

Torah ב"ה Tidbits

ISSUE 1666

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ישראל

י"ב תמוז תשפ"ו - JUNE 27TH 2026

BALAK - בלק

AVOT 6



Special Section:
Halachot of the Fast
of 17 of Tammuz and
the Three Weeks

More Than A Last Resort

Mrs. Aliza Back
Page 62



**Halachot & Customs of Shiva Asar
B'Tammuz & The Three Weeks**

Rabbi Eli Ozarowski Page 76



לינו פה הלילה במדבר כ"ב:ד'

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT BALAK ZMANIM

CANDLES 7:13 PM • EARLY 6:19 PM • HAVDALA 8:31 PM • RABBEINU TAM 9:06 PM



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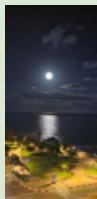
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Table of Contents



- 04** Dear Torah Tidbits Family
Rabbi Avi Berman
- 10** Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary
Rabbi Reuven Tradburks
- 18** "Who Was Your Teacher?"
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Weinreb
- 22** The Hardest Word to Hear
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l
- 30** Probing the Prophets
Rabbi Nachman Winkler
- 34** The Secret of a Nation
That Stands Alone
Rabbi Shalom Rosner
- 38** Evil Eye
Rebbetzin Shira Smiles
- 42** Simchat Shmuel
Rabbi Sam Shor
- 46** Balak: Saddle Up!
Rabbi Judah Mischel
- 48** Schedule
OU Israel
- 58** Chasing Avraham
Rabbi Moshe Taragin
- 62** More Than a Last Resort
Mrs. Aliza Back
- 66** Rav Kook on Pirkei Avot (6:6):
Joyful Learning and
Finding True Happiness
Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider
- 70** Mention of Rosh Chodesh
in *Al Hamichya* after Dark
Rabbi Daniel Mann
- 74** Parenting Through the
Lazy Days of Summer
Michal Silverstein, MS
- 76** Halachot and Customs of
Shiva Asar B'Tammuz and
The Three Weeks
Rabbi Eli Ozarowski
- 84** A Biblical 'Responsa' -
To Fast or Not to Fast
Rabbi Ian Shaffer
- 86** Bilaam's Trap
Rabbi Jacob Solomon
- 88** Two 'Yeses' at the
Same Time: Now What?
Aleeza Ben Shalom
- 90** The Y-Files Comic
Netanel Epstein
- 92** Torah 4 Teens by Teens
Rabbi Ginsberg // Lielle Stern



COVER PHOTO Photographed by Dr. Ivor Newman L.D.S. R.C.S.

My wife Elaine and I made aliyah from Edgware U.K. almost exactly nine years ago. This picture was taken about three weeks ago, shortly before dawn, from my lounge window in Netanya. I saw this scene as I was saying Modeh ani. The reason I mention this is that I find that all mitzvot have deeper quality now that I live here. Like the move from 2D to 3D.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

-  Last Opportunity to Say Kiddush Levana until: 15 Tammuz/Mon. night June 29
-  The Fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz is observed on Thursday (July 2).
The Fast concludes at 8:08pm (in Jerusalem)

CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM

Ranges 11 days Wednesday - Shabbat
June 24 - July 4 | 9 - 19 Tammuz

Earliest Tallit and Tefillin	4:35-4:39
Sunrise	5:35 - 5:38
Sof Zman Kriat Shema	9:08-9:11
Magen Avraham	8:24-8:27
Sof Zman Tefila (According to the Gra and Baal HaTanaya)	10:19-10:21
Chatzot (Halachic Noon)	12:41-12:43
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	1:17-1:18
Plag Mincha	6:19
Sunset (Including Elevation)	7:52-7:53

	BALAK			PINCHAS		
	Candles	Early	Havdala	Candles	Early	Havdala
Yerushalayim/Maale Adumim	7:13	6:19	8:31	7:13	6:20	8:31
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	7:30	6:22	8:33	7:30	6:22	8:33
Beit Shemesh/RBS	7:31	6:20	8:32	7:32	6:21	8:32
Gush Etzion	7:28	6:20	8:31	7:28	6:20	8:31
Raanana/Tel Mond/Herzliya/K.Saba	7:30	6:22	8:34	7:30	6:22	8:34
Modiin/Chashmonaim	7:29	6:21	8:33	7:29	6:21	8:32
Netanya	7:31	6:22	8:35	7:31	6:22	8:34
Be'er Sheva	7:28	6:20	8:31	7:28	6:21	8:31
Rehovot	7:30	6:21	8:33	7:30	6:22	8:33
Petach Tikva	7:13	6:22	8:34	7:13	6:22	8:33
Ginot Shomron	7:29	6:21	8:33	7:29	6:21	8:33
Haifa / Zichron	7:22	6:23	8:36	7:22	6:23	8:35
Gush Shiloh	7:28	6:20	8:32	7:28	6:20	8:31
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	7:30	6:22	8:34	7:31	6:22	8:34
Givat Zeev	7:33	6:20	8:32	7:33	6:20	8:31
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	7:28	6:20	8:31	7:28	6:20	8:31
Ashkelon	7:30	6:22	8:34	7:30	6:22	8:33
Yad Binyamin	7:30	6:21	8:33	7:30	6:22	8:33
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	7:24	6:21	8:34	7:24	6:21	8:34
Golan	7:29	6:20	8:33	7:29	6:20	8:32
Nahariya/Maalot	7:21	6:23	8:36	7:21	6:22	8:35
Afula	7:30	6:21	8:34	7:30	6:21	8:33

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem): Balak - 9:06 PM • Pinchas - 9:06 PM

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

Daf Yomi: Chulin 58



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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OU ISRAEL
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Some people love to travel, whether to go on vacation or to see Hashem's amazing world. It is something they devote so much time, effort, and money to. As Jews, perhaps we might say that it is in our DNA, as a nation formed while traveling for forty years in the desert. In this week's *parsha*, *Parshat Balak*, we read (Bamidbar 24:5) "*Mah tov u ohalecha Yaakov, mishkenotecha Yisrael*" - "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob; your dwelling places, O Israel." Chazal tell us that Bilaam looked out at Klal Yisrael and saw our tents arranged so that no opening faced another, each family afforded its privacy, and praised us for it. Bilaam saw a nation that had learned how to travel, with dignity, with grace, and with mindfulness of how to keep the Torah and spread Torah in the field.

I have come to appreciate that flying is part of my job as Executive Director of OU Israel. I travel to meet my colleagues in North America, to speak in different communities and share what the OU is doing here in Israel, and to raise funds for the many OU programs we run across the country. And whenever I fly, I make a point of staying with close friends, with people I love.

Instead of going to a hotel, I find that staying with friends and family is so much more comfortable. Besides the advantage of saving the OU money, the real beauty of it is that you come to know people in a far more intimate way. When you spend a Shabbat, or even a few weekdays, in someone's home, you truly get to know who they are and they get to know you. Over the years, *Baruch Hashem*, I have developed wonderful relationships with

incredible people across North America, in both the United States and Canada. It makes flying so much easier when the family hosting you cares deeply about what we are doing in Israel, supports it, and feels part of the dramatic change the OU is making here. Whether I am in New York, New Jersey, Florida, Toronto, Los Angeles, or Vancouver, I am always staying with people I am very fond of, people who love me and whom I love in return.

Once a year I travel to Vancouver, British Columbia. Not because it is a large Jewish community, but because I have friends there who are quite literally like family. These are friends whom my wife and I met when we spent five years of our lives helping build the youth and future of the Vancouver community, through NCSY and through Congregation Schara Tzedek. The community has been led for the past twenty-three years by Rabbi Andrew Rosenblatt, and it is made up of truly wonderful people: deeply Zionist, passionate about the State of Israel, and, though they live so very far away, sending their children to learn in Israel, to earn degrees here, to make aliyah, and to serve in the IDF.

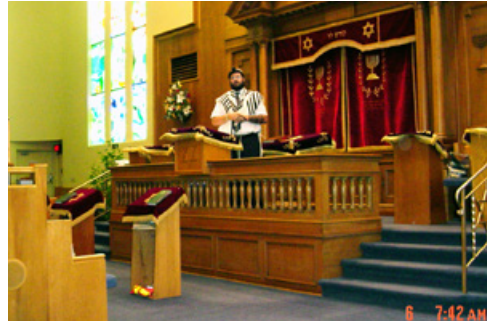
Being in the community every year, especially over Shabbat, is a tremendous treat for me. Each year Rabbi Rosenblatt asks me to speak in shul, to give the sermon and often to deliver other Torah lectures as well, and I always enjoy doing that. This year, as I sat in *shul* for *Parshat Korach* (currently, the Torah reading outside Israel runs a week behind Israel), I realized that it was exactly twenty-five years ago that I spent my first Shabbat in Vancouver, when I

came to look at the community before my wife and I moved there with our three boys. Twenty-five years, half a Jubilee, is such an incredible amount of time.

Throughout that Shabbat I tried to reflect on where I was twenty-five years ago, personally, emotionally, in my maturity, and in my Torah, when we first arrived to do work for NCSY, for the local *kollel*, and as the youth rabbi of Schara Tzedek. As the memories came flooding back to me, it was so heartwarming to me when I looked around. Heartwarming to see how much we made our mark and influenced the community positively; heartwarming to see how many lifelong friends and students we made there, and whom we have continued to host in our home in Israel over the twenty years since we returned; and heartwarming to understand how much the community shaped me in return, taking what I had received from my mother and father and from the yeshivot I learned in, and placing my wife and me in a community with such a powerful sense of unity.

In Vancouver, you find every type of Jew praying together: people in black hats alongside people who drive to shul on Shabbat morning, all standing as one community. That is unfortunately too rare today: a community that embraces everyone, where everyone wants to grow in their relationship with God, with one another, and with Torah.

At some point before Shabbat, Rabbi Rosenblatt shared something with me. He told me how he knows that every family that decides to leave Vancouver to make aliyah to Israel is a tremendous achievement, both for him as the rabbi and for the community at large, and that the shul is so proud of those who do so. I can say that because of this attitude, *Baruch Hashem*, there are families from Vancouver



now living all over Israel, from Mitzpe Netofa to Beit Shemesh, Efrat, Yerushalayim, Netanya, Tel Aviv, and many other places, individuals and families truly making an impact on Israeli society. And when he said this to me, you knew he meant every word. He viewed every individual and family that chose Israel as a major success.

At the same time, he said, he encourages those who are not making aliyah not to go searching for a larger community to move to. Every Jew in Vancouver, like every Jew in a small town across North America, is someone who makes a difference. Whether it is checking the *eruv*, helping with the *mikvah*, taking on roles in the shul such as *gabbai*, *chazzan*, and so on, or supporting the local kosher establishments, the Vancouver community rolls up its sleeves and does whatever is needed, but it needs solid members to stay and be an anchor for the Jewish community at large.

Nevertheless, he asked me to get up and tell the community what the OU is doing for *olim* and for the Anglo community in Israel. Explain to them, he said, that even if they cannot afford an apartment in Yerushalayim or Beit Shemesh, there are so many other options. Tell them about the JLIC presence we have built on campuses across Israel, and encourage them to send their children to finish high school and come study for a degree

here. Tell them about NCSY in Israel, so that families arriving with teenagers know their children will have the same kind of youth experience they had in North America. Tell them about our women's initiatives, our Yom HaAtzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim programming, our many Torah initiatives, and our Frontline Support for lone soldiers. Tell them about the work OU Israel is doing for teens at risk in Kiryat Shmona, Nahariya, Akko, and other cities across Israel.

I tried to do exactly that. But I took it a step further. I spoke about every Jew finding his or her *tafkid*, finding what they are good at and where they can contribute. I told them about Anglos who made *aliyah* and now volunteer in our teen centers, teaching our teens English, serving food in the centers, being part of the team working day in and day out with these young people, helping each teen discover their *tafkid*, and finding their own in return. I talked about all of our programs and the impact they are making in Israel, especially for *olim*. I spoke about how OU Israel has mapped out close to four hundred communities across Israel with significant English-speaking populations.

People need not think only of Yerushalayim, Beit Shemesh, Efrat, or Modiin, places so many feel they cannot afford. There are countless communities ready to embrace them with open arms, at far more affordable prices, where each person can find a home and a purpose. We have an incredible team, led by Esti Moskowitz, out in the field getting to know these communities and gathering the data, and *be'ezrat Hashem* we will keep adding wonderful people across the country and strengthening these communities, to better the State of Israel and to better ourselves.

A friend of mine from Gush Etzion, who happened to be in shul that Shabbat with his wife after a trip through the Rockies, came over afterward and shared how meaningful it was to hear that there are endless options in Israel, and that the moment a person decides Israel is for them, whether young or old, the OU will be there for them.

And I was especially moved by how many people came over to talk to me over the course of Shabbat and afterwards about their desire to make *aliyah*, about the things they were finishing up so that they could move to Israel. It was clear that my messages and Torah reached their hearts.

May we take the bracha we recite three times every single day in *Shemoneh Esrei*, “*Teka beshofar gadol licheruteinu, vesa nes lekabetz galuyoteinu*” - “Sound the great shofar for our freedom, and raise a banner to gather our exiles,” and turn it from a *bracha* into a complete reality, in which we see all our brothers and sisters choosing to come home, *be'ezrat Hashem bevinyan Beit HaMikdash* very soon.



Rabbi Avi Berman
Executive Director, OU Israel

לעילוי נשמות

בילא בת בנימין ע"ה

Bayla Gold a"h
on her 7th *yahrzeit* ט"ו תמוז

and

הרב אברהם שלום גולד זצ"ל

Rabbi Sholom Gold זt"l
On his 3rd *yahrtzeit* - ט"ט תמוז

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OU... BEYOND KASHRUT

Legacy Camp: Transforming Summer Into a Lifeline

This summer, 800 Israeli teens are counting down the days until OU Israel Teen Centers' Legacy Summer Camp, a place of joy, healing, and belonging after a year marked by upheaval and loss. Many of these teens were forced to flee their homes. They have endured the loss of loved ones, the disruption of their education, and the constant uncertainty that comes with living through war.

