TORAH TREATS

An Anthology of Short Divrei Torah & Stories Compiled by Yitzchok Henry



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לעילוי נשמת



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Hamaayan -The Torah Spring ~ Edited by Shlomo Katz



הֶן־עָם֙ כְּלָבִ֣יא יָק֔וּם וְכַאֲרִ֖י יִתְנַשָּׂ֑א - "The people will arise like a lion cub and raise itself like a lion." (23:24)

The Zohar states: "Who is a strong nation like Yisrael! When the dawn appears, the get up like a lion to serve their Master with songs and praises, and they study Torah every day."

R' Avraham Abish Zeinwirth shlita (Yerushalayim) writes: This relates to the Gemara (Beitzah 25b) which states: "Why was the Torah given to the Jewish People? Because they are brazen."

R' Shmuel Eliezer Eidels z"l (Maharsha; Poland; 1555-1631) explains that one who is overly shy cannot learn, because he won't ask questions. Therefore, the Torah was given to the brazen, to the nation that is strong like a lion.

We Jews are proud that we have lived to see thousands of Jews who have not given up, who will never give up, and who are living proof that one day we will rebuild anew. ~ Bluzhever Rebbe, Reb Tzvi Yehudah Spira (1936-2015)

כָּעֵת יֵאָמֵר לְיַעֲקֹב וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מַה־פָּעַל קל. הֶן־עָם כְּלָבִיא יָקוּם וְכַאֲרִי יִתְנַשָּׂא
"Even now it is said to Yaakov and Yisrael `What has G-d wrought?' Behold! The People will arise like a lion cub…" (23:23-24)



In the days of Czar Alexander III (died 1894), the Russian banker Baron Horace Guenzburg z"l (1833-1909) arranged for several leading rabbis to meet with the Interior Minister to plead for the annulment of various anti-Semitic decrees.

However, the Minister invited one of his most anti-Semitic advisors to attend, and the latter succeeded in undoing any positive impression that the rabbis made. He said, "I understand the purpose of every single creature that G-d created, from the inanimate to the human. However, I fail to see what benefit the Jewish People bring to the world. They are like a leprosy on our holy land, Russia," and so on.

The rabbis left downcast, but then they noticed that one of their number, **R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor z"l** (1816-1896; rabbi of Kovno), was laughing. In response to their inquiry, he explained that he now understood the verses quoted above as never before. "A day will come when the world will say, `Why did G-d create the Jewish people? What has G-d wrought?' And when that happens, it will be a sign that better days are coming for the Jewish People; `The People will arise like a lion cub'."

And, indeed, it was in the days of Alexander III that the chain of events began which lead to the fall of the czars.

רֵאשִׁית גּוֹיִם עֲמָלֵק - "***Amalek is the first among nations***" (24:20)

Amalek was the first nation to attack Bnei Yisrael and thus represents the epitome of evil. Appropriately, **R' Shlomo David Yehoshua Weinberg z"l hy"d (the "Slonimer Rebbe"**; killed in the Holocaust) taught that the above phrase alludes to a common trait which is one of the foremost tools of the evil inclination.

The initial letters of the phrase "**רֵאשִׁית גּוֹיִם עֲמָלֵק**" spell "**רגע**" / "one moment." - When a person knows that it is time to repent, the yetzer hara tells him, "One moment! There will time to repent later." (Zichron Kadosh)

וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם לָאָתוֹן כִּי הִתְעַלַּלְתְּ בִּי לוּ יֶשׁ־חֶרֶב בְּיָדִי כִּי עַתָּה הֲרַגְתִּיךְ - "***Bilam said to the donkey, `Because you mocked me! If only there were a sword in my hand I would now have killed you!'"*** *(22:29)*



Based on this pasuk, the **Midrash Rabbah** notes how ridiculous Bilam's mission was. Says the Midrash: Bilam may be compared to a healer who was on his way to recite an incantation over a snake-bite victim. Suddenly, the healer was accosted by a scorpion, and the healer started shouting, "Quick, give me a stick to kill the scorpion." The bystanders asked him, "You claim that you can heal others with your incantations, but you cannot save yourself without a stick?"

So, too, Bilam was on his way to destroy the Jewish People with his tongue, yet he needed a sword to kill his donkey! (Midrash Rabbah 20:14)

וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּשִּׁטִּים וַיָּחֶל הָעָם לִזְנוֹת אֶל־בְּנוֹת מוֹאָב - *"Yisrael settled in the Shittim and the people began to commit sins ."* (25:1)

The gemara (Sanhedrin 106b) relates that after Bilam failed in his attempts to curse Bnei Yisrael, he advised Balak: "The G-d of this nation hates immorality." Therefore, Bilam recommended that Balak entice and cause Bnei Yisrael to sin, leading Hashem to (G-d forbid) destroy Bnei Yisrael. - This would accomplish indirectly what Bilam was unable to achieve through his curses.

R' Shimshon David Pinkus shlita (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel) writes: There is an awe-inspiring lesson here – that no person and no force in the world can harm a Jew. Only the Jewish people can cause their own downfall through their own actions [either individually or collectively].

There is a second lesson here, as well, writes R' Pinkus – sins are caused by outside influences. The Jewish soul is pure and it does not sin unless it first allows itself to be exposed to harmful influences. (Tiferet Torah)

וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹקִים אֶל־בִּלְעָם לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם־לִקְרֹא לְךָ בָּאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים קוּם לֵךְ אִתָּם וְאַךְ אֶת־הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר־אֲדַבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ אֹתוֹ תַּעֲשֶׂה - ***"And Hashem came to Bilam that night and said to him, 'If the men came to summon you, arise and go with them; but only the thing that I shall speak to you – that shall you do'."*** (22:20)

R' Moshe Feinstein z"l asks: If Hashem did not intend to let Bilam curse Bnei Yisrael, why did He let Bilam go?

He answers: The story of Bilam demonstrates the power of the yetzer hara/evil inclination. Although Bilam was a prophet and he knew that Hashem did not want Bnei Yisrael to be cursed, he nevertheless went to great lengths and made many preparations to try to circumvent Hashem's will.

The lesson that we must derive from this, says R' Feinstein, is that one should not rely on his intellect, piety, Torah study and belief in Hashem to protect him from his evil inclination. Unless a person is constantly vigilant, it is all too easy to become ensnared and ultimately to sin. (Darash Moshe II, p.203)

וַיִּפְתַּח ה' אֶת־פִּי הָאָתוֹן - "*Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey and it said to Bilam . . .*" (22:28)



R' Shimon bar Tzemach Duran z"l (Rashbetz; 1361-1444) writes: One should have no trouble accepting this, since we see several species of birds that can be taught to speak. - He adds: The reason that Hashem showed this to Bilam was to teach him that just as He gives the power of speech to creatures that do not ordinarily speak, so He can take away the freedom to speak from those who usually have it–as He does in our parashah to Bilam.

וּבוֹ תִדְבָּק – '*And cleave to Him.*' (Devarim 10:20)

"When we rely on someone, that person is always on our mind. If a patient relies on their doctor, the doctor is always on their mind. - Similarly, if we have Bitachon and rely on Hashem for everything important, we will always think of Him. – Thus, Bitachon leads us to think about Hashem throughout the day, fulfilling the Torah command to cleave to Him." ~ The Beis Halevi on Bitachon.



וְעַתָּה֩ לְכָה־נָּ֨א אָֽרָה־לִ֜י אֶת־הָעָ֤ם הַזֶּה֙ – *'So now please come and curse this people for me.'* (22:6)

How often does it occur that someone harms us? We are talking about an evil person who, for whatever reason, decides that we are in the way of his progress; or he wants to take revenge on us for something we have done which, in his mind, deserves punishment.

While the individual may be totally wrong (or, even if he is totally right), we are not permitted to curse him. First, we do not curse Jews. They are our brothers. The fact that they are not acting like brothers does not change our relationship towards them. So, what does one do when an evil person makes his/her life miserable? He prays to Hashem to bless him. - He does not curse his detractor.

A Jew came to the **Chazon Ish, zl**, and asked the sage to curse another Jew. The situation had deteriorated, so that he simply could not tolerate "life" because of this fellow. "Rebbe, please curse him. Maybe, in this way, he will stop making my life so miserable."

The Chazon Ish looked at the man (who thought that he was making a legitimate request) and said, "I will not curse him; rather, I will bless you. We do not curse. Instead, we seek blessing for our lives."

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, once remarked (it was the week of Parashas Balak) to someone who visited him, "When a Jew has a tzarah, troubling situation, what does he do? He goes to a tzaddik, righteous person, and petitions his blessing. Balak, however, had a tzarah (he thought that the Jews would overrun his country), and what did he do? He went to Bilaam, the pagan prophet, not for a blessing, but for a curse. He asked Bilaam to curse the Jews."

I think the reason is quite simple. One who is insecure cannot tolerate competition. The mere thought that someone is presenting a challenge to his position means that he must destroy the competition.

What about bettering himself, elevating himself to the point that he has no competition? That would require self-confidence, which, for an insecure person, comes at a premium. Rather than strengthening himself, he would rather undermine the competition. Such a person deserves to be challenged.



וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם אֶל־מַלְאַךְ ה' חָטָאתִי כִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה נִצָּב לִקְרָאתִי בַּדָּרֶךְ וְעַתָּה אִם־רַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ אָשׁוּבָה לִי – '***Bilaam said to the angel of Hashem, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing opposite me on the road***.' (22:34)

As usual, Bilaam speaks out of both sides of his mouth. On the one hand, he seeks to excuse himself for his actions, claiming, **לֹא יָדַעְתִּי**, "I did not know" that you (the angel) stood before me. On the other hand, he concedes, **חָטָאתִי**, "I sinned." What is it: excuse, or sin? He cannot have it both ways.

The Shlah HaKadosh explains that the two go together – **חָטָאתִי כִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי**, "I sinned, because I did not know." The mere fact that I did not know is a sin. How can Bilaam claim that he was unaware, that he did not know? He himself said that his donkey was perfect; it had never before acted with such insolence! (His donkey was well-behaved; it had never given him any trouble.) - This alone should have been to Bilaam (who was a pagan prophet) a sign from Hashem. Hashem was speaking to him. He should have immediately asked himself, "What does G-d want from me?" Instead, he closed his eyes; he ignored the signs.

This, in and of itself is a sin. When one chooses to ignore a message from G-d, claiming that he did not notice it, he is guilty of a spiritual deficiency. Let me add, that when one purposely closes his eyes and

refuses to see the message vividly presented to him, he goes beyond ignorance- to the point of utter brainlessness.

There are times, observes **Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl**, when a person is sent a message from Heaven, such as an illness accompanied with such extreme pain that one must be blind not to see that Hashem is speaking to him. The Almighty wants him to wake up, look around, think, introspect. Yet, he chooses to ignore the message. Why? - It is too much to handle. He would rather experience the pain than change his ways. So, he simply closes his eyes.

Ignorance may be bliss, but, at one point, it becomes obtuseness. Ignorance as a sin is different from the legal jargon, '*Ignorantia juris non excusat*', which means that people cannot claim ignorance of the law as an excuse for absolving an illegal act. - Ignorance as a sin means that we are responsible for our lack of knowledge. We should have known; we should have listened; we should have opened up our eyes and seen the message.

One who "should have," but did not, is a sinner. It is as simple as that.



וַיַּעַל בָּלָק וּבִלְעָם פָּר וָאַיִל בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ – '***And Balak and Bilaam brought up a bull and a ram on each altar***.' (23:2)

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, was a master orator. As a maggid, he was able to reach thousands with his powerful, animated oratory. The manner in which he presented his ethical lessons, couched in stories to which his listeners could well relate, captivated his audience, impacting them with his critical message and sage advice. - Yet, Rav Sholom was not happy. He felt that in order to be worthy of lecturing to the masses, he himself should be more "sincere." There should be no vestige of eminence or haughtiness, no personal interest whatsoever. (This story is related by **Horav Reuven**

Karlinstein, zl. Obviously, Rav Sholom's issue with honor and arrogance is far removed from anything we could imagine. He was a holy person whose entire life was devoted to Torah, mitzvos and Klal Yisrael. Nonetheless, on his lofty level, he felt insincere.) - Perhaps he was missing a drop of lishmah, for its own sake (the mitzvah of reaching out to fellow Jews). Perhaps he took personal enjoyment from his successful lecturing.

At that time, the Mashgiach of Ponevez (and Mir), **Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl**, lived in Yerushalayim. Rav Sholom decided that he would share his personal misgivings with Rav Chatzkel (as he was lovingly and venerably called). He did. - The Mashgiach listened, ruminated for a moment, and said, "If there is a question of sincerity, it is not simple…Arrogance is a vile character trait."

Rav Sholom left the Mashgiach's apartment feeling even more morose. He was broken-hearted. Instead of encouraging words, the Mashgiach seemed to be even more demanding of him. As he was returning home, his mind deep in thought, Rav Sholom chanced upon a distinguished chasid of Gur, indeed, an old friend of his. Rav Sholom poured out his heart, sharing with him his tale of woe. (While such feelings of insincerity might not bother most of us, Rav Sholom was greatly troubled. This gives the reader a glimpse of his impeccable character and devotion to Hashem.)

"I thought the Mashgiach would hearten me, encourage me to continue my work and not worry. On the contrary, he added to the weight that is already sitting on my heart," Rav Sholom said.

The chassid replied, "You are well aware of Chazal's statement (Sanhedrin 105b), 'A person should always engage in the study of Torah, or the performance of a mitzvah, even if not for its own sake (i.e. even for ulterior motives), because from learning Torah and performing a mitzvah not for its own sake, he will eventually come to learn Torah or perform a mitzvah for its own sake.'" This concept is substantiated by the reward received by Balak for the forty-two

offerings that he offered up to Hashem. He merited to have Rus descended from him (Rus was a descendant of Eglon, the grandson of Balak). (Simply, Chazal teach us that one should not be discouraged if he finds himself learning Torah or performing mitzvos for less than pure motives, such as fame and honor. It is part of climbing the ladder of spirituality. One begins with impure motivation, but as he continues to climb, he will notice a deeper attachment to Torah and mitzvos, thus purifying his motives.)

The chassid continued, "I once heard this Chazal explained by one of the gedolim, Torah giants, as, even if you might be acting she'lo lishmah, for ulterior motives, but, as a result of your words, you cause another Jew to alter the course of his life, to the point that now he will serve Hashem through Torah and mitzvah performance – lishmah, purely for the sake of the mitzvah – then you should continue your work. Therefore, my dear friend, even if you sense that your work contains even a miniscule measure of impurity, do not worry, because you are inspiring thousands to adhere to Hashem's Torah and mitzvos."

When Balak offered his forty-two offerings, his intention was that, through them, Bilaam would be able to curse Klal Yisrael. This was ulterior motive at its nadir. Yet, as **Maharal** explains, these sacrifices ultimately led to the Jewish People being blessed. In reward, he merited to have Rus descend from him.

Various goals and objectives motivate one to "act publicly," be it speaking, writing, carrying out acts of loving kindness, etc. Veritably, it would be wonderful if we could all act lishmah, but, even if our motives are "slightly" self-serving, the barometer for appropriateness should be: do our public acts inspire/help others, or are they only for self-aggrandizement?

Somewhere in the equation must be an aspect of lishmah, or the success factor of the endeavor will be restricted.

וַיִּפְתַּח ה' אֶת־פִּי הָאָתוֹן - *'Hashem opened up the mouth of the she-donkey.'* (22:28)



At times, the truth can be painful. It can be brutal. Why? Because it is the truth. Unembellished truth can be enlightening – but, sadly, not all of us are able to withstand the power of illumination.

Balak sought to defeat the Jewish People. He hired Bilaam, an evil pagan prophet, to curse them. Bilaam was a powerful individual who had been blessed with being the pagan world's response to Moshe Rabbeinu. In the end, Bilaam's intended negative intent was transformed into positive results.

Bilaam was not supposed to accept Balak's offer, but, true to his evil, weak nature, he proceeded anyway. As he rode his donkey on the way to cursing the Jews, his donkey saw an angel three times – and moved aside. Bilaam did not care to have his donkey take charge of the journey, and he indicated his displeasure by striking the donkey repeatedly. Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey, granting it the power of speech – a power generally reserved for human beings – and allowing it to rebuke Bilaam for planning to curse the Jews.

The donkey is not considered the "swiftest" of animals. Why did Hashem select the donkey to convey His message to Bilaam?

Interestingly, when the donkey opened his mouth to rebuke Bilaan, the pagan prophet had no answers for his errant behavior. What about the donkey's rebuke stunted Bilaam?

In his Bircas Peretz, **the Steipler Gaon, zl**, explains that the donkey knew no chochmos; he spoke whatever came to his "mind," which was pure, unembellished truth. No one can stand up to the truth. No one can argue with the truth. The donkey had no personal desires that influenced him. Thus, he was able to give a straightforward, honest critique, untainted by personal interest.

The wisest pagan, the individual who had reached the height of prophecy (or perhaps its nadir), was unable to justify his behavior when confronted by the less-than-swift donkey. Why?

The truth is glaring and pierces right through one's misconceived rationalizations. How often do we qualify our actions by self—prevarication? Lying to oneself is the most common, and probably most injurious, form of dishonesty. We rationalize activities that are less-than commendable by convincing ourselves that what we are doing is in the best interest of an individual, the community, our family, our self. If, at the end of the day, it is a lie – it is in no one's best interest.

לֹא־הִבִּ֤יט אָ֙וֶן֙ בְּיַעֲקֹ֔ב וְלֹא־רָ֥אָה עָמָ֖ל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל - "***He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no perversity in Yisrael.***" (23:21)

The Baal Shem Tov Hakadosh once spent Shabbos in a city that was home to a large chassidic following. It happened that on that Shabbos a darshon, an ethical lecturer, who would travel from city to city speaking from the podium admonishing its inhabitants regarding their religious observance, also spent Shabbos in that community.

The Baal Shem Tov was a person who empathized with all Jews. In his desire to provide the speaker with a large captive audience, he personally attended the drasha, lecture. The chassidim understandably followed suit. The darshan went up to the lectern and spoke penetrating words of inspiration. He laced his speech,

however, with harsh criticism of the crowd for their lack of total religious observance, citing their lack of Torah study, flimsy minyan attendance, and diminished yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven.

When the Baal Shem Tov heard the onslaught of invectives leveled at the community, he stood and proceeded to leave the room. Understandably, when the chassidim noticed the Baal Shem leaving, they, one by one, began to follow suit, until there was no one left to listen to the darshan's critique.

After Shabbos, the darshan came to the home where the Baal Shem was staying, complaining that because of the Baal Shem, everyone left his lecture, leaving him to speak to the four walls. He could not complete his intended drasha and who knows if now he would even get paid?

Hearing this, the Baal Shem Tov arose from his chair. With tears streaming down his face, he turned to the darshan and said, "You permitted yourself to criticize Jews in public. I would like you to know that when a Jew toils throughout the day – going around the market in search of a livelihood for him and his family – and in the evening – after a full day of back-breaking labor, which has ultimately proven unsuccessful in yielding a decent financial return – just barely makes it to shul to pray with a minyan – his prayer causes an incredible uproar in Heaven. The entire Heavenly Tribunal gather together around the Heavenly Throne and say, "Who is like Your nation Yisrael"! - And now, you – a creation of flesh and blood – have the audacity to censure such fine people!"

A similar incident occurred with **Rav Meir, z.l., the rav of Tiktin, Poland**. A maggid once came to his community and asked permission to lecture in the main shul. Rav Meir not only gave permission, but he also even attended the discourse. The maggid began castigating the crowd, rebuking them with powerful words. He criticized their lack of business ethics, their petty infighting and lack of religious observance. In short, he was far from complimentary.

Rav Meir listened intently to the maggid's words, and suddenly he began to sob loudly. After the drasha, the maggid came over to the rav's home to hear his opinion of the speech.

Rav Meir said, "Your words were penetrating and indeed true, because – without a doubt – I am filled with sin. I must ask you, however, why you felt it important to reprove me in public? Was it necessary to humiliate me in front of the entire religious community? You could have rebuked me in private and still achieved the same effect."

The maggid, hearing these words, became visibly shaken. "Rebbe, I did not mean you. I would never suspect the rav of any impropriety, let alone transgressions such as the ones I mentioned. No, I was speaking to the assembled members of the community."

"The people are pure of any blemish. They are pious and holy," answered Rav Meir innocently. "If you found reason to censure anyone, it must have been me to whom you were speaking. Hence, I ask you again: why did you embarrass me in public?"

This story sends home several messages. One of these messages identifies the chasm that lies between our generation and those that preceded us. - It might be a good idea to reflect on this point.



עֲשֵׂה לְךָ שָׂרָף וְשִׂים אֹתוֹ עַל־נֵס וְהָיָה כָּל־הַנָּשׁוּךְ וְרָאָה אֹתוֹ וָחָי – '***Make for yourself a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole; and it shall be that everyone that is bitten when he sees it, shall live***.' (21:8)

The narrative stimulates a number of questions: Why did Moshe Rabbeinu fashion the serpent of copper? Why not of another substance, such as clay or wood? Is there a relationship between the word nachash, serpent, and the word nechoshes, copper? Why was this serpent placed upon a pole? How is one who is bitten by a serpent cured simply by gazing at the serpent?

Horav Avigdor Miller, Shlita, addresses these questions in his commentary on this parsha. The serpent is a symbol of the yetzer hora, evil inclination. The yetzer hora's strength lies in its ability to be elusive, to conceal itself from its victims. Thus, the first serpent, the nachash that played a leading role in the sin of Adam Ha'rishon, presented itself as a friendly advisor.

Hashem chose the nachash as the symbol for all forms of persuasion, using its guile to manipulate man into succumbing to temptation. Every serpent should serve as a reminder of this concealed force. The ability to ensnare defines the essentially character of the nachash.

The serpent travels on its stomach, hiding in the grass, so that it can strike without warning, when it is least expected. Because of its unique nature, the serpent is copper-colored, a color that easily blends in with most environments. This allows the snake a greater opportunity to remain concealed, especially upon the earth or in the grass.

Moshe understood the hidden peril of the serpent. He, therefore, chose to fashion a serpent of copper. Even the name nachash alluded to the serpent's resemblance to nechoshes, copper, pointing to the difficulty man has in recognizing the danger of the nachash. Thus, Hashem commanded Moshe to place this copper serpent upon a pole, so that everyone would see it and be reminded of its existence. This way, people would be warned to avoid the fatal temptation of its misleading advice.

The complainers were punished in order to provide a lesson to be cognizant of the effects of the subtle persuasion of the serpent. When the people looked at the copper serpent, they were reminded of the existence of the evil inclination. They would avoid the tragic consequences that its bite could catalyze.

The way to be healed of the snake bite/yetzer hora, is to be aware of its existence at all times. The serpent seeks to remain incognito,

to hide from its victims. It enters the minds and hearts of men, poisoning their concepts and philosophies. They think they are thinking straight, but, alas, they are only succumbing to the effects of the serpent's guile.

The healing is through awareness. Whoever notices the serpent survives. It is as true today as it was then. When we open our eyes to the efforts of the serpents, we will realize that it subtlety leads us astray: to follow the trends of the times; to defer to every challenge to the Torah way of life; to view modernity as a savior and reject the past.

When we recognize the tempting nature of the snake, we are able to avoid the entrapping, deception of the yetzer hora.



וַיַּרְא בָּלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר – '***And Balak ben Tzipor saw***.' (22:2)

Horav Ze'ev Weinberger, Shlita, writes that he once heard stated in the name of **Horav Moshe M'Rozvandov, zl**, an ambiguous statement regarding the relationship among Parshios Korach, Chukas, and Balak. He said that the letter "Kuf," "**ק**" is found in all three parshios. Kuf begins one, is in the middle of the next, and ends the third parsha. Korach, begins with a kuf; Chukas has the letter kuf in the middle, and Balak has it at the end. Needless to say, this statement is enigmatic. What lesson is to be derived from the position of the kuf in the names of the three parshios?

This question was presented to **Horav Gedalyah Shorr, zl**. After thinking for a few moments, he said, "The letter kuf alludes to kedushah, holiness, which begins with the letter kuf. Korach had kedushah in the beginning. His ancestors were great people. He descended from Shevet Levi.

Parshas Chukas, which discusses the laws concerning the Parah Adumah, has a kuf in the middle, since the red cow is burned in the present. The kedushah is here and now.

Balak has the kedushah in the end, in the future. Rus, a future Moavite descendant, after converting became the mother of royalty, the House of David Ha'Melech.

We infer from this idea a valuable lesson. Kedushah is present at some point, either in the beginning, the middle, or the end. Holiness must be present in order to sustain the inherent value of a situation. This kedushah will not, however, protect the individuals involved.

We see that Korach met a tragic end, despite his noble pedigree. Balak was a rasha until his demise, despite his virtuous descendants.

What do we learn from here? We see that kedushah must be consistent; in the beginning, the middle, and the end. One cannot be inclined to holiness at his convenience. Selective virtue has no place in living a Jewish life.



וַיִּפְתַּח ה' אֶת־פִּי הָאָתוֹן. וַתֹּאמֶר הָאָתוֹן אֶל־בִּלְעָם הֲלוֹא אָנֹכִי אֲתְנְךָ אֲשֶׁר־רָכַבְתָּ עָלַי מֵעֹדְךָ עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה - "***And Hashem opened the mouth of the she-donkey ... And the she-donkey said to Bilaam, 'Am I not your she-donkey that you have ridden all your life until this day?***'" (22:28,30)

The "mouth of the she-donkey" -- or the miracle of the she-donkey's speech -- is mentioned as one of the ten supernatural phenomena which originated during the period of time between the end of the sixth day of Creation and the commencement of Shabbos.

We can glean profound lessons from the necessity for such a miracle. We would like to place emphasis upon the actual statement the she-donkey made and the lessons we learn from it.

Horav Yitzchak Rabinovitz, z.l., who was better known as **Reb Itzele Ponievezer**, used the following homiletic illustration to admonish a group of ill- mannered individuals who were determined to disturb a meeting by arguing about their respective pedigrees. Reb Itzele said that the donkeys came to Hashem with a complaint, "Why are we always put down as the fools of the animal kingdom? Aren't we the most hardworking? Many animals roam wild, while we maintain our allegiance to our master. We never rest, we are constantly called upon to serve day or night. What is our reward for all this hard work? Frequent beating? Please Hashem, grant us the ability to speak, so that we may be able to communicate our pain and perhaps receive some consideration from our masters."

Hashem responded to their request, saying, "I will give one of you an opportunity I have never before accorded to any other animal. I will grant the power of speech to one of you, and we will see what will be the result."

The opportunity came, years later, when the evil Bilaam left on a mission to curse Bnei Yisrael. Knowing full well the futility of this undertaking, his she-donkey challenged her master and attempted to prevent him from going. Indeed, the donkey had prepared an eloquent speech, "Bilaam, you intend to kill a whole nation with your tongue, but for me you require a sword!"

These striking words would have left an indelible impression on Bilaam. What did the donkey say, however, to fulfill his once-in-a-lifetime opportunity? Did she use chochmah, wisdom, or did she think like a donkey when she uttered her famous statement?

When she opened her mouth to speak for the first time, she said, "Am I not your she-donkey that you have ridden all your life until this day?"

A donkey is a donkey! This "foolish" animal presented evidence why she lacked the power of speech with this statement. The first chance she had to convey an important message, she started

bragging about herself. The first thing that came to her mind was -- herself! Rather than take the opportunity to speak on behalf of Bnei Yisrael, she talked about her own pedigree and glory. Whereupon Hashem responded, "If this is how you apply My unique gift; if this is what you do with this glorious opportunity; if instead of defending others you glorify yourself, then, the power of speech will continue to be beyond your grasp. Return to your speechless state! Until you learn to live and speak for others as you do for yourself, you will continue being the dumb creature you have always been."

This "narrative" and its homiletic rendering are truly thought provoking. The power of speech is one of Hashem's greatest gifts. It distinguishes between man and animal. This gift should be used for the loftier things in life and thought, not as a vehicle for self-aggrandizement and vain pride. As **Horav Moshe Swift, z.l.**, notes, the test of a person's greatness is how he stands up in the defence of others. An individual who has the opportunity to come to the defence of others, but instead tries to absolve himself by saying, "I had nothing to do with it," is making the speech of a donkey.

Bilaam's donkey had the greatest opportunity but used it to defend herself. - We must learn from this narrative that we do not simply live for ourselves. Our purpose on this earth is to help others. The success or failure of our lives is commensurate with our ability to apply ourselves to attain this goal.

Rav Yonason Eibschitz explains why we say 'Hashem sefosai tiftach – G-d open my lips' right before shemona esrei. He explains that when man stands before the Master of the Universe, one's vocal cords should freeze in paralysis, out of fear. We therefore offer a special prayer that G-d should grant us the fortitude to open our lips in prayer. ~ Praying with Fire

וַיַּךְ בִּלְעָם אֶת־הָאָתוֹן לְהַטֹּתָהּ הַדָּרֶךְ. וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַלְאַךְ ה' עַל־מָּה הִכִּיתָ אֶת־אֲתֹנְךָ זֶה שָׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים - "*And Bilaam smote the donkey to turn her into the way... And the angel of Hashem said to him, why have you smitten your donkey these three times?*" (22:23-32)

When Bilaam set out on his journey to Balak, who desired is services in order to curse the Jewish nation, Hashem sent an angel with an unsheathed sword to hinder him. The donkey was miraculously able to see the angel, while Bilaam could not. The angel blocked the donkey's path three times. After the first time, the donkey veered off the path, Bilaam hit him. This recurred when the donkey pressed Bilaam's foot against a fence. The third time, the donkey, having nowhere to turn, settled down on the ground only to be hit again by Bilaam. When the donkey was miraculously granted the power of speech, it admonished Bilaam for embarking upon a journey which was against Hashem's will. Finally, Hashem permitted Bilaam to see the angel, who immediately rebuked him for hitting the donkey three times. Bilaam's reply was simply that he was not aware of the angel's presence. Thus, he now conceded his guilt in not noticing the angel's presence.

The Sefer Chasidim questions this "sin". Is it wrong for a rider to strike his donkey when he veers off the correct path or pushes him against a fence? Secondly, what was Bilaam's sin in not noticing the angel?

He explains Bilaam's sin in the following manner: Bilaam should have realized that the donkey's unusual behavior was a sign of Hashem's displeasure with Bilaam's intended journey. Thus, Bilaam appropriately conceded his guilt in not recognizing these repeated messages to him.

One who complacently travels on the path of life, never reflecting upon his personal life or recognising unusual events, is guilty of sinful behavior. A Jew is obligated to use his G-d-given mind to be cognizant of the lessons that should be gleaned from a particular

situation. Nothing occurs in this world by chance. - In His beneficence, Hashem offers us these subtle messages to protect us from misfortune.





Should I be saying Tikkun Chatzos during this time of the year – the Three Weeks?

Tikun Chatzos is a good thing, but don't just *daven* it *uhp*. I would say that it's a good idea to just sit down on the floor before you go to sleep – even for a minute. Do it after your wife falls asleep – or after your husband falls asleep – so that they won't think you've gone crazy. But sit on the floor in *aveilus* for the Churban Beis Ha'mikdash, mourning for the destruction, for a full minute and then go to sleep. - A minute is also good enough. Don't think it's a small thing.

When I was a boy, I used to say *tikun chatzos*. But now – even better – sit on the floor for a moment and think about what we're missing. A minute for the *Churban Beis Ha'mikdash* and then go to sleep. This is a very good *eitzah* you're hearing now – a very important piece of advice.



Why did Hashem create sleep if it's such a waste of time?

Why did He create hunger? It's a waste of time to eat! Why did He create the necessity to go to the bathroom, it's a waste of time! It's a good question – I'll tell you why:

Hakodosh Boruch Hu made this world for the purpose of recognizing Him. Now, how can people recognize Hashem when they're so busy in this world? You're thinking only of your own affairs and you forget about Hashem. So Hashem says, "I'm going to remind you of Me." And so, you get hungry. You have to eat, you need food, and then when you get a piece of bread: "Oh, I thank You Hashem, what would I do without the bread?! I can't live without bread." And the bread causes you to be grateful, to love Hashem, and you're fulfilling your purpose in the world.

Let's say, a person is tired; he's very tired, and his body gets worn out. And now he needs sleep to feel rested. Are you going to just sleep like a cat sleeps? So Hashem says, no. If you're able to go to sleep, you have to thank Hashem for that. Some people can't sleep; some people are sick and they can't sleep. Sleep is a blessing and you have to thank Hashem for the sleep. That's why He makes you tired. Say it with your mouth: "Ah geshmakeh pleasant night's sleep!" It's better than eating the most delicious things! In the morning you get up, and you're refreshed, you're a new person. Modeh ani l'fonecha – "I thank You, Hashem."

So the sleep is the for purpose of causing people to be more grateful to Hashem. That's only one of the benefits of sleep. There are other benefits too, but this is one of the benefits of sleep that is included in the great program of making people more perfect in this world.

How much time should a yeshiva man give away to help others come closer to Torah and to yiddishkeit?

Now that's a question that I have been concerned with for at least forty years; and I never found an answer. But tentatively we will say as follows: As long as you're interested in learning and you have an hour that you want to spend on learning, keep it for yourself. Learn that hour. - But keep in mind that there are hours that you do waste. Many people need some recreation. It's fun to be mekarev rechokim and there is plenty of wasted time.

I'll give an example. If you're a yeshiva man, and on Fridays after the seder you are one of those who sit in the beis hamedrash while they're sweeping up and you sit in the dust and you continue to learn – some people do that by the way; they learn until the last moment and then just before Shabbos they run home to take a bath – if that's you, then I say, don't budge. Keep on learning. But if you're going to waste time Friday afternoon then 'waste' it on kiruv rechokim and get Olam Haboh in your spare time.

There's a lot of time wasted by everybody. Some people need a little rest from learning or a change- so waste that time in the right way. But the rule is – and it may sound selfish, but I wouldn't budge from it – if you have an hour to learn, do so and don't give it away for any other purpose.

"Once we realize that Hashem is a real live father who takes care of all our needs, there are no more questions. – Everything is clear.

If we had a close relative who possessed even a millionth of the wealth and power that Hashem does, we would surely not worry about anything." ~ Rabbi Shimshon Dovid Pincus Zt'l.

AT THE ARTSCROLL SHABBOS TABLE

A PROJECT OF THE Mesorah Heritage Foundation

WEEKLY INSPIRATION AND INSIGHT ADAPTED FROM CLASSIC ARTSCROLL TITLES

A Safe Journey - Flashes of Greatness by Rabbi Shlomo Landau



Danny was a nine-year-old boy who lived with his family in London. Danny loved visiting his zeidy and bubby who lived in Manchester and he also loved the two-hour train ride from London to Manchester. Once they boarded the train Danny would cozily sandwich himself between his parents and dreamily watch the city fade into the countryside. Before he knew it, they would arrive in Manchester where his grandparents would always be waiting to fetch them and drive them to their welcoming home.

