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To Strengthen the Weak

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Several instructions involving aiding the weak – the stranger, orphan and widow – appear in the twenty-fourth chapter of Devarim. The Torah roots these instructions in the Egyptian exile and subsequent exodus, as expressed in Devarim 24:18, "And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Hashem your G-d redeemed you therefrom. Therefore, I instruct you in this."

This justification is shocking; would we be exempt from aiding the weak had we not been redeemed from Egypt? Is the stronger citizen's social obligation to the vulnerable dependent upon his having experienced personal suffering and redemption?

Ramban refers the reader to his comments on the Torah's earlier instruction (Shemot 22:20), "You shall neither abuse nor pressure the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." In explaining that verse, Ramban writes that former slaves surely know that G-d heeds the prayers of the alien and forlorn, and so we must refrain from harming them. In other words, the Torah invokes the Jewish national history of slavery in Egypt to motivate us to honour the weak. However, this explanation does not fit our own passage, which presents the Egyptian experience not as emphatic motivation, but as the root of the command itself.

Another approach is brought by Rashi: The Jews were a nation of penniless slaves, and their entire national wealth is a product of their Divine redemption. Therefore, all they own is bound to Divine command, and G-d may instruct them to disburse all of their funds as He chooses. The exodus from Egypt is reason not for the

command to aid the needy, but for its scope.

Rashi's words suffice to explain Devarim 24:18, "and Hashem your G-d redeemed you therefrom." However, further along, regarding the mitzvah leaving certain grapes for the needy, the Torah states simply, "And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore, I instruct you in this matter." No mention is made of the Divine redemption which led to our wealth; there must be a separate explanation for the Torah's emphasis upon the slavery itself.

A hint to a solution may be seen in a passage from the Talmud (Bava Metzia 59b), "What is the meaning of, 'You shall neither abuse nor pressure the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt'? Rabbi Natan taught: Do not invoke your own blemishes in [demeaning] others." As Rashi explains, the simple meaning is that Jews ought not demean strangers, for in so doing they would demean themselves as former strangers in Egypt. This may explain Divine instructions regarding care for the vulnerable; all of us began in this situation, and degrading the weak would be an act of degrading ourselves. However, this requires greater exploration; could the command to benefit the orphan, widow and stranger stem only from our desire to benefit ourselves?

It appears to me that one may grasp the heart of the matter via the well-known debate between Turnus Rufus and Rabbi Akiva (Bava Batra 10a):

Wicked Turnus Rufus challenged Rabbi Akiva: If your G-d loves the indigent, why does He not support them?

Rabbi Akiva replied: So that we would be saved from Gehennom [by giving to the indigent]...

Turnus Rufus said to him: If G-d desires circumcision, why does the child not emerge circumcised?

Rabbi Akiva replied:... Because G-d gave Israel the commandments only to strengthen them.

Regarding both of these issues, Turnus Rufus claims the primacy of a natural order which includes the indigent, and children who are born with foreskins. Thousands of years of social aid within the Jewish community has yet to end poverty, just as thousands of years of circumcision has yet to alter human physiognomy. Turnus Rufus asks: Why do you stubbornly attempt to reverse the irreversible?

To which Rabbi Akiva responds with an answer which is rooted in our parshah. The slavery of the Jewish people to Egypt was not slavery of one nation to another; rather, our Egyptian experience represents human bondage to physical nature and human nature. Our departure from Egypt is not an individual nation's liberation; rather, it represents a call for general liberation, a declaration that we aspire to a world above and beyond the natural state. We join with G-d in creating and building the world.

The natural response to the pauper, stranger, orphan and widow, may be one of disrespect, asking why we ought to leave from our crops for them. The Torah's response is sharp: "Remember that you were a slave in Egypt." We were slaves, and had the world remained in its natural state, then we, our children and our grandchildren would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. As Rashi explained, the pauper facing us *is* us. To this Rabbi Akiva challenges: Will we extend the exodus from Egypt? Will we fall back to the natural state, or will we join a Divine revolution, and strengthen the world?

