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Who's Crying?

by Rabbi Yaakov Blau

The Haftarah for the second day of Rosh HaShanah, from Yirmiyahu 31, is replete with poignant imagery and famous Pesukim. Passuk 14 describes the sound of Rachel's bitter cries for her children being heard from Ramah. Later in the Perek, Hashem tells her to stop crying because her children will return. Who is this Rachel who is crying for her children?

The Meforashim have myriad approaches to this Passuk. Rashi (ad loc. s.v Rachel Mevakkah Al Baneha) quotes the Midrash Aggadah as explaining that the Rachel mentioned in this Passuk refers to Rachel Imeinu. When the evil king Menasheh brought Avodah Zarah into the Beit HaMikdash, all of the Avot and Imahot beseeched Hashem for mercy. Hashem was unmoved, KaVeYachol, until Rachel pleaded her case. She began with the argument that Hashem's mercy greatly exceeds that of a regular person. Next, she explained how she allowed "competition" into her marriage. When Ya'akov was supposed to originally marry Rachel, Rachel and Leah arranged signs so that Ya'akov would not be able to be duped by Lavan should he attempt to substitute someone for Rachel. Rachel gave those signs to her sister and thereby enabled the marriage to transpire. Accordingly, argued Rachel to Hashem, that if she was quiet in that situation, Hashem should likewise "be quiet" in the face of the Jews bringing "competition" into the Beit HaMikdash. Hashem replied that this was indeed a sound defense.

Radak gives what is likely the Peshat of the Passuk. He explains that the "Rachel" mentioned in Yirmiyahu 14 does not refer to the actual person Rachel, but rather is used to personify the ten tribes that went into exile (the Mahari Kara has a similar approach). Since Efrayim was the leader of the ten tribes, his grandmother is used to convey the grief of their prolonged exile which was not suffered by Shevatim Yehudah and Binyamin. Radak then quotes a different Midrash which understands the Passuk as referring to the actual Rachel. This Midrash attempts to justify why Ya'akov buried Rachel on the way to Efrat, claiming that he foresaw that the Jews would be led into exile via that very

way. By burying Rachel there, Ya'akov afforded the Jews the opportunity to pray for her to intercede on their behalf.

Finally, Targum Yonatan takes a very different approach. He understands Ramah as referring to an actual place (the other Meforashim understand it as meaning "on high"). Later in Sefer Yirmiyahu (40:1), immediately following the Churban HaBayit, the evil Nevuzaradan, the executioner of Bavel, is described as sending Yirmiyahu from Ramah. The crying in 31:14, explains the Targum, is that of the Jews crying at the time of that incident, assumedly because of the Churban. Targum Yonatan understands the image of Rachel crying as referring to Yerushalayim crying, although it is unclear how he derives that understanding from the words of the Passuk. The Targum then continues to explain that the reward of returning to Israel mentioned in Passuk 15 was given because of the merits of the actions of the Avot.

While the obvious reason why this Perek is read on Rosh HaShanah is because of the Zichronot mentioned in Passuk 19 (Mishnah Berurah 601:2), perhaps these various approaches can provide us with additional messages for the Yom Tov. Rashi's approach teaches us the critical importance of being able to let things go and not harbor ill feelings and grudges. If Hashem can, KaVeYachol, allow "competition" into the Beit HaMikdash, certainly we can as well. Radak's first understanding conveys the message of taking a long term approach to viewing Yad Hashem in our lives. The 10 tribes continue to remain in exile, but we still believe that they will ultimately return. In a similar vein, the Midrash that he quotes shows how things are put in motion long before we can understand their future purpose, as Ya'akov buried Rachel hundreds of years before the Jews came by that route to pray. It is incumbent upon us to believe that there is a Divine plan for what happens to us, even though it is often difficult to understand it as it unfolds. Finally, Targum's mentioning Zechut Avot does not merely teach us that we benefit from the actions of our forefathers, but it is meant to encourage us to look to the Avot, and how they acted, for inspiration as to how we should conduct our lives. May we all be Zocheh to find meaning from the Haftarah on Rosh HaShanah to continually grow in our Avodat Hashem.

Timely Pesukim

by Efraim Tiger ('18)

The sixth Aliyah of Parashat Nitzavim begins with the Pasuk: "Ki HaMitzvah HaZot Asher Anochi Metzavecha HaYom Lo Nifleit Hi Mimecha VeLo Rechokah Hi," "For this commandment which I command you this day, is not concealed from you, nor is it far away" (Devarim 30:11). In this Pasuk, the Torah describes a

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Mitzvah that seems not to be difficult for even the simple Jew to attain. In fact, the Torah says that this Mitzvah is not something that one would even have to look anywhere for other than within himself, as the Torah later states, “*Ki Karov Eilecha HaDavar Me’od BeFicha UViLvavecha La’asot*,” “For this thing is very close to you; it is in your mouth and your heart, so that you can fulfill it” (30:14). This Pasuk means that this Mitzvah is very close to each of us – it is in our mouths and hearts.

