

If we were to search Scripture for an appropriate expression of our relief, joy, and thanksgiving at the heroic and brilliant rescue by Israel of the over 100 Jewish hostages kept by Arab and German terrorists in the Entebbe Airport in Uganda, one important verse would come to mind:

בְּרֹאשׁ הַיָּמִים יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל, "Now it shall be said concerning Jacob and Israel, what hath God wrought?"

Indeed, for the last several days our national mood has been reminiscent of the heady days following the Six-Day War. And yet, this very association with the Six-Day War raises problems that were debated then too. Amongst these is, should we really be thanking God for this victory, or congratulating the Israelis who risked so much and achieved so mightily? Should we be reciting this verse, "What hath God wrought?" or the verse immediately following it: *וַיִּשָּׂא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ כִּי־לִיּוֹן* "Behold a nation arises as a lioness, and lifts up its head as a lion." Should we be proclaiming, "What hath God wrought," or "(Israel is) a nation that arises like a lioness and lifts up his head like a lion?" After all, it is these courageous young men who risked their lives -- and the prestige of Israel -- in a raid concocted so quickly, and executed so brilliantly. So, which shall it be: *וַיִּשָּׂא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ* and its religious consequences; or *וַיִּשָּׂא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ* and its political-military ramifications?

This is no idle speculation. Two attitudes strive for supremacy within each of us, and the two attitudes are present in our community as well. One of them, perhaps the minority, is what might be termed quietistic. It advocates שלימות, complete faith in God, to the exclusion of man's strength or power. In fact, it is somewhat contemptuous of man's activities. The other point of view, much more prevalent, is activist. It focuses exclusively on what the teachers of Musar called אמץ, effort or initiative. It disdains appeals to faith, and comes dangerously close to the boastfulness against which Moses warned us: אני וזרעתי וישראל, "it is my power and the strength of my hand which has made for this success of mine."

The first attitude is one which responds only with the words *מה עשה*, What hath God wrought; the second knows only the following verse, *אֵלֶּיךָ כְּאִשָּׁה בְּעִתָּהּ*, it is a nation which arises as a lioness.

Secularist man tends to see science and technology and all human achievement as displacing the Divine in the world. The secularist mentality is such that it perceives human genius in competition with God's work, and holds that religion is meaningful only when science has no answer and technology no solution -- as if faith in God were a function of human ignorance! It sees no reason to exclaim about what God wrought, when it knows that achievement is a result of a nation arising like a lioness.

We have here the echos of the "secular city debate" which was current in theological circles a number of years ago. In a less sophisticated manner, we can always hear such arguments and challenges as, "can you still believe in God -- or in Torah, or observe the commandments -- in a space-age?"

Opposed to this is the outlook of religious man who, in his faith, often fails to appreciate the importance of human creativity, of science and technology -- even while he makes use of it and enjoys the benefits and advantages that it has brought to civilization. In a way, such an approach is a subtle indication that it accepts the secularist premise that man's achievements are in competition with, and seek to displace that, of God, except that we side with God in this contest and exclaim, *אֵל בְּעַד נָו*.

Neither of these, to my mind, is authentically Jewish. I must hasten to add that I deny as well the kind of compromise which attributes success to man and failure to God!

There is such a way of thinking which ascribes human vulnerability and natural cataclysms to God, and man's triumph -- to man. In the insurance industry, when we speak of natural disasters or catastrophes, we employ a euphemism, "an act of God!" (Indeed, I heard of an Orthodox Jewish insurance agent who was seeking to sell a policy to an equally pious potential client, and said to him, "Now if there should occur an act of God, God forbid...") Such a mentality recites *אֵל בְּעַד נָו*, "What hath God wrought," only at the occasion of bad news. But if there is economic success, or a career triumph, or a military victory, then this mentality is one which then recites *אֵל בְּעַד נָו*, it is a result of my genius, my talent, my competence. But such a division of credit and blame is manifestly unfair.

What should be the authentic Jewish attitude? I believe it is: that neither one is adequate! We need both verses -- *אֵל בְּעַד נָו* in order to avoid the arrogance that comes from the successful exercise of human power, and *אֵל בְּעַד נָו* to avoid the paralysis of human power that is often the result of spiritual passivity.

There is no fundamental contradiction between the two verses, although we must always live in the tension between them. A truly religious Jew sees God's wisdom in man's wisdom, and God's power in man's power. For God and man, according to Jewish teaching, are partners in creation, and it is God who delegated to man the role of His surrogate in the mastery of creation. If indeed man is "the image of God," then man's deed must reflect God's personality. In such a case, a manifestation of human wisdom or the benevolent use of human power for creative ends, must be seen as a reflection of the character of God. No wonder that the Halakhah directs us to recite special blessings upon encountering unusually wise or powerful men, in which we declare our gratitude to God for sharing His power and wisdom with mere flesh and blood. For us, *אֵל בְּעַד נָו* is a reflection of *אֵל בְּעַד נָו*.