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NEW FOR THIS YEAR!
This Week in Israeli History (page 3)
and
Our Haftorah (page 4)

Sirens are not bound to a particular message; the rising wail may alert us to the passage of an ambulance, the scoring of a goal or the approach of a missile. The shofar is likewise multivalent, a summons to repentance, war or national gathering. (See, similarly, the trumpets of Bamidbar 10.)

Rav Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook saw in the shofar a herald of our national redemption. More, though, he heard in the shofar's blast a command to our nation to take charge of our redemption, to rouse our brethren and return to our land. In the poem below, "HaShofar", composed in the year after his own aliyah to Israel, Rav Kook called upon us to sound the shofar, to pound the ground, to instruct and rebuke, to wake Jews from their exilic graves and come home to the land of our ancestors.

Of particular note is Rav Kook's approach to Jews who have strayed from the Torah. In the fourth verse he describes Jews who "play in *zeramim*," which can refer to streams of water or ideology, and who "wander in *hazayot*," which can refer to sprinklings of water or to foolish errors. In the fifth verse he pledges first that those who slumber in exile will return to the land; after this, he promises, those who stray from Torah, those of "uncircumcised ear," will be roused. In other

words: The return to the land will come first, and the return to Torah only afterward.

This Elul marks the 77th yahrtzeit of Rav Kook. On this occasion we are obligated to demand of ourselves: What are we doing to return home, to Israel and to Torah? And what are we doing to sound the shofar for others?

HASHOFAR

Ascend to the top of the mountain
and take up the great shofar,¹
and lift your eyes and see
the suffering of the lowly nation.

And blow the great shofar,
tekiah, teruah, shevarim,
and pound with your foot,²
and so the graves will quake.

And these sounds will ascend through passages,³
to the very roots of the souls,
and those who roll will be set into motion
to build up the ruins.

And those who sleep will be roused,
the grandchildren of the lions,
who play in streams,
and wander in sprinklings.

And those who sleep will awake
from the slumber of the exile,
and those who stray will be roused,
those of the uncircumcised ear.⁴

And they will rise and ascend to the land
in which their forebears did reign,
and they will put an end, an abrupt halt,
to the exile in which they had been dispersed.

[1] Likely Yeshayah 18:3, but note Shoftim 3:27

[2] Yechezkel 6:11

[3] Melachim I 6:8

[4] Yirmiyah 6:10

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613 Mitzvot: #186, 439

Korbanot To Go?

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Mitzvot 186 and 439 ban the slaughter and sacrifice of korbanot outside of the location G-d sanctifies for that purpose. This applied when the portable mishkan was situated in certain locations, and it applies when the Beit haMikdash stands. There is some debate regarding this law's application today; per Tosafot (Yoma 63a) it is not in force without a Beit haMikdash, but the Rambam (Hilchot Maaseh haKorbanot 19:15) disagrees.

The Sefer haChinuch identifies two reasons for this limitation:

- We are not ordinarily permitted

to kill animals; the only justification is for food or medicine, or to participate in one of the rituals defined by the Torah. Absent such a condition, despite the value of spontaneous worship, sacrifice would be wasteful, and is therefore prohibited by the Torah.

- On the positive side, Divine selection of a particular site elevates that location both in an objective sense and from our subjective perspective. Therefore, we are best suited to commune with G-d at the chosen location, and we should serve G-d where our bond will be complete.

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Hitoriri: Jewish Spirituality Accepting Rebuke R' Ezra Goldschmiedt

Late into the evening, after hours of Torah study, a young Avraham Mordechai Alter (who would one day be known as "Imrei Emet", the third leader of the Gerrer chassidic dynasty) had decided to call it a night. As he was leaving the beit midrash, a friend pulled him aside. "Reb Avraham! I know you were about to head home and go to bed, but if you could stay a while longer, I would appreciate it. I'm having tremendous difficulty wrapping my head around a particular *sugya* (topical Torah discussion), and I could use your help in explaining it to me."

