

ב"ה Torah Tidbits

ISSUE 1522

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ישראל

י"ב תמוז תשפ"ג • 1 JULY 2023

פרשת בלק
PARSHAT BALAK
AVOT CHAPTER 6



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מה-טבו אהליך יעקב משכנתיד ישראל
במדבר כד:ה

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT TIMES PARSHAT BALAK

CANDLES 7:13PM • EARLIEST 6:20PM • HAVDALA 8:31PM • RABBEINU TAM 9:06PM



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HELPFUL REMINDERS

Last Opportunity to Say Kiddush Levana: Until 14 Tammuz, Sunday night July 2nd, all night.
The Fast of the "17th Day of Tamuz" is observed on Thursday July 6th. Fast ends 8:09pm (Jerusalem).

THIS WEEK'S COVER IMAGE!

Photographed by Zev Rothkoff - "I live in Efrat. My parents brought us on Aliyah 50 years ago. The photo was taken on a week long hike with Amitim Letiyulim in the Negev. The tents in the desert remind me of Ma Tovv from this week's Parsha."



A SHORT VORT | BY RABBI CHANUCH YERES

Rav, Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

In memory of my mother's yartzheit - Shirley Yaffa Yeres on 15th of Tammuz - Chaya Shaindel bat Alexander Halevi z"l)
יאמר בלך אל בלעם.....האמנם לא אוכל כבדר (כ"ב:ז')

"And Balak said to Bilaam...will I truly not be able to honor you? (22:37)

What was Balak hinting to Bilaam? Rashi answers that Balak was prophesizing unwittingly that Bilaam would eventually leave him in disgrace.

The Dubno Maggid (1740-1804) pointed out that this situation is analogous to a doctor who, after examining his patient, asked to be paid already in full before evening administering any treatment. The family member who had summoned the doctor was surprised and responded: "It seems that you have given up hope on this ill person. The fact that you are asking to be paid in full up front, implies that you feel there is no chance of survival. That's why you want your money now."

So too, this is what Balak said to Bilaam. Don't you think that I will be able to honor you?

Why do you insist that I show you all the honor immediately, up front? Is there some reason that you fear that I won't be able to honor you later, meaning that you won't succeed in your task?

Here we see how Balak, unintentionally, hints to the fact that Bilaam will ultimately fail and not be able to help him curse the Israelites.

- Shabbat Shalom

CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



	BALAK			PINCHAS		
	CANDLES	EARLY	HAVDALA	CANDLES	EARLY	HAVDALA
Yerushalayim / Maale Adumim	7:13	6:20	8:31	7:13	6:19	8:30
Aza area (Netivot, S'derot et al)	7:30	6:22	8:33	7:29	6:22	8:32
Beit Shemesh / RBS	7:32	6:21	8:32	7:31	6:21	8:31
Alon Shvut	7:28	6:20	8:31	7:28	6:20	8:30
Raanana / Tel Mond / Herzliya / K. Saba	7:31	6:22	8:34	7:30	6:22	8:33
Modi'in / Chashmona'im	7:29	6:21	8:32	7:29	6:21	8:31
Netanya	7:31	6:22	8:34	7:30	6:22	8:33
Be'er Sheva	7:29	6:21	8:31	7:28	6:20	8:30
Rehovot	7:30	6:22	8:33	7:29	6:22	8:32
Petach Tikva	7:13	6:22	8:34	7:13	6:22	8:32
Ginot Shomron	7:30	6:21	8:33	7:29	6:21	8:32
Haifa / Zichron	7:22	6:23	8:36	7:21	6:23	8:34
Gush Shiloh	7:29	6:20	8:32	7:28	6:20	8:31
Tel Aviv / Giv'at Shmuel	7:31	6:22	8:34	7:30	6:22	8:33
Giv'at Ze'ev	7:33	6:20	8:32	7:32	6:20	8:31
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	7:28	6:20	8:31	7:27	6:20	8:30
Ashkelon	7:30	6:22	8:34	7:30	6:22	8:32
Yad Binyamin	7:30	6:22	8:33	7:29	6:21	8:32
Tzfat / Bik'at HaYarden	7:26	6:21	8:34	7:25	6:21	8:33
Golan	7:29	6:20	8:33	7:28	6:20	8:31

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem) - 9:06PM • Next Week - 9:06PM

All Times According to MyZmanim (20 mins before Sunset in most Cities;
40 mins in Yerushalayim and Petach Tikva; 30 mins in Tzfat and Haifa)

Daf Yomi this Shabbat: Gittin 46



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JERUSALEM

Ranges 11 days Wed - Shabbat

June 28 - July 8 / 9 - 19 Tammuz

Earliest Tallit and Tefillin 4:36 - 4:41

Sunrise 5:36 - 5:40

Sof Zman Kriat Shema 9:09 - 9:12

Magen Avraham 8:25 - 8:28

Sof Zman Tefila 10:20 - 10:22

(According to the Gra and Baal HaTanya)

Chatzot (Halachic Noon) 12:42 - 12:44

Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha) 1:18 - 1:19

Plag Mincha 6:19

Sunset (Including Elevation) 7:53



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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
Executive Director, OU Israel

Over the past few months I traveled overseas on various work trips. Reuniting with many students, families, colleagues and friends, I prepared myself for the standard questions I know I'll receive. "Avi, help me explain the building of settlements to my co-workers." Or, "Avi, I know there must have been a reason why the IDF attacked Gaza, but I can't get a reasonable answer from the mainstream newspapers. Can you clarify what is really happening?" These questions are usually followed by a positive and dynamic discussion.

But I returned from my most recent trip abroad with a heavy heart. In contrast to my previous experiences, the questions I received were far more judgmental and disapproving. "Avi, how could people behave this way?" Or, "Things in Israel are really going sideways, eh Avi?" Although their attitudes changed drastically once I explained the political situation, it pained me to think people's feelings towards Israel were tarnished. Even if only momentarily.

These discussions resonate with this week's Parsha, where we learn about the power of speech. Balak, the King of Moav, summons Bilaam to curse the Jewish people. However, HaShem thwarts his attempts, and instead when Bilaam speaks, he blesses the Jewish people and shares prophecies for the times of *Mashiach*, many of which are coming to fruition today. I find this story a striking reminder of the responsibility we have to use our words for positive speech.

As someone who remains conscious of the *zechut* I have to call *Eretz Yisrael* my home, I feel a responsibility to share its beauty with others. It just so happens that in just four days I'll celebrate 38 years since my family made *aliyah*. In the spirit of this week's *parsha*, I'll share some experiences I had during my *aliyah* that continue to make an impression on me today.

My family made *aliyah* from New York on the 15th of *Tamuz* at a time before Nefesh b'Nefesh could ease our *aliyah*. I remember arriving in Israel with my family on a Thursday afternoon eager to see our new home in *Kedumim*. After hours of waiting in the airport for our documents to be processed, we arrived at our house exhausted and spent... to see the beauty of *Am Yisrael* unfold just minutes after entering the front door.

As we put our bags down and began situating ourselves, our neighbors knocked on the door. Between their broken English and my parents' broken Hebrew, we soon understood that we were being invited to their home for supper and that the

community arranged Shabbat meals for us so we could get settled. During dinner my parents reminded us that we would enter Shabbat only after visiting the *Kotel*, *Me'arat Hamachpelah* and *Kever Rachel*, and they had us go to sleep early so we could make the most of the next day.

In the morning we piled into an orange Volkswagen, driven by our cab driver Razi Levy, and embarked on our journey. I vividly remember seeing the *Kotel* for the first time and gazing upon the walls of the Old City. Throughout that morning I could not contain my excitement for our next destination. In my childhood home my parents hung a large photo of *Kever Rachel* on our living room wall. I often would find myself staring at it, imagining the stories in the Torah unfolding and wondering what it would feel like to stand so close to history. Finally, I would stand beside *Kever Rachel* and experience Jewish history up close.

As this was back in 1985, before the Oslo Accords, Razi stopped the car at a nondescript gas station. To my surprise, he got out of the car and casually pointed to *Kever Rachel* across the street. At first I could not believe that *Kever Rachel* looked just like the photo in my old living room. But as we crossed the street I thought about the proximity of the mundane gas station to such a holy site. It felt disrespectful to me, and I left *Kever Rachel* that day feeling deeply upset.

A few months later, during a *parshat HaShavuah* class, we learned about the passing of Rachel. Our teacher spoke about the fact that Rachel would always be the *Em HaDerech*, buried where her children could always find her. It occurred to me

then that because the Jewish people continues to thrive and build on the foundations established by our *avot* and *imahot*, something as mundane as a gas station continues to tell the story of Rachel - *Kever Rachel* is truly a stop on the traveler's way - and it is elevated as a result.

That moment opened my eyes to the realization that my parents brought me to a country filled with our history dating back thousands of years, and it is a country that continues to fulfill the prophecies. I suddenly appreciated that in Israel the *Tanach* is more than a storybook - it is a map that can teach me about my past. 38 years since making *aliyah*, this idea still excites me and I try to find opportunities to bring *Tanach* to life for my own children.

As I approach my *aliyah* date, I am reminded of the gift I have been given by my parents and *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* to call Israel my home, and am taking this opportunity to express my gratitude. In the spirit of this *parsha*, I encourage Torah Tidbits readers to utilize the power of positive speech and gratitude for *Eretz Yisrael*. This Shabbat, find opportunities to share your journey here and the ways in which your life has been enriched.

May the beauty of *Eretz Yisrael* continue to inspire us all, and may we continue to merit to see the blessing and prophecies of Bilaam come true.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,

Rabbi Avi Berman
Executive Director, OU Israel
aberman@ouisrael.org

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המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים



FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



The Indivisibility of the Jewish People

On October 8, 1913, the Beilis trial opened. The indictment accused "Menachem Mendel the son of Tuviah Beilis, 39," of having murdered "together with other people, not discovered, under duress of mysterious religious obligations and rituals, one Andrei Yustchinsky."

The lawyer that headed the defense team was the legendary Oscar Gruzenberg. He knew that the prosecution's attack was going to be directed against the Talmud and other works of Jewish scholarship, alleging support of the practice of ritual murder. He therefore enlisted Rabbi Yaakov Mazeh, Rabbi of Moscow, to head the rabbinic advisory team for the defense.

