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We continue our study of the mishnayot which begin Ta'anit Chapter Two. The translations here are from Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz's English edition of the Talmud, Volume 14 (Random House). Since we're going to go ahead in order, it may be worthwhile purchasing this volume, Rabbi Steinsaltz's Hebrew version of this tractate or a regular volume of the Bavli that contains this tractate.

Now, say to yourself, "I will not panic! I will understand this passage and if I don't I will email Judy for more help or ask my local rabbi or teacher." Do not, do not, *do not* panic! This passage is going to require you to do one of the really fun things in Talmud study: work with several books at once. Sit yourself down at a table with a regular prayerbook, a High Holiday prayerbook and a Bible (that's all of Scripture, not just Torah) and a copy of the Talmud or a print out of this page. Then make your way through the passages cited in these mishnayot. It's going to take some time, so set a good portion aside for this purpose. Go methodically, slowly and do it with joy. This should be an enjoyable, possibly meditative, experience. Be patient with yourself, especially if you don't have a lot of experience looking things up in the Tanach (the Hebrew name for the Bible).

Here's some background to help make this passage a bit more intelligible. The main prayer of Jewish liturgy is called simply Tefillah ("prayer") or Amidah ("[the] standing [prayer]") or Shemonah Esrei ("[the] eighteen [benedictions]). (Important concepts in Judaism are like characters in Russian novels: they have several names.) This prayer is something like a Kitchenaid mixer: there's the basic version and then a whole lot of attachments that can fundamentally change the nature of the machine. This mishnah details the "attachments" for fast days. You'll find two of those mentioned in the musaf (extra) service of Rosh Hashanah, the Zikhronot ("Rememberances") and Shofarot ("Shofars") and you might want to look at them there if you aren't familiar with them. The additions mentioned in this mishnah are inserted between the seventh blessing ("Redeemer of Israel") and the eighth one ("Who Heals the sick"). The blessings in the Amidah end with a formulaic "seal": "Blessed are You...". This mishnah describes the additional blessings and their appropriate "seals".

And he says before them twenty-four blessings, the eighteen of every day and he adds to them another six. And these are they: Zikhronot and Shofarot;

"In my distress, I cried to the Lord and he answered me (Psalm 120)";

"I will lift up my eyes to the hills, etc. (Psalm 121)";

"Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord (Psalm 130)";

"A Prayer of the afflicted, when he faints (Psalm 102)".

Rabbi Yehudah says: It is not necessary to say Zikhronot and Shofarot. Rather, he says instead of them:

"If there be famine in the land, if there be pestilence (I Kings 8:37)", [and]:

"The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the droughts. (Jeremiah 14:1)"

And he says their endings. For the first he says: "He Who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, He will answer you and will hearken unto the sound of your crying [on] this day. Blessed are You, O Lord, the Redeemer of Israel."

For the second he says: "He who answered our forefathers at the Red Sea, He will answer you and will hearken unto the sound of your crying [on] this day. Blessed are You, O Lord, who remembers the forgotten."

For the third he says: "He who answered Joshua at Gilgal, He will answer you and will hearken unto the sound of your crying [on] this day. Blessed are You, O Lord, who hearkens unto an alarm."

For the fourth he says: "He Who answered Samuel at Mitzpah, He will answer you and will hearken unto the sound of your crying [on] this day. Blessed are You, O Lord, who hearkens unto crying."

For the fifth he says: "He who answered Elijah on Mount Carmel, He will answer you and will hearken unto the sound of your crying [on] this day. Blessed are You, O Lord, who hearkens unto prayer."

For the sixth he says: "He who answered Jonah in the belly of the fish, He will answer you and will hearken unto the sound of your crying [on] this day. Blessed are You, O Lord, who answers in time of trouble.

For the seventh the says: "He who answered David and Solomon his son in Jerusalem. He will answer you and will hearkened unto the sound of your crying [on] this day. Blessed are You, O Lord, who has mercy on the land." (**M. Taanit 2:2 4**)

Discussion Questions:

1. Look up the passages named in the mishnah and match them to their appropriate "seals". (The first one, Redeemer of Israel, goes with the seventh blessing of the Amidah.) How do the seals match the texts? Do you think the elder leading prayer extemporaneously linked the psalm and the seal in some way? Try it. What would a sample "link" of text and seal sound like?

2. If you were to take a beseeching text from Scripture and "seal" it, which would it be and how would you seal it? It probably did not escape your notice that all the examples of God answering prayer in the mishnah are about men. How would the list of texts and seals look if we went through Scripture and related the times that God answered women's prayers? What if it was one (or several) of the "ritualized" stories of your life and the way God intervened on your behalf and a "seal" that summed up that narrative?

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