eyes: what else could I have done other than either to convert to the bosom of the only salvation-granting Church on earth, or, what is more probable, to turn to commerce and money business?³⁰

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