As Danny grew, an idea began to formulate in his mind. Wouldn't it be wonderful if he were to visit his grandparents for a weekend? He would love their undivided attention. And it was such an easy commute as he had ridden the train so many times that he could even travel alone. Eventually, he built up the courage to run his idea by his parents. Initially, they were adamant that he was way too young to travel on his own, but Danny's persistence paid off and finally, his parents promised him that for his eleventh birthday weekend, he could visit his grandparents all by himself.

Danny counted down the months until he would turn eleven and finally get his wish fulfilled. At last, the week of Danny's birthday approached and he anxiously looked forward to the weekend so that he could take his long-awaited trip.

On the day of his solo journey, Danny rose early and packed a small case to take along. Truth be told, he did have butterflies in the pit of his stomach both from excitement and from the anxiety of traveling alone.

When they arrived at the train station, Danny's father went to buy him a ticket and even accompanied Danny onto the train. Danny swung his small case onto the shelf above his seat. On the outside he appeared calm and confident but on the inside, he was growing more and more nervous by the minute.

His father, perhaps sensing some of Danny's apprehension, asked him if he was sure that he was okay traveling all by himself. Danny assured his father that he was okay. After all, it was a short two-hour trip, and anyway, his grandparents would be waiting on the platform as soon as the train arrived in Manchester.

"Well then, goodbye Danny, safe travels," his father said. But as he said goodbye, Danny's father pressed a folded piece of paper into Danny's sweaty palm. "Danny, if for some odd reason you begin to panic or if something happens, just open this note and you will be okay."

"No worries, Dad, I am just fine," and with that Danny quickly stuffed the folded note into his coat pocket. Moments later the train pulled out of the station as Danny tried to calm his pounding heart and settle down. But, try as he might, his apprehension just continued to grow. It only got worse when a shady-looking character entered his train car and sat down directly across from Danny. All kinds of frightening thoughts entered his mind and his imagination shifted into overdrive.

At the next stop, a group of rowdy thugs entered his car and sat near him. Danny began to panic. This was not how he had imagined the train ride and he regretted ever coming up with this crazy idea. The world around him began to spin as the panic intensified and Danny was losing it when he suddenly remembered the paper in his pocket. Frantically, he stuck his hand into his pocket and unfolded the piece of paper. As he began to read the note, a smile broke out on his face and a sudden calm set in.

The note read. "Danny dear, if you are reading this note while still on the train, stay calm and walk to the back of the train. You will find me in the last car waiting for you!"

Danny grabbed his case and quickly walked through the train to the last car. Sure enough, his father was sitting there. Relieved, Danny ran into his father's arms. He knew that with his father onboard he would surely be okay. - On life's journey, complications and challenges sometimes arise and suddenly we begin to panic as we feel like we have to go at it all alone.

This is so far from the truth, as a Yid always figuratively carries a note in his pocket that says, "Imo anochi b'tzarah — I am with you in your time of need. Just grab your pekel and find Me. I am there for you on your journey!"





It's All in Your Mind

The Baal Shem Tov taught that often times, one can control his feelings when it comes to happiness and depression, and that is because these emotions come from the way we look at things. One can effectively overcome depression by changing the way he thinks. We know this, instructs the Baal Shem Tov, from the Hebrew letters that make up these words. The word for 'thought' is Machshavah (**מחשבה**), and if we rearrange the letters, it spells BeSimchah, (**בשמחה**), which means 'happiness'. - It's all in one's mind. If one controls his thoughts in a situation, he can see it with Simcha, joy.

Rav Avraham Pam, zt"l, would often say, "People are always looking for the 'city of happiness', and it can be found in the 'state of mind'!

The Weekly Vort

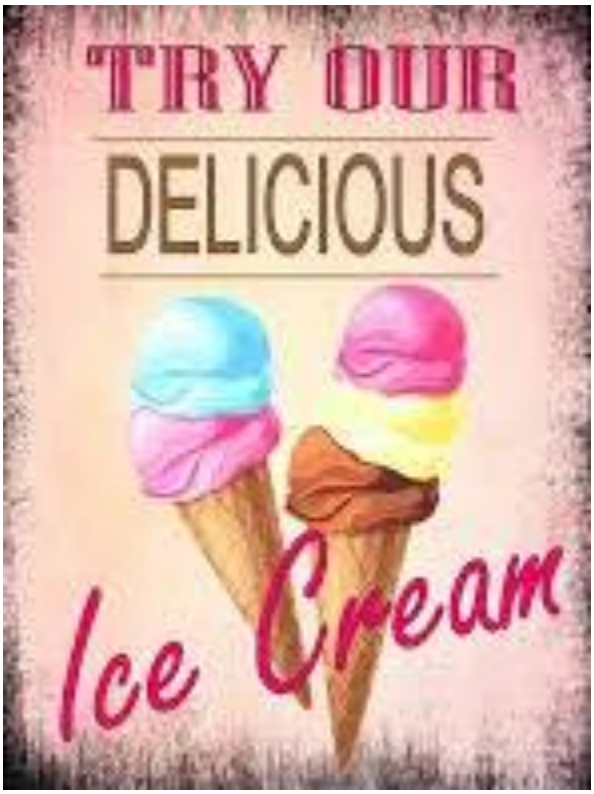
● **תמות נפשי מות ישרים ותהי אחריתי כמהו** – ***May my soul die the death of the upright, and may my end be like his!*** (23:10).

Bilaam asked to die the death of the upright, yet he was unwilling to live a righteous life. He wanted to die like a penitent but not to live like one.

The Ohr Hachaim HaKadosh explains: "I have met sinful people who told me they would be willing to repent if they could be assured that immediately after doing so they would die. However, to repent and remain fully committed over a long period of time is too difficult. The evil inclination has too tight a grip on them."

The Chofetz Chaim stated: To die as a Jew is easy. Since we believe in the eternity of the soul, it is not hard to die. One passes from temporal existence to eternal bliss. The only fear one has is that he might not have spiritually prepared himself in this world. The real challenge is to live like a Jew. Every moment of life has responsibilities one must meet and pitfalls one must avoid. - Bilaam wanted to die as a Jew; he could not imagine living as one. (A Shabbos Vort)

● In Honor of Shabbos



It was a scorching hot Friday afternoon in Yerushalayim. Dressed in his Shabbos clothing, the *tzaddik*, **R' Aryeh Levin**, was busy walking by all the shops, urging the shopkeepers to close up in time for Shabbos. R' Aryeh spotted a very long line of customers snaking around the corner in front of the ice cream shop. The owner seemed to have no intention of closing up anytime soon. The hot weather was highly conducive for his booming Friday afternoon business.

It was already candle lighting time, and R' Aryeh walked quickly towards the ice cream shop. He understood that it would be very difficult for the owner to pull himself away from the numerous customers. But Shabbos was Shabbos… R' Aryeh weaved his way through the crowd until he reached the front of the store. He strode into the store, sat down on a stool and placed his *shtreimel* on the table.

The owner understood why this rabbi had entered his store; R' Aryeh was a familiar figure from his weekly pre-Shabbos rounds.

The owner looked at the surge of customers. He was not going to lose out on business like this, he decided. It was not every day that he could sell his entire stock in less than an hour.

Then he heard R' Aryeh's soft words: "What can I tell you? You are facing a very hard test. Still, Shabbos is Shabbos…" R' Aryeh then got up slowly, put the *shtreimel* on his head, and shook the hand of the owner like an old friend. Then he hurried out of the store. After R' Aryeh walked quite a distance, he glanced behind him. The line had dispersed, and people were walking off in all directions. The owner was shooing the last of the crowd away and locking up his shop.

R' Aryeh breathed deeply and shook his head, "I envy that shopkeeper," he thought to himself. "He succeeded in passing a difficult test."

A few years later, the store owner met R' Aryeh and told him, "I will never forget the words you said to me that Friday afternoon. You felt that I was facing a very hard test. You understood what I was going through. The words 'Shabbos is Shabbos' that you whispered to me penetrated my heart. I felt that you were feeling the pain of the holy Shabbos. At that moment, I made up mind that I would not cause a Jew like you pain. I immediately locked up my store."

R' Aryeh grabbed his arm and said, "If only there were more like you within the Jewish people!" ("Reb Aryeh")

Never doubt Hashem's love for you. He is your greatest supporter and strongest encourager. He believes in you when you stumble and rejoices in you when you rise. He sees you, He hears you, and He loves you unconditionally. No matter where this journey takes you, He will be by your side every step of the way. ~ Inspired by the teachings of Rebbe Nachman.



The Toldos says in his sefer **Tozfnas Paneiach** the explanation of the pasuk - **שִׁוִּיתִי ה׳ לְנֶגְדִּי תָּמִיד כִּי מִימִינִי בַּל־אֶמּוֹט** – '***I have placed Hashem before me constantly; because [He is] at my right hand, I will not falter***.' (Tehilim 16:8)

There was once a man who had an audience with the king. As he was talking to the king, a person came up to him and hit him hard.

The man who was hit will certainly not hit back. – Why?

Because if someone had dared to start with him while he was standing in front of the king, then it must mean either of two things: Either the man was ordered to do so by the king, and if so then he can't hit back – or, if he's not a messenger of the king, certainly the king would punish him.

שִׁוִּיתִי ה׳ לְנֶגְדִּי תָּמִיד explains the Toldos is that a person should be aware of the fact that he is always standing in the presence of Hashem - **כִּי מִימִינִי בַּל־אֶמּוֹט** – he never gets lost, even when he is hurt by others. He understands that the other person is either a messenger of the 'king', or if not, Hashem will already take care of it for him. – He doesn't have to worry.

"You cannot fool Hashem; ultimately, you cannot fool others either. The only one you can fool is yourself. And to fool a fool is no great achievement."~ The Rebbe Maharash, Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn of Lubavitch.

Hashem is watching over us

"It appears that neither Bnei Yisrael, nor Moshe had any idea that Bilaam hired Balak to curse them. The give and take between Bilaam and the emissaries of Balak is like a smoky, back-room cabal. Throughout this whole parsha, you could just imagine bnei yisroel, going about their business, eating the Manna from Hashem and utterly clueless that forces are gathering to curse them.

The lesson here is that even when we do not know that we are in danger, Hashem is watching over us. He is protecting us. He is putting obstacles in the way of people who wish to harm us, just as He did to Bilaam on the donkey.

We must have emunah that Hashem's watchful eye is protecting us, especially when the danger is not apparent."



Key to Success - The "Shoe" In Court

A story is told about a lively child who didn't have patience to learn. Every challenge that he faced broke him. The melamed reached out to the Rav of the city, asking him if he would try to positively influence the child to be more devoted and interested in learning. The Rav agreed, and a meeting was set up.

That morning, when the boy awoke, he suddenly felt a fear of the unknown. He wasn't sure what to expect. What was the Rav going to tell him?

When he met the Rav, he was warmly welcomed into his office. During the conversation, the Rav related to the boy a Din Torah that he had: "I had a Din Torah between a sefer Torah and a pair of shoes, and I want to hear your opinion.



The shoes came complaining to the sefer Torah, asking, 'Why do we have such different fates? When the sofer finished making you, they placed a silver crown on your head and carried you to a Beis midrash amidst dancing and joy. Whenever they take you out of the Aron Hakodesh, people stand up, form lines before you, and hug and kiss you.



When you get worn out, you will have a levayah and be buried with prestige and honor. - "'But me, on the other hand, I'm just a pair of shoes. People don't respect me. They tread with me into the mud. I will be tossed into the garbage when I'm worn out. Is it fair that we should have such opposite fates? "

'I remember how, years ago, we both came from the skin of the same cow. We were raised in the same barn, ate the same fodder, and drank from the same trough. But a sofer bought you, turned you into parchment, and made you into a sefer Torah. At the same time, a shoemaker bought me and turned me into a pair of shoes. Why do we have such different fates? We used to be the same!'

The Rav turned to the boy and asked him for his opinion. What would he say to the shoes?

Hearing the plea of the shoe the boy felt the weight of the shoe's claim. The boy said that he agreed with the claim of the shoes. It didn't seem fair to him why the shoes are so degraded while the sefer Torah is so respected. The Rav then asked the boy what he thought would be the claim of the sefer Torah. What would it answer? Perhaps, the Rav said, there's a fundamental difference between them: While it's possible to craft a pair of shoes in a couple of hours, many hours of hard and diligent labor are needed to make a sefer Torah. A sofer writes each letter one at a time until the entire sefer Torah is finished. - That differs the two.

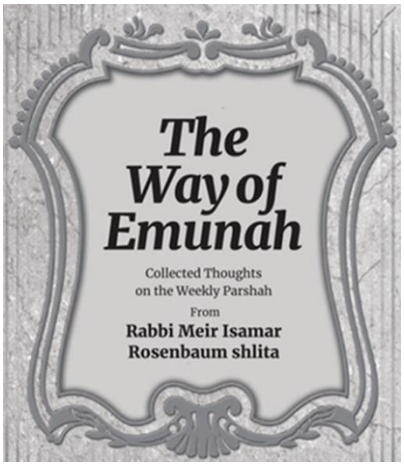
Hearing that, the boy agreed that the sefer Torah deserves its respect. So much toil was put into making it.

The Rav said, "My son, if you want people to honor and admire you, you must toil diligently. You must put in a lot of effort. Otherwise, you will be like a pair of shoes with minimal value."

One of the gedolim of today told this story at a family simchah, saying how he was that child in this story who didn't have that passion to learn. The Rav told him about the "Din Torah" to teach him that the crown of Torah is acquired with effort and toil. - After this discussion, he began putting his efforts into Torah study, and maximized his abilities'.

The perfection of character is revealed when kindness flows naturally, not as obligation alone but as an expression of love for the Creator manifest through love of His creations. ~ Chovos HaLevavos.

"When you let go and rely on Hashem, you open yourself up to His endless possibilities." – Rabbi Nachman of Breslov.



● Do Not Open Your Mouth to the Satan

We see from this Parshah how much one inappropriate word can harm a person from the pasuk that tells us that when Balak sent for Bilaam in order to ask him to curse Klal Yisroel, he told the messengers to tell him **וְעַתָּה֩ לְכָה־נָּ֨א אָרָה־לִּ֜י אֶת־הָעָ֣ם הַזֶּ֗ה** (22:6): "***And now, please come and curse the people for me***."

The words "**אָרָה־לִּ֜י**" can also mean "curse me", and, in fact, he ended up being cursed.

The Shlah Hakadosh says that we learn from this that one should never "open his mouth for the Satan", as even if one says something without intention, it could come to hurt him. This is seen from the fact that Balak did not mean for the curse to go on him, but he actually did bring the curse upon himself.

וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֱלֹקִים֙ אֶל־בִּלְעָ֔ם לֹ֥א תֵלֵ֖ךְ עִמָּהֶ֑ם לֹ֥א תָאֹ֛ר אֶת־הָעָ֖ם כִּ֥י בָר֥וּךְ הֽוּא – '***And Hashem said to Bilaam, "Do not go with them. Do not curse the nation***…' (22:12)

● The Benefit of Embarrassment

The Bas Ayin zy"a explains this pasuk to mean that Hashem first told Bilaam not to go with the messengers. Later, when Balak sent more distinguished men to get him, Hashem told Bilaam, "If men come to call you, get up and go with them."

Why did Hashem "change His mind"?

He answers by saying that Hashem wanted Bilaam to not only not curse the Jews, He also wanted him to bless them, as he ultimately did. However, it would have been impossible for the blessing of an impure man like Bilaam to be fulfilled. But after he experienced some embarrassment due to the incident with his donkey (as Rashi

explains 22:29), he became a somewhat better person and was able to bless Klal Yisroel.

Accordingly, he explains that when Balak first sent messengers who were not so distinguished to get Bilaam, Hashem understood that he would not be so embarrassed in front of them and, therefore, he would still not be able to give his blessing. For this reason, Hashem did not allow him to go with them. However, when he sent more important ministers to get him, Hashem knew that Bilaam would be very embarrassed when his donkey disobeyed him in their presence, and this shame would make him enough of a better person to be able to bless Klal Yisroel. - Therefore, He told him to go with them.



וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם אֶל־מַלְאַךְ ה׳ חָטָאתִי כִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה נִצָּב לִקְרָאתִי בַּדָּרֶךְ
"***Bilaam said to the angel of Hashem, "I have sinned because I didn't know.***" (22:34)

● **A Lack of Knowledge is no Excuse**

The Sanzer Rov zy"a once rebuked a certain Rov for not helping a very poor family in his city. The Rov tried to defend himself by saying, "It wasn't my fault. I didn't know how bad their situation is!"

The Sanzer Rov told him, "That is not an excuse. Bilaam tried to use this answer by telling the malach that he didn't know he was there. However, we see that a lack of knowledge is not an excuse. - This teaches us that every Rov and parnes must know who is in need in order to help them."



"When a Jew's heart is pure, even the curses of the nations turn into blessings. Balak sought destruction, but Hashem transforms hatred into merit when our inner thoughts remain faithful." ~ Rav Chaim of Volozhin.



וַיִּשָּׂא בִלְעָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֹׁכֵן לִשְׁבָטָיו וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹקִים – '***And Bilaam lifted his eyes and he saw Yisroel…and the spirit of Hashem was upon him.***' (24:2)

● **With a Sincere Heart**

Rashi says that he saw that the doors of their tents did not face each other.

The Kobriner Rebbe zy"a explains that Bilaam saw that each Yid had his personal derech of serving Hashem. Each one followed his heart to serve Hashem in his own way. Their tents did not face each other in the sense that no one copied anyone else; rather, each one found his own path to serve Hashem. - When Bilaam saw this, he knew that they were worthy of being blessed.



JEP 50 OVER 50 YEARS
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The Power of Truth - Hee Haw!

Bilaam, the prophet of the non-Jews was so excited. He hated the Jews. Even as an adviser to Pharaoh in Egypt, Bilaam was the one who had suggested that Pharaoh persecute the Jews. Now Bilaam was on the way to curse the Jews.



Balak, the king of Moav, had promised Bilaam much honor and much riches in exchange for doing so. Bilaam was so eager to receive all that honor and all those riches. He loved both very much. Bilaam saddled his faithful donkey to ride to Moav. On the way, Bilaam's donkey exhibited unusual behavior. First it left the road and walked on the field. Bilaam hit the donkey to guide it back on to the road. Sometime later it, approached a vineyard with a narrow space between two fences. It squeezed itself to one side, pushing Bilaam's foot against the wall and injuring it. Bilaam again hit the donkey. Later, they reached a narrow trail. Bilaam's donkey crouched down and refused to move. Bilaam got very angry at his donkey and hit it again.

Hashem performed a miracle and Bilaam's donkey started talking to him. "What have I done to you that you struck me these three times?"

Bilaam replied, "Because you mocked me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would have killed you now."

The donkey responded, "Am I not your she-donkey that you have ridden all your life until this day? Have I been accustomed to do such a thing to you?"

To that Bilaam had to respond, "No." - At that point, Hashem opened Bilaam's eyes to see why his donkey had stopped. An angel was standing there with a sword in his hand. It was an angel of mercy to try to save Bilaam from sinning in his attempt to curse the Jews.

The donkey had a good argument. Bilaam, the wise man and prophet, representing the other nations of the world, was silenced by his donkey. His donkey was correct, and he was wrong to have hit it.

The Sforno elaborates on this. The donkey told Bilaam that if it kept stopping, it must have been for a good reason. The donkey had served Bilaam faithfully for many years without disobeying. Suddenly, now it disobeyed. That fact should have been obvious to such a wise person as Bilaam. Bilaam should have realized logically that the problem was not his donkey. Rather, the problem was that Hashem was unhappy about the mission that Bilaam was on.

Why didn't Bilaam realize the obvious?

The Sforno explains that Bilaam was blinded by his strong desire for money and honor (22:32). That desire blinded him from seeing what was obvious. The result was that Bilaam was totally embarrassed in front of Balak's messengers who saw his ineptitude. They thought it was humorous that a man who was going to curse an entire nation couldn't control his donkey without hitting it. Furthermore, the donkey debated Bilaam and won!

What made Bilaam realize his error? - When his donkey stated the obvious truth, it jolted Bilaam and caused him to admit that he was wrong.

The Midrash Rabbah (Braishis 93:10) quotes the sage Abba Kohen Bardela's reaction to Bilaam's inability to answer his donkey's criticism. "Woe unto us on the day of [final] judgement. Woe unto us

on the day of rebuke!" - The shame that Bilaam felt upon hearing the truth is the same shame all of us will feel on the day that Hashem judges us. When Hashem shows us the truth we will be overwhelmed with embarrassment. When Hashem shows us that we actually had the ability to do something good or that we truly had the strength to overcome our desires, we will be stunned into silence. We see that the desire for wealth and riches can blind a person from seeing what is obvious. We also see the power of truth to wake up a person to his mistakes. It can also help redirect his course in life!

[Based on a dvar Torah by Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l, Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim.]

The Value of a Smile – Rabbi Shlomo Landau



One erev Shabbos **Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon zt'l** calls his dentist, and he says to him, "I have some toothache, do you think that you could take care of it before Shabbos?"

The dentist has the mashgiach describe exactly what the problem is, and he said, "It doesn't sound like an emergency, can I take care of it after Shabbos?"

Reb Mattisyahu persisted and said, "No, no, it is an emergency, please could you take care of it before Shabbos."

The dentist said, "Why is it an emergency?"

This is what Reb Mattisyahu said…. "You know, Friday night after davening everybody comes over to the front of the shul to say 'good Shabbos to the rabbonim, and I try so hard to give each and every person a warm and validating smile, but because of the tooth pain,

I'm having a hard time smiling – I would therefore really appreciate if you could sort it out before Shabbos."

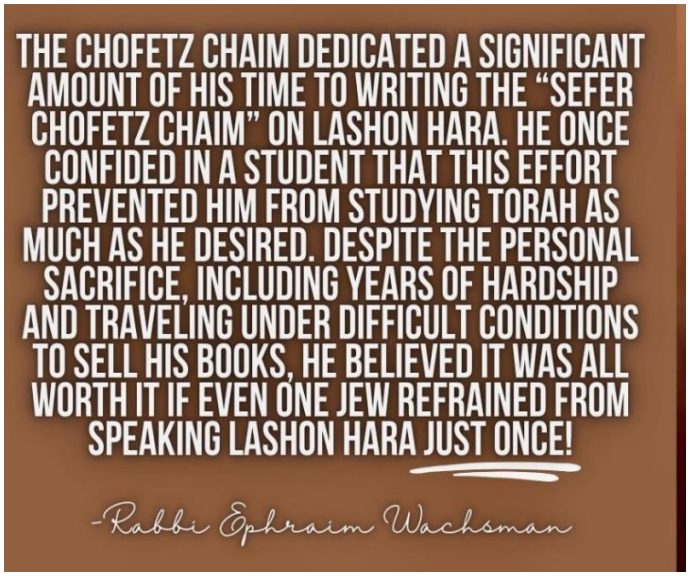


Reb Mattisyahu's problem was that he couldn't give somebody else a smile!

Chazal teach us (Kesubos 111b) - **וּלְבֶן שְׁנַיִם מֵחָלָב** – 'Giving a person a smile (showing your teeth) is sweeter than giving them a glass of milk.'

Let me ask you a question – Who are you going to give a smile to today? Is it the cashier in the grocery store? Or the gas attendant filling up your car? (remember those days?) Hey, maybe even your spouse? Or your child? – Because a smile is worth so much.

The root of the mitzvah of charity is to train the soul toward compassion and goodness. By giving, a person reshapes his nature until mercy becomes second nature and selfishness fades. ~ Sefer HaChinuch.





בס"ד

למודי משה

The Danger of Cozy and Private Homes

The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (105b) says that Bilaam sought to curse the Jewish people, but Hashem reversed each curse into a *berachah*. The Gemara illustrates this by listing the blessings that Bilaam gave and their opposite, which reveals what curses he wanted to give.

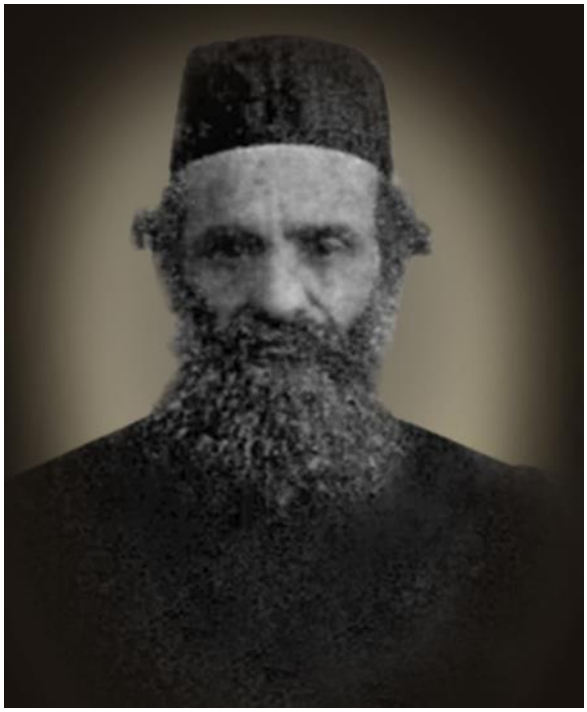
For example, he wanted to curse us with a lack of *botei midroshos* and *botei kenasiyos*, but Hashem reversed it to the blessing of (*Bamidbar* 24:5): **מה טבו אהליך יעקב משכנתיך ישראל** – "How goodly are your tents, Yaakov, your dwellings, Yisroel". In what way is this *berachah* praising our modest homes considered the opposite of Bilaam's desire to eliminate our *botei midroshos* and *botei kenasiyos*?

Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Darash Moshe*) explains that Bilaam blessed the Jewish people with cozy, private homes in the hopes that they would choose to spend their free time in the comfort of their houses instead of going to the *beis medrash* and *shul* to learn Torah and daven. - To thwart his intentions, Hashem gave us an abundance of *shuls* and *yeshivos* from which to choose.

Although it is tempting to remain in our warm, familiar environment, especially at night and on weekends, we should recognize that this allure comes from Bilaam's curse.

While it is certainly a good thing to have a nice Jewish home, it becomes a true *berachah* when we are able to leave it for the more conducive atmosphere of the *beis medrash* and *shul*, where we benefit from being around learned Rabbis and encouraging peers, particularly in the summer months when our domestic responsibilities are often reduced. (**R' Ozer Alport**)

AT THE ARTSCROLL SHABBOS TABLE
A PROJECT OF THE Mesorah Heritage Foundation
WEEKLY INSPIRATION AND INSIGHT ADAPTED FROM CLASSIC ARTSCROLL TITLES



Not Abusing the Gift of Speech - Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski

וַתֹּאמֶר הָאָתוֹן אֶל־בִּלְעָם הֲלוֹא אָנֹכִי אֲתֹנְךָ אֲשֶׁר־רָכַבְתָּ עָלַי מֵעוֹדְךָ עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה -The she-donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your she-donkey, that you have ridden upon me all your life until this day?" (22:30)

Rav Itzele of Ponevezh once attended a community meeting where several important community issues were to be resolved. However, instead of discussing the pros and cons of the issues, a heated verbal battle erupted among the attendees. Some claimed that they were greater contributors to the community coffers and had the right to be heard first. Others claimed seniority, while yet others said that as officials of the community, they should speak first. - Soon there was a clamor, with each one asserting his rights, and no one addressing the issues for which the meeting had been called.

R' Itzele pounded on the lectern and demanded silence. Out of respect for him, everyone was quiet.

R' Itzele said, "I must tell you a story which explains a portion of the Torah. "The donkeys came before Hashem with a bitter complaint. 'Why have we been singled out from all animals to suffer? Wild animals roam the jungles freely and have no master over them. Cows and sheep give their milk and wool but are left at leisure all

day to graze in the pasture. We alone are beasts of burden. We know no peace. Our masters place heavy loads on our backs and whip us if we don't move fast enough for them. It would only be fair for us to be able to speak to our master's and tell them when we are tired and not to overburden us.' - 'Hashem said, 'You have a just complaint. I will give you the ability to speak.'

"So Hashem gave Balaam's donkey the ability to speak. But instead of explaining to Balaam that there was an angel standing in her way, what did the donkey say? 'Am I not your she-donkey that you have ridden all your life until this day?' - It started telling how important it was.

Hashem then took the power of speech away. 'Donkeys who know nothing other than to assert their importance do not deserve to speak.'

We would do well to remember R' Itzele's parable.

Bumper To Bumper - Flashes of Greatness by Rabbi Shlomo Landau

Machsom Erez is the busy border crossing for those entering and leaving Gaza. The soldiers stationed at the crossing are constantly vigilant not just for possible terrorists entering Israel, but also for stolen cars leaving Israel and entering into the Gaza Strip. Once a stolen car passes into Gaza it is all but gone forever. Toward this end, the Israeli soldiers are trained to carefully inspect each and every car to ensure that it is not stolen.

One day, a brand-new car pulled up to Machsom Erez driven by a beady Arab fellow. The soldiers immediately became suspicious and subjected the car to a full search, thoroughly inspecting all the documents. But try as they might, they could find nothing wrong and decided to let the car pass.

A second before they waved the car onward, their supervisor emerged from inside the guard house and upon seeing the brand-new car decided to investigate. He walked around to the back of the car and immediately ordered the driver out.

"Thief!" he began to shout. "Miserable thief, I know that this is a stolen car. Admit to your crime or it will be ten times worse for you!" After a minute or two, the Arab broke down and admitted that it was a stolen car.

The perplexed soldiers looked at their supervisor in bewilderment. They had just searched the car and interrogated the driver, and all had seemed in order; how did their superior ascertain so quickly that the Arab was a thief?

The supervisor smiled and motioned that they come around to the back of the car and take a careful look at the bumper. Proudly displayed on the bumper was a sticker with the words "Ein Od Milvado"! Clearly, this was a Jewish car that the Arab had stolen!

But this is really just the beginning of the story, for when the supervisor traced down the Jewish owner he was treated to another remarkable chapter in this story.

The owner was a secular Jew living in Maaleh Adumim and he had just recently purchased a brand-new car. When the supervisor called him, he burst into tears. All he could muster was a single sentence, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu is great!" After he calmed down, he shared that the fact that his car was found was solely the credit of Yeshivas Kaf HaChaim and their kiruv efforts.

He continued to explain that just one day earlier, a group of avreichim had knocked on his door. He had just received his brand-new car and all that he was interested in was the supple leather seats and the many luxuries of his new ride. The last thing that he was interested in doing was engaging in conversation with a bunch of religious fellows. He communicated his disinterest, but before the

avreichim took leave of him one of them said, "Even if you are not interested in doing anything for your Yiddishkeit, would you at least consider putting an 'Ein Od Milvado' bumper sticker on your car?"



He thought for a minute and said, "You know what, I am ready to do that for Hakadosh Baruch Hu." He took the sticker and affixed it to the rear bumper of his new car.

Not half an hour later, he exited his home to discover that his car was gone! He was furious! Here he had just showed recognition for Hakadosh Baruch Hu and this was the payback? A stolen car?!

He quickly hurried to Yeshivas Kaf HaChaim and asked to speak with the rosh yeshivah. When he met the rosh yeshivah, he unloaded and bitterly lamented the fact that less than half an hour after he had publicly acknowledged Hashem, his brand new car had been stolen.

The rosh yeshivah empathized and immediately gathered a group of bachurim to recite Tehillim. Within hours he received a call from the supervisor at Machsom Erez that his car had been recovered only moments before it was too late! And all because of his "Ein Od Milvado" bumper sticker!

Truly, the "Ein Od Milvado" had been there for him just in the nick of time.

"Growth is not achieved instantly, rather takes time and steady effort." - R Mordechai Gifter



Imagine a box full of gold and diamonds. Inside this box there is also some straw and scraps of paper. If you were to ask someone what's in the box and he said "straw and scraps of paper" and you opened it to see for yourself, what would you say about this person? Probably that he is off the wall! How can he say that the box has junk in it when it is full of priceless items? - A normal person would not even relate to the junk but rather say it is a precious box of valuables, even if the junk is the overwhelming majority and only a few valuables are buried inside.

Similarly says **R' Yeruchom Levovitz zt'l**, the gemara says (Eiruvin 19a) that every Jew, even the worst sinners, are full of Mitzvos like a pomegranate is full of seeds. If so when talking or even thinking about another Jew, what fool can think of the bad in him?

Are we completely blind to the priceless good deeds that he has done. In the face of those mitzvos, how ridiculous is it to even pay any attention the so-called atrocities that he has committed? No matter what, he is still precious, and we should look at him in wise manner and stop being fools!

"Balak's fear was not of swords but of prayer. He sensed that the tefillah of one Jew can overturn armies. The power of kedushah lies in the quiet word uttered with emunah." ~ Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin.

FACEBUKER SHABBOS TABLE TALK

Continuing the Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Winiarz of blessed memory

Living on the Edge

When Bilaam failed to curse the Jews, Balak suggested that they go to a different location from where he would only see a portion of the nation.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk asks: If his intent was to curse the entire nation, why would Balak suggest going to someplace where he would not have a vantage point of all of them?

The answer is that Balak realized that as a unit, Klal Yisrael has tremendous glory and majesty. He thought that by looking at individual Jews, however, Bilaam would find flaws and be able to curse the whole. However, as Bilaam said, "[Hashem] did not gaze upon iniquity in Israel," so even looking at the individuals, he found only goodness and holiness.

Based on this, we would all do well to realize that when we look at other Jews it should not be with a jaundiced eye, but rather one that refuses to find fault with a person. That is not to say we should condone things that are against the Torah, but rather that we should condemn the sin not the sinner (unless the person falls into the category of those of whom King David said, "Those who hate you Hashem, do I hate.") If Hashem, Who is responsible for reward and punishment, does this, shouldn't we, who are not supposed to judge our fellow man, be looking away more frequently?

If someone isn't the same "type" as we, does that make them less of a child of Hashem? Absolutely not! There are twelve tribes, and each has its own way of serving Hashem. Who's to say that any one way is "the right way" or that another way is wrong?

We are now entering the Three Weeks, the time when we mourn the losses of holiness in Klal Yisrael. The Luchos, the korbanos offers,

the Batei Mikdash. Nearly all the tragedies that befall us could be prevented by unity. So what keeps us from that?

The fact that we're constantly focused on our differences, instead of our similarities. If we were to avert our gaze and try to see the good in others instead of being judgmental, we could be blessed by Hashem in kind and He would look away from our sins.

If we recognize that each person is a part of the glorious whole of the Jewish People, we will find the greatness that even a malicious half-blind gentile wizard could not fail to see and bring G-d's blessing to our entire nation.

