

Torah Tidbits

ב"ה

ISSUE 1620

JULY 12TH 2025 • ט"ז תמוז תשפ"ה

פרשת בלק
PARSHAT BALAK

PIRKEI AVOT 6

United
We Stand

ישראל

"No Curse Can Hold": Parshat
Balak and the Power of Ahavat
Yisrael Jen Airley Page 60



"Balaam and Dostoevsky"
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
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כגנת עלי נהר במדבר כ"ד:ו'

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT BALAK ZMANIM

CANDLES 7:11 PM • EARLY 6:19 PM • HAVDALA 8:29 PM • RABBEINU TAM 9:04 PM



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To read this week's Dvar Torah by
Rebbetzin Dr. Adina Shmidman
and **Rabbi Chanoch Yeres**
see Torahtidbits.com > Individual Articles

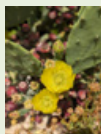
IMPORTANT REMINDERS



Last Opportunity to Say Kiddush Levana until: 14 Tammuz/Wed. night July 9



The Fast of the 17th of Tamuz is on Sunday July 13.
The fast begins at 4:17am and concludes at 8:17pm (Jerusalem time)



COVER IMAGE Photographed by Elisheva Elbaz

I made aliya in 2005 (I've lived in Israel for 20 years!). We live in Maale Adumim. This is a photo of a cactus flower. It reminds me of the Sabra qualities of the Jewish people, their beauty and perseverance in a harsh environment.

CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM

**Ranges 11 days Wednesday - Shabbat
July 9 - 19 / 13 - 23 Tammuz**

Earliest Tallit and Tefillin	4:42-4:49
Sunrise	5:41-5:46
Sof Zman Kriat Shema	9:12-9:16
Magen Avraham	8:29-8:33
Sof Zman Tefila	10:23-10:25
(According to the Gra and Baal HaTanya)	
Chatzot (Halachic Noon)	12:44-12:45
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	1:19-1:20
Plag Mincha	6:19-6:16
Sunset (Including Elevation)	7:52-7:48



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	BALAK			PINCHAS		
	Candles	Early	Havdala	Candles	Early	Havdala
Yerushalayim/Maale Adumim	7:11	6:19	8:29	7:08	6:17	8:25
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	7:28	6:21	8:30	7:26	6:19	8:27
Beit Shemesh/RBS	7:30	6:20	8:30	7:27	6:18	8:26
Alon Shvut	7:27	6:19	8:29	7:24	6:17	8:25
Raanana/Tel Mond/Herzliya/K.Saba	7:29	6:21	8:31	7:26	6:19	8:28
Modiin/Chashmonaim	7:28	6:20	8:30	7:25	6:18	8:26
Netanya	7:29	6:21	8:32	7:27	6:19	8:28
Be'er Sheva	7:27	6:20	8:29	7:24	6:18	8:26
Rehovot	7:28	6:21	8:31	7:26	6:19	8:27
Petach Tikva	7:11	6:21	8:31	7:08	6:19	8:28
Ginot Shomron	7:28	6:20	8:30	7:25	6:18	8:27
Haifa / Zichron	7:20	6:22	8:33	7:17	6:20	8:29
Gush Shiloh	7:27	6:19	8:29	7:24	6:17	8:26
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	7:29	6:21	8:31	7:26	6:19	8:28
Givat Zeev	7:31	6:19	8:29	7:29	6:17	8:26
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	7:26	6:19	8:28	7:24	6:17	8:25
Ashkelon	7:29	6:21	8:31	7:26	6:20	8:28
Yad Binyamin	7:28	6:21	8:30	7:26	6:19	8:27
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	7:23	6:20	8:31	7:20	6:18	8:28
Golan	7:27	6:19	8:30	7:24	6:17	8:26
Nahariya/Maalot	7:29	6:22	8:33	7:26	6:20	8:29
Afula	7:28	6:20	8:31	7:26	6:18	8:27

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem): Chukat 9:04 PM • Pinchas 9:01 PM

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: Avodah Zarah 24



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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Many people who have grown up in English-speaking countries heard this saying from a young age. Its intention is that even when people say negative things, ultimately they are just words that shouldn’t hurt us.

This always stuck with me. I was always the big, tall kid growing up. Kids in my class or around the neighborhood couldn’t really bother me physically, but sometimes, out of their own frustration, they would use their words against me. When this would happen, I would remind myself of this line, and tell myself that no matter what somebody said to me, it doesn’t need to make a difference in my life.

As I got older, I started to learn the way Judaism relates to the concepts of the power of words. For example, the Gemara teaches us (Megillah 15a), “Do not let the blessings of regular folk be light in your eyes.... And do not let the curses of regular folk be light in your eyes.” The idea is that when people speak, positively or negatively, they do have

an impact, whether for good or for bad. Words matter.

This seems to be the opposite of what I heard growing up. Are words really something that can never hurt us? We know that harmful words have negative consequences, and we teach our children, and ourselves, the power of speech and the importance of the words that come out of our mouths. I think what the line is getting at is not that words have no effect on our world, since they obviously do, but how they affect our self-confidence and self-worth. With regard to how we react to these insults, it is up to us to realize: they’re just words.

Throughout Jewish history, *Am Yisrael* has had words cast at us in the most negative ways. In this week’s *parsha*, *Parshat Balak*, Bilaam is commissioned to try and say the most terrible things about us. Fast forward to today, and we see that not much has changed. The past 20 months have been brutal for all those that care about the Jewish people, Israel and what is said about us around the world. All it takes is a couple minutes on the predominantly pro-Palestinian social media to see the amount of ignorance that’s out there and how that ignorance is turned into hateful words against the Jewish people, including at rallies, TV shows, and even concerts. People want to take the same role as Bilaam and curse the Jewish people, curse the IDF soldiers, curse our Prime Minister, curse our ministers, and curse the State of Israel.

Many ask why the story of Bilaam is in

לעילוי נשמת

ROSE KELMAN a”h

רוז-רשקה בת

ישעיהו ופייגה-פאני ע”ה

On her first Yartzheit 19th Tamuz

Moishe Kelman & all the family

the Torah. Ok, Bilaam tries to curse us and fails. There's drama there, but many events happened around the world during our time in the wilderness, so why include this one in the Torah? Most likely, we weren't even aware at the time it was happening. As Bilaam says, we were probably dwelling in our beautiful tents.

I think it's because of what happens after Bilaam starts to realize that he cannot curse the Jewish people: "How shall I curse, whom God has not cursed? How shall I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced?" (Bamidbar 23:8). In this context, he calls us "*Hen am levadad yishkon u'vagoyim lo yitchashav*" - "This is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations."

This is an incredibly powerful idea. We need this incident to be recorded in the Torah in order to have this knowledge, this realization, that we are a people destined to dwell alone on the world stage. We need it because it enables us to continue our path of truth - defending our brothers and sisters, securing our southern and northern borders, and securing ourselves from countries that we don't even share borders with - without worrying about the curses from our enemies. If we paid attention to international conspiracies against the one Jewish state, we might become paralyzed, powerless, and our enemies would take advantage of our weakness. Bilaam's message to us is necessary at this time.

Bilaam's story also teaches us that though we know our lonely path in world history, there are still those who bless us, and we must recognize and appreciate that. There are many non-Jews who pay attention to



HaKadosh Baruch Hu's blessing to Avraham Avinu: "I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you" (Bereshit 12:3), and they consistently and fervently bless the Jewish people. It's especially hard to do this today, when support for Israel is not as popular as it used to be. Amongst them are many American senators and congressmen, as well as members of parliament in European countries, and many other leaders and lay people all around the world all standing up for what they know is true.

So let me take the opportunity to thank those who bless us, and the curses of those who curse us should turn into blessings, just as they did in *Parshat Balak*. Let me also take the opportunity to thank my kindergarten

teacher (Morah Rivka) for teaching me that important concept of letting go of insults and knowing my self-worth. As we end the school year and enter summer vacation, let me thank all the teachers and *ganenot* out there for the incredible and influential hard work they do all year, and to remind them that their words stick, sometimes staying with their former students for their entire lives. On behalf of all the parents and the children who have you to thank for their education, thank you for all your hard work.

If you're a parent and you appreciate what your children's teachers have done this year, now is the perfect time to call them and thank them for a wonderful year. I'm sure that your positive words will be so meaningful to them.

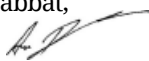
To all those starting jobs in summer camps, whether it be Camp Dror, Camp Dror Manhigut, Nofesh-Yachad, NCSY Chai, Legacy summer camp, or any of the NCSY summer camps coming to Israel with thousands of teenagers, we salute you and wish you tremendous *hatzlacha*. These are roles that educate our youth and are so important for their growth. I truly believe they are crucial for the future

of the Jewish people because as impactful as school is, summer camp many times creates role models for teenagers that are crucial for the growth of our next generation.

This past Thursday and Sunday, we had the *zechut* of having the staff of Camp Dror at the OU Israel headquarters in Har Hotzvim. I told everyone gathered there how important summer camps are as part of the Jewish education and experience of our children and encouraged them to be proud role models for the young campers looking up to them. I blessed them that they should make an incredible impact that will stay with them for many years to come.

So let me wish each and every one of my Torah Tidbits readers a beautiful, healthy and safe summer. A summer in which all of our hostages come home and our brave IDF soldiers are successful and safe. May we continue hearing *besorot tovo* for *Klal Yisrael*, and may all those that bless us be blessed and all their blessings come to fruition.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



Rabbi Avi Berman

Executive Director, OU Israel

aberman@ouisrael.org

לעילוי נשמות

בילא בת בנימין ע"ה

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on her 6th yahrzeit ט"ו תמוז

and

הרב אברהם שלום גולד זצ"ל

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FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



Mitzvot and Magic

Do you believe in magic?

Religion is at times conflated with superstition, the mystical and magical. This makes sense, as a way of life built around one invisible force – G-d – would be prone to preoccupation with other presumed invisible forces. The true distinction between mitzvah and magic is something that we ourselves may lose sight of as we come to view mitzvah opportunities in terms of the deliverables they offer, their *segulah* value. The *mezuza* that we place on our doorpost may be valued as an amulet that magically provides G-d's protection to the home rather than as a faith-inducing and self-fulfilling reminder of G-d's place and presence in our homes and lives. Even charitable acts can be recast from expressions of caring for and sensitivity

to others into a pathway to *yeshuot*, a tool to spare ourselves personal crises. This mindset deploys religious activities as magic methods to manipulate G-d and produce the outcomes that serve our own needs. A more correct religious worldview is built on *avodat Hashem*, genuine deference to G-d while using every opportunity to serve Him.

My teacher, *mori v'rabi* Rav Moshe Shapira zt"l, would illustrate this point by highlighting a Midrashic comment (Bereishit Rabba 69:3) that contrasts how Pharaoh dreamed of himself standing over the Nile River that he worshipped, whereas Yaakov in his dream of the ladder saw G-d standing over him. This implies that proper religious activities are not us managing G-d, using magic tricks invoking Divine mystical powers to achieve our own ends and meet our needs, but rather G-d standing over us as we put our own needs aside and humbly serve G-d.

