

Parashat Devarim 5775, 2015

The Ultimate Redemption of Zion

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *haftarah*, “*Chazon Yeshayahu*” (“the Vision of Isaiah”), like our *parasha*, always precedes Tisha b’Av (the Ninth of Av). Yeshayahu’s main message is one of poignant despair in response to the appalling actions of our eighth century B.C. ancestors. Indeed, Isaiah goes so far as to declare:

An ox knows his owner and a donkey his master's crib; Israel does not know, my people does not consider. Woe to a sinful nation, a people heavy with iniquity, evildoing seed, corrupt children. They forsook the L-rd; they provoked the Holy One of Israel; they drew backwards. (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 1:3-4, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

In Yeshayahu’s view, our ancestors were even lower than beasts of burden, for they had forgotten their very Master, the Creator of the Universe. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find a more dire and foreboding prophecy.

The final verses of our *haftarah*, however, evoke an entirely different theme. Herein, Yeshayahu declares that the ultimate future of our people will be built upon morally upright judges and counselors. As a result, Jerusalem will once again become the faithful city of righteousness:

And I will restore your judges as at first and your counselors as in the beginning; afterwards you shall be called City of Righteousness, Faithful City. Zion shall be redeemed through justice and those who return in repentance through righteousness. (1:26-27, with my emendations)

The sentence, “Zion shall be redeemed through justice and those who return in repentance through righteousness,” certainly brings us much needed solace, since it promises, “*yeish tikva l’am Yisrael*” (“there is hope for the Jewish people”). At this point we might well ask: “How can we turn these idealistic words into practical reality?” I believe that the best means we have is to fulfill the commandment, *v’halachta b’drachov* (emulating Hashem’s actions, i.e. *imitatio Dei*). In my estimation, this *mitzvah* enables us to achieve authentic rapprochement with our Creator, something for which our souls so deeply long.

What are the constitutive elements of this *mitzvah*? The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) formulated these in the following manner:

We are commanded to walk in these intermediate paths - and they are good and straight paths - as [*Sefer Devarim* 28:9] states: “And you shall walk in His ways.” [Our Sages] taught [the following] interpretation of this *mitzvah*: Just as He is called “Gracious,” you shall be gracious; Just as He is called “Merciful,” you shall be merciful; Just as He is called “Holy,” you shall be holy; In a similar manner, the prophets called G-d by other titles: “Slow to anger,” “Abundant in kindness,” “Righteous,” “Just,” “Perfect,” “Almighty,” “Powerful,” and the like. [They did so] to inform us that these are good and just paths. A person is obligated to accustom himself to these paths and [to try to] resemble Him to the extent of his ability. (*Sefer Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot* 1:5-6, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, with my emendations)

Thus, as Maimonides so clearly reveals, the Torah, the Sages and our overall *massorah* (tradition) place a remarkable emphasis upon our emulating the actions of the Master of the Universe. In sum, what Hashem does, we must become. As such, we are obligated to be gracious, merciful, holy, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, righteous and just. These ethical traits, and the moral actions that stem therefrom, thereby emerge as the hallmarks of the authentic Jewish persona.

May it be Hashem's will and our fervent desire that both as a nation, and as individuals, we will fulfill the *mitzvah* of *v'halachta b'drachov*, and thereby witness the ultimate fulfillment of Yeshayahu's stirring words: "Zion shall be redeemed through justice and those who return in repentance through righteousness." May this time come soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on "*Tefilah: Haskafah and Analysis*," may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

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