TORAHANYTIMES NEWSLETTER

Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser - Very Dear

In one of the **Chazon Ish's** travels, he stopped off in Vilna and decided to head into one of the shuls. Since no one around knew who he was, he quietly went to the shelf, took a Chumash, and sat down to learn. But there was someone who'd been watching him all along. The gabbai.

The gabbai, not a great scholar and not recognizing the Chazon Ish, approached him and asked if he was a member of the shul. "I'm not," replied the Chazon Ish. At the sound of this, the gabbai did not hesitate to take the Chumash from the Chazon Ish's hands and return it to the shelf. But that wasn't all. The gabbai went on to berate the Chazon Ish, lecturing about what he had done. All the Chazon Ish could think was, "I'll take revenge."

The next day, the Chazon Ish returned to the shul during davening. At that time, the gabbai would walk around with the pushka, collecting tzedaka. The Jews of Vilna were very poor, however, and could only afford to give a penny at most. But when the gabbai came to the Chazon Ish, he placed fifteen coins into the pushka. The

gabbai, surprised, looked at him and realized it was the same person he had scolded the day before.

The following day, when the Chazon Ish came to the shul, the gabbai ran over with the nicest, newest Chumash and handed it to him.

That was the Chazon Ish's revenge—a demonstration of generosity and humility. And only the Chazon Ish could teach such a lesson.

Now, let me share with you an even more recent story which epitomizes such sterling qualities of great character.

Rav Tzvi Kushelevsky *shlita* infused the Jewish world with great emunah and bitachon when he had a baby boy at the advanced age of eighty-eight. It certainly was a cause for celebration not only for him and his family, but for the entire world Jewish world.

But what people don't know is that many years earlier, he went to the great tzaddik, the **Baba Sali**, and asked for a beracha to have a child. The Baba Sali handed him a bottle of his famous holy waters and instructed him to take it home and have his wife drink it, assuring him that everything would be good.

When Rav Kushelevsky returned home, it was late at night, so instead of waking his wife, he decided to store the bottle in the refrigerator until morning. Except morning never arrived in the way Rav Kushelevsky anticipated. That night, a boy who routinely stayed in Rav Kushelevsky house was thirsty, and he opened the refrigerator, saw the bottle, and drank every last drop.

In the morning, Rav Kushelevsky realized what had happened. But despite this, he never said a word to the boy, never mouthed a complaint, and never let anyone know. Never. He showed remarkable restraint and strength, not letting a soul know about the happenings of that night.

Interestingly, a few days later, the boy approached Rav Kushelevsky and asked if they could learn Zohar together. But more importantly, and as we know today, what happened was nothing short of miraculous, the Divine hand of Hashem.

At the age of eighty-eight, Rav Kushelevsky, alongside his wife, brought his son into the Covenant of Avraham Avinu. His wife may never have drunk the water set aside for her, but who knows, perhaps the exemplary display of sensitivity and restraint shown by Rav Kushelevsky accomplished no less.

Good middos are dear in the eyes of Hashem. Very dear.

Dr. Dovid Lieberman - More than Monkeys



There are some people who believe that we came from monkeys. My question is, if we came from monkeys, why are there still monkeys? But be that as it may, I want to share with you a fascinating research study in social psychology.

I watched a video of an experiment involving two monkeys, each in their respective cages. The researcher gave the first monkey a simple task: push a lever and receive a cucumber as a reward. The second monkey had the same task and received the same reward. This pattern continued for a few rounds, with each monkey happily accepting their cucumber.

Then, the researcher gave one monkey a grape instead of a cucumber for completing the task. The monkey enjoyed the grape very much. When it was the other monkey's turn, he pushed the lever and received a cucumber, as usual. However, having seen his neighbor get a grape, the monkey looked at his cucumber, then at the other

monkey, and finally at the researcher. Then, he did something unexpected: he threw the cucumber back at the researcher.

Previously, the monkey was perfectly happy with the cucumber, but upon seeing his neighbor get something better, he became dissatisfied.

The experiment illustrated a profound truth about envy. **וְרִקָּב עֲצָמוֹת קִנְאָה** – '*Envy rots the bones*', (*Mishlei* 14:30). - When we focus on what others have, what they want, and what they desire, we lose sight of our own needs, our own desires, our own life.

A person who maximizes their own potential and recognizes their own value focuses on who they are and what they have. Everything we have is tailor-made for our growth. Our hair color, intelligence, family, background, and environment are all designed to help us thrive. When we concentrate on optimizing ourselves, something magical happens: everyone around us seems to do better as well.

By focusing on our own growth, we can reach our full potential. But if we constantly compare ourselves to others, we risk reducing ourselves to nothing more than envious monkeys.

So let's focus on our own paths and maximize the unique gifts we have been given. Let's be more than just monkeys.

Parsha Points to Ponder by Rav Ozer Alport

Q. The Gemora in Berachos (7a) explains that Bilaam's skill was an unparalleled ability to determine the precise moment when Hashem was angry and utter curses at that time, which would then take effect. Did Moshe also possess this ability, and if so, why didn't he ever use it, and if not, how could Bilaam know more about Hashem's conduct of the world than Moshe?

A. Rav Meir Chodosh explains that Moshe focused on developing a positive desire to bless and build up the Jews rather than a negative

need to curse and harm others. As a result, Moshe had no interest in knowing the information that Bilaam possessed regarding the time of Hashem's anger, and therefore he did not know it.

Q. Which object was buried in Parshas Balak and remained hidden for centuries until it was eventually discovered by King David?

A. The **Zohar HaKadosh**, teaches that Balak initially assumed that Bilaam's powers came from sorcery, so he asked Bilaam to gather certain grasses and the heads of snakes and combine them in a sorcerer's cauldron to produce a potent concoction that could be used against the Jewish people.

Balak recognized that Bilaam's strength came from his mouth, so he asked him to curse the Jews. Nevertheless, in his tremendous hatred for the Jewish people, Balak did not abandon his magical pursuits. As he had requested Bilaam to do, he proceeded to gather the different species of vegetation and snakeheads and mixed them in a special pot. Balak then dug a hole approximately half a mile deep (1500 cubits) in the future location of the Beis HaMikdash and buried his mystical brew there in an attempt to neutralize Dovid's future endeavors at the site. When Dovid was preparing the foundations of the Temple, he excavated the ground to this depth, and when he discovered the cauldron, he brought it up and defused its powers.

Q. Why is no mention made of the reaction of Balak's officers who were accompanying Bilaam to the talking donkey or the revelation of the angel?

A. The **Daas Z'keinim** and **Paneiach Raza** write that the angel killed the officers traveling with Bilaam, which explains why no further mention is made of them.

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that they were traveling in front of Bilaam and therefore did not observe or hear the commotion and exchange between Bilaam, his donkey, and the angel. Alternatively,

even if they were present, they were not on the same spiritual level as Bilaam, so they did not see or hear anything out of the ordinary.

Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman suggests that even though they witnessed the exchange, the officers did not reflect on the miraculous scene and it made no impression on them to reconsider the propriety of their plans, so no reaction was mentioned.



Harav Yosef Meir Hakohen Kantor זצוק"ל used to daven in the Agudah Shul in Monsey where he was the Rov for many years. One Friday night on his way home from shul, it was very icy outside and he slipped on the steep path that was across the street from his house on Emes Lane and broke his foot.

He wasn't able to move, and it took time until someone heard his call and came and called Hatzalah. It was so slippery that one of the Hatzalah members slipped and fell on Rav Yosef Meir 's foot, yet he did not show any pain.

They wanted to take him to the hospital, yet Rav Yosef Meir only agreed to go after making Kiddush. They brought him two cups of grape juice/wine and he made Kiddush, and then they went to the hospital.

As part of the hospital protocol, they took blood tests, and they discovered then that he was a diabetic.

On Motzei Shabbos, one of his sons called and Rav Yosef Meir told him that he had a moradikah thought on Shabbos morning. He said "When I made the **ברכה** of **המכין מצעדי גבר**, I had in mind the fact

that were I fell was prepared for me, and by the next **ברכה** of **שעשה לי כל צרכי (נוסח ספרד)**), that Hashem did everything I needed that through the fall I found out that I am a diabetic and now that I know so that I can take care of it".

I remember when I once went to Monsey for Shabbos and he stressed to me the moiridika hashgacha pratis in the story. All that he saw was the light in the darkness.

HaRav Yosef Kantor **זכר צדיק וקדוש לברכה** did not see anything in life as "Nega" but rather saw only " **ענג** " meaning: he did not see anything as "bad" but rather as good from Hashem.

The Ibin Ezra once went to the home of the heiligeh **Rambam** to learn from the Rambam. When the Ibin Ezra arrived the Rambam told his servants to have the Eben Ezra go into a room and peel onions for 3 days. The Ibin Ezra could not figure out why but he did as he was told.

The Rambam had servants put a bucket to catch his tears. After the three days were over the Rambam greeted his guest warmly and explained that he saw a terrible sickness in the Ibin Ezra's eyes and the only way to get out the bugs were with tears. The Rambam then showed the bucket and the bugs in the tears.

It states in the Zohar, "The Holy One, blessed be He, the Torah and Yisrael are one." - The same way one cannot pick Hashem or His Torah apart by saying, "This particular verse doesn't appeal to me," so too, should we approach our fellow Jew, treating him with respect and acknowledging his importance to the Jewish People as a whole. ~ Reb Yitzchak of Vorka (1779-1848).



NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"L

This week's parsha has a very powerful message that I am excited about and I want to share with you:

It says in Bava Basra that Moshe Rabbeinu wrote Parshas Bilaam. But what is the Gemara telling us? Moshe wrote the whole Torah, as we know. What's the chiddush that he wrote Parshas Bilaam as well?

The Chasam Sofer explains that all the miracles written in the Torah were things we saw with our own eyes -- our forefathers saw the Eser Makos with their own eyes, they saw the Sea split, they saw everything, and they passed down that firsthand knowledge to us.

But not the story with Bilaam. No one even knew what was happening. Balak quietly sent for Bilaam, took him up on a hilltop, and told him to curse the Jews. No one saw and no one knew.

And don't think it was some kind of a joke. Bilaam was capable of wreaking immense damage. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu watched over the Jewish people and protected them. - Even Moshe Rabbeinu didn't know at the time that Bilaam was looking down on them from the hilltop and trying to curse them, until Hashem told him about it.

This is why the Gemara states specifically that Moshe wrote Parshas Bilaam, because this is a story that the Jewish people knew nothing

about on their own; they knew only from Moshe Rabbeinu, who heard it from Hashem.

This really shows Hashem's love for His people. He protects us and guards us all the time. Even when we don't know what is threatening us and what is about to happen, in His great love for us He protects us from it all.

And what was the greatest miracle of all?

It says in the Midrash that it was Yehoshua stopping the sun in its course, as it says in Tanach. It was a greater miracle than Yetzias Mitzrayim and Krias Yam Suf and everything else that ever happened.

Why was stopping the sun greater?

My father zt"l explains that all other miracles entailed a changing of nature here on earth. So it was with leaving Egypt, splitting the Sea, etc. But stopping the sun in its course entailed a change in a higher world, in the world of the planets and stars and celestial bodies. This was the greatest miracle.

My father added that the miracle with Bilaam was actually even greater than this, because Bilaam's power was his knowledge of the exact moment when Hashem is angry, and Hashem refrained from anger during that whole period of time. This was a change in the highest world of all. It was a change relating, so to speak, to Hashem Himself. This is the greatest miracle that could be.

And Hashem worked this astoundingly great miracle without the Jewish people even knowing about it!!!

What we can learn from this is the awesome love and protection that Hashem bestows on us. He protects us, me, you, your family. He personally protects every individual, because His love and care for us is infinite.

We do live in a world that has worries and nisyonos and pain. But we should not forget that there is Someone who loves us and takes care of us and protects us even when we don't know about it!

Wishing you all the best, with all my heart

Harav Yosef Dov Pincus



The Retina Specialist Who Couldn't Believe What He Was Seeing By Shlomo Horwitz

Dr. Sidney Schechet, a retina specialist from Baltimore's Elman Retina Group, felt a deep sense of duty and compassion tugging at his heart since October 7th. Soroka Hospital in Beersheba is one of the main trauma centers for the soldiers injured from the war in Gaza, and their eye doctors were overwhelmed by so many soldiers coming in with severe eye trauma from the war. Furthermore, some of the eye and retina surgeons were called up to serve as well leaving the department short-handed.

Dr. Schechet decided to answer the call for help and offer his ocular trauma and retinal expertise. He and other American retina surgeons left their practices to volunteer for two weeks at Soroka hospital.

The morning, he arrived, Dr. Schechet jumped in and got to work in the operating room. He worked day and night treating soldiers with severe eye injuries and also helping anxious civilians. He tried to use his surgical skills and confident medical knowledge to bring relief to

both patients and staff alike. It didn't hurt that his mother was Israeli, so he knew enough Hebrew to put people at ease.

In the midst of the chaos, Dr. Schechet found many moments of profound connection. He listened to the stories of the soldiers, shared in the relief of families whose loved ones were finally getting the care they needed, and felt the gratitude and immense bravery of a community under intense strain.

During his time at Soroka, Dr. Schechet encountered a condition he had treated many times before: Central Serous Retinopathy (CSR). This retinal disease causes vision to blur and become severely distorted. CSR is still quite mysterious but is believed to have a correlation with serious stress. Dr. Schechet typically initially treats CSR patients by encouraging them to manage stress via yoga, deep breathing, exercise, meditation, etc.

Since October 7th, there were many cases of CSR, which came as no surprise to Dr. Schechet and the rest of the doctors. One day, Dr. Schechet saw an elderly patient come in with a forlorn look. He reported having impaired vision for the past several months. He had severe CSR and fluid in his eye which was distorting his vision. He was a Holocaust survivor who had family members murdered and taken hostage by Hamas on October 7th.

With these unimaginable tragedies, Dr. Schechet found himself at a loss for words. He thought, *How on earth can I tell these people to reduce the stress in their lives?*

So, Dr. Schechet decided to skip his usual stress reduction lecture, but he owed it to him to explain the cause of his vision issue and the long road ahead to find a resolution. - After explaining that the condition in this case was triggered by the immense stress he had undergone, the patient teared up and quietly stared into space deep in thought before responding to Dr. Schechet. "You mean I am going blind as a *direct* result of the loss of my loved ones?"

Dr. Schechet nodded while placing a hand on the patient's shoulder. Suddenly the patient looked up at him with a bright smile. Startled, Dr. Schechet asked why he was smiling, considering his vision was severely and possibly permanently affected, and that it could take months or even years to heal.

The patient responded, "I actually feel a sense of relief now knowing that I am physically sharing in the pain and suffering of my loved ones. I've felt profound guilt at being spared, but this eye problem shows me that I'm still connected with the ones who are in heaven and the ones in Gaza who will return. And I'm smiling because I have that opportunity to share in their pain."

Dr. Schechet was profoundly moved by this unexpected reaction and sentiment. It demonstrated the Jewish trait of "*nosei ol im chavero*" – sharing someone's burden and loss. He bade the patient farewell and scheduled a follow-up ten days later. When the man came back, Dr. Schechet was stunned to find out that the problematic fluid had nearly gone away completely, something unheard of in the treatment of CSR. They knew that this was a true testament of the strength and constant source of light found within a Jew's soul.

The time Dr. Schechet spent at Soroka Hospital was intense but deeply fulfilling. Back in the US, he shared this medical miracle with distinguished ophthalmologists. He was routinely met with skepticism. But he had seen it, with his own eyes.

Every mitzvah has a specific spiritual light, but Shabbos contains the root of all mitzvos. Therefore, one who truly experiences Shabbos can repair deficiencies accumulated throughout the week — not through effort but through attachment. ~ Pri Tzadik.

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From our Sages

אָרָה־לִּי אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי־עָצוּם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי – *'Curse me this people, for he is mightier than me.' (22:6)*

The Hebrew phrase **עָצוּם הוּא מִמֶּנִּי** ("he is mightier than me") also translates as "he is mightier from me." For in truth, the might of the people of Israel is Moshiach, who (via Ruth the Moabite, ancestress of King David) is a descendant of Balak! (**Shaloh**)

וַיִּקֶר אֱלֹקִים אֶל־בִּלְעָם – *'G-d happened upon Balaam.' (23:4)*

The hallmark of evil and unholiness is an attitude of "It just happened." Nothing is coincidental to the Jew; every event is purposeful and significant. (**Chassidic saying**)

עֲפַר יַעֲקֹב – *'The dust of Jacob.' (23:10)*

Everyone treads upon the dust, but in the end, the dust triumphs over them all. . . . So it is with the Jewish people. (**Midrash Rabbah**)

דָּרַךְ כּוֹכָב מִיַּעֲקֹב – *'There shall shoot forth a star out of Jacob.' (24:17)*

This means that every Jew has a spark of the soul of Moshiach in his soul. (**Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov**)

'Respect is what we owe; love, what we give.'

Parsha Knowledge

STORIES & INSPIRATION ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA

A Story of Hope



Every morning, we recite the prayer of *Ma Tovu*. It's the first prayer that we recite upon entering the synagogue. It's a beautiful prayer… However, the fact that we say this is very strange. This prayer emanates from a very contaminated and wicked source. This prayer comes from Bilam, an evil man, who wasn't even Jewish. He was a Rasha. However, this prayer is almost universally accepted, and we say it in the prayer service. Why? Why not say a prayer from someone holier? What's going on here?

I heard from my father, Rav Yitzchok Fingerer, shlita something incredible: **The Lev Simcha, the Rebbe of Ger** says that when Bilam said *Ma Tovu* even though he was wicked, depraved, and evil, at that moment – the moment when he said *Ma Tovu*, he was sincere. With genuine feeling and conviction, Bilam turned to Hashem and uttered these words.

This teaches us a fundamental and pivotal lesson in Yiddishkeit and growth. When you are sincere and turn to Hashem out of love, conviction, and sincerity, Hashem loves it. We have this as a daily reminder when we say *Ma Tovu*. Hashem is saying that it doesn't matter who you are or what your past is. If you pray to Hashem – He loves it! Hashem wants to hear from each and every one of us! It doesn't matter on what we did previously. That is why we begin the

Shacharis prayer service with a lesson of how effective our *teffilos*, our prayers can be.

I would like to share with you an incredible and powerful story: **Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein shlita** was once giving a class to physicians. After the class, a doctor came over to Rav Zilberstein holding a child's siddur, a little prayer book. The doctor was clutching and holding onto the siddur for dear life. It appeared to be very precious and dear to him, but it was a strange sight for a grown man, a doctor, to be seen holding a little child's siddur with such emotion.

Rabbi Zilberstein asked the doctor the reason for this, and the doctor shared the following beautiful story: He and his wife were married for over 15 years, but they suffered from infertility – they were told that it was biologically impossible for them to have a baby. They were despondent. As the years went on, they gave up on having a child and decided to adopt a sweet little baby.

This boy grew up and when he was five years old, he had a siddur party where he and his class received their very first siddur. When he received his siddur, the young boy turned to his father and said, "Daddy, I'm so excited to have a siddur." In response, the father said to him, "Why? Why are you so excited to have a siddur?" What the boy said made his father burst into tears. The boy said, "I am so excited because now I can daven and pray for a brother. I always wanted a little brother."

What the boy said broke his father's heart because the boy had no idea that he was adopted. The boy didn't know that they couldn't have children. The man didn't have the heart to tell his son that he couldn't have a brother and that they couldn't biologically have a baby. The boy however said, I'm going to pray and beg Hashem for a baby brother.

Now, the doctor with his face full of tears, turned to Rav Zilberstein and said, "Rabbi, the reason why I'm holding this siddur with such emotion is because it's the holiest prayer book in the world.

Yesterday I made a *bris milah* for my newborn baby son! Defying against all odds, my wife and I had a baby boy!" Do you know when this all happened? You won't believe this: The baby was born nine months after he received his siddur – right after the boy started davening! Because of his heartfelt prayers, the boy now had a little brother!



◣ United Blessings - Reb Menachem Mendel of Rimanov

כִּי־מֵרֹאשׁ צֻרִים אֶרְאֶנּוּ וּמִגְבָעוֹת אֲשׁוּרֶנּוּ הֶן־עָם לְבָדָד יִשְׁכֹּן וּבַגּוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשָּׁב
"***For from their beginning, I see them as mountain peaks, and I behold them as hills. Behold a people that will dwell alone, not reckoned among the nations.***" (23:9)

Bilam's curse was that each Jew should be isolated and that there would be no connection, one with the other. - It is our task to turn that curse into a blessing and become a thoroughly united people to the extent that there will be no division whatsoever.

"If a Jew wishes to see a miracle today, he need only look at himself. The greatest of all miracles is that even one Jew exists in our day and age." ~ Rabbeinu Bachya Ibn Pekuda (1050-1120)

Story of the Week Compiled by Aaron Leitner

A veteran *Avreich* told me, recently, that he has never experienced the *nisyonos* or the *misiras nefesh* of a working man. Those that do go to work, can all tell their own stories. Here, Reb Moshe Landau* tells one of his own.

"Thirty years ago, newly married and fresh out of *Kollel,* I opened a wholesale jewellery business. Taking the plunge and starting my own business was exiting, but was also, mildly terrifying. I had recently become a father, and being an entrepreneur meant that I had no pay cheque to rely on. If I wanted to support my family, I had to 'roll up my sleeves'.

"Shortly after I opened my company, a friend told me about a trade show that was taking place in Las Vegas. 'If you're in the wholesale line, you have to be there,' he said.

"When I looked into it, I saw that it was an excellent opportunity for me to expand. The trade show attracted just the kind of custom I wanted, and I knew that the show had the potential to boost my business tremendously.

"I took the plunge and invested several thousand dollars in preparation for the show. I hired a top-of-the-line company to design and build my booth, making sure that every detail reflected my brand. I reserved a place, and then I booked a flight to Las Vegas and a room in a nearby hotel.

"The night before the show, I arrived at the hotel with suitcases filled with my most impressive jewellery. Early the next morning, I took a taxi to the convention centre. I was met by members of the team that had created my booth. Together, we wheeled my suitcases through the magnificent lobby and into the massive ballroom, which was already buzzing with activity.

"As soon as I entered, I was grateful to be there. The atmosphere was purposeful, professional and upbeat. All around me other booths

were being set up, and I knew that I was in the place I was supposed to be.

"When I reached my booth, I was very impressed. Soft accent lighting illuminated the perfectly designed spaces to showcase the glittering diamonds and other gems. I carefully unwrapped each watch, necklace, bracelet and set of earrings, laying each one in its most advantagous spot. With each piece of jewellery, I put on display, I could feel my excitement build. The booth was stunning, definitely worth all the time and effort I'd put into it, and I was confident that with *siyata dishmaya*, my investment would pay off.

"A short while after I arrived and had laid the last piece of jewellery in its place, I was ready to stand back and admire my work. "This is it," I told myself. "This is my chance, B'ezras Hashem Yisborach!"

"I looked around the huge room, dreaming of how many potential clients I would meet and how many relationships I'd cultivate before the day was over. A wave of anticipation surged through me. Then I went to stand behind my display.

"When I looked up, I got my first glimpse of the booth that was directly opposite mine. I shuddered and immediately turned away. Of all the hundreds of vendors in that room, the booth right across from mine was a newsstand – filled with the most immoral pictures.

"I was horrified. How could I stand across from those awful pictures for hours? I just couldn't do it.

"But the show was only just starting, and I had invested thousands of dollars in this endeavour, not to mention the amount of business it could potentially bring in.

"I picked up the phone and called the person I always turned to for advice – my father, a Holocaust survivor and a very wise man. I was hoping that he would give me the advice I needed. But my father didn't answer his phone.

'What should I do?' I wondered.

"But then I realised that the answer was clear. I knew that no matter how much money I stood to lose, I couldn't stay in that hall. I was a *Yid* first and a businessman second. Without thinking further, I began pulling my jewellery off the stands and stuffing them back into the suitcases.

"Working quickly, I cleared display after display, leaving my beautifully designed booth empty of the merchandise it had been created to show. Within a short time, my booth was empty and my suitcases packed.

"Then came the hard part – grabbing the handles of the suitcases and walking away. Aside from losing the money I'd paid to be a vendor, I was also walking away from the opportunity to participate in this trade show again. This particular show had an ironclad rule that the owners had made – any presenter who left before the show was over forfeited his chance to ever display at this show again.

"But there I was, walking away before the show had even started. I walked through the massive room, passing booth after booth, schlepping my suitcases behind me.

"Suddenly, I heard a woman cry out, "Ouch!"

"I turned around immediately, realising that one of my suitcases must have bumped into her. "I'm so sorry!" I said.

"That's okay," she replied. Then she took a good look at me and my suitcases, heading towards the exit. "May I ask you where you're going?" she inquired incredulously. "The show is just starting and you're leaving?"

"I nodded.

"Her eyes bulged. "Why would you do that?" she asked.

"Because I'm an observant Jew," I explained, "and my booth was set up directly across from a newsstand with very immodest pictures. I can't stand there all day with those pictures in front of me."

"And that's why you're walking away? From all of this?" she gestured around the room, where business conversations were starting to heat up.

"I nodded again. "Yes," I replied unequivocally.

"I don't believe it," she declared, clearly impressed. Then she reached into her bag and handed me her business card. "I want to meet you in two days' time in my office in Minnesota," she said.

"With no other leads to follow, I left the show and headed home to New York. Two days later, I was in Minnesota.

"This woman turned out to be a partner in Value Vision, a massive international corporation that was the third-largest home shopping company in the world. It was established in 1990, and by 1996 employed over 1200 people and had already made over $159 million in sales. The company owned its own television network, which sold exclusive, high-end, limited-edition jewellery.

"I want to do business with you," she said.

"Right there and then we struck a deal, and within a short time I'd made over $100,000 in sales – far beyond anything I could have dreamed of as the best possible outcome of the trade show.

"When I'd reserved my place at the show, I had hoped for an opportunity to take my business up a few notches. Instead, Hashem had given me a chance to prove who I really am – which gave me the opportunity of a lifetime.

What a huge *Kiddush Hashem!*

Working in the corporate world requires making instant decisions which often have far reaching repercussions. Delaying, even for the best of reasons, may lose the opportunity to make a Kiddush Hashem!

Good Shabbos

Toras Avigdor Snippets

A sampling of previous Toras Avigdor booklets



● Multitudes of Yisroel

When Balak, the king of Moav, climbed the mountains of his land and saw the Am Yisroel camping in the nearby valley, a great fear overtook him. Millions of men, women and children, camping on his border meant trouble for the nation of Moav, and the great number of Jews caused Balak and his people much dread and consternation.– *"Moav became very frightened of the people, because they were numerous,* וַיָּקָץ מוֹאָב מִפְּנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל *– and the people of Moav became disgusted with the Bnei Yisroel"* (Balak 22:2).

It's a common thing you'll find by some gentiles – some Jews too – that they're afraid of too many Jews. Someone recently showed me an article, a clipping from a certain newspaper whose name I don't want to mention at all; certainly not in a shul. And the writer was telling that in Miami, the young orthodox Jews are increasing and multiplying. He describes a visit to a pizza shop, a kosher pizza shop, and he writes there that when he ordered a slice of pizza he had to wait thirty minutes before he was served! "That's how crowded it was with orthodox Jews," he said. And he quotes the rabbi of the local shul: "Once upon a time this community was dying out, but now it's vibrant; it's growing in leaps and bounds." Now, the one writing the article was gritting his teeth when he was writing these words.

"Young orthodox people are filling up the place," he said. "*Too many Jews,*" is what he meant.

Now, in Miami, maybe there are a lot of orthodox Jews, but it's nothing like what the *machaneh Yisroel* looked like. The sight was tremendous – tents as far as the eye can see, without end. Jewish tents! Filled with ultra-Orthodox Jews! And Balak was not happy with what he saw.

● **The Prophet Is Inspired**

So what did Balak do? He called Bila'am to take a look: "Behold a nation has gone forth from Mitzrayim, and their multitudes are covering the land – right opposite me" (ibid. 22:5). "Too many Jews moving into the neighborhood," said Balak. And so he wanted Bil'am to see the sight himself and be inspired to curse the Am Yisroel. "Please come over and see, and curse this nation for me" (ibid. 22:6).

And yet, when Bil'am looked came and looked down at the thousands of Jewish tents, his reaction was different than Balak's – he was inspired in a very different way: *"For from the highest rocks I see the Am Yisroel, and from the hills I view them"* (ibid. 23:9). Unlike Balak, Bila'am was speaking *b'nevuah*, with prophecy, and he saw the Am Yisroel the way Hashem sees them. And therefore, instead of dread and disgust, the multitude of the Am Yisroel aroused the admiration of Bila'am. Bila'am was thinking: "Great numbers of the Am Yisroel! That's Hashem's joy in this world!"

The sudden appearance on the stage of history of a nation of huge multitudes that had only recently been a family of seventy souls, was something tremendous; but to actually see the huge multitudes was awe inspiring. And it was a sight that brought Bil'am to great heights of prophecy: *"From the highest rocks I see them"* means, "I see them through the eyes of Hashem." The sight of the Am Hashem caused an upsurge of feeling in Bila'am which Hashem utilized as a vehicle for *nevu'ah*, and at that moment there came forth from the mouth of Bil'am *the thoughts of Hashem*.

● But Who's Counting?

And this is what he said: מִי מָנָה – "Who counts them?" When Bila'am saw the vast numbers of the Am Yisrael, he said, מִי מָנָה עֲפַר יַעֲקֹב – "*Who is counting the dust of Ya'akov,* the Am Yisroel that is as numerous as the dust?" "You know who counts them?" Bila'am asked. Hashem counts them.

Hashem is *always* counting the Bnei Yisroel. Way back at the end of *sefer Bereishis* Hashem was counting, and again in the beginning of *Shemos* he counted the seventy Bnei Yisroel again. And as the family grew into a tribe, and then into a nation, Hashem was always keeping track of their number. You remember when the Am Yisroel came into the *midbar* Hashem counted them again and again. שְׂאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ כָּל עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – "*Count the entire Bnei Yisroel,*" Hashem says. So מִי מָנָה עֲפַר יַעֲקֹב – "*Who is it that is counting Yaakov?*" It's Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Hashem is counting.

Now, Hakodosh Boruch Hu knew how many Bnei Yisroel there are. He could have told Moshe Rabeinu *al pi nevuah*, "You have so and so many Jews – don't waste time counting." And yet, Hashem told him, "Count." Again and again, we see in the *chumash* that Hashem wants us to count the Bnei Yisroel. And there's good reason for that.

When we count in the Torah again and again and again, the purpose is to show that we should appreciate מִי מָנָה עֲפַר יַעֲקֹב – "Who is the real One counting?" And so the counting that was repeated so many times in the *midbar* was only to emphasize that Hashem is counting us all the time.

● Census Questions

Now, that's a question. Because why did Hashem need to count them so often? They weren't going to war right now that they needed a count. So what's the difference if it's six hundred thousand or six hundred and three thousand, or six hundred and three thousand five

hundred and fifty (Bamidbar 2:32)? It's a big nation and finished. What's the need to always be involved with numbers?

And the answer is that Hashem wants us to know that *He desires numbers!* To Hashem, each Yisroel is a very important addition! שְׂאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ – "*Count the heads*", means *lift them up,* elevate them, because each one is very important to me. Don't say, there are hundreds of thousands of Jews and therefore what's the difference, one more or one less? No! שְׂאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ – "*Lift up every head* because each additional *Chaim'l*, every additional *Chana'le*, is important to Me," says Hashem.

● **Fat Jolly Jews Are A Pleasure!**

It's a mitzvah for us to count because Hashem wants you to know that *He's* counting. He wants you to count like *He* counts. We're counting one-by-one; this one, and that one, and the next one; *l'gilgelosom*, each Jew is counted. Their heads pass by, Jewish heads, ah! Each one is a pleasure; Ah! Ah! That's what we're thinking, because that's what Hashem is thinking.

Look at a Jewish face as it passes by – every single one is a pleasure. It's a pleasure to have skinny serious Jews – it's very important to have them. And fat jolly Jews – it's a pleasure to have them too. Business-like Jews, they're also pleasure. Each one is a pleasure – no question about it, and that's why Hashem is counting us.

Rabbi Elya Lopian once repeated something he had heard from the Alter of Kelm. He said "It was worthwhile for Hashem to create the world, and to keep it existing for six thousand years, just for one person to recite בָּרוּךְ הוּא וּבָרוּךְ שְׁמוֹ just one time.

However, saying בָּרוּךְ הוּא וּבָרוּךְ שְׁמוֹ 1000 times is less important than responding אָמֵן once, and responding אָמֵן 1000 times is less important than answering אָמֵן יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא once."



Yiras Shamayim by Rabbi Moshe Krieger

This week's Parsha tells us how Billam wanted to curse the Jewish people but was prevented in doing so through a series of miraculous events. The Gemora in Berachos, (7) tells us that there is one moment every day when Hashem is mad with the Jewish people and nobody in the history of the world knew how to calculate that moment accept for the wicked Billam. Billam proceeded to use this knowledge to attempt to curse the Jewish people but Hashem "uncharacteristically" decided not to get angry that day.

We must understand this strange Gemorah. Firstly, what does it mean that Hashem gets angry every day for one moment? Does Hashem "plan" to lose His temper? Does Hashem even have a temper? Furthermore, the **Ari Z'L** says that Hashem was "upset" that he couldn't lose His temper during these unique few days in history. How do we understand these strange anthropomorphisms which we are attributing to Hashem?

R' Gedalya Sher, the famous Rosh Yeshiva of Torah V'daas used to explain these words of Chazal as follows: We know that Hashem has two basic methods of running the world. One is loving kindness and the other is strict judgment. Each of these two methods is equally important in our lives. Without the loving kindness that Hashem does for us daily, certainly none of us would make it if we were forced to make an accounting for each one of our actions. Yet without the strict judgment which Hashem imposes on the world, its inhabitant would rapidly degenerate to a state of complete chaos. - It emerges that Hashem's wielding of these two attributes at the

appropriate time generates a state of perfect harmony in the creations.

We find that Hashem's "anger" in the world is extremely important. It generates the requisite fear needed in the world to keep its citizens at bay. Indeed, this is why Billam attempted (and succeeded) afterward in causing the Jews to sin. He saw that Hashem was forced to withdraw His attribute of "strict judgment" (in order to save all their lives) and exploited that opportunity when the Jews and the entire creation was weak in this point, to attack them on their one vulnerable area – their Yiraas Shamayim. This also explains the Ari's words that Hashem was "upset" in not being able to "employ" His normal dose of fear into the world.

R' Gedalya continues by explaining that this is why Pinchas' actions were so effective in returning the world to its natural order and made Hashem so happy. Pinchas artificially injected the fear into the Jewish people by stabbing two of the transgressors with a spear and displaying them to everyone. This fear is exactly what was needed in the world to replace the dosage of fear that Hashem had to hold back (to save everybody's life).

