

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi

Torah Empowerment for Women

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#244

As Your Sword Bereaved Women

There's no greater horror for a woman than the invasion of her home. Rabbanit Yemima brings encouragement amid the security situation in the south, with four short prayers for this destabilizing time.

We have to realize this is a war on women. Because **הוא – שואתו – his wife means "his home."**¹ Home invasion is an invasion of femininity, motherhood, safe space, the womb. First I want to send hugs to all the women who maintained a sukkah of calm even as they shook in fear, all day, for their young ones. They came up with something to say such as "It'll be OK," even as they melted in fear. We send you the biggest embrace in the world.

As the prophet says to 'Amalek: **כְּאִשֶּׁר שָׁקְלָה נָשִׁים חֶרֶבְךָ – כִּן תִּשְׁכַּל מְנָשִׁים אִמָּךְ – As your sword bereaved women, you mother will be the most bereaved of women.**² Don't dismiss women. You hurt women; you kidnap women; you invade women's sage space. As your sword bereaves women, women's prayer will bereave your mother. This will become a day of mourning for your mother, because you disdain women's power, but their power is immense.

There's nothing more horrific to a woman than invasion of her home. Here I feel the need to mention the words of Rabbi Yehuda Ben-Yishai, whose daughter, Ruti Fogel, her husband, and three children (May Hashem avenge their blood), were murdered in a home invasion in Itamar 12 years ago. Rabbi Yehuda Ben-Yishai requested one thing, which I remember clearly: please, please

don't expose our youth to the photos or clips of the horror, because that weakens the power of prayer.

That's what he said, not long after that massacre. That curiosity is natural, he acknowledged. But do you think the horror will spur your prayer? Nope. The moment you see a picture, your faith weakens. You say, "That's it. We're done for. How could they do this to us? Why do I daven anyway?"

The fewer videos they see, Rabbi Ben Yishai said, the longer and more pleasant lives they'll lead.

The prayer for this situation is that of Rabbi Meir Ba'al HaNes, who didn't rest for a moment in the face of a woman in captivity. The Romans took his wife B'ruria's sister, the daughter of Rabbi Hanina Ben T'radyon. He refused to rest with her in prison. He went to the chief of the guard: release that woman now, because women are always released first anyway.

"I can't – they'll kill me!" the guard insisted.

"Just say, **אֱ-לֹהֵא דְמֵאִיר עִנִּי, אֱ-לֹהֵא דְמֵאִיר עִנִּי – God of Meir, answer me, God of Meir, answer me!**" They won't be able to harm you."

And he secured her release.³

We must keep that statement with us now: God of Mair, answer me! God of Meir, answer me!

I keep getting asked the same womanly question: “I’m a young bride. My husband just got called up to reserve duty for the first time since our wedding. I’m so worried!” “I’ve having labor contractions, and I’m afraid to drive on this road,” both using the Hebrew word *tzir*. And the most moving one: “I ask that you daven for me. I’m doing my reserve duty as a condolence officer.” Her job is to knock on doors and give families the worst news of all.

We embrace you, women. We embrace your epic mission.

Now I want to say a word or two to the “It’s because” people, as I call them. “It’s because of our Yom Kippur davening,” they proclaim (or some other “reason”). Be quiet!

I beautiful young boy with amazing curls was once taken captive; his name was Yishma’el ben Elisha. Rabbi Yehoshua debated whether it was worth it to ransom him for an exorbitant amount – could it be done? What were the consequences?

He stands near the prison, curious how the boy will respond to his recitation: **מִי נָתַן לְמַשָּׁה יַעֲקֹב וְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְבָזִים – Who gave Ya’akov over to despoiling, Yisrael to looters?** Who did these horrors to us?

And from his cell, Yishma’el ben Elisha answers, **הֲלוֹא ה’ – Is it not Hashem, against Whom we have sinned, and did not desire to walk in His ways, nor listen to His Torah?**⁴

Then R’ Yehoshuya ben Hananya quotes a different verse: **בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן הֵקָרִים, הַמְּסֻלָּאִים בָּפֶזַח – Precious children of Tziyon, analogous to fine gold.**⁵ Tears stream from his eyes. *I adjure as witnesses heaven and earth* that

this boy, this captive, will be great among Yisrael. We’re going to fight for his release.⁶

Wait, doesn't R’ Yishma’el just say it’s all because of our sins?

Yes, but when he becomes the Kohen Gadol, he no longer speaks that way. He won’t say, “It’s their fault.” He won’t even say, “It’s our fault.” It’s because we have cruel, fearsome enemies. Yes, we’ve sinned and we’re divided, and that certainly hasn’t helped us, but when R’ Yishma’el ben Elisha – his is the next prayer, after “God of Meir, answer me” – enters the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, and sees Hashem enthroned, Hashem says to him, **יְשַׁמְעָאֵל בְּנִי, בְּרַכְנִי – Yishma’el my son, bless Me**, he knows it’s a rare moment of divine goodwill.