Bilaam was a powerful sorcerer who had a track record of success casting his spell on others but who came up completely short when trying the same against the Jewish people. As he himself grudgingly recognized (Bamidbar 23:23), "*lo nachash b'Yaakov v'lo kesem b'Yisrael*, sorcery is ineffective against Yaakov and magical spells do not impact Yisrael." While there may have been something to Bilaam's magical powers, he became utterly impotent when in conflict with G-d and His people. As Klal Yisrael, we are forbidden to engage in sorcery and told to instead place our trust in G-d, *tamim tiheyeh*

In loving memory and לעלוי נשמת

KURT ROTHSCHILD ז"ל
גרשון בן החבר מרדכי ז"ל
on the occasion of his 3rd yahrzeit

He devoted his 102 years in this
world to תורת ישראל, עם ישראל
and ארץ ישראל

May he be a מליץ יושר for his family
and for all of כלל ישראל

im Hashem Elokecha, recognizing that instead of mimicking the pathetic efforts of Bilaam to work around G-d's will for our own goals, we would do better to entrust ourselves to the one true Power to be reckoned with. For that is Torah at its essence: not a set of clever rituals but an encompassing deference to the infinitely greater wisdom and power of G-d. As Shmuel told Shaul (Shmuel 1 15:22), "*hinei shemo'ah mizevach tov*, it is better to heed G-d's word than to present Him an offering."

Bilaam ultimately brought the Jewish people down when instead of trying to overpower he undermined. His successful scheme combined luring the Jewish men to behave immorally with the daughters of Moav and having those women use the power of their seduction to draw the men to worship the god Pe'or. The worship of Pe'or was shockingly strange as it involved defecating on the idol. While many have offered interpretations of this strange ritual, one thing is clear: it was not an act of deference to god. Conventional worship involves bowing humbly and giving to G-d something that is precious to us, while with Pe'or they stood over the god and gave it that which they had no use for, their waste.

Bilaam successfully undermined us when he got us to practice religion as magic. He drew us into his lifestyle of immoral selfish indulgence by shifting our religious mindset from deferential service to manipulative utility. As children of Yaakov, we need to find our way back to his path of humility and deferential trust in G-d. ■

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חווה פֶּעסָא בת אהרן זלמן הכהן ע"ה
Mother of Reuven Tradburks

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. All the action and conversation are aimed at the Jewish people.

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.

But more crucially Bilaam will say only what G-d says. And instead of cursing us, G-d blesses us.

This is perhaps the most powerful lesson of this story. Because the past few weeks have been failure after failure. The spies, Korach, plagues, punishments. We might surmise that

we are a failure of a people. And that G-d is displeased with us.

And then we overhear what G-d tells Bilaam. We are blessed. Good. Righteous. Now, we wouldn't have thought that at all. We would have thought we are a disappointment. Sometimes we need an outsider to remind us how blessed we are.

Failures, weakness, lack of faith? Yes, that is life. We have it all. But. Those things do not define us in the eyes of G-d. *Those are things we do; they are not who we are.* That is crucial. Then. And now. We make plenty of mistakes. We are unfaithful at times. We sin. Rebel. Yup, that is life and that is our people. But. It does not define us. We are a great people. And make mistakes.

This parsha is a powerful statement to us. Of the respect the nations have for us. And of the enduring love of G-d, in spite of all these conflicts and disappointments.



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 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. That's quite a difference; grasshoppers or oxen.

The difference lies in 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.

Bilaam is told not to go by G-d. And then told he may go. What changed? This is an example of the maxim, on the path man chooses, he gets Divine assistance. Whether it is a good choice or bad. Bilaam is intent on going, so go he will.



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: 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 satire. A donkey is not a smart animal. You, Bilaam, the one with prophecy, with great insight and vision, cannot see what a donkey can see? This is really not a smart animal. And it sees more than you? That is a pretty humiliating moment for the prophet.

And as a paradigm: be wary of those who speak in the name of G-d. Donkeys may be more reliable.



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

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His words in his mouth. Bilaam returns to Balak and pronounces the prophecy: How can I curse a people that is not cursed? They are a people that dwell apart. Oh, that my lot be theirs. Balak is not happy; Bilaam affirms that he says only what G-d places in his mouth.

Bilaam speaks in G-d's name; but not a curse but a blessing. After all the failures and disappointments of the past few weeks, what does G-d think of the Jewish people? Blessed. What a powerful reassurance. Were we to think we have lost His love through the various failings, we hear loud and clear His enduring love.

Bilaam describes the Jewish people as dwelling apart. Rabbi Sacks remarks that this is not to say we are isolated, scorned, though there have been plenty of times when we have been isolated and scorned. But rather, this refers to the Jewish peoples championing ethics. We are unique in our ethic, our values. At times in history, we will be the voice of conscience of the world, fighting the battles of principles against evil. And we will be a lone voice.



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. They are not sorcerers; G-d acts for them. They rise like lion cubs, stir as lions. Balak is again unhappy; Bilaam affirms he says what G-d instructs him to say.

The first blessing was general and focused on Jewish uniqueness, the quality of the Jewish people. The second blessing becomes a bit more relevant to the moment. If you, Balak, are looking for vulnerabilities in the Jewish people, to capitalize on those weaknesses to defeat the Jewish people in war. Well, G-d does not see those weaknesses. And when the moment needs, "the people will rise as a lion". Those are fighting words. Don't test us. We will attack like lions. Lions usually win.

This is the source of the name of the historic Israeli attack on Iran. If need be, "we will rise as a lion".



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 your tents, 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.

In this third bracha, Bilaam gazes at the Jewish people and sees trees and gardens. This is in contrast to the lions of the second. Lions are power. Victory in war. Trees and gardens are the aftermath, the fruits of the war.

This a further taunt to Balak. You want to thwart the Jewish march to the Land. Not only are they as lions when taunted, so you

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do not stand a chance militarily with them. But, their goal, of settling the land of Israel, that too will happen. I see trees and gardens, the Jewish people planted successfully in their land.



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. ■



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 (Vayetzei, Mikeitz), and then this one, on the fewest parshiyot in a sedra list. 104 pesukim - 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

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“Balaam and Dostoevsky”

Frustration. Disillusionment. But also insight and a lifelong intellectual perspective. That is how I would describe the experience I am about to share with you, dear reader.

It all started with Dostoevsky. That’s right, Fyodor Dostoevsky, the famous 19th century Russian novelist, author of *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, and much more. His works were strangely not part of the curriculum of the high school I

attended. I came to his writing on my own.

How impressed I was! Here was a writer who really plumbed the depths of the human psyche. He grappled, not only with profound moral issues, but with questions of existential religious significance.

I vividly remember reading *Notes from the Underground*, astounded by the fact that a gentile author, living in Czarist Russia, had so much to say to a Brooklyn yeshiva boy.

And then I learned a bit about Dostoevsky’s background. I was stunned to discover that this perceptive, sensitive and gifted man was... a vicious anti-Semite. I had great difficulty in reconciling the discrepancy between the art – sophisticated and empathic; and the author, full of primitive hatred, which I experienced as aimed at me. After all, my ancestors lived in the towns and villages he describes – and not long ago!

I experienced this disillusionment time and time again in subsequent years. In college, I became enamored with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, who was often acclaimed as the greatest thinker of the 20th century. Then I learned of his support for the Nazi regime, and I could no longer bring myself to even open his books.

This experience was repeated later in my education when I became familiar with the psychology of Carl Jung, only to discover his

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complicated relationship with Jews and Judaism, and his pro-Nazi sentiments. What an exhaustive list of gifted men who possessed such talent when it came to humanity, yet who were so absurdly tainted by their active aversion to our people. It extends back in time to Martin Luther, persists through the music of Wagner and the history of Toynbee, and is certainly not lacking for contemporary examples.

Truth be told, the list goes back even further, to this week's Torah portion, *Parshat Balak*, and the extraordinary and fascinating man named Balaam. If there is one lesson to learn from this week's narrative of Balaam and his encounter with the Jewish people, it is this: A man can be a universally acclaimed spiritual leader, and a gifted poet and orator with prophetic powers almost identical to those of Moses, and simultaneously be a vile anti-Semite, capable of genocidal schemes.

Read this week's *parsha* very carefully, for there is an essential message in it. The message is that we dare not assume that we need only fear anti-Semitism at the hands of maniacs, fanatics, or ignoramuses. Quite the contrary! Sophisticated, educated and highly cultured individuals can also detest us and conspire to destroy us.

This is the lesson of the Holocaust. True, Hitler was hardly an intellectual or artistic giant. But his evil genius lay in his ability to realize that the most advanced civilization in the history of the world would eagerly abide by his murderous vision. He knew how this was just the veneer of German art, literature, philosophy and, yes, religion.

In terms of this week's Torah portion, he knew what Balak knew: That there are individuals with:

Strong religious commitments: “I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God to do anything small, or great.” (*Numbers* 22:18);

A direct spiritual channel to the Divine: “And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him...” (*ibid.* verse 20)

Inventive skills sufficient to create a phrase which we ourselves adopted to preface our daily prayers: “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob...” (*Numbers* 24:5).

But in actuality, they are no more than “hired guns,” and beneath the façade of the “gentleman” lies the “agreement” to discriminate, persecute, murder and exterminate an entire people.

It is a difficult lesson to accept. But our history has long established its deep-rooted veracity and its urgency, clearly based upon the story we read this Shabbat. ■

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Not Reckoned Among the Nations

The year is 1933. Two Jews are sitting in a Viennese coffee house, reading the news. One is reading the local Jewish paper, the other the notoriously antisemitic publication *Der Stürmer*. “How can you possibly read that revolting rubbish?” says the first. The second smiles. “What does your paper say? Let me guess: ‘The Jews are assimilating.’ ‘The Jews are arguing.’ ‘The Jews are disappearing.’ Now let me tell you what my paper says: ‘The Jews control the banks.’ ‘The Jews control the media.’ ‘The Jews control Austria.’ ‘The Jews control the world.’ My friend, if you want good news about the Jews, always pay attention to the antisemites.”

An old and bitter joke. Yet it has a point and a history, which begins with this week's Parsha. Some of the most beautiful things ever said about the Jewish people were said by Bilaam:

“Who can count the dust of Jacob ... May my final end be like theirs! ... How beautiful are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel! ... A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel.”

Bilaam was no friend of the Jews. Having failed to curse them, he eventually devised a plan that worked. He advised the Moabite women to seduce Israelite men and then invite them to take part in their idolatrous worship. 24,000 people died in the subsequent plague that struck the people.¹

Bilaam is numbered by the Rabbis as one of only four non-royals mentioned in the Tanach who are denied a share in the World to Come (Sanhedrin 90a). Why then did God choose that Israel be blessed by Bilaam? Surely there is a principle *Megalgelim zechut al yedei zakai*: “Good things come about through good people” (Tosefta Yoma 4:12). Why did this good thing come about through a bad man?

The answer lies in another principle, first stated in Proverbs (27:2): “Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips.” Tanach is perhaps the least self-congratulatory national literature in history. Jews chose to record for history their faults, not their virtues. Hence it was important that their praise come from

1. Numbers chapter 25, and Numbers 31:16.

an outsider, and one not known to like them. Moses rebuked the people. Bilaam, the outsider, praised them.