R' Shach used to use Billam as an example of how far a person who doesn't have fear of Heaven can fall. Billam was able to talk to Hashem face to face, just like Moshe Rabenu. He had full cognizance of Hashem's existence and voracity. Yet, when it came time to curse the Jewish people, he cursed them in direct defiance of Hashem's will, just because of his rotten Middos. This is how far we can fall if we are not careful to work on our fear of Heaven.

One should be aware that fear of Heaven requires constant maintenance. One cannot simply acquire a certain amount of Yira and then hope to subsist on that for the rest of his life. Just as one who eats a big breakfast, is hungry again by dinner time because the caloric intake from breakfast has been exhausted. So to Yiras Shamayim requires constant work. This is why we say Krias Shema

in the morning and in the evening every day – to reaccept the yoke of heaven twice daily.

Perhaps we can conclude with a well-known story that happened to the **Chasam Sofer**. Once while teaching three new students the Chasam Sofer dozed off from exhaustion. The three students commented to each other dubiously that they had heard that their new master was so wise, sharp, and possessed such a fear of heaven, but that they didn't think it was so true.

The Chasam Sofer remarked that he didn't mind at all about their negative comments regarding his accomplishments in Torah because he could testify about himself that he tried his hardest to succeed in Torah, using the abilities that Hashem gave him. But when he heard that they said about him that he didn't seem like such a Yire Shamyim, he began to weep so copiously, that within a few minutes, he had completely drenched his clothes and had to go change all of his garments!

Avraham's school

In this week's Parsha, Balak hires Bilam to curse the Jewish people because he realized that this was the only viable way to neutralize the very real threat the Jewish people represented to Balak's existence on this earth. Bilam was all too happy to accept this particular mission, because he hated the Jews more than Balak.

In his enthusiasm, Bilam woke up early in the morning and saddled his donkey himself in order to set out on his quest to curse the Jewish people, but on his way, he encountered a little roadblock. Bilam's donkey saw an angel who was standing on the road with a drawn sword ready to strike Bilam. In order to protect her master, the donkey first deviated from the path it was on and went into the nearby field. Bilam then hit his donkey for the first time. The donkey then tried to stall by squashing Bilam's leg against the wall,

but this too only infuriated Bilam, and he hit her again. And finally, the donkey refused to move, which earned her a third thrashing before Hashem opened up her mouth and she rebuked Bilam for his mistreatment of her.

The word she used in her rebuke was, "Why did you strike me these three 'Regalim'?" The simple translation of the word "regalim" is times. Meaning, the donkey was asking Bilam why he hit her those three times. But Rashi points out that the donkey was hinting to Bilam that if he was going up against a nation who kept the 3 regalim (holidays), there is no way he would succeed.

However, the question needs to be asked, why specifically were the Jewish holidays the Mitzvah which Bilam should have been most afraid of? The Jews keep 613 Mitzvos, each one being extremely powerful in its nature to protect and defend the Jewish people. Why were our holidays singled out as the most formidable ally to protect us against Bilam's verbal attack?

The Shem Mishmuel deals with this difficulty, and he explains that the non-Jews also perform the will of G-d in many respects. They have laws governing morality, honesty, murder, and many other subjects which are very much in line with G-d's will. But there is one area which the non-Jews are completely unwilling to give up, and that is their desires.

One will not find a non-Jew who is willing to curb his desires and give up his entire "self" in order to do the will of Hashem. The Jewish holidays are the primary illustration of the Jews' excellence in this trait.

During each one of the three Jewish holidays, a Jew leaves his home, and the comfort and security that this provides, not knowing if he will come back to find anything in the place he left his wife and children, and travels up to three days in order to get closer to Hashem. One thing is certain – during these three times a year, a Jew shows unequivocally his loyalty and his willingness to sacrifice

everything he owns to come close to his Creator, and this Mitzvah was therefore a powerful defence for the Jews' cause, that Bilam sought to destroy.

But the Shem Mishmuel, suggests another more subtle reason why it was so important for Bilam to negate the importance of the Jewish holidays. The Mishna in Avos teaches us that Bilam was afflicted with three very poor character traits. He was stingy and couldn't see the good in other people, he was arrogant, and he was a pleasure seeker. These three traits are exactly what the Mishna tells us to stay away from.

Avraham Avinu, on the other hand, possessed the exact opposite traits. He was generous and saw the good in his fellow man, humble, and would attempt to minimize the amount of pleasure he could take from this earth.

The Mishna goes on to say that anyone who excels in these three traits is from the students of Avraham Avinu, and one who does poorly in them is from the students of Bilam. These three traits are responsible for the three most insidious crimes in the Torah – crimes which a person must even give his life to avoid doing.

The three holidays which the Jews celebrate are also congruent with these three pillars which the world stands on. Shavuos obviously represents the study of Torah. Pesach represents the service of prayer, which is also called "Avodah", or service, and the primary focus of the Pesach holiday, was the Pesach offering which was offered in the Beis Hamikdash. And Succos represents kindness, since the Succos holiday comes out during the grain harvest, a time which is abundant with commandments of kindness and providing for the poor people.

Bilam's sole goal was to convert the world to his way of thinking and to convince the world to become stingy, haughty, and seekers of pleasure. But his donkey patiently explained to him that there was no way he would win against the Jews, who spent their entire lives

fighting these three sinister traits by keeping all three holidays, year after year, and always strengthening the three pillars of the world!

The one point which I think we can all take away from these interesting equations is how important it is to spend our lives trying to uproot these three primary dreadful traits from our hearts, and all their sister traits, and replace them with good and positive qualities by excelling in Torah, prayer, and kindness.

May we all merit to extricate ourselves from Bilam's school and join Avraham's school!

Ephemeral World

In this week's Parsha, Balak, after hearing of the miraculous victories of the Jewish people, and their imminent arrival and takeover of his land, hires Bilam to curse the Jewish people as a last, desperate measure to try and halt the Jewish advance. This attempt turned out to be futile because Hashem protected the Jewish people and did not allow Bilam's formidable aptitude in sorcery to be effective during the time he wanted to curse them. So instead, he resorted to causing the Jews to sin by enticing them with the Midianite women, thereby hoping to cause the Jews to lose spiritual status in the eyes of Hashem and make them more vulnerable to a military assault.

This second strategy met with some success, and many Jews died in a plague as a result, but earned Bilam a death sentence, when he was killed by the Jewish army shortly afterward. However, the Torah testifies that Bilam possessed some very unique talents.

We know that Moshe was unparalleled as a Jewish prophet, but in the non-Jewish prophets, Bilam was indeed Moshe's equal. That means that incredible level of intimacy of the knowledge of Hashem which Moshe was able to achieve, was present in the wicked Bilam as

well! If that is true, how could he possibly fall to the depths he fell to in which he attempted to completely annihilate Hashem's chosen nation. How could somebody so knowledgeable in Hashem's ways have made such a fundamental error as to honestly believe that he could "trick" Hashem, who by definition is flawless and not susceptible to trickery? What was he thinking?

The famous Mashgiach, **R' Yerucham** explains that Bilam should serve as an incredible lesson in human nature. We humans have the bizarre capacity to know something is true on an intellectual level, beyond any doubt, and yet not accept it on an emotional or practical level. We can act in a way which is not consistent with what we believe to be true.

The only way to ensure that our actions are commensurate with our beliefs is to constantly repeat to ourselves and reiterate our ideas until our conviction in them is solidified. Only by doing this frequently and regularly can we hope to bring our actions to the level of our thoughts, otherwise, our passions will take over and will always pull us downward.

When the Tzadik, **R' Nachman from Breslov** was a young man, he used to sit in Shul next to his grandfather, who sat in the important section of the Shul. One day, little Nachman noticed that one of the elderly men who normally sat next to his grandfather hadn't come to Shul for a couple of days. So little Nachman asked his Zayde where this man was. His grandfather replied that the gentleman had passed away. But little Nachman didn't understand what those words meant, as he had never encountered death before.

His Zayde explained to him, "Nachman, you see the temporary nature of this world. You see how ephemeral it is, and how things are here one day and gone the next. Clearly this world is only to gather all that we can, and to leave with as much merchandise in hand as possible."

R' Nachman wrote in his later writings that that moment was a major turning point in his life. That stark realization of how real death was, was driven deep within him, and at that moment he began a life dedicated solely to growing in spirituality, paying no heed to any other pursuit. - Such is the power that a genuine realization can have on a person in that it fuelled the rest of his astonishing life and allowed him to become who he became.

R' Gamliel Rabinovich once commented to me, "You know it's funny that in the old days, they would only announce on the loud speakers when a great leader passed away, but now, every day we here these kind of announcements. I guess it is because in the olden times, Jews were always thinking about the day of reckoning, so they didn't need constant reminders, but now that people have stopped thinking so much about their own demise, they need daily reminders".

The Beis Halevi used to have the words, "**שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד**" written on his snuff box so that every time he would take a sniff of tobacco, he would be reminded of Hashem at least six times a day.

R' Avigdor Miller used to stroll frequently in areas where he could view nature and would concentrate intently on the intricacy of every tree and flower he would find and would graphically draw attention to their beauty and unfathomable wisdom, using this a constant tool to extol the virtues of the Creator to himself and to others.

In summary, this work is not easy, but through taking advantage of the constant reminders that are built into our religion by actively contemplating their significance, and supplementing this with extracurricular exercises, each and every Jew can succeed in allowing his actions to be consistent with his beliefs.

May we all merit to shrink the space between our actions and our beliefs!



Chizuk - Inspiration

Daniel Kravitz, the owner of a second-hand furniture shop in Denver, was taken aback by the customer who entered his store. The young man was dressed like a hoodlum, with a shaved head that clearly marked him as a neo-Nazi. His bare arms were covered with tattoos with the venomous message, "Kill Jews!" Fortunately, Daniel's Yarmulke was concealed beneath a cap.

Daniel spent the next hour assisting his customer. He took the man on a tour of the shop, helped him select a decent array of furniture, granted him a generous discount, and helped the young neo-Nazi load his purchases into a waiting pickup truck. Then, after looking the man over carefully to make sure he was not carrying any weapons, Daniel began to speak.

Tell me, he said cautiously, "Do you really believe what all those tattoos say?"

You bet I do," the man replied.

Have you ever hurt anyone?" Daniel pressed.

Yep!"

Daniel paused, then asked, "What do you have against the Jews?"

They are thieves and liars" the customer launched into a tirade, spewing out every imaginable anti-Semitic stereotype.

Daniel listened patiently until the man had finished speaking. Then he removed his cap to reveal his Yarmulke and said, "Are you aware that you have just spent an hour with a Jew? Haven't I been honest, kind, and generous this whole time?" The neo-Nazi gaped in disbelief, "No way! No, you're not a Jew, man!"

Daniel motioned to the Mezuzah on the door, then showed the man a Siddur on his desk. "You can see very clearly that I am Jewish, and I'm not at all like the image you have of Jews. You have been

brainwashed. I can't believe that your parents raised you with this kind of hate. You must be estranged from them," Daniel surmised. The neo-Nazi grimly confirmed his suspicions, he hadn't spoken to his parents in ten years. Just then another customer came in and Daniel wished the neo-Nazi a good day and turned to assist the other customer.

Six months later, the man returned to the store, this time with a full head of hair, decent clothes, and long sleeves to conceal his tattoos. To Daniel's surprise, the man embraced him warmly. "I need to apologize to you and thank you," he said tearfully. "You really made me reassess all of the ideas I had believed. Thanks to you, I now know what a Jew is, and I've decided to turn my life around. I've even reconnected with my parents."

We can make a difference. We cannot give up. We can bring light to the deep darkness.

A Show of Respect

It was a beautiful summer day at Niagara Falls. Against the backdrop of the constant, majestic cascade of water, another magnificent scene was taking place. The bachurim of Camp Agudah Mesivta were visiting the falls, and they stood listening to their revered rebbi, Rav Chaim Yisroel Belsky, drinking in his words of wisdom.

The rosh yeshivah leaned on two boys for support, while the rest of the group listened intently as he spoke, mesmerized by the rosh yeshivah's boundless knowledge and insight. The boys' awe for their rebbi was nearly tangible; the group exuded both deference and reverence for Rav Belsky.

Unbeknownst to the boys, they had attracted the attention of some other tourists. Before long, a man approached a small cluster of boys to make a heartwarming comment. "I've seen many beautiful sights at Niagara today," he told them, "but this truly tops it all. The way you boys treat your elders is like nothing I have ever seen before. This is even more inspiring than all the natural wonders I have witnessed here."

When we show respect to others — whether to our parents, our elders, or even strangers, it can play a major role in bringing about a kiddush Hashem. Often, we fail to realize when we have unintentionally been guilty of disrespect, or to recognize how much of an impact we can make by correcting the oversight.

Pinchas (name changed), a yeshivah bachur, was about to purchase a drink at a 7-Eleven convenience store when he noticed that a disgruntled-looking man was standing off to the side, holding three large cups, while a group of yeshivah bachurim waited to pay for their purchases.

Pinchas instantly realized that his friends had unintentionally cut in front of the man in line, and he motioned for the other customer to go ahead of him. "You just go ahead with all your friends," the man said in an irritated tone.

"Please," Pinchas said, "you were here first; you should go ahead of me."

With that, the man's demeanor changed. After the cashier had rung up his purchases, she asked, "Will there be anything else?"

"Yes," the other customer said loudly. "Please charge me for this boy's drink as well. I want to treat him; he deserves it."

Showing respect is a powerful way of making an impression on others. Being respected also makes it possible for people to live up to their potential to fill the world with kevod Shamayim.

102 Stories That Changed People's Lives – Rabbi Tzvi Nakar - The Bigger Merit

One day, in a certain shul in Bnei Brak, one of the shul members, someone who dutifully paid the membership fees, went over to the gabbai and asked him to make sure that on one of the upcoming Shabbosim he should get the aliyah for maftir and to be the chazzan for Mussaf since it was the Shabbos before his mother's yahrtzeit.

The gabbai checked the schedule and confirmed that the Shabbos in question was available. The congregant was happy. He was an organized person and wanted to make sure everything was in order for his mother's yahrtzeit.

On the Shabbos he had requested the aliyah for maftir and the opportunity to lead Mussaf, he entered the shul filled with anticipation. Minutes later, he noticed that a stranger had joined the minyan and was deep in conversation with the gabbai.

The regular congregant was curious to hear what the debate was about, and to his shock he found out that the stranger had asked for maftir and the chance to serve as chazzan for Mussaf.

That was his maftir! His Mussaf! Here was some stranger pressuring the gabbai to give those privileges to him! He couldn't believe it.

At that moment, a battle raged inside him. If there was justice in the world, then it must be on his side. He was a longtime member of the shul, he had arranged it with the gabbai ahead of time, and he had contributed so much to the shul over the years. The other man was a stranger who had just walked into shul and on the spot had asked for the honors he had reserved for himself. Even if it were a regular Shabbos, he had no right to ask such a thing. No one owed the man anything. When an established member of the shul has arranged ahead of time to have those honors, it was a chutzpah!

On the other hand...a small voice whispered to him that he should give in. No one understands how an aliyah and tefillah before the

amud helps a neshamah in the Upper World. No one knows what happens to a soul in Gan Eden. We do our best to bring merits to the souls of our loved ones, but maybe giving up the honors to someone else has a greater power to elevate the neshamah. That, too, is an immense merit. With great effort and determination, he went over to the gabbai and told him that he was willing to give up maftir and Mussaf.

"Chas v'shalom!" the gabbai said. "What do you mean? There has to be order in a shul, a proper way of doing things."

He meant that the members of the congregation have precedence, certain basic rights, and among those rights is an aliyah and the chance to daven at the amud on a Shabbos on which they have a yahrtzeit. The gabbai reassured the congregant that he didn't have any intentions of giving in to the visitor's request.

But the shul member had already decided that even the most prestigious aliyah isn't worth a machlokes. Arguments and fights are a thousand times more destructive than giving up a precious aliyah.

"No, my friend," he said to the gabbai. "He can have it. I don't want any fights. I don't want to cause problems. Give him the aliyah and give him Mussaf, too. I'll take another aliyah, and I'll daven at the amud on the yahrtzeit itself."

The gabbai saw that he meant what he said and gave the visitor the aliyah and Mussaf. The davening concluded in a pleasant and goodhearted atmosphere. Everyone got what he wanted. The visitor received the honors he had requested, and the regular shul member was happy that he'd had the merit to give up something that was important to him and bring further merit to his mother's neshamah.

The gabbai was happy that both men were happy.

Rav Aharon Toisig, a prominent rav from Bnei Brak, was present when these events occurred, and he related the story as it happened. But the story didn't end there.

The next day, the man who had given up the aliyah arrived in shul, and it was obvious that something had happened that had left him shaken.

He related that last night his mother came to him in a dream, and said to him, "My son, I was given special permission by the Heavenly court to descend to This World to thank you. The ascension I experienced today when you gave up the aliyah and the davening at the amud was greater than any I had ever experienced. I remember well the elevation I merited in past years, when on the Shabbos of my yahrtzeit you received an aliyah and davened Mussaf before the amud. But that didn't come close, didn't even resemble, what I merited this year, when you mustered the fortitude to give up the honors that were rightfully yours to run from machlokes."

When he woke up, he was trembling, covered in sweat, and his limbs were quaking. It's not every day a person gets a visit from a resident of the Next World. It was something he'd never forget.

Hashem's Heart Has No Hooks

If you love someone *because* of a reason, then you may not truly love *them* — you love the reason. For example: if you love your wife because she's a great cook, then what you really love is good food, not your wife. If you love your children because they carry on your legacy, then it's your legacy you love, not your children themselves.

The same applies to our relationship with Hashem. He doesn't love us *because* we do mitzvos or perform well. His love is not conditional on our success or failure. He simply loves us.

"Sin may distance us from Hashem, but Teshuvah brings us closer than we were before." ~ Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk.

Rabbi Jeremy Golker – Avrohom, Bilaam and The Importance of Good Middos

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (5) says: **כָּל מִי שֶׁיֵּשׁ בְּיָדוֹ שְׁלשָׁה דְּבָרִים הַלָּלוּ, מִתַּלְמִידָיו שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ. וּשְׁלשָׁה דְּבָרִים אֲחֵרִים, מִתַּלְמִידָיו שֶׁל בִּלְעָם הָרָשָׁע. עַיִן טוֹבָה, וְרוּחַ נְמוּכָה, וְנֶפֶשׁ שְׁפָלָה, מִתַּלְמִידָיו שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ. עַיִן רָעָה, וְרוּחַ גְּבוֹהָה, וְנֶפֶשׁ רְחָבָה, מִתַּלְמִידָיו שֶׁל בִּלְעָם הָרָשָׁע.** - *Whoever possesses these three things, he is of the disciples of Abraham, our father; and [whoever possesses] three other things, he is of the disciples of Balaam, the wicked. A good eye, a humble spirit and a moderate appetite he is of the disciples of Abraham, our father. An evil eye, a haughty spirit and a limitless appetite he is of the disciples of Balaam, the wicked.*



Rav Shlomo Heiman in **חידושי ר׳שלמה על התורה** says that this is perplexing. Is this the only contrast between these two groups? They're poles apart! The talmidim of Avraham Avinu are **מאמינים בבורא עולם, והללו כופרים גמורים עובדי עבודה זרה**

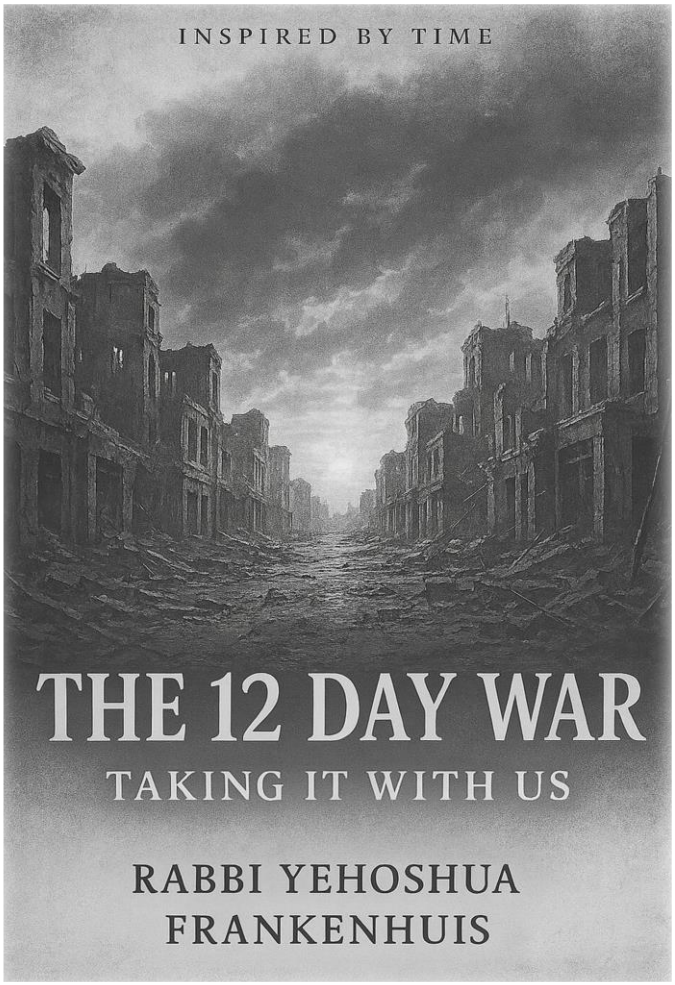
Chazal's intention was to teach us that the strength of character of Avrohom's talmidim was that even though they were living in a generation of idol worship, they went against the wind of time, and they had the clarity to follow Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This was possible only because of their **מידות טובות**.

Conversely, the students of Bilaam were so contaminated, that although they lived at a time where they saw open miracles, they had no effect on them. **אלא שבעלי מדות רעות היו**.

Imagine two magnets that have cotton wool and other debris in between the contacts. It is obvious that the power of attraction will

be diminished. Bad traits is all the debris which blocks and contaminates the attraction to Hashem.

Serving fine wine in a dirty glass is generally considered a poor practice as it can negatively impact the taste and experience. Dirty glasses can introduce contaminants that alter the wine's flavour.



The Real War is Just Beginning

A wise man once observed a group of soldiers returning from battle. Their armour was battered, their swords stained with the blood of the enemy, and their bodies bore the marks of a fierce struggle. Yet despite their wounds, their faces shone with pride and their steps were firm. They had emerged victorious – and they rejoiced in their triumph.

The wise man approached and said to them: "You have returned from the small war. Now you must prepare yourselves for the great war."

The soldiers looked at him curiously and asked, "What is this great war you speak of?"

He replied, "The small war is the battle fought on the physical battlefield – against visible enemies, with weapons and shields, amid the clamour of war. But the great war is the inner struggle: the lifelong battle against desires, temptations, and the passions of the soul."

We are all familiar with this powerful teaching from the Chovos haLevavos (Sha'ar Yichud haMa'aseh, 5). Yet its timeless message resonates now more than ever – because Klal Yisrael is living it.

We have just emerged from a monumental war – the long-dreaded and deeply feared conflict with Iran. A war that many expected would stretch on for months, perhaps years. And yet, Baruch Hashem, it ended swiftly and decisively. Not in months. Not in weeks. In just twelve days. A stunning victory that defied all predictions.

The Twelve-Day War is over. Missiles rained down, but miracle after miracle shielded us. Explosives fell but caused no harm. Terrorists were neutralized mere seconds before their attacks. The hand of Hashem was clear to all who looked.

And yet – as extraordinary as this victory was – it was only the small war that was won.

Now, the great war begins.



When They Were Young

A CHAIN OF COMPASSION

RABBI SHMUEL KAMENETSKY
הרב שמואל קמנצקי שליט"א

Recently, Reb Eliav Friedman, a head counselor in a day camp in Eretz Yisrael, said to his counselors on the first day of camp, "Make sure to look out for any boy who looks lonely. Go over to him, buy him a treat from the canteen, shmooze with him, and maybe even play a game of ball with him.

"Do you know why I am telling you to do this? Because when I was a young boy, I went to a camp called Camp Morris, in Woodridge, New York. I was very lonely and sad. One division head, Rabbi Ezzy Fireworker, noticed me and made me feel better. I want you to know that Reb Ezzy changed my summer and changed my life. Therefore, look out for those boys on the side and reach out to them."

But what made Rabbi Ezzy Fireworker do this?

Many years earlier, Ezzy had been a camper in Camp Agudah in Ferndale, New York. That summer, his grandmother became ill and was rushed to the hospital. As soon as Ezzy heard the news, he was so upset that he began to cry. - One young man noticed and took care of him. After that, Ezzy felt much better and was able to enjoy himself in camp. Ezzy always remembered that act of thoughtfulness.

And who was the young man who changed Ezzy Fireworker's summer with one act of kindness? Shmuel Kamenetsky, who was a counselor at Camp Agudah at the time!

Sometimes, a single act of kindness can make a big difference. Whether you're at school or camp, by doing something nice for someone else, you can change their day, their summer, or even their whole life. And guess what? That person might go on to do something kind for someone else, continuing a chain of goodness that keeps spreading.

"The survival of the Jewish people, and their commitment to the torah and Mitzvos, despite all manners of persecution and oppression, is in my opinion, greater than all the miracles and wonders performed for our ancestors in Egypt, the wilderness, and Har Sinai. - This is a miracle of the highest order!" ~ The Ya'avetz, Rabbi Yaakov Emden (1697-1776).

Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky





Shmuel Kamenetsky was born in 1924 in Slabodka, to R' Yaakov and Rebbetzin Itta Ettil. As a young boy, he left his hometown of Tzitavyan to learn, first in Shavel and then in Slabodka. In 1938, he and his mother and his siblings joined his father in Toronto, Canada.

He studied at Etz Chaim in Toronto, Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in Baltimore, and Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood. He married Temi Brooks.

In 1953, R' Shmuel founded the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia. In 1955, he was joined by R' Elya Svei. Together, they guided many, many *talmidim* throughout the years.

R' Shmuel has been actively involved in many important national Jewish organizations. He serves on the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah of Agudath Israel of America and is a member of the Vaad Roshei Yeshivah of Torah Umesorah. In addition to his broad-based, Torah knowledge, he is noted for his warmth and compassion. He also guides many individuals who come to ask his advice.

Lubavitcher Rebbe, R' Menachem Mendel Schneerson *zt"l* would say:

אָרָה־לִּי אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה - '***curse this people for me***.' 22:6- It is interesting to note that the people who Bilaam wanted to curse were those who were unprotected by the clouds of glory, as the *Meforshim* explain on the *posuk*, **וַיַּרְא מִשָּׁם קְצֵה הָעָם** - *'He saw the furthermost part of the people.' 22:41*

The clouds of glory protected all the Jewish people except those impure or spiritually blemished. Nevertheless, *Hashem's* great love for the Jews, even these Jews, caused Him to reverse Bilaam's intention and transform his prophecy into blessings."

וְלֹא רָאָה עָמָל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל - '***He has seen no perversity in Israel***.' 23:21

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh says: **וכל עסקם בתורה אינם מרגישים שיש להם עמל.. אלא אדרבא כאדם המרויח וכאדם המשתעשע בשעשועים לרוב חשקם בתורה.**

"Although they [Tzadikim] are busy with Mitzvos, and put great effort into learning Torah, they do not consider fulfilment of all these commandments burdensome. - On the contrary, they feel like one who is gaining! They delight in and cherish their learning out of their great love for the Torah." – They don't see it as a burden at all.



Reading the Fine Print in Bilaam's Refusal to Go

There is a strange similarity between a *pasuk* in Parshas Balak and a statement in Maseches Avos. When Balak tries to entice Bilaam to come and curse *Klal Yisrael*, Bilaam at first refuses and

says, "If Balak will give me a house full of silver and gold, I am unable to transgress the word of G-d."

This is strikingly reminiscent of a statement in the sixth chapter of Pirkei Avos, where somebody came to Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma and made him an offer that he seemingly could not refuse. A person approached the Tanna and invited him to come to his city to build a Yeshiva there. He made him an outstanding offer to which Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma responded, "My son, even if you offer me all the silver and gold and precious stones and jewels in the world, I refuse to live in any place other than a place of Torah." [Avos 6:9]

Now, even though this sounds strikingly similar to what Bilaam said, Bilaam is condemned. Chazal take Bilaam's statement as being an implicit hint to the officers of Moav that he would really like all that silver and gold, and that he thinks he is worth it. No one suspects Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma of intimating that for the right price he could indeed be convinced to come. What is the difference between the statement of Bilaam and, *l'havdil*, the statement of Rav Yossi ben Kisma?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky makes a very interesting observation: "If Balak will give me a house full of gold and silver… I won't do it!" What about two houses? What about five houses? For one house? Nu! What is one house full of gold and silver worth? For that price alone, I will not consider coming. By specifying that a **single** house is the offer he refuses, he implies that if the price were right – then maybe there would be what to discuss.

What is the language of Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma? It is "**all** the silver and gold and precious stones and jewels in the world." There is nothing more to talk about! No money in the world can change my mind. I will only live in a place of Torah. That is the difference between Bilaam's refusal and the refusal by Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma in Pirkei Avos.

The Al-mighty Rejects Bilam's Offer to Bless Israel

Balak wants to hire the greatest sorcerer of his time — perhaps the greatest sorcerer of all time — Bilam, to curse *Klal Yisrael*. As we know, Bilam was a prophet, and G-d appears to him at night and instructs him, "Do not go with them (the agents of Balak); do not curse the nation for they are blessed" [Bamidbar 22:12].

Rashi fills in the details of this conversation. Hashem told Bilam, "Don't go with them," and Bilam countered, "If not, let me curse them from here." Hashem then became explicit with Bilam and told him, "Don't curse the nation." To which the Gentile prophet responded, "If I can't curse them, let me bless them." Hashem responded, "They don't need your blessings for they are (already) blessed."

This is a strange Rashi. Chazal say that Bilam was an extremely evil person; he had no love for the Jews. He hated them. So what is this business, "If I can't curse the Jews, so let me bless them"? What is he thinking?

I once saw someone express the idea that Bilam's intent here was still of a nefarious and malevolent nature. There are two ways to destroy the Jewish people. It is possible to curse them that they should be afflicted with all types of troubles, disease, poverty and oppression. But there is another way to destroy the Jewish people. That is, if the Jewish people are overwhelmed with affluence and money, that also can provide a terrible challenge to the nation. This is, in fact, what the Torah alludes to at the beginning of Sefer Devarim [1:1] when the *pasuk* mentions "*Dee Zahav*" — implying that Klal Yisrael has been spiritually challenged by all the wealth and gold that they were given. As we all know, riches can provide a terrible spiritual challenge. Chazal say that the "test of wealth" is harder to handle than the "test of poverty."

Bilam's was not out to bless the Jews. He was out to destroy the Jews. He said to the Al-mighty, "Let me bless them." What was he going to ask for? It was that they should be rolling in dough. The

outcome of that would be that they would not be able to handle this "test of wealth" and would spiritually self-destruct.

This was the meaning of Bilam's request to Hashem, "Let me bless them." The Al-mighty responded, "Thanks, but no thanks. They do not need your blessing, for they are blessed."

Young Groom Sets Up Throne Prematurely

Rav Zilberstein walked into the home of a newly married couple and noticed a beautiful gold armchair, almost like a throne, at the head of the dining room table. Rav Zilberstein said to the newly married young man "What are you doing with such a chair in your house?" The young man responded, "Before my wedding, when I was learning about the mitzvah of Shalom Bayis , I was taught the Rambam that a wife should look at her husband like an officer or a king. [Hilchos Ishus 15:20] If my wife is supposed to look at me like a king, I figured I should have all the paraphernalia of a king!"

Of course, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein was extremely put off by this attitude and he said "It is clear to me that you never heard the insight of **Rav Chaim Soloveitchik** on Parshas Balak."

The parsha begins: "Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Emori. Moav was very frightened of the people, because it was formidable; and Moav was disgusted in the face of the Children of Israel. Moav said to the elders of Midyan, 'Now the congregation will chew up our entire surroundings as an ox chews up the greenery of the field.'" And then the narration continues: "and Balak son of Zippor was king of Moav at that time." [Bamidbar 22:2-4]

This seems a very odd way of writing the narration. The natural way to write this would be to begin "Balak son of Zippor, King of Moav, saw…" If the Torah is introducing Balak at the beginning of the parsha, it should tell us right then who he is! Why does the Torah wait 3 pasukim to tell us that he happened to be the king?

Rav Chaim explained. The primary goal of a king is to take care of his people, to protect his subjects and to worry about them. The Torah introduces us to Balak and tells us that Balak was rightfully fearful of what was going to be with the people of Moav. He lost sleep over it. He sought the counsel of Midyan and he came up with a plan to protect his people. He demonstrated the primary responsibility of a king – concern for his subjects. It is only after he demonstrated having concern for his subjects that the Torah confers upon him the title: "Balak son of Zippor was king of Moav at that time".

Rav Zilberstein then said to the young groom, "Young man, if you want to be the king in your household, you have plenty of time to get your throne. The first thing you need to do is act like a king. Your domain is your home and your "subjects" are your wife and your family. After you demonstrate your worry, concern, and loss of sleep for their needs and problems, then you can claim the title "King". This is what the Rambam meant – a husband should earn the role of being a king in his house, not artificially set up the trappings of royalty without demonstrating the characteristics of royalty.

Being an Ingrate is the "Worst of the Worst"

The following insight is from the **Alter of Slabodka**. According to the Medrash, Bilaam said to Balak: Both of us are ingrates. Were it not for Avraham Avinu, there would never have been a Balak King of Moab in the world. For if not for Avraham's merit, Lot would never have escaped the destruction of Sodom. "How can you – a descendant of Lot – hire me to curse the descendants of Avraham? I, too, am an ingrate", Bilaam told Balak, "because if not for their father Yaakov, I would not be around either. Lavan only merited having sons – from whom I descended – by virtue of the fact that Yaakov lived in his house. How can I curse Yaakov's descendants? I too must be an ingrate."

This is a strange Medrash. It is as if Bilaam the wicked is giving a mussar schmooze [a lecture in personal ethics]. Since when was Bilaam into "midos tovos"? Why is this person, who has all the evil human traits in the world, expressing remorse – as it were – that he was an ingrate?

The Alter of Slabodka says we see from here that the worst character trait of all is to be an ingrate. Even a Bilaam, who was the prototype of evil character traits, felt bad about being an ingrate.

Rav Ruderman, the founding Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel, was a disciple of the Alter of Slabodka and this idea is very typical of the themes he would frequently speak about. There were basically three topics to which he returned over and over in emphasizing proper behavior to his students: Torah;Chessed; and HaKaras HaTov.