In the period leading up to the trial, Rabbi Mazeh received a letter from Rav Meir Shapiro, who would eventually be known to the world as the Lubliner Rav, initiator of the Daf Yomi and founder of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, but at the time was the 26-year-old Rav of the town of Galina. He wrote to Rav Mazeh anticipating that one of the citations that would be brought before the court would be the Talmudic statement (Yevamos 61a) that only the Jewish people are referred to as *Adam*,

man. Does this not imply that the Talmudic sages saw gentiles as subhuman and therefore justify their ritual murder?

Wrote Rav Meir Shapiro: Human beings are referenced in the Torah using a variety of terms: *adam*, *ish*, *enosh*, and *gever*. Each of those terms other than *adam* has a singular and plural form: one *ish*, two *ishim*; one *enosh*, two *anashim*; one *gever*, two *gvarim*, while "*adam*" has no plural form as it symbolizes how all people can constitute a single entity, everyone feeling they are part of the same body. That quality, taught Rav Meir, is manifest specifically in *Klal Yisrael* who uphold mutual responsibility as a core value, *kol Yisrael areivim zeh la'zeh*. As all of us constitute one *Adam*, no individual Jew can be separated from the entirety of the Jewish people. When one Jew named Mendel Beilis is on trial for murder, the hearts of Jews across Russia, Poland, England, and America, along with every Jew everywhere, are beating in rhythm with his and feel as if they are sitting with him on the bench of the accused. That inherent unity and fundamental solidarity of the Jewish people is why we are called *adam*.

When Balak invited Bilaam to curse the

Jewish people, he brought him to a vantage point from where he could see only part of the Jewish people; "You will see only a part of them; you will not see them all." Sforno (Bamidbar, 22:13) explains that Balak understood that there was no way Bilaam could bring destruction upon the eternal Jewish nation, but he felt that if he could isolate a group from the whole, they would indeed be vulnerable.

Evidently, he was wrong as Bilaam could not even effectively curse part of the people.

Balak was correct in principle. Had Bilaam successfully isolated a portion of the people, his curses may have been effective. His mistake was that he was trying to accomplish the impossible; as Rav Meir Shapiro taught, there is no such thing as isolating a part of our people from the whole. Whenever we are faced, r'l, with a tragedy, the entire Jewish community rallies to respond. Whether with financial support or prayers, the Jewish People are united. When one of us is hurt, the entire nation feels the pain.

From the perspective of Bilaam and his students, whose entire worldview is self-centered and driven by personal desires (see Pirkei Avot 5:19), the part - the individual or family - is indeed separate from the whole, living for itself and thinking about itself. But for the children and students of Avraham, "bestowers of loving-kindness, the children of bestowers of loving-kindness who embrace the covenant of Avraham Avinu" (Kesubos, 8b), our eyes and hearts are turned outward, always seeing ourselves as part of a whole. ■



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ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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PARSHAT BALAK

Parshat Balak is unique in the Torah; it is entirely from the perspective of those looking at the Jewish people. There is no other parsha like it. Here we are, moving toward the Land of Israel, having fought and defeated Sichon and Og last week. The entire flow of the Torah at this point is the description of this march. And then an entire parsha, not of the view of the Jew in the march, but the view of the non-Jew, fearful of this march. We have heard plenty of how the Jews feel during this march; unsure, fearful, confronted by opposition both from within and from the nations through whom they are marching. But this parsha is a peek at what it feels like to be on the other side; fearful of the power of the Jewish people. While *we* are fearful in the march, *they* are just as fearful of us. Or more accurately, they are actually more fearful of us than we of them.

And while the march to the Land has had success with the defeat of the mighty Sichon and Og, we are also at a moment of loss of leadership. We have suffered the death of Miriam and Aharon. With the loss of Miriam and Aharon, and the impending loss of Moshe, the great spiritual forces of the people are slipping away.

Perhaps it is this that Balak and Bilaam perceive; strength of spirit of the Jewish people, but spirit that is bound up with its

great leaders. With the loss of its leaders, perhaps its strength wanes as well.

So, they seek to curse the people, to puncture their spiritual strength with a Divine curse. But they err in treating the Jewish people with the yardstick of normal nations, whose fate rises and falls with the skill of its leaders. The strength of the Jewish people lies not in its leaders, but in the covenant with the Divine. We are marching to His beat. He is leading us to this land. Of course, we need leaders, but the Jewish people as a people have strength with whichever leaders we have. By virtue of that covenant. A covenant that lapses not.



1ST ALIYA (BAMIDBAR 22:2-12)

Balak, king of Moav, is afraid of the Jewish people; they are like an ox, licking clean all in its path. He sends messengers to Bilaam, requesting of him to curse the Jewish people. Bilaam said he would only do as G-d instructs. G-d told him not to go, for the Jewish people are blessed.

Balak figures that if the Jewish people

הקמת מצבה for
KURT ROTHSCHILD ז"ל
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July 7th - תמוז ה'תשע"ז

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can defeat the strongest of the strong, Sichon and Og, then defeating the Jewish people will require more than military prowess. He recognizes that the spirit of the Jewish people is its power. It is this spirit that must be disrupted.

This story is also a powerful lesson in self-perception. The spies thought that the people of the Land viewed them as grasshoppers. Here, Balak describes the Jewish people as oxen. The difference in the 2 is who is speaking; is it us imagining what people think of us or is it the people telling us what they actually think of us? The spies had no idea what the people of the Land thought of the Jewish people; all they could do was project. What do *I* think that *you* think of me? That says far more about me than it does about you. As if to say; if I were you, I would think of me as a grasshopper. Because that is what I think of myself. Here, Balak tells us himself what he thinks of the Jewish people. Oxen. Powerful. Formidable.



2ND ALIYA (22:13-20)

Bilaam told the messengers to return to Balak, as G-d instructed him not to join them. Balak tried again, with greater dignitaries as messengers. He promised Bilaam great honor. Bilaam replied that even the promise of a house full of silver and gold would not allow him to ignore G-d's word. G-d said: if these men want you to join them, you may go but only say what I tell you.

לעילוי נשמת
RABBI MACY GORDON Z"l
On his 6th yearzeit 10 Tamuz



3RD ALIYA (22:21-38)

Bilaam awoke, saddled his donkey and joined the noblemen of Moav. G-d was angry. An angel with a sword appeared in front of the donkey, so it swerved to the side. It then stood in front of a narrow path; Bilaam's leg was pushed against the side. It then blocked the way of a narrow path and the donkey stopped. Bilaam hit the donkey. The donkey spoke:

לעילוי נשמת
יעקב יוסף בן מרדכי הכהן ז"ל
JACOB ROTTENBERG Z"l

On his 15th yearzeit - 10 Tamuz
Mark & Livia Rottenberg
Shopsy & Miriam Kanarek

This story introduces us to the complexity of our relationship with the non-Jewish nations. Balak and Bilaam see a world of powers beyond the rational, physical world. They believe in the power to curse the people. And that this power is given to specific people. And we must assume that Bilaam had success in his powers, for Balak never questions Bilaam's ability. In addition, Bilaam enjoys communication from G-d. The Jewish people will need to contend with the world of the unseen when they enter the Land; people who believe in all sorts of powers that will vie with our G-d for our attention. There is fertile debate as to the veracity of Bilaam's powers; however, the simple reading of the story seems to indicate that he is a prophet, one who G-d speaks with and who has used his powers successfully before.



4TH ALIYA (22:39-23:12)

Balak and Bilaam build 7 altars, offer offerings and peer out at the Jewish people. G-d speaks to Bilaam, placing His words in his mouth. Bilaam returns to Balak and pronounces the prophecy: How can I curse a people that is not cursed? Oh, that my lot be theirs. Balak is not happy; Bilaam affirms that he says only what G-d places in his mouth.

With this glimpse of the other side, of what others think of us, we see not only the desire of Balak and Bilaam to injure us spiritually, for they know that is where our power lies. But it also reassures us that G-d is not only our G-d, but He has Power over the other nations as well. The great prophet Bilaam says only what G-d allows him to say. And were we to think we have lost His love through the various failings; we hear

why did you hit me? Have I not served you loyally? Bilaam then saw the angel with its sword. The angel spoke: you did not see what the donkey saw. Now go but only say as G-d instructs you to say. Bilaam continued with Balak's messengers, while Balak came to greet him. Why, Bilaam did you not come? Bilaam responded that he will say only what G-d instructs.

The talking donkey is a great image. Not the first animal to speak; the serpent in the garden of Eden also spoke. King Solomon is described as knowing the language of the animals. The speaking donkey can be seen as a satire. You, Bilaam, the one with prophecy, with great insight and vision, cannot see what a donkey can see. The donkey isn't known for its wisdom. And it sees more than you. That is a pretty humiliating moment for the prophet.

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5TH ALIYA (23:13-26)

Balak and Bilaam try a different location where only part of the Jewish people are visible. After offering offerings on 7 altars, G-d places His words in Bilaam's mouth. Bilaam returns to Balak and prophecies: G-d does not see iniquity in Israel. He is their benevolent King. They are not sorcerers; G-d acts for them. They are as lions. Balak is again unhappy; Bilaam affirms he says what G-d instructs him to say.

What are they hoping in choosing a different location? Perhaps Bilaam and Balak acknowledge that the Jewish people as a people are blessed. But not every single Jew. We have blemishes. When G-d looks at the whole, He sees that the good outweighs the weaknesses. If we can get Him to look at the blemishes, maybe He will overlook all the good. Oh, that we could learn from Bilaam and quit glaring at the blemishes but gaze at the Jewish people as a whole.



6TH ALIYA (23:27-24:13)

Balak and Bilaam try again from a different spot. Bilaam avoids his sorcery and gazes at the Jewish people. He prophecies: how wonderful are the Jewish people. They are as trees, watered gardens, powerful. G-d redeemed them; they are as crouched lions. Those that bless them are blessed. Balak is again angry; Bilaam affirms he says what G-d instructs.

Bilaam gazes at the Jewish people and sees its beauty. Balak who merely heard about the Jewish people saw them as an ox, licking clean all in its sight. Bilaam does not suffice with hearing, but looks at the people,

seeing them as trees, water, and gardens.



7TH ALIYA (24:14-25:9)

Bilaam prophecies regarding the other nations: all will fail to stop Israel, including Moav, Edom, Amalek, Keini. The Jewish people began to be seduced by the women of Moav, attaching to their gods. Pinchas arose and smote a Jewish man and Midianite woman before the people.

Balak understood the power of the Jewish people is in its relationship to G-d. And that relationship can be soured by inducing the Jews to sin. Appealing to human weakness and causing the men to sin is a true vulnerability of the Jewish people. Cursing may not work; reducing them to sin will.