He says to Hashem: **יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, שְׂכִיבְשׁוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ אֶת פְּעָסְךָ, וְיִגּוּלוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ עַל מַדּוּתֶיךָ, וְתִתְנַהֵג עִם בְּנֶיךָ בְּמִדַּת הַדִּין – My it be Your will that Your mercy vanquish Your anger; that Your mercy cover all Your other attributes; that You act toward Your children with the attribute of mercy; that you take them beyond the boundary of the law.**⁷ You’re angry, yes. We do fight a lot. But not today. Look how united we are. May it be Your will that... you take us *beyond*, literally “within,” – not a single pilot refused to serve this week when he received his callup notice. Not a one, despite all the talk over the last few months. Not a single soldier refused to show up “because he, because that, because politics.” Look at what really makes them tick inside, not what they say when things are their dysfunctional normal. We’re a good nation, *Ribbono Shel ‘Olam*.

R’ Yishma’el ben Elisha was a warrior for women. He would make them come out so good in any dispute. This true disaster for women is yours now, R’ Yishma’el. Get us beyond the strict letter of the law.

And your last bit of homework, one final instruction. What do we do when the air raid siren sounds?

³

⁴ Y’sha’yahu 42:24.

⁵ Eikha 4:2.

⁶ Gittin 58a.

⁷ B’rakhot 7a.

ג יִשְׁלַח עֲזָרָךְ מִקֹּדֶשׁ וּמִצִּיּוֹן יִסְעֶדֶךָ:

ד יִזְכֹּר כָּל מִנְחָתְךָ וְעוֹלָתְךָ יִדְשָׁנָה סֵלָה:

ה ה' יִתֵּן לָךְ כְּלָבֶבְךָ וְכָל עֲצָתְךָ יִמְלֹא:

ו וְנִרְנְנָה בִּישׁוּעָתְךָ וּבִשְׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ נִדְגַל יִמְלֹא ה' כָּל מִשְׁאָלוֹתֶיךָ:

ז עֲתָה יִדְעָתִי כִּי הוֹשִׁיעַ ה' מִשִּׁיחוֹ יַעֲנֶהוּ מִשְׁמִי קִדְּשׁוּ בְּגִבֹּרוֹת יֵשַׁע יְמִינוֹ:

ח אֵלֶּה בָּרָכְבּ וְאֵלֶּה בְּסוּסִים וְאֶנְחֲנוּ בְּשֵׁם ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ נִזְכִּיר:

ט הִמָּה כָּרְעוּ וְנִפְּלוּ וְאֶנְחֲנוּ קִמְנוּ וְנִתְעוֹדֵד:

י ה' הוֹשִׁיעָה הַמֶּלֶךְ יַעֲנֵנוּ בְּיוֹם קִרְאָנוּ:

R' Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin said something simply wonderful. When a trumpet sounds, it has two purposes: either to call the people to assemble at the Tent of Meeting to learn Torah from Moshe Rabbeinu, or it's a call to battle.

The trumpet is a siren. The word for trumpet, *hatzotz'ra*, is a compound: *hatzi tzara*, half-trouble. When we call for assembly via trumpet, it evokes the Giving of the Torah. "Yemima, why did it happen on Simḥat Torah?" Because when Moshe convened the people to teach them Torah, he had to make sure they were united. The trumpet emits only one sound at a time, one that unites everyone.

In R' Tzadok's words:

כדי שיהיו ישראל באגודה אחת, היה קורא להם משה רבנו *For Yisrael to be a single bundle, Moshe would summon them with a trumpet, so they would be united in heart.* Like at the Giving of the Torah; like at Simḥat Torah.

וכן במלחמה תוקעים בחצוצרה, כי העיקר שיהיו ישראל כאיש אחד בלב אחד, ושיתוקנו בצפירה הזו גם פושעי ישראל, כי על ידי זה מתגברים על אומות העולם, כי כל כוחן – לקטרג עלינו ולטעון נגדנו הוא, שאיננו מאוחדים – *Similarly, in war, we sound the trumpet, because the root of it is to have Yisrael united in heart; that even the sinners of Yisrael be included and repaired in that sound. That is how we overcome the nations of the world – their entire power rests on their capacity to accuse us of disunity.*

והחצוצרה הופכת לצרת רבים את הכל, וצרת רבים, חצי והחצוצרה *The trumpet transforms everything into a collective crisis, and a collective crisis, half-trouble, is the trumpet.*

So each time we hear that siren, that trumpet, we must take upon ourselves "half-trouble." Carry that yoke with them, because shared trouble is only half trouble.

And just recite chapter 20 of T'hillim:

א לִמְנַצֵּחַ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:

ב יַעֲנֵךְ ה' בְּיוֹם צָרָה יִשְׁגָּבְךָ שֵׁם אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב:

To the conductor, a psalm to David

Hashem will answer you on a day of trouble; the name of the God of Ya'akov will shelter you.

He will send to your aid from the Holy, and from Tziyon will support you.

He will remember all of your tributes, and will be "fattened" by your 'olah-offerings, Selah.

He will grant what your heart wishes, and realize all of your counsels.

Let us raise voice at Your deliverance, and the name of our God we will invoke; Hashem will grant all your requests.

Now I know that Hashem has saved His anointed; He will answer via His holy Name; with the mighty deliverance of His right hand.

Those rely on their chariots, and those on their cavalry; whereas we invoke the name of Hashem our God.

These have bent and fallen, whereas we stand up and gain resolve.

Hashem, deliver! The King will answer us on the day we call.

Each of us, with the power of her prayer, her cry, her love, her good thoughts.

We pray for the recovery of all the wounded, and for good tidings for each Jew – and all of Jewry.

◆ Translated by Rav David Swidler

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