Rav Ruderman felt that if a person did not recognize those who did him favors, it called into question the person's entire humanity. We all have our failings and our foibles, but to be an ingrate is the worst of the worst.

A Clash Between Torah and Secular Ethics

In the dramatic confrontation between the Malach [angel] and Bilaam, after Bilaam's donkey speaks to him, the Malach tells Bilaam "Had she not turned away from me, I would now even have killed you and let her live!" [Bamidbar 22:33]. In other words, if I had my preference, I would have killed you and left the donkey alive. Rashi writes that, in fact, the Malach did kill the donkey, the reason being so that later people would not say about it "This is the donkey that put Bilaam in his place." This is an example of the Almighty being concerned about a person's dignity.

I remember as a little kid, when I first heard this Rashi, I felt so bad for the donkey. This was an innocent donkey, a wondrous talking donkey. It had to die to preserve the honor of the wicked Bilaam so

that later, people would not mock Bilaam and point to this donkey as the one who bested him in a debate!

The Torah is concerned about the dignity of a low-life, degenerate human being — the wicked Bilaam. The donkey on the other hand, could have been a walking Kiddush Hashem. People would point to it and speak of the miracle that happened through it. Why kill this poor donkey to spare the honor of a low-life?

We clearly see that the Torah is more sensitive about the honor and dignity of man, albeit the worst of men, than it is about any animal, albeit the best and most glorious of animals. In ethics classes in the secular world, they always pose the following question: If a person has the choice of rescuing from a fire or from drowning or from some emergency scenario, only one individual — the family's trustworthy dog who has been in the family for 15 years and saved countless people's lives etc., etc. or a homeless smelly person who is drunk one day and strung out on drugs the next day — who should the person save, the dog or the drunk?

In most classes, everyone says that we should save our dog rather than the homeless person. This is not the Torah's way of viewing things. Not only should we save the human being in such a scenario, but we should even kill the animal to save the dignity of a human being — even a wicked human being!

The Chofetz Chaim teaches us that when a person speaks loshon hora, he is wasting one of the most precious commodities this world has to offer — time.

"Bilam's downfall was his desire for honor. True avodah is to speak only what Hashem places in one's mouth — humility is the vessel through which blessing flows." ~ Rav Shlomo Wolbe.



Why the Uniform? Couldn't You Wear Shabbos Clothing?"

A uniformed soldier [a member of the Israeli Defense Forces] came into **Rabbi Zilbershtein's** Synagogue in Ramat Elhanan in Bnei Brak on Shabbat and conversed with the Rabbi for a few moments. After their short conversation the Rabbi instructed the synagogue sextant to honor him and call this soldier up to the Torah.

Everyone was surprised at this honor bestowed on someone who didn't even live there. And couldn't the soldier who was off duty any way come into synagogue with Shabbat clothing and not his uniform?

Indeed Rabbi Zilbershtein asked him why he came to synagogue on Shabbat in his uniform instead of his Shabbat clothing. The soldier said: "I started becoming religious a few years ago and I keep Shabbat, but my mother doesn't yet keep Shabbat."

"Since she loves and reveres the army so much, whenever I come home my uniform goes straight in the machine for washing and ironing. So I decided I would wear them today so she wouldn't do this laundry on Shabbat and desecrate it."

Rabbi Zilbershtein finished telling the people what the soldier said.

"I was overcome by this" said Rabbi Zilbershtein. I told him:' "There's no greater honor for Shabbat than this. That's why I told the synagogue sextant to call this soldier up to the Torah and accord him honor so everyone should ask about it and would learn how to honor the Shabbat and prevent others from stumbling on it. Sacrificing to help someone else keep Shabbat is the greatest honor for the Shabbat."

The Foolish Highway Robber



A distraught father once came to **R' Zalmen Plitnick** (d. 1984), Rav of Liverpool, England, and implored him to speak to his daughter to convice her not to marry her gentile fiancee.

R' Plitnick spoke with her for a long time, but to no avail. She was determined to marry him.

When the father heard that R' Plitnick had been unsuccessful, he was bitterly disappointed.

R' Plitnick (whose father-in-law, R' Moshe Londinsky, was Rosh Yeshivah of the **Chofetz Chaim's** Yeshivah in Radin, as well as the Chofetz Chaim's neighbor) told the father of the girl a story which he heard from the Chofetz Chaim, based on the Yerushalmi (Brachos 38b).

A great doctor discovered a cure for a debilitating children's disease. He would travel to cities and villages to dispense the medicine and heal children. One night, as he was traveling, he was assaulted by highway robbers who took all his belongings. Having found no valuables, they threw his belongings into the river.

The next morning, the doctor dejectedly told the patients waiting at his next stop that he had no medicine. At the head of the line of patients was a man whose son was very ill. He had been relying on the doctor's medicines.

The doctor looked at the man and said, "Don't you recognize me? I was the one whom you robbed last night. Where is everything you took from me?"

The man was startled, as he replied, "I threw it all into the river."

The doctor shook his head sadly, "You had the remedy in your hand and you threw it away. Now there is nothing I can do for you."

The Chofetz Chaim explained, "We want our rabbis to provide all the answers for our children. But if people come home from shul on Shabbos and sit at the table criticizing what the Rav said in the drashah, or if people in general ridicule what the rav stands for, then when the Rav is needed to remedy theirs or their children's problems, he will be powerless – because the parents have undermined his credibility."

R' Plitnick's message was clear to the distraught father. He had come to the Rav for advice to prevent his daughter's inter-marriage, yet, through his criticism of the Rav over the years, he had unwittingly undermined the Rav's sage advice to his daughter. (*Along the Maggid's Journey by Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn)*

L'Maaseh… The Awesome Unity Of Shema Yisroel



Rav Yaakov Galinsky, zt"l, related in a public address that once he was on a railroad platform during wartime. He said, "The Germans were advancing upon my town in Lithuania. I was a young yeshiva student, and many of us had no other plan but to put as much distance between ourselves and the Nazis. Trains were still running, and I purchased a ticket to head eastward, as far as I could get.

"We all figured that we were better off with the Soviets. I got off the train in a strange location, not knowing anyone, with the winds of

war threatening to blow in at any time. Where could I go? I looked for a Jewish face on the railroad platform and found none.

"I did notice a figure at the other end, shining shoes and wearing a cap. Jews commonly wore such caps, but then again, so did many others. I could hardly go over to him and ask him if he were Jewish and give away my identity and vulnerability.

"Without uttering a word, I sat down at the shoeshine stand, and the local fellow began to work, without even establishing eye contact. After a minute or two, I turned my head to the side, and quietly muttered the first line of 'Shema Yisroel' under my breath. I thought to myself that if the fellow was not Jewish, he would hardly take notice.

"The man did not look up, and continued his rubbing and polishing. But the words that escaped his lips in a whisper were unmistakable: 'Baruch Sheim K'vod Malchuso L'olam Va'ed', the familiar response to the first line of the Shema. The fellow took me to his home and hid me for a week before I could find transportation further east. That week enabled me to survive, and to eventually reach Siberia, where I took refuge for the rest of the war."

Rav Galinsky further explained, "Fellow Jews may not know each other, but that Shema immediately established our brotherhood and common faith. It only takes a few words for unrelated Jews to prove themselves brothers. Jews share a history and a belief system that unites them and makes them one. Their unity and common convictions is a mystery to others, and to some, like our enemies, our instant connection arouses jealousy and hatred. But for us it is our lifeblood. It is what keeps up going and enables us to survive throughout the generations. We can only exist through our Achdus!"

("Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights" compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg)

An Incident with The Chofetz Chaim



I heard directly from **Rabbi Mordechai Schwab zt'l** who was known as 'The Tzadik of Monsey' an incredible story from more than 90 years ago. He had gone to see the sainted **Chofetz Chaim** who was quite elderly at that time. When it came time to take leave, he shook hands with the Chofetz Chaim who grasped his hand firmly.

Then the Chofetz Chaim seemed to doze off. The young Rabbi Schwab tried to gently remove his hand. The Chofetz Chaim held on even tighter as he appeared to be slumbering.

Reb Mordechai called out to the sleeping Rabbi that he needed to go to catch his train but his grip was firm and so he remained. After a period of some time he awakened and released the young would-be Tzadik.

Reb Mordechai hurried to town only to discover that he had missed the train. Later it was learned that the train he was hoping to travel on was in one of the worst train accidents in Poland's history.

True kindness is when one gives without feeling himself to be the benefactor. As long as the giver senses superiority, the chesed remains incomplete; perfected chesed resembles the sun, which shines without awareness of its own generosity. ~ Toras Avos.

The Awesome Importance of Answering Amen to a Child's Blessing



This awesome story from the **Kaf Hachaim** (124:30) and **R' Shloma Zalman Auerbach** (Halichos Shlomo end of sefer) reveals how severe the punishment for not answering "*Amein*" to a *Bracha* can be. "Rav Mordechai Yaffo (known as the "*Levush*") once went to study by a great Sephardic Scholar named Rabbi Abohav.

One day Rabbi Abohav's son made a *Beracha* and everyone answered "*Amein*" except for Rabbi Yaffo. Rabbi Abohav was so angry with him that he excommunicated him. After 30 days, Rabbi Yaffo asked forgiveness which Rabbi Abohav granted. Rabbi Abohav then told him the following story depicting the severe punishment for not answering "*Amein,*" explaining that he excommunicated him to save him from a much harsher punishment.

"Before the expulsion of The Jews in Spain in 1492, there were holy Jewish communities there. The evil Torquemada, leader of the Inquisition attempted to expel them many times, but there was one pious Jew whom King Ferdinand respected, and he would always save the Jews from expulsion. After one such edict, the Jews came to the king's friend begging him to intervene on their behalf. He agreed to go to the King, but wished to *daven Mincha* first. They persuaded him to go immediately, since it was a matter of life or death. The King was very happy to see him, and they started conversing about the decree.

Meanwhile, a priest came in and started to bless the King with a long Latin blessing. The Jew, who had not yet *davened Mincha,* withdrew to a corner and started to *daven*, hoping that he would finish *davening* before the priest would conclude his blessing, thus his absence would go unnoticed.

The priest, however, concluded his blessing while the Jew was still *davening Mincha*, and called upon everyone present to answer (the Latin equivalent of) "*Amein*" on his blessing. Everyone answered "*Amein*" except the Jew who was still *davening*.

Afterwards, the priest asked the Jew if he answered "*Amein*" to his blessing. When the pious Jew told him that he didn't answer "*Amein*," the priest flew into a rage. He started ripping his hair out, screaming that now his blessing would not be fulfilled because the Jew didn't answer "*Amein*." When King Ferdinand heard this, he also became furious and ordered the Jew killed with a cruel death and his body sent home. He then, together with Queen Isabella, signed the final edict expelling all the Jews from Spain by Tisha B'Av 1492.

A close friend of the murdered Jew fasted for many days to be allowed to know what sin this pious Jew had committed to deserve such a brutal death. The murdered Jew appeared to his friend in a dream and explained to him that one time, (and only one time), he neglected to answer "*Amein*" to his child's blessing.

Until this incident the Heavenly Court did not prosecute him. However, when this priest got angry over his failure to say "*Amein*," the Heavenly Court focused on this sin and sentenced him to die such a horrible death."

"Rabbi Abohav concluded; "Heaven will forgive you on the condition that you publicize this story, and warn everyone to be careful and always answer '*Amein*'."

Pomegranate Piece Peace By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach



A Moslem neighbor of the rabbi of the Jewish community in Djerba came to him with his tearful story. "My beloved wife," he said, "insisted on paying a visit to her father's home against my wishes. I couldn't budge her but I demanded that the visit be a very brief one. If she would not be back home before I finished eating the pomegranate I had just started, I warned her, she would be divorced.

"This apparently upset her, and she intentionally came back much later. According to Moslem law, she is no longer my wife and the truth is that I want her back."

The rabbi, author of a commentary on *Mesechta Me'ilah* called "*Me'il Yaakov*", came up with a brilliant idea.

"It is well known," he said, "that when one eats a pomegranate, some of the pieces which make up its fruit fall to the floor. Go back home and search the floor under your table if there are any pieces there. If so, you did not complete eating that pomegranate and your divorce declaration is not binding."

The fellow followed these instructions and indeed found some of the pomegranate seeds on the floor. The local Moslem kadi absolved him of his vow to divorce his wife and praised the brilliance of the rabbi whose fame subsequently spread throughout the entire region.

Captured by a Nine-Foot Cobra By Lazer Brody



Sergeant Sammy Adler, USMC, crouched shin-deep in the mud of the Vietnamese jungle less than a mile from the Laotian border. The Vietcong had been smuggling massive amounts of armaments into South Vietnam by way of Laos. His company's mission was to ambush the smugglers, confiscate the arms shipment, and capture whomever they could for interrogation.

An annoying mosquito buzzed in Sammy's ear, and a leech bit his wrist. He didn't dare slap himself, for the slightest noise could reveal his position to an enemy ambush. The mission therefore called for radio silence, which necessitated the three platoons of Company C to maintain eye contact with each other.

A heavy dawn mist descended on the jungle. The fog was so thick that Sammy barely saw Captain John Willis, his company commander, from a distance of three feet. Willis scribbled a note and passed it to Sammy: "Platoon B, 0800, green east". Sammy looked at his watch and nodded in understanding. His orders were to crawl over to Platoon B, one hundred yards to the right, and to inform the platoon leader that at exactly eight a.m., all three platoons would leave their present position and approach the Laotian border due east of them.

Sammy slithered inch by inch in the mud. His life depended on his absolute silence. He looked at his watch again - five minutes after seven. He took a deep breath and continued, first an elbow, then a knee, another elbow, then another knee.

He stopped dead in his tracks: A roundish brown object, the exact size and shape of antipersonnel mine, was right before his nose. The "mine", none other than a turtle, stuck its head out and laughed in Sammy's face, and then crawled away nonchalantly. He exhaled deeply in relief, and continued in the direction of Platoon B.

Forty-five minutes expired; Sammy wiped the mud off the face of his watch and read the time - ten minutes to eight. The fog lifted, but heavy rain drenched the already saturated jungle. All along the seemingly endless one hundred yards to Platoon B's position, Sammy kept track of his crawling pace. He counted four hundred movements of nine inches each, the equivalent of one hundred yards. He should have reached Platoon B by now, but saw nothing other than mud and jungle.

A minute before eight: What a mess, Sammy thought. In sixty seconds, Platoons A and C will be moving east, and Platoon B hasn't been informed yet. Where in the daylights is Platoon B? Where the heck am I?

"Chikachikachik! Chikachikachik!" The cobra's forked tongue almost touched Sammy's nose. The snake snarled, exposing his two deadly fangs, and braced to an attack position. Sammy froze - he thought that the pounding of his pulse could surely be heard for miles away. In a few split seconds, he envisioned his entire life flashing before his eyes. What a pathetic way to go, he lamented, killed by a cobra in the muck and mire of a Vietnamese jungle, ten thousand miles from home. He couldn't ask the cobra for a stay of execution until he had a chance to send a postcard to Mom and Dad.

Sammy's M-16 rifle lay in a futile silence beside him. His commando knife remained idle in its scabbard, as did the three assault grenades in his ammo belt. He didn't dare move a muscle. Beads of salty sweat from his forehead traversed his right eyebrow and then dripped down and stung his right eye. Wiping his forehead was out of the question.

Jungle survival school taught him that only a bronze statue lives through an encounter with an irate cobra. I'm a bronze statue, Sammy thought to himself; I'm a bronze statue.

"Chikachikachik! Chikachikachik!" The cobra continued with his head cocked in a foreboding assault position. The snake seemed to lock itself - only his tongue darted periodically to and fro. The cobra was massive - eight, maybe nine-feet long and no less than ten inches thick. It maintained direct eye contact with Sammy. An entire hour transpired, then another hour.

Eventually, the rain stopped, and the sky cleared. The sun was in the treetops directly overhead, indicating that the time was approximately twelve noon. Sammy heard the staccato of machine-gun fire and the thuds of mortar shells in the distance. The snake wouldn't let Sammy budge; it had been holding the exhausted, nerve-shattered Marine at bay for four hours already.

Every muscle in Sammy's body cried out in pain. His neck was as stiff as granite, his fatigues were soaked, and the unbearable winter dampness seemed to chill the fibers of his soul. Another two hours passed. Each minute was a trial of a lifetime. Sammy kept thinking to himself, "One more minute, one more minute. I'm still alive. Hold on, Adler, one more minute! You can stick it out for another minute. Thank you, G-d, for letting me live another minute."

G-d? When did He come on the scene? Sammy surprised himself. He never prayed in his life. His parents never practiced any form of religion, even though his grandparents were religious Jews. Sammy Adler was raised American - baseball, apple pie, The Marine Corp, and nothing else.

The snake seemed to alter its facial expression from threat to understanding. The minute Sammy thought about G-d, he could have sworn that the snake nodded its head, as if to say, "You're correct, soldier!" At that very instant, the snake uncocked its head,

performed a perfect West Point "at ease" and "about face", and slithered away to the thick of the jungle.

Sammy's head dropped like a two-ton anchor. He broke out in a cathartic sob, and his entire body shuddered for a good five minutes, releasing the pent-up tension from within. He looked at his watch - seventeen hundred hours, or five in the afternoon.

Who could ever believe it? A U.S. Marine had just been held captive for nine hours in the custody of a nine-foot cobra. Were it not for his aching muscles and the leech bites all over his body, he wouldn't have believed it himself.

After several minutes of massaging his legs, he was able to stand. He didn't have much time, for nightfall was less than an hour away. The last nine hours felt like nine years. Sammy, a superb navigator, began walking in the direction of the company bivouac - exhausted mentally and physically, but alive. He arrived at the clearing by the river, in the proximity of his platoon's ambush position, and received the shock of his life:

Captain John Willis and the Marines of Company C's three platoons were slaughtered to the last man in a counter-ambush. The realization of the miracle hit Sergeant Sammy Adler like a ton of bricks: The Al-mighty had sent a gigantic cobra to guard over him. Were it not for the cobra, he would have returned to his company's position and would have been slaughtered too. Nine hours of unimaginable stress and suffering, with a deadly cobra staring him in the face, turned out to be the blessing of his life, a Divine revelation in the jungles of South Vietnam.

Just as Hashem sustains creation despite its flaws, so must a person act with kindness even when others seem undeserving. True chesed imitates Divine patience. ~ Tomer Devorah.

Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld *Rosh Hayeshiva Yeshivas Beis Dovid*



There is a fascinating medrash in this week's parsha that tells us about the brachos that Bilaam gave Klal Yisrael.

Says the medrash, **greater** were the brachos that Bilaam gave Klal Yisrael then the brachos that were given by Yaakov Avinu and Moishe Rabeinu.

That is incredible! What does that mean? Explains **Rav Wolbe Z'tl** that when Yaakov Avinu and Moishe Rabeinu gave a brocho to the shevatim, they added a bit of mussar as well. Why? Because with Bilaam, there was no mussar. It was pure bracha.

The reason is because when Yaakov and Moishe looked at Klal Yisrael, they saw that Klal Yisrael had avoidas Hashem and ahavas Hashem for the Riboino Shel Olam. When they saw this focus, they realised, that there was always scope for improvement and therefore room for criticism.

However, Bilaam's analysis of Klal Yisrael was totally focused on the Riboino Shel Olam's connection to Klal Yisrael alone. As the pasuk says **לֹא־הִבִּ֤יט אָ֙וֶן֙ בְּיַעֲקֹ֔ב וְלֹא־רָ֥אָה עָמָ֖ל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל ה' אֱלֹהָ֣יו עִמּ֔וֹ** 23:21 . Says Rashi – **אפילו מכעיסין וממרים לפניו אינו זז מתוכן** Whatever happens to Klal Yisrael, however much they fall, whatever situation that they find themselves in, He does not move from their midst.

When Bilaam saw this. When he saw that the Riboino shel Olam always stands by Klal Yirael, Bilaam said that this is a nation that is incredibly great.

There is an incredible lesson to learn from this. Sometimes, we get caught up into what we perceive to be our lowly spiritual state. We

could be doing more chessed, davening with more kavana, learning Torah better, we could be doing more mitzvos.

There is always room for improvement, and it is true, but take a moment. Take a moment to appreciate who we are, and what we have. Yes, sometimes we fall. But, despite and regardless of all our deficiencies, The Riboino Shel Olam never discards us or moves from our side. The Shechina that is continually resting amongst us , is incredible. Look at how much Hashem love us and cares about us.

Just like a parent that waited twelve long years to have a child - When that child comes into the world, the parents will love and do anything for that child with everything that they have. The Riboino Shel Olam loves us more than that. He continues to rest His Shechina opon us wherever we are holding.

That is the message that Bilaam is telling us. The way he perceived Klal Yisrael was not the same way that Yaakov and Moishe Rabeinu looked at our connection with Hashem, but with Hashem's connection with us.

Yes, we have all got room for improvement, but we should always remember, and cherish our relationship and the love that The Riboino Shel Olam pours upon us. ***Have a great Shabbos!***

Hashem appears distant, but there is in fact no one closer than Him… The space between heaven and earth is vast, and He is high above His universe, but a person can enter shul, stand near the pulpit, and pray in a whisper, and Hashem hears his prayer, like a person whispering in his friend's ear…

Could there be a רִבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם any closer than that? ~ Rabbi Simlai, Talmud Yerushalmi (Berachos 9:1)

Rabbi Pesach Krohn - Project Mesorah



In this week's sedra, we have a very interesting pasuk that **Rav Pam** mentioned regularly when he spoke about shidduchim.

We all know the story that Bilaam went with his donkey and he wanted to curse the Yidden. The posuk tells us **וַיִּתְיַצַּב מַלְאַךְ ה' בַּדֶּרֶךְ לְשָׂטָן לוֹ** - that the malach of Hashem was there and the donkey saw it. But Bilaam did not see it. **לשטן לו** means to oppose him. In other words, to stop the donkey from going.

Rashi says something very interesting **מלאך של רחמים היה והיה רוצה למנעו מלחטוא**.This was an angel of mercy, he wanted to prevent Bilaam from sinning and coming to an untimely death. Bilaam didn't look at that way. He looked at it as though the Satan had got in the way.

Rav Pam said that many times when a shidduch appears to not be working out, or the sale of a house is not working out, or a business deal is not working out, a person might think, "Oh vey, the Satan has got mixed up in here, and that is why I can't accomplish it."

The answer is, no, it is not the Satan. It is the malach shel rachamim. Hashem is telling us that this is not for you. This is not the shidduch, not the job, not the house. Therefore, if you tried your best and it doesn't work out – walk away from it. Just realize that Hashem is telling you that this is not for you.

Torah Tavlin

R' Yeshaya Halevi Hurvitz zt"l (Shelah Hakadosh) would say: **וְעַתָּה֩ לְכָה־נָּ֨א אָרָה־לִ֜י** "*And now come, I pray you, and curse me this people.*"

The exact words that Balak used were **'ארה לי'** - 'Curse me', words which can also be interpreted to mean that he himself should be cursed, which is exactly what eventually happened. Hashem decided to grant his insidious request in its literal sense and the one whom Balak asked to be harmed was truly harmed.

One must always think before speaking and pay attention to the words he uses."

Chacham Rabbeinu Chayim ben Attar zt"l (Ohr HaChayim) would say:

וגם בלק הלח לדרכו **24:25** - Where did Balak go? Balak was not a native Moabite, but a Midianite. Fearing the Jewish people, and cognizant of Balak's intense hatred of the Jews, the Moavim invited him to become their king.

Upon hearing from Bilaam that the Jews posed no present threat, and only in the times of King David would they suffer losses, the Moavim concluded that there was no longer any need for the arch anti-Semite to be their king. Consequently, Balak was forced to resign and **הלח לדרכו** - he returned to his native country, Midian, so that his reign was short-lived."

"There is no such thing as a sincere prayer that goes unanswered. Any heartfelt request addressed to Hashem, must be answered. – Rest assured, that every prayer will be answered somehow and someday." ~ The Steipler Gaon.

The following story occurred many years ago, and caused a great stir in the community at the time. A renowned ba'al chessed and lay leader who lived for many years in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn, was killed one day in a tragic car accident. When news got out, people were stunned. Thousands of Jews participated in his funeral, many of whom had benefitted from his assistance and advice.



A number of prominent local Rabbanim delivered tearful eulogies, praising the countless acts of kindness that the man performed in his lifetime, with great mesiras nefesh and a love for every single Jew. There was not a dry eye in the crowd. After the hespedim, the funeral procession began to slowly make its way through the streets of Boro Park as streams of people continued to join in on all sides. As is customary in some circles, the procession with the aron paused next to each shul and Beis Medrash, and Kaddish was recited by the niftar's children. This continued on for a very long time, until the aron was taken to the cemetery for its final internment.

Meanwhile, the funeral of another Jew who had also been killed in the same tragic car accident was taking place. This Jew was completely secular; he was a Holocaust survivor who had distanced himself from Torah and mitzvos. A small group of friends and relatives gathered for the funeral, which was over rather quickly. The moment the few eulogies were completed, members of the chevra kaddisha entered the room, and prepared to take the aron with the secular Jew for burial. Suddenly, they let out cries of dismay. A terrible error had occurred. The chevra kaddisha had somehow mixed up the two bodies in the funeral parlour, and the

Holocaust survivor was placed in the coffin that was winding its way through the streets of Boro Park. The well-known askan and ba'al chessed was lying right there before them!

The most senior member of the chevra kaddisha could not remember such a painful error in his forty years of doing this holy work. Quickly, and without delay, they rushed out with the coffin to try to remedy the mistake before it was too late. They placed the aron with the lay leader in a car and speedily drove through the streets of the city, hoping and praying they could reach the cemetery before the others had completed the burial.

Boruch Hashem, they arrived at the field just as the family and many friends and admirers who had come, were preparing to lower the body into the ground. The senior member of the chevra kadisha ran out of the car yelling, "Wait, wait! There's been a mistake; we have to switch the aron!" Shocked, everybody stopped what they were doing, and the mistake was explained.

Immediately, the switch was made, and the burial resumed. Hespedim and parting words were repeated, the niftar was buried, and Kaddish was recited again. This story made waves throughout the world and was discussed endlessly during the days of shivah. People could not understand how a simple Jew, a secular Holocaust survivor, should have been accorded such great honour and fanfare.

Slowly, the pieces of the puzzle were put together, and the hashgacha of the story became clear. The Holocaust survivor who was zocheh to such an honorable levaya was raised in a religious family which stringently fulfilled the Torah and mitzvos. This man had learned in yeshivos and grew up fully observant. When the war broke out, his entire family was deported to Auschwitz where he lost everything. Miraculously, he survived. People came forth and remembered that during the war, and even after his release from the camp, the niftar was extremely diligent to bring many who had died to a Jewish burial. This mitzvah was what kept him going.

Wherever and whenever he could, he would gather a minyan of Jews to say Kaddish. It was almost impossible to find ten Jews who would agree to attend and say Kaddish each time someone died in the ghetto or in the camps, and it was extremely risky, but this Jew put his life on the line each and every time.

Unfortunately, in the course of time, due to his great suffering, he lost his faith along the way, and eventually abandoned Torah and mitzvah observance, r"l. He married and moved to America and lived a life devoid of Yiddishkeit.

However, no good deed is left unrewarded and when his time came to leave this world, Hashem repaid him, and in the zechus of his mesiras nefesh, he was zocheh to merit thousands of Jews answering the Kaddish for him. (Shiru Lamelech)

Margaret Thatcher



When asked about her most meaningful accomplishment, Margaret Thatcher, the "Iron Lady" of British politics, did not typically mention serving in the British government, defeating the Argentine invasion of the Falklands, taming runaway inflation, or toppling the Soviet Union. The woman who reshaped British politics and served as prime minister from 1979 to 1990 often said that her greatest single accomplishment was helping save a young Jewish Austrian girl from the Nazis.

On the morning of the 12th of March, 1938, the German Wehrmacht crossed the border into Austria. The troops were greeted by cheering

Austrians with Nazi salutes, Nazi flags, and flowers. This was officially referred to as the Anschluss, the term used to describe the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany. The campaign against the Jews of Austria began immediately after the Anschluss. They were herded through the streets of Vienna, their homes and shops were plundered. Jewish men and women were forced to wash away pro-independence slogans painted on the streets of Vienna. The Nazis dissolved Jewish organizations and institutions, hoping to force Jews to emigrate.

Their plan succeeded. By the end of 1941, 130,000 Jews had left Vienna. They left behind all of their property but were forced to pay the Reich Flight Tax. The majority of the 65,000 Jews who stayed in Vienna eventually became victims of the Holocaust - little more than 2,000 survived.

In 1938, Edith Muhlbauer, a 17-year-old Jewish girl, the daughter of a wealthy Austrian banking family, wrote to Muriel Roberts, Edith's pen pal and the future prime minister's older sister. Edith was terrified. The Nazis had begun rounding up the first of Vienna's Jews after the Anschluss, and Edith and her family worried they might be next. They were rich and influential, just the type of people the Nazis targeted in their determination to rid the world of its Jewish influence. She concluded her letter with a furtive plea, asking if the Roberts family might help her escape Hitler's Austria.

The father of Muriel and Margaret, was a grocer in a small town. They lived in a cold water flat above the grocery with an outhouse; the Roberts did not have the time or the money to bring Edith to their home. So, Margaret Roberts, then 12 and her sister Muriel, 17, set about raising funds to help. With the determination that later set her apart from her peers and characterized her tenure as prime minister of Great Britain, Margaret and her sister were successful in raising money and bringing their new friend to the British Isle. Edith stayed with the Roberts family - as well as more than a dozen

other Rotary families - for the next two years, until she joined her relatives in South America. During the months she was in the Roberts' home, Edith bunked in Margaret's room and the two became fast friends.

Edith Muhlbauer left an impression on the future prime minister. "She was seventeen, tall and graceful, evidently from a well-to-do family in Austria," Thatcher later wrote in her memoir. But the most important thing Margaret learned from Edith was to embrace and assist those who were downtrodden. "She told us what it was like to live as a Jew under an anti-Semitic regime. One thing Edith reported particularly stuck in my mind: The Jews, she said, were being made to scrub the streets!" For Margaret Thatcher, who believed in meaningful work, this was as much a waste as it was an outrage. No human being should ever be treated in this manner.

Margaret Thatcher never forgot the lesson: "Never hesitate to do whatever you can, for you may save a life," she would tell audiences, after Edith had been located, alive and well, in Brazil. Had the Roberts family not intervened, Edith recalled years later, "I would have been forced to stay in Vienna and they would have killed me and my entire family."

When Thatcher visited Yad Vashem during a historic, first visit to Israel by a British prime minister in 1986, she was visibly shaken as she stood in front of a photo of a German soldier shooting a Jewish mother and child. She exclaimed, "It is so terrible. Everyone should come and see it so that they never forget. I am not quite sure whether the new generation really knows what we are fighting against." Thatcher spoke up with courage and strength. When she believed in an ideal, like saving a terrified Jew from Austria, she was not afraid to follow through, even if she had to stand up against great odds to do so.



Rabbeinu Bechaye zt"l writes 24:16 **נאם בלעם בנו בעור ונאם הגבר שתם העין** - When the wicked Bilaam spoke Hashem's words of prophecy, he referred to himself as a **גבר** - rather than the more common term **איש** or **אדם**. A **גבר** can mean a man, but it can also be translated as a rooster.



Just as a rooster crows at dawn for it alone is knowledgeable of the exact time when the day begins, Bilaam too, was knowledgeable in the exact time when to utter a curse. Just as a rooster crows seven times a day, Bilaam uttered seven prophecies. Just as a rooster is not accepted as a korban in the Bais HaMikdash for it mates with any species of bird, Bilaam too, was a lowly man of bestiality with many species. Just as a rooster stands on one foot for extended periods of time when it crows, Bilaam too, had only one healthy foot to stand on."

22:22 **וַיִּתְיַצַּב מַלְאַךְ ה' בַּדֶּרֶךְ לְשָׂטָן לוֹ וְהוּא רֹכֵב עַל־אֲתֹנוֹ**

The Zohar Hakadosh teaches that Bilaam was punished for, among other things, hurrying to do evil against the Jewish Nation: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, 'Wicked one, you are hurrying and preparing your gear and hastening to leave my authority. I promise on your life, that you and your donkey will remain in my control.'

Soon, 'the Angel of Hashem stood on the road as an adversary.' What is the meaning of 'stood' (**ויתיצב**)?

Rabbi Aba said, 'He deviated from his usual skill and adopted another skill, because he was an Angel of Mercy and not of Judgment, against

Bilaam. That is what Rabbi Shimon meant when he said, '*The wicked transform mercy into judgment*.' Therefore, it is written, 'As an adversary,' but not for another, because that was not his wont, since he (the angel) was of the Attribute of Mercy."



At the outset of World War II, **the Brisker Rav, R' Yitzchok Zev Halevi Soloveitchik zt"l**, fled from the city of Brisk. While vacationing in the town of Krenitz, the German army attacked and invaded Poland, and he was unable to return to Brisk. Even if he could, he understood that as soon as the Germans entered his city, their first order of business would be to hunt down the Rav, and likely his family, as well. Under tremendous stress and amidst a ferocious bombing campaign by Nazi warplanes, the Rav made his way to Warsaw, and later moved to Vilna, where he was looked upon for guidance by so many suffering Jews.

He was fortunate to survive the Holocaust together with three of his sons. His wife, mother and three small children, who were in Brisk when the war broke out and were unable to leave, perished **ר"ל**.

The journey from Warsaw to Vilna was fraught with great danger and uncertainty. Trains were not running since all the rail lines had been bombed, and the only means of travel available was by horse and wagon. So it was, that the Brisker Rav and his sons set out for Vilna, on bombed-out roads filled with terrified refugees, in a horse-drawn wagon. They were amongst a group of wagons traveling to Vilna.

When their caravan reached the outskirts of Kobrin, the Brisker Rav looked out the window and saw that it was getting late in the day. Immediately, he announced that it was time to daven. However,

rather than daven inside the wagon, in which he found it impossible to concentrate properly, he asked the wagon driver to wait for a few minutes while they davened at the side of the road. The other passengers immediately started to complain that he was endangering them by insisting on this delay. "On the contrary," answered R' Yitzchok Zev, "I won't delay anyone. If you wish, continue on to Kobrin, and I'll finish my prayers and follow after you on foot."

The Rav was adamant in his determination, and nobody was going to oppose the Brisker Rav. With a great deal of respect and fear of the Brisker Rav, all the passengers in the wagon waited until he finished his prayers - which took even longer than usual due to his concentration and devotion.

A short time later, they entered Kobrin. The city was totally deserted. Not a soul was in the street. Finally, a Jew emerged from a hiding place. "You are quite fortunate that you did not come any earlier," he told them. "The Germans were just here and assembled all the refugees and took them all away. They left the city minutes ago with their captives."