That said, however, what is the meaning of one of the most famous descriptions ever given of the people Israel:

“It is a nation dwelling alone, not reckoned among the nations.” (*Num. 23:9*)

I have argued against the interpretation that has become popular in modern times, namely that it is Israel’s destiny to be isolated, friendless, hated, abandoned and alone, as if antisemitism were somehow written into the script of history.² It isn’t. None of the Prophets said so. To the contrary, they believed that the nations of the world would eventually recognise Israel’s God and come to worship Him in the Temple in Jerusalem. Zechariah (8:23) foresees a day when “ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’” There is nothing fated, predestined, about antisemitism.

What then do Bilaam’s words mean? “It is a nation dwelling alone, not reckoned among the nations.” Ibn Ezra says they mean that unlike all other nations, Jews, even when a minority in a non-Jewish culture, will not assimilate. Ramban says that their culture and creed will remain pure, not a cosmopolitan mix of multiple traditions and nationalities. The Netziv gives the sharp interpretation, clearly directed against the Jews of his time, that “If Jews live distinctive and apart from others they will dwell safely, but if they seek to emulate ‘the nations’ they ‘will not be reckoned’ as anything special at all.”

2. For more on this debate, read Rabbi Sacks’ book *Future Tense*.



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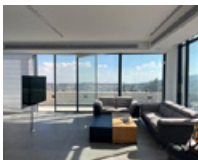
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There is, however, another possibility, hinted at by another noted antisemite, G. K. Chesterton³, who we have already mentioned in *Beha'alotecha*. Chesterton famously wrote of America that it was “a nation with the soul of a church” and “the only nation in the world founded on a creed.” That is, in fact, precisely what made Israel different – and America’s political culture, as historian Perry Miller and sociologist Robert Bellah pointed out, is deeply rooted in the idea of biblical Israel and the concept of covenant. Ancient Israel was indeed founded on a creed, and was, as a result, a nation with the soul of a religion.

We discussed in *Beha'alotecha* how Rabbi Soloveitchik broke down the two ways in

3. That Chesterton was an antisemite is not my judgment but that of the poet W. H. Auden. Chesterton wrote: “I said that a particular kind of Jew tended to be a tyrant and another particular kind of Jew tended to be a traitor. I say it again. Patent facts of this kind are permitted in the criticism of any other nation on the planet: it is not counted illiberal to say that a certain kind of Frenchman tends to be sensual.... I cannot see why the tyrants should not be called ‘tyrants’ and the traitors ‘traitors’ merely because they happen to be members of a race persecuted for other reasons and on other occasions.” (G.K. Chesterton, *The Uses of Diversity*, London, Methuen & Co., 1920, p. 239). On this Auden wrote, “The disingenuousness of this argument is revealed by the quiet shift from the term ‘nation’ to the term ‘race’.”

which people become a group, be it a camp or a congregation. Camps face a common enemy, and so a group of people bands together. If you look at all other nations, ancient and modern, you will see they arose out of historical contingencies. A group of people live in a land, develop a shared culture, form a society, and thus become a nation.

Jews, certainly from the Babylonian exile onward, had none of the conventional attributes of a nation. They did not live in the same land. Some lived in Israel, others in Babylon, yet others in Egypt. Later they would be scattered throughout the world. They did not share a language of everyday speech. There were many Jewish vernaculars, versions of Yiddish, Ladino and other regional Jewish dialects. They did not live under the same political dispensation. They did not share the same cultural environment. Nor did they experience the same fate. Despite all their many differences though, they always saw themselves and were seen by others as one nation: the world’s first - and for a long time the world’s only - global people.

What then made them a nation? This was the question Rabbi Saadia Gaon asked in the tenth century, to which he gave the famous answer: “Our nation is only a nation in virtue of its laws (*torot*).” They were the people defined by the Torah, a nation under the sovereignty of God. Having received, uniquely, their laws before they even entered their land, they remained bound by those self-same laws even when they lost the land. Of no other nation has this ever been true.

Uniquely then, in Judaism religion and nationhood coincide. There are nations with many religions: multicultural Britain is one among many. There are religions governing

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many nations: Christianity and Islam are obvious examples. Only in the case of Judaism is there a one-to-one correlation between religion and nationhood. Without Judaism there would be nothing (except antisemitism) to connect Jews across the world. And without the Jewish nation Judaism would cease to be what it has always been, the faith of a people bound by a bond of collective responsibility to one another and to God. Bilaam was right. The Jewish people really are unique.

Nothing therefore could be more mistaken than to define Jewishness as a mere ethnicity. If ethnicity is a form of culture, then Jews are not one ethnicity but many. In Israel, Jews are a walking lexicon of almost every ethnicity under the sun. If ethnicity is another word for race, then conversion to Judaism would be impossible (you cannot convert to become Caucasian; you cannot change your race at will).

What makes Jews “a nation dwelling alone, not reckoned among the nations,” is that their nationhood is not a matter of geography, politics, or ethnicity. It is a matter of religious vocation as God’s covenant partners, summoned to be a living example of a nation among the nations, made distinctive by its faith and way of life. Lose that and we lose the one thing that was and remains the source of our singular contribution to the heritage of humankind. When we forget this, sadly, God arranges for people like Bilaam and Chesterton to remind us otherwise. We should not need such reminding. ■

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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PROBING THE PROPHETS

BY RABBI NACHMAN (NEIL) WINKLER
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But He is Always Seeing You!

The nevu'ah (prophecy) found in p'rakim 5-6 of Sefer Micha was selected as the haftarah for this parasha for the obvious reason that the prophet Micha calls upon Israel to remember the kindness Hashem showed them by reversing Bil'am's intended curses into blessings and this, of course, is the very focus of this week's Torah reading. And, although mention of Balak and Bil'am is also found in Sefer Yehoshua [chp. 24] and Sefer Shofetim [chp. 11-which was read is last week's haftarah], both messages were shared with a population that lived only a few generations after the nation had witnessed the events. However, Micha's charge to Israel, as found in our haftarah, demands that the people remember those same events, even

though the entire saga took place some 700 years after Israel witnessed it!

I would submit, therefore, that our ancients saw the message of Micha as one of particular significance to future generations. They regarded the prophet's recollection of Bil'am's failure to curse Israel – not simply as a Divine act of assistance to His people - but as an encouragement to the nation to always realize that Hashem's miraculous deeds of salvation are often hidden and, as a result, not recognized. Consider: How did Israel know of the plot of Balak or the plans of Bil'am? How did they learn the exact words of this malevolent gentile prophet/soothsayer? If, after all, the entire “scenario” took place only between Balak, Bil'am and G-d Himself – how would the nation be expected to have any of the details that the prophet urges them to remember??

In my opinion, we might rightly consider the Torah's “exposure” of the entire saga as a vehicle to bring home that very lesson to Israel of the desert and Jews of the future: ***Hashem is there-even when we don't know it!*** This truth is found in Moshe's closing shira of Ha'azinu in which he quotes Hashem's reaction to Israel's faithlessness telling Israel: [D'varim 32: 20] “Astira fanai meihem”, “I will hide My ‘face’ (My presence) from them”, and adds: “Ehreh mah acharitam”, “And see what will happen to them”. Hashem is actually

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promising that **EVEN** when He is “hiding” from us, He will still be caring for us and gazing down to see what might happen. **You may not ‘see’ Him...but He always sees you!!** Indeed, even in times of His anger, Hashem continues to be our protection. We may not know it or even recognize His divine miracles that protect us ...but He is always there!

And, we reiterate that very thought multiple times each day in the Modim tefilla, when we praise G-d as the One whose miracles (“Al nissecha sheb’chol yom immanu”) and wonders (v’al nifl’otecha) surround us each day (“sheb’chol et, erev vavoker v’tzohorayim”).

If we properly understand this haftarah in this way, it begins to take on a more significant message, realizing that this haftarah precedes the three weeks of mourning that lead up to Tish’a B’Av almost every year. In times of crisis and difficulty we may find our faith wavering when searching for HaKadosh Baruch Hu to be a source of help and assistance...and, sadly, do not find Him. But Micha’s nevu’ah teaches us that the failure to find the Divine Source is our failure.

He is always there!

He is always watching!

You may not ‘see’ Him...but He is always ‘seeing’ you!!■

Rabbi Winkler’s popular Jewish History lectures can be viewed by visiting the OU Israel Video archive:
<https://www.ouisrael.org/video-library>

**Shabbat afternoon
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Ma Tovu – Turning a Curse Into a Blessing

The opening verse in our daily tefilla is מה טובו אהלך יעקב משכנותך ישראל – How good are your tents oh Jacob, your dwelling places, oh, Israel (Bamidbar 24:5). It must be a significant statement if it is assigned to be the first line we recite each morning as we enter the *Beit Knesset*. Hazal interpreted the phrase to refer not to tents and dwellings but rather to *shuls* and *yeshivot*. How good are your shuls and yeshivot. May they increase in influence and grow in beauty and splendor.

Yet, if we consider the source of this pasuk, it may not seem appropriate to include it in our prayers at all, let alone assign it such a prominent position. These words were uttered in our Parsha by none other than *Bilam Harasha*. In fact, his intention was to curse Bnei Yisrael, and to state that “you

should **not** have shuls and schools and may they **diminish** in influence and scope.” A divine command changed the words that were uttered from Bilam’s mouth from a curse to a blessing.

Why is it then that our custom is to include these words at the beginning of our tefilla? It is interesting to note that although his opinion has not been widely accepted, the Maharshal was indeed disturbed by this custom and he did not recite this verse. He started his tefilla with the second line “*va’ani berov chesdecha*” (see Maharshal Responsa 64).

Rabbi Norman Lamm in his book ‘A Commentary for the Ages’ offers an insightful explanation. If it is the accepted opinion to begin our day with *Ma Tovu*, then there must be something special that reflects an aspect of the basic personality of the Jew and a deep indigenous part of the Jewish character. Perhaps we recite *Ma Tovu* not despite the fact that it was intended to harm us, but because of that very fact. In Rabbi Lamm’s words: “It is Jewish to find the benediction in the malediction, the good in the evil, the opportunity in the catastrophe.”

Essentially, as history proves, we learn to make the best of the worst and to squeeze holiness from the profane! The Temple was

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destroyed so Hazal instituted “sacrifice of the heart”. Jerusalem was destroyed and so we built Yavneh. For centuries we refused to surrender to a curse. We seek and find the spark within, the silver lining beneath it all. That is what is implied when we recite *Ma Tov*.

Hashem, continue that power within us! Let us make the best of a difficult situation -and turn a curse into a blessing.

The aim of prayer is **not** to change God, but to **change ourselves**! We come before God as humble petitioners and ask for the ability to change ourselves. To provide us with the strength and ability to squeeze the blessing out of the curse. As we recite *Ma Tov*, may Hashem hear our cry and strengthen a nation experiencing challenging times so that we may uncover the hidden blessing. ■



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Meticulous Middot

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (*Avot* 5:22) teaches us that there are two primary approaches to life, those that follow the virtues of Avraham Avinu and those that align themselves with the unsavory character of *Bilam Harasha*. To be a disciple of Avraham Avinu is to possess three principal values: a good eye, a humble mind, and an undemanding soul. A disciple of *Bilam Harasha* exhibits the opposite: an evil eye, a haughty mind, and a demanding soul. The Mishnah then asks, what is the difference between these two? The Mishnah answers, the students of Avraham Avinu enjoy goodness in this world and inherit the eternal world, Bilam's students descend into the abyss for eternity. Is this the only difference? Does there exist a continuum between the two extreme positions?