For eight precious days, Legacy Summer Camp offers something they desperately need: a safe and nurturing environment where they can simply be teenagers again. Surrounded by caring counselors, supportive friends, meaningful activities, and opportunities for Torah growth, they are given space to laugh, heal, rebuild confidence, and rediscover hope. More than a summer program, Legacy Camp provides a sense of community, stability, and connection, helping these young people move forward with renewed strength and resilience.

Each week, we share one OU Israel initiative empowering lives and communities in our homeland, supporting English-speaking *olim* in their *klita* and supporting Israel's most vulnerable teens to rebuild trust, confidence, and a future.





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ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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PARSHAT BALAK

Parshat Balak is unique in the Torah; it is entirely from the perspective of those looking at the Jewish people. There is no other parsha like it. 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. But hey, look at that, Bilaam relates what G-d thinks: we are blessed.

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 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

May the Torah learning
from this issue be a merit to

אליהו בן משה ז"ל
Eugene Kullman ז"ל

Niftar 15 Tamuz 5762
June 30, 2002

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.

**Condolences to Yaakov Twerner
on the passing of his wife**

Marlene a”h

**and to her children
Leiby, Faygie and Mike
on the passing of their dear mother**

Shloshim will be next week

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים



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

Balak and Bilaam build 7 altars, offer offerings and gaze out at the Jewish people. G-d speaks to Bilaam, placing His words in his mouth. Bilaam returns to Balak and pronounces the prophecy: How can I curse a people that is not cursed? 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 people's 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

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thwart the Jewish march to the Land. Not only are they as lions when taunted, so you 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.

MICHA 5:6-6:8

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

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

Shabbat afternoon
Parshat HaShavua Shiur
Given by Rabbi Chanoch Yeres
At Beit Knesset Ohel Yitzchak
Rehov Washington at 5:30pm

“And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples — like dew sent by G-d, like torrents of rain upon vegetation that does not hope for any man and does not wait for the sons of men.” The prophet describes how Hashem will remove the idols and sorcerers and how He will destroy the Jews' enemies.

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

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

It is with deep sadness
we announce the passing of
our dear mother
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devoted wife of
Mr. Kurt Rothschild z"l
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STATS

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

2 Parshiyot; 1 closed, 1 open.

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

104 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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A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANUCH YERES
RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

יעמד מלאך ה' במשעול הכרמים גדר מזה וגדר מזה (כב:כד)

"Then the angel of G-d stood in a hollow way between the vineyards, a fence on this side and a fence on that side." (22:24)

Rashi explains that the usage of the word "fence" without further description, implies the fence to have been made of stone.

Why is it important for Rashi to share with us the material of which the wall was made?

The Sefer Toldot Yitzchak (Rabbi Yitzchak Karo 1475-1535, Spain-Jerusalem) offers an answer. In Parshat Vayetzei, Lavan and Yaakov founded a covenant by means of constructing a stone monument. "This heap of stone is a witness, and this pillar shall be a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me" (31:52). Bilaam was a descendant of Lavan (Talmud Sanhedrin 105). By breaching this ancient agreement of Lavan and Yaakov, by attempting to curse Israel, the appropriate reaction is to punish Bilaam using stone- the very material that was used in building that original covenant. The very witness (stone) of that covenant was used to exact the price of Bilaam becoming lame (Talmud Sanhedrin 106). - Shabbat Shalom

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THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
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“Who Was Your Teacher?”

Except for the saints among us, we all boast. Sometimes we boast about our own natural endowments, our good looks, or our athletic prowess. Often we boast about our achievements, social or professional.

There is one type of boasting that seems to be unique to the traditional Jewish community. That is a boasting not about oneself, but rather about one’s teachers, or *rebbeim*. Thus, you will find young people saying, “My *rebbe* is greater than yours!” Or, “I am a student of so-and-so, so you better respect me for that!”

For some of us, it sounds strange that a person would claim religious or intellectual superiority on the basis of the identity of his teacher. After all, the piety or wisdom of a teacher does not necessarily filter down to the disciple. Nevertheless, boasting about the greatness of one’s master is fairly common in some of our circles.

My paternal grandfather, Reb Chaim Yitzchak Weinreb of blessed memory, was particularly perturbed about this phenomenon. As loyal readers of this column know, my *zaide* taught me many things. One lesson which he repeatedly emphasized was the importance of not falling prey to the

tendency of boasting about whose student one was. He felt it was much more important to be able to claim that one was actually walking in the footsteps of the master, behaviorally emulating his virtues and accomplishments.

One of the prooftexts which he adduced to help drive this lesson home was a passage in the fifth chapter of *Pirkei Avot*, *Ethics of the Fathers*, which reads:

“Whoever possesses these three traits is one of the disciples of our father Abraham; whoever possesses the three opposite traits is one of the disciples of the wicked Balaam. A generous eye, a modest demeanor and a humble soul are the traits of the disciples of our father Abraham. An evil eye, an arrogant demeanor and an insatiable soul are attributes of the disciples of the wicked Balaam. What is the difference between our father Abraham’s disciples and those of the wicked Balaam? Our father Abraham’s disciples enjoy this world and inherit the world to come...The wicked Balaam’s disciples inherit *Gehinnom* and go down to the pit of destruction...”

My grandfather would expound upon the above text by saying: “Imagine that a person studied for years under some great Chassidic Rebbe, dressed like him, and imitated his every gesture. Or imagine the student who attended the lectures of some great *yeshiva* head and could actually repeat every word verbatim. But if that person or student was guilty of envy, of arrogance, or of selfishness, he would be categorized by our Sages not as

a disciple of the great Rebbe or Talmudist, but as the disciple of the wicked Balaam.”

He would continue to drive home his point by stressing the flip side of the teaching of *Pirkei Avot*: “On the other hand, imagine the person to whom circumstances denied the privilege of spending time with a great Chassidic Rebbe or the chance to study under the tutelage of a Talmudic giant. But if that person was generous, modest and humble, he could lay claim to the title ‘disciple of our father Abraham’.”

Balaam is the main character in this week’s Torah portion, *Parshat Balak* (*Numbers* 22:2-25:9). There is much to be gained from a careful study of Balaam’s behavior. One major lesson is that a person can be wise and famous, internationally renowned, and endowed with mystical powers and the gift of prophecy, yet be done in by the flaws of his personal character.

I no longer remember whether or not I asked my grandfather the question that occurred to me long ago about this passage in *Pirkei Avot*. I remain puzzled by why our Sages choose not to compare Balaam with his contemporary and adversary Moses. Why do they instead choose to contrast him with Abraham, who lived centuries before Balaam?

I have come to believe that our Sages had good reason for preferring the Balaam/Abraham comparison. I suggest that our rabbis were fascinated by the many similarities between the two. They were both prophets, but prophets whose missions were not confined to the Jewish people. Balaam was designated as a prophet for all the nations of the world, and Abraham, although the biological father of the Jewish people, was also the *av hamon goyim*, the spiritual father of

all of humanity.

Both Abraham and Balaam shared the unusual power of being able to bless others effectively. Of Abraham, it is written, “I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and curse him that curses you; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.” (*Genesis* 12:2-3) And Balak, king of Moab, is sufficiently confident of Balaam’s abilities to say, “For I know that he whom you bless is blessed indeed, and he whom you curse is cursed.” (*Numbers* 22:6)

Furthermore, both Abraham and Balaam set off on long journeys, one to the binding of Isaac, and the other to nefariously undermine the people of Israel. Both wake up in the early morning to load their donkeys in preparation of their journeys. And each of them is accompanied upon his journey by two young servants.

The message seems clear. Two individuals who are similar to each other in so many ways can ultimately be so different that one’s disciples “inherit the World to Come,” whereas the disciples of the other “inherit *Gehinom* and go down to the pit of destruction.”

One fails to properly use his Divinely given blessings and, because of his “evil eye, arrogant demeanor and insatiable soul,” becomes the archetype of perversion and treachery.

The other cultivates “a generous eye, a modest demeanor and a humble soul” with such success that those of us who emulate him, even if we live millennia after his death, can lay claim to being his disciples.

The next time someone asks you, “Under whom did you study? Whose disciple are you,” I hope that you can say that you are at least striving to become a disciple of Abraham. ■

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לעילוי נשמות

פנחס בן יעקב אשר וגולדה בת ישראל דוד אייז ע"ה ועזריאל בן אריה לייב ומעניה בת יצחק שרטור ע"ה

The Hardest Word to Hear

The story of Bilaam, the pagan prophet, begins with a bewildering set of non-sequiturs. It involves a sequence of events that seems to have no logic.

First, the background. The Israelites are approaching the end of their forty years in the wilderness. Already they have fought and won wars against Sihon, King of the Amorites and Og, King of Bashan. They have arrived at the plains of Moab - today, southern Jordan at the point where it touches the Dead Sea. Balak, King of Moab is concerned, and he shares his distress with the elders of Midian. The

language the Torah uses at this point is precisely reminiscent of the reaction of the Egyptians at the beginning of the book of Exodus.

[The Egyptian Pharaoh] said to his people: "Here, the children of Israel are more numerous and powerful than us..." and he was disgusted at the Children of Israel. (*Exodus 1:9-12*)

[Balak, the King of Moab] was very fearful because of the people, because it was numerous, and Moab was disgusted at the Children of Israel. (*Numbers 22:3*)

The strategy Balak adopts is to seek the help of the well-known seer and diviner, Bilaam. Again there is a literary evocation, this time of the words of God to Abraham:

God to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse." (*Genesis 12:3*)

Balak to Bilaam: "I know that whoever you bless is blessed and whoever you curse is cursed." (*Numbers 22:6*)

This time the parallel is ironic (indeed the Bilaam story is full of irony). In the case of Abraham, it was God who blessed. In the case of Bilaam, the power was thought to reside in Bilaam himself. In fact the earlier statement of God to Abraham already prefigures the fate of Moab - one who tries to curse Israel will himself be cursed.

The historical background to the Bilaam

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יעקב יוסף

בן מרדכי הכהן ז"ל

Jacob Rottenberg z"l

On his 18th yearzeit - 10 Tamuz

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narrative is well-attested. Several Egyptian pottery fragments dating from the 2nd millennium BCE have been found containing execration texts - curses - directed against Canaanite cities. It was the custom among pre-Islamic Arabs to hire poets thought to be under Divine influence to compose curses against their enemies. As for Bilaam himself, a significant discovery was made in 1967. A plaster inscription on the wall of a temple at Deir Alla in Jordan was found to make reference to the night vision of a seer called Bilaam - the earliest reference in archaeological sources to a named individual in the Torah. Thus, though the story itself contains elements of parable, it belongs to a definite context in time and place.

The character of Bilaam remains ambiguous, both in the Torah and subsequent Jewish tradition. Was he a diviner (reading omens and signs) or a sorcerer (practising occult arts)? Was he a genuine prophet, or a fraud? Did he assent to the Divine blessings placed in his mouth, or did he wish to curse Israel? According to some midrashic interpretations he was a great Prophet, equal in stature to Moses. According to others, he was a pseudo-prophet with an "evil eye" who sought Israel's downfall. What I want to examine here is neither Bilaam nor his blessings, but the preamble to the story, for it is here that one of the deepest problems arises, namely: what did God want Bilaam to do? It is a drama in three scenes.

In the first, emissaries arrive from Moab and Midian. They state their mission. They want Bilaam to curse the Israelites. Bilaam's answer is a model of propriety: Stay the night, he says, while I consult with God. God's answer is unequivocal:

But God said to Bilaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed." (*Numbers*



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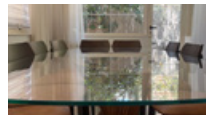
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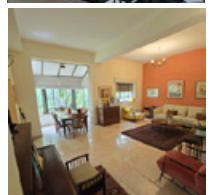
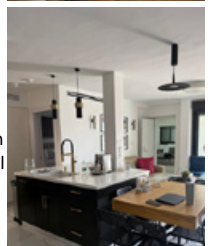
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22:12)

Obediently, Bilaam refuses the emissaries. Balak then redoubles his efforts. Perhaps more distinguished messengers and the promise of significant reward will persuade Bilaam to change his mind? He sends a second set of emissaries and gifts. Bilaam's reply is exemplary:

"Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the Lord, my God." (*Numbers 22:18*)

However, he adds a fateful rider:

"Now stay here tonight as the others did, and I will find out what else the Lord will tell me." (*Numbers 22:19*)

The implication is clear. Bilaam is suggesting that God may change His mind. But this is impossible. That is not what God does. Yet to our surprise, that is what God seems to do:

That night God came to Bilaam and said, "Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you." (*Numbers 22:22*)

Problem 1: first God had said, "Do not go." Now He says, "Go." Problem 2 appears immediately:

Bilaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Bilaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. (*Numbers 22:21-22*)

God says, "Go." Bilaam goes. Then God is very angry. Does God change His mind - not once but twice in the course of a single narrative? The mind reels. What is going on here? What is Bilaam supposed to do? What does God want? There is no explanation. Instead the narrative shifts to the famous scene of

Bilaam's donkey - itself a mystery in need of interpretation:

When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Bilaam beat it to get it back on the road.

Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Bilaam's foot against it. So he beat it again.

Then the angel of the Lord moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it lay down under Bilaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff. Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Bilaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"

Bilaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."

The donkey said to Bilaam, "Am I not your own donkey, whom you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?"

"You have not," he said.

Then the Lord opened Bilaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown. (*Numbers 22:23-31*)

The commentators offer various ways of resolving the apparent contradictions between God's first and second reply. According to Nahmanides, God's first statement, "Don't go with them" meant, "Don't curse the Israelites." His second - "Go with them" - meant, "Go but make it clear that you will only say the words I will put in your mouth, even if they are words of blessing." God was

angry with Bilaam, not because he went but because he did not tell them of the proviso.