HAFTORAH: MICHA 5:6-6:8

This week's *haftorah* makes mention of the incident of Balak the king of Moav hiring the sorcerer Bilaam to curse the Jewish people — the main topic of this week's Torah reading.

The prophet Micha prophesied about what will occur after the war of Gog and Magog, the war which precedes the coming of the Mashiach and the Final Redemption.

"And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples — like dew sent by

G-d, like torrents of rain upon vegetation that does not hope for any man and does not wait for the sons of men." The prophet describes how Hashem will remove the idols and sorcerers and how He will destroy the Jews' enemies.

Micha then goes on to rebuke the Jewish people for not observing Hashem's commandments, calling as witness the "mountains and hills" — a reference to the Avot and Imahot — and reminding them of the great things Hashem had done for them. He took them out of Egypt and replaced the curses that Bilaam wanted to utter against them with blessings.

The Jewish people respond by saying that they do not know how to serve Hashem and ask for guidance. The prophet reminds them of the Torah and that all they need to do is contained within it: "He has told you, O man, what is good, and what G-d demands of you: but to do justice, love kindness, and walk discreetly with your G-d." ■

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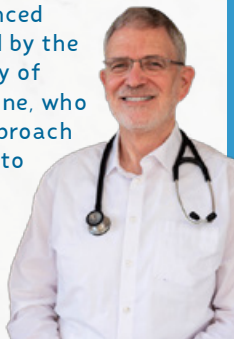
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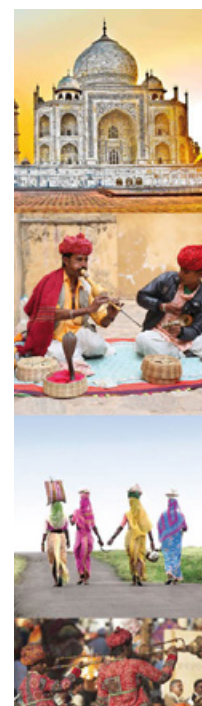
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STATS

40th of 54 sedras; 7th of 10 in Bamidbar.
Written on 177.8 lines (ranks 35th).

2 Parshiyot; 1 closed, 1 open.

There are 2 one-parsha sedras (Vayeitzei, Mikeitz), and then this one, on the fewest parshiyot in a sedra list.

104 p'sukim - rank 34 (8th Bamidbar).

1455 words - ranks 33 (8th Bamidbar).

5357 letters - rank 35 (8th Bamidbar).

Balak is close to average for the Torah's sedras but is on the small side for Bamidbar.

MITZVOT

Balak is one of 17 sedras in the Torah without mitzvot

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"We only hear what we want to hear. We only see what we want to see."

This statement about human nature, pessimistic though it may be, rings true to most of us. It helps explain all sorts of strange human behaviors, ranging from the question of why some of us have difficulties in communication to why the Jews of Eastern Europe failed to see the Holocaust looming on the horizon.

We are all familiar with the experience of listening to a speaker and discovering that we heard a very different message than did our companion, who was sitting right beside us in the audience.

We hear and see what we want to, and fail to hear and see the proverbial "writing on the wall", perhaps because it is so unpleasant to us that it simply does not register.

It was long ago, while still in college, that I learned that this observation about human nature has ancient roots in the history of philosophy. Of course, philosophers do not generally express themselves in terms that are easily understood. The great 18th-century philosopher Immanuel Kant

used the term "transcendental idealism" to refer to his contention that "the human mind creates the structure of human experience". For him, there is no such thing as a universal perception of the world around us. We each see the world differently, according to our own subjective interests, biases, and prejudices.

In simpler terms, we placed our own "constructs" upon everything that we see or hear, so that you may hear one message and I may hear an entirely different one. We may both be standing before the same picture, but you may see it one way, while an entirely different picture appears before me.

Nearly 200 years after Immanuel Kant wrote his treatise on this subject, a psychologist named George Kelly, considered by many to have been the father of modern clinical, cognitive psychology, used Kant's notion to formulate an approach to psychotherapy. He argued that we experience the world through the lens of our "constructs", which we used to interpret or construe new events. He insisted that each person's system of constructs is unique, and that by understanding an individual's system of constructs a therapist can help patients modify their constructs to enable them to better cope with their behavioral problems.

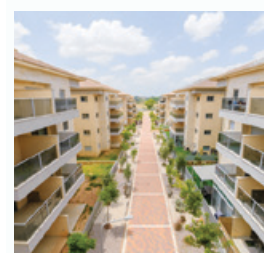
Many others have subsequently followed in the footsteps of Kant and Kelly. One of my favorites was a social psychologist



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named Gustav Ichheiser. A native Austrian, but had to flee when the Nazis invaded that country. He spent much of his life in exile, but wrote on the subject of social misunderstandings. He felt that we can better understand social and political conflict if we understand the degree to which we misperceive each other. He famously wrote, "what seems to be often constitutes a more solid psychological reality than what actually is."

I have a special interest in Ichheiser's otherwise obscure writings because of his insights into the nature of anti-Semitism. He provides an astute analysis of anti-Semitic behavior, based upon his numerous first-hand experiences with anti-Semites who "saw" clean Jews as "dirty", poverty-stricken Jews as wealthy, and helpless Jews as all-powerful.

The observations that I have just summarized help us understand the behavior of Balaam, the "anti-hero" of this week's Torah portion, Balak (Numbers 22:2-25:9).

He defied the Lord. This, despite his prophetic talents which, we are told, rivaled those of Moses himself, and despite his having heard the Lord's clear message not even to accompany those who would have him curse the Israelites, much less to actually curse them.

In the opening chapter of our Parsha we read of the mission upon which the elders of Moab and Midian set out. They bore the message of their king, Balak: "Put a curse on this people for me... Perhaps I can thus defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know... that he whom you curse is cursed."

Balaam does not immediately comply.

He tells them that he must first consult the Lord and then "I shall reply to you as the Lord may instruct me." But the Almighty clearly and forcefully tells Balaam: "Do not go with them. You must not curse that people, for they are blessed."


To condense the biblical narrative, we soon discover that Balaam persists in his willingness to accompany the messengers, and makes a wholehearted attempt to curse the Israelites. So persistent is he that the Lord begrudgingly grants him a vague permit to "go with them, but whatever I command you, that you shall do."

Commentators throughout the ages have been puzzled by Balaam's willful defiance of the Lord's initial instructions. Balaam, by his own testimony, knows the Almighty's mind. He receives a clear and unambiguous prophecy. Yet he fails to obey. How are we to understand this?

I propose that we apply the sentence with which I began this essay. "We only hear what we want to hear. We only see what we want to see." Balaam heard the Lord's command to desist from accompanying the messengers and to avoid cursing the Israelites. But he didn't "hear" that command because he did not "want to hear it". He "heard" it differently from the way we will hear it this Sabbath from the Torah reader in our local synagogue.


We hear a clear "Balaam, don't you dare!" But he heard a mild refusal, full of loopholes, subject to modification, and perhaps even capable of being withdrawn.

Using the terminology of Kant and Kelly, Balaam placed his own "construct" upon the words issued by the Divine. He heard those words filtered through the unique



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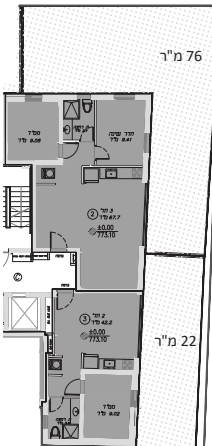



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"constructs" which he developed in the course of his life. Those constructs distorted the message so that he did not "hear" it as definite and unambiguous, but as subject to negotiation and interpretation.

What were Balaam's "constructs"? What aspects of his personality and character influenced his perception so that he could distort and attempt to disobey the Almighty's clear command?

I propose that an answer to this question can be found in a remarkable passage in Pirkei Avos, "Ethics of the Fathers" Chapter 5, Paragraph 22. It reads, "A generous eye, a modest demeanor and a humble soul are the traits of our father Abraham. An evil eye, an arrogant demeanor, and an insatiable soul are attributes of the disciples of the wicked Balaam."

If our "constructs" resemble Abraham's generosity, modesty, and humility then our perceptions will be unobscured. We will see and hear accurately. We will not distort the sensory impressions which we encounter in life. We will not "see and hear what we want to see and hear", but we will see what is real and hear what is spoken.

If, on the other hand, our "constructs" are based upon jealousy, arrogance, and insatiable material desires, those "constructs" will distort what we "hear and see", so that they will not interfere with our self-interests. Our "evil eye" will distort what we "see", and our "arrogant demeanor and insatiable soul" will assure that we "hear what we want to hear."

There is a lesson here for all of us, and it is an important one. Our inner selves determine how we perceive and how we react to our outer reality. We must model ourselves

after Abraham, so that generosity, modesty, and humility become the core of our inner selves, enabling us to "see and hear" clearly and correctly.

We must suppress our Balaam-like envy, arrogance, and insatiable desires, so that we no longer "hear and see what we want to hear and see" but clearly hear and see the full breadth, depth, and beauty of our wondrous world. ■

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With thanks and Toda. Love, Yoni

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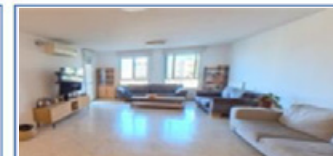
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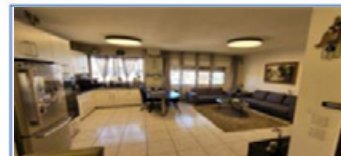
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What Makes God Laugh

There is an old saying that what makes God laugh is seeing our plans for the future¹. However, if Tanach is our guide, what makes God laugh is human delusions of grandeur. From the vantage point of heaven, the ultimate absurdity is when humans start thinking of themselves as godlike.

There are several pointed examples in the Torah. One whose full import has only recently become clear occurs in the story of the Tower of Babel. Men gather together in the plain of Shinar and decide to build a city and a tower "that will reach to heaven" (Gen. 11:4). As it happens, we have archaeological confirmation of this fact. Several Mesopotamian ziggurats, including the temple of Marduk in Babylon, have been found with inscriptions saying that they reach heaven.²

The idea was that tall buildings – man-made mountains – allowed humans to climb to the dwelling place of the gods and thus communicate with them. The Mesopotamian city states were among the first places of civilisation, itself one of the turning points in the history of human life on earth. Before the birth of agriculture, the ancients lived in fear of nature: of predators, of other tribes and bands, and of the vicissitudes of heat and cold, drought and flood. Their fate depended on matters beyond their control.