Let us see how we can apply the lessons of the Mishnah on a personal level.

In *Matnat Chaim*, Rav Matityahu Salomon discusses the frightening implications of this Mishnah. One can be involved in learning Torah and doing acts of chessed yet possess the character traits of Bilam. It is not enough to possess wisdom and follow the dictates of Torah law. One must do the internal work to achieve an integrated, balanced character guided by Torah values. Thus, we can understand how the second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred even though the people at that time were learned in Torah and engaged in kind deeds. One can open a gemach, a free loan enterprise, but look uncharitably upon others who open a similar gemach in the same neighborhood! The Mishnah's question highlights the challenge of discerning one's character by looking at their outward presentation.

Bilam is the archetype of one who possesses wisdom but has not worked on refining his character. Such a person is capable of destroying an entire nation, literally or figuratively, for the sake of money or prestige. As a modern example, we have witnessed how the Germans, who prided themselves on intellectualism and culture, could act so barbarically and commit unthinkable atrocities.

Rav Shlomo Heiman *zt"l* explains that the Mishnah is sharing a significant insight into Avraham Avinu's success in drawing so many people to believe in Hashem in a generation full of idolatry. The refinement

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of one's middot allows him to clearly see Hashem's Presence in this world. Conversely, Bilam lived in a generation where Hashem's Presence was obviously perceived, even to the nations of the world, and yet, his malice, arrogance and insatiable greed did not allow him to recognize Hashem's supremacy.

The time period between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av, notes the *Netivot Shalom*, is like the black background to bring the period of Elul and the High Holy Days into focus. It provides us with a perspective to prepare once again to make a yearly accounting. We cannot be satisfied with superficial improvement, rather, we must ensure to align ourselves with the ethics of Avraham Avinu – a good eye, a humble mind and an undemanding soul. ■

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<p>Rabbi David Stav</p> <p>Why Are Our Kids Struggling to Keep Halacha?</p>	<p>טל צ'רנובסקי טל דינור</p> <p>טל דינור אביטל ברעם</p> <p>על גשר צר</p> <p>קריאה מבוימת של סצינות מתוך ההצגה דתילונים של בית לסין</p>	<p>הרב חיים כהן</p> <p>עוקד ונעקד</p> <p>עקדת יצחק בעיני הראי"ה זצ"ל</p>	<p>הרב חיים בן-נח</p> <p>מנהיגות יהודית אז והיום</p>	<p>הרב אלישע אבינר</p> <p>דור תהפוכות - האם ההיגיון שלנו מצליח?</p>	<p>11:20 - 12:20</p>
<p>Rabbanit Michal Nagen</p> <p>Dr. Tanya White</p> <p>How Does Crisis Affect Faith? A Conversation After October 7th</p>	<p>הרב דוד סתיו קלמן ליבסקינד</p> <p>החברה הישראלית לאן?</p>	<p>הרב ניר והרבנית נעמה מנסי</p> <p>הבוקר שאחרי</p> <p>מה קרה להאבה בעיני החופש?</p>	<p>הרב יוסף והרבנית עפרה שטרן</p> <p>פתח ליבנו בתורתך</p> <p>על חינוך לתורה ולמצוות בבית הבוגר</p>	<p>מירי וסטרין הרבנית ד"ר לאה ויזל</p> <p>"ראיתי ספינה אחת ששטפה בים, והייתי מצטער על תלמיד חכם שבה"</p> <p>על מעברים וסערות בעולמם של חכמים</p>	<p>12:40 - 13:40</p>

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13:40-14:40

<p>Haviv Rettig Gur</p> <p>Jewish Unity from Past to Future: Is It Worse Now Than in the Past? What Has United Us Before?</p>	<p>אילי טואל הרב עמנואל גר' זורה לוי</p> <p>כשרות שנוגעת באמון - הסיפור של זהר</p>	<p>שלום ויל חתם כהן-כחלון</p> <p>איך עושים יהודית ודמוקרטיה</p>	<p>איתן זלגור מיכאל שמש</p> <p>שבר ואפשרות:</p> <p>החברה החרדית בתוך החברה הישראלית שלאחר המלחמה</p>	<p>הרב אלחנן ניר אמונה אלון</p> <p>מה לרומן בבית המדרש?</p>	<p>14:40 - 15:40</p>
<p>Omer Barak</p> <p>When Secular Israelis Experience Antisemitism Firsthand</p>	<p>הרב יובל שרלו גב' עדי דמרי</p> <p>מוסר, מכונה ומסורת: אתגרים הלכתיים ואתיים בחינוך בעידן הבינה המלאכותית</p>	<p>הרבנית ד"ר מיכל טיקוץ-אסיק</p> <p>כשלא הכול הולך חלק: ההלכה בין אידיאל למציאות</p>	<p>הרב ליאור אנגלמן</p> <p>חרבות ברזל - עם כלביא: התבוננות אמונית</p>	<p>הרב אייל ורד</p> <p>נדרנו נדר! החורבן והתיקון בעקבות מסכת נדרים</p>	<p>16:00 - 17:00</p>
<p>Rav Yuval Cherlow Rav Asher Sabag</p> <p>Ethical and Halachic Questions in the Swords of Iron War</p>	<p>ורד אביעד-מחזון</p> <p>פרופ' פסח ליכטנברג דפנה נץ</p> <p>הזכות להיטעם בהמון</p>	<p>הרב דוד סתיו</p> <p>למי חסר מקדש?</p>	<p>ד"ר מיכה גודמן</p> <p>אפרת שפירא רוזנברג</p> <p>תפקיד הצינות הדתית בלב המאבק הישראלי</p>	<p>הרב יחיאל מיכאל יוספי</p> <p>הדרשה האחרונה והלילה האחרון בחיי רבי נחמן מברסלב עם תובנות לחיים של אהבה והתפתחות</p>	<p>17:20 - 18:20</p>

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Balak: Key to Redemption

The *gaon* Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap was a fiery *eved Hashem*, a brilliant talmid chacham, *poseik* and Kabbalist. He was the author of numerous volumes of *Sefer Mei Marom*, a sweeping theological work covering the gamut of *machsheves Yisrael* and expansively addressing the cosmic forces expressed in historical realities. A *talmid muvhak* and spiritual heir of Rav Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook, he was a successor to the role of Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav.

As a young man, Rav Charlap spent Shavuot in Yaffo where Rav Kook served as Chief Rabbi. In his memoir, he describes catching a glimpse of the Rav's shining countenance during davening, and witnessing the *dveykus* with which Rav Kook recited "*Akdamos*", trembling and weeping copious tears. Rav Charlap was swept off his feet: "I was moved to the very foundations of my soul. It was clear that the Rav was not only a Torah genius, but also a true *tzadik*. From that moment on, I clung to the Rav with great love in every way, and I became his disciple... I felt that I was being consumed by a Divine flame, all my corporeality evaporated, and my soul, which

became bound up in the soul of my Master, the Rav, rose above the highest worlds."

Rav Charlap was respected across all ideological divides in the Holy City. When the Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood of Yerushalyim was established outside the Old City in 1908, he was appointed as the *marah d'asra* and founded a yeshiva there called Beis Zevul (which is also the name

of the series of his published halachic works).

At an event marking a century since the establishment of the Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood, Rav Shmuel Auerbach shared his childhood memories of Rav Charlap's exalted *tefillos*. His father, the righteous *posek ha-dor*, Rav Shlomo Zalman, would encourage the young boy to witness how Rav Yaakov

Moshe would daven, with intensive focus, slowly and with *kavanah*. "More than seventy years after those *tefillos*, the way the Rav of Shaarei Chesed said 'Shema Yisrael' still echoes in my ears and reverberates in my heart."

מִה־טוֹב אֹהֶלְיָךְ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֶתְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Mah tovu — how good are your tents, O Yaakov;



Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap zt"l

Your dwellings, O Israel! (24:5)

Mah tovu marks the beginning of our daily davening, and it is also customary to say this *pasuk* when entering a shul or prayer space each morning. Framing our *tefillah* experience with words uttered by Bila'am, a degenerate sorcerer hellbent on awakening supernal stink-eye and cursing the Jewish people, is somewhat disconcerting. Gemara *Berachos*, 12b goes so far as to inform us that Chazal contemplated incorporating Bila'am's words into an even more significant part of our daily prayers, alongside the recitation of the *Shema*.

In *Berachos* 7a, Chazal maintain that Bilaam was *yodeah daas Elyon*, with insight drawn from the dark side. He knew the thoughts of his Creator and had the prophetic ability to pinpoint the precise moment of the day, the exact 1/58,888th of an hour, when one could invoke a Divine curse upon the Jewish People, *chas v'shalom*. He actively sought to exploit this moment to curse Am Yisrael and bring down Hashem's wrath upon us.

However, as Reb Simcha Bunim, the "Lev Simcha", sixth Gerrer Rebbe taught, at that very moment, instead of cursing Bila'am HaRasha actually spoke from his heart and pronounced *Mah tovu...*, extolling the virtues of the nation of Israel. Despite himself, Bilaam had an unexpected moment of sincerity, and issued a heart-felt blessing instead of the precisely scheduled curse. At that split second of vulnerability, his 'prayer' for Am Yisrael's salvation from Balak is what came to fruition.

In *Mei Marom*, his *peirush* on the *siddur* (vol 13, p. 22), Rav Charlap teaches, יש להרגיש / כי עצמיות התיבות של התפילה הם המפתחות "One must feel that in essence the words of

prayer are keys..." These 'keys' unlock the chains that hold us back and grant us access to gates that might otherwise be closed. Rav Charlap adds a cryptic note and personal, parenthetical postscript to this teaching: }ובאור ליום שבעה עשר בתמוז תש"ו ראיתי בחלום הלילה את כבוד קדושת רבינו הרב זכר צדיק וקדוש לברכה ושאלני מה חידשתי הרוחניות, אמרתי לפניו קטע זה.

"On the night of the 17th of Tamuz, 5706 (1946), I saw the honorable, holy Rav, may his memory be for a blessing, in a dream. He asked me, 'What new spiritual insights have you authored?' And I related this teaching to him."

This weekend marks the 17th of Tamuz and the beginning of the days of *Bein HaMeitzarim*, an auspicious moment to redouble our efforts and pour out our hearts in sincere prayer and supplication for our salvation. May we break free from the shackles of exile that continue to restrain us and open all the gates. May we merit that the Jewish People be praised On High, and blessed with redemption and the rebuilding of Hashem's own 'dwelling' on earth, *bim'heirah*.