In the nineteenth century, Malbim and R. Zvi Hirsch Mecklenberg suggested a different answer based on close textual analysis. The Hebrew text uses two different words for “with them” in the first and second Divine replies. When God says, “Don’t go with them” the Hebrew is *imahem*. When He later says “Go with them” the corresponding word is *itam*. The two prepositions have subtly different meanings. *Imahem* means “with them mentally as well as physically,” going along with their plans. *Itam* means “with them physically but not mentally,” in other words Bilaam could accompany them but not share their purpose or intention. God is angry when Bilaam goes, because the text states that he went *im* – with -them - in other words, he identified with their mission. This is an ingenious solution. The only difficulty is verse 35, in which the angel of God, having opened Bilaam’s eyes, finally tells Bilaam, “Go with the men.” According to Malbim and Mecklenberg, this is precisely what God did not want Bilaam to do.

The deepest answer is also the simplest. The hardest word to hear in any language is the word “No”. Bilaam had asked God once. God had said “No”. That should have sufficed. Yet Bilaam asked a second time. In that act lay his fateful weakness of character. He knew that God did not want him to go. Yet he invited the second set of messengers to wait overnight in case God had changed His mind.

God does not change His mind. Therefore Bilaam’s delay said something not about God but about himself. He had not accepted the Divine refusal. He wanted to hear the answer “Yes” - and that is indeed what he heard. Not because God wanted him to go, but because God speaks once, and if we refuse to accept

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what He says, God does not force His will upon us. As the Sages of the Midrash put it: “Man is led down the path he chooses to tread.”

The true meaning of God’s second reply, “Go with them,” is, “If you insist, then I cannot stop you going - but I am angry that you should have asked a second time.” God did not change His mind at any point in the proceedings. In scenes 1, 2 and 3, God did not want Bilaam to go. His “Yes” in scene 2 meant “No” - but it was a “No” Bilaam could not hear, and was not prepared to hear. When God speaks and we do not listen, He does not intervene to save us from our choices. “Man is led down the path he chooses to tread.” But God was not prepared to let Bilaam proceed as if he had Divine consent. Instead He arranged the most elegant possible demonstration of the difference between true and false prophecy. The false prophet speaks. The true prophet listens.

The false prophet tells people what they want to hear. The true prophet tells them what they need to hear. The false prophet believes in his own powers. The true prophet knows that he has no power. The false prophet speaks in his own voice. The true prophet speaks in a voice not his (“I am not a man of words,” says Moses; “I cannot speak for I am a child” says Jeremiah).

The episode of Bilaam and talking donkey is pure humour - and, as I have pointed out before, only one thing provokes Divine laughter, namely human pretension. Bilaam had won renown as the greatest prophet of his day. His fame had spread to Moab and Midian. He was known as the man who held the secrets of blessing and curse. God now proceeds to show Bilaam that when He so chooses, even his donkey is a greater prophet than he. The donkey sees what Bilaam cannot see: the angel standing in the path, barring their way. God humbles the self-important, just as He gives importance to the humble. When human beings think they can dictate what God will say, God laughs. And, on this occasion, so do we.

Some years ago, I was making a television programme for the BBC. The problem I faced was this. I wanted to make a documentary about *teshuvah*, repentance, but I had to do so in a way that would be intelligible to non-Jews as well as Jews, indeed to those who had no religious belief at all. What example could I choose that would illustrate the point?

I decided that one way of doing so was to look at drug addiction and recovery. Addicts develop behaviours that they know are self-destructive, but they are part of their lifestyle. To break these habits involves immense reserves of will. An addict looking to address these self-destructive behaviours must acknowledge that the life they have led

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is harmful to them and to others, and needs to change. That seemed to me a secular equivalent of *teshuvah*, which could illustrate the message to viewers.

I spent a day in a rehabilitation centre, and it was heartbreaking. The young people there - they were aged between 16 and 18 - all came from broken families. Many of them had suffered abuse. Other than the workers at the centre, they had no networks of support. The staff were exceptional people. Their task was astonishingly difficult. They would succeed in getting the addicts to break the habit for days, weeks at a time, until then they would relapse and the whole process would have to begin again. I began to realise that their patience was little less than a human counterpart of God's patience with us. However many times we fail and have to begin again, God does not lose faith in us, and that gives us strength. Here were people doing God's work.

I asked the head of the centre - a social worker - what it was that she gave the young people to make a difference to their lives and give them the chance to change. I will never forget her answer, because it was one of the most beautiful I ever heard. 'We are probably the first people they have met who care for them unconditionally. And we are the first people in their lives who cared enough to say "No."'

"No" is the hardest word to hear, but it is also often the most important - and the sign that someone cares. That is what Bilaam, humbled, eventually learned and what we, too, must discover if we are to be open to the Voice of God. ■

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
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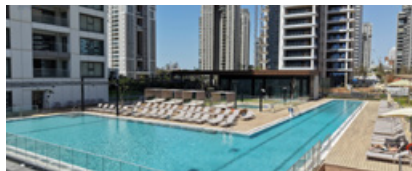
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PROBING THE PROPHETS

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“Am K’lavi Yakum”

Does the opening phrase of this week’s haftarah trouble you? It never bothered me - until I began to consider the seemingly innocent words: V’hayah Sh’eirit Ya’akov”- “The remnant of Jacob shall be, in the midst of the many peoples, like dew from G-d...” Certainly, I was unsure of what that meant, exactly, but it was Michah’s words “**Sh’eirit Ya’akov**” that disturbed me. “The **remnant of Jacob**”?? To

what ‘remnant’ is the navi referring? And why would it be addressed **only** to a remnant?

I was again reminded how important it is to ascertain the era during which these prophecies were given in order to understand the message Michah was relaying to his generation. I turned to the recently published book “Ki Karov Eilecha” by HaRav Ya’akov Meidan to better clarify the nevu’ah found in our haftarah.

Rav Meidan reveals that Michah spoke his words during the reign of the righteous King Chizkiyahu – a time when the Assyrian hordes invaded Judea and destroyed most of their cities. Hence, the navi addresses the ‘remnant’ of Israel, i.e. those who survived the Assyrian onslaught. And yet, although Hashem spared Yerushalayim due to the entreaties of the King, Chizkiyahu had sinned by relying upon an alliance with Egypt for salvation – and **not** upon HaKadosh Baruch Hu [see Sefer Yishayah 31:1-3; 36: 4-6].

All of this becomes clear with the closing words of this opening verse where Michah states that the surviving Judean nation will become independent from others “**that do not look to anyone nor place their hope in mortals**” [5:6]. This promise of an independently powerful Israel continues with the navi’s assurance that: “**Your hand shall prevail over your foes, and all your enemies shall be cut down!**” [5:8] and, even more powerfully: “**The remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations...like a fierce lion among flocks of sheep!**” [5:7]

In essence, the haftarah’s initial p’sukim

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establish the primary theme of Micha's message. The success of the Jewish nation will depend on Israel's complete reliance upon, and faith in, our Father in Heaven. Chizkiyahu's decision to form an alliance with Egypt, would eventually lead to the collapse of the Judean Kingdom some years later, as subsequent monarchs followed his decision and, in fear of enemy attacks, relied on alliances with neighboring powers.

Michah's message to his generation was a simple one: **Belief in G-d must mean faith in Him alone – and not in other 'gods', others' promises or other alliances.** This simple truth is found in Moshe's farewell "song" in the declaration:

"Hashem badad yanchenu, v'ein IMO el nechor" – "Hashem guides [Israel] alone; with no alien deity alongside. [D'varim 33: 12]

In fact, Rav Meidan suggests that there is a meaningful connection of this very message found in our haftarah **to** this week's parasha. He submits that this navi's lesson of **independent power** is actually echoed in Hashem's prophetic words that He placed in the mouth of Bil'am. (And, I would add, the words are ones especially significant for us in these days). For Bil'am declares: **"Hen Am l'vadad yishkon"** - that Israel would be a nation that would dwell **alone**, and then adds: **"Hen Am k'lavi yakum!"** - "She shall be a nation that rises like a lion...!"

It is only when we place our faith **in** – and rely **on** – the One and Only Divine Being, will we be successful! Only of such a nation can it be said to be an ...

AM K'LAVI YAKUM!! ■

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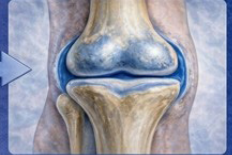
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The Secret of a Nation That Stands Alone

The Torah records Bilam's striking description of the Jewish people:

"הן עם לבדד ישכון ובגויים לא יתחשב"

Behold, it is a nation that dwells alone and is not reckoned among the nations. (Bamidbar 23:9)

At first glance, this phrase can sound isolating and even troubling. Are we meant to be alone, detached and separate from the world?

Yet, as developed by Rabbi Greenberg in *Midarkei HaParasha*, this description is not a weakness but a statement of profound uniqueness and strength.

ALONE, BUT NOT ISOLATED

Bilam, a prophet of the nations, recognized something essential about Klal Yisrael. *Am*



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Levadad Yishkon does not mean disconnection. Rather, it means that the Jewish people operate under a different reality. We are distinct. The rules that govern other nations such as the natural flow of history, rise and fall, strength and decline, do not fully apply to us.

A NATION BEYOND HISTORY

This idea has been noted not only by our sages, but even by the greatest thinkers among the nations.

The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre

acknowledged that the Jewish people cannot be understood through ordinary historical frameworks. They are, in his words, *"beyond time."*

Similarly, figures such as Winston Churchill recognized that regardless of one's personal feelings toward

the Jewish people, one cannot deny their extraordinary and unique role in world history. And perhaps most famously, Mark Twain marveled: All the great empires - Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans - rose with power and noise, and then disappeared. *"The Jew saw them all... and remains."* What is the secret of this eternity?

THE HIDDEN MEANING OF "הן"

A beautiful insight highlights this uniqueness. The pasuk states *Hein Am Levadad Yishkon*. The word *"הן"* (*hein*) hints to something that stands alone. In numerical patterns,

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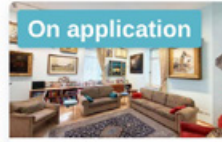


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most numbers pair naturally. 1 with 9, 2 with 8, and so on. But 5 stands alone. Similarly, among the tens, 50 stands alone. The two letters from which the word hein is comprised are the letter hey (5) and nun (50).

So too, the Jewish people, represented by “Hein”, stand apart, not as outsiders, but as something fundamentally different.

THE QUESTION THE WORLD CANNOT ANSWER

Throughout history, observers have noticed the same phenomenon: A small nation that is numerically insignificant, yet central to the story of humanity. It is constantly persecuted, scattered and challenged, yet never disappearing. The world asks the question again and again: What is the secret of Jewish eternity?

Rav Kook provides the answer with clarity: The eternity of the Jewish people is not natural,

rather it is divine. It is rooted in our connection to Hashem. We are not sustained by power, land, or numbers but by a relationship.

Am Levadad Yishkon is not a statement of loneliness. It is a statement of identity. We are not alone because we are abandoned. We are alone because we are different. Because we carry something eternal. Because we are connected to something beyond history.

In a world that constantly pressures us to blend in, to conform, to become like everyone else, the Torah reminds us: Our strength is not in being like the nations. Our strength is in being true to who we are.

The nations rise and fall, but a people connected to eternity endures. May we merit to embrace that uniqueness, to live it proudly, and to strengthen our connection to Hashem, so that we continue to stand, not alone, but eternally. ■

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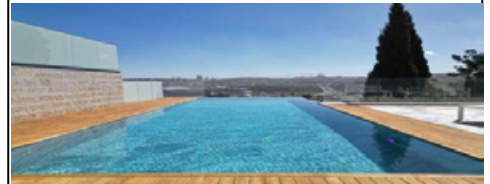
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Evil Eye

“*Vayar Balak ben Tzipor et kol asher asah Yisrael la’Emori* - Balak the son of Zipor saw all that Israel had done to the Emorites.” (Bamidbar 22:2)

Our *parashah* opens with Balak **seeing** the Jewish people as a military threat and he immediately hires Bilam to curse the Jews. Midrash Rabbah (20,2) teaches that it would be better for wicked people to be blind, as their **eyes** bring catastrophe and destruction to the world. Why is ‘seeing’ emphasized here, is it not the whole personality of the wicked evil?

Rav Shach *zt”l* notes that although a wicked person is wholly corrupt, it is precisely through his sight that he connives with plans

to destroy others. Wherever he looks, he sets his eye on the best way to inflict harm. Hence, the Midrash concludes, it would be better if he were blind.

Most fascinating is Balak’s approach. Certainly, Balak had the right to self-defense considering what he perceived as a threat to the security of his nation. But what was his attitude? The Chofetz Chaim *zt”l* notes that if Bilam was known as one whose blessings



Rav Shach *zt”l*

as well as his curses came to fruition, then Balak could easily have engaged Bilam to bless him with success in a campaign against the Jews. Instead, Balak opted to hire Bilam to curse the Jews in an attempt to destroy

them. Balak was not as much interested in protecting himself, as eradicating *Am Yisrael*. This is the “evil eye” that the Midrash highlights.

The Midrash draws a parallel to a similar scenario in *Sefer Bereisheet*. When the four kings and five kings went to war with each other, their main objective was to capture Lot and to kill Avraham Avinu. It was less a territorial war than a crusade to destroy Nimrod’s arch enemy. Indeed, the *Yalkut Shimoni* comments on the verse, “The few of the righteous are better than the multitude of many wicked men.” (*Tehillim* 37:16) - this was the first war in human history, a war that has foreshadowed many more wars of evil’s

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Rav Yisrael Salanter *zt"l* describes two primary ways for one to achieve superiority. One can either develop himself to become a better person, thereby giving others the opportunity to recognize his deeds and greatness, or he can continuously put others down, disparaging and finding fault in those around him. Clearly, the latter is more interested in the undoing of others over his own success.

