



Parashat Devarim 5772 - #242

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On the Haftarah... Gentle Rebuke

[Ashkenazim/Sefardim: Yeshayahu 1:1-27
Yemenite Jews: Yeshayahu 1:1-31]

Although the prophet Yeshayahu compared the behavior of Israel to the residents of Sedom and Amorah, he still carefully guarded his love for them. We hear the message clearly, since "things that come from the heart, enter the heart."

"Hear the word of Hashem, officers of Sedom, listen to the Torah of our G-d, Nation of Amorah" (Yeshayahu 1:10). The harshness of the prophet's words shocks us. Sedom and Amorah are the supreme symbols of wickedness and ethical decay. This is similar in our day to calling another person a Nazi! How could such abusive words emanate from the mouth of the prophet, the loyal agent of the Master of the Universe?! "Sinful Nation, a Nation loaded with guilt, seed of evildoers, children given to corruption" (ibid. v. 4)! "Therefore, the Master, Hashem of Hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: I will get relief from My foes and avenge Myself on my enemies" (ibid. v. 24)." Is it really possible to relate to the Nation of Israel as the enemy of Hashem?

In the face of such harshness, we must point out that according to Halachah the mitzvah of rebuke must be accomplished with gentleness and love (see Rambam, Hilchot De'ot 6:8), since words spoken aggressively are never heard. In addition, this mitzvah must be accompanied by two other mitzvot: Do not hate your brother in your heart and love him. "Things that come from the heart enter the heart" (Maharam Alshich on the verse "With all your heart"). Rebuke out of love, saturated with affection for the other person, cannot be refused, while harsh words are ignored from the outset.

But – don't worry – Yeshayahu is not delivering hatred. Despite his harsh words, he is a prophet of love. All of his prophecies are laced with love and comfort. In the same chapter, he says "Zion will be redeemed with justice, and those who return to her with righteousness" (ibid. v. 27). For the Nation of Israel, nothing is irreversible: "I will restore your judges as in

days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City" (ibid. v. 26). What a sign of loyalty!

How then can we reconcile the difficult nature of this prophecy? Through a parable brought by our Rabbis in the Zohar: A father is enraged at his son and is ready to hit him. His mother yells and stops the father's impending strike. The son sighs a sigh of relief. What he did not know is that his two parents were in it together. Their roles complemented one another: one represented strict punishment and the other represents security and forgiveness (Zohar, Vayikra 14:2). Did the father really want to wound his son? Did the mother really want to ignore her son's sinful behavior? The parents therefore created a plan to instill fear into the child and put him on the correct path.

This parable is used to explain the aftermath of the Sin of the Golden Calf. "Hashem said to Moshe...Leave Me now so My anger will burn against them and I will destroy them" (Shemot 32:10). This was obviously not Hashem's intention. He remained the loving and merciful Father, but wanted to instill fear within us so we would repent.

The Zohar teaches us the role of the mother who would save her son – before Moshe Rabbenu even knew it. Hashem therefore hinted to Moshe Rabbenu: "Leave Me." Moshe Rabbenu then understood that it was his responsibility to pray and plead for Divine forgiveness for His Nation. The Torah tells us that his request was answered, and he succeeded in canceling the Divine punishment. But if it were not for the fact that Hashem forgave them for the Sin of the Golden Calf, they would not have understood either the severity of their sin or their ability to repent.

The same applies to Yeshayahu. He had to shock the Nation of Israel so that they would understand their corrupt ways and return to the right path. "Wash and make yourselves pure, take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing evil. Learn to do right, seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (ibid. v. 16-17). We clearly see that the prophet had complete hope and trust that he could help the Nation repent. "Come and reason together, says Hashem, though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow, though they are red as crimson, they will be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat from the best of the Land" (ibid. v. 18-19).

If we review all of Yeshayahu's prophecies, we see that his words are always words of comfort. He is the one who discusses the coming of the Messiah at length (chap. 11). Out of this fatherly love occasionally appears tough rebuke, but included in it are expressions of love. The right and obligation of a loving father is to occasionally deliver harsh rebuke to his son.

The Nation of Israel did not question for even a second Yeshayahu's love and self-sacrifice for them, and his unending faith that the Nation would return to the ethical and holy path.

Rav Aviner on... Daily Study of Faith

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Matot-Masa'ei 5772 – translated by R. Blumberg]

The innovation of Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav, said Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook, or, more precisely, one of its innovations, is the study of faith.