Only with the spread of domesticated animals and agriculture did people gather in towns, then cities, then empires. A tipping point occurred in the balance of power between nature and culture. For the first time humans were not confined to adapting to their environment. They could adapt their environment to suit them. At this point they – especially the rulers – began to see themselves as gods, demigods, or people with the power to influence the gods.

The most conspicuous symbol of this was buildings on a monumental scale: the

Enuma Elish as "Esagila," which means "the house of the lifting up of the head." Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar both repaired this building, inscriptions to which say that they "raised high the head" of the tower "to rival the heavens." Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), p. 73.

ziggurats of Babylon and other Mesopotamian cities, and the pyramids of Egypt. Built on the flat land of the Tigris-Euphrates valley and the Nile delta, they towered over their surroundings. The great pyramid of Giza, built even before the birth of Abraham, was so monumental that it remained the tallest man-made structure on earth for four thousand years.

The fact that these were artificial mountains built by human hands suggested to their builders that humans had acquired godlike powers. They had constructed a stairway to heaven. Hence the significance of the phrase in the Torah's account of the tower, "And the Lord *came down to see* the city and the tower, which the children of man had built" (Gen. 11:5). This is God laughing. On earth, humans thought they had reached the sky, but to God the building was so infinitesimal, so microscopic that he had to come down even to see it. Only with the invention of flight do we now know how small the tallest building looks when you are looking down from a mere 30,000 feet.

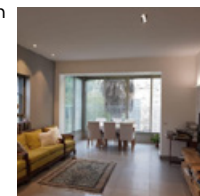
To end their hubris God simply said, let us "confuse their language" (Gen. 11:7). They no longer understood one another. The entire project was turned into French farce. We can visualise the scene. A foreman calls for a brick and is handed a hammer. He tells a worker to go right and he turns left. The project foundered in a welter of incomprehension. Men thought they could climb to heaven but in the end they could not even understand what the person next to them was saying. The unfinished tower became a symbol of the inevitable failure of vaunting ambition. The builders achieved what they sought but not



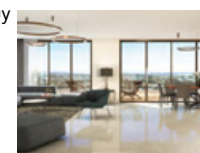
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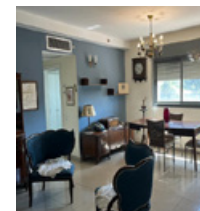
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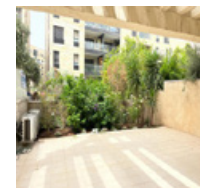


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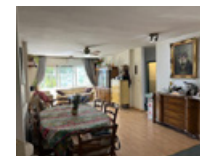


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in the way they intended. They wanted to “make a name for themselves” (Gen. 11:4) and they succeeded, but instead of becoming a byword for man’s ability to reach the sky, Babel became babble, an emblem of confusion. Hubris became nemesis.

The second example was Egypt during the early plagues. Moses and Aaron turned the water of the Nile into blood and filled Egypt with frogs. We then read that the Egyptian magicians did likewise to show that they had the same power. So concerned were they to show that they could do what the Hebrews could do, that they entirely failed to realise that they were making things worse, not better. The real skill would have been to turn blood back into water, and make frogs not appear but disappear.

We hear the Divine laughter especially

in the third plague: lice. For the first time, the magicians tried and failed to replicate the effect. Defeated, they turned to Pharaoh and said, “This is the finger of God.” The humour comes when we remember that for the Egyptians the symbol of power was monumental architecture: pyramids, temples, palaces and statues on a massive scale. God showed them His power by way of the tiniest of insects, painful yet almost invisible to the eye. Again hubris became nemesis. When people think they are big, God shows them they are small – and vice versa. It is those who think themselves small – supremely so Moses, the humblest of men – who are truly great.

This explains the otherwise curious episode of Bilam’s talking donkey. This is not a fanciful tale, nor simply a miracle. It arose because of the way the people of Moab and Midian thought of Bilam – and perhaps, by extension, the way he thought of himself. Balak the Moabite king, together with the leaders of the Midianites, sent a delegation to Bilam asking him to curse the Israelites: “Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me ... for I know that whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse is cursed” (Num. 22:6).

This is a pagan understanding of the holy man: the shaman, the magus, the wonder-worker, the person with access to supernatural powers. The Torah’s view is precisely the opposite. It is God who blesses and curses, not human beings. “I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you I will curse,” God said to Abraham (Gen. 12:3). “They shall place My name on the children of Israel and I will bless them,” He said about the priests (Num. 6:27). The

idea that you can hire a holy man to curse someone essentially presupposes that God can be bribed.

The narrative is admittedly obscure. God tells Bilam not to go. Balak sends a second delegation with a more tempting offer. This time God tells Bilam to go with them but say only what He instructs him to say. The next morning Bilam sets out to go with the Moabites, but the text now states that God was “angry” with him for going (Num. 22:22). That is when the episode of the donkey takes place.

The donkey sees an angel barring the way. It turns aside towards a field but Bilam hits it and forces it back to the path. The angel is still barring the way and the donkey veers into a wall, crushing Bilam’s foot. Bilam hits it again, but finally it lies down and refuses to move. That is when the donkey begins to speak. Bilam then looks up and sees the angel, who had been hitherto invisible to him.

Why did God first tell Bilam *not* to go, then that he *should* go, and then become angry when he went? Evidently God could read his mind and knew that Bilam did really want to curse the Israelites. We know this because later, after the attempt to curse the Israelites failed, Bilam succeeded in causing them harm, advising the Midianites to get their women to seduce the Israelite men, thus provoking the anger of God (Num. 31:16). Bilam was no friend of the Israelites.

But the story of the talking donkey is another instance of Divine laughter. Here was a man reputed to be a maestro of supernatural forces. People thought he had the power to bless or curse whomever he chose. God, the Torah tells us, is not like



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that at all. He had two messages, one for the Moabites and Midianites, another for Bilam himself.

He showed the Moabites and Midianites that Israel is not cursed but blessed. The more you attempt to curse them the more they will be blessed and you yourself will be cursed. That is as true today as it was then. There are movements throughout the world to curse the state and people of

Israel. The greater the malice of Israel's enemies, the stronger Israel becomes, and the more disasters its enemies bring upon their own people.

God had a different message for Bilam himself, and it was very blunt. If you think you can control God, then, says God, I will show you that I can turn a donkey into a prophet and a prophet into a donkey. Your animal will see angels to which you yourself are blind. Bilam was forced to admit:

How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced? (Num. 23:8)

Hubris always eventually becomes a nemesis. In a world in which rulers engaged in endless projects of self-aggrandisement, Israel alone produced a literature in which they attributed their successes to God and their failures to themselves. Far from making them weak, this made them extraordinarily strong.

So it is with us as individuals. I had a beloved friend, no longer alive, about whom it was said that "he took God so seriously that he didn't need to take himself seriously at all." Pagan prophets like Bilam had not yet learned the lesson we must all one day learn: that what matters is not that God does what we want, but that we do what He wants. God laughs at those who think they have godlike powers. The opposite is true. The smaller we see ourselves, the greater we become. ■

These weekly teachings from Rabbi Sacks zt"l are part of his 'Covenant & Conversation' series on the weekly Torah teaching. With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel. Visit www.RabbiSacks.org for more.



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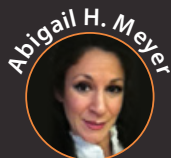
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TIME	MONDAY 7/10 & 7/17	TUESDAY 7/11 & 7/18	WEDNESDAY 7/12 & 7/19	THURSDAY 7/13 & 7/20
9:30AM to 10:30AM EST	MRS. RIVKA SEGAL <i>Living Tehillim: Find Yourself in the Songs of Tehillim</i>	DR. HINDI POSY <i>"Rifah Na Lah": A Contemporary Medical Perspective on Women's Health in Tanach</i>	MRS. RIVKA SEGAL <i>Living Tehillim: Find Yourself in the Songs of Tehillim</i>	DR. HINDI POSY <i>"Rifah Na Lah": A Contemporary Medical Perspective on Women's Health in Tanach</i>
10:45AM to 11:45AM EST	MRS. SHALVIE FRIEDMAN <i>The Three Principles: Faith According to the Sefer Haikrim</i>	MRS. MICHAL HOROWITZ <i>Tikun Hamiddot Based on the Iggeret HaRamban</i>	MRS. SHALVIE FRIEDMAN <i>The Three Principles: Faith According to the Sefer Haikrim</i>	MRS. MICHAL HOROWITZ <i>Tikun Hamiddot Based on the Iggeret HaRamban</i>
8:00PM to 9:00PM EST	MRS. RIVKA MARON <i>Beyond Rav Saadya Gaon</i> — ABIGAIL H. MEYER — <i>In the Shadow of the Beit Hamikdash Revisited: Jewish Art and Architecture of Antiquity</i>	RABBANIT SHANI TARAGIN <i>Money and Mitzvot Matters</i>	MRS. RIVKA MARON <i>Beyond Rav Saadya Gaon</i> — ABIGAIL H. MEYER — <i>In the Shadow of the Beit Hamikdash Revisited: Jewish Art and Architecture of Antiquity</i>	RABBANIT SHANI TARAGIN <i>Money and Mitzvot Matters</i>



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Halacha



Tanach

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Rabbi David Walk
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10:20 AM

Mishnah with Rambam's
commentary **Rabbi Dr.
Aaron Adler**

11:30 AM

Shivat Tzion in Tanach:
**Rabbi Yitzchak
Breitowitz**

2:00 PM

Men's Talmud
Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

***L'AYLA CLASSES
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MON, JULY 3

9:15 AM

Divrei Hayamim (L'Ayla)
Rebbetzin Pearl Borow

10:30 AM

The Thought of Rav Kook
on Eretz Yisrael: A study of
the sefer Eretz Chefetz
Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

11:45 AM

Novel Parsha Nuances
Rabbi Avi Herzog

8:30 PM

Semichat Chaver
Program **Rabbi Elyada
Goldwicht** (The Bais)

TUE, JULY 4

9:15 AM

Rebbetzin Shira Smiles
Torah Tapestries (L'Ayla)
(Resumes July 11)

10:30 AM

Parshat HaShavua
Rabbi Yosef Goldin

9:30AM Minchat Chinuch
Rabbi Breitowitz

2:00 PM Men's Talmud
Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

7:30PM (The Bais) Safrus
(Men) **Rabbi Tzvi Mauner**

8:00PM
Sefer Shmuel **Rabbi Machlis**

SPECIAL EVENT

9:15AM-1:00PM
L'Ayla-Full morning of
Learning for Women

WED, JULY 5

9:00 AM

Torah and Technology
Rabbi Shimshon Nadel
(new course)