History has shown that many have enthusiastically followed Balak's lead, regarding the Jewish people with a jaundiced eye and plotting ways to rid the world of the "Jewish problem." We can counter this by doing our best to build ourselves up rather than putting others down. "Hashem is our Shadow"; how we behave toward others will determine how others behave towards us. ■

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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR
DIRECTOR, TORAH INITIATIVES,
OU ISRAEL

Our *sedra* this week contains one of our most familiar verses: *Ma Tovv Ohalecha Yaakov, Mishkenotecha Yisrael.*- *How good are your tents, Yaakov, your dwelling places, Yisrael...*

These words which we recite each and every morning upon entering our *Batei Knesset*, were originally uttered by *Bilaam HaRasha*, when he intended to curse the Jewish people, and *Hashem*, caused these words of blessing to flow forth from his mouth instead. What exactly is the significance of this statement- “How good are your tents, *Yaakov*, your dwelling places, *Yisrael*”? Why of all possible *pesukim* that we might choose to focus on as we enter our synagogues, was this particular verse selected?

The great *Reb Dov Ber, the Maggid Mezeritch, zy'a*, one of the prime disciples of the *Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh*, explained that we begin each day by reciting this verse, which reminds us to acknowledge the goodness within the tents of *Yaakov*, the innate goodness of each member of *Klal Yisrael*. Before

we can daven, or embark on any other activity, we must first condition ourselves to see and appreciate that innate goodness.

The *Netivot Shalom, the Slonimer Rebbe zy'a*, points out that as *Bilaam* was about to curse the Jewish people as a whole, instead the words uttered are uttered in the singular- *Ohalecha Yaakov-Your (singular)*

tents Yaakov, Mishkenotecha (your (singular) dwelling places Yisrael. What served to protect *Am Yisrael* from *Bilaam*, and others who might seek to harm us, is *Achdut*. When the Jewish people are united, as one singular entity, we are protected from each and every *Bilaam*, who might seek to harm us.

Rav Kook, zy'a offers a different insight regarding

the significance of this verse. *Rav Kook* points out that an *ohel-a tent*, is a specific type of *mishkan-dwelling place*. We as Jews, explains *Rav Kook*, should always perceive ourselves as if we are dwelling in an *Ohel, a tent*. A tent is a dwelling place, providing shelter for those who are on a journey. *Rav Kook* explains that, each of us should view ourselves as if we are on a journey, moving forward in growth, striving to come closer to the *Ribono Shel Olam*, and not *chas v'shalom*, remaining stagnant, settled and stuck in one place. Each of us must learn the goodness of what it means to dwell in tents, to continue to move forward, to journey on, to grow in our



Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook zt"l

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Avodat Hashem.

The **Avodat Elazar of Kozhnitz zy'a**, offers yet another beautiful interpretation of our *pasuk*. *Ma Tovu Ohalecha Yaakov, Mishkenotecha Yisrael*- what makes *Am Yisrael* unique amongst the nations, is the fact that even our private homes become a *mishkan*-a place for the *Shechina's* presence, through the *mitzvot* we engage in each and everyday within our homes.

There is deep wisdom and relevance contained within each of these four beautiful insights. Each morning as we begin our day through *tefila*, we recite this verse to center us, to ground us, and root within us these four fundamental values-acknowledging goodness,unity, spiritual and emotional growth, and sacred space.

Yehi Ratzon, may we merit to heed these powerful messages encrypted in this familiar *pasuk*, and may we indeed be blessed to fill our homes with *mitzvot*, and move forward, shielded from all those who wish us harm, because we continue to journey together, united as one. ■

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Balak: Saddle Up!

The legendary Rosh Yeshiva and author, Rav Shimshon Pincus, zt'l, was a *talmid chacham*, *ba'al avodah* and *tzadik*, who served as Chief Rabbi in the Negev city of Ofakim with self-sacrifice and love.

A talmid of Rav Pincus suffered from an acute dental condition. Numerous infections had caused him to lose teeth and painful gum inflammation. Not wanting to trouble anyone, the young married man, an *avreich* in Ofakim, tried to hide his condition and downplayed the perpetual discomfort he was experiencing.

One day his wife approached Rav Pincus and shared her husband's suffering with the Rav. He was unable to chew and was in such pain that he could barely sleep. Exhausted and racked with pain, he was losing weight dangerously. Without hesitation, Rav Pincus excused himself and returned a few minutes later with several thousand shekel. He then spent some time making phone calls to various contacts to help the *avreich's* wife find an oral surgeon who could help.

The Pincus family lived very modestly and the incident took place at a particularly difficult time with regard to their *parnassa*. A friend of the *avreich* who was aware of the situation asked the Rav how he could give away such a large sum of money when he himself was struggling to cover his growing family's needs.

Rav Pincus looked quizzically at the *talmid* for a moment, and replied with a wide smile and a wave of his hand. "This *avreich* can't sleep! He can't eat... Tell me, if it was my son, and he needed emergency dental work, would you understand the expense? What's the difference if it's my son, your son, or the *Ribbono Shel Olam's* son?"

ויקם בלעם בבוקר ויחבוש את אתונו

"And Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey... (*Bamidbar*, 22:21)

Our sedra describes how Balak, king of Moav, contracts the evil prophet, the respected and powerful sorcerer Balaam, to curse *Am Yisrael*. Rashi points out an important lesson in the alacrity with which Balaam responds to the invitation: "From here we learn שהשנאה מקלקלת את השוורה — that hate causes a disregard for the standard of dignified conduct, for Balaam saddled his donkey *by himself*." As a result of his intense, irrational hatred of Jews, Balaam didn't wait for his servants, and rushed to saddle his donkey on his own, relishing the opportunity to embark on this mission to cause harm to *Am Yisrael*.

Rashi continues by juxtaposing Balaam's actions with Avraham Avinu's at the *Akeidah*:

Mazal Tov to
Arlene Saslow and family
on the engagement of
her grandson

“Hakadosh Baruch Hu said (to Balaam), ‘*Rasha*, Wicked one! Their father Avraham has already preceded you, as the *pasuk* says, וַיִּשָּׁכֶם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֶּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־הַמִּלּוֹךְ — Avraham arose in the morning and saddled his donkey.’” (*Bereishis*, 22:3)

When Avraham Avinu rose early in the morning, eager and prepared to fulfill Hashem’s will at the *Akeidah*, he was נְדַדְרָז לְמַצְוָה ‘alacritous to perform the commandment’. This, the Gemara explains (*Sanhedrin*, 105b, Rashi), is an example of how אהבה מקלקלת את הדולה, שורה של גדולה, “Love negates the standard conduct of those of prominence.” In this case, Avraham Avinu’s passionate dedication and love for Hashem negated his normal conduct, and he rushed to bind his son on an altar.

This coming week begins the period of *Bein haMeitzarim*, when our focus intensifies on making a *tikun* for the destruction of the *Beis haMikdash*. It is a time for us to consider our dedication to both our brothers and sisters, as well as our passion and fervor in *mitzvah* observance. Perhaps it is a time as well for us *l’kalkeil shura*, ‘to break the rules of conduct’ in our Ahavas Yisrael and go beyond our typical standards of giving and doing on behalf of others.

May we learn from the opposite examples of Balak, and *lehavdil*, Avraham Avinu — as well as the holy actions of Rav Pincus, zt”l — and may we do whatever it takes to help others and fulfill Hashem’s will.

.....
Excerpt from Baderech: Along the Path of the Torah, forthcoming (Mosaica Press, Elul 5786) ■

Rav Judah Mischel is executive director of Camp HASC, the Hebrew Academy for Special Children. He is the founder of Tzama Nafshi and the author of the “Baderech” series. Rav Judah lives in Ramat Beit Shemesh with his wife Ora and their family.



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Chana Deutsch

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Known to many simply as "JoCo," he had a unique gift for making every person feel valued and believed in. To colleagues, educators, and students alike, "JoCo" became synonymous with connection, encouragement, and an unwavering commitment to helping others realize their potential.

May his legacy continue through the many professionals, educators, and young people whose lives were enriched by his friendship, guidance, and belief in them.

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Chasing Avraham

Bilaam’s fascination with Sefer Bereishit and the world of the Avot is striking. Before he even utters his prophecies and curses, he seems intent on retracing their footsteps. Rising early in the morning, he personally saddles his donkey rather than delegating the task. Unmistakably, Bilaam is reenacting Avraham’s journey to the Akeidah. Like Avraham, he rises at dawn, prepares his own animal, and sets out on a mission that will ultimately be interrupted by a malach.

Bilaam tries to place himself within the story of Avraham.

Upon arriving at the vantage point from which he hopes to curse the Jewish people, Bilaam begins with a cryptic declaration:

“כִּי מֵרֹאשׁ צְרִיִם אֶרְאֶנּוּ, וּמִגְּבֻעוֹת אֶשְׁרֹנּוּ”

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

On the surface, Bilaam is describing his vantage point as he gazes down upon the Jewish camp from his mountaintop. Chazal,

however, understood these words differently. Rashi explains: “אני מסתכל בראשיתם ובתחלתם — שרשיהם” “I look to their origins, to the roots from which they emerged.”

Bilaam was not merely surveying our nation. He was searching for the source of our strength. Looking beyond the desert encampment before him, he turned his gaze back toward the beginnings of Jewish history and the figures who first set that history in motion.

Bilaam’s fascination with the Avot surfaces again in his repeated demand for seven mizbeichot. As Rashi notes, he was keenly aware of the seven mizbeichot erected by the Avot—four by Avraham, one by Yitzchak, and two by Yaakov. By constructing seven corresponding altars, Bilaam hoped to draw upon the same spiritual foundations upon which our nation had been built.

As his efforts begin to unravel, Bilaam voices a surprising aspiration:

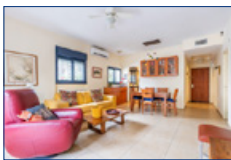
“תָּמוּת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יְשָׁרִים”

“Let me die the death of the upright.”

The term yesharim is one of the descriptions Chazal associate with the Avot. According to the Midrash, Bilaam’s final wish reflected a growing recognition that he could neither escape nor overcome their legacy. The Avot, whose footsteps he had tried to imitate, now became the figures whose fate he envied.

By now a pattern has emerged. Throughout the narrative, Bilaam’s thoughts repeatedly

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return to the Avot. He studies their beginnings, recreates their altars, echoes their actions, and ultimately longs for their destiny. Why is Bilaam so preoccupied with the Avot?

The answer lies in Bilaam's ambition. He was not merely trying to curse us. He was attempting to replace us. Bilaam imagined himself as the founder of a new chosen nation. That is why his attention repeatedly returns to the Avot and, above all, to Avraham. He studied the origins of our chosenness in search of the formula that had created our covenant and our destiny. If he could uncover the secret of why Avraham had been chosen, perhaps he could claim that role for himself.

Yet despite all his gifts, Bilaam failed to understand what actually made Avraham worthy of becoming the father of a chosen nation.

THE LIMITS OF PROPHECY

What does Bilaam miss? Why is he unable to become the founder of a new chosen nation the way Avraham did? He possessed extraordinary gifts. He was a prophet, and he obviously had keen historical sensitivity. What was his fatal mistake?

Firstly, he was theologically reckless. He declared himself:

יָדַע דַּעַת עָלַיִן

“One who knows the knowledge of the Most High.”

He allowed his prophetic abilities to swell his sense of self.

Avraham also hears the voice of Hashem. Avraham was first to discover the One God who had eluded humanity for nearly two thousand years.

In fact, because of Avraham's close relationship with Hashem, he feels compelled to challenge what appears to be divine injustice. How could the entire population of Sedom be destroyed?

הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט

“Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?”

Avraham pleads for their salvation and enters into a remarkable negotiation with Hashem.

Yet even as he questions, Avraham never assumes that he fully understands the divine plan. He recognizes that however much he knows of Hashem's will, the divine mystery always extends beyond human comprehension. Avraham frames his theological challenge with humility and with the acknowledgment that

וְאֲנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר

“I am but dust and ashes.”

Unlike Avraham, Bilaam never submits to the divine mystery. He never accepts the hierarchy between human understanding and divine knowledge. Intoxicated by his prophetic gifts, he presents himself as the ultimate knower of God's will. He attempts to retrace Avraham's path toward Hashem, but without Avraham's humility.

He is taught a devastating and almost comical lesson. His own donkey, bereft of intellect or spiritual awareness, perceives a heavenly messenger that Bilaam himself cannot see. The “great prophet” is reduced to arguing with his donkey, unaware that a malach is blocking their path. The scene borders on farce. The

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once-mighty visionary becomes a figure of ridicule, outmaneuvered by his own animal.

Bilaam is forced to confront how little he truly understands of Heaven and its workings. Whatever prophetic vision he possessed was not his own achievement, but a gift granted by Hashem. And a gift can be withdrawn. The heavenly insight in which Bilaam took such pride could just as easily be withheld from him and granted to a donkey.

Humility in the presence of Hashem is not merely a moral prerequisite for encountering Him. It is the natural consequence of that encounter. The more deeply we perceive Hashem, the more aware we become of the vast distance between Hashem and human understanding. The more we know, the more we recognize how much remains beyond our grasp.

In this light, Bilaam's theological arrogance reveals how little he truly understands of Hashem. Ironically, his confidence in his own knowledge exposes the severe limits of his knowledge of Hashem.

THE MORAL DISCOVERY

But Bilaam misses something else. Chazal detect not only theological error but moral failure. The Mishnah in Avot places Bilaam and Avraham side by side and measures them by the qualities of their character—and Bilaam comes up lacking:

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איזו היא דרך ישרה שידבק בה האדם? ... כל מי שישי 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 Avinu, while whoever possesses three opposite traits is among the disciples of the wicked Bilaam. A good eye, a humble spirit, and a modest soul are the traits of the disciples of Avraham Avinu. An evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and an expansive appetite are the traits of the disciples of the wicked Bilaam.” (Avot 5:19)

Bilaam is greedy. He repeatedly hints at the reward he expects to receive for his services. He is arrogant — not only in the way he views Hashem, but in the way he treats other people. Finally, he possesses an evil eye, constantly searching for flaws — whether in individuals or in nations — that he can condemn and target with his supernatural powers. Rather than searching for redeeming qualities, he searches for weaknesses to expose.