יְשׁוּעַת ה' כְּהֶרֶף עֵין

'Hashem's salvations can come in the blink of an eye.' (*Midrash Lekach Tov* on *Esther*, 4:17) ■



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Conditions for *Bishul Akum*

Our Sages decreed that certain foods cooked by non-Jews are prohibited for consumption, even if the ingredients themselves are entirely kosher. This rabbinic prohibition is known as *Bishul Akum*. According to most early authorities (see *Tosafot*, *Avodah Zara* 38:a), the rationale for this decree is to discourage overly close social interaction with non-Jews, which could ultimately lead to intermarriage.

While this decree may appear to prohibit all forms of cooking by non-Jews, the Sages established specific conditions under which this prohibition applies, based on the underlying logic of the decree.

TWO CONDITIONS

The *Gemara* (*Avodah Zara* 38:a) presents two key conditions, each taught by one of the major *Batei Midrash* in Babylonia during the Amaraic period. The *Beit Midrash* in Sura taught that the prohibition of *Bishul Akum*

only applies to foods that are not typically eaten raw, i.e., foods that are usually cooked before consumption. The *Beit Midrash* in Pumbedita, on the other hand, held that *Bishul Akum* applies only to foods that are served at a king's table, meaning they are of a type customarily served at formal or distinguished meals.

Both conditions reflect the same underlying concern: social intimacy created through shared meals. When food is typically eaten raw or is not served at elegant meals, it lacks the social significance that the Sages were concerned about, and thus does not fall under the decree of *Bishul Akum*.

DISPUTE AMONG THE RISHONIM

There is a notable dispute among early halachic authorities regarding whether both conditions must be met for the prohibition to apply. The *Ramban* (*Avodah Zara* 37:b) rules that only one of the two conditions is sufficient. According to his view, if a food is either not eaten raw or is served at a king's table, it would fall under the prohibition of *Bishul Akum*. Conversely, *Tosafot* (ibid) adopts a more lenient position, requiring both conditions to be present. Therefore, if a food can be eaten raw—even if it is also served at formal meals—it would not be subject to the prohibition.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (YD 113:1), followed

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by virtually all later authorities, rules in accordance with *Tosafot*. As such, both conditions must be met for a food to fall under the prohibition of *Bishul Akum*.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This ruling has several practical implications. For example, dairy products such as cheese and yogurt, although commonly served at formal meals, are typically eaten raw. As such, their preparation by non-Jews would not fall under the prohibition of *Bishul Akum* (*Ozta Halachot, Bishul Akum* p.261) however, a food like porridge, while made from ingredients that are not eaten raw, is not typically served at formal meals, and would likewise be exempt.

The *Gemara* also mentions an additional condition: whether the food is eaten with bread at a formal meal. The *Pri Chadash* (113:3) cites this view and provides evidence that the *Rambam* supports it. According to this approach, desserts such as cakes and soufflés would not be subject to *Bishul Akum* because they are not typically eaten with

bread.

However, the *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* (ibid) do not codify this condition as part of the halacha. The *Aruch HaShulchan* (YD 113:7) explains that while the *Gemara* uses this expression, it is not meant to be taken literally. Rather, it serves to illustrate that the food in question should be of the type typically served at a significant meal—where bread would usually be present. Thus, the phrase “eaten with bread” indicates social importance, not a literal requirement.

In summary, although desserts are not eaten with bread, they may still qualify for *Bishul Akum* if they are not eaten raw and are served at formal meals. The same applies to foods like rice, which, while not typically eaten with bread, are often served at distinguished meals and thus may fall under the decree. ■

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Classes @ Bet Knesset Nitzanim, 3 Asher Street, Bakaa

9:20 AM

Understanding Tefila
Rabbi Yossi Goldin
(Resumes July 15)

11:25 AM

Modern Masters **Rabbi Sam Shor**
(Rabbi Goldin will resume in Fall)

10:15 AM

Meaning in Mitzvot
Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz

12:20 PM

Unpacking the Messages
of Chazal **Rabbi Shai Finkelstein**
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Holy Poetry

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler

10:20 AM

Contemporary Issues in Halacha
and Hashkafa

Rabbi Anthony Manning

11:25 AM

Wisdom of Rav Kook

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

12:30PM

Medieval Jewish History

Dr. Deborah Polster

(Will Resume in Sept.)

THURSDAY JULY 17

COMMUNITY BEIT MIDRASH IN ARNONA

Classes @ Bet Knesset
Shai Agnon,
11 Rechov Leib Yaffe, Arnona

9:15 AM

Parshat HaShavua

Rabbi Ari Kahn

10:30AM

Parshat HaShavua

Rabbi Baruch Taub

11:20AM

AMTrailblazing the Text of TaNach

Rabbi Neil Winkler

8:00 PM

Halachic Controversies

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10:40 AM One Nation, One Heart-A Vision for Medinat Yisrael

12:00PM Communal Lunch, followed by
Divine Connections: Discovering Meaning in Mitzvot

9:15 PM Communal Melava Malka- Havdala, light refreshments
followed by: The Keys are in Our Hands-A Three Weeks Primer

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Thursday July 17, 9:15-1:00 PM



9:15AM

Words of Introduction

Mrs. Zemira Ozarowski

9:25AM

Tehillim and
Mourning the Beit HaMikdash

Mrs. Atara Starr

10:15AM Tehillim Art Workshop

Mrs. Penina Rothman

11:05AM Brunch Break

11:20AM From Cry to Clarity:
The Journey to Joy through
Tehillim **Mrs. Yael Dworkin**

12:10AM

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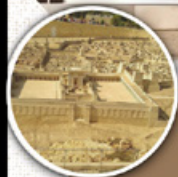
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BY RABBI SAM SHOR
DIRECTOR, TORAH INITIATIVES,
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Rav Elazar Shach, zt"l, the great and saintly *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Yeshivat Ponevitch* in *Bnai Brak*, had a neighbor—a pious *baal habayit* who was not 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* passage. 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, zy'a 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. In



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every generation there is a *Bilaam* who sits around a table, sometimes surrounded by advisors, to plan how they will terrorize or seek to bring trouble upon *Am Yisrael*.

Each and every *Shabbat* as we sit at our *shabbat* tables we recite the verse from the 23rd psalm- '*taaroch lefanai 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.

Similarly the **Lubavitcher Rebbe zy'a** taught:

"The Shabbat itself is a fortress of holiness which encloses and protects the soul..."

Yehi Ratzon, in these troubling times, may each of us be blessed to realize the spiritual fortitude that we can gain through the beauty of *Shabbat Kodesh*.

Shabbat Shalom. ■



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Lost in Sefer Bereishit: Bilaam's Defeat

The Gemara in Berakhot (12b) discusses the selection of the third section of *Keri'at Shema*. To fulfill the daily obligation of remembering *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Chazal expanded *Keri'at Shema* to include a Torah passage that explicitly recalls our liberation. In the end, they selected the concluding section of *Parashat Shelach*, which discusses Tzitzit but closes with the familiar declaration:

“אני ה' אלוהיכם אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים”

“I am the Lord your G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.”

The Gemara poses a striking question. Why did Chazal not choose Bilaam's prophecies, which mention *Yetziat Mitzrayim* not once, but twice? In his vision, Bilaam describes the Exodus in bold, elevated terms:

“א-ל מוציאם ממצרים כתועפות ראם לו”

“G-d who brought them out of Egypt—His strength like the towering horns of a wild ox.”

The Gemara ultimately disqualifies Bilaam's section because it is too long. Including his prophecies in *Keri'at Shema* would have been considered a *tircha de-tzibbura*—a burdensome addition for the *tzibbur*.

Yet, the very fact that his words were considered reveals something deeper. Many verses in the Torah mention *Yetziat*

Mitzrayim, but Bilaam's prophecy touches on a more fundamental level. The themes woven through his vision are so essential that, in principle, they might have warranted inclusion—were it not for technical reasons that ruled them out.

OBSESSED WITH BEREISHIT

Bilaam shows a strange fixation on Sefer Bereishit and the story of our Avot. He rises early to begin his campaign against the Jewish people, personally saddling his donkey instead of delegating the task. This imagery is unmistakable—he is echoing Avraham's journey to the Akeidah. Like Avraham, he wakes at dawn, readies his own animal, and will meet a *malach* emissary who might block his path.

Before he even climbs the desert mountain, Bilaam tries to climb into Avraham's footsteps.

When he arrives, Bilaam begins his prophecy with a cryptic line:

“כִּי מֵרֹאשׁ צֻרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ, וּמִגְבְּעוֹת אֶשְׁוֹרְנוּ”

“From the tops of rocks I see him, from the hills I behold him.”

Literally, the verse shows Bilaam standing atop a summit, looking down at the nation he wants to weaken. Yet Chazal see a deeper meaning. Rashi explains, “אני מסתכל בראשיתם,”

“I look to their beginnings, to the root of their origin.” Bilaam wasn’t just surveying the land; he was probing the spiritual roots of the Jewish people, tracing their foundation all the way back to Sefer Bereishit. Somehow, he believed that by uncovering their origin story, he could disrupt their destiny.

SEVEN ALTARS AND A RIGHTEOUS DEATH

Bilaam’s fixation with *Sefer Bereishit* surfaces once again in his demand for altars. He repeatedly instructs Balak’s men to construct seven altars, hoping they will serve as the spiritual platform for his intended curse. As Rashi notes, Bilaam was deeply aware of the seven *mizbeichot* described in *Sefer Bereishit*—four built by Avraham, one by Yitzchak, and two by Yaakov. By replicating these seven altars, he hoped to tap into the foundation of Jewish identity. His strategy was to first confront our spiritual legacy and afterwards to curse our people and our history.

As Bilaam begins to sense that his efforts to derail Jewish destiny are failing, he utters a surprising wish:

“תָּמוּת נֶפֶשִׁי מוֹת יְשָׁרִים”

“Let me die the death of the righteous.”

The term *Yesharim*—the upright—is one of the titles Chazal assign to our *Avot*. According to the Midrash, as Bilaam realizes his plan is unraveling, he expresses a longing for the fate of the *Avot*. He can’t seem to get *Sefer Bereishit*—and the lives of the *Avot*—out of his mind. He awakens early, as Avraham did. He personally saddles his donkey, mirroring Avraham’s journey to the *Akeidah*. He studies the roots of Jewish history before attempting to curse us. He erects seven altars to parallel the altars built by Avraham, Yitzchak, and

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Yaakov. And as his failure becomes clear, he yearns for an end like theirs.

Sefer Bereishit and the lives of our *Avot* are circling constantly through Bilam’s imagination.

ANTI-AVRAHAM

Chazal noticed the striking parallels between Avraham and Bilaam and drew a sharp contrast between them. They taught that whoever has certain traits is counted among Avraham’s disciples, while those with opposite traits belong to Bilaam’s followers: “כל מי שיש בידו שלשה דברים הללו, מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו. ושלשה דברים אחרים, מתלמידיו של בלעם הרשע. עין טובה, ורוח נמוכה, ונפש שפלה – מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו. עין רעה, ורוח גבוהה, ונפש רחבה – מתלמידיו של בלעם הרשע.”

Whoever possesses these three traits is among the disciples of Avraham. Whoever possesses three other traits is among the disciples of Bilaam. A generous eye, a humble spirit, and a modest soul—these are the disciples of Avraham. A jealous eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul—these are the disciples of Bilam the wicked. (Avot 5:19)

In this way, Bilaam stands as the anti-Avraham. His actions embody the opposite of Avraham’s virtues. Where Avraham shows

humility, generosity, and purity of heart, Bilaam displays arrogance, envy, and selfish ambition.