If there is no *אֵל בְּעַד נָו*, if there is no human initiative -- what the Zohar calls *אֵל בְּעַד נָו*, "initiative from below" -- the world must remain fallow, and the dark forces of nature will reign supreme in the absence of such human creativity. I recall the story of a farmer in Maine who bought an old and dilapidated farm. Slowly, he repaired the sheds, plowed the land, pruned the trees and hedges, fixed up the farmhouse. After he had finished, the local parson came

by for a visit and, beholding the scene of this successful renovation, said, "I am glad to see what the Lord has done to this farm." Whereupon the farmer, in typically laconic Yankee fashion, responded, "You should have seen this farm when the Lord had it alone!"

Indeed so, God insists that man become the tool for His creative work. If He has it by Himself, He will refuse to do any more with it.

Similarly, if Israel had not undertaken its brilliant exploit, we would have lost not three or four hostages, but over 100, Heaven forbid. Without *אלהינו אלהים*, we would have had no occasion to say *אלהינו אלהים*. Without those Israeli lions, we would not today be thanking God. Perhaps when we are next solicited for the campaign on behalf of Israel, we will not groan and moan and complain, but remember the risks that these young lads of Israel embraced when they undertook this arduous and dangerous maneuver.

And yet -- and yet! Human agency alone cannot be held exclusively responsible for this miracle! I shudder to think what might have been, the untold errors and accidents and slip-ups that might have made a shambles of the entire effort and would not only have resulted in a massacre of the hostages and the would-be rescuers, but in a devastating public reaction to the futile Israeli effort. I can understand the censure of Israel by the French Pilots Association on the basis of a possible failure -- though I ordinarily find it difficult to sympathize with anything French these days. Indeed, if not for *אלהינו אלהים*, we would have no occasion for pride which would lead us to exclaim *אלהינו אלהים*. Without God, our lions would be of no avail.

So we offer today our warmest and most deepfelt felicitations to the Israel Defense Army, the lions of Israel. Not only Jews, but decent people throughout the world will join us in these congratulation. This is especially true of England, which not too long ago had the uncomfortable experience of having a representative of the Crown humiliated by that obese psychopath, Idi Amin, when the Ambassador came grovelling and bowing and scraping before him. Now, England too can hold up its head higher and exclaim with all the world about Israel, *אלהינו אלהים*.

But no less -- and even infinitely more -- must we offer our prayer for thanks to Almighty God and exclaim *אלהינו אלהים*, "What hath God wrought!" in so protecting and prospering our Israeli soldiers in this extremely perilous effort.

I cannot help but think, at this occasion, of how God bends man to His purposes, how little we know of what role we play in history. It seems such a short time ago that Israel was banished from UNESCO, and the representative of Lebanon came up to the rostrum of the United Nations and arrogantly crowed, "Israel is a country which belongs nowhere!" And now look at what God hath wrought: in the same week that Israel managed this brilliant coup of saving its hostages from Uganda, Lebanon is in the deepest throes of its most agonizing despair, it has effectively ceased to be a nation, it is -- and I say this without any special satisfaction -- a country which is a non-country, it is itself nowhere! How ironic is the justice that God executes upon the nations of the world. *אלהינו אלהים*!

The same coordination of an intersection between the Divine and the human must always be part of our understanding of the forces of history, and this understanding must guide us in all our endeavors -- not only that of Israel's military and political and economic security, but also in our efforts for Torah whether in Israel (and I speak specifically of such great and distinguished yeshivot as Kerem B'Yavneh, on whose behalf I have come to these shores); whether Jewish activity in the United States, or Jewish education in England.

In offering our congratulations to Israel and our thanks to God Almighty, in expressing both verses in profound appreciation of this historic event in which Israel proved to be so bold, so swift, so quick and so powerful, our lesson is clear: we must learn from this heroic act to inspire ourselves to heroism in pursuit of our spiritual goals as well. And here too we must be -- bold and swift and quick and powerful. For so we read this afternoon in the fifth chapter of Avot: *יְהִי צֶדֶק בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִמָּר דָּו' עִס כְּנֶמֶר יָדָם כְּנֶשֶׁר וְיָדָם כְּצִבִּי וְקִבּוֹר כְּעֶשֶׂה*. "Be bold -- as the leopard; and swift -- as the eagle; and quick -- as the deer; and powerful -- as the lion. And all this must be done -- in order to carry out the will of our Father in Heaven."