10:15 AM

Contemporary Halachic Issues
Rabbi Anthony Manning

11:30 AM

Ani Maamin-But Do You Know
if it's Really True? (new course)
**Rabbi Yitzchak
Feigenbaum**

12:30 PM Lunch and Learn
Rabbi Neil Winkler

8:00 PM
Halachic Controversies
Rabbi Aschi Dick (The Bais)

SPECIAL EVENT

8:00PM-12:30PM
ATID (Young Olot Ages
18-30) Three Weeks
program - **Rabbi
Menachem Nissel**

THURS, JULY 6

9:00 AM

Parshat HaShavua
Rabbi Ari Kahn

10:15 am

Parshat HaShavua
Rabbi Baruch Taub

11:30 AM

Unlocking the Messages
of Chazal
Rabbi Shai Finkelstein
(Resumes July 13)

2:00 PM

Men's Talmud-Mesechta –
Bava Basra
Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld



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Rabbi Taub

Parsha, 7:00PM Mon
Halacha, 7:00PM Wed

Rebbetzin Shatz

(L'Ayla)-Insights of
Chazal- Tues, 5:00PM

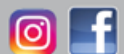
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Parshat HaShavua
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Sefer Michah, the sixth book in Trei Asar (a collection of the prophecies from the twelve “minor” prophets) is the source from which this week’s haftarah is taken. The book consists of seven prakim that focus, primarily, on the navi’s condemnation of Israel both for her lack of faithful adherence to Hashem and for her unethical behavior one to another. Michah HaMorashti, as the text refers to him, was a younger contemporary of Amos, Hoshe’a and Yishayahu, and he censured both Israelite states: the Northern Kingdom of Shomron and the Southern Kingdom of Yehudah.

One who studies through the text would find the opening chapters filled with the prophet’s warning of the approaching divine punishment, in which he describes Hashem’s impending devastation of Shomron, due to her corrupt behavior and the eventual destruction of Yerushalayim, who followed in the same ways. This same dark theme continues as Michah’s berates the nation’s leaders for their corruption of justice, their avarice and their thievery and goes on to condemn the false prophets whose fabricated prophecies led the nation to ignore the warnings of G-d’s prophets and to continue on their sinful ways.

In the middle of all of these depressing messages we hear the words of hope echoing in our ears: “V’hayah sh’erit Ya’akov...”

the opening words of our haftarah carries the promise that Israel will be a blessing to all of the nations who, like welcome rain, depends on no person – but on Hashem alone. These surprising visions of hopefulness and faith in the midst of the navi’s prophecies of doom, seem to have no place here at all. Promises of victory over the enemy and a final destruction of Israel’s tormentors should have formed a separate section of the navi’s words. In fact, were we to read the p’sukim that follow the closing of our haftarah selection, we would be quite surprised at Michah’s disapproval –indeed, severe criticism – of Israel’s behavior. The vision of hope and promise seems to be all but forgotten in the continued condemnation that the prophet rains down upon the nation, condemnation that goes on into the very final perek - and even includes the navi’s lament over the coming destruction.

And yet, the optimistic promises that unexpectedly interrupt the prophet’s censure actually color the entire tone of Michah’s message and helps us better understand what the prophet’s overall censure is meant to accomplish. Although




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we tend to focus upon the closing words of our haftarah, those that express the simple demands of Hashem, (“to do justice, love kindness and walk ‘humbly’ with your G-d”), the prophet’s purpose is to bring Israel back to Hashem, and the condemnations that fill Michah’s painful address is best understood in the earlier verses of the haftarah. It is there that the navi challenges the people with a simple question:


“My nation” cries G-d, “what wrong did I do to you – how did I tire you? Answer me!” Hashem’s “emotional” outburst placed in the mouth of Michah, challenged the people to look back at their faithlessness in light of the kindnesses and compassionate acts He performed for them. (Indeed, it is in these few verses that the navi makes mention of the events in this parasha and Hashem’s reversal of Bil’am’s curses). The prophet’s depiction of the sins of Israel were made precisely to allow the nation to objectively see how poorly they behaved in light of the kindly way G-d dealt with them.

It is THIS message that Michah hoped would serve as a “wake-up call” to the corrupt nation. Let them know that they still had time to return to He Who has endless compassion.

That is always the lesson...for us as well. ■



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The Power of a Mitzva

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בִּלְק לֶךְ-נָא אִתִּי אֶל-מָקוֹם אֲחֵר
אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶנּוּ מִשָּׁם אֶפֶס קִצְהוּ תִרְאֶה וְכָלוּ לֹא
תִרְאֶה וְקִבְנוּ-לִי מִשָּׁם: וַיִּקְחֵהוּ שִׂדֵּה צִפִּים אֶל-
רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה וַיִּבֶן שִׁבְעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וַיַּעַל פֶּר וָאֵיל
בְּמִזְבְּחָם: (במדבר כג: יג-יד)

Balak said to him (Bilam), "Come with me to another place from where you will see them; however, you will see only a part of them, not all of them and curse them for me from there. He took him to the field of the lookouts, to the peak of the mountain, and he built **seven altars and offered up a bull and a ram on [each] altar**. (Bamidbar 23:13-14)

Balak asks Bilam to curse Am Yisrael and then builds seven altars upon which to sacrifice to God so that Bilam's curse will take effect. At first glance, one may speculate that Balak's sacrifices are insincere and therefore not viewed favorably and are totally ineffective. Yet, as Rav Schwab points out in his sefer *Maayan Beit Hashoava*, in the Talmud (Sota 47a) we are taught:

והאמר רב יהודה אמר רב לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ובמצוות ואע"פ שלא לשמה שמתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה שבשכר ארבעים ושנים קרבנות שהקריב בלק מלך מואב זכה אלף עולות יעלה שלמה ויצתה ממנו רות

שיצא ממנו שלמה שכתוב ביה (מלכים א ג:ד)

Rav Yehuda in the name of Rav says: A person should always engage in Torah study and in performance of mitzvot, even if he does so not for their own sake, as through such acts performed not for their own sake, one will come to perform them for their own sake. He proves the value of a mitzva done not for its own sake: As in reward for the forty-two offerings that Balak, king of Moab, brought, he merited that Ruth descended from him, from whom King Solomon descended, about whom it is written that he brought many offerings: "A thousand burnt-offerings did Solomon offer up" (I Kings 3:4).

The gemara extrapolates a well-known principle from Balak's actions. One should fulfill a mitzva *shelo lishma* – "*shemetoch shelo lishma ba lishma*." This is derived from the fact that although Balak offered sacrifices without the proper intent, he was rewarded with descendants that included Ruth and Shlomo Hamelech – the latter of which offered many sacrifices.

MERIT OF A MITZVA

The performance of a mitzva has unbelievable consequences, even without the proper intent. We find this elsewhere where a small mitzva can have a tremendous impact. We are told that Moshe feared fighting Og, because he informed Avraham that Lot was taken captive. Although Og's intention was that Avraham



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will be killed at war and Og could then marry Sarah, Moshe still feared that Og may have had *zechuyot* from helping save Lot's life, that could lead Og to be victorious over Moshe and Klal Yisrael.

Similarly, Chazal tell us that Yaakov feared his confrontation with Esav, because Esav may have had *zechuyot* from his fulfillment of the mitzva of *Kibud av v'em and Yishuv ha'aretz* - two mitzvot that Yaakov was unable to fulfill while he was in the house of Lavan.

We learn from Balak's offering of sacrifices, the power of a mitzva. If he merited Shlomo Hamelech as a descendant for his insincere offerings, consider what one would merit for fulfilling mitzvot wholeheartedly. May we be able to fulfill mitzvot with the proper intent. ■

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Relationship Revealed

“Lo hibeet aven be’Yaakov ve’lo ra’ah amal beYisrael – [Hashem] does not look at wrongdoing in Yaakov and He sees no iniquity in Israel,” (*Bamidbar 23:21*) This sweeping praise from Bilam is powerful enough to be mentioned in the Malchiyot section of Mussaf on Rosh Hashanah. How, though, are we to understand this idea? Sin is unfortunately a reality for us, there is no denying it.

Rav Zaidel Epstein in *Sefer He’arot* explains that even if a Jew commits a sin, it does not become part of his essence. Shlomo Hamelech tells us so sweetly in his Song of Songs, “*Kulach yafa ra’ayati, u’mum ein bach* – You are all beautiful my beloved and there is no blemish in you.” (*Shir Hashirim 4:7*) This is how we must view ourselves, intrinsically pure and holy. We can never fall into despair that we are mired in sin with no recourse to ever improve.

The Slonimer Rebbe in *Netivot Shalom* elaborates on this theme. Hoshea Hanavi enjoins us, “*Shuva Yisrael ad Hashem Elokecha ki kashalta be’avonecha* - Return, Israel, to Hashem your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity.” (*Hoshea 13:2*) The word “*avon*”, iniquity, is a term used for purposeful sin. How can one willfully sin?

The Rebbe explains that every time a Jew sins, even if it is deliberate, it is considered philosophically an “accidental stumbling.” One only sins when overcome by a spirit of foolishness, as Chazal teach us. Clearly, if one would know the impact of violating the Will of Hashem, one would never “sell their birthright for a pot of lentils.” We can liken this to the wonder exhibited by a simple villager who sees a chandelier for the first time and is taken by the rope that holds it in place. When he cuts the rope and the chandelier comes crashing down, he is dismayed since he obviously had no intention of causing damage and darkness, he just wanted the rope. Similarly, Hashem looks at our sins understanding our foolishness and does not hold us responsible for the immense implications of our actions.

Rav Wolbe quotes an amazing Midrash articulating that the *brachot* of Bilam were greater than the *brachot* of Yaakov Avinu. The latter critiqued the people, while Bilam just praised them. The difference, teaches Rav Wolbe, is in perspective. Yaakov Avinu was speaking as a leader of the people, always aware that there is room for improvement. In contrast, Bilam’s perspective focuses on the connection between Hashem and His people. Hashem will always be with us, regardless of our flaws

רפואה שלמה
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and misdeeds. This idea is reflected in two of the *brachot* we say in *Birkos Hashachar* every morning. We first speak of “*Ozer Yisrael b’gevurah*,” Hashem girds us with strength to channel our energies toward fulfilling His Will. Then we say “*Oter Yisrael betif’ara*,” Hashem crowns us with His glory, even with our shortcomings. This is powerfully invigorating, to realize that despite all of our deficiencies, Hashem still loves us and will never abandon us. On our end, we must build on this confidence in our inherent holiness, continually deepening and broadening our relationship with our Maker. ■

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Author of *Baderech: Along the Path of Teshuva* (Mosaica 2021)

Yud Beis Tamuz: Obligation!