Again, this is not merely a moral failing. It reflects a distorted understanding of Hashem's presence in the world. Avraham did not discover Hashem through prophecy, nor through scientific inquiry. He encountered Hashem through the moral fabric woven into creation. He beheld a world delicately balanced to sustain life and promote human welfare. As Chazal describe it, he saw a birah doleket — a palace illuminated with light and life.

Avraham intuited that a world so intricately calibrated toward life could not be accidental. It pointed to a Creator. More importantly, it pointed to a Creator who is moral, compassionate, and invested in the welfare of His world. Avraham discovered Hashem through the

moral spirit that Hashem infused into creation.

And this discovery compelled Avraham not merely to contemplate morality, but to become an agent of moral goodness. He did not wear two separate hats. He was not a part-time philosopher and a part-time do-gooder. These were two expressions of a single identity. Avraham discovered a moral God and therefore felt called to bring moral blessing into the world.

Avraham understood that without moral action, our knowledge of Hashem remains incomplete. There are limits to how much of Hashem we can grasp through intellect alone, and even through prophecy. Yet when we act with compassion, justice, kindness, and responsibility, we encounter Hashem in a different way. We do not merely think about Him; we strive to resemble Him. The more we act in His image, the more deeply we understand Hashem who stands behind those values.

This is precisely what Bilaam failed to grasp. He sought Hashem through prophecy, convinced that spiritual knowledge alone could bring him close to God. He never understood that without moral refinement and moral action, his knowledge of Hashem would remain shallow and incomplete.

WHY BILAAM FAILED

Bilaam was attempting to found a new chosen nation and, in his mind, replace the original one. He gambled that after forty years in the desert and the death of the generation that had left Egypt, the nation of Hashem might be supplanted. Perhaps history could be rebooted. Perhaps he could retrace Avraham's footsteps and succeed where others had failed. After all, he was a prophet whose stature, in certain respects, rivaled that of Moshe.

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But Bilaam made two fatal errors. First, he failed to understand the limits of human comprehension of Hashem. Rather than being humbled by his encounter with God, he became inflated by it. Second, he failed to recognize that moral behavior is itself a pathway to knowing Hashem.

Without humility in the face of Hashem and without moral and ethical refinement, he saw very little of Hashem—ultimately less than his own donkey.

According to Chazal, Bilaam died on the battlefield, an anonymous corpse among the fallen soldiers of Midyan. In the end, all his prophecy amounted to very little. He sought to become a new Avraham yet lacked the qualities that had made Avraham worthy of founding our nation in the first place. ■



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We often turn to tefillah when we feel powerless. When a loved one receives a scary diagnosis, when a child is struggling, or when a soldier's safety is uncertain, tefillah comes naturally. In these moments we know that only Hashem can help us.

Our attitude, however, may shift when we feel in control. When we spend weeks preparing for a presentation, carefully research a community before moving, or hire the most recommended professionals to do our shiputzim, we are confident. Once we have invested the necessary hishtadlut, the need for tefillah may seem less urgent. But is tefillah meant to be just a fallback plan for when our own efforts fall short or does it serve a more central role?

Tefillah was built into the infrastructure of the world. At the very beginning of creation the Torah notes that the trees and the fields had not yet grown because לא המטיר ה' על הארץ ואדם אין לעבוד את האדמה - "Hashem had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil." (Bereishit 2:5) Rashi explains that Adam HaRishon was created into a world that existed in potential and only after he davened did Hashem bring forth the plant life that was waiting beneath the surface.

The same principle applies to our own lives.

Hashem created each of us with the innate capacity of our intellect, abilities, and unique talents and tasked us with maximizing our potential. Fulfilling this mission requires a combination of tefillah and hishtadlut. We must turn to Hashem with the awareness that every outcome depends on Him while acting independently to take responsibility for our lives.

To understand this balance, we need look no further than the avot, who established the shachrit, mincha, and maariv tefillot that we daven every day. We know that each of them davened for his barren wife, yet the Torah is replete with examples of their significant hishtadlut.

After Avraham Avinu defeated the four kings and rescued Lot, the king of Sodom offered him the spoils of war. Avraham refused, declaring 'הרמותי ידי אל ה' - "I lift up my hand to Hashem" (Bereishit 14:22) Onkelos translates this as raising his hands in tefillah. He recognized that his massive military success belonged entirely to Hashem.

Later, the Torah tells us that during his stay in Gerar יצחק בארץ ההוא וימצא בשנה ויזרע יצחק בארץ ההוא וימאה שערים ויברכהו ו - "Yitzchak sowed in that land and in that year he reaped a hundredfold; thus had Hashem blessed him." (Bereishit 26:12) Rav Yitzchak Kalish of Vorki points to the order of the wording to teach us that only after Yitzchak puts in the necessary hishtadlut did Hashem bless him with abundance.

The Sifsei Chaim expands on this duality of tefillah and hishtadlut through the story of

Yosef and his brothers. When Yosef demanded that Binyamin be brought down to Mitzrayim, Yakov instructed his sons to gather various gifts and extra money to bring along with their youngest brother. He then tells them "and may Hashem grant you mercy before the man" (Bereishit 43:14) Rashi explains that Yakov was teaching his sons that although they have prepared well and are missing nothing, they must not forget to daven.

According to the Sifsei Chaim, we cannot approach Hashem with an expectation of success without fulfilling our own responsibility to act. We must do our part, while recognizing that our actions alone are never enough. Ultimately tefillah itself is an essential form of hishtadlut, because true effort requires acknowledging Hashem as the ultimate source of every outcome. Tefillah and hishtadlut are two sides of the same coin that cannot be separated from each other.

Rabbeinu Yonah takes this a step further in his commentary on the words בכל דרכיך - "in all your ways know Him" (Mishlei 3:6) explaining that this means recognizing Hashem in every area of life, even the most mundane. We must bring Hashem into the details. When we are working, parenting, traveling, or even looking for a parking spot, we can pause and ask Him for help with the little things. We are never promised exactly what we want but through tefillah we have the opportunity to transform our daily routine into a living partnership with Hashem instead of waiting for crisis to compel us to turn to Him. ■

Aliza Back is the Yerushalayim Coordinator for the OU Israel Women's Division, where she channels her passion for learning Torah into creating meaningful learning opportunities for women and girls.

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Rav Kook on Pirkei Avot (6:6): Joyful Learning and Finding True Happiness

“Torah is acquired in forty-eight ways... joy...” (Avot 6:6)

Rav Chaim Volozhin offered a deeply insightful comment regarding the need for joy when engaged in Torah study: “One who studies for one hour with joy will accomplish more than one who studies for several hours in a state of distress.” The eminent founder of the Volozhin Yeshiva argued that one accomplishes more when one studies Torah in a cheerful and joyful state of mind. (Ruach Chaim, 6:6)

Rav Kook arrived in Jaffa, Israel, in 1904 and published his first collection of essays in a book entitled *Ekvei Hatzon* (in 1906). In this impassioned work, Rav Kook directed his message to the Jewish community living in the Land, addressing the critical issue of the religious and non-religious sectors who were estranged from one another. Rav Kook presented his thoughts on how to bring the *yishuv hayashan* (religious/

traditional camp) and the *chalutzim* (secular pioneers) closer together.

The second essay in the book, “Joy and Happiness” (*HaOneg V’Hasimcha*), emphasizes the notion that the performance of mitzvot is to be carried out in a joyful manner. He emphasized that Torah study must be engaged in with joy and delight. Whenever we involve ourselves in matters that increase

our happiness and are uplifting, we are eager to continue on that track and to return to it again and again. Thus, joyful Torah study will spark increased commitment and devotion to Torah learning in all sectors of the Jewish community.

Rav Kook elaborates on this idea and says that every Jew needs to identify which area of Torah study he or she finds personally elevating and radiant. Thus, one should give special attention to those particular areas of learning. The study of Mussar, philosophy, Kabbalah, and aggadeta, which have often



Grave of Rav Aryeh Levin and Rebbetzin Tzippora Chana

gone underappreciated, should be treated with reverence and pursued, especially by those who feel drawn to these realms of Torah. (See also *Orot HaTorah* 9:1 and 9:6.)

Rav Kook believed in a Torah study that engenders a feeling of happiness and delight. He felt that when the *chalutzim* experience the positivity and joy found in Torah study, they will surely be interested in pursuing more learning and gradually committing themselves to observing mitzvot. A Judaism saturated with joy offers a pathway back for those who are distant from Torah observance. (*Ekvei HaTzon, HaOneg V'Hasimcha*, Rav Kook)

TRUE SIMCHA

The notion of *simcha* and how to attain authentic joy was a topic that Rav Kook frequently addressed. He analyzed this concept based on the following well-known verse recited during Kabbalat Shabbat and on the night of Yom Kippur.

In Psalm 97, King David describes the gift of light that is “planted for the tzaddik” (righteous one), but for the *yishrei lev* (the straight-hearted) there is *simcha* (joy). The Talmud (Ta’anit 15a) clarifies that the *yishrei lev* are superior to the righteous.

Rav Kook elaborated on the special quality of the *yishrei lev* and the authentic happiness they experience. There are those who struggle with an internal conflict and are able to overcome the evil inclination. They battle and choose the right path. These are the *tzaddikim*. They are guided by the light, and eventually they discover the reward for their conviction to overcome temptation and choose the good. The *yashar*, however, attains a higher rung by being at one with God. His will is aligned with God’s will. He does not fight a battle. Rather, he achieves a

natural affinity and love for every mitzvah.

Thus, the “straight of heart” experiences joy in the present rather than as delayed gratification. Inasmuch as his will is identical with the will of God, he beholds eternity while yet he lives. This exquisite teaching of Rav Kook beautifully echoes the Mishnah’s teaching in Pirkei Avot (2:4): “Make His will like your will.” (*Siddur Olat Reiyah*, vol. 2, p. 17)

Rav Kook, writing in a kabbalistic vein, observes that the initials of *u-le-yishrei lev simcha* form the word “selav,” the quail that the Children of Israel ate in the desert. Rav Kook’s point is that the *yashar* is able to consume meat, a symbol of material pleasures, without in the least compromising his spiritual integrity. He has reached the level at which all of his actions are innately and sincerely geared toward the service of the Almighty. (See *Shemoneh Kevatzim* 2:280 and *Iggrot HaRa’aya*, vol. 2, pp. 168–169, cited by Naor in *Koren Rav Kook Siddur*, p. 390.)

A SHOCKING WEDDING SONG

How does one achieve authentic happiness?

Rav Kook astutely commented on a dramatic Talmudic story about the wedding of Ravina’s son, in which the sage Rav Huna Zuti stood up and entertained the guests by

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singing a song. The lyrics he chose startled the group: “Woe unto us, for we shall die; woe unto us, for we will die.” Why would he possibly sing about the demise of man in a celebratory setting?

Rav Kook explains this perplexing choice of lyrics by delineating between two types of happiness. When one is feeling unhappy or anxious, one way to help induce calm and happiness is to distract the person from what is worrying him. However, this is not the ideal method because the things that are upsetting him will undoubtedly reappear and sadden him once again.

The more effective method is to demonstrate that even those things that sadden or frighten a person are not a reason to be depressed. With faith in God and an understanding that there is a loving Creator who directs and supervises all that occurs, one can find serenity and calm in one’s life. Therefore, even something as foreboding as death should not depress a person, knowing that everything Hashem does is for the best.

Rav Huna Zuti felt that in a setting saturated with genuine joy, he could impart this profound lesson—namely, to perceive all of life’s challenges, even the deep sorrow of death, as part of a larger plan and to recognize that all that we confront is orchestrated within the

loving providential plan of God. (*Ain Aya, Berachot 31a, piska #15*)

Rav Kook is teaching that true happiness and joy are achieved when we remain attentive to the goodness of God even in the face of life’s trials and tribulations. We achieve a state of happiness when we are acutely cognizant of Hashem’s presence and enduring compassion, even when it is not readily apparent.

“WHERE IS YOUR “BITACHON”?”

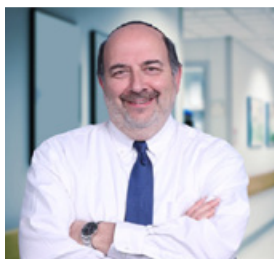
The notion that faith in Hashem is the core attribute that invigorates our ability to withstand the tests of life is illustrated in the following story.

The eminent student and dear friend of Rav Kook, Rav Aryeh Levin, would often say that he was deeply inspired by the righteousness of his wife, Rebbetzin Tzipora Chana. He constantly credited her with helping to build a home saturated with heroic kindness and unshakable faith.

During the period of the British Mandate in pre-state Palestine, the financial conditions of the majority of Jerusalem’s Jewish residents were abysmal. At one point, in the home of Rav Aryeh and his wife, there were literally only a handful of coins left, and they barely had a morsel to eat. She turned to Rav Aryeh and asked that he take the little money they had, go to the marketplace, and purchase what he could so they could have a meal. As Rav Aryeh arrived at the marketplace and reached into his pocket, he discovered that the coins were gone. He had somehow lost the money on his way.

Rav Aryeh simply did not know how he could possibly return home and tell his wife that the money had been lost and that he had not purchased a single item of food. With no other choice, he turned around and

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depressingly trudged his way back home. As soon as he walked in, his wife immediately saw on his face that something had gone wrong. She turned to her husband and said, “Aryeh, where is your cherished attribute of Bitachon (faith)?” (*Derech Avot*, Sternberg, p. 181)

Rav Aryeh’s righteous wife personifies the noble quality of holding fast to sincere faith. With deep *bitachon* one perceives life not as happenstance but rather through the prism of the enduring providence of the Almighty. With this lofty perspective implanted in our minds and hearts we can achieve a sense of true serenity and happiness. ■

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Mention of Rosh Chodesh in *Al Hamichya* after Dark

לעילוי נשמת
 יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Question: I had a meal at the end of Rosh Chodesh that required an *Al Hamichya* and had to leave before finishing for *Ma'ariv*. When I returned and finished the meal, should I have mentioned Rosh Chodesh in *Al Hamichya*?

