

Text Study: Pidyon Shvuyim - Redemption of Captives

(Adapted from www.theicenter.org)

Jewish sources offer an important frame for discussions about the necessity, and the cost, of redeeming captives. Redemption of captives – *pidyon shvuyim* – is a core value that Jewish law and tradition regard as a *mitzvah* - literally, a Jewish commandment. This text from Maimonides is often referred to in discussions about how far to go to redeem a captive. This text can be studied in *chevruta* (pairs) or small groups, or in full class discussions. Start by making sure you understand the passage, and then move on to discussing how it resonates for you and whether you agree.

Maimonides: Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Matanot Aniyim 8:10-11

“The redeeming of captives takes precedence over supporting the poor or clothing them. There is no greater mitzvah than redeeming captives for the problems of the captive include being hungry, thirsty, unclothed, and they are in danger of their lives too. Ignoring the need to redeem captives goes against these Torah laws: “Do not harden your heart or shut your hand against your needy fellow” (Devarim 15:7); “Do not stand idly by while your neighbor’s blood is shed” (Vayikra 19:16). And misses out on the following mitzvot: “You must surely open your hand to him or her” (Devarim 15:8); “...Love your neighbor as yourself” (Vayikra 19:18); “Rescue those who are drawn to death” (Proverbs 24:11) and there is no mitzvah greater than the redeeming of captives.”

Questions to consider:

- Why do you think Maimonides ranks this as the number one mitzvah? Do you agree?
- Do you find his argument compelling? Why or why not?
- How does this impact your consideration of the case of Gilad Shalit or the hostages taken captive on October 7, 2023?