Obviously, no innovation is really involved. The study of faith is part of the study of Torah - but over time it had been forgotten. There was a need to awaken it once more, to restore such study to its rightful glory. Our greatest Torah luminaries sorrowfully noted this abandonment, as, for example, in Mesillat Yesharim, Chovot Ha-Levavot, and the Sefer “Tikunei Ha-Zohar” commenting on what it called “Oraita Yevesha” [“dry” or sterile Torah].

Moreover, transcending those works, the Tanach itself records what the prophets had to say about “the guardians of the Torah who ignore G-d” (Yirmiyahu 2:8). This omission did great harm, for Torah is not just a matter of Mitzvah observance, but of keeping the Torah based on faith. G-d’s commandments are enormously broad, enormously profound. They possess a soul.

Therefore, the Torah includes two parts:

1. The study of Talmud and Jewish law, which guide us in what to do.
2. The study of faith, which guides us in what to believe, what to think, what to feel.

The expression “study of faith” is an innovation of Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, and also seems to conceal within it a contradiction: “Study” involves the intellect, whereas “faith” is life. Yet the Vilna Gaon said long ago – and this is the source of Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah’s utterances – that we have to study the book “Kuzari” because the main tenets of Jewish faith and of the Torah depend on it. Thus, we are supposed to study faith.

As far as the spiritual connection between study and faith, we find two verses, the one (Kohelet 7:12), “Wisdom preserves the life of him who possesses it”, and the second (Habakuk 2:4), “The righteous man shall live by his faith”. Maran Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohai Kook explained that wisdom, itself, is not life. Yet if it is studied properly, it can afford one life. Faith, by contrast, is life.

What emerges from all of the preceding is that we must set aside time for daily study of faith. Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah taught the yeshiva that faith must be studied daily, for no less than an hour and for no more than two hours. Obviously, however, even someone who is not a yeshiva student needs that same spiritual nourishment, for that is what nourishes the soul. More precisely, study of the Talmud and of Jewish law nourishes the soul as well, but study of faith is the life’s breath of the soul.

And how fine and how natural it is that this initiative emerged from Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav, the central, universal yeshiva, the mother of all our religious Zionist yeshivot. As Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah wrote, “To help our souls... by setting aside time to study all those precious works on morality and reverence for G-d, from both the earlier and later periods, those involving the revealed knowledge and those involving the hidden knowledge, one work after another, and striving to ascend along the pathway of philosophy and analysis...” (Igrot Ha-Re’iyah, Igeret 95).

Stories of Rabbenu –

Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Military Exemption for Yeshiva Students

Rav Shear Yashuv Cohain, son of the Nazir and Rav of Haifa, related that during the War of Independence there was a major dispute between Rabbis – including within Yeshivat Mercaz Ha-Rav – whether or not yeshiva students should be drafted into the

military. The students followed the path of our Rabbi and the Nazir and were active in the Haganah, Etzel and Lechi. During the waiting period, after the UN votes and before the end of the British Mandate, Rav Shear Yashuv would learn in the yeshiva. One day he left the yeshiva and saw a broadside with the huge title that Maran Ha-Rav Kook opposed drafting yeshiva students into the army. It included harsh quotes from one of his letters regarding this issue. He was unsure what to do and was deep in thought when he bumped into our Rabbi. Our Rabbi, who recognized his state of mind, said: "Shear Yashuv, what happened? Why are you so upset and pale?" He told him what happened and pointed to the broadside. Our Rabbi roared over and over: "This is a distortion! This is a total distortion!"

After he calmed down, he explained that these quotes were taken from a letter of Maran Ha-Rav Kook to Rav Dr. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of England, regarding being drafted into the British army. This letter had been presented to the government. Yeshiva students who arrived in London from Russia and Poland as refugees of World War One and were learning Torah were left off the list of those exempt from military service (for example, priests, who were exempted). Maran Ha-Rav Kook admonished him, and said that this has nothing to do with the war for Jerusalem (Igrot Ha-Re'eiyah vol. 3, letter #810). Rav Shear Yashuv encouraged and aided our Rabbi to publish a booklet clarifying this issue (see Le-Hilchot Tzibur #1).

During the difficult battle for the Old City in Jerusalem, the Jewish community was defeated and Rav Shear Yashuv, who was badly wounded on his leg, was taken into Jordanian captivity along with the surviving fighters. He thus did not merit seeing the publication of the booklet he initiated. After approximately eight months and the establishment of the State, Rav Shear Yashuv was released and taken to Zichron Yaakov for rehabilitation. Within a day, at a time when buses were rare, our Rabbi appeared outside his window. He entered the room, hugged and kissed him and burst out crying. He removed a small booklet from his pocket and gave it to him. It was the first booklet printed with a dedication to Rav Shear Yashuv (The booklet was printed in Le-Netivot Yisrael vol. 1 #23).

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