Answer: There are several points of *machloket/safek* that impact this topic.

The concept of mentioning *me'ein hameora* (= *mehm* – about the special day) in a *beracha acharona* (classically, in *Birkat Hamazon*) after the day is over because one started the meal during the day is the subject of a *machloket Rishonim* (see Beit Yosef, Orach Chayim 188). The Shulchan Aruch has an apparent contradiction on the matter (see OC 188:10; OC 271:6), and the strongest explanation is that out of doubt, it is appropriate to say *mehm* based on either the beginning of the meal or the time of the *bentching* (Magen Avraham 271:14). How bad it is to mention something from a wrong day

is complicated (see *Ginat V'radim OC, I:28, Mishna Berura 108:38*).

There are two explanations of why to follow the beginning of the eating on Shabbat. One is that when one ate on Shabbat, he became obligated in *mehm*, and that obligation does not cease (see *Mishna Berura 188:32*). Another is that even though Shabbat is over, it is still a time that could be Shabbat if he had laudably extended it further (Magen Avraham 188:18 in the name of the Shelah). The second idea, related to extending the day, does not apply to Rosh Chodesh. The first idea does apply, but the comparison is imperfect because the obligation of *mehm* on Rosh Chodesh is weaker, as there is no obligation to eat and therefore one who skips *Ya'a'leh V'yavo*, does not have to repeat *Birkat Hamazon* (Shulchan Aruch, OC 188:7). Nevertheless, the Shulchan Aruch (*ibid.* 10) rules that one who started a meal during Rosh Chodesh mentions *mehm* when *bentching* at night.

Does this concept also apply to *Al Hamichya*? *Mehm* is less important in *Al Hamichya*, as we rule that if one forgot it, even on Shabbat and *Yom Tov*, he need not repeat *Al Hamichya* (*Mishna Berura 208:58*). There are few reasons why not. For one, it is not unanimous that one ever has to do *mehm* in *Al Hamichya* (*Sha'ar Hatziyun 208:60*). Also,

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this type of non-bread eating does not typically fulfill required eating (ibid.). Finally, *mehm* might have been instituted only as a preferable recitation (ibid.). Therefore, the case for there being a need to say it after the day is weaker. Shevet Hakehavi (V:42) argues that only important eating on a special day enables *mehm* to extend to the night and therefore eating that gets only *Al Hamichya* does not warrant it. There is room to disagree, as one way or the other, there was an obligation or expectation to recite *mehm* in this *beracha acharona*. As mentioned above, erring on the side of saying is not a major problem, as we say *mehm* when there is a *safeik*, and in *Al Hamichya* it contains only a few “innocuous words,” which are not a *beracha* (see Ginat Veradim ibid.) and do not even include Hashem's Name.

In your specific case, there was a reason to specifically not have added *mehm* (even if it had been a bread meal) – the fact that you already *davened Ma'ariv*, officially ushering in the new day. The Magen Avraham (188:17) says that fundamentally after eating makes one obligated in *Birkat Hamazon* with *mehm*,

whenever you *bentch*, the special day should be mentioned. But once ushering in the new day with *Ma'ariv*, it looks like a contradiction if one makes a recitation that is a throwback to the previous day. Contradictions are problematic, not just unnecessary. There is significant logic to say that this only applies to day changes that have significant halachic consequence, like when Shabbat enters or ends, and not to the end of the day of Rosh Chodesh (see *Machatzit Hashekel* to 188:17). On the other hand, *davening Ma'ariv* any day has some halachic significance regarding ending *halachot* of the previous day (see Rama, *Yoreh Deah* 196:1). In any case, the Mishna Berura (188:34) clearly states that *Ma'ariv* of the evening after Rosh Chodesh precludes saying *mehm* of Rosh Chodesh. ■

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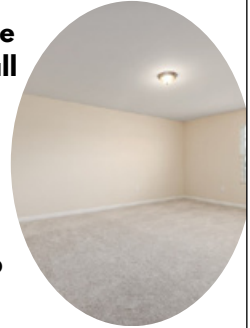
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Parenting Through the Lazy Days of Summer

As school ends and summer begins, many parents start to panic, especially if they're parents of teens. When kids are little, keeping them occupied and knowing where they are is a lot less challenging. When it comes to teenagers and the summer, many parents are unsure of their role and how involved they should be in their day-to-day activities.

Although it's uncommon to find full-day summer camps in Israel for school-aged children that extend for the full two months, it's still important to schedule daily activities for them. There are a range of programs

and options to choose from. Here are a few suggestions.

A group of parents can form a joint summer camp and rotate running daily activities. Local community centers tend to offer art, sports and swimming camps for a few weeks. For very young children, many schools offer camps which extend a few weeks beyond the end of school year. And if you have a bunch of kids at home who are of similar ages, and you don't work, you may decide to do mommy camp for a few weeks. Whatever you choose to do, it's important to plan ahead. It's a good idea to split up the summer into segments, and that kids know what they will be doing during those times.

As children grow, many parents become less sure of their role in managing their teens' summers. They question how much freedom or guidance to provide alongside boundaries and control. Although summer vacation is a time when teens have freedom from school, parent involvement is still necessary when planning their

summers. With so much technology at their fingertips, it's more important than ever that teens engage in meaningful activities. This can mean going on day trips with friends, playing sports, volunteering, or working as a counselor or in a store. Here too, parents can help their teens split up their time throughout the

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summer between these different options. Summer vacation doesn't mean that parents should totally step back. Parenting responsibilities just change. You may not have to keep track of school events and academic demands, but you're still responsible for guiding your children and keeping them safe.

Summertime is an incredible time for your child to learn, grow and gain new life skills. It's an opportunity to build family relationships and make memories by going on a family trip. Use the summer to teach your teens to manage their time wisely and take advantage of their vacation. Values and basic responsibilities should continue throughout the summer. I'm not referring to having strict schedules, but if your child normally goes to minyan every day he should continue to do so in the summer. It's an opportunity for parents to show some flexibility and look for a later minyan, but it's important to model consistency and commitment even on vacation. This goes for household tasks as well. Some downtime is also healthy and can promote creativity.

It's a good idea to have a discussion with your teen about what they'd like to do in the summer and what goals they have set for themselves. They may want to work in order to earn money for driving lessons, or learn or perfect a new skill like horseback riding, swimming, or painting. Some teens may say they have no idea what they want to do or that they don't want to do anything. This doesn't get you off the hook. You may have to do research and make suggestions and give advice to your kids. Parenting in the summer requires effort and initiative. Teens that are left bored and entirely to their own devices, usually end up spending excessive time scrolling or gaming, which can be



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detrimental and unproductive.

Although Israeli kids have been through a lot this year, it's a disservice to leave them to make all their own decisions. Even if they seem to not want any input from parents, it's important to guide them. They don't know all the options available to them, and if they do, they lack skills to fully plan things alone. It's also important to be curious and still ask your teens who they will be going out with, how they plan on getting there and back and other details. They are almost adults but not just yet. It's also okay to loosely limit screen time on vacation in whatever way you normally set boundaries.

Summer is not a break from parenting. It's an opportunity to parent differently, by helping children to develop independence while knowing they still have guidance and support from their parents. When boundaries are set through discussion and genuine curiosity rather than judgment and control, teens are more likely to see them as an expression of care and concern. ■

Feel free to send in any **parenting questions** you may have to parenting@ouisrael.org (Details will be changed to preserve anonymity).

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



RABBI ELI OZAROWSKI

GUEST CONTRIBUTOR



Halachot and Customs of Shiva Asar B'Tammuz and The Three Weeks

The period known as *Bein HaMetzarim* (“between the straits”), commonly referred to as the Three Weeks, extends from the Seventeenth of Tammuz until Tisha B’Av. During this period, we commemorate the destruction of both *Batei Mikdash* and other related tragedies through various halachot and customs of mourning, which intensify as Tisha B’Av approaches.

In this review, we will focus on some of the halachot of fasting on *Shiva Asar B’Tammuz* and the customs observed specifically during the period from the Seventeenth of Tammuz until Rosh Chodesh Av (some of the guidelines become stricter after Rosh Chodesh Av). Since there are different opinions and customs concerning some of these issues, one should consult a competent halachic authority in cases of uncertainty. Readers are also welcome to contact the author at ozarowsk@gmail.com with questions.

THE FAST OF THE SEVENTEENTH OF TAMMUZ

The Nature of the Fast

The Seventeenth of Tammuz is one of the

four public fasts established in connection with the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*. Among the tragedies commemorated on this day are the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem prior to the destruction of the Second *Beit HaMikdash*, the cessation of the daily Tamid offering, the burning of a Torah scroll by Apostomos, and the placement of an idol in the *Beit HaMikdash* (Mishna, *Ta’anit* 4:6). These fasts have been accepted by the Jewish nation and are therefore generally viewed as obligatory in nature (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 550:1).

Exemptions from Fasting

Pregnant women are exempt from fasting (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 554:5). Although the Rema records a custom that pregnant women would fast if they felt well (Rema, O.C. 554:6), later *poskim* note that the common practice today is that pregnant women generally do not fast on the minor fasts (*Aruch HaShulchan*, O.C. 554:7; *Chazon Ovadia, Arba Ta’aniyot*, p.59).

The same exemption generally applies to nursing women (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 554:5). Many authorities define a nursing woman as one who is actively breastfeeding. Some authorities extend the exemption further and

maintain that a woman retains the halachic status of a nursing mother for up to twenty-four months after childbirth, even if she is no longer nursing. Nevertheless, the more common contemporary practice is to require fasting once nursing has ceased, unless another basis for leniency exists (see R. Moshe Harari, *Mikraei Kodosh, Hilchot Ta'aniyot* 1:4, and *Peninei Halacha, Zemanim* 7:8).

A person who is ill is exempt from the fast (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 554:6). In this context, “ill” is defined as one who is bedridden due to his illness. However, one who feels just a bit weak and wishes to lie down due to the fast alone, but will recover quickly after eating, should keep fasting in most cases (*Peninei Halacha, Zemanim* 7:7). Any specific questions should be discussed with both a competent physician and a qualified rabbinic authority.

Children are not obligated to fast on the Seventeenth of Tammuz. Unlike Yom Kippur, where older children are trained to fast for part of the day, most authorities maintain that there is no obligation to train children to fast on the minor fasts (*Chayei Adam* 66:10; *Chazon Ovadia, Arba Ta'aniyot, HaChayavim V'HaPeturim Min HaTa'anit* 7). Some families have the custom to encourage healthy older children to delay breakfast or fast for a limited number of hours as an educational exercise, provided that the child wishes to do so and it will not affect his or her health (*Rama MiFano* 111; *Piskei Teshuvot* 550:5). However, many *poskim* write that children should not fast the entire day (ibid.; *Kaf Hachaim* 550:9). They also recommend minimizing treats and other special snacks for children who are old enough to understand the significance of the day, while continuing to provide them with their regular meals (*Mishna Berura* 550:5; *Piskei Teshuvot* 550:5).

What Is Forbidden?

The primary prohibition of the Seventeenth of Tammuz is eating and drinking. One should avoid tasting food on the Seventeenth of Tammuz unless there is a significant need. When necessary, one may rely upon the lenient opinion and taste a small amount provided that it is not swallowed (*Shulchan Aruch* and Rema, O.C. 567:1, 3, and *Mishna Berura* 567:11).

One who needs to take medication such as non-chewable pills during a fast may generally do so, since non-chewable pills are not considered normal food and one merely swallows them without chewing (*Nishmat Avraham*, O.C. 550:4). Therefore, if the pill does not have a pleasant taste, it may be swallowed without water when necessary. If swallowing the pill without water is difficult, many authorities permit taking it with water that has been made bitter and unfit for drinking (*Peninei Halacha, Zemanim* 7:7). If this is not possible and failure to take the medication could cause the person to become ill, some authorities permit swallowing it with a small amount of regular water (*Piskei Teshuvot* 567:3). Syrups or chewable pills should ideally be taken either before or after the fast, though one should consult with one's doctor and rabbi in cases of need.

Some *poskim* permit brushing teeth or using mouthwash during a fast (*Aruch HaShulchan*, O.C. 567:4), while others forbid, unless one feels significant discomfort (*Piskei Teshuvot* 567:2, based on *Mishna Berura* 567:11).

The other afflictions applicable on Tisha B'Av and Yom Kippur do not apply. Therefore, bathing in both hot and cold water, anointing, wearing leather shoes, and marital relations are permitted (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 550:2).

When the Fast Begins and Ends

Unlike Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av, the fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz begins at dawn rather than the previous evening (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 550:2). Therefore, one may eat and drink during the night preceding the fast. However, if a person goes to sleep without intending to wake up and continue eating, the fast is generally considered to have begun upon retiring for the night. Accordingly, anyone who wishes to eat or drink before dawn should stipulate before going to sleep that he intends to do so upon awakening (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 564:1). Many authorities distinguish between food and drink and permit drinking upon awakening even without an explicit stipulation, though it is preferable to stipulate regarding both (*Mishna Berura* 564:6).

It should also be noted that although the fast begins in the morning, according to many *poskim*, the restrictions of the Three Weeks begin already at sunset of the previous evening (*Piskei Teshuvot* 551:7), although some are lenient in specific cases of need (see *Igrot Moshe*, O.C. 1:168).