Though Bilaam is obsessed with our Avot, he becomes their dark reflection—a twisted mirror image of all they represented.

BALAK, AS WELL

It seems that Balak and his emissaries were also deeply engaged with *Sefer Bereishit*. When Balak hires Bilam, he declares:

כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר תְּבָרֵךְ מְבָרֵךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תָּאָר
יֵאָר

“For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.”

The wording here echoes Hashem’s promise to Avraham:

וְאֶבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אָאָר

“I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse.”

It was not only Bilaam who sought to understand the foundations of *Sefer Bereishit*. Balak, too, recognized that the key to overcoming the Jewish people lay hidden within the ancient promises made in that sefer.

Why is *Sefer Bereishit* at the heart of this struggle? Why is it the key to the future and victory of the Jewish people? Why do Bilaam and Balak seek to outmaneuver the Avot by retracing and mimicking their journeys and experiences?

What was Bilaam thinking?

UNCHOSEN?

Bilaam was no fool. He claimed to be a prophet who understood Hashem’s will. The story suggests this was empty boasting, but even without prophecy, recent history was clear. The Jewish people were Hashem’s chosen, marked by supernatural miracles. Hashem had brought the mighty empire of Egypt to its knees and split the roaring sea.

He spoke from heaven and sent down heavenly bread to sustain us through a perilous forty-year journey in the desert. The fierce warriors of Canaan trembled before us. We had defeated the powerful king Sichon and toppled the giant Og.

So what was Bilaam thinking? How could he believe that Moav—a weakened nation recently defeated by Sichon—could overcome us?

Bilaam was betting that the course of history had changed. Maybe we were once chosen, but clearly we had betrayed that chosenness. Twice we defied Hashem—first by crafting a golden idol, and again by rejecting the Land He promised us. We were condemned to wander the desert for forty years, until a whole generation passed away. Perhaps we had been chosen once, but the generation that left Egypt no longer lived up to that legacy.

A new generation arrived, bringing fresh hope. Maybe this time, faith and covenant would endure. Yet sadly, it seemed like the old story repeated itself—complaints about water and manna, popular uprisings longing to return to Egypt, even complaints against Hashem Himself. Once again, the people acted as if they were no longer chosen.

This was exactly Bilaam’s wager. Perhaps we had once been chosen, but history had moved on. Hashem had bypassed our people. We were stuck east of the Jordan, unable to enter Israel freely. Trapped in local conflicts with no clear victory. The old leadership had passed away, and Moshe was forbidden from the Land. History was shifting, and the story of Jewish chosenness seemed to be slipping away.

A NEW ORIGIN STORY

Bilaam saw an opportunity to craft an

alternate narrative of redemptive history. Perhaps Hashem was ready to restart the story—with a new prophet and a new people. After all, the Moabites traced their lineage to Lot. Maybe another branch of Shem ben Noach's family would carry the divine legacy forward.

Bilaam was the first to suggest what later became known as “Replacement theory”—the idea that Hashem had rejected us as His chosen people and selected another nation instead. This claim, echoed by various religions over time, finds its earliest expression in Bilaam's words.

To challenge Bereishit, Bilaam retraced its footsteps. He studied Sefer Bereishit to grasp the origins of the chosen people. He built altars, hoping to ignite a new narrative of chosenness and redemption.

To his dismay, Bilaam discovers that our covenant is unshakable—sealed in salt and beyond decay.

He laments:

“מה אקוב לא קבה קל”

“What can I curse? God has not cursed; what can I denounce? The Lord has not done anything evil.”

The Midrash explains that Bilaam expected Hashem to be angry with the rebellious Jewish people and to curse them. He imagined his own curse would echo a divine wrath already in motion—amplifying judgment and sealing their fate.

But when he realizes that even after all our sins, Hashem still loves us, Bilaam grasps the futility of his plan. If Hashem refuses to curse us—even after our betrayals—then Bilaam has no power to do so. His voice is meaningless if Heaven remains silent.

He is stunned to see that despite religious

failings, Hashem remains devoted to His chosen people:

“לא הביט און ביעקב ולא ראה עמל בישראל ה’

אלוקיו עמו ותרועת מלך בו”

“He has not looked upon wrongdoing in Jacob, nor seen trouble in Israel; the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of the king is among them.”

Bilaam had naively assumed that after our sins, Hashem would regard us with disfavor.

He is shattered when he realizes that even amid our spiritual struggles, Hashem does not turn away or condemn us.

A MESSAGE FOR HISTORY

It is this unraveling of Bilaam's gamble that gives his prophecy its enduring historical and religious power. For this reason, Chazal considered including it in *Keri'at Shema* and would have done so if not for practical considerations.

Beyond recalling *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, Bilaam uncovers that our covenant with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is eternal and unbreakable. His revelation stands as a refutation to all who, throughout history, have claimed that Am Yisrael was replaced by the passing of time.

Many have followed in Bilaam's footsteps, but history has proven their claims wrong. We were chosen by Hashem thousands of years ago. Sometimes we failed to live up to our mission. Sometimes we were expelled from our Land. None of this cancels Jewish history. None of this undoes our chosenness. We are not just chosen; we are His children. A father never abandons his child. ■



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A Good Eye

“There has arisen no prophet in Israel like Moshe’ (Deuteronomy 34:10), but among the nations of the world there has arisen. Who is he? Bilam ben Be’or.”¹ That is some high praise for a non-Jewish prophet, no matter how accomplished. Note, however, that the verse says “like Moshe” (כְּמֹשֶׁה), and this is an instance where the *kaf* of comparison (כּ) remains in the realm of “not quite.” In fact, in one significant respect Bilam did not hold a candle to Jewish prophets of even non-Mosaic rank:

All the prophets [of the Jewish people] were motivated by the attribute of mercy toward both the Jewish people and the nations. [...] As for the prophets of the nations of the world, they were motivated by the attribute of cruelty, for [Bilam] arose to uproot an entire nation for no reason at all.²

Perhaps Bilam was bitten by the nasty bug of anti-Judaism, as his actions bespeak a blind hatred of the Jewish people. When offered a princely sum by an entourage from Moav to curse the Jewish people, he had the audacity to think God might see things his way (Numbers 22:19). He then woke early to pronounce his curse and even saddled his own donkey (Numbers 22:21). Our Sages observe that he broke with routine and did not wait for his servants, since “hate prevents

thinking straight.” Contrast this with Avraham’s saddling of his own donkey prior to the *Akedah*, the Binding of Yitzchak—“love prevents thinking straight.”³

The Midrash tells us that Bilam exhibited the “attribute of cruelty,” so it was in character for him to attempt to harness God’s “attribute of judgment.” For one moment every day, for a mere 1/58,888th of an hour, God gets angry, and “no living being can determine precisely when this moment occurs except for the wicked Bilam.”⁴ Bilam’s intention was to curse the Jewish people at this precise moment, so that God Himself would be the one to destroy them.

It is difficult to comprehend what exactly it means for God to get angry, since He is perfectly benevolent and is not an entity that experiences passions. Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook viewed the notion of God getting angry as a way of teaching us about our own *midot*, our character and conduct.⁵ Every human character trait with which God has endowed us can be used positively. One *should* feel anger at injustice, corruption, cruelty, and other equally terrible human failings. Of the spectrum of emotions, though, anger should color our perception of the world only on the rare occasions it is truly warranted. This is what is meant by God’s anger lasting 1/58,888th of an hour. In modern parlance, this emotion should linger

1. *Yalkut Shimoni*, §966.

2. *Midrash Tanchuma, Balak*, §1.

3. *Ibid.*, §8, quoted by Rashi on Numbers 22:21, *וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת אֲתָנּוּ*.

4. *Berachot* 7a.

5. *Ein Ayah, Berachot*, 1:69.

for a microsecond, long enough for it to register and be acted upon, and then dissipate.

The wicked, entrenched in immorality and iniquity, use the raw power of negative emotions to further their diabolical ends. Bilam used his unusual gifts to tap into divine “anger” and pipe it onto the Jewish people. The righteous, according to Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlop, know that God is only merciful, and so they seek to bring blessing into the world and annul divine decrees made in divine “anger.”⁶

Our Sages contrast Avraham and Bilam in how they view the world:

Those who have a good eye, a humble spirit, and a modest soul are among the disciples of our forefather Avraham. Those who have an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and an insatiable soul are of the disciples of the wicked Bilam.⁷

The Mishnah does not focus on all the great character traits of Avraham, but on the essential attributes that were at the root of his generous spirit.

A person with a good eye wishes that others be blessed with good fortune. The Mishnah in *Pirkei Avot* asks: “Who is rich? Whoever is happy with their lot.” Rebbe Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, the *Sefat Emet*, imparted to his Chassidim that the very rich are those who are happy when their friends experience good fortune.⁸ Furthermore, by cultivating this outlook, we become more like Avraham in seeking to extend our own good fortune to others. Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook drew the following contrast: “Bilam was a professional hexer. Avraham was a source of blessing... [all the families of the earth] shall be blessed

through you’ (Genesis 12:3).”⁹

Rav Kook the father explained that a good eye, arguably man’s most precious *midah*,¹⁰ does not come from working on a single character trait like compassion or generosity. It is an entire perspective on the world and on life. One recognizes God’s goodness and feels blessed to live in such a world. When a Jew awakens in the morning the first words uttered are *modeh*, an expression of thanks. Rav Kook explained that this prayer verbalizes a feeling of optimism and hope for oneself, one’s fellow Jew, and the entire world.¹¹

Rav Kook once advised: If you find yourself in a dark place, don’t waste your time cursing the darkness, just light a candle. This is the Jewish way. It is no coincidence that the titles of Rav Kook’s writings incorporate the Hebrew word for lights, *orot*. They strive to see the world from a benevolent God’s-eye-view, as it were, in which everything is rising and fractures are healing. Divine anger is—at worst—fleeting. The kindness and compassion Rav Kook and his writings promote light up the world. ■

9. *Sichot ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, Bereshit*, 137.

10. See *Pirkei Avot*, 2:14.

11. *Siddur Olat Re’iyah*, 1:1. See further *Parashat Vayetze*, “Jewishness is Thankfulness.”



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Mazal Tov to
Stefan and Rochelle Somogyi
and family on the birth of their
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6. *Mo'ed Katan* 16b. See *Mei Marom, Nimukei Mikra'ot*, 201.

7. *Pirkei Avot*, 5:19.

8. See further *Parashat Yitro*, “*Baruch Hashem*.”



לעילוי נשמת
 יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Minyan or Tallit and Tefillin?

Question: Right before entering *shul* for *Shacharit*, I realized I forgot my *tallit* and *tefillin* (=t&t). If I would go home to get them, I would effectively miss *tefilla b'tzibbur* (it was the last *minyan*). What is preferable – to *daven* at home with t&t or *daven* in *shul* without them?

