

Ki Tetze 5780, 2020:

The Power Within

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, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, Dovid Shmuel ben Chasiyah and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

There are two *mitzvot* in the Torah whose fulfillment promises *arichut hayamim* — long life. The first is the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av v'eime* — honoring one's parents, found in the *asseret hadibrot*. The second is in our *parasha*, namely, the commandment of *shiluach haken* — sending away the mother bird prior to taking the baby chicks from her nest:

Honor your father and your mother as the L-rd your G-d commanded you, *l'ma'an yarichune yamecha* — in order that your days be lengthened, and that it may go well with you on the land that the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you. (*Sefer Devarim* 5:16)

You shall send away the mother, and [then] you may take the young for yourself, in order that it should be good for you, *v'ha'arachta yamim* — and you should lengthen your days. (*Sefer Devarim* 22:7, these and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

As noted, both *mitzvot* contain the parallel phrases *l'ma'an yarichune yamecha* and *v'ha'arachta yamim*. This is particularly fascinating, since *kibbud av v'eime* is widely viewed by *Chazal* as a *mitzvah chamurah* — a difficult and often challenging commandment, whereas *shiluach haken* is a relatively easy *mitzvah* to perform. Nonetheless, the Torah associates both with long and good lives. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons that Rabbi Yitzchak declared:

Everything that you have been told to do in the Torah — you must keep [and perform, as] you do not know through which commandment you will acquire life. There are instances wherein the reward is [written] next to it [in the Torah text], and there are cases where the

reward will only be realized in the future... (*Midrash Yalkut Shimoni, Sefer Mishle, 937, translation my own*)

A straightforward reading of the Torah's expressions, *l'ma'an yarichune yamecha* and *v'ha'arachta yamim*, in juxtaposition to *kibbud av v'eime* and *shiluach haken*, suggests that long and good lives will be the natural outcome of fulfilling these commandments. Yet, this is by no means necessarily the case, as illustrated by the following vignette from the life of the once great Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah (Acher), the close colleague of Rabbi Akiva and the *rebbe* of Rabbi Meir:

Once he was sitting and learning in the Ginnosar Valley and he saw a man climb to the top of a palm tree and take the mother bird and her young [at the same time], and he went down from there in peace. The next day he saw another man climb to the top of a palm tree, send away the mother and take the young, and when he went down from there, a snake bit him and he died. Scripture states, "You shall send away the mother, and [then] you may take the young for yourself, in order that it should be good for you, and you should lengthen your days." (*Sefer Devarim 22:7*). [At this point he thought to himself:] Where is the good of this man? Where is the long life of this man? (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Chagigah II:1, translation, http://cojs.org/jerusalem_talmud_haggigah_2-1, with my brackets and emendations,*)

This story is cited by the *Talmud Yerushalmi* as one of the reasons Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah rebelled against Hashem and His Torah. At face value, where, indeed, was "the good of this man...[and] the long life of this man?" The answer to this essential question is found in the conclusion of our passage: "He did not know that Rabbi Ya'akov had previously explained that 'in order that it should be good for you' refers to *olam habah* — the world to come that is all good, and 'and you should lengthen your days' refers to *l'atid sh'kulo aruch* — the future [end of days] that is everlasting." In other words, although it appears that the Torah is all but guaranteeing *arichut hayamim* as a result of fulfilling the *mitzvot* of *kibbud av v'eime* and *shiluach haken*, this is not the case. Instead, the ultimate positive outcome of these *mitzvot* will not be realized until the time of *olam habah* and *l'atid sh'kulo aruch*.

Tragically, the great Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah was not privy to Rabbi Ya'akov's interpretation of this aspect of *schar v'onesh* for, in all probability, if he had known and internalized this analysis, he would never have become Acher — “the Other.” As my rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993) teaches us, the authentic Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah “never sinned, never betrayed *Knesset Yisrael*, never identified with the Romans, and never sought to tear Jewish children away from Torah and the fear of Heaven. It was another person, Acher, who was the traitor... All the while, the real Elisha remained hidden in the depths of his personality, an Elisha who never betrayed G-d or the Jewish people but was a hostage of the pseudo-personality that was Acher.” (This and the following quotation prepared from a 1961 public lecture in Yiddish by Professor Barry Landy of Cambridge, U.K)

Why did Rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah become entrenched in his Acher persona? The answer, according to the Rav, is that although he acknowledged Hashem's power, he failed to recognize the power that he had within himself:

Do you know why Elisha rebelled against the Creator, in spite of his greatness in Torah? Because he did not appreciate his own strength, and thus betrayed G-d. It is as if to say, Elisha knew G-d's power, but he did not know his own power to overcome his outer Acher, and thus he turned away from G-d. His own weak self-awareness and his failure to “know himself” were the real cause of his tragic sin.

We stand today a mere three weeks before Rosh Hashanah, when we and the entire world will be judged. It is an awe-inspiring time during which many of us may question whether we have the power within ourselves to change for the better. As such, now is the time to recognize our inner strength and raise our spiritual self-awareness to the highest heights, and return to Hashem in heartfelt and abiding *teshuvah*. With Hashem's help and our most

fervent desire, may this be so. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom, and may Hashem in His great mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael* and from all the nations of the world.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and_the *parasha's* name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdb718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:
[**http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd**](http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd)

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.