THE THREE WEEKS

Shehecheyanu

One should generally postpone eating a new seasonal fruit or wearing a new garment that requires reciting the *beracha* of *Shehecheyanu* until after Tisha B'Av (*Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 551:17). If a seasonal fruit will no longer be available after Tisha B'Av, one may eat it during the Three Weeks and recite *Shehecheyanu* (Rema). If a person forgot that the fruit was new and already recited the regular *beracha* before tasting it, he should then recite *Shehecheyanu* before eating the fruit (*Birkei Yosef* 551:12). Those who do not customarily recite *Shehecheyanu*

on new garments may wear them during the Three Weeks (*Halichot Shlomo*, *Moadim* 14:1).

When *Shehecheyanu* accompanies a mitzva that should not be delayed, the *beracha* is recited as usual. Thus, a *brit mila* or *pidyon haben* is performed at its proper time together with all associated *berachot* (*Shulchan Aruch* 551:17).

According to most *poskim*, one may eat new fruits requiring *Shehecheyanu* on the Shabbatot that fall during the Three Weeks before Rosh Chodesh Av (*Mishna Berura* 551:45, 98; *Chazon Ovadia*, *Arba Ta'aniot*, *Birkat Shehecheyanu* 1). Some are more stringent and recommend refraining from reciting *Shehecheyanu* even on Shabbat (R. Mordechai Eliyahu, *Hilchot Chagim* 25:16).

A pregnant woman who strongly desires a new fruit may eat it during the Three Weeks, and according to many Sephardic authorities, she should also recite *Shehecheyanu* (*Hilchot Chagim* 25:19). Ashkenazic authorities generally maintain that she may eat the fruit but should refrain from reciting *Shehecheyanu* (*Mishna Berura* 551:99). Similar considerations apply when a person is ill and requires the fruit for medical reasons.

Haircuts and Shaving

The widespread Ashkenazic custom is to refrain from haircuts during the Three Weeks (Rema, O.C. 551:4). Many Sephardic communities begin the restriction later (*Chazon Ovadia*, p.158). However, some Sephardic communities also adopted the custom to refrain from haircuts throughout the Three Weeks (*Ben Ish Chai*, *Devarim* 12; *Beit Yehuda*, p. 109).

If a mustache interferes with eating, it may be trimmed even during this period (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 551:13).

Many *poskim* maintain that shaving is included in the general prohibition on

haircuts and is therefore forbidden throughout the Three Weeks (R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *Shalmei Moed*, p.406). Some hold that those who shave daily may continue to shave regularly until Rosh Chodesh Av, based on the view that the mourning observed during the Three Weeks resembles the lighter form of mourning observed during the twelve months after the loss of a parent (R. Hershel Schachter, *Nefesh HaRav*, p. 191, citing R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik). Some also permit shaving when necessary to avoid financial loss or jeopardizing one's employment (*Igrot Moshe*, O.C. 4:102). Most contemporary authorities do not permit shaving in honor of Shabbat during the Three Weeks (*Oholei Halacha, Moadim*, vol.2, p.140), though some permit one who normally shaves every Friday in honor of Shabbat to do so until the week of Tisha B'Av (*MiBashan Ashiv*, p.200, citing R. Aharon Lichtenstein).

According to the accepted Ashkenazic custom, women are included in the haircut restrictions just as men are (*Mishna Berura* 551:79). However, many authorities permit practical grooming needs, such as shortening hair to facilitate hair covering or removing hair that causes discomfort or embarrassment (*Igrot Moshe*, O.C. 2:137; *Peninei Halacha, Zemanim* 8:10).

Many *poskim* hold that children should not receive haircuts throughout the entire Three Weeks, though some permit haircuts for young children when necessary until the week of Tisha B'Av itself (*Mishna Berura* 551:82).

Weddings and Engagements

According to Ashkenazi practice, weddings are not conducted at any point during the Three Weeks (Rema, O.C. 551:2). Among Sephardim, the widespread practice follows

the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch*, permitting weddings until Rosh Chodesh Av (*Ohr L'tzion* 3:25), though some adopted stricter practices (*Ben Ish Chai*, First Year, *Devarim* 4).

Engagements are permitted, and a modest *seuda* may also be held (*Peninei Halacha, Zemanim* 8:9), though music and dancing may be subject to the restrictions discussed below.

Dancing and Music

Dancing should not take place during the Three Weeks as an expression of mourning for the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* (*Mishna Berura* 551:16; *Chazon Ovadia*, p.149).

Likewise, most contemporary *poskim* prohibit listening to instrumental music during this period, whether performed live or through recordings, as an expression of mourning. Although Chazal instituted restrictions on music following the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, the common practice is to be more lenient during the rest of the year (see *Shulchan Aruch* and Rema, O.C. 560:3; *Tzitz Eliezer* 15:33). During the Three Weeks, however, one should be stringent (*Igrot Moshe*, O.C. 4:21:4; *Chazon Ovadia*, p. 151). A minority of *poskim* permit listening to recorded music privately during the Three Weeks (R. Mordechai Willig, as cited on Yutorah by R. Aryeh Lebowitz concerning *Sefirat Ha'Omer*).

Some authorities permit singing without instrumental accompaniment (see *Peninei Halacha, Zemanim* 8:2-5; *Chazon Ovadia*), while others permit only when singing alone (R. Eliashiv, cited in *Shoneh Halachot* 551:5), or when it is not part of a festive gathering that would ordinarily involve dancing (*Chazon Ovadia*, p.151). Others maintain that even vocal music should generally be avoided during the Three Weeks (*Halichot Shlomo, Moadim* 14:3; *Hilchot Chagim* 25:6). All agree that vocal singing at a *seudat mitzva*, such as

a *brit mila*, *bar mitzva*, or *siyum* is permitted (*Hilchot Chagim* 25:6).

Some *poskim* limit the restriction during the Three Weeks, at least until Rosh Chodesh Av, to music that arouses rejoicing and dancing. According to this view, slower or classical music is permitted because it does not create a festive atmosphere (*Halichot Shlomo, Moadim* 14:3; R. Yaakov Ariel, cited in *Oholei Halacha*, p.134; R. Yosef Zvi Rimon, *Yemei Nissan Vi'iyar*, p.124; *Peninei Halacha, Zemanim* 8:4). The same applies to slow, soulful songs intended to inspire a person spiritually (*Yerushalayim B'moadeha, Bein HaMetzarim*, p.192).

Other *poskim* maintain that all forms of music are forbidden except for music that assists in generating feelings of mourning (see *Kovetz Mibeit Levi*, Nissan 5766, p.77, concerning *Sefirat Ha'Omer*, and *Kovetz Halachot, Bein HaMetzarim* 4:4-5). Even some of the more lenient opinions write that it is nevertheless appropriate to refrain from quieter forms of music, including cantorial pieces and similar recordings, unless there is a particular need, because the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* deserves meaningful mourning (*Halichot Shlomo*, loc. cit.).

Some authorities maintain that if a cappella music consists solely of human voices, it is permitted according to those who allow vocal music during the Three Weeks. Others argue that modern a cappella recordings are specifically designed to imitate instrumental music and therefore share the same status (R. Yisroel Belsky, *Shulchan HaLevi* 13:6).

Some authorities prohibit instrumental music even at a *seudat mitzva* (mitzva meal) (*Eliya Rabba* 551:26; *Minchat Yitzchak* 1:111). Others permit the normal celebration of a *seudat mitzva* during the Three Weeks, including singing and dancing, but only when those

are customary elements of the event (*Ashrei Ha'Ish*, O.C. 3:68:2; *Chazon Ovadia*, p.151).

Some authorities permit students to continue music lessons that began before the Three Weeks when the purpose is educational rather than recreational (see *Bi'ur Halacha* 551:2; *Piskei Teshuvot* 551:14). Others recommend practicing slower pieces that do not create a festive atmosphere (*Oholei Halacha, Moadim* vol.2, p.137).

It is permitted for a driver to listen to music if doing so helps him remain alert and avoid falling asleep while driving, since it serves a practical purpose rather than entertainment (*Kovetz Halachot, Bein HaMetzarim* 4:14). Similarly, one whose work requires exposure to music, such as a kindergarten teacher, may generally continue one's normal activities when the music is not being played for personal enjoyment (*Hilchot Chagim* 25:8). It is also permitted to remain in a waiting room, enter a store, ride a bus, or attend a function where music is playing in the background, since the music is merely incidental and the purpose of being there is unrelated to listening to it (*Kovetz Halachot* 4:17-19).

Children below the age of *chinuch* (generally around age six) are not included in the custom of refraining from music. Once children reach the age of *chinuch*, however, they should generally participate in the mourning customs appropriate to their age (*Ashrei Ha'Ish* 3:68:10). In settings such as camps and schools, where music may be used to manage groups of younger children, practical questions should be discussed with a competent halachic authority.

Avoiding Dangerous Activities During the Three Weeks

Although the obligation to avoid danger applies throughout the year, many authorities

write that one should exercise particular caution during the Three Weeks, since this period is associated with tragedy and calamity (see *Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 551:18). Some contemporary *poskim* recommend avoiding hikes and excursions that involve significantly greater risk than ordinary hikes or outings (*Nitei Gavriel*, *Bein HaMetzarim* 23:2), though routine activities, including pleasure trips, remain permitted (see *Oholei Halacha*, *Moadim* vol.2, p.146).

Some authorities discourage swimming and visiting the beach during the Three Weeks, even in an otherwise halachically permissible setting, due to the increased risks associated with water activities (*Nitei Gavriel*, *Bein HaMetzarim* 42:14; *Hilchot Chagim*, p.198). However, the more widely accepted practice today is to permit these activities until Rosh Chodesh Av (*Halichot Shlomo*, *Moadim* 14:7; *Peninei Halacha*, *Zemanim* 8:5). Similarly, some authorities suggest that purely elective medical procedures should be scheduled at another time if convenient (*Torat HaYoledet*, ch.62), while others write that the concern applies only during the Nine Days (*Chazon Ovadia*, p.128). Of course, medical need certainly permits procedures during this time according to all opinions.

Bein Adam L'chavero

Let us conclude by noting that, according to

the *Chidushei HaRim*, the Three Weeks are a particularly appropriate time to strengthen our observance of interpersonal mitzvot and deepen our sense of unity and connection with our fellow Jews (cited in *Oholei Halacha*, p. 131), especially those who may be somewhat different from us. Just as the *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed due to *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred), so too it will be rebuilt through *ahavat chinam* (baseless love) (First Rebbe of Moditz, *Divrei Yisrael*; R. Avraham Yitzchak Kook, *Orot HaKodesh*, vol. 3).

May our observance of these customs, together with a renewed commitment to both *bein adam laMakom* and *bein adam l'chavero*, and our sincere mourning for the loss of the *Beit HaMikdash*, serve as a merit for us to witness its rebuilding, speedily in our days. ■

Rabbi Eli Ozarowski serves as editor of the Tzurba M'Rabanan English halacha series, as well as the editor of the written material for the Semichas Chaver halacha program. He is also the author of the OU's Torat Imecha Halacha Series for women and a translator for the Steinsaltz Mishna series. Rabbi Ozarowski received semicha from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) and holds an M.A. from the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration. He lives in Mitzpeh Yericho with his wife, Zemira, who serves as Director of the Women's Division at OU Israel, together with their nine children. Rabbi Ozarowski gives many shiurim in the community and is also frequently consulted on halachic matters.

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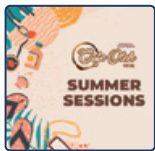


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A Biblical 'Responsa' - To Fast or Not to Fast

We read in the book of Zecharia in Chapter 7:
In the fourth year of King Darius, on the fourth day of the ninth month, Kislev, the word of GOD came to Zechariah - when Bethel-Sharezer and Regem-Melech and his men sent to entreat the favor of GOD, [and] to address this inquiry to the priests of the House of GOD and to the prophets: "Shall I weep and practice abstinence in the fifth month, as I have been doing all these years?"

There is a clear question here of whether to continue the public fast days, such as the 9th of Av, in a time when the Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt, as it was in the days of Zecharia (one of the last prophets).

There is seemingly no clear answer to this

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question.

In Zecharia Chapter 8 we read:

Thus said GOD: I have returned to Zion, and I will dwell in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem will be called the City of Faithfulness, and the Mount of GOD of Hosts the Holy Mount. Thus, said GOD of Hosts: There shall yet be elderly men and women in the squares of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the squares of the city shall be crowded with boys and girls playing in the squares.

There is the famous reference here to the time, as we are living in today, when Jerusalem will become a place of great activity, both for the old and young. This was particularly encouraging for the returnees to Jerusalem, who did not rebuild the city walls for many years, until Nechemiah arrived, approximately 70 years later. How did this speech answer the original question, if at all?

Later in this Chapter we have a *Pasuk* which we recognize from the Selichot for fast days:

כה־אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת צוֹם הַרְבִּיעִי וְצוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְצוֹם הָעֲשִׂירִי יִהְיֶה לְבֵית־יְהוָה לְשִׂשׁוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה וְלִמְעֻדִים טוֹבִים וְהָאֲמַת וְהַשְּׁלוֹם אֲהַבּוּ:

Thus said G-D of Hosts: The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth month, the fast of the seventh month, and the fast of the tenth month shall become occasions for joy and gladness, happy festivals for the House of Judah; but you must love honesty and integrity.

Again, we can ask how does this *Pasuk* relate to the original question about the fast

days?

I recently heard a shiur from Professor Gabi Shitrit of Haifa University, who pointed out that all our fast days were originally meant to be days of happiness. As an example, the spies returned from their mission in Eretz Yisrael on the 9th of Av, which was meant to be a day of happiness at hearing their report on *Eretz Yisrael*. It became a day of tragedy due to the sin of the spies. Other fast days were similar, e.g. 17th of Tammuz, which was meant to be a day of *Matan Torah* when Moshe returned with the *Luchot* and because of the sin of the Golden Calf, it became a day of tragedy.