Avraham agreed, and working together they eventually came to an understanding of the issue – at 4:00 AM. Taking leave of his unexpected study partner, Avraham's head first hit the pillow at a time when the rest of the world had long been asleep. Waking up the next morning was no easy task, but the young scholar made his way to Shacharit, albeit to the late minyan.

Leaving Shacharit, Avraham met the Chiddushei HaRim, his grandfather, leader of the Gerrer chassidim. Seeing his grandson leaving the late minyan, the Chiddushei HaRim furiously exclaimed, "Avraham! What's the matter with you?! You're the future of the Gerrer chassidim! How can an aspiring talmid chacham like yourself wake up so late?!" Avraham then stood silently and listened as his grandfather lectured him on the evils of laziness.

The two eventually parted ways. Later, hearing what had happened, Avraham's chavruta from the previous night approached the Chiddushei HaRim and explained that his grandson's late start was in no way due to laziness.

In response, the Chiddushei HaRim confronted his grandson once more – "Why didn't you tell me you were up so late learning? Do you enjoy hearing me yell for nothing, making a fool out of myself?" "Heaven forbid!" replied Avraham. "Trust me, Zeideh, I listened and took every word to heart. Laziness is a trait that I must always guard against. While it may be true that in this particular instance I had not stumbled, why should that prevent me from hearing your words of wisdom and rebuke?"

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Torah in Translation
***Y'hi Ratzon* on the**
fruit of Rosh haShanah
Rabbi Ovadia Yosef
Yechaveh Daat 1:51
Translated by Yair Manas

Question: Regarding the custom practiced in all of the scattered communities of Israel, to bring to the table on the nights of Rosh Hashanah certain fruits and vegetables, saying on each a specific *Yehi Ratzon* prayer linked to their names, should we first say the blessing on the fruit and then say the *Yehi Ratzon*, or do the opposite - first say the *Yehi Ratzon* and then say the blessing?

Answer: The source for this practice is from Horiyot (12a): One should accustom himself to see on Rosh Hashanah, for a good omen, gourd, fenugreek, leek, beets, and dates. Rashi explains that these objects grow faster than other fruits and vegetables, so it is a positive omen to see them on Rosh Hashanah. In Keritut (5b), the text is: "A person should accustom himself to eat", instead of "to see", and so it appears in the Tur and Shulchan Aruch...

The Magen Avraham wrote that we see from the Shulchan Aruch that we should first make a blessing on the fruit, and eat some of the fruit, and then say the *Yehi Ratzon*, so that we not interrupt between saying the blessing and eating the fruit. Even though some say to say the *Yehi Ratzon* before eating, and they opine that the *Yehi Ratzon* is not an interruption... Nonetheless, optimally one should eat the fruit and then say the *Yehi Ratzon*, because saying the *Yehi Ratzon* is not truly necessary. Further, even if for a necessity one should not interrupt between the blessing and the eating, optimally...

The Mateh Moshe wrote to say the *Yehi Ratzon* before the blessing... but it appears that one should not do this, ideally, according to the Zohar Parshat Vayechi (227b), "One should always bless and praise G-d first, and then bless his friend and entreat on his behalf. If one does not do so, blessing his friend before blessing G-d, then the blessing to the friend will not be fulfilled. Therefore, when Yaakov blessed Yosef's children he first praised G-d, 'The G-d before Whom my forefathers walked, Avraham and Yitzchak, the G-d who has shepherded me from my beginning until now.' Yaakov then concluded with, 'May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the children, etc. and

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef was born in Baghdad, to a working-class family, on the eleventh of Tishrei, 1920. At the age of four, he moved to Israel with his family; due to their penury, young Ovadia alternated time between studies and work. He studied at the Porat Yosef yeshiva in Jerusalem under Syrian sage Rav Ezra Atiyeh, and was ordained by Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ben Zion Uziel at the age of 20. Beginning in 1945, he served as a judge on rabbinic courts in Jerusalem.