The obvious question on this important Pasuk is, to which Mitzvah is this description referring? Many Meforashim take the basic approach and say that this Mitzvah is clearly the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah. The Torah is telling us that any Jew, no matter how motivated, can fulfill this amazing Mitzvah because it is not a Mitzvah that anybody has to even look for; it is within all Jews, in their mouths and hearts. Anybody can fulfill the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah as long as he puts in the basic effort required. The Gemara (Eiruvin 54a) takes this idea a step further and quotes Rav Yitzchak, who understands the Pasuk as follows: “When is this Mitzvah close to you? In the time when it is in your mind and heart to actually *do it*.” The Torah Temimah (to our Pasuk) explains that someone who learns Torah just for the educational benefit or as a scholarly pursuit and doesn’t intend to *fulfill* the Mitzvot is completely missing the point of the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah and the idea of “Karov Eilecha.” One who doesn’t *perform* the Mitzvot has no chance of coming close to the Torah and the Mitzvot within: he views learning Torah as the same as reading an encyclopedia, which is also a scholarly pursuit.

Since Parashat Nitzavim is always read the week before Rosh HaShanah, many other Meforashim take the approach that the Mitzvah alluded to in the Pasuk is the Mitzvah of Teshuvah, something timely for the upcoming Yom Tov of Rosh HaShanah. The Kerī’at HaTorah on the second day of Rosh HaShanah is the story of the Akeidah. The final Aliyah in that portion goes through the genealogy of Avraham Avinu’s family leading to the birth of Rivkah. Rav Shimon Schwab zt”l, in his Seifer titled *Ma’ayan Beit Hasho’eivah*, states that given the fact that this is the last Aliyah we read on Rosh HaShanah, there must be some added significance that could add to our Avodah on this very holy day. He explains (citing Rashi) that this section is written only because of the birth of Rivkah; all the other people mentioned in this Parashah are mentioned merely because of their being related to Rivkah. If this is true, why is Lavan (the brother of Rivkah) not mentioned in this portion? Rav Schwab explains that the reason for Lavan’s being left out is that he was a Rasha to the extent that he didn’t deserve to have his name mentioned in this part of the Torah.

According to Rav Schwab, this omission of Lavan is actually the reason we read this portion now. There is essentially a hidden lesson within this exclusion. The idea is that as we reach the end of our Tefillah on Rosh HaShanah, what better way to inspire us to do Teshuvah than to be reminded of Lavan and the fact that he was left out of the Torah (in this section) because he was a Rasha.

As we approach Rosh HaShanah, we should take these messages of Torah and Teshuvah to heart and make sure not to be like Lavan and be “left out” when Hashem is providing us the chance to become closer to Him.

ISRAELI GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CHILLUL SHABBAT - AN UPDATED PERSPECTIVE OF AN AMERICAN RABBI AND A CALL TO ACTION TO AMERICAN JEWS¹ – PART TWO *by Rabbi Chaim Jachter*

Last week we raised the important question as to whether maintaining Israel’s image justifies the violation of Shabbat. We presented a discussion of this issue that appears in “Techumin,” volume 30. The consensus of opinion was that in certain circumstances, violation of rabbinic prohibitions could be countenanced for this purpose.

Two Justifications to Tilt towards Permitting Biblical Level Prohibitions

Two more considerations might justify violating Biblical level prohibitions on Shabbat. Rav Shlomo Levy, the Rosh Kollel of Yeshivat Har Etzion, notes that severe anti-Israel propaganda may incite Jew/Israel haters to commit acts of violence against us. This is especially dangerous in locations outside of Israel with large anti-Jewish/Israel populations, such as France and Great Britain. The Jews who reside in these countries do not have Tzahal to protect them. A timely response by the office of the Israeli army spokesman to false accusations might prevent violent actions against Jews residing in the Galut in response to severe anti-Israel propaganda.

A critical consideration not fully addressed in the “Techumin” article is the importance of maintaining Israel’s strong alliance with the United States government. This alliance is essential to Israel’s survival, which is why anti-Israel activists work so hard to undermine this relationship. When the office of Tzahal’s spokesman deals with an issue which impacts the American-Israeli alliance, its impact is vital for Israeli security. Yielding on Shabbat and Yom Tov to the anti-Israel propaganda machine could negatively impinge on the special relationship between the United States and Israel which is based on broad American support for the Jewish State due to shared values.

The American government in recent decades has allocated more than three billion dollars annually to Israel’s security needs.