Rabbi Avrohom Drizin, known as ‘Avrohom Mayorer’ (named after his Russian hometown), was a dedicated *chasid* of all three Lubavitcher Rebbes in the 20th Century. A one-man *chesed* institution, in Russia he was the Rosh Yeshivah of Lubavitcher Yeshivah of Nevel, in Israel he helped build Kfar Chabad, and in Crown Heights he was appointed as a *shadar* (*shlucha d’rabbanan*) by the Frierdiker Rebbe, Reb Yosef Yitzchok. He was a master of *mesirus nefesh* and respected by all as a great *oveid* and a powerful *mashpiah* or spiritual guide.

Reb Avrohom would often travel alone through the United States teaching Torah, recruiting *talmidim* and fundraising for Yeshivah Tomchei Temimim. Once, when was in his late 70’s, he visited a Jewish community in Houston, Texas to be *mezakeh*, to strengthen the Jews, and provide them an opportunity to support the Yeshivah.

After davening Maariv in a shul there, when everyone else had left for home, Reb Avrohom asked the *gabbai* if he could remain in the shul. The shul’s manager had no problem trusting the elderly, *ehrlischeh*

Chasidic visitor: “Of course, be our guest! Just please lock up on your way out.”

When the *gabbai* arrived early next morning to set up for Shacharis, he was shocked to find Reb Avrohom sitting in the exact place he left him the night before. “Rabbi! Did you go home? Did you sleep here on a bench?” “No, I didn’t,” Reb Avrohom admitted. “So, pardon for me asking, but what were you doing?” “Well,” he smiled shyly, “I was *farbrenging*!” Puzzled, the *gabbai* looked around at the empty, silent sanctuary. “What? *Farbrenging* with whom?”

“Myself! It’s *Yud Beis Tamuz*, the day my Rebbe was freed from prison. Therefore myself and my friends — the Rebbe’s other students and emissaries — also gained a new lease on life on this day.”

With incredible *mesirus nefesh*, sacrifice and fearlessness, Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the Frierdiker, or ‘Previous’, Lubavitcher Rebbe, dedicated his life to battling the oppressive Bolshevik policies of the former Soviet Union. Fighting the atheist Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the Frierdiker Rebbe made every effort to encourage Torah observance. He created and led a clandestine network of schools, a life-line of Yiddishkeit throughout the land. He funded *shechita* and *mikva’os*, and kept orthodox Judaism alive in Russia. Over the decades of his

leadership, he was arrested and imprisoned numerous times for “counter-revolutionary” activities, and in 1927, he was sentenced to death. Following a massive international campaign and political pressure, his sentence was commuted to prison and banishment.

Yud Beis Tamuz marks the Frierdiker Rebbe’s salvation and ultimate release from the evil *gezeira*. For the next quarter century in Latvia, and later in the United States, he continued to lead with intensity and focus, spurring the growth and reach of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement.

Reb Yechezkel ‘Chatche’ Feigin was a leader of the Chabad underground in the USSR, and the Frierdiker Rebbe’s right hand man and trusted *mazkir* (secretary). Reb Chatche’s position as *mazkir* took up most of his day, leaving little time for his personal devotions and Torah learning. A dedicated *oveid* accustomed to having time and headspace for lengthy davening with deep *kavanah*, he asked that the Rebbe allow him more time for his own *ruchniyus*, spiritual needs.

“Chatche... In Gluboke, near Vitebsk,” the Rebbe responded, “there is need for a new yeshivah.”

Reb Chatche understood that the Rebbe was not *mevateir*, did not permit. Like most of the heroes of that era, Reb Chatche was known as a resilient, strong person. But here, uncharacteristically, he began to cry. The Rebbe began to cry along with him, “Oy, Chatchkeh! I understand you... it is the same for me! But what should we do? Sit by with folded arms?”

Reb Chatche shouldered his obligation and continued his *shlichus* faithfully until his murder *al kidush Hashem* by the Germans.

Haunted by the painful memories and horrific suffering he had endured, broken in body and spirit, a holocaust survivor arrived at 770 Eastern Parkway to seek consolation and blessing from the Frierdiker Rebbe. The Yid was consumed by survivors’ guilt. He had lost his wife and children, and was the lone survivor of a large extended family and community. “Why did I survive while the others did not?” he asked the Frierdiker Rebbe, pointedly. What merit do I have over my friends and *mishpacha*? What *zechus*, what merit do I have to be alive?”

Zechus? Chov! “Merit? Obligation!” The Frierdiker Rebbe’s clear and emphatic response turned the Jew’s life around with just two words.

May we “gain a new lease on life” this *Yud Beis Tamuz*. May we draw inspiration from the heroism and sacrifice of the Previous Rebbe, and recommit ourselves to Yiddishkeit and the wellbeing of others. ■

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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

Program Director, OU Israel Center

Rav Elazar Shach, zt"l, the great and saintly Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Ponevitch in Bnai Brak, had a neighbor—a pious baal habayit who was particularly learned—whose sons grew to all be exceptional Torah scholars. Rav Shach himself lived and breathed Torah all the time, yet his neighbor's children appeared to surpass his own in their total dedication to Torah study. Rav Shach himself commented on what seemed to him at the root of the distinction.

"My neighbor spent a long time at the *Shabbat* table interacting with his children and singing *zemirot*. I, on the other hand, was always very engrossed in working through a difficult *Rambam* or some other intricate Torah argument. One should never underestimate the power of our *Shabbat* tables to fill our children with a spirit of holiness through singing *zemirot* together and speaking *Divrei Torah* together on their level...."

In our sedra this week, we read that *Balak*, the King of *Moav* sent messengers to enlist the assistance of *Bilaam* the prophet to curse the Jewish People. The *pasuk* states:

"Vayishlach Malachim el Bilam ben B'or **Petora** asher al Hanahar eretz bnai amo likro lo...."

"And he sent messengers to Bilam Ben B'or, at **Petora** which was on the river in his native land to enlist him...."

At first glance this verse is telling us that **Petora** was the name of the place where Bilam was stationed, which was located near

the river. However in a famous comment, Rashi, based on the Midrash Tanchuma, offers a different insight:

Petora: "Like a money changer, who sits before a table and people lay out their coins on the table to exchange currency, so too people would come to Bilam and lay out their written requests before him to offer his prophetic insights..."

Rabbi Moshe Wolfson, shlita points out that seemingly based on this midrash cited by Rashi, Bilam's wisdom and prophetic energy occurred while he was seated at this specific table, at this specific location. So too, many of the enemies of the Jewish people have sat around their tables to plot to harm us.

Each and every *Shabbat* as we sit at our *Shabbat* tables we recite the verse from the 23rd psalm—"*Taaroch lefani shulchan, neged tzorerai...*" "*Set before me a table in full view of my enemies.*"

Rabbi Wolfson explains that the antidote to each and every *Bilam* who sits around a table to plot to harm the Jewish People, is the way we conduct ourselves when we sit around our tables!

Taaroch lefani shulchan, neged tzorerai—The hospitality, joy, singing, Torah learning and unity that we create at our *Shabbat* tables, is the greatest *shmira*, protection from all those who sit at their tables and plot to do us harm.

Yehi Ratson, may each of us be blessed to realize the great gift that is *Shabbat Kodesh*.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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The Keini Challenge

Bilaam was certainly persistent. He desperately tried to jinx the Jewish people with pagan spells. When his attempts were repeatedly thwarted, he finally realized that everything, including human speech, is mandated by Hashem. He returns to his homeland of Midyan in shame, deprived of the riches and rewards he so desperately coveted. This has been a wasted road trip for the legendary prophet from Midyan.

Before he departs though, he delivers a final message, this time a prophecy, rather than a curse. Casting his gaze to the end of time, he maps the Messianic era. After portraying the arrival of Moshiach as a meteoric star which shoots across heavens, Bilaam chronicles the fall of Edom, Amalek and Ashur, all of whom will be punished for their historical crimes against Jewish history. Bilaam's Messianic landscape is extremely binary: we are redeemed while our enemies, effectively enemies of Hashem, are vanquished. There is no space for neutrality.

Yet, there is one nation whose fate isn't predetermined, and they receive historical advice from Bilaam. This visionary prophet encourages the tribe of Keini to construct a durable home or a "nest" as strong as a boulder. Who are the Keini tribe and what role do

they play within Bilaam's Messianic system?

To better understand the Keini model we must inspect an interesting contradiction about the role of gentiles in the Messianic era.

TWO MESSIANIC MODELS

Our prophets presented two conflicting Messianic fates for the international community. Many prophecies describe gentile nations enjoying universal spiritual and material prosperity. Humanity finally acknowledges the Jews as divine agents, tasked with educating Man about monotheism and morality. By contrast, other Messianic prophecies depict violent apocalyptic wars with mass casualties and major population destruction.

Often the very same navi formulates contradictory narratives. In perek 49 Yesha-yahu depicts foreign nations fostering and nurturing Jewish destiny - והיו מלכים אומניך ושרותיהם מניקותך. Yet, in perek 63, Yesha-yahu describes Hashem as figuratively returning from battle with bloodied clothing - חמוץ בגדים.

Evidently, some gentiles survive the Messianic era and others do not. Righteous nations benefit from Messianic prosperity while the wicked do not. None of these prophecies, though, list the precise qualifications for survival or annihilation.

HISTORICAL AFFILIATION

Presumably, the most important factor influencing Messianic fate is the historical

role of various gentile nations. Nations which were kind or even embracing of Jews, and certainly those which aided Jewish history, join the Messianic era. By contrast, those who persecuted Jews, and, certainly, those who clashed with Jewish history will be punished and discarded from that era.

It remains unclear how this historical accountability will unfold. After all, should a modern-day Roman be held accountable for the despicable actions of Vespasian? Should an average German citizen be sentenced for the crimes of the Nazi regime? Our moral sensibilities rail against collective punishment, not to mention historical culpability for sins committed centuries ago, but our prophecies do imply intergenerational responsibility. These are difficult questions, which only Moshiach himself will answer, but Bilaam informed the world that decisions of nations affect their long-term historical trajectories in the Messianic era.