In 1947, at Rabbi Uziel's request, Rabbi Yosef moved to Cairo to serve as Chief Rabbi. The arrangement did not last, though; Rabbi Yosef found himself at odds with the communal leadership regarding halachic matters, particularly kashrut. He returned to Israel in 1950, becoming a judge in Petah Tikvah, and then Jerusalem; in 1965, Rabbi Yosef joined Israel's Supreme Rabbinical Court.

During this time, Rabbi Yosef's responsa and other writings became immensely popular. In 1954 Rabbi Yosef won the Rav Kook Prize for Torah literature, and in 1970 he received the Israel Prize. He became Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv in 1968, and then Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel in 1973.

Rabbi Yosef's responsa address contemporary issues of all kinds, and stand out for the breadth of the works cited in these encyclopedic writings. Rabbi Yosef is also known for political involvement, as the founder and spiritual leader of Israel's highly successful Shas party; he retired from the bench in 1986 because of legal limits on the political activity of the judiciary. His style of public address is that of the study hall, interweaving biblical passages and rabbinic teachings with caustic rebuke and hyperbolic rhetoric; the result sparks frequent controversy, particularly because Rabbi Yosef is one of the leading authorities in Jewish law today. In June 2012, Forbes Israel ranked Rabbi Yosef as the "most influential rabbi in Israel".

they will be fruitful like fish within the land."...

And so, here, it is appropriate to advance the blessing on the fruit, which is a blessing to G-d, and then eat, and afterward to say the *Yehi Ratzon* prayer, which is an entreatment and a request for mercy upon us...

This Week in
Israeli History
Elul 18, 1953:
Unit 101
Hillel Horovitz

In the years after the War of Independence, terrorists continually invaded the State of Israel and attacked its citizens, operating principally from Jordan and Gaza. By 1953 this infiltration had become systematic and effective. This led the Israeli General Staff to establish a new commando unit, charged with retaliation against those forces across enemy lines. This occurred on the 18th of Elul.

Many officers opposed the establishment of this unit; this included the Chief of Operations, General Moshe Dayan. The unit was established, under the leadership of Major Ariel Sharon, while Dayan was abroad. The unit was named "Unit 101". The unit included about fifty men, including staff. The unit's culture was very different from that of the rest of the IDF. The soldiers wore civilian garb, were not ranked and had no meaningful chain of command. They emphasized sticking to the mission, brotherhood within the unit, and success in achieving their goals.

Unit 101 carried out many operations, from forays into refugee camps in Gaza to incursions into Chevron, where they killed a wanted terrorist after a march of more than twenty kilometers in enemy territory. The unit's main publicity came about as a result of the retaliatory attack in the town of Qibya. After a fatal attack against Jews in the town of Yehud, the IDF decided to launch a response against the town from which the terrorists had come. Unit 101 destroyed tens of houses, killing many residents and triggering international condemnation. Prime Minister David Ben Gurion first denied IDF involvement, but days later Ariel Sharon acknowledged the operation, stating that they had not realized the houses were occupied.

Five months after the unit was established, its members were merged into Paratrooper Unit 890, led by Sharon. Unit 101 no longer exists in the IDF structure, although one of the paratrooper units is called "101".

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Who is the prophet of our haftorah?

Yeshayah (Isaiah) was a prophet in the period leading up to the exile of the ten northern tribes of Yisrael by the Assyrians. He lived in the southern kingdom of Yehudah, and he prophesied during the reigns of Kings Uziah, Yotam, Achaz and Chizkiyahu. According to the Talmud (Sotah 10a), he was a descendant of Yehudah and Tamar.

As the Talmud (Bava Batra 15a) informs us, the book of Yeshayah was compiled by King Chizkiyahu and associates of his. The prophecies of Yeshayah may be classified in two categories, Rebuke and Redemption; the former dominates the early chapters of the book, while the latter occupies the latter portion. The split is not clean, though; portions of the former include redemption, and portions of the latter include rebuke.