¹ A special thank you to Keshet Israel of Washington, D.C. where I delivered a Shiur on this topic on Parashat Pinechas 5776. The many insights of the participants in the Shiur, many of whom hold

responsible position in government and political think tanks, have greatly enriched our discussion.

Moreover, the American government financed the Iron Dome missile defense system with hundreds of millions of dollars in aid, which has saved hundreds if not thousands of lives. In 2016, the Israeli government has pressed the American government to dramatically increase this aid, and the American government committed to a ten year, thirty eight billion dollar package. Maintaining Israel's image is critical to maintaining this level of military support. This military support is designed to maintain Israel's qualitative edge in the Middle East, which is critical to Israel's survival in the face of the overwhelming numerical superiority of its enemies.

Moreover, Israel has recently enhanced its relationship with Turkey, Egypt and even Saudi Arabia. Proper public relations responses are critical to maintaining these highly sensitive and very important alliances. Popular outrage in response to a severe anti-Israel accusation could undermine these governments' abilities to maintain close ties with the Jewish State.

An enlightening interaction of religious Israeli diplomat Yehuda Avner with Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach

Ambassador Yehuda Avner², in an interview with the Orthodox Union's "Jewish Action" (May 2011), relates his experiences regarding violation of Shabbat for the purpose of furthering Israel diplomacy:

I recall an occasion in 1975 when US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was engaged in shuttle diplomacy, negotiating with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in an attempt to bring about an interim agreement in Sinai. The negotiations broke down because Rabin was not satisfied with proposals which impinged on Israel's security. Kissinger went off in a huff, readying to place the failure of his mission on Israel. This showdown occurred just before Shabbat and Rabin asked me to immediately prepare our case for worldwide broadcast before Kissinger had a chance to brief the pressmen accompanying him on his flight back to Washington. A battle for public opinion was on, not least to win over Congress and the American public at large to accept our version of things, and I was the only one on the premier's staff who was not only familiar with all the facts but also had the language competence to promptly make our case. But I told Rabin that Shabbat was upon us, and what he was asking me to do was not a matter of vital policy but of Hasbarah (public diplomacy or advocacy), and for that I was not willing to violate Shabbat. Well, do I remember the look of contempt

on his face as I left. The next day, Shabbat afternoon, after davening Minchah at the Gra shul in the neighborhood of Sha'arei Chesed, I happened upon Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. He knew what I was engaged in, and he asked me in Yiddish what was new. I told him what had happened, and he said to me in Hebrew, "Are you sure you had all the information to make the right decision?" I took this to mean that I might not have made the right decision after all, and immediately started to walk back to the prime minister's office. When I got there it was already Motza'ei Shabbat. Rabin was in the midst of an emergency Cabinet session, and as I walked in, he spat at me, "Now you come? It's too late," and he showed me the briefing that Kissinger had given the journalists accompanying him on his flight back to Washington, in which he placed all the blame for the crisis on Israel's shoulders. This had the most serious consequences. President Gerald Ford declared a reassessment of the whole Israeli-US relationship, beginning with a partial arms embargo³. To this day I do not know if I did the right thing, and whether following Rabin's instructions would have made a difference or not.

Mr. Avner's experience teaches that public relations might have Pikuach Nefesh ramifications and that Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach considered violating Shabbat for its sake. While this incident involved public relations on a far grander scale than the scenarios described at the beginning of last week's discussion, it nonetheless teaches the importance and highly impactful nature of Israel diplomacy. The "Techumin" article does not mention this story with its critical insight from Rav Auerbach. This story must be brought to the attention of the Israeli army rabbinate for its consideration in formulating its Halachic policy regarding Shabbat violation for the sake of preserving Israel's image.

An important ramification of this story is that individual soldiers should obey directives from superiors. It is undoubtedly a judgment call if a situation truly warrants Chillul Shabbat. However, we see from the incident in which Yehuda Avner was involved that Prime Minister Rabin correctly diagnosed the situation, and

² British born Yehuda Avner was a religious Jew who served as a close aide to many Israeli leaders, from Levi Eshkol to Menachem Begin. His diplomatic career was crowned with a post as Israel's ambassador to Great Britain, Ireland and Australia.

³ Fortunately, President Ford rescinded this reassessment under pressure from both houses of Congress, which were actively lobbied

by AIPAC, the organization that promotes the alliance between The United States and Israel (Dr. Michael Oren, Power, Faith and Fantasy: The United States in the Middle East, 1776 to 2006, p. 536). However, miracles do not, as noted by the Gemara (Megillah 7b), occur at every hour.

Ambassador Avner's refusal to heed Rabin's directive placed Israel's security in serious jeopardy. This incident teaches that the superior might have more information and greater experience to better evaluate as to whether a situation is truly one of Pikuach Nefesh.