Everyone exclaimed that the Brisker Rav had performed a miracle. "It was no miracle at all," he replied, "but a purely halachic decision. I asked myself why should I be in such a hurry to get to Kobrin when it's unclear that the danger there is less than it was in Warsaw. And if there was no reason to rush to Kobrin, I could see no reason to daven sitting in a wagon rather than standing up. These were my only considerations.

When someone asks only what the halacha demands of him, Hashem responds, 'No one who obeys Me suffers for it.'" (Devarim Rabbah 4:5) Many people think that the Brisker Rav's many stringencies stemmed from an anxious personality. This incident, however, disproves this theory. Would a nervous person have stopped a wagon in mid-journey with perfect composure, while German warplanes flew

overhead dropping bombs, just as he was about to enter a seeming haven?

The only concern the Brisker Rav ever had was whether he was fulfilling the will of his Creator to the fullest.

24:5 מַה־טֹּבוּ אׇהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל

At the end of her life, Rebbetzin Miriam Mann of Bnei Brak was flown to America to undergo a vital operation. When she arrived in the hospital, a nurse handed her a hospital gown and told her to change into the revealing garment and wait in a large room filled with other patients, male and female, all of whom were awaiting surgery. Rebbetzin Mann could not bring herself to do it.

In response to her family's pleas, she wept, "I have been careful about tznius throughout my life; how can I violate that principle now?"



A senior surgeon passed by and found the rebbetzin crying. When he learned the reason for her distress he was impressed. He ordered the nurse to put the rebbetzin in the "Presidential suite." He explained to the thankful rebbetzin, "We have a suite that is reserved for the president and other VIP patients, where they can prepare for operations in privacy. With your sense of commitment, you are certainly as deserving as any VIP patient we have ever treated!" (*Nefesh Chaya*)

R' Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk ZT"L (Meshech Chochma) would say: כִּי הִכִּיתָנִי זֶה שָׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים –



Rashi interprets the use of the words שָׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים by the donkey as a rebuke to Bilaam by saying, 'How do you expect to uproot a nation that observes the three holidays of pilgrimage (עולה רגל) to Jerusalem?'

The understanding is based on Chazal's explanation of the posuk: שלש פעמים בשנה יראה - three times a year the people shall be seen (יראה), which means that when Bnei Yisroel do the mitzvah of Oleh Regel, they envision Hashem's Countenance at some level.

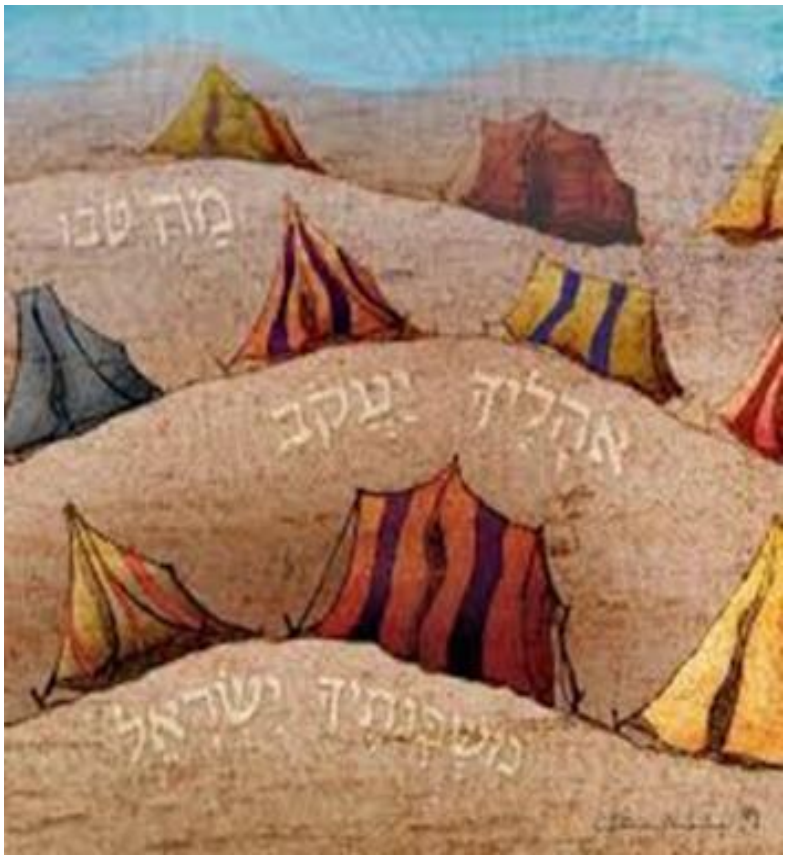
If so, said the donkey, how does Bilaam, who cannot even see an angel, a mere messenger of Hashem, expect to overpower Bnei Yisroel, an entire Nation who merits seeing a level of Hashem's Countenance?"

Horav Mordechai Gifter זצ"ל was in Baltimore for Shabbos by his children. After the Shabbos seudah, he saw that the some bochurim were coming to talk to him. Rav Gifter told them that instead of coming to talk to him, they should rather spend their time talking to Abaya and Rava by learning gemara in the beis medrash.

You cannot change others. You can only inspire them to change themselves.

Torah Tavlin - R' Chaim Yosef Kofman zt"l

מַה־טֹּבוּ אׇהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל 24:5



Did you ever wonder why we begin our day by reciting the words of Bilaam, "**מַה־טֹּבוּ אׇהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב**" when the Torah has so many other berachos to choose from? What is it about this posuk that gives us the will to start a new day?

The Mishna in Avos (5:22) teaches that Bilaam had an "**עין הרע**" (evil eye.) - This means that he looked at the world in a non-generous fashion, always wishing bad upon others and looking to curse them. He was a very powerful man and for this reason, he was hired by Balak to cripple Klal Yisroel.

Hashem, in His great mercy, would not allow Bilaam's ayin hara to manifest itself, and instead of cursing, he blessed them. Rashi tells us that on his last try, Bilaam raised his eyes and saw Bnei Yisroel: "Their doorways were not aligned, one opposite the other."

Many meforshim explain this to mean that he saw their great modesty and it moved him to bless the people. Another way to explain this is that Bilaam, saw how the Jewish people were never aligned against each other.

In other words, rather than look at each other with an ayin hara - wishing bad upon a fellow Jew or coveting what the other person had - each Yid was happy for his friend, each Yid "fargined" his neighbour, and what was in his friend's tent belonged to him and no

one else. Not one Jew looked at his friend and felt "opposite him" - they loved one another with a Lev Tov and an Ayin Tov.

Upon seeing such a sight which was foreign to him, Bilaam could not help but comment, "How beautiful are your tents, Yaakov." The idea of joy, love and being truly happy for another Jew is all rolled up into that one sentence.

Is it any wonder that we begin our day with this mission statement? "Who is rich? One who is happy with his lot." Whose lot? Your friend's. Be happy with the lot that your friend has!



If Bilaam had the ability to find that precise moment and eradicate Klal Yisroel, why did he wait until now? Why didn't he do this earlier, while still in Midian? What exactly did he need Balak for?

Chacham Dovid Pinto Shlit'a explains that Bilaam required Balak's participation - namely that he should respond Amen - to enable the curse to take effect. The last two letters of the name בל**עם** together with the last letters of the name **בלק** spell out "**עמלק**".

The first letters of both their names spell out the word "**בלבל**" which means to confound or confuse. Bilaam recognized that in order to do what Amalek was unable to do earlier during the sojourn of Bnei Yisroel, it was necessary to "cool off" the intense spirituality of the Jewish people as well as confuse (**לבלבל**) them into sinning.

By performing both these actions, and by employing Balak to assist him with these tasks, he felt he would be invincible.



Chacham Rabbeinu Yitzchok Abohav ZT"L (Menoras HaMaor) would say: מָה אֶקֹּב לֹא קַבֵּה קל וּמָה אֶזְעֹם לֹא זָעַם ה' "'*How can I curse if G-d has not cursed? How can I be angered if G-d is not angered?*' 23:8

In Hebrew, the expression, "I curse" is spelled **אקב**.

What do these letters conceal? The three letters that make up this word are the initials of **אַמן, קַדיש, בַּרכו**.

In other words, the wicked Bilaam is saying, 'How can I curse the Jewish people, for several times a day they say Amen, Kadish, and Borchu?'

This is our strength, and it allows us to remain constantly blessed."

Chacham Yosef Chayim of Baghdad ZT"L (Ben Ish Chai) would say:

מַה־טֹּבוּ אׇהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל 'How good are your tents, Yaakov, your dwelling places, Yisroel.'



The first word of the posuk - **מַה** - signifies humility, as Moshe and Aharon said, **ונחנו מה** - 'What are we?' (**שמות טז"ז**) Thus, the posuk implies that the most effective way to turn one's home into a pleasant, peaceful abode is to practice humility, so that no one member of the family should raise himself or herself over any other.

What is the best way to bring the Shechinah into family life? Modesty, through which Hashem brings His Shechinah to reside among the people in the family."

Rabbi Gamliel Rabinowitz ZT"L (Tiv HaEmunah) would say: "On his way to curse Klal Yisroel, Bilaam struck his donkey several times for acting in unusual ways: when the donkey veered from the road, when the donkey pressed his leg against a wall, and when the donkey finally crouched down and refused to go on.



The claim against Bilaam is that he should have realized that these out-of-the-ordinary occurrences were messages directly from Hashem Yisbarach, instead of assuming that they were everyday natural occurrences.

Similarly, a person who does not think and acknowledge that everything that is happening around him is a message direct from Hakadosh Boruch Hu - is in fact sinning."

Torah Tavlin - From The Wellsprings of R' Guttman - Ramat Shlomo

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־בִּלְעָם לֹא תֵלֵךְ עִמָּהֶם לֹא תָאֹר אֶת־הָעָם כִּי בָרוּךְ הוּא: 22:12

The Gemara in Makkos (י:) describes how Hashem told Bilaam not to go with the messengers of Balak to curse the Jews. From here the Gemara learns out the famous dictum, words by which a person should live his life: - "In the way that a person wants to go, he is led." Hashem does not interfere with a human being's free will.

Whereas all life circumstances are predestined in all situations, in the case of good and evil, man is given the freedom to choose. And then, based on the direction he chooses Hashem helps him along.



The Mashgiach, **R' Wolbe** ZT"L taught that whatever a person truly wants in life, whether it is spiritual or even physical in nature, he will usually obtain it because nothing stands in the way of a strong will. **R' Avigdor Miller** ZT"L explains that one who desires and seeks wisdom is helped from above and that the amount of heavenly assistance he receives is in direct proportion to the sincerity of the seeker.

The Alter of Novardok ZT"L was known to say: "There is no such thing as I cannot. One who says he can't, is simply lacking ratzon (will). That is why he thinks that he can't!"

R' Zelig Pliskin writes that a "lack of spiritual accomplishment does not come from a lack of ability but from a lack of will. Therefore, the most important thing for a person to work on is to intensify his will to do the will of Hashem. May Hakadosh Boruch Hu give us the ability, insight, wherewithal, and opportunity to truly fulfil His ratzon.

"I keep many pictures of my children and grandchildren on the walls of my home. I want to be able to constantly look at them and remember the great kindness which the Almighty has bestowed upon me!" ~ R' Moshe Schwab zt"l.



R' Yaakov Yosef of Polonye ZT"L (Toldos Yaakov Yosef) would say: "When can we truly merit the fulfilment of **מַה־טֹּבוּ אׇהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל** - 'How good are your tents Yaakov'?

Only when these tents - Shuls and Batei Medrashim - become **משכנותיך ישראל** - 'Your dwelling places, Yisroel' – places where Jews actually come and dwell. A synagogue should not be built solely for its beauty, standing empty a whole week and only with difficulty finding a minyan on Shabbos and Yom Tov."

Reb Shmuel Donn-Remez [לעילוי נשמת יהושע ע"ה בן ברוך הלוי נ"י]



וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ כֹּה אָמַר בָּלָק בֶּן־צִפּוֹר **אַל־נָא תִמָּנַע מֵהֹלֵךְ אֵלָי** 22:16:

The messengers of Balak said to Bilaam, "Balak says, "Do not withhold from traveling to me."

The Ben Ish Chai explains: Balak needed Bilaam's help and his powers of Tumah to defeat Klal Yisroel.

Now what did Bilaam have in terms of destructive power that Balak did not have? One of the Satan's greatest tactics is to infiltrate the last letters of the names of the Avos and use them against Klal Yisroel **ר"ל**.

אברהם יצחק יעקב ישראל

בלק had only 3 letters. He was missing the **ם**, and that is what he wanted from **בלעם**.

Balak wanted to use the **ם** from Bilaam's name together with the three letters of his own name to destroy the Bnei Yisroel.

All this is hinted to right here in our Pasuk…Balak sends a message to Bilaam begging him as follows: אַל־נָ֣א תִמָּנַ֔ע מִ֥-הַלָּ֖ךְ אֵלָֽי. Please do not withhold the "מ" in your name… travel to me! Let us add your "מ" to my "ב ל ק" and try to defeat this nation!



In the winter of the year 1592, in the court of Emperor Rudolph II, there were some ministers who were envious of the great respect and honour that the famed **Mahara"l M'Prague**, **R' Yehudah Loewy ZT"L** was enjoying.

Although the Emperor had never actually met the Mahara"l, both Jews and non-Jews knew that he was a holy man and they respected him greatly. As a result, the benevolent Emperor was predisposed to deal kindly with the Jews.

The courtiers of the Emperor planned to drive the Rabbi out of Prague and send him and all his flock into exile. Knowing that the Emperor would not immediately agree to anything of the sort, they enlisted the help of the Empress, who promised to induce the Emperor to carry out the plan.

That evening, the Empress handed papers containing the harsh decree to her husband and demanded that he sign them at once. At first, the Emperor hesitated, but when his wife persisted, he told

her that he would "sleep on it," and deal with the papers in the morning. That night, the Emperor had a strange dream. He was waging war but was captured and placed in prison. For many years the Emperor remained in prison, living on bread and water, no one taking any interest in him.

One day an old Jew passed the prison. The Emperor called out to him. "I am the Emperor," the prisoner exclaimed. "Don't you recognize me?" "You have changed, Sire," the old man replied. "I swear to you that I am the Emperor Rudolph. Please get me out of here," the prisoner begged desperately. The old man knocked at the prison wall with his cane, and immediately there appeared a passage in the wall. The Emperor walked out and went with the old man to his home. "You cannot return to the palace in this state," the old man told him, I will send for a barber and a tailor to groom you and to prepare royal robes for you."

With tears of gratitude rolling down his cheeks, the Emperor asked, "How can I ever thank you?" The Emperor awoke and felt the hot tears on his cheeks. His thoughts turned to his strange dream.

"Only the great Rabbi Loewy, could explain the meaning of my dream," the Emperor thought. "Request Chief Rabbi Loewy for an audience immediately!" As soon as the Mahara"l entered, the Emperor recognized him as the old Jew he had seen in his dream. "Please tell me about my dream," the Emperor said, challenging the Mahara"l. Instead, the Mahara"l replied, "What do you have under your pillow?" The Emperor now remembered that the Empress had placed the decree under his pillow, to be ready for his signature first thing in the morning.

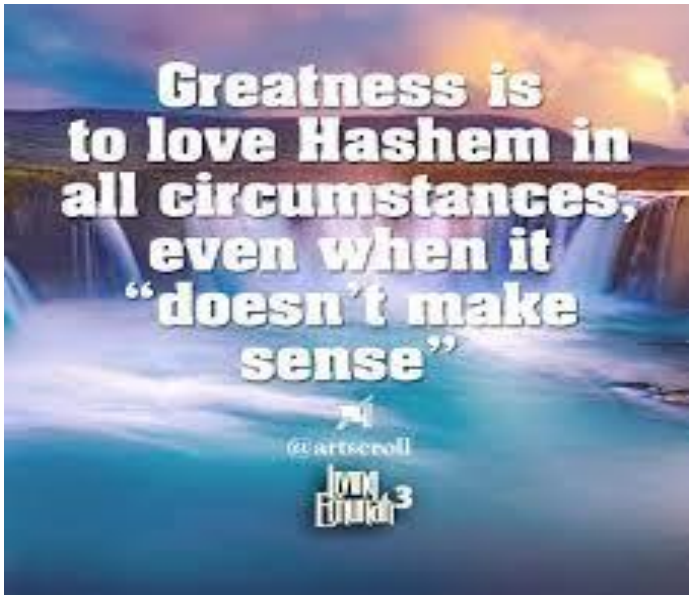
Awed by the presence and insight of the Mahara"l, Emperor Rudolph announced, "I promise you no harm will befall the Jews of Prague. "He immediately tore up the papers containing the cruel decree.

Rabbi Yehoshua Alt 24,000 Gone



Tosafos [Avoda Zara 4b], tells us that Bilaam could have cursed us in the moment (**רגע**) Hashem gets angry with the word **כלם** - destroy them. Although the curses of Bilaam were unsuccessful, they were successful in that there was a plague in which 24,000 died. This is alluded to in **כ ל ם** as if we multiply the letters with each other, we get to this number. That is, 20 (**כ**) multiplied by 30 (**ל**) is 600. Multiplying that by 40 (**מ**), we get 24,000!

Pardas Yehuda- Rabbi Yehuda Z. Klitnick



Why were the Yidden concerned about the Manna? **וַיְדַבֵּר הָעָם בֵּאלֹקִים וּבְמֹשֶׁה לָמָּה הֶעֱלִיתֻנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לָמוּת בַּמִּדְבָּר כִּי אֵין לֶחֶם וְאֵין מַיִם וְנַפְשֵׁנוּ קָצָה בַּלֶּחֶם הַקְּלֹקֵל**: The people spoke against Hashem and against Moshe, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in this desert, for there is no bread and no water, and we are disgusted with this rotten bread."

The commentaries ask, what was the legitimacy of the complaint of "for there is no bread and no water", when they had the Manna and water from the Well of Miriam? Secondly: Why did the Yidden term the Manna as "rotten bread"?

To give a better insight to this Parsha, Rashi quotes from the Sifri 88b and the Gemarra Sota 75b ***With this rotten bread***: Since the manna was absorbed into their limbs [and not excreted from their bowels], they called it rotten They said, "*This manna will eventually swell up in our stomachs." Is there any mortal who ingests but does not excrete?*

However, this insight adds much difficulty, as the Yidden were now close to the end of 40 years in the dessert, and they consumed the Manna all these years, and they did not get sick. Why would they expect that now they would suddenly become sick from the Manna?

The Rebbe of Pashischa has a brilliant insight to our difficulties: Chazal teach us that after Miriam passed away, her well stopped giving out water. Bamidbar 20:2 states: The congregation had no water; so they assembled against Moshe and Aharon. Rashi quotes: From here we learn that all the forty years that they had the well, it was in Miriam's merit. — [Ta'anith 9a], Afterwards, Posuk 11 states: Moshe raised his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, when an abundance of water gushed forth, and the congregation and their livestock drank. Now the Yidden had their water supply from the rock.

The Rebbe continues, the Yidden realized that the water from the Well of Miriam was very holy, that its waters were the cure for the Manna, and as such were not worried about getting sick from the Manna. However, now that the Well of Miriam ceased to give water, and they had to drink water from the rock, the Yidden were worried that this water was not as holy, and would not be the cure for the Manna, hence, they became frightened that now they would become sick from the Manna. That is why they complained **אין לחם**, we have no physical bread, only spiritual bread, and we may get sick, since **ואין מים** we don't have the holy water from the Well of Miriam, therefore the bread is **לחם הקלקל** "rotten bread".

This explains very well this Parsha according to the Rebbe of Pashischa. This complaint was ill received, as Hashem was upset at the lack of Emunah. The Torah states: Hashem sent against the people the venomous snakes, and they bit the people, and many people of Israel died. Then Hashem told Moshe "Make yourself a serpent and put it on a pole and let whoever is bitten look at it and live. This was to rectify the sin of Emunah, as now the Yidden realized that Hashem only does good things for the Yidden, and with the power of Emunah, of looking at the serpent, did they live.

This is a powerful message: whatever happens in the world, is only good for the people. Emunah in Hashem, is the only solution to navigate through rough terrains and to get on the right track of peaceful tranquillity.



During the early part of the Second World War, twenty-four Italian rabbis were arrested by the Italian Arma dei Carabinieri, a Gendarmerie-like military corps loyal to Benito Mussolini, and were about to be sent to a death camp in Nazi-occupied Europe, and certain death. When news of the arrests reached **R' Aharon Kotler zt"l**, Rosh Yeshivah of Beis Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey, he turned to the well-known activist, **Irving Bunim z"l**, and asked him if he knew of anyone who could intercede on behalf of these 24 rabbis.

Having nowhere else to turn for help, Irving Bunim suggested, perhaps in jest, the Italian Mafia in New York. R' Aharon urged Bunim to contact them immediately. Irving Bunim had numerous contacts all over the city and he managed to send a message to the mob. He said it was a matter of life and death, and he would be indebted to them for this favour.

A meeting was arranged. Bunim was surprised when R' Aharon told him that he wished to be present at this meeting with an Italian Mafia chieftain in New York City. On the appointed day, R' Aharon

and Bunim went to meet the Godfather of the Mafia, Joe Bonanno. They arrived at an impressive and intimidating setting, with Bonanno, the boss, surrounded by a number of his fierce underlings.

R' Aharon did not speak English, so it was Irving Bunim who detailed the serious problem of the 24 rabbis trapped in Italy. The Mafia chief was quiet for a moment. Then, he asked Bunim, "Who is the elderly man sitting next to you?" Bunim replied, "His name is Rabbi Aharon Kotler. He is the 'Godfather' of the Jewish people." This sparked smiles all around the table. "Really?" asked the Mafia chief. "A Jewish Godfather?" "Yes!" replied Mr. Bunim emphatically. He knew that it was important to show strength of purpose to Bonanno.



Joe Bonanno, the Mafia boss of New York City said, "Tell him I want a blessing." Irving Bunim turned to R' Aharon and in Yiddish told him, "Ehr vill a bracha fun dem Rov." (He wants a blessing from the rabbi). Instantly, R' Aharon replied with feeling, "Zug em, ehr zul leiben lang un shtarben in bet." Bunim turned back to the Mafia chief, Joe Bonnano, and told him, "The rabbi blesses you with long life and that when you pass away, you should die in your bed." (Mob bosses were often assassinated on the street and never reached old age.) Upon hearing this, the Mafia chief smiled.

The tension in the room lightened, and he replied, "I like that," and promised within two weeks to arrange the freedom of the 24 rabbis stuck in Italy. To his credit, the rabbis were quickly freed.

In 1968, five years after R' Aharon had passed away, a shiny black stretch limousine pulled up in front of the Lakewood Yeshivah in N.J. Two Italian men, impeccably dressed in the latest fashion, with slicked-back hair and a jaunt in their step, got out of the car and

boldly walked into the main office of the yeshivah. They wish to speak to Rabbi Kotler, they said. Someone quickly went to call the Rosh Yeshivah, **R' Shneur Kotler zt"l**. He came over and introduced himself. "No, not you," said one the two Italian guys. "We are looking for an older man - the dean of the school." "That was my father," said R' Shneur, "but he passed away a number of years ago. Can I be of assistance?"

The Italian men looked at each other and shrugged. Why not, they thought. The older one began to explain that they are the Bonanno brothers from New York City, and that their father, Joe Bonanno, who has been running the "family business" since 1931, was retiring. He always attributed his long life to the blessing of the saintly man from New Jersey. Now that he was handing over the reins of the business to them, they came here for the same blessing.

"I'm sorry," said R' Shneur. "My father was a great man, and he could do that, but I am not on that high level." The two brothers were disappointed. They bid farewell to R' Shneur and left without another word. Joe Bonanno, also known as Joey "Bananas" was a legend in the Mafia world. For using his extensive influence to rescue 24 Italian rabbis from the Nazis and certain death, and with R' Aharon Kotler's blessing of a long life, the Mafia Godfather lived to 97 years old. He died on May 11, 2002, in Tucson, Arizona - in his own bed.

Pearls of Wisdom… A Word for the Ages

The Gemara teaches (Megilah 6b), "If someone says 'I have tried, but I have not achieved anything,' do not believe him." Why is this?

The Kotzker Rebbe answers that simply trying to do something is achieving and is an accomplishment. It is the effort one puts forward that counts, not necessarily the results!

Reb Shmuel Donn-Remez [לעילוי נשמת יהושע ע״ה בן ברוך הלוי נ״י]

25:1 **וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּשִּׁטִּים וַיָּחֶל הָעָם לִזְנוֹת אֶל־בְּנוֹת מוֹאָב**

" And the Yidden settled in Shitim and the nation began to engage in immorality with the daughters of Moav"

The Medrash tells us that Bilaam was the one who caused this terrible episode to occur. Before taking leave of Balak, he advised him as follows: As hard as you try to destroy the Bnei Yisroel, you will not succeed as Hashem is on their side. However, Hashem does not tolerate immorality. Entice the Yidden to sin with **זנות** and they will lose the protection of Hashem. Then you will succeed in destroying them.

We do not see openly in the peskim that this was all the plot of Bilaam, but the **שמנה לחמו** finds a remez in the Sof Tevois…

וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּשִּׁטִּים וַיָּחֶל הָעָם

These letters are the Gematria of **בִּלְעָם**

רֵאשִׁית גּוֹיִם עֲמָלֵק - "Amalek is the first among nations" (24:20)

Amalek was the first nation to attack Bnei Yisrael and thus represents the epitome of evil. Appropriately, **R' Shlomo David Yehoshua Weinberg z"l hy"d (the "Slonimer Rebbe"**; killed in the Holocaust) taught that the above phrase alludes to a common trait which is one of the foremost tools of the evil inclination.

The initial letters of the phrase **רֵאשִׁית גּוֹיִם עֲמָלֵק** spell the Hebrew word **רגע** - one moment.

When a person knows that it is time to repent, the yetzer hara tells him, "One moment! There will time to repent later." (*Zichron Kadosh*)

Parsha Pshetel – Rabbi Yankie Shechter

"מי מנה עפר יעקב ומספר את רבע ישראל" 10:23 – אדרת אליהו



"When Klal Yisroel were divided by their flags, they were split into four groups".

If one splits the Gematria of the word **ישראל** into four parts he will have 135 four times, with one remaining (Gematria of **ישראל** = 541 = 540 +1 = x4 541. The "one" represents that Klal Yisroel is the unique nation in the world, it is "one."

Additionally, that 1 can be given to all the four parts to equal 136 each, which is the Gematria of **קול** ,which is a Remez that Klal Yisroel's strength lies with their **קול** ,their "voice" of Torah when they learn the Torah Hakdosha. Bereishis 27:22 " **הקול קול יעקב**– " the power of Yaakov is with his voice, with his voice of Torah.

We have **קול** four times as a Remez that one must learn and be complete with the four parts of the Torah: **סוד, דרוש, רמז, פשט**.

מי מנה עפר יעקב - 28 – פרקי דרבי אליעזר

When Bilaam saw that the Midbar was filled with Orlos (the foreskins of all the Bris Milah's performed by Klal Yisroel) he said, "who could withstand them (Klal Yisroel) when they have the Zechus of the blood of Bris Milah, and then they cover it with dirt." From here we have the Minhag to cover the Orlos from Bris Milah in the dirt.

מי מנה עפר יעקב ומספר את רבע ישראל 10:23 – רבינו יואל



Bilam was telling Balak that Klal Yisroel are **עפר - פר' - ע**, they bring seventy (**ע**) cows - פר – Korbonos on behalf of the seventy nations as Korbonos for them (Sukkah 55b).

It is in the Zechus of Klal Yisroel that the seventy nations of the world survive and have sustenance in this world.

"מי מנה עפר יעקב ומספר את רבע ישראל" 10:23 – בעל הטורים

"עפר" is the same Gematria as **ערלה בחול** –this is a Remez that after Klal Yisroel cut off the Orlah by a Bris Milah, they place it in the sand.

"מי מנה עפר יעקב" - כתב סופר

It says in **Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer** that Bilam feared of Klal Yisroel for they had a great Zechus from the blood of the Bris Milah, and by covering the Orlah from the Milah in the dirt. What is the great Zechus of Klal Yisroel burying the Orlah in the dirt?

The Mitzvah of Milah is a great Kovod for Klal Yisroel, for it is a sign that we are the chosen nation, from among all of the nations of the world. With this Mitzvah, a father brings his son under the wings of the Shechina, and it is like he was Makriv his son to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, and then sprinkled blood just like Korbonos.

There is one caveat for this to happen, and that is that one must perform the Milah on his son the same way as Avrohom Avinu. Avrohom performed the Milah to enter into a Bris with Hakodosh Boruch Hu, and his only intention was to follow the Rotzon Hashem. He did not become arrogant by this great symbol he received, rather

he remained humble and said, "**ואנכי עפר ואפר** –I am but dust and ashes."



Hakodosh Boruch Hu only rests His Shechina on those who are humble. This is the Remez of our burying the Orlah in the dirt. We are Meramez that we did not become arrogant from being Zoche to this great Mitzvah, the Mitzvah that distinguishes us from the other nations of the world. We are like Avrohom Avinu, that even after performing this great Mitzvah we remain humble. This was the fear of Bilam. How can I, Bilam, go up against a nation that is Zoche to the great Mitzvah of Milah, yet even with that they do not become arrogant, and bury the Orlah in the ground?

24 - דברי ישראל - מה טובו אהליך יעקב משכנתיך ישראל

The Shem Havayah in **מספר קטן** - (For Mispar Koton you only count the first digit – Yud is 1, Heh is 5, Vov is 6, and Heh is 5, for a total of 17) is the Gematria of **טוב** ,17.

Klal Yisroel, in reference to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, is referred to as **עמו** – His nation, which in Mispar Koton (**ע**=7, **מ**=4, **ו**=6' for a total of 17) is also equal to 17, and the Mispar Koton of **תורה** (**ת**=4, **ו**=6, **ר**=2, **ה**=5) is 17.

This teaches us that Hakodosh Boruch Hu, Klal Yisroel, and the Torah are all one. Mispar Koton is a Remez to the Midah of **קטן**, making oneself small, being humble.

Chazal say that when a Talmid Chochom learns Torah, Hakodosh Boruch Hu sits opposite him and learns with him. This only happens

when one is humble. **מה טובו** – **מה** is a Loshon of humility, what am I? When one is humble, he is Zoche to **טוב** – "to all that is connected to **טוב** – he connects Hakodosh Boruch Hu, the Torah and himself.

Parsha Potpourri - Rav Ozer Alport



Hashem attempted to impede Bilaam by sending a sword-wielding angel to block his path, but only his donkey saw it. When the donkey tried to turn and avoid the angel, Bilaam grew angry at the donkey, striking it and threatening to kill it (22:23). As Bilaam's power lay in his mouth, why didn't he simply curse his donkey? (Baal HaTurim, Paneiach Raza, Oznayim L'Torah)

The **Baal HaTurim** and **Paneiach Raza** answer that Bilaam wasn't able to indiscriminately issue curses whenever he wanted. The Gemora (Berachos 7a) teaches that he was able to determine when Hashem was angry and to curse at that time. At the time of his confrontation with his donkey, he recognized that Hashem wasn't angry, so he was unable to curse the donkey.

Alternatively, Bilaam was planning to curse the Jews later that day and cursing his donkey would "use up" his quota and render him unable to curse the Jews. The **Oznayim L'Torah** explains that Bilaam's curses didn't magically take effect. Rather, he was able to tap into the sources of impurity in a person to cause him to sin, for which he would be punished. However, this concept only applies to people, so he was unable to curse his donkey.

Rav Mordechai Kamenetzky - Listen To The Mocking Bird



Bilaam, a man whom our sages say had prophetic vision equal to if not greater than Moshe, is hired by the Nation of Moav to curse the Jewish Nation. At first, he is reluctant. Upon hearing the tremendous reward of storehouses filled with gold and silver, however, he acquiesces and sets out on his dastardly mission.

Then a miracle occurs. An angel, who is seen only by Billam's donkey, blocks the path. His ordinarily faithful she-donkey tries to squeeze by the Angel and inadvertently presses Bilaam's foot against the wall. During this time, Bilaam, unaware of the metaphysical circumstances that brought about the shift in his donkey's behavior, is incensed. He strikes the animal three times.

Another miracle occurs! The donkey begins to talk. He carries on a brief conversation with his Master. "Why did you hit me three times?" asks the donkey "Because you mocked me! If only there were a sword in my hand I would kill you!" replies Bilaam.

The donkey continues to plead her case. "Am I not your faithful donkey that you have ridden on all your life? Have I been accustomed to do this type of thing to you?" Bilaam replies meekly in the negative. Hashem opens his eyes, and he finally realizes that an Angel blocked the way.

The human aspect of the incident is perhaps more astonishing than the miracle itself. How is it possible that the great seer who hears his donkey speak begins to threaten it with death? Doesn't he realize

that a supernatural event is occurring? Second, why would he threaten to kill the animal? By doing so he would never get to his destination. Wasn't that a totally irrational threat? The episode reminds me of an old yarn by the writer Leo Rosten.

Irving, a wealthy man, walked into a pet shop and inquired about a pet for his lonely grandmother. "I have the perfect gift," exclaimed the proprietor. "It's a myna bird that talks Yiddish. It can say up to fifty different phrases! It will keep you grandmother company and cheer her when she is lonely."

A week after the gift arrived, Irving, called his grandmother. "Bubbie, How did you like the bird?" "Delicious, Irving. I had the butcher fillet it." "But, Bubbie, that bird spoke Yiddish!" Irving shrieked in horror. "So why didn't it say something?"



Billam was experiencing the event of a lifetime. He had an angel directly in his path, and his donkey was actually speaking to him. But he did not notice. He had his eye focused on one thing. His heart was set on cursing the Jew's and collecting a handsome fee. Miracles were occurring all around him, but he lost all rational control. He did not notice. He was only interested in his honor. He would have slaughtered his donkey on the spot.