The unique circumstances of this week's haftorah

According to the Israeli midrashic work Pesikta (cited in Tosafot Megilah 31b and Avudraham), the haftarot of the seven weeks following the catastrophes of Tishah b'Av are among the oldest

haftarot to have fixed readings. These are called the *shivah d'nichemta* ("the seven of consolation"). Historically, most haftarot were read from any passage of the Prophets which related to the week's parshah, but the readings of these weeks must be taken from Yeshayah's words of consolation to a suffering Jewish nation. The Rambam recorded this as law in Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Tefillah 13:19.

This week many congregations have a unique reading, a double haftorah, because of a quirk in this year's calendar. Parshat Re'eh was read on Rosh Chodesh, and so many synagogues recited the haftorah appropriate for a confluence of Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh, instead of the haftorah of consolation appropriate for that week. Those synagogues will read the omitted haftorah together with the haftorah normally scheduled for this week, since they appear consecutively within the book of Yeshayah. (Magen Avraham 425:1; Mishneh Berurah 425:7)

It is worth noting that this passage is also read as the haftorah for Parshat Noach, because in comforting the

Jewish nation Yeshayah refers to the Divine oath not to bring another flood upon the world.

What is the message of our haftorah?

The prophet envisions the Jewish people as a childless woman and a distressed pauper; the former reflects loss of our physical future due to the assaults of the enemy, and the latter reflects loss of hope due to our great suffering. Yeshayah tells the childless woman to expand her tent, for she will produce children who will spread far and wide. To the distressed pauper, Yeshayah promises glorious wealth and children of piety and peace.

Yeshayah also makes demands upon the Jewish nation. To earn this exalted future, we must practice righteousness and distance ourselves from corruption. When we are thirsty, we should seek the water of Torah; when we lack silver for bread, we should pursue Divine wisdom. This is the path by which we will earn Divine splendour.

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Highlights for September 1-7 / 14-20 Elul

Many of our regular shiurim re-start after Succot, but opportunities abound now!

Shabbat, September 1

7:45 AM R' Baruch Weintraub, Rav Kook, Or Chaim **not this week**

10:20 AM R' Baruch Weintraub, Parshah, Clanton Park

90 min before minchah Hillel Horovitz, Hebrew Shiur: Spoon, Fork and Spork, BAYT

75 min before minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Daf Yomi: Berachot 31, BAYT

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Jewish Self-Defense, Gemara Avodah Zarah, BAYT

Sunday, September 2

9:15 AM Hillel Horovitz, Parshah, Zichron Yisroel, Hebrew

6:00 PM R' Baruch Weintraub, Halachic considerations in actual questions in Israel: Cities of Refuge?, **Hebrew**, 4 Tillingham Keep

40 Min Before Minchah R' Baruch Weintraub, Halachic considerations in actual questions in Israel: Car accidents, **Hebrew**, Clanton Park, **men**

After maariv R' Baruch Weintraub, Daf Yomi, Clanton Park, **men**

Monday, September 3

After maariv R' Baruch Weintraub, Daf Yomi, Clanton Park, **men**

8:20 PM Hillel Horovitz, Shemuel Bet, Week 1, Bnai Torah

Tuesday, September 4

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shaarei Shomayim, with Mekorot, starts September 11

Wednesday, September 5

8:00 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Living Midrash: The Akeidah, BAYT, *women*

Coming Up: Pre-Selichot

Motzaei Shabbat September 8

11:00 PM Hillel Horovitz, "Tall, Grande and Venti: A Perfect Guide for your Perfect Cup", Kehillat Shaarei Torah

11:00 PM Adam Frieberg, Introduction to Selichot, Shaarei Tefillah

12:30 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Kabbalistic Repentance: The Ari's Letter, Thornhill Community Shul

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 9 — OUR 5773 LAUNCH

The Length of our Days:

Judaism and Immortality

7:30 PM Minchah

7:45 PM Program Begins

At BAYT