THE KEINI

Which brings us to the curious case of the Keini tribe. They originally occupied a tract of land near Israel, which was included in the territory divinely gifted to Avraham. Ultimately, this nomadic people wandered the ancient Middle East, inhabiting areas south of Israel, as well as southern regions of Israel proper.

Living in these precincts, they could have easily associated with our sworn enemies, the Midianites and Amalek, each of which lived in that general vicinity. Recognizing this scenario, Bilaam strongly encouraged them to cast their lot with the Jews and to build a solid nest for their future. Fortunately, for their sake, they obliged and

affiliated themselves with Jewish history.

Yitro, a Midianite priest who hailed from Keini origin, was the first to choose Jewish destiny for his tribe, by marrying his daughter to Moshe Rabeinu. Decades later, Otniel, a Keinite, half-brother of the righteous spy named Calev, spearheaded the conquest of an Israeli city named Kiryat Sefer, receiving Calev's daughter's hand in marriage as reward. By following Bilaam's historical instructions, Keini continued to make the right choices.

Of course, the most epic Keini decision occurred when a woman named Yael subdued a Midianite general named Sisra, clinching our victory in a very tense war. She just happened to be the wife of Chovav, a Keini chieftain who had relocated to the north of Israel. By consistently siding with our people, Keini secured a strong Messianic future.

THE KEINI TEMPLATE

This Keinite experience serves as a template for general gentile nations: affiliation with the Jewish nation assures Messianic relevance, whereas hostility to Jews assures historical oblivion.

As history begins to end, and the arc of redemption becomes clearer, we acquire a better sense of which nations have passed the Keini challenge. Our people's return to our Homeland would not have been possible without the support of the West. Fresh off their impressive victories in two major 20th century wars, the Western alliance, led by the United States, threw its full diplomatic weight behind the formation of the State of Israel. These nations seem to be Keini successes.

Closer to home, we have benefitted from staunch support of the local Druze

population which has valiantly defended our people and our Homeland, equal partners in building Israeli society. They are literally walking in the footsteps of the Keini.

By contrast some of the assistance we have received from gentile religions has been perplexing. Evangelical Christians view our return as confirmation of their own Messianic narratives and enthusiastically support our people. This awkward and unprecedented situation causes much ideological discomfort and no clear answers.

When Moshiach finally arrives, we will know the full Keini roster. Until then, we wait patiently, celebrating the renewed gentile support of our people and looking to the day that most of humanity will bask in the knowledge of Hashem. ■

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HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

BY REBBETZIN DR.
ADINA SHMIDMAN



MICHA (5:6 - 6:8)

וְהָיָה | שְׁאֵרִית יַעֲקֹב בְּקֶרֶב עַמִּים רַבִּים כְּטֹל
מֵאֵת ה' כְּרִבְבִּים עַל־יַעֲשֹׁב אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִקְוָה
לְאִישׁ וְלֹא יִיחַל לִבְנֵי אָדָם:

The remnant of Jacob shall be, In the midst of the many peoples, Like dew from the LORD, Like droplets on grass— which hopes not for a man Nor places hope in mortals. (Micha 5:6)

The pasuk in Micha compares the remnant of Yaakov to dew and droplets on grass, an anticipated daily event. The Malbim comments on the words of the Navi, highlighting the difference between the phrases, *וְהָיָה* and *יִיחַל*, which describes the feeling of hope - looking forward to something that is not guaranteed. There is an element of doubt whether the event that one wishes for and awaits will actually occur. By contrast, *יִיחַל* is anticipation, having confidence knowing that what one is waiting for will certainly arrive. The Navi shares that in the times of Moshiach, Hashem's hand is so obviously present and reliable like the dew that falls without human intervention and like grass that doesn't wait for man for water. In the end of days, G-d will provide for us without the need of human intervention.

During challenging times, one of the perakim we often recite is perek 130. The pasuk, *וְהָיָה ה' קִנְיָתָנוּ וְלֹדְדֵנוּ הוֹחֵלֵתָנוּ*,

I look to the LORD; I look to Him; I await His word captures these two words mentioned in our Haftorah and expounded upon here. We daven with hope, *קִנְיָתָנוּ* and anticipation, *הוֹחֵלֵתָנוּ* that the redemption come speedily. We pray that we are answered and that like the grass and dew, we are able to feel Hashem's presence and love through the gifts that he shows upon us. ■

Rebbe Dr. Adina Shmidman is the founding director of the Orthodox Union Women's Initiative and the rebbe of the Lower Merion Synagogue in Bala Cynwyd, PA.

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TOWARDS MEANINGFUL SHABBOS

BY REBBETZIN ZEMIRA OZAROWSKI
Director of OU Israel L'Ayla Women's Initiative



Becoming an "Erev Shabbos Jew"

I would venture to guess that the vast majority of those reading this column are Shomer Shabbos (Shabbos observant) but the question is – how many of us are 'Erev Shabbos Jews'?

Rav Soloveichik writes in his book *Al HaTeshuva* (p.97-98) the following statement –

True, there are Jews who observe Shabbos... But it is not for Shabbos that my heart aches; it is for the forgotten 'erev Shabbos' (eve of the Sabbath). There are Shabbos-observing Jews but there are no 'erev Shabbos' Jews who go out to greet Shabbos with beating hearts and pulsating souls. There are many who observe the precepts with their hands, with their feet, and/or with their mouths - but there are few indeed who truly know the meaning of the service of the heart!"

He laments the fact that over the past century, though we Baruch Hashem continue to be Shabbos observant, we lack the Erev Shabbos sense of anticipation and excitement that was present in previous generations.

Rabbi Dr. Hillel Goldberg writes in his sefer *'Shabbos is More than One Day a Week'*

that he remembers Rav Soloveitchik saying the following in a lecture at the Maimonides School in Boston more than forty years ago - "A person works on Friday until the last moment. He speeds home, arriving fifteen minutes before candle lighting time, then jumps into the shower, then back into the car, then speeds to shul just in time for the beginning of Mincha. This is not Shabbos. Holiness requires preparation."

Living in Israel, many of us are off from work on Friday and thankfully do have the opportunity to devote much of our day to Shabbat preparation and yet, if we don't focus properly, we may feel that we are merely spending the day checking off the numerous physical tasks on our list. How can we transform our mundane Fridays into days of unbelievable Kedusha?

One suggestion offered by Rabbi Goldberg is to work on changing our mindset. As we reach the middle of the week, we should take pause and contemplate the upcoming Shabbos, to internalize the fact that we are now moving closer to Shabbos, that we will soon have the special opportunity to connect to Hashem through the holiest day of the week. During stressful weeks, we often count down the days till we can take a break and catch up on our sleep, but how often do we wait with anticipation for the incredible Kedusha of Shabbos? Rabbi Goldberg writes, "The more the mental anticipation and actual preparations for

Shabbos, the more one will taste Shabbos. The more one will treasure it, the more one will center one's life around it... The more grateful for Shabbos one will become and the closer to the Shechinah one will become".

On a personal note - I recently received as a gift a special Shabbos planner with lists and lists of what to do every day of the week to prepare for Shabbos – which day to invite guests, which day to create the menu, which day to go to the fruits and vegetables store, etc. My immediate reaction was – this book is just not for me. For as long as I can remember, I have always prided myself on being efficient. In school I would study well but only the night before and never earlier, so as not to waste too much time on it. When catching a bus, I make sure to time it so that I get there exactly as the bus pulls up, so as not to waste time waiting

unnecessarily. And the same goes for Shabbos. Over the years, I was always proud of the fact that despite the many guests we would host, we never started preparing before Friday afternoon.

But a change in mindset would dictate that it's not about efficiency, it's not about getting the job done. Rather, it's about illustrating my anticipation for Shabbos. If I just want to get the tasks done as quickly as possible, I may accomplish that very successfully but if I want to gear up for Shabbos and whet my spiritual appetite for the special Kedushas Shabbos, then I need to take small actions throughout the week to remind myself of what is to come.

In the next article, we will discuss in more detail the concept of performing our Shabbos preparations שבת קודש and thereby becoming an 'Erev Shabbos Jew'. ■

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FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE RAV DANIEL MANN



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לעילוי נשמת
יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Using Dishes of an Unkown Type

QUESTION: Years ago, someone (*kashrut* observant) gave me a set of used china dishes. I do not remember whether the dishes are for meat or dairy (or who gave them to me). Is there a way I can use the dishes?

ANSWER: There are several potential (complicated) grounds for leniency, whose cumulative effect will power our recommendation. One should not reach conclusions about each one based on our short presentation.

After a utensil (*kli*) has not been used for hot food for 24 hours (*eino ben yomo*), the taste it gives off is assumed to be *pagum* (spoiled), and, for the most part, the *kli* does not prohibit other hot food that is put into it (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 122:1-2). It is rabbinically forbidden to use the *kli* out of concern that people will not wait sufficiently (ibid.). However, Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Nidda 27a), discussing your case, reasons that if we are not sure about kosher *keilim* whether they are meat or dairy and 24 hours have passed, one can use the *keilim* based on a

safek d'rabbanan (a doubt whose worst-case scenario is a Rabbinic prohibition).

It is difficult to rely on this source alone. For one, it is unclear that this leniency is accepted. Also, it is possible that one should not use such *keilim* in a way that sharp foods (e.g., onions) can absorb taste from them (see Shulchan Aruch, YD 96:1; Badei Hashulchan, YD 93:18). Also, R. Akiva Eiger relates to earthenware, which we normally assume cannot be *kashered*. If they can (see below, opinions, including of R. Akiva Eiger), it is possible we would not employ halachic leniencies without *kashering* (see Shulchan Aruch, YD 102:3 with commentaries).

In this case, another grounds for leniency is that the dishes have not been used for 12 months (*yishun*). Some sources raise this as a leniency in various contexts based on the assumption that absorbed particles have "dried up" (see Shulchan Aruch, YD 135:16). Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe, YD I:43) joins that leniency with another that applies here – the *kli* has not absorbed *treif* but kosher meat or dairy particles, whose issue is that they **can become treif** if mixed improperly with the opposite type. Therefore, he reasons that after *yishun*, we should not halachically have to worry about the absorbed particles causing problems. Another lenient factor is that considering you ask about dishes, not pots, the potential absorption is mainly from food that is hot

on the level of *kli sheini* (not in the *kli* it was cooked in), which lowers the chance/intensity of absorption (see Shulchan Aruch, YD 105:2; Shach ad loc. 8; Igrot Moshe ibid.).