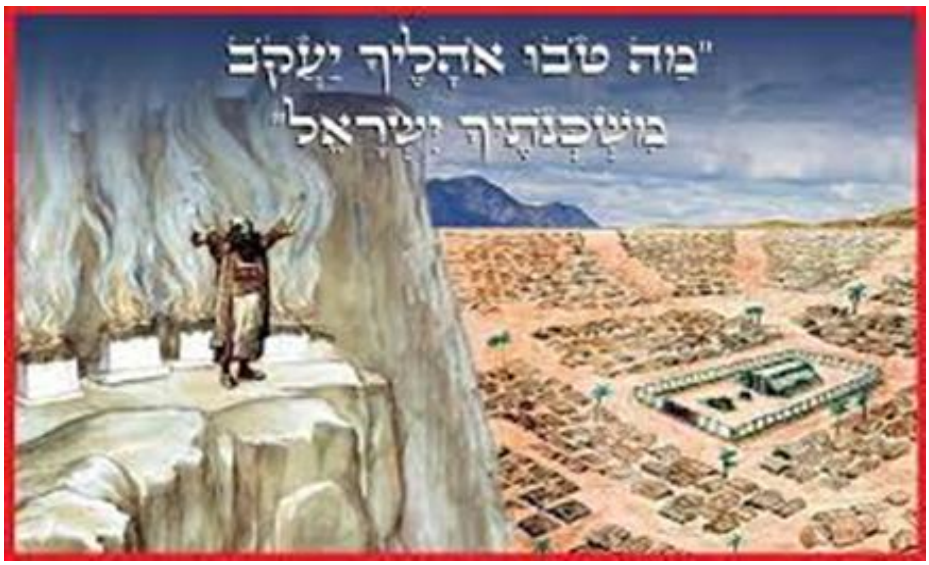
Often, events occur that should jar us into rethinking our current situations. But our minds are set, our hearts are pre-determined, and our conclusions are foregone. A talking donkey or even a bird for that matter could not get us to stop and think. The world around us is filled with miraculous events, some, perhaps, greater than a talking donkey. All we have to do is listen.

Parsha Potpourri - Rav Ozer Alport

The Gemora in Berachos (7a) teaches that Bilaam's skill was an ability to determine the moment when Hashem was angry and to utter curses at that time, which would then take effect. Did Moshe also possess this ability, and if so, why didn't he ever use it, and if not, how did Bilaam know more about Hashem's conduct of the world than Moshe? (Peninim MiShulchan Gevoha)

Rav Meir Chodosh explains that Moshe focused on a positive desire to bless and build up the Jews rather than on a negative need to curse and harm others. As a result, Moshe had no interest in knowing this piece of information about the time of Hashem's anger, and therefore he didn't know it.

"מה טובו אהליך יעקב משכנתיך ישראל" How good are your tents, Yaakov 24:5



The Zera Shimshon asks that if Bila'am's intention was to praise the tents of Yaakov (the Batei Kenesi'os) why did he add the word **מה**? why didn't he just say it as a statement - "The tents of Yaakov are good". As well, why did Bila'am choose to refer to the Jewish people as Yaakov?

The Zera Shimshon explains that the Mekubolim teach that the secret of the Mezuza is that the word **מזוזות** becomes - **מות זז** *death is removed*, meaning that a structure with a Mezuza protects those that are inside from death.

As well, the 'inside' of the word **מזוזות** is **זוז** which has the numerical value of twenty-six. – the same numerical value as the name of Hashem.

The 'outer' letters of **מזוזות** are **מת** – death, implying the name of Hashem separates the **מ** from the **ת** and protects us from death.

Shuls - Batei Kenesi'os, are exempt from the obligation of placing a Mezuza on their doorposts. This is because they are intrinsically places of life. They, therefore, do not need the Mezuza to save those in them from death.

When Bila'am said these words, "*How good are your tents, Yaakov*" he was referring to the Batei Kenesi'os. This is why he said the words **מה טובו** as opposed to only **טובו** since the words **מה טובו** have the same numerical value as the word **חיים**.- life. They both equal sixty-eight. This hints to the fact that the Batei Kenesi' are places of life.

This is also why he specifically chose to refer to the Jewish people by the name Yaakov. The passuk says (Micha 7:20) **תתן אמת ליעקב**.The word **אמת** has the same make-up as the word **מזוזות**. This is as follows: The **מ** and the **ת** are clearly the same in both words and the **א** in reality is made up of two **י**'s and a **ו**. These letters have the numerical value of twenty six – the same as the name of Hashem (**הוי"ה**) which itself is also hinted to in the word **מזוזות** as explained..

Since the trait of Yaakov is the trait of **אמת** which has the same properties as the word Mezuza, Bila'am used the name Yaakov since it is most connected to what he was saying. (The words were in reality placed in his mouth by Hashem as he himself told Balak.)

This also explains what the Gemara says (Ta'anis 5b) that Yaakov Avinu did not die. Since Yaakov Avinu's trait is the trait of **אמת** and the properties of this word negate death (as explained above) Yaakov Avinu did not die.

Parsha Potpourri - Rav Ozer Alport - Parsha Points to Ponder



The Midrash teaches (Vayikra Rabbah 11:7) that wherever the word **והיה** appears, it connotes joy. In describing the fiery serpents which attacked the Jewish people as punishment for their complaints, the Torah states (21:9) **והיה אם נשך הנחש את איש** – *and if the serpent bit a man.*

Why did the Torah use the word **והיה** in conjunction with the attack of the serpents, something which should have caused suffering and not joy? (*Meshech Chochmah, Mishmeres Ariel*)

The **Meshech Chochmah** answers that whoever was bitten and looked at the copper image of the serpent which was placed on a pole was cured not only from the serpent bite, but also from any other illness from which he may have been suffering, which was a source of joy.

The **Mishmeres Ariel** suggests that the fact that they were required to look upward at the serpent on the pole caused them to think about Hashem up in the Heavens, which is a positive benefit of being bitten. Alternatively, he points out that after somebody has been exposed to poison, his body naturally develops immunity, so the fact that they were able to be healed and continue living with new antibodies was considered a source of joy.

The Double Entendre of "Shalosh Regalim"

וַיִּפְתַּח ה׳ אֶת־פִּי הָאָתוֹן וַתֹּאמֶר לְבִלְעָם מֶה־עָשִׂיתִי לְךָ כִּי הִכִּיתָנִי זֶה שָׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים

"Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey and she said to Bilam, 'What have I done to you that you have struck me these three times (zeh shalosh regalim)?'" [Bamdibar 22:28].

The fact that the Torah here uses the term shalosh regalim rather than the more common shalosh pe'amim provides fertile ground for rabbinic commentary. Shalosh Regalim is usually the term we find to describe the Three Pilgrimage Festivals (Pesach, Shavuos, and Succos).



Rashi here quotes the teaching of Chazal that the angel was hinting here (through the words of the donkey), "You are attempting to destroy a nation that celebrates three times a year."

In other words, "You do not have a chance of success, Bilam, because Klal Yisrael has a merit which will sustain them forever by virtue of the fact that they celebrate the Three Pilgrimage Festivals. Three times a year, they go up to the Beis HaMikdash, the House of the Al-mighty, and thereby maintain an intimacy with Him.

What is the nature of this merit? Shalosh Regalim demonstrates the unity and cohesiveness of the Jewish people. Everybody needs to go up together. Everybody prays together in the same Bais Hamikdash courtyard. Everybody brings the same offerings. Despite the divisions that exist within our nation, at least three times a year we are all one big happy family. Everyone joined together in peace and harmony.

This is the merit that Chazal are referring to. Bilam, you want to uproot the Jewish people. You will never do it because the merit of the unity that is provided by the Shalosh Regalim is such a powerful force that you will never succeed in cursing Klal Yisrael.

When Klal Yisrael is united, it is a force that can never be destroyed. No curses or other weapons will ever be successful against the nation that celebrates the Three Pilgrimage Festivals in unison.

Midei Shabbos BeShabbato: by Rabbi Eliezer Chrysler

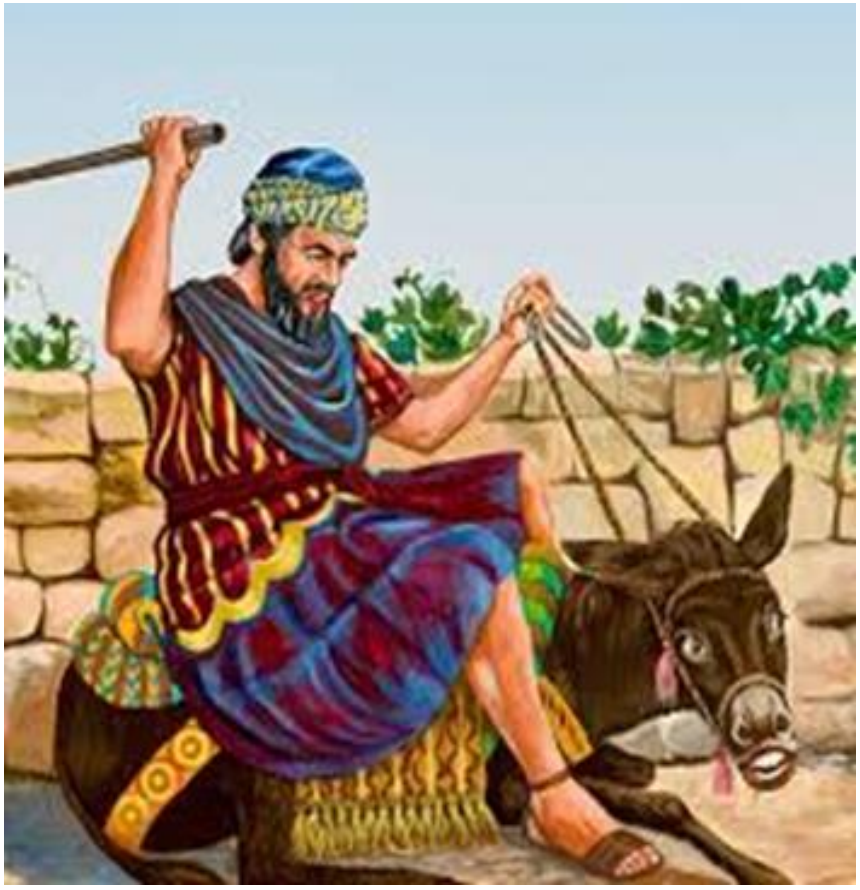
Bil'am and the Rooster, וּנְאֻם הַגֶּבֶר שְׁתֻם הָעָיִן *"And so says the man whose eyes are closed* "(24:3).

The word for 'man' that the Torah uses here is "Gever", which often refers to a rooster, the **Ba'al ha'Turim** observes.

Indeed, he points out, there are a number of similarities between Bi'lam and a rooster: firstly, because Bil'am, just like the rooster, which is the most promiscuous of all the animals, was the most promiscuous of all men. Secondly, he had the ability to discern the exact fraction of a second when G-d was angry each morning – just like a rooster (whose comb turns white at that exact moment). And thirdly, Bil'am, just like a rooster, stood on one leg (because he was lame in the other one).

Rabbi Frand on Bolok - The Word and the Sword

לוּ יֶשׁ־חֶרֶב בְּיָדִי כִּי עַתָּה הֲרַגְתִּיךְ ***"If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you"*** (22:29)



Said Bil'am to his ass. This was most demeaning in the eyes of the Bolok's officers, comments Rashi. Here was a man on his way to curse an entire nation, and to kill an ass he requires a sword!

The question arises, why indeed did Bil'am require a sword? Why could he not kill his ass with the same curses that he intended to pronounce against Yisrael?

The Ba'al ha'Turim resolves this problem in posuk 23, where, commenting on the words ***"and Bil'am struck the ass with his stick"***, explains that he did not curse it because he had in mind to curse Yisrael, and two curses cannot take effect on the same day.

And besides, he adds, we know that Bil'am's ability to curse was confined to the one split second each morning, when the comb of the rooster turns white, as Chazal have taught us. And presumably, that was not the time of day on which this episode took place.

"The biggest mistake we can make in life is to forget how much Hashem loves us." – Rabbi Yaakov Mizrahi.

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman- Torah Wellsprings



Bilaam said (23:9), הֵן עָם לְבָדָד יִשְׁכֹּן וּבַגּוֹיִם לֹא יִתְחַשָּׁב "*The nation dwells alone and they aren't counted among the gentiles.*"

This is wonderful praise of the Jewish nation, how they live a spiritual life, above and uninfluenced by all nations of the world, and they aren't influenced by them. The Midrash (*Shemos Rabba* 15:7) writes that the word הן which is the beginning of this encouraging *pasuk*, also indicates to the concept that the Jewish nation stands alone. This is because the letters ה & ן are letters that don't have partners. As the Midrash states: "All letters have a partner. The exception is these two letters ן & ה . For example, the letters א״ט is *gematriya* 10. Similarly ב״ח is *gematriya* 10. ג״ז is 10. ד״ו is 10. But the ה remains alone. The same is with the נ. It doesn't have a partner. Because י״צ is *gematriya* 100. כ״פ is 100. ל״ע is 100. מ״ס is 100. But the נו״ן remains alone.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, 'Just as these two letters can't join with any other letter, similarly, the Jewish nation can't connect with the gentile nations."

It states in (*Shir HaShirim* 4:1), הִנָּךְ יָפָה רַעְיָתִי הִנָּךְ יָפָה עֵינַיִךְ, "*You are beautiful, my friend. You don't have a blemish.*" These are the words Hashem says to praise the Jewish nation. The passuk begins with the words הִנָּךְ because these letters mean that we are alone, uninfluenced by the nations of the world. We already showed (from the Midrash) that letters ן & ה are lone letters. It is also so with the letter ך Because it is known that the letters מנצפך (letters that

have a double) also have a numerical value, a *gematriya*. The value of ד is 500 (for it is the next letter after ת which is 400). ם is 600, ן is 700, ף is 800, and ץ is 900.

Each of them can join with another letter to become a thousand. The ץ with the ק are 1000. ר״ף is a thousand. ש״ן is a thousand. ת״ם is a thousand. But the ד remains alone. Therefore, it states הִנָּךְ יָפָה, because that is the beauty of the Jewish nation: They remain alone, uninfluenced, and not mixed with the nations of the world.

Sometimes the beauty of the Jewish nation (or of an individual Yid) is concealed, but that is a temporary status. Soon their bright light will shine through.

Jewish Education Program Queens [JEP]

The Power of Truth! Hee Haw!



הֲלוֹא אָנֹכִי אֲתֹנְךָ אֲשֶׁר־רָכַבְתָּ עָלַי מֵעוֹדְךָ עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הַהַסְכֵּן הִסְכַּנְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת לְךָ כֹּה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא *"Am I not your she-donkey that you have ridden all your life until this day? Have I been accustomed to do such a thing to you?" He said, "No." (Bamidbar 22:30)*

Bilaam, the prophet of the non-Jews was so excited. He hated the Jews. Even as an adviser to Pharaoh in Egypt, Bilaam was the one who had suggested that Pharaoh persecute the Jews. Now Bilaam was on the way to curse the Jews. Balak, the king of Moav, had promised Bilaam much honor and much riches in exchange for doing so. Bilaam was so eager to receive all that honor and all those riches. He loved both very much.



Bilaam saddled his faithful donkey to ride to Moav. On the way, Bilaam's donkey exhibited unusual behaviour. First it left the road and walked on the field. Bilaam hit the donkey to guide it back on to the road. Sometime later it, approached a vineyard with a narrow space between two fences. It squeezed itself to one side, pushing Bilaam's foot against the wall and injuring it. Bilaam again hit the donkey.

Later, they reached a narrow trail. Bilaam's donkey crouched down and refused to move. Bilaam got very angry at his donkey and hit it again. Hashem performed a miracle and Bilaam's donkey started talking to him. "What have I done to you that you struck me these three times?" Bilaam replied, "Because you mocked me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would have killed you now."

The donkey responded, "Am I not your she-donkey that you have ridden all your life until this day? Have I been accustomed to do such a thing to you?" To that Bilaam had to respond, "No." At that point, Hashem opened Bilaam's eyes to see why his donkey had stopped. An angel was standing there with a sword in his hand. It was an angel of mercy to try to save Bilaam from sinning in his attempt to curse the Jews.

The donkey had a good argument. Bilaam, the wise man and prophet, representing the other nations of the world, was silenced by his donkey. His donkey was correct, and he was wrong to have hit it.

The **Sforno** elaborates on this. The donkey told Bilaam that if it kept stopping, it must have been for a good reason. The donkey had served Bilaam faithfully for many years without disobeying. Suddenly, now it disobeyed. That fact should have been obvious to

such a wise person as Bilaam. Bilaam should have realized logically that the problem was not his donkey. Rather, the problem was that Hashem was unhappy about the mission that Bilaam was on.

Why didn't Bilaam realize the obvious? The Sforno explains that Bilaam was blinded by his strong desire for money and honour (22:32). That desire blinded him from seeing what was obvious. The result was that Bilaam was totally embarrassed in front of Balak's messengers who saw his ineptitude. They thought it was humorous that a man who was going to curse an entire nation couldn't control his donkey without hitting it. Furthermore, the donkey debated Bilaam and won!

What made Bilaam realize his error? When his donkey stated the obvious truth, it jolted Bilaam and caused him to admit that he was wrong.

The **Midrash Rabbah** (Braishis 93:10) quotes the sage Abba Kohen Bardela's reaction to Bilaam's inability to answer his donkey's criticism. "Woe unto us on the day of [final] judgement. Woe unto us on the day of rebuke!" The shame that Bilaam felt upon hearing the truth is the same shame all of us will feel on the day that Hashem judges us. When Hashem shows us the truth we will be overwhelmed with embarrassment. When Hashem shows us that we actually had the ability to do something good or that we truly had the strength to overcome our desires, we will be stunned into silence.

We see that the desire for wealth and riches can blind a person from seeing what is obvious. - We also see the power of truth to wake up a person to his mistakes. It can also help redirect his course in life!

"The purpose of our lives is to seek out Hashem – find Him, and build a relationship with Him." – Rabbi Noach Weinberg.

Jewish Education Program Queens [JEP]

Be a Say-Little and Not a Do-Little!

כִּי־כַבֵּד אֲכַבֶּדְךָ מְאֹד "For I will honour you greatly" (Bamidbar 22:17) וַיִּזְבַּח בָּלָק בָּקָר וָצֹאן וַיִּשְׁלַח לְבִלְעָם "Balak slaughtered cattle and sheep and sent [some] to Balaam" (Bamidbar 22:40)

A small group of tourists wanted to experience the Passover seder of a particular, distinguished rabbi. The rabbi agreed to host them and named a sum of money to cover the cost of the meals. They happily agreed. After the holiday, the tourists thanked the rabbi for a beautiful and inspirational experience.

As they were leaving, the rabbi handed them an envelope, containing all the money they had given him for the cost of the meals. "Why are you returning the money? We got more than our money's worth". The rabbi replied, "Had I not charged you, you wouldn't have felt as comfortable eating to your heart's desire. I returned the money because I don't want to be paid for the great mitzvah of having guests".



This rabbi exhibited the trait of tzadikim, as Shamai said, **"Say little and do much"**. As **the Maharsha (B.M. 87A) explains**, sometimes a potential guest won't want to bother or burden a host. If the host initially offers a little, the guest will more readily accept his offer. The host can always offer more later.

This is exactly what our forefather Avraham did when he was visited by three "Arab travellers" soon after he had a circumcision.

Avraham realized that the travellers didn't want to bother him. Therefore, all he offered them was some bread to refresh themselves. That, they were willing to accept. Once, the guests were already seated, Avraham prepared a magnificent feast for them. They were already seated and were not expecting so much, so they stayed.

Contrast this behaviour to that of two wicked people who exhibited the opposite trait- **Say much and do little**. Avraham wanted to buy the cave of Machpelah to bury his wife, Sarah. The owner, Efron originally offered it to Avraham as a gift. When Avraham refused, Efron hinted at the price he wanted. Efron eventually asked for payment in special, more expensive currency.

In this week's parsha, Balak hired Bilaam to curse the Jews. Balak said "I will honour you very much". Yet, when Bilaam arrived, Balak didn't invite Bilaam to feast with him. Not only that, but he also sent over a very meagre meal. This was not the honour that he had promised.

In these two instances, people were swayed by the dishonest promise of receiving more.

The Kisei Rachamim (Avos d'Rav Nosson Perek 13) has a novel approach. A person should not explicitly say that he wants to learn "this" many areas of Torah. That will awaken the Evil Inclination (Satan) who will then try to make his task more difficult by placing distractions in his way.

Similarly, King David said that tomorrow he was going to see a nice house instead of saying he was going to go to the beis medrash to learn Torah. That was so as not to awaken the Satan who would try everything in his power to make the learning more difficult. Likewise, the Torah was given unbeknown to the Satan who had tried to convince Hashem to keep the Torah for the angels and not to give it to us.

Perhaps this also explains what happened with Efron. The Avos dRav Nosson states, **WHILE** Avraham was weighing the coins, he heard Efron's desire and ended up giving him the better currency. Perhaps, the Evil Inclination had caused Efron to become dazzled by the money and ask for more than he originally intended.

If we are a say-little type of person, we have a better chance of accomplishing more mitzvos. People will be more willing to accept our favours and we won't awaken the Satan who tries to distract us.



Living Jewish – From Our Sages

כָּרַע שָׁכַב כַּאֲרִי *He couches down, he lies down as a lion* (Numbers 24:9)

Even when a Yid is "asleep" in exile he is considered "as a lion," for his heart is always "awake" to G-d, to Torah and to mitzvot. (*Ohr HaTorah*)

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman- Torah Wellsprings

There's a vort taught by the **Sefer Chasidim, the Shlah HaKadosh, the Kedushas Levi, and by Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa, zy'a.** They all teach essentially the same lesson. Bilam was traveling on his donkey, en-route to curse the Jewish nation.

Suddenly, Bilam's donkey stalled. At first it left the main road, and walked through the fields; then, it walked on the side of the road, crushing Bilam's foot against a stone wall. Finally, the donkey simply sat down in the middle of the road, stubbornly refusing to go

forward. Each time, Bilam beat his donkey so he could continue on its way.



Is there anything wrong with the way Bilam treated his donkey? Wouldn't everyone beat their donkey to steer it on the correct path? Hashem opened Bilam's eyes to see an angel standing on the road, with a drawn sword in his hand. **וַתֵּרֶא הָאָתוֹן אֶת־ מַלְאַךְ ה׳ נִצָּב בַּדֶּרֶךְ וְחַרְבּוֹ שְׁלוּפָה בְּיָדוֹ** .The malach of Hashem asked him, 'Why did you hit your donkey… three times?" Bilam replied, ...**אֶל־ מַלְאַךְ ה׳ חָטָאתִי כִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה נִצָּב לִקְרָאתִי בַּדָּרֶךְ**, "I sinned. I didn't know that you were standing in front of me…" (22:34).

The Sefer Chasidim ask, Bilam seems to contradict himself in this passuk. He said that he sinned, and then he said that he didn't know that the malach was there. If Bilam didn't know that the malach was standing before him, how did he sin? It seems that he acted rationally. Wouldn't everyone beat their donkey when it isn't going the right way?

The answer is, **חָטָאתִי כִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי**, "my sin was that I didn't know," because he should have known. When Bilam was going to curse the Jewish nation, his donkey was acting up. Bilam should have thought about his animal's unusual behaviour and asked himself, "what does this mean?" He should have realized that Hashem was hinting to him to return home.

The Vilna Gaon says that the words "malach Hashem" is written ten times in these pesukim, because the angel tried to stop Bilam ten times. He received ten messages and hints, and he still didn't get the point. The fact that his donkey was speaking to him, should have

caused Bilam to start thinking. Bilam should have asked himself: "What is going on here? How can a donkey speak?" But he didn't realize that something miraculous occurred. He simply responded to the questions that his donkey asked him. Bilam's donkey served him faithfully. The donkey said so himself. "Did I ever behave this way before?" it asked Bilam and Bilam admitted that it hadn't.

Bilam should have realized that there must a reason why his donkey was acting out of character. Bilam knew that Hashem didn't want him to go. As Rashi writes: (22:22) "[Bilam] saw that the matter was bad in Hashem's eyes, and he still desired to go." He should have put two and two together and understood that the donkey was stalling because Hashem was trying to stop him from reaching his destination.

When something is unusual, one should ask himself whether there is something that he should be learning. Perhaps it is a message from heaven. If Bilam would have considered this, he would have come to the understanding that Hashem was telling him to return.

We will now quote the Sefer Chasidim (siman 153): The Sefer Chasidim teaches, "When the malach said to Bilam, 'Why did you hit your donkey?' Bilam should have answered, 'What sin is there in hitting a donkey? It isn't tzaar baalei chaim…' And when Bilam's foot was crushed against the wall, should he have not hit his donkey even then? The answer is, he should have understood that perhaps it wasn't Hakadosh Baruch Hu's desire that he curse them…

This is the meaning of חָטָאתִי כִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי *'I sinned, because I didn't take to heart what was happening…'* Everything is orchestrated from Above and nothing happens by chance. One should pay attention to what's happens around him and see if he can understand what Hashem is telling him. We mustn't jump to conclusions and try to decipher messages when we aren't certain of its meaning. However, sometimes the message is clear. Bilam could have easily understood

that Hashem wants him to return, if he would have paid attention to what was happening to him.

Balak said to Bilam, **הִנֵּה עַם יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם הִנֵּה כִסָּה אֶת־עֵין הָאָרֶץ**, "behold a nation has left Mitzrayim, and behold they are covering the face of the earth" (22:5). The earth alludes to nature. Accordingly, we can explain that Balak's complaint was that the Jewish people "cover" the concept of 'earth' (nature). They claim that everything is from Hashem, and nothing is by chance.

Bilam said **קֵל מוֹצִיאָם מִמִּצְרָיִם**, "Hashem took them out of Mitzrayim" (23:22). Rashi writes, "[Balak] said **הנה עם יצא ממצרים**, 'behold a nation left Mitzrayim.' But they didn't leave [Mitzrayim] on their own. G-d took them out." Similarly, we know that everything that happens to a person is pre-destined from heaven.

In the times of the **Chofetz Chaim**, there was a yid who moved to China for business purposes. When he would return to Europe on business trips, he made sure to visit the Chofetz Chaim zt'l.

"How are our brothers in China?" the Chofetz Chaim asked. "There are almost no yidden there," the merchant replied. "There are millions of goyim, and only a few yidden. They are all very weak in their Yiddishkeit."

The Chofetz Chaim gave him his sefer Nidchei Yisrael and said, "I wrote this sefer for yidden who are living distant from the Jewish centres. It is good for any part of the world. Bring it to the Yidden living there." The Chofetz Chaim asked, "And what else is new in China?" "There was a tsunami," the man replied. "Thousands of people died." "Oy, we must do teshuvah," the Chofetz Chaim exclaimed. "Why must we do teshuvah?" the merchant asked. "I told you that they are almost only goyim there. The catastrophe wasn't for us, it was for them." The Chofetz Chaim replied with a mashal:

"Many people gathered in a hall, to listen to speeches. Almost everyone present was goyim. There were just a few yidden. Someone

stood at the podium and spoke in Yiddish. Who was he speaking to?" "Obviously, he was speaking to the yidden," the merchant replied. "Why do you say that? I told you that most people present were goyim. There were only a few yidden there." "Yes, but goyim don't understand Yiddish. If someone stands up and speaks in Yiddish, he is speaking to the Yidden."

"Exactly," the Chofetz Chaim agreed. "And similarly, when Hashem does something in the world, who is Hashem speaking to? Do you think that he is speaking to the gentiles who don't pay attention to Hashem's messages? He is speaking in a language that yidden understand, because they believe that everything is from Hashem, for a purpose. Hashem was speaking to the Yidden!"

Or HaChaim HaKadosh



In honour of the Or HaChaim's yahrtzeit, the 15th of Tamuz, we relate the following stories:

When the Or HaChaim HaKadosh zy"a first came to Eretz Yisrael, he lived in Teveria. One of the tzaddikim who lived in Teveria at that time was **Reb Chaim Abulefiya zy"a**. Once, the Or HaChaim and Reb Chaim Abulefiya were sitting together at a seudah, and the Or HaChaim HaKadosh didn't want to eat. He explained, "I sense impurity on the food." It didn't take long before it was discovered what happened. People thought that the maid was sleeping in the kitchen. She had actually died. The Or HaChaim sensed this impurity on the food, so he didn't want to eat anything. This story spread, and people were wondering whether the Or HaChaim was a greater tzaddik than

Reb Chaim Abulafia, because the Or HaChaim sensed the impurity, and apparently, Reb Chaim Abulafia hadn't. The Or HaChaim was concerned for the honour of Reb Chaim Abulafia, so he left Teveria and moved to Yerushalayim.

The Or HaChaim HaKadosh once came to a city. He didn't know in which home he could rely on the kashrus, but when he heard someone saying likavod Shabbos Kodesh, as he was preparing for Shabbos, he knew that he could go to this home. On Friday night, the people of this town would go to their rav and listen to his beautiful and inspirational divrei Torah. The Or HaChaim's host was going, and the Or HaChaim HaKadosh joined them.

The rav was a holy man, and he would tell them the Torah that he heard in the yeshiva shel maaleh (in heaven). In the middle of the drashah, the Or HaChaim HaKodosh corrected the rav. The Rav replied, "I swear that you are Reb Chaim ben Atar, the Or HaChaim HaKadosh, because I heard this dvar Torah in heaven, and your words are exactly as I heard them. In heaven, this dvar Torah is repeated in the name of Reb Chaim ben Atar, so this must be you."

The following morning, the Or HaChaim HaKadosh joined the community again, and went to listen to the divrei Torah of the rav, and he returned again for shalash seudos. The Satan came to this rav and said, "Finish shalash seudos quickly." "What's the rush?" the rav asked. The Satan explained, "As you know, every Shabbos, even the neshamos that are in Gehinom are permitted to go to Gan Eden. But when Shabbos is over, they are returned to Gehinom. I am not able to bring them back to Gehinom, until you say Havdalah, marking the end of Shabbos. Now, you are prolonging Shalash Seudos, and you are preventing me from doing my mission. Therefore, please, finish Shalash Seudos already so I can send the neshamos back to Gehinom."

The rav didn't pay attention to him. On the contrary, now that he knew that he was helping many souls in heaven, he purposely wanted

to prolong the Shalash Seudos. The Satan kept returning, urging him to finish. But the rav just ignored him, or told him, "What's the rush." At one point, the Rav became angry at the Satan's constant nudging, and he said, "What's the big rush! Take it easy already!" Immediately after saying this, the rav asked for mayim achronim. They would bench and finish the meal.

Why did the rav change his mind? The rav explained that anger is Gehinom itself. After becoming angry, he knew that it won't help to prolong the Shalash Seudos any longer. The anger had already ruined the moment, so they may as well bench, daven Maariv and say Havdalah.

Many brachos and yeshuos come to those who study the holy sefer, Or HaChaim HaKadosh. Yidden of Yerushalayim, and essentially, throughout the world, know that if one needs a yeshuah (salvation) he should undertake studying Or HaChaim, and he will see wonders.

In particular, studying Or HaChaim is mesugal for bearing children. **Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer zt'l** said that since the Or HaChaim didn't have any children, he placed his entire power of bearing children into his sefer. Therefore, studying it is mesugal for bearing children.

At a rabbinic convention, the **Chofetz Chaim** passed the kitchen, and he saw the host's daughter checking the rice for bugs. Sometime later, the Chofetz Chaim saw that she was still there, checking the rice. Torah Wellsprings Torah Wellsprings Wellsprings - Balak 19 "How many times do you check the rice?" he asked. She replied, "Our relative, **Reb Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz** also came to the convention, and he will be eating with us this evening. In his honour, I am being extra careful with the kashrus, and I'm checking the rice **twelve times**."

The Chofetz Chaim was impressed by her kavod HaTorah, so he blessed her that she should live long, always have a clear mind, and never need eyeglasses. Indeed, she lived until the ripe old age of 98.

She moved to Eretz Yisrael, lived in Petach Tikvah. All of the Chofetz Chaim's brachos materialized.

Her relative, the Chazon Ish was her shadchan. She married Reb Mordchai Shraga Eiselman, but for seventeen years they didn't have children. She went to the Chazon Ish and she told him about her plight. The Chazon Ish gave her a brachah that she should have children. She said, "I don't want a brachah, I want you to promise me that I will have children." The Chazon Ish put his head down, and when he raised it he answered, "I can't promise this." She said, "I was an orphan, and you were my shadchan. Now you must take responsibility for the shidduch."

The Chazon Ish put his down head another time, and raised it and said, "You should go to the kever of the Or HaChaim HaKadosh." This was in the year 5704, and it wasn't safe to go to Har HaZeisim because of the Arabs. She mentioned this to the Chazon Ish, who replied, "There is no other solution." She went to the Or HaChaim's kever on his yahrtzeit, the fifteenth of Tamuz. Exactly nine months later, on the 25th of Nissan, she had a son.

"Knowing where an act of kindness will lead is impossible. One cannot possibly trace its progress through the world as it spreads goodness through the many lives intertwined in the fabric of humanity. No one can see what Hashem sees as the effects of one kind act mounts higher and higher.

No one, therefore, can imagine the immeasurable reward he earns for his act of kindness. - A person can only know that the good he has done is no doubt far greater than the good he thinks he has done." ~ Chofetz Chaim, Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838-1933)

whY I Matter - Young Israel of Midwood Edited by Yedidye Hirtenfeld

וַיִּפְתַּח ה׳ אֶת־פִּי הָאָתוֹן וַתֹּאמֶר לְבִלְעָם מֶה־עָשִׂיתִי לְךָ כִּי הִכִּיתָנִי זֶה שָׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים
"Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey and it said to Bilam . . ." (22:28)



R' Shimon bar Tzemach Duran z"l (Rashbetz; Spain; 1361-1444) writes: One should have no trouble accepting this, since we see several species of birds that can be taught to speak.

He adds: The reason that Hashem showed this to Bilam was to teach him that just as He gives the power of speech to creatures that do not ordinarily speak, so He can take away the freedom to speak from those who usually have it—as He does in our parashah to Bilam. (*Magen Avo*)

Shabbos Treasures - The Precious Gift of Shabbos

Rabbi Paysach Krohn tells a story of a non-religious couple that lived in Eretz Yisroel. They had a daughter, Shula, and for safety concerns, they decided to send her to the closest kindergarten they could find near their home, which happened to be a religious kindergarten. Shula was 5 years old and loved her school. Her Morah told the group stories all about Shabbos, and they would act out lighting Shabbos candles and having a Shabbos Seudah. Shula looked forward to her turn when she could be the "Shabbos Imma", and would pretend lighting Shabbos candles at home.

Shula begged her mother to light Shabbos candles but her mother refused. She explained to her daughter, "We are not religious. We

don't do these things!" Weeks went by and Shula continued to beg her mother until eventually her mother became frustrated and told her daughter to never mention this again. Shula, however, was not put off, and she had an idea. She thought, "If my mother won't light, then I will light for her!" That Friday afternoon Shula took out all the money she had from her moneybox and walked to the local store around the corner, and she asked the store owner for two candles.