The theme in Sefer Zecharia is to show us that the fast days were all cases of missed opportunities, and this message is as relevant when the Temple was standing as it was when in a state of destruction. Along the same lines, Professor Shitrit quoted the *Hesped* given by Abba Even in 1966, at the levaya of Dr Yaakov Herzog, who was slated to become the Chief Rabbi of the UK, but died prematurely. *'We are recognizing a tragedy in that not only do we mourn the death of this great man, but we are also mourning what could have been, had he lived longer and achieved his full potential'*.

This is the answer which is alluded to in Sefer Zecharia and remains relevant even during the times of rebuilding of Jerusalem, when the streets will be teeming again with many inhabitants. We recognize that opportunities have been missed, from which we must learn.

Our continued existence here in Eretz Yisrael is a great example of such an approach. We have learned many of the great lessons of history, such as that famously expressed by Menachem Begin, that *'when they say*

they want to destroy us, they mean it'. With G-d's help may we continue to thrive here and take these lessons to heart. Our existence here is nothing short of miraculous and the prophet Zecharia tells us that Hashem wants us to recognize His great kindness throughout our history. It is certainly important to remember this on these special days of introspection, even if they become holidays, as we are promised in the very near future. Other commentators have expressed the case for continued mourning in terms of what these sad days represent, such as loss of religious autonomy because of the destruction of the Temple. However, even if the physical act of fasting becomes obsolete, the message of the fast day will always be relevant. We must always learn from missed opportunities, so as not to make the same mistake again. October 7th must never ever happen again.

May we see the full redemption happen speedily in our days - Amen. ■

Rabbi Ian Shaffer came on Aliya with his wife in 2022 after teaching in Stern College in Manhattan for 22 years. Originally from London, UK where he was Deputy Head of Judaic Studies at Immanuel College. He lives in Modiin and gives weekly shiurim in the OU Men's Kollel as well as a bi-weekly shiur in the community for men and women. He recently published his first Sefer on Shmuel Aleph & Bet – A Companion Volume.

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Bil'am's Trap

Bil'am's method of initiating the Israelites' downfall was to ruin the link between the Almighty and His Chosen People. He attempted to do this twice:

1. By planning to curse Israel. That first time he was unsuccessful, because, "G-d did not wish to listen to Bil'am, but because (He) loved you, He turned the curses into blessings" (Devarim. 23:6).
2. By making it possible for Israel to sin through idol worship and sexual immorality in the incident of Baal Peor. After Bil'am had to face Balak's wrath for his failure to curse the Israelites for the third time, he said to Balak, "Come, let me advise you...". The Talmud (Sanhedrin 106a) brings the tradition that the advice was to incite the Israelites to take part in prostitution with the eligible ladies of his kingdom: "Their god hates sexual immorality." The 'passport' to a Moabite woman was participating in the worship of Baal Peor (a particularly obnoxious procedure detailed in the Midrash: Sifre 131). Thus the second time Bil'am did succeed in ruining the links between G-d and the Israelites: the twenty-four thousand Israelites died by plague in consequence of the sin of Baal Peor.

In his unsuccessful efforts to undermine Israel by cursing them, the Torah mentions

Bil'am's name over and over again. In his successful efforts to undermine Israel through initiating the sin of Baal Peor, his name is not mentioned even once in the main account. Only much later on, in a different context, does the Torah explicitly connect Bil'am with Baal Peor: Moshe said to his military officers, "Did you indeed let every female live? Behold! – They caused Israelites to commit treachery against G-d, by the word of Bil'am, in the matter of Baal Peor, and the plague occurred..." (31:15-16)

Why therefore does Bil'am's connection with Baal Peor not appear in the main account?

The Rashbam suggests that the connection actually does occur in Bil'am's final words to Balak where he gives him a piece of advice without elaborating on what the advice was: "Let me advise you..." (24:13) That advice, the Rashbam says, was given in whisper; 'not for publication at this stage'. His sage insight passed on the information that if you want to get the Israelites into G-d's disfavour, don't waste their time trying to curse them, but tempt them with idolatry and forbidden sexual relations.

Perhaps one reason that the advice was not explicit is to teach the following. As long as people are aspiring and doing their best to act correctly, they should trust that G-d is behind them. The second generation of Israelites in the desert had not been involved with the downfalls of the Golden Calf and Spies. Enemies appeared here and there,

openly and behind the scenes. Bil'am was the latter: he worked entirely without the Israelites knowledge at the time. His agenda was not the success of Moab, but the fall of Israel. He did his best, but G-d frustrated him.

But once a person or for that matter a community acts in a way that negates positive values, such as *avoda zara* and *gilui arayot*, they do not need an outsider to undermine them. They are the ones who do the undermining for themselves. Bil'am opened the door, but the offending Israelites walked through it. They didn't have to. But they did. With the consequence of 24, 000 dead (25:9).

The situation may be compared to an owner of a jewellery shop that goes home for the night and leaves the business unlocked. Thieves enter in the middle of

the night and take out the pearls, diamonds, and rubies. When arrested and on trial, the thieves cannot excuse themselves with "it wasn't us: the owner did not lock the door". Of course it was them. Leaving the door open does not alter the fact that the people entered and stole the valuable jewellery.

Bil'am is like the owner of the shop, and the B'nei Yisrael were the thieves. As the Israelites fell for the temptation of Baal Peor, they could not blame Bil'am for giving in to their own temptations.

And that is the message of Bil'am's absence from the last section of the Parasha. It teaches us that as long as we are positively true to our roots, we should not worry about what others think of us. But once we abandon our principles we can weaken and even destroy ourselves. We ourselves are to blame; we cannot put the blame on others. ■

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Two 'Yeses' at the Same Time: Now What?

לעילוי נשמת
 מאיר יצחק בן יוסף אליהו הכהן ז"ל

Chanah asks: What do I do when I receive two “yes” responses for one of my members at the same time? Who do I say yes to first or do I set them up on two dates at once?

Aleeza answers:

If you’re receiving two “yes” responses for the same member at the same time, that’s not a matchmaking problem. That’s a matchmaker success. It means people are interested, opportunities are opening up, and you have done the work to find relevant matches.

This situation is more common than many new matchmakers realize. Often, we send multiple suggestions on behalf of a member and then wait. Sometimes responses trickle

in one at a time, and sometimes we hear nothing for weeks on end. Other times, two people happen to become available, interested, and ready to move forward at the exact same moment.

So what should you do?

Your job is not to set up two first dates simultaneously. Your job is to make the best professional judgment you can and move forward with the match that feels most appropriate first.

Consider the factors that led you to make both suggestions. Which match appears stronger based on values, goals, stage of life, personality, or other important compatibility indicators? Which one gives you the greatest confidence as a first introduction?

Once you make that decision, proceed with that setup.

For the second person, simply let them know that the member is currently pursuing another introduction and that you will happily reach back out if they become available. There is no need to overexplain or apologize. This is a normal part of the matchmaking process.

Remember, matchmaking is not only about navigating suggestions. It is also about navigating timing, availability, schedules, and human emotions. Two excellent people

can become available at the same time. A member can be traveling. Someone may need an extra week to respond. Life rarely unfolds in a perfectly organized sequence.

The goal is not to eliminate these challenges. The goal is to navigate them gracefully, respectfully, and with clear communication.

Trust your judgment. Make the best decision with the information you have today. If the first match progresses, wonderful. If it doesn't, you have another potential date for your member.

May you be blessed with wisdom in your decisions, patience in your process, and the clarity to guide your members with confidence and care. And may every challenge you encounter become another step toward helping build lasting Jewish homes.

Blessings,
Aleeza ■

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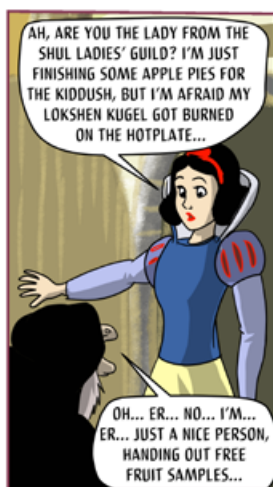
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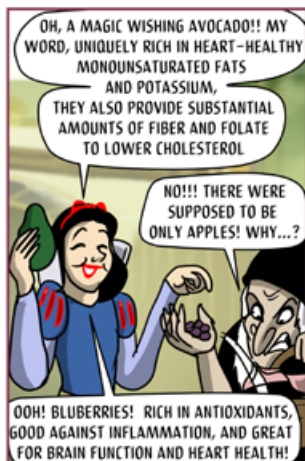
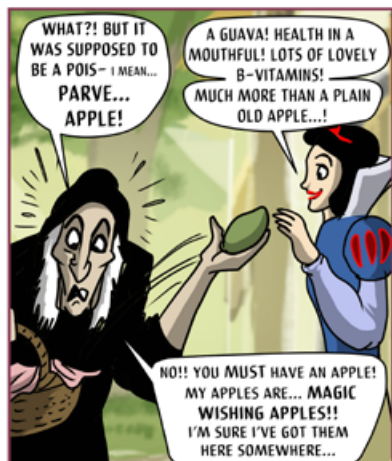
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AND SO, THE EVIL QUEEN DISGUISED HERSELF AS AN OLD PEDDLAR AND SNEAKED UP TO SNOW WHITE'S COTTAGE, WHILE THE DWARFS WERE OUT, PRESUMABLY AT A LATE MINYAN...



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PITCHING OUR TENTS

In this week's fascinating Parsha, Balak, there is a whirlwind of strange prophecies, blessings, curses, and even donkeys! Amidst all this oddity and strangeness, Baalam's third blessing stands out as one of the most significant Pesukim and blessings from the Torah, a verse recited daily by every Jew:

כ"ד:ה' מַה־טֹבוֹ אֶהְיֶיךָ יִצְחָק
מִשְׁכְּנֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

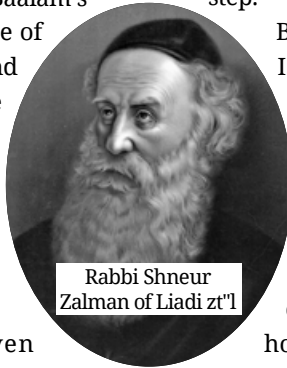
24:5 How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!

With such importance given by Chazal, placing this Pasuk before Pesukei Dezimra, we are compelled to delve deeper and uncover the reason behind its prominence.

For starters, Rashi cites the Gemara in Bava Batra to teach that Baalam observed how the entrances of the tents were not facing each other. This arrangement fostered privacy and embraced modesty among the people.

Rav Yisroel of Ruzhin explains that each

of us has the ability to choose the direction in which we open our tents. Shir Hashirim Rabba teaches that Hashem tells us if we make a tiny hole the size of a needle, He will enlarge it to the size of a grand hall. In other words, if we put forth even a small effort to move forward and open ourselves up in the right direction, Hashem will help and guide us along that path. The key is to take the first step.



Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi zt"l

But how do we take that first step? In which direction should we open our tents?

The Alter Rebbe of Chabad, Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, famously explains that the word מה ("what") represents the concept of Bitul, or nullification. Instead of asking why or how, the question becomes what or for whom, shifting focus away from oneself and toward nullifying oneself to Hashem or to another Jew. When a person does this, they move in the direction of 'Tovu-goodness'. These are the tents of Yaakov and the dwelling places of Yisrael. May we merit to nullify ourselves for others and may Hashem open for us a new dwelling place speedily with the rebuilding of the third Beit Hamikdash.



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and this year one detail in the parsha especially stood out for me.

The majority of the parsha focuses on Balak and Bilam's attempts to curse Bnei Yisrael. Balak is terrified of the Jewish people and believes that the only way to defeat them is by cursing them. Again and again, Bilam tries to curse them, yet Hashem turns every curse into a blessing. Throughout the entire story, Hashem is protecting His people at every step.

What I found so remarkable is that from a simple reading of the text, it sounds as though Bnei Yisrael have no idea any of this is happening. They continue with their daily lives, completely unaware of the danger surrounding them and of the protection they are receiving from Hashem.

Then, almost immediately after these incredible acts of Hashem's protection, the

Torah tells us that many members of Bnei Yisrael became involved in serious sins with the daughters of Moav and the worship of Baal Peor. It's hard to ignore the irony: while Hashem is protecting them from a threat they cannot even see, they are acting in ways that are the opposite of what He wants from them.

I think there is an important lesson here. We might tend to think that Hashem is only looking out for us when we are doing everything right, but Parshat Balak teaches us otherwise. Even when we make mistakes or fall short of who we should be, Hashem continues to guide, protect, and care for us in ways we may never even know about.

Like Bnei Yisrael in the Midbar, we do not always see what Hashem is doing behind the scenes. But that does not mean He is not there looking out for us — always. ■



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MONDAY, JULY 6



GAZA DAY

**FROM DESTRUCTION
TO RENEWAL**

- Visit communities devastated on Oct. 7th
- Walk the Nova Festival site
- Hear firsthand testimony from survivors and military leaders
- Meet Gush Katif pioneer Anita Tucker
- Discover the vision for rebuilding Israel's future

TUESDAY, JULY 7



KNESSET DAY

**INSIDE ISRAEL'S
LEADERSHIP**

- Guided tour of the Knesset
- Meet Members of Knesset
- Hear from families of fallen IDF heroes
- Visit the Gush Katif Museum
- VIP Access to the Pulse of Israel Annual Conference at the Begin Center

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8



JUDEAN HILLS DAY

**WALKING THE PATHS
OF OUR FOREFATHERS**

- Hevron with Yishai Fleisher
- Gush Etzion
- Arugot Farm with Ari Abramowitz or Jeremy Gimpel
- Walk in the footsteps of Avraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David & more
- Meet modern pioneers building Israel's future

THURSDAY, JULY 9



SAMARIA DAY

**WITNESS HISTORY
BEING REWRITTEN**

- Visit Chomesh and Sanur
- Explore Ancient Shiloh
- Meet pioneering families
- Deepen understanding of the strategic & historical importance of Samaria
- See Jewish history returning to life

FRIDAY, JULY 10



JERUSALEM DAY

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

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