In the years since the "Techumin" article was written in 2010, the urgency of maintaining Israel's positive image has grown. Elements that are not understanding of and sympathetic to Israel's defense needs now constitute a significant constituency in both the Democratic and Republican parties. The distancing from Israel is most pronounced among younger Americans. Maintaining Israel's image has assumed greater importance as Israel's security needs have grown and American support for Israel needs to be strengthened.

Conclusion

Posekim⁴ have accepted the ruling of Rav Yechezkeil Landau (Teshuvot Noda BeYehudah 2: Yoreh Dei'ah 210) that violation of Shabbat for Pikuach Nefesh is permitted only for a "Choleh Lefaneinu," a present and clear danger. However, Rav Yechei'eil Ya'akov Weinberg (author of the famed Teshuvot Seridei Eish, in an essay published in "Techumin" 12:382-384) writes that for a Tzibbur, an entire country, the definition of "Choleh Lefaneinu" should be expanded. Similarly, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited by Rav Moshe Mordechai Farbstein, Assia 9:164, and Rav David Lau, "Techumin" 35:76) rules that leadership must responsibly address even a very tiny chance of danger to the entire community, even though an individual would reasonably tolerate such a miniscule risk. Based on this point, Rav Shlomo Zalman permitted a soldier to decode communications from an enemy country to Medinat Yisrael, despite the very small chance it posed a security threat.

Thus, as an American rabbi who has attended nearly every NORPAC mission to Washington, D.C., since 1997 to lobby members of Congress to strengthen the American-Israeli alliance⁵, I wish to contribute to this discussion by arguing that maintaining Israel's positive public image has definite Pikuach Nefesh ramifications in terms of its relationship with the American government and other governments as well. This is a point not emphasized in the "Techumin" article but is critical in order to determine the importance and ramifications of the degree of Pikuach Nefesh involved. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach did not agree with Yehuda Avner's initial assessment of dismissing the

maintaining of Israel's image as simply an exercise in Hasbarah (public relations) that does not justify violation of Shabbat.

This issue also has major ramifications for American Jews. As we prepare for the upcoming Yamim Nora'im, we should consider our role in advancing Israel's security through public relations. Every Jew should have the basic knowledge to know how to properly respond to anti-Israel propaganda which seeks to delegitimize and ultimately destroy the State of Israel. Chazal teach, "Know how to respond to a heretic" (Avot 2:19). In our times this includes playing a role in ensuring security by knowing how to respond to those who seek to undermine the State of Israel by defaming it⁶. If preserving Israel's image possibly justifies Chillul Shabbat, it certainly behooves us to play our part in the battle and be ready to make our contribution to maintaining Israel's positive image.

The "Techumin" article cites Rav Avigdor Neventzhal, whose reaction to the question as to whether Israeli public relations warrants Chillul Shabbat was, "I do not know⁷." This humble response of a giant Torah scholar and Poseik underscores the difficulty in resolving this challenging dilemma. May Hashem grant us the wisdom to properly resolve this issue. In the spirit of the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah, we conclude with the plea, "Avinu Malkeinu, Setom Piyot Mastineinu UMekatrigeinu," "our Father and our King, silence the mouths of those who defame and slander us."

Editors-in-Chief: Hillel Koslowe, Yehuda Koslowe

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Questions, comments? Contact us at:

Kol Torah

c/o Torah Academy of Bergen County

1600 Queen Anne Road

Teaneck, NJ 07666

Phone: (201) 837-7696

koltorah@koltorah.org

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⁴ Such as the Chatam Sofer (Teshuvot Y.D. 336), the Maharam Schick (Teshuvot Maharam Schick Y.D. 347-348), the Chazon Ish (Y.D. 208:7) and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Teshuvot Minchat Shlomo 2:83 in the Machon Otzarot Shlomo edition).

⁵ Rav Hershel Schachter told this author that the Minhag to refrain from shaving during the Omer is waived for those attending the NORPAC mission to Washington, as they must make a dignified presentation to members of Congress on behalf of the American-Israeli alliance. He compared this to a ruling of Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, who permitted a mourner in Shiv'ah to shave when he went to government offices in attempt

to obtain a visa to enter the United States for relatives trapped in Europe during the Second World War.

⁶ It is important to recall that those who wish to eliminate us, such as the ancient Egyptians and the Nazis, first defame us (see Shemot 1:10) to lay the groundwork for their efforts to destroy us.

⁷ It is certain, though, that individual efforts to protect Israel's image in the media, while very important, do not warrant Chillul Shabbat. Even violations of rabbinic prohibitions are not waived for this purpose. Only government responses rise to the level of Pikuach Nefesh.