Answer: If you were just missing a *tallit*, it would clearly be better to *daven* with a *minyan* (Ishei Yisrael 12:19). Arguably, it is improper to recite *Kri'at Shema* (=KS), whose third *parasha* commands to wear *tzitzit*, without a *tallit* on, like doing so without *tefillin* is (see *Berachot* 14b). However, not all agree that it is an issue because the *mitzva* applies only if one is wearing a four-cornered garment (Tosafot ad loc.). Furthermore, you presumably are fulfilling the *mitzva* with your *tzitzit*. While we are somewhat concerned that the *tzitzit* garment is not large enough for the *mitzva* (*Darchei Moshe*, Orach Chayim 8:3) and there are other advantages to *davening* with a *tallit* (including covering one's head with it), most Ashkenazi single men demonstrate that this is far from critical, as they men rely on the

assumption they are big enough (see *Living the Halachic Process* III, F-7).

Regarding *tefillin*, we mentioned the *gemara* that it is problematic to do KS without them, because it contains their commandment. Important sources (see *Tosafot* ad loc., *Shulchan Aruch*, OC 25:4) extend this to *Shemoneh Esrei* (=SE). This is not an absolute rule, as we recite KS without *tefillin* when *sof z'man* KS is before our *davening* and we will later repeat KS with *tefillin* on (see *Yabia Omer* I, OC 4). Which is stronger – the preference to *daven* with a *minyan* (*Shulchan Aruch*, OC 90:16) or reciting KS/SE with *tefillin*?

The *Magen Avraham* (66:12) writes that one who is waiting to borrow *tefillin* should forgo SE with a *minyan* in order not to *daven* without them. His source is based on what we might call the halachic transitive property of inequality: If one enters *shul* when the congregation is about to start SE of *Shacharit*, he must not skip straight to SE because the importance of *davening* SE immediately after mentioning *geula* is greater than that of *davening* SE with a *minyan* (*Shulchan Aruch*, OC 111:3). Nevertheless, if one attains *tefillin* between *geula* and SE, he should put on the *tefillin* at that point, despite the resulting break (ibid. 66:8.). This shows that the importance of *davening* with *tefillin* is greater than the proximity of SE to *geula*. If SE with *tefillin* is of greater importance than the proximity of *geula* and *tefilla*, and that proximity is of greater importance than SE with a *minyan*, it follows that *davening* SE with *tefillin* is more

important than *davening SE* with a *minyan*.

We have shown (Living the Halachic Process IV, A-3) how to deflect the Magen Avraham's proof and pointed out that some disagree with him, but the Mishna Berura (66:40) and most *Acharonim* (see Ishei Yisrael *ibid.*) accept his ruling. However, especially because the Magen Avraham is already a *chiddush*, we need not extend the choice to prefer the *tefillin* over *minyan* to your case because you would lose other things as well. Although we consider *minyan* more important for *SE* than for being able to recite other *devarim shebekedusha* (see Chaye Adam I:19:1), it is very possible that the Magen Avraham would agree that the two together are more important than *tefillin* for *davening*. You can add to that the value of *davening* in a *shul* (Shulchan Aruch, OC 90:9). Therefore, we would recommend to stay in *shul* rather than *daven* at home and put on *t&t* and repeat *Kri'at Shema* after going home.

You may have overlooked better alternatives. Many *shuls* have spare pairs of *t&t* or

people to borrow from at some point in *tefilla*. (In order to make a *beracha* on a *tallit* and fulfill the *mitzva*, one must acquire it temporarily (*ibid.* 14:3); for *tefillin*, it just must not be stolen (*ibid.* 25:12).) Another possibility was to return with *t&t* and although not making it to *SE* with the *tzibbur*, partake in some of the *devarim shebekedusha*. (You would just need to ensure that you did not miss *sof zman KS* or *tefilla*.) ■

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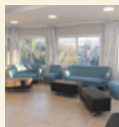


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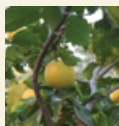


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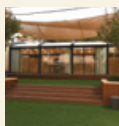
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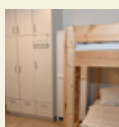


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MOTHER OF SGT. BINYAMIN HY''D

“No Curse Can Hold”: Parshat Balak and the Power of Ahavat Yisrael

I don't think I've ever been as excited to relearn Parshat Balak as I was this year. As a nation still reeling from the recent Operation “Rising Lion”—a name drawn directly from our Parsha's verse “עם כלבא יקום” (“A nation shall rise like a lion”)—I couldn't help but feel that this week's Torah portion is more alive and relevant than ever. These were words originally intended as a curse by Bilam, the infamous non-Jewish prophet hired by Balak to annihilate Am Yisrael with words alone. And yet, they became a source of blessing, strength, and pride.

How can we explain this transformation of Bilam's intention of curses to the actualization of blessings?

There are so many lessons to learn from

this very point. Firstly, the power of words—in blessings and curses. מוות וחיים ביד הלשון. Life and death are in the power of the tongue. We as humans have the profound ability to use verbal language. It's a gift and ought to be used wisely.

Secondly, each time Bilam was unsuccessful in delivering his curses, he moved locations thinking that would help. Can we escape Hashem? When God wants something, He can find us anywhere.

Bilam, a supposed master prophet, is repeatedly unable to utter the curses he's hired to deliver. Almost humorously, a donkey opens its mouth and rebukes its rider. Bilam, known for his precise control of language, stammers and fails. But beneath the surface of this near-comic narrative lies one of the most profound spiritual principles in the Torah: when the Jewish people are united, no curse in the world can take hold.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin 105b reveals the true intent behind Bilam's efforts. It wasn't just to curse us with words, but to disconnect us from our Source. He knew that if Am Yisrael could be separated from Hashem, the spiritual protection we enjoy would fall away. But he failed—because even in our lowest

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moments, even after the most grievous sins—as long as we remain connected to each other, we remain tethered to Hashem.

Take for example Bilam's so-called "curse":

"הן עם לבדד ישכון ובגויים לא יתחשב"

"Behold, a nation that dwells alone, not counted among the nations".

Bilam intended we would assimilate, disappear into the masses. Instead, his words declared an eternal truth: we remain distinct, protected not by numbers or alliances, but by our unique connection to Hashem.

For his third attempt to curse the Jewish nation, Bilam turns toward the desert—וישת אל המדבר פניו—perhaps hoping to invoke the memory of our greatest national sin, the Golden Calf, which occurred in that wilderness. But the words that follow shock even him:

וישא בלעם את עיניו. וירא את ישראל שוכן לשבטיו. ותהי עליו רוח אלוקים.

"Bilam raised his eyes and saw Israel encamped according to its tribes, and the spirit of God rested upon him."

What changed? Rashi explains: Bilam saw that each tribe maintained its individuality, its privacy, and its modesty.

The Slonimer expands on לשבטיו - we are as one, united tribe. It was precisely this unity that triggered Divine protection. Our Sages explain that in order to have אהבת ה' (love of God) we must first have אהבת ישראל (love for our fellow Jew). When we truly love each other, we open the channel to love Hashem.

When Bilam saw how each שבט (tribe), cared and respected each other, he understood: this bond between the people and Hashem cannot be severed. No curse will prevail.

The שבטים (twelve tribes) were not

identical. Some were scholars, others warriors, farmers, artisans, merchants, and teachers. Yaakov Avinu deliberately blessed each child differently, affirming their individuality while binding them into a single collective mission. Unity in diversity wasn't a flaw—it was the design.

This idea echoes the teachings of the Apter Rav, Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heshel of Apta, known as the Ohev Yisrael. He famously taught that every single parsha in the Torah contains a lesson in Ahavat Yisrael. In our parsha, Balak, his students challenged him: where is the lesson in love here?

He answered it is in the very name of the parsha- Balak.

BaLaK—spelled בִּלְק—is an acronym, he said, for the phrase "ואהבת לרעך כמוך" ("Love your neighbor as yourself").

His students objected: "But it's not the same letters!"

To which the Apter Rav replied:

"באהבת ישראל לא מדקדקים באותיות"

"When it comes to loving other Jews, don't get caught up in exact letters".

If you're always nitpicking details, you'll never reach love.

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differences. It means recognizing that every Jew, even one who sins or struggles, is still part of the camp, still beloved by Hashem. And that, perhaps, is the ultimate defense against our enemies.

As we approached the 17th of Tammuz, I was certain we wouldn't fast this year. I truly believed Zechariah's prophecy would come true:

"The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months will be transformed into joy and celebration" (Zechariah 8:19).

But it seems we still have some work to do. Perhaps we are not yet fully שוכן לשבטינו —dwelling together with mutual love and respect.

Still, Parshat Balak reminds us: we're close. The power to turn curses into blessings lies not in the mouths of prophets or enemies, but in Hashem's 'hand'- based on the way we love, care for, and unite with one another.

When we embody "ואהבת לרעך כמוך", no curse can take hold. Not even Bilam's. ■

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SHOSHANA JUDELMAN

TORAH TIDBITS CONTRIBUTOR

Flipping the Narrative

Every conversation is a complicated wrestling match between the desire to be seen and the need to self-protect. It is fraught with the possibility of misunderstanding.

Each of us sees the world through our own filters. So sometimes I don't hear what you are saying but rather what I am expecting.

In this week's parsha, Balak, King of Moab, sends messengers to hire the prophet Bilaam to curse Am Yisrael. After the messengers lay out their proposal, Bilaam tells them that he only has prophecy at night and they will have to wait until morning to receive an answer.

In an almost shocking display of his powers of prophecy, Bilaam does, in fact, "meet" with Hashem that night. The Torah tells us:

הָאֱלֹהִים עָמָד:

G-d came to Bilaam and said, "Who are these men with you?"

Did Hashem not know?

Rashi tells us that Hashem asked this question to mislead Bilaam. Before this episode, Bilaam was afraid to curse Am Yisrael. He saw the wonders Hashem did for His people and he did not want to anger such a powerful G-d. But when Hashem asked, "Who are these men with you?" it seemed to Bilaam that maybe he had misjudged the situation, perhaps the G-d of Israel was not as all-knowing as he had believed. Perhaps there was a chance to get at Am Yisrael after all? Based on this misconception, Bilaam took the job.

The Maharal, Rabbi Yehudah Loew of Prague, teaches that since the ways of Hashem are straight and true, we must dig deeper in our efforts to more fully understand Rashi's explanation. Hashem doesn't try to trick us. The Maharal brings a teaching from the Gemara (Shabbos 104a) that if a person wants to corrupt or sin, he is provided with an opening to do so and if a person wants to do good, or bring a purification to the world, he is helped from Above. The Maharal explains that, in Bilaam's case, he *wanted* Hashem to be less powerful, and he *wanted* a chance to curse Am Yisrael. He, therefore, heard what he wanted to hear in Hashem's question.

Hashem didn't trick Bilaam; He provided an opening and Bilaam used it to trick

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himself.

How often do we do that to ourselves?
How often do I read a text and interpret
it according to whatever narrative I have
playing in my head?

Balak is the only parsha told from the point
of view of an outsider, a different perspective.
Perhaps this change in perspective can be
read as a hint to us to open our hearts to see-
ing an interaction from a different viewpoint?
That, as much as I see my own hypothesis
playing out in your words, perhaps that is
not actually what you meant?