The approach that Igrot Moshe (ibid.) practically recommends in a case of need for one who wants to sell dishes to another to use for the opposite type, is to try to *kasher* the dishes. Although earthenware cannot be *kashered* (Pesachim 30b), in regard to *keilim* that have undergone *yishun*, we can rely on doing *hagala* three times to *kasher* even china in case of significant loss (Igrot Moshe ibid. and YD II:46; Bemareh Habazak II, p. 68). (A whole set of china qualifies for most people as such a loss). Also, not all agree that glazed *keilim* are like earthenware, for which *kashering* does not work (Igrot Moshe ibid.). The possibility of *kashering*, though, makes it more difficult to rely on the aforementioned R. Akiva Eiger, without *kashering*. Actually, in a responsum (I:49, cited by Pitchei Teshuva, YD 110:19), R. Akiva Eiger is lenient only after *hagala* three times.

There is a *minhag* (see Magen Avraham 509:11) not to *kasher keilim* from meat to dairy use and vice versa. However, because this case contains a few indications for leniency in the matter (*yishun*, it is the only way to use the *keilim*, *hagala* is needed only based on *safek*, it is not being done by the person who used it for the other type), this *minhag* should not prevent *kashering* here (see Living the Halachic Process I, E-3).

In summary, doing *hagala* on the dishes (in a pot of the type for which you want to use it) three times is called for and sufficient, based on a preponderance of grounds for leniency. ■

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PORTION FROM THE PORTION

RAKEL BERENBAUM
Contributor, Torah Tidbits

Bilaam or Avraham?

In this week's portion we read about Bilaam's attempt to curse the Jewish people. Those still learning Pirkei Avot on Shabbat afternoons also read about Bilaam last week. There we read "Anyone who acts in three certain ways is among the students of Avraham our forefather, and anyone who acts in three opposite ways are the students of the wicked Bilaam. A good eye, a humble spirit, and a modest soul are the ways of Avraham's students. A bad eye, an arrogant spirit and a greedy soul are the ways of Bilaam's students". It is interesting that the Mishna compares Bilaam to Avraham, who lived generations before him, rather than to Moshe who was his contemporary. What do our Rabbis want to teach us from this comparison?

Both Bilaam and Avraham were prophets. While Bilaam only prophesied for the nations, Avraham was the father of our nation and as well "*Av hamon goyim* – the father of many – prophesying for many nations. Both Bilaam and Avraham had been given the ability to bless as God promised Avraham "Vhaye bracha - ... I will bless you, and I will aggrandize your name, and [you shall] be a blessing" (Bereshit 12:2) and Balak tells us about Bilaam "for I know that

whoever you bless is blessed and whoever you curse is cursed," (Bamidbar 22:6). Here we already see a difference between them. While Avraham is all about blessings, Bilaam is blessings and curses, as he closes his third and last parable about Israel. "Those who bless you shall be blessed, and those who curse you shall be cursed," (24:9).

The Torah also tells us about how each of these prophets went on a journey. Similar words are used in both episodes to make us stop, think, compare and learn from the comparison. Both of them, "Vyashkem", woke up early with anticipation for the adventure ahead, Bilaam to "curse" the Jews and Avraham to the *akeida*.

It looks like they are the same, but their intentions were so dissimilar. Avraham was going to do the Will of God, even if it meant doing something that seemingly was against his own principles. Bilaam, on the other hand, was trying to bend God's Will to meet his own. For this difference Avraham merited blessings "That I will surely bless you.... And through your children shall be blessed all the nations of the world, because you hearkened to My voice," (Bereshit 22:17-19) while Bilaam brought disgrace on himself.

Pirkei Avot doesn't suffice in analyzing the differences in their personalities, rather they talk about what we can learn about how to live our lives and be "the students of Avraham". They bring a lesson for all of us who may be at a turning point on our journey,

and not sure which way God wants us to go. How can we decide which is the right way to go? What compass should we use to help us decide? The Mishna's recommendation is to go with "a good eye, a humble spirit and a modest soul." With these in your hand you are sure to be a "student of Avraham" choose the right path.

This is a good lesson for all of us, to be a bit more humble. As Avraham said about himself "*Vanochi afar vefer*". If we are able to think a bit less about how great we are we can make space for others and increase our love for our brothers, needed so much these days in order to help us fight against our enemies from outside.

Bilaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel; so he did not go in search of omens as he had done time and time again, but turned his face toward the desert. (24:1)

Since the verse tells us about Bilaam looking to the desert where Israel was located, this week's recipe is for a no-bake dessert called a "desert rose". I had a jar at home of Sumsumiya which is a spread that combines techina, honey and walnuts and almonds so I tried that instead of the second ingredient and it came out just as yummy – so the recipe can be made with many substitutes.

"CHOCOLATE DESERT ROSES"

- 200g dark chocolate, cut into small pieces
- 56g unsalted butter, coconut oil, or almond butter
- 100g cornflakes
- Bit of salt (optional) if you want to make them sweet and salty
- Shredded coconut (optional)

Place cupcake liners in a cupcake pan. Melt your choice of butters, or oil in a double boiler on low heat. Add the chocolate and mix often. When it's all melted, slowly pour the chocolate mixture over the cornflakes folding the chocolate in with a spatula. Try not to break the cornflakes. It could take a few minutes till all the flakes are covered with chocolate. Spoon some of the cornflake mixture into each cupcake liner. Sprinkle a bit of salt or coconut flakes over the desert roses. Let them set in the fridge for about half an hour before serving. ■

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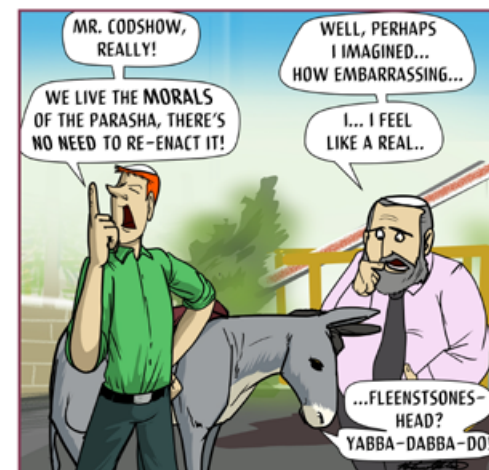
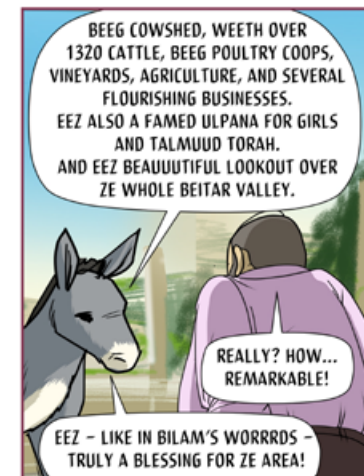
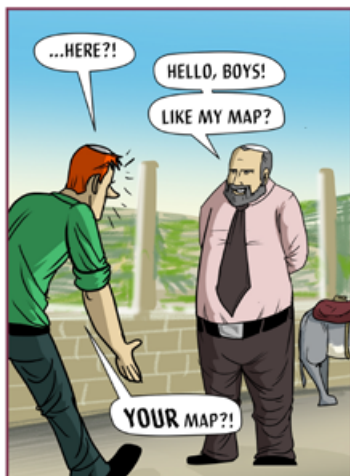
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Pitching Our Tents

In this week's fascinating Parsha, Balak, there is a whirlwind of strange prophecies, blessings, curses, and even donkeys! With so much oddity and strangeness, in Baalam's third blessing we encounter one of the most important Pesukim and blessings from the Torah. A Pasuk which every Jew says every day:

מִה־טֹבוֹ אֱהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֶתְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:
(כ"ד:ה)

How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! (24:5)

With such importance to Chazal to place this Pasuk before Pesukei Dezimra, we need to dive deeper to figure out why.

For starters, Rashi brings the Gemara is Bava Batra to teach us that Baalam saw how the entrances of our tents were not facing each other, in order to create privacy and embrace modesty.

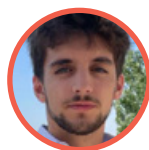
Rav Yisroel of Ruzhin explains that we all have the ability to choose which direction to open *our* tents. Shir Hasharim Rabba tells us that Hashem says to us that if we make a tiny hole the size of a needle, he will enlarge the opening to that of a grand hall. In other words, if we do our best and try

just a little to move forward and open up in the right direction, Hashem will help us and guide us down that path. The key is to take that first step.

But how do we take that first step? In which direction is the right direction?

The Alter Rebbe of Chabad, Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi famously talks about how the word *מה*, meaning what, represents the concept of Bitul/nullification. This is because instead of a person asking why or how, the question is what and/or for who. I.E. to make something not about yourself but rather to nullify yourself to Hashem or even to another Jew.

When a person does this, they have gone in the direction of 'Tovu- goodness'. These are the tents of Yaakov and the dwelling places of Yisrael. May we able to nullify ourselves for others and may Hashem open up for us a new dwelling place speedily with the rebuilding of the third Beit Hamikdash.



Hillel Smolarcik
12th Grade, Efrat

G-d's Love For His People

When we look through Sefer Bamidbar, the section of the Torah that describes Bnei Yisroel's travels through the desert, there are many events mentioned that

strongly affected the Jews. From the stories of Korach, the spies, and Pinchas, we see obvious lessons. Stay away from negative speech, keep proper kavod, never be afraid to do what is right; but what can we learn from parshat Balak? Rav Lord Jonathon Sacks mentions in one of his essays that for the entire story of Balak and Bilaam, none of the Israelites, including Moshe himself, were aware of what was happening. If it is not a story about the Israelites themselves, why is it in Sefer Bamidbar at all?

The answer, seemingly, is that the message of the story of Bilaam was to teach the Jews of all later generations to learn a lesson from it. Even though the episode of Bilaam did not affect the Jewish people at that time, it was

mentioned repeatedly by Moshe, Yehoshua, and even Micah and Nechemya later on.

We may ask, why did God choose us? Why are we special? The answer to this question is because He loves us. He doesn't love us because He chose us to follow His word, He chose us because of His love for us! Where is His love for us expressed? In the blessings of Bilam. Bilam, looking down on all the tribes of Israel, had no choice but to bless them.

As Moshe tells Bnei Yisroel in Parshat Ki Teitzei, "The Lord your God would not listen to Bilam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, *because the Lord your God loves you.*" By using the mouth of Bilam, who hated us, to bless us instead, G-d is demonstrating that through the power of love, even curses will turn to blessings. ■







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