



## Halakha Source Sheet עיוני הלכה Redeeming Captives Rabbi Aaron Alexander

**Question:** *How far might the community go in redeeming captives?*

### 1) Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra, 8a/b

רבה רמא צדקה איתמי דבי בר מריון. אמר ליה אביי, והתני רב שמואל בר יהודה: אין פוסקין צדקה על  
היתומים – אפילו לפדיון שבויים! אמר ליה: אנא לאחשובינהו קא עבידנא  
איפרא הורמיז, אימיה דשבור מלכא, שדרה ארנקה דדינרי לקמיה דרב יוסף, אמרה: ליהוי למצוה רבה)  
יתיב רב יוסף וקא מעיין בה, מאי "מצוה רבה"? אמר ליה אביי: מדתני רב שמואל בר יהודה: אין פוסקין  
צדקה על היתומים אפילו לפדיון שבויים, שמע מינה פדיון שבויים מצוה רבה היא  
אמר ליה רבא לרבה בר מרי: מנא הא מילתא דאמור רבנו דפדיון שבויים מצוה רבה היא? אמר ליה  
– דכתביב: "והיה כי יאמרו אליך אנה נצא, ואמרת אליהם כה אמר ה', אשר למות – למות, ואשר לחרב  
לחרב, ואשר לרעב – לרעב, ואשר לשבי – לשבי". ואמר רבי יוחנן: כל המאוחר בפסוק זה קשה מחבירו

Rabba imposed charity on the orphans of the house of bar Maryon. Abaye said to him: But didn't Rav Shmuel bar Yehuda teach: One does not impose a charity on orphans even for the sake of redeeming captives, [since they are minors]!? Rabba said to him: I did this to elevate their status.

Ifera Hurmiz, the mother of King Shapur (Persia) sent a purse full of dinars to Rav Yosef. She said to him: Let [the money be used] for a great mitzvah. Rav Yosef sat and considered: What great mitzvah? Abaye said to him: From what Rav Shmuel bar Yehuda taught, that one does not impose a charity obligation on orphans even for the sake of redeeming captives, learn from this that redeeming captives is a great mitzvah.

Rava said to Rabba bar Mari: This matter that the Sages stated that redeeming captives is a great mitzva, from where is it derived? Rabba bar Mari said to him: As it is written: "And it shall come to pass, when they say to you: To where shall we depart? Then you shall tell them: So says the Lord: Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for famine, to famine; and such as are for captivity, to captivity" (Jeremiah 15: 2). And Rabbi Yoḥanan says: Whichever is written later in this verse is more severe than the one before it.



## עיוני הלכה Halakha Source Sheet

### Redeeming Captives

Rabbi Aaron Alexander

#### 2) Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 3b

שְׂרִיגִי. אָמַר לִיה רַבִּינָא לְרַב אֲשִׁי: גְבוּ זֹזִי וּמַחְתִּי, מָאִי? אָמַר לִיה: דִּילְמָא מִיתְרַמִּי לְהוּ פְדִיּוֹן שְׁבוּיִים, וְיִהְבִּי לְהוּ  
אִי הָכִי, לִיבְנִי, וְהַדְרִי הוֹדְרִי, וּמַחְתִּי כְּשׁוֹרִי, מָאִי? אָמַר לִיה: זְמַנִּין דְּמַתְרַמִּי לְהוּ פְדִיּוֹן שְׁבוּיִים, מְזַבְנִי וְיִהְבִּי לְהוּ  
אֲפִילוּ בְּנוּ נְמִי! אָמַר לִיה: דִּירְתִּיה דְּאִינְשֵׁי לֹא מְזַבְנִי

Ravina said to Rav Ashi: What if money [for the construction of a new synagogue] has already been collected and it rests for that purpose? [Can we knock the old one down yet?] Rav Ashi said to him: Even if the money has been collected, there is still concern that perhaps an opportunity for redeeming captives will present itself, and they will hand over the money, thus no synagogue will be present whatsoever. (i.e., don't knock it down yet...)

Ravina continues: What is the halakha if the bricks to be used for the construction of the new synagogue are piled up, the boards are prepared, and the beams are ready? [Can we knock the old one down yet?] Rav Ashi said to him: Sometimes an opportunity for redeeming captives will present itself, and they will sell the building materials and hand over the proceeds for this purpose. c) Ravina challenges: If so, even in a case where they already built the synagogue there should be a concern that they might come to sell the structure for that purpose, and therefore one should never be permitted to destroy an old synagogue. Rav Ashi said to him: People do not sell their residences, and certainly not their synagogues.

#### 6) Proverbs 24:11-12

הֲצַל לְקַחְתִּים לְמָוֹת וּמָטִים לְהָרֵג אִם-תְּחַשׂוּדָ: כִּי-תֹאמֶר הוֹ לֹא-גִדְעֵנוּ זֶה הֵלֵא-תִכְּנֹן לְבוֹתָ הוּא-יָבִין וְנִצֵּר נִפְשָׁד, הוּא יִדַע  
(11) וְהִשִּׁיב לְאָדָם כְּפַעְלוֹ:

If you refrained from rescuing those taken off to death, Those condemned to slaughter— 1If you say, “We knew nothing of it,” Surely God who fathoms hearts will discern [the truth], God who watches over your life will know it, And God will pay each person as they deserves

#### Conclusion:

1. Redeeming captives is a communal obligation
2. Redeeming captives takes precedence over other ways the community supports those in great need
3. There was an understanding of how far a community might go to redeem captives because it is viewed as the greatest obligation