May each and every one of us have the
strength to remember parshas Balak in
those moments of deepest confusion, when
we feel broken by that text or conversation,
and ask: Am I bringing my own baggage in
here? Am I coloring this interaction with my
own mindset and insecurities? I bless us to
remember that by flipping the perspective
here, the Torah helps give us the strength
and the courage to do the same.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

Shoshana teaches Chassidus for the Shirat David
Community in Efrat as well as in Jerusalem for Midreshet
Rachel v'Chaya and Shiviti Women's Institute. She is a
guide in Poland with JRoots and co-leads inspirational
trips to Ukraine and around Eretz Yisroel. Shoshana
has also been a guide at Yad Vashem since 2014.

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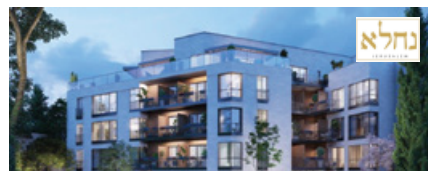
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מאיר יצחק בן יוסף אליהו הכהן ז"ל

Fear of Rejection

Shmuel asks:

My close friend recently shared something that felt so honest and I didn't have a good answer for her..

"What can I do with my fear of rejection? It holds me back, and I don't want it to close my heart to something good."

Aleeza answers:

Thank you so much for asking this question it's one that lives quietly in so many hearts. The fear of rejection is so human, so normal... and yet it can feel so heavy. I want to gently remind her: she's not alone in this.

Here's what I've learned: rejection doesn't define your worth. It redirects your path. Sometimes it feels like someone is saying "no" to you, but really, Hashem is saying, "not this person, not now." That doesn't mean something is wrong with you. It means something better is ahead. We take a step forward, and sometimes Hashem says "yes," sometimes "not yet," and sometimes "no." But every time, our we become stronger. More resilient. More ready for the one who will choose us and whom we'll choose back.

Fear of rejection often comes from the belief that it says something about who we are. But it's not about you. It's about the match not being right. Every person who dates faces fear of rejection in some way. It's part of the courage it takes to build something real. Dating is not just about finding someone it's about becoming someone. And every time you show up, even afraid, you're becoming braver, wiser, and of course heading towards your match.

Here are a few gentle questions she can ask herself:

- What am I really afraid will happen if someone says "no"?
- Have I survived rejection before and what did I learn from it?
- What if this next "no" is just one step



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closer to my “yes”?

She doesn't have to erase the fear. She just can't let it lead. Let hope lead. Let clarity lead. Let curiosity lead.

She is strong enough to face disappointment. And when it's right, nothing not even fear will stand in the way of the bayit ne'eman Hashem is preparing for her.

Blessings, Aleeza ■



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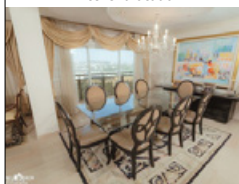
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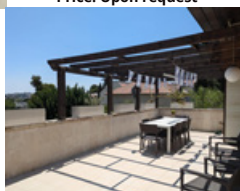
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Michal Silverstein, MS

Finding Connection in Chaos

As I write this article, postwar with Iran, I'm still trying to find the balance between imminent threat and normal life. These days don't give us much time to process. We're living in extremes and are expected to simply switch from high alert to normal, overnight. Obviously, our brains and bodies are not built that way. We're not wired to just "snap" out of things or turn off our sympathetic nervous system.

In order to help our children process during uncertain times, it's important to allow space for their emotions and confusion to come out. Although most people seem to go right back to normal life, there can be lingering stress and tension below the surface. Adults generally cope by finding things that give them comfort and calm. While this is also true for children, they really seek "connection".

Children crave connection, especially with their parents. It gives them context to their experience and validates their emotions. When children have outbursts or fits of anger, seemingly "out of the blue", the best thing to do is to be there with them. Being present with them, shows that we are not afraid of their big emotions such as pain, sadness, fear and anger. We are there to anchor them during their feelings of being overwhelmed. We don't have to run to solve

their frustrations, give solutions, or words of comfort. The parent should allow for those tough feelings to land. It can be helpful to make eye contact, nod, lean in and really listen. You can say something like "I'm happy you're sharing with me", "I hear you" or "would you like to tell me more?". Make sure to remove distractions such as cell phones. This sends the message that your child is worthy and what he has to say is important. When he finishes letting out all of his emotions and calms down, you can offer words of comfort or validation. When a child knows that his parent can sit with him in his pit of despair and confusion, it provides him with comfort.

"Doing nothing" is a powerful tool that is highly underrated. When you decide to sit quietly with your child, you are mastering emotional regulation, providing support and becoming a role model. During these very charged times "giving space for the chaos" actually allows for connection and resilience. ■

Michal Silverstein has a MS in educational psychology and counseling. She facilitates parenting workshops in and around Jerusalem and maintains a private practice.

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Building on the Foundation of Faith

בס"ד

In the coming days, we will transition from the study of Sefer Tehillim to that of Sefer Mishlei. These comprise the first two books of a three part set introducing the Ketuvim, the third section of Tanach. These first three works, Tehillim, Mishlei and Iyov, are known by the acronym Sifrei Eme"t, for the first letter of each sefer. This acronym reflects both the distinct content and style of these three works, which are poetic in nature and focus on fundamental aspects of living a Torah-true life. While in Sefer Tehillim we concentrated primarily on the relationship between man and G-d, in Sefer Mishlei the primary - albeit not exclusive - focus is on the relationship between man and his fellow.

Sefer Tehillim concludes with the verse כל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל י-ה הַלֵּלוּ-הָ - every living soul should praise Hashem. Radak explains that this verse is predicated on the content of the previous verses, in which the psalmist calls upon us to praise Hashem with an array of musical instruments. He suggests that in conclusion, this verse teaches that the sincere praise of the Neshama, the animating spirit residing within the body, in recognition of Hashem's works, is the greatest praise of all. Alternatively, Malbim suggests reading the

word נשימה as נשמה - with every breath we take we should praise Hashem for His great unceasing kindness and for the wonders we continually experience. Every breathing soul should live with a constant awareness of the miraculousness of our very existence. With the echoes of the beauty and depth of Tehillim resounding in our minds, this lofty demand seems quite reasonable; however, as we resume our daily activities, it fades into the recesses of our consciousness.

Perhaps this is why Tehillim is followed by Sefer Mishlei in our Tanach, despite the fact that this is a departure from the order instituted by Hazal in the Talmud (Bava Batra 14b). It brings to mind the explanation as to why the chronological narrative of Sefer Shemot is interrupted after Parashat Yitro, which details the awe-inspiring events of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, by the series of practical laws detailed in Parashat Mishpatim, following which the narrative resumes. The Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was a cataclysmic, highly charged metaphysical experience. The people were elevated to such an improbably high level of spirituality that according to the midrash, our souls were actually lifted from our bodies and we had to be revived and brought back to the physical

world. The Torah follows this encounter with a set of practical laws to teach us that in order to remain successfully committed to the ideals we embraced at Mount Sinai, we have to engage in constant application of those ideals in the real world. If they remain theoretical, they will soon be forgotten.

Similarly, throughout Sefer Tehillim we were raised to higher levels of consciousness of Hashem's constant Presence in the world. We felt His constant embrace as we faced the challenges and miracles of our ever-changing reality through the lens of the psalmist. How can we hold on to that lofty state of mind as we conclude the sefer? We transition from the divinely inspired words of David HaMelech to the wisdom of his son Shlomo, who advises us how to refine our character so that we make the right choices in our daily lives, choices that are in keeping with the ideals and values we so strongly identified with in Sefer Tehillim.

After outlining these goals in the opening pesukim of Sefer Mishlei, Shlomo exclaims, *יראת ה' ראשית דעת* - Fear of G-d is the beginning of knowledge; fools scorn wisdom and moral instruction. Malbim elaborates: Fear of G-d is a prerequisite for wisdom, for all knowledge stems from Him. Thus, it is only possible to achieve wisdom on a foundation of awe and reverence of Hashem, which in turn is predicated on Emunah, on belief in Hashem and His omnipotence. How fitting that Sefer Mishlei, with its goal of teaching the wisdom and understanding that will direct us to act in keeping with the principles of Torah, follows Sefer Tehillim, which laid the foundation of deepened Emunah and Bitachon in Hashem and in His constant manifestation in the world! ■

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Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program

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PITCHING OUR TENTS

In this week's fascinating *Parsha, Balak*, we encounter a whirlwind of strange prophecies, blessings, curses, and even talking donkeys! Amidst all the unusual and dramatic events, in Bilaam's third blessing we find one of the most important *pesukim* and blessings in the Torah—a verse that every Jew recites each morning:

“מַה־טָּבוֹ אֶהְיֶה לְךָ יַעֲקֹב, מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל”

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

With such significance that *Chazal* placed this *pasuk* before *Pesukei DeZimra* in the daily prayers, it's worth exploring more deeply why it carries such weight.

Rashi, quoting the Gemara in *Bava Batra*, teaches that Bilaam noticed how the entrances of the tents were not facing each other—preserving modesty and creating a sense of dignity and privacy.

Rav Yisrael of Ruzhin adds that we all have the ability to choose the direction we open our tents. *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* says that if we open even a tiny hole the size of a needle, Hashem will expand it into a grand opening. In other words, if we make a small effort to head in the right direction, Hashem will magnify that effort and guide us further. The key is taking that first step.

But how do we know what that first step is? What is the right direction?

The *Alter Rebbe*, Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, famously teaches that the word “מה” (*mah* – “what”) represents the idea of *bitul*—self-nullification. Instead of asking “why” or “how,” we ask “what” or “for whom?” It's about removing ourselves from the center and submitting to something greater—Hashem or another Jew. When we take that step, we move toward “טובו”—goodness. These are the tents of Yaakov and the dwelling places of Yisrael.

May we be *zocheh* to nullify ourselves for others, and may Hashem open for us new dwellings—speedily and in our days—with the rebuilding of the Third *Beit HaMikdash*.



MEIRA RUBIN
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A HIDDEN MEANING

Parshat Balak tells a strange story—one that Bnei Yisrael didn't even witness. Balak hires Bilaam to curse them, but Hashem flips the curse into a blessing. Bnei Yisrael never hear the curses or the blessings. Nothing about their situation visibly changes. So why does the Torah spend time retelling this story again and again?

Because it teaches us something essential: Hashem loves us—even when we don't see it. He protects us behind the scenes. Even when

we make mistakes, complain, or fall short—His love stays with us.

Like in *Sefer Hoshea*, where Hashem compares His love to that of a husband who remains committed to an unfaithful wife—hurt, but still loving.

Even the blessings we quote from Bilaam aren't truly his—they're Hashem's words. He turned a curse into a blessing out of His deep love for His people.

The Rambam reminds us:

Love has the power to turn curses into blessings.

It is the only force strong enough to overcome hate.

Love can heal the brokenness of the world.

This story isn't just about Bilaam or Bnei Yisrael. It's about how deeply Hashem loves us—even when we don't know it. ■



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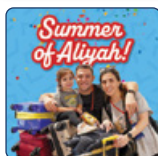
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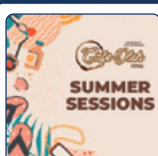


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