The owner knew that Shula's family was not religious and wouldn't need Shabbos candles, so he simply assumed that Shula wanted Yartzeit candles, so he gave her two little Yartzeit candles that came in a metal can with the word "Zachor", in memory, written on the side. Shula brought these home, not knowing the difference. She arranged her doll's table with a white tablecloth and set it for a Shabbos Seudah. She placed a Kiddush cup on the table and then her candles. Copying what her Morah had shown her in school, Shula lit the Yartzeit candles, and watched them burn. After not seeing their daughter for some time, Shula's parents went to check on her, and they were shocked to see her sitting next to the Yartzeit candles. They asked her what she was doing, and Shula said what she had learned in school. She pointed to the Yartzeit candles and said, "This candle is for my mother and this candle is for my father!" Her parents looked on in total astonishment. Their daughter was lighting Yartzeit candles for her parents, as if to say that they were no longer alive!



It was a wake-up call like no other they ever had. They asked Shula why she was doing this and Shula replied, "Because you won't light Shabbos candles yourself, I'm lighting these candles for you!" With tears in their eyes, her mother bought Shula to the living room. Her mother removed some candlesticks from the cupboard and placed them on the table. Shula smiled and watched as her mother lit the

Shabbos candles for the first time in her life. As the months went by, Shula's parents started keeping more and more Mitzvos. Her father started going to the local Shul, and very soon, Shula witnessed her father saying his own Kiddush at their own Shabbos Seudah!

וַיִּזְבַּח בָּלָק בָּקָר וָצֹאן וַיִּשְׁלַח לְבִלְעָם וְלַשָּׂרִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ

"Balak slaughtered cattle and sheep and sent to Bil'am and to the officers who were with him." (22:40)

Who were these "officers"? The Torah mentions only that Bil'am traveled with two lads, not with officers! **R' Chaim Tirer z"l (better known as R' Chaim of Czernowitz**; died 1817) explains: The midrash relates that Bil'am was insulted that Balak sent only one bull and one sheep for his dinner. Why? Aren't one bull and one sheep more than enough for three people (Bil'am and his two attendants)?



R' Chaim answers that the officers were other people whom Balak sent to eat with Bil'am. That was an insult to Bil'am, for proper hachnassat orchim requires either that the host eat the first meal with the guest or that the host personally attend to the guest. [R' Chaim adds parenthetically that this is the meaning of the verse (Bereishit 18:8), "He (Avraham) stood over them beneath the tree and they ate." Because Avraham "stood over them" and served them, it is as if they all ate together.] By sending animals to Bil'am to eat with Balak's officers–but without Balak himself–Balak insulted Bil'am.

Why did Balak do this? Because, when Bil'am said (Bemidbar 22:38), "Whatever word G-d puts into my mouth, that shall I speak!" Balak knew that Bil'am would be of no help to him. *(Be'er Mayim Chaim)*



Pirkei Avos says, "Ten things were created on erev Shabbos by bein hashmoshos…" (5:6). One of them is **פי האתון**, the wondrous ability of the speaking donkey. The Ramban asks, why doesn't the Mishnah also list **פי הנחש**, the mouth of the snake that spoke to Chavah?

The Divrei Yoel of Satmar zt'l answered: The snake spoke and caused sin. The donkey spoke to prevent Bilam from sinning. Therefore, only the donkey's ability to speak is considered important to have been created in the beginning of Creation.

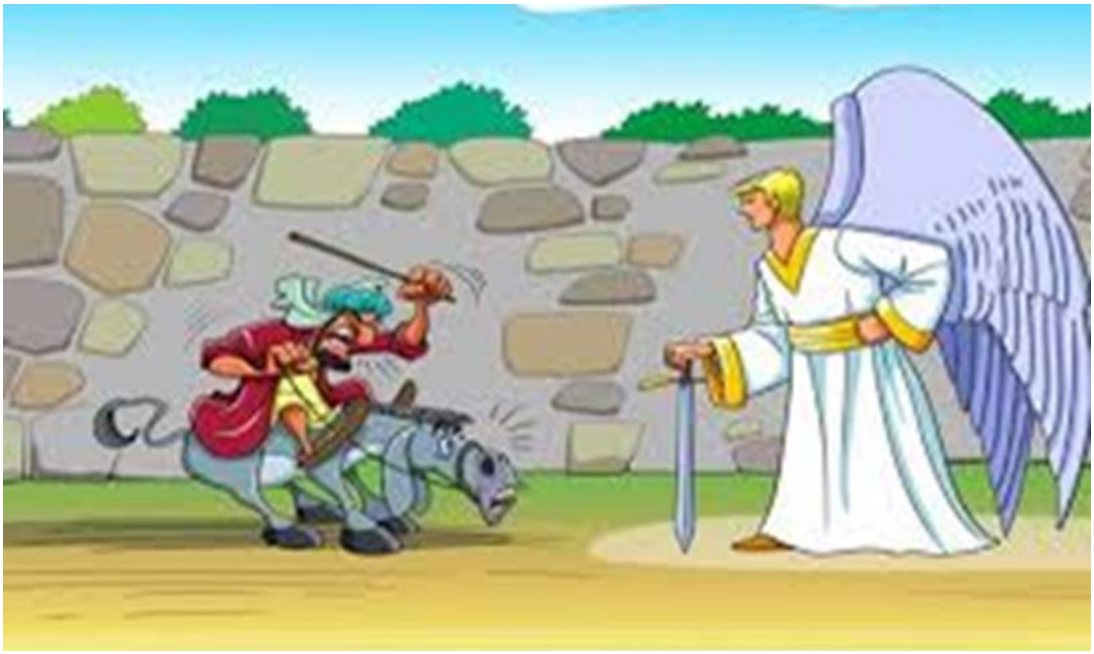
Parshah Thoughts Ideas and Reflections By Rabbi Aron Moshe Jacobsohn

In the Torah, Parashas Balak is written without any paragraph breaks in the entire topic of Bilaam. **The Chofetz Chaim** observes that the purpose of breaks in the Torah was to give a person a chance to contemplate what he has just learned (Sifrah, beginning of Vayikra).

Bilaam chose to live his life without ever stopping to contemplate why and what was going on in his life. Therefore, to emphasize this lack of focus, his topic in the Torah has no breaks.

Pardes Yehuda – Rabbi Yehuda Z Klitnick

Whose Sword Was The Malach Brandishing?



וַיְגַל ה׳ אֶת־עֵינֵי בִלְעָם וַיַּרְא אֶת־מַלְאַךְ ה׳ נִצָּב בַּדֶּרֶךְ וְחַרְבּוֹ שְׁלֻפָה בְּיָדוֹ

Hashem opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of Hashem standing in the road, with a sword drawn in his hand.(22:31)

"In his hand"? Would not **וְחַרְבּוֹ שְׁלֻפָה** "his sword drawn" have been more suitable? It is common knowledge that a sword is brandished while in the hand. --??—

Let us reference a preceding posuk (29), where the wicked Bilaam confronts and taunts his loyal donkey: **לוּ יֶשׁ־חֶרֶב בְּיָדִי כִּי עַתָּה הַרַגְתִּיךְ** - if I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now.

This is odd; where then was his sword all this time? We would expect someone like Bilaam to be armed. We can speculate that the malach/angel was brandishing Bilaam's personal sword, forcing Bilaam to berate his donkey by saying, in effect "Lucky for you that I don't have a sword now and have to use a mere stick to beat you." When Hashem enabled Bilaam to see what was happening, he saw how the malach was holding the drawn sword which belonged to him -- "in his (the malach's) hand!"

Middos



The Apter Rav was known by the title of his Sefer, the "Oheiv Yisroel" because he was very meticulous in the Mitzvah of loving a fellow Jew. He was known to have said that in every single Parshah in the Torah, there is a hint to the Mitzvah to love a fellow Jew. He was once asked by his Chassidim where this Mitzvah is hinted at in Parashas Balak.

The Oheiv Yisroel responded that Parshas Balak is an easy Parshah in which to find this allusion, for the very letters of **בלק** - BaLaK stand for the Mitzvah of V'ahavta L'rei'acha Kamocha, to love your friend as you love yourself. The Chassidim questioned the Apter Rav about this, saying that the word 'V'ahavta' begins with the letter 'Vov' and Balak begins with a 'Bais', and furthermore, the word 'Kamocha' begins with a 'Chaf', and 'Balak' ends with a 'Kuf'! Two of the three letters do not match, even though they make the same sound!

The Rebbe smiled and explained, "If you are so particular about 'the letter of the law', then you will never come to Ahavas Yisroel, to love a fellow Jew. In order to achieve Ahavas Yisroel, a person must be a little flexible. Don't look so closely at the letters themselves. Even just looking at the sounds they make is sufficient for this lesson!"

Parsha Potpourri Compiled by Ozer Alport

ויעמד מלאך ד' במשעול הכרמים גדר מזה וגדר מזה (22:24)



Although this week's parsha is named for Balak, in reality the wicked Bilaam is the focus of the action. Although at first glance it seems that this is the first time that we are being introduced to Bilaam in the Torah and that the events described therein have no connection to earlier episodes, our Sages reveal to us the depth of the Torah and open our eyes to see that this isn't the case.

The Medrash Tanchuma (Vayeitzei 13) and Targum Yonason ben Uziel (22:5) teach us an amazing fact: they write that Bilaam was none other than Lavan, the father of Rochel and Leah.

Using this concept, the Tosefes Beracha offers a fascinating explanation of an episode in the parsha. Hashem attempted to impede Bilaam's journey by sending an angel to block his path, but only Bilaam's donkey saw the sword-wielding angel. The Torah tells us that the angel stood in the vineyards, with a fence on either side of it. Rashi cryptically comments that the fences were made of stones. **סתם גדר של אבנים הוא**

What is Rashi trying to teach us?

When Yaakov parted from his father-in-law Lavan, Lavan proposed a peace treaty between them. They took stones and made a mound, which Lavan said would serve as a witness if either of them

attempted to cross over it for unfriendly purposes (Bereishis 31:45-49).

The Tosefes Beracha (and Chizkuni) suggests that Rashi is teaching us that the angel was standing guard next to the fence of stones, for it was the very same mound of rocks at which Yaakov and Lavan made their covenant of peace. When Bilaam, who we now know was none other than Lavan, attempted to cross it and violate the peace treaty, the sword-wielding angel came out in full force to stop him.

Extending this one step further, the Rosh notes that the Torah records (31:8) that Bilaam was killed with a sword. He explains that when Yaakov and Lavan made their pact, Yaakov placed a sword in the mound of rocks to serve together with the stones as witnesses to their covenant of peace. They agreed that whoever broke the treaty should be punished by the witnesses. For this reason, Bilaam was first warned through being pressed by his donkey against the stone fence. When he refused to take heed, he was killed **בחרב**, which refers to something already well-known, in this case the very sword which they placed in the mound of rocks to serve as a witness.

Rabbi Yehoshua Alt [לעילוי נשמת שמואל אביגדר בן יצחק מאיר ע״ה]

The Zohar informs us that **בלעם** and **בלק** are from the power of **עמלק**. It therefore is no coincidence that **בלעם** and **בלק** were sorcerers just as **עמלק** was.

Taking a close look at the last two letters of בל**עם** and ב**לק**, we notice the word **עמלק**.

"Every time you thank Hashem, you ignite a spiritual light that cannot be extinguished." – Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn.

R' Shmuel Winzelberg- Torah U'Tefilah

ויחר אף בלק אל בלעם ויספק את כפיו כד:י *Balak's anger flared against Balaam and he clapped his hands* (24:10)



Rebbe Chaim Kaniyevski, Shlit"a, asks, "Why did Balak get so angry? Bilaam had already told him that he was not able to say anything, except that which HaKadosh Baruch Hu placed in his mouth - **אִם־יִתֶּן־לִי בָּלָק מְלֹא בֵיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲבֹר אֶת־פִּי ה' אֱלֹקי לַעֲשׂוֹת קְטַנָּה אוֹ גְדוֹלָה**". If Balak were to give me his houseful of silver and gold, I am unable to transgress the word of Hashem, my G-d, to do anything small or great' (22:18).

Then why was Balak so surprised now and he became so angry with Bilaam? Rebbe Chaim answers that Balak did not believe Bilaam. Balak simply thought that Bilaam was holding out for more money to curse them. (*Umatok HaOhr*)



Climb the Ladder

Most people are satisfied to live as frum Jews. Very good. But they're missing the opportunity. Once in history they appear in this world. - To live a life of habit is a tragedy of tragedies.

We must understand the opportunity to change ourselves. To climb the ladder of perfection. ~ R' Avigdor Miller zt"l.

Donkey business Written by Rabbi Daniel Leeman

We have been taught that Bilaam was on the same level of prophecy as Moshe. But was the evil Bilaam really on par with the righteous Moshe?

We have also been taught that when "Bilaam arose early to saddle his donkey", G-d said, "Evil one! Avraham already came before you, as it says, 'Avraham arose early and saddled his donkey'".

The question is asked what is so special about being before, and why is Bilaam being referred to here as 'evil'?



When the **'Ohev Yisroel', the Apta Rav, R' Yehoshua Hershl**, was on his travels it happened that he encountered a steep hill. He quickly descended from the wagon drawn by his horse, and ascended the hill afoot.

"Holy Rabbi," inquired his attendant, "why did you come down from the wagon and climb this steep hill afoot?"

"Because," replied the Rabbi, "I am afraid the horse will call me to court; it will claim that I had no pity on it, making it draw me up the hill."

"And if so," probed the attendant, "would you not win the case on the ground that the horse was meant for man's service?" "Yes," said the Rabbi, "there is no doubt that I would win; but I would rather walk up the hill a dozen times, than find myself in litigation with a horse!"

Perhaps with regards to their level of prophecy they were equal, but Moshe was nevertheless greater because unlike Bilaam, he was wise enough not to have disputes with his donkey!

Indeed we have been taught that wisdom is greater than prophecy.

But there is a prerequisite to true wisdom: awe of G-d.

Perhaps it is in this that Avraham was 'before' Bilaam: Avraham prepared his donkey and went "as commanded by G-d" – primarily with the awe of G-d, whereas Bilaam prepared his donkey and went "with the officers of Moav" – against the main will of G-d, i.e. awe of G-d. Subsequently Avraham, like Moshe, had enough wisdom to treat his donkey fairly, but Bilaam, who not only treated his donkey harshly, but even ended up arguing with it… and losing!

Be wise and don't get 'court' out! Have an ee-awesome Shabbos.

A Hidden Message To The Donkey's Escapades

Written by Benjamin Rose



The Psukim state that Bilam's Donkey went off track three times. The Daas Zekeinim says that Rashi says that these ventures were a Siman of the Avos, and he explains these enigmatic words as follows.

The first time when the Malach blocked the donkey's path it veered off to the "Sadeh" a field. This represents Avrohom who besides for Yitzchok, he had two other sets of children, Yishmael and the Bnei Ketura. The message to Bilam was, if you want to curse Avrohom's children then go to the right or left to either of these other children, but do not stay on the middle road, which represents Yitzchok.

The second episode was when the donkey went on a narrow path between two walls and squeezed Bilam's leg against the side wall. This narrow road which had room for only two people represented Yitzchok's two children, Yaakov and Eisav. The donkey pushed Bilam to one side, telling him he can only curse Eisav and not Yaakov.

The last time, the Malach totally blocked the road and the Donkey had no where to go but lie down. This is the children of Yaakov who are all Kadosh V'Tahor and cannot be cursed.

Go 'With' Them Written By Oizer Alport



The entire back-and-forth between Bilaam and the angels is very difficult to comprehend. Initially, when Balak's representatives came to invite Bilaam to curse the Jews, Hashem said to Bilaam in no uncertain terms (22:12): lo seilech imahem – do not go with them.

When Balak followed-up by sending higher-ranking officers, Hashem relented and explicitly permitted Bilaam to go with them (22:20), which he indeed did the following morning. Curiously, the very next verse states that Hashem was angry with him for going. Why did Hashem change his position regarding the permissibility of going with Balak's agents, and why did he get upset when Bilaam merely followed His instructions?

A number of commentators (the Vilna Gaon, Malbim, and Tosefes Bracha) beautifully note that there are two words in the Hebrew

language which mean "with them" – imahem and itam. As every subtle difference is loading with meaning, they explain that while both words mean "with them," the word imahem is used to refer to a case in which one is completely identical "to them," while itam is appropriate for a case in which one is similar, but not identical, "to them."

We may now understand that the agents of Balak wished Bilaam to go with them not just physically but in kindred spirit, united in their plan to curse and destroy the Jewish nation.

Not surprisingly, Hashem replied lo seilech imahem – you may not go together with them in an identical fashion, one in which you share the same motives that they do. When Hashem subsequently appeared to relent, it was with one crucial condition: kum leich itam – you may walk together with them, but not united with them in your intentions, as Hashem explicitly permitted him to say only what He would command him. Bilaam, with his intense hatred for the Jews, refused to accept this subtle, but critical, distinction, and the Torah relates that vayeilech im sarei Bilaam – united with them in their mission, and it was precisely at that moment that Hashem got angry at his refusal to follow directions!

We may now answer another difficulty with this understanding. When the angel subsequently gives Bilaam permission to go with the men, Rashi comments (22:35) b'derech she'adam rotzeh leilech molichin oso – a person is led in the direction in which he truly wishes to go, so in this case Bilaam was given permission to go with Balak's agents for the purpose of cursing the Jews. Why didn't Rashi write this comment when Hashem previously allowed him to go with these men?

The Gaon explains that until now, he was permitted only to walk with them, but not united with them in their intentions.

At this point, the angel said to him leich im ha'anashim, thereby giving him permission for the first time to join them in their

diabolical scheme, and it was precisely at this point that Rashi noted that Hashem permitted him to travel in the path he truly desired to go in!

Parshah Pearls *(Adapted from the Ba'al ha'Turim)*

וַיִּשָּׂא מְשָׁלֹו ***"And he raised his (voice to say a) parable"*** (23:7).



Bilaam raised his voice deliberately, so that all the nations of the world should hear his blessings. What, do you really think that he was singing the praises of K'lal Yisrael?

Not at all, explains the Ba'al ha'Turim! He wanted them all to hear Yisrael's praises, in order to arouse their jealousy. If you can't get in through the front door, he figured, then get in through the back!

And this is what the posuk in Mishlei refers to when it says מְבָרֵךְ רֵעֵהוּ בְקוֹל גָּדוֹל בַּבֹּקֶר הַשְׁכֵּים קְלָלָה תֵּחָשֵׁב לֹו ***"He blesses his friend in a loud voice, and in the morning, it turns out to be a curse".***

"Emunah is not something to be found outside of oneself, it is a flame that burns within the heart of every person, waiting to be kindled." – Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk.

Short Vort.com -Do angels of mercy carry swords? Written by Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

וַיִּחַר־אַף אֱלֹקִים כִּי־הוֹלֵךְ הוּא וַיִּתְיַצַּב מַלְאַךְ ה׳ בַּדֶּרֶךְ לְשָׂטָן לוֹ

***Hashem became angry that he (Bilaam) went, and He placed an Angel of Hashem on the road to prevent him* (22:22)**



Rashi explains that the Angel who approached Bilaam was actually an Angel of Mercy. If so, notes ***Rav Pam***, it is strange that we find this Angel in a proceeding verse carrying a sword. What is the Angel of Mercy doing carrying a sword; surely, a sword would be a more suitable for an Angel of Destruction?

Rav Pam answers that the Angel of Mercy's role is to manifest Hashem's mercy in the world, and as such, he can come in many guises and forms. He is not limited to looking sweet and cheerful offering good tidings, because his role is to bring about the ultimate good. His job is to stop people making mistakes and help them lead their lives in the right direction — as such, He may even be wielding a sword — as long as the end result is for the person's greater good.

In fact, we may not realize at the time that he is in fact a merciful Angel — we may not even realize that he is an Angel, but Hashem can put us in any situation where people or situations can command our next move, and whether we know it or not, it's all part of Hashem's ultimate plan for our greater good.

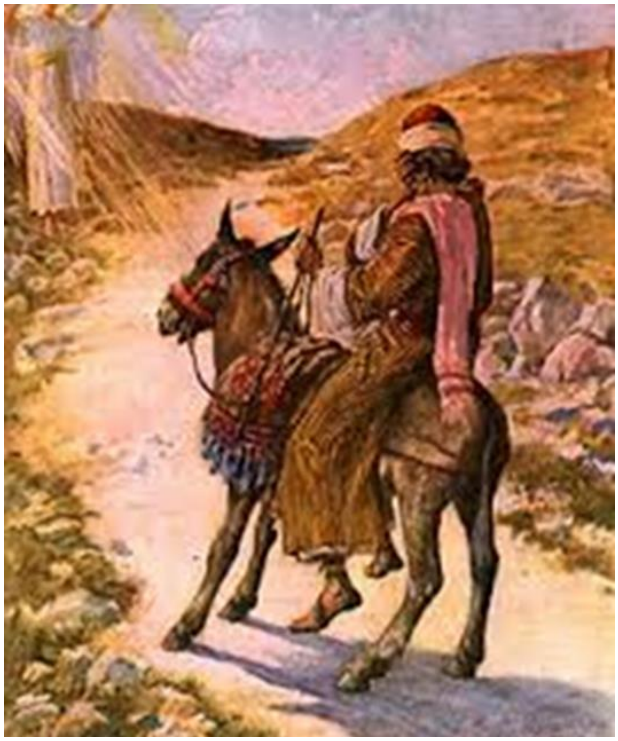
To demonstrate this concept, **Rav Yissocher Frand** related that ***Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky*** applied for a certain Rabbinical position in Europe. Confident that he was most suited for the job, Rav Yaakov was very disappointed when he was rejected from the position. Ultimately, he felt that he had no choice but to head to America to find a livelihood. After several positions around America

and Canada, he was eventually appointed Rosh Yeshiva of the great Yeshivas Torah Vadaas, and soon became one of the *Gedolim* of America.

So we see, said *Rav Frand*, that his rejection, even though he didn't see it at the time, was actually the for Rav Yaakov's greater good; for had he stayed in Europe, not only would he likely have not have become the great Rosh Yeshiva and leader of a generation that he became, but he would also have not likely survived the Nazi onslaught that totally wiped out the entire city where he wanted to serve as the community Rav.

So, when an opportunity passes us by, we should not be too disheartened. We should have confidence that Hashem, Who only wants the best for us, is setting us up for a greater opportunity, and when the time comes, we should be ready to take it with tremendous gratitude for all of our previous "failures" that lead us to this point.

Teshuvah



Bilam beat his donkey three times, because his donkey was stalling and disobeying him. Hashem opened Bilam's eyes and he saw the reason for his animal's unusual behaviour.

A malach (angel) stood before him, with a drawn sword in its hand. "Why did you hit your donkey three times?" the malach asked. Bilam answered, חָטָאתִי כִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי, I sinned, because I didn't know that you were standing in front of me."

The Midrash says, "The passuk is telling us that Bilam was a wise rasha . He knew that teshuvah protects from punishment. [He knew

that] whoever sins and says, חָטָאתִי, 'I sinned,' no malach can harm him" (Yalkut Shimoni).

The Sifsei Tzaddik teaches that we should learn from this the potential of teshuvah. Bilam wasn't repenting leshem shamayim; he didn't sincerely regret his bad intentions. He only admitted that he sinned because he knew that this would save him from punishment. Yet it was sufficient. We should derive from this that we always have the option to amend. With sincere regret, and with true teshuvah, we can certainly rectify any wrong committed.



Pirkei Avos compares the Jewish nation to a brazen leopard and to a powerful lion. הֱוֵי עַז כַּנָּמֵר ... וְגִבּוֹר כָּאֲרִי "Be brazen like a leopard… and mighty like a lion" (5:20). Bilam also compared Yidden to a lion, as it says, הֶן עָם כְּלָבִיא יָקוּם וְכַאֲרִי יִתְנַשָּׂא *"Behold the nation stands up like a lion…"* (Bamidbar 23:24).

What is the difference between a lion and a leopard? Since the Mishnah lists them separately, they are apparently two aspects of avodas Hashem. The Chidushei HaRim explains that הֱוֵי עַז כַּנָּמֵר *"be brazen like a leopard"* is said to people who have sinned. Before their sin, they were like a mighty lion. They were ready to take on every challenge, and to serve Hashem with all their might. But after their sin, they often feel broken-hearted.

The Mishnah tells them, be brazen like the leopard. Don't remain in your fallen state. Be strong and brazen and pick yourself up again. And then once again you will be courageous and powerful like a lion, in your avodas Hashem.

The Beis Yisrael zy'a said that it is a mitzvah to repeat this vort to bachurim, so they will know that it is always possible to rectify mistakes.



Pirkei Avos also says, וְקַל כַּנֶּשֶׁר "be light like an eagle," because one should serve Hashem with agility like an eagle. There are lighter matters than an eagle. A piece of paper is lighter, a feather is lighter. However, when a feather or when a piece of paper is dropped, it will eventually hit the ground. But an eagle will not fall. It picks itself up again and soars to the heavens. The Mishnah says, be like an eagle that doesn't let itself drop. Regardless of the errors of the past, pick yourself up again.

The Steipler Gaon zt'l said, the sefarim tell us various ways one can cleanse himself from sin. Among them is fasting and other procedures. But I say that the greatest rectification is when one sins and doesn't remain there. He picks himself up. Doing so purifies the person from his sins more than all the other methods.

Someone once told the Steipler zt'l about his sins, and how distant he is from serving Hashem properly. The Steipler asked him, "Do you have any good moments; times when you serve Hashem properly?" The man concurred. "Focus on those moments!" the Steipler told him. Because our goal in avodas Hashem should be to live with the realization that regardless of what occurred, we can always life ourselves up again and continue to serve Hashem.

יְשׁוּעַת ה' כְּהֶרֶף עַיִן. "The salvation of G-d is like the blink of an eye." – Pesikta Zutreta, Esther 4:17.

Pearls of Wisdom… A Word for the Ages



The Avnei Neizer was careful to always serve his guests himself. One time a guest of his said, "I am a simple person and I don't deserve this respect from you."

The Avnei Neizer brought his guest to a window and showed him a leather shop that was across the road. He said, "That store only sells leather products. There's nothing holy about them. However, when a Sofer works with leather and turns them into Tefilin, they become holy.

Right now, you are my guest, and you are my Mitzvah. You have now become holy, and therefore, you deserve immense respect!"

The Torah Any Times Newsletter

Rabbi Benzion Klatzko Changing the Narrative

The world looks at us in a certain ways and is quick to apply condescending labels – anti-Semitic, money-hungry, separatists – but we should be just as quick to show them how their narrative of us Jews is wrong.

I was at a house sale some time ago, where I spotted a beautiful piano. Both my wife and I had grown up with pianos, and I figured that it would be a nice piece of furniture to add to our home and be used to play. Turning to the man running the sale, I asked for the price. "$250 in cash," he said. I knew immediately that $250 was a superb price for a good piano and showed interest in buying it. "The only thing is that a lady came here before you and was asking about

it. It looks like she is going to buy it." I turned around and soon spotted the woman, a Jewish lady, who had shown such interest. "No problem," I replied to the proprietor, "she came first and has the preferred right to purchase it." "But wait just one minute here," added the owner, "let's just make sure that she has the money."



Checking with the woman that she had the $250 in cash on hand to buy the piano, she said that she would take a look. If she didn't have it, she offered to go home and bring the money right away. Turning to me, he asked if I had the money readily available. "I do have the cash," I said, "but I am not going to jump in front of her."

"Why?" the man asked me in curious disbelief. "You have the cash! I'll sell it to you, and it'll be a done deal."

Before he could go any further, I interjected. "I can't do that," I said. "In Judaism, we have a concept which teaches that if a person enters into a transactional agreement with someone and settles on a price, even though no transaction has actually been completed, no one else can interfere and try to purchase the item for themselves (in the language of our rabbis, this is termed, 'ani hamehapech b'charara – an impoverished person chasing a crust of bread.') Here this woman has agreed to pay the settled price of $250; I can't jump in and grab the deal."

But the owner didn't understand and couldn't grasp the fact that I was so politely allowing her to buy the piano and stepping aside myself. "Do you have the money or not?" he asked the woman again.

She opened up her purse, and including singles, had a total of $70. The man turned back to me. "Look, she doesn't have the money!" "I can go home," she said. "Ma'am," firmly said the owner, "I can't afford to lose a customer if I have to wait for you while you return home."

I then turned to the woman, and said, "How much more do you need? Another $180?" I opened my wallet, counted out $180 and handed it to her. "Take this," I said, "I'll give you my address and you can send me the money when you get back home."

The owner couldn't believe his eyes. What about the Jewish narrative that we are cheap, stingy and selfish? "Do you even know this lady?" he asked. "No, I replied, "but I trust that she will return the money to me as soon as she has the opportunity." And that was it. I then proceeded to walk into one of the adjacent rooms.

Just minutes later, one of the young helpers came running over to me. "Do you know what they're saying about you out there? They're so impressed. They said that they realize now that they've never understood Jews!"

Reflecting on this, I realized that here was an opportunity to not only make a Kiddush Hashem, but to also change the narrative that the world has of Jews.

The story has a very interesting ending though. As I was about to leave, I noticed that there were a few bottles of wine and alcohol for sale. "How much are these?" I asked. The owner looked at me and said, "They're yours." "No, no, I don't want them for free," I made clear. "How much are they?" "They're yours; I want you to have them."

The owner certainly had the right to freely give them to me, and so, I graciously complied. After taking them and returning home, I discovered that one was a $300 bottle of scotch, the other was a bottle of Cherry Heering Liqueur that was about fifty years old, and

the third was a bottle of Sabra Liqueur from the 1960s. They were all collector's items and worth more than the piano I had let go.

Every Shabbos during Shalosh Seudos , I take out these expensive bottles for my guests and have what I call "Commitment L'Chaims." Whoever would like can come up, make a L'Chaim and take upon themselves some commitment they would like. They may commit to start keeping Shabbos, putting on Tefillin or whatever else they can do.

But even if that was not the ending of the story, the lesson to take away is the opportunity we have when we perform a Kiddush Hashem. We do not simply inspire others by our caring and thoughtful actions; we change their narrative of the Jews and offer the world new lenses from which to view us Jews much more positively.

Rabbi Lazer Brody Your Blemish, Your Beauty

For one elderly Jew who lived on the border of Ukraine and Romania, his job as the local watercarrier required him to walk down the paths of the Carpathian Mountains to the nearby river, fill up two buckets, and head back up with them thrust upon his shoulders. Just about all day long, he would bring the townspeople their fill of water. Yet, there was something special and unique about this particular town. The residents were especially pious individuals, and incredibly, even their buckets could talk. And on one occasion, one of the conversations a bucket had with another bucket led to a remarkable realization.

One bucket was brand new with a nice and sturdy surrounding rim, encased in iron and decorative polished wooden slats. The other bucket, however, was old and rusty, aside from which it had a hole, causing it to leak. Every morning, by the time the poor watercarrier would reach the top of the mountain, the old bucket would only be

one-third full. And so, one day, the new bucket struck up conversation with the old bucket.

"I don't wish to insult you, but haven't you been serving our owner for many years? You look like you could use a long-term retirement.



Besides, you have a hole and leak every time you're filled up. I only imagine our boss will want to get rid of you soon. Don't you think so?" The old bucket was discernably upset and taken aback by this realization. "Look," replied the old bucket, "I've been working for our owner for thirty years. Although I may be old, I have much experience. Despite me not being perfect, who says our owner will throw me away?"

As the new bucket took in the words of the old bucket, he realized that he had misspoken. But, in the back of the old bucket's mind, he still remained worried about his job's security. "Just maybe," he thought to himself, "this young bucket is on to something. Perhaps my owner really wants to get rid of me even after so many years of loyal service…" And so, the old bucket decided he would approach his owner about this concern.

One day, as the owner made his way to the top of the hill with his two buckets, he set the young bucket down, allowing for the rare occasion of spending a few moments alone with the old bucket. The old bucket, having waited for this opportunity, quickly realized that now or never was the time to ask his question.

"My dear owner," began the bucket, "are you going to get rid of me? Do you not like me anymore? We have been together for so many years…" The elderly man, caught off guard by the bucket's comment, was not hesitant to reply. "Get rid of you? You're my beloved bucket who I've been using for thirty years! You and I are going to the Next

World together. I'm never going to give you up!" "Well," continued the bucket, "I just wanted to make sure, because the young bucket did mention how I am quite old and have a hole. I myself have begun to wonder, why in fact do you continue to use me if I have a hole? Why don't you buy another bucket?"



The owner, looking down at the bucket, let out a smile. "Let me tell you something, my dear bucket. I am an old man myself, and it is difficult for me to walk up and down the hill and fill up water. But you know where I gain the strength to do so every day? Just look down at the path leading up and down the hill. You see those beautiful flowers blossoming along the path? You know who made that path of flowers? That little hole of yours. Every time I carry you up the hill, by the time I reach the top, there is only one-third of water left. But where has the rest of the water gone? One little drop of water falls here and another little drop falls there. Sooner than later, a flower begins to grow, and then another flower and another.

Whenever I see those beautiful flowers you produced all along the path, I forget how my back is aching and legs are tiring and I continue walking with renewed vigor and optimism. By virtue of your hole, I gain the strength to continue on with my job every day. What you consider to be your blemish is your beauty. And so, you are not something I would ever sell, but something I will always cherish."

In our own lives, we often look at our flaws and failures as imperfections and deficiencies we wish we never had. We feel that

we do not measure up to the benchmark of perfection we ought to. But then, one day, we come to realize that in fact our blemish is our greatest source of beauty and blessing. Our "hole" is not our problem, but our perfection. All that goes into who we are as a person is precisely what we need to fulfill our mission in life. We need not wish we were someone or something else. Exactly the way we are is exactly the way we need to be. And there is nothing more beautiful and precious than that.

Rabbi Zecharia Wallerstein Who Should You Save?



As one man sped through the streets of New York city on a rainy night, he came across a bus stop at which three people stood. He looked around trying to make out any bus in the near distance, but nothing stood out. And then he looked over at the three people standing amidst the torrential downpour. He immediately paused and blinked a few times, trying to make sure that what he saw was in fact reality.

Standing there was a beautiful and charming girl, accompanied by a man who had once saved his life. Next to them was an elderly lady

who was shivering and coughing, clearly on the verge of dying. He then looked to his side and noticed the one empty seat available in his newly purchased two-seater corvette. "What should I do?" he asked himself again and again. "Who should I save?"

He knew that the beautiful girl was his *bashert* and were he to pass up on this opportunity, he would never get married. Yet, then there was his friend who had saved his life. Would he overlook the kindness he had bestowed upon him and be ungracious? But with all this in mind, there was still the old woman who needed to be transported to the hospital this very minute, and if any more time would be wasted, she would sadly meet her demise.

This was the question which was posed to four hundred applicants vying for one position in a law firm.

Think about it for a minute. Who would you save? Why? Don't read beyond until you have come up with your answer…

Only one out of the four hundred applicants came up with the right answer. All other three hundred and nighty-nine candidates didn't. What should you do? This is not merely a riddle, but teaches a profound lesson, and as you will soon see, tells you something about yourself as well.

Get out of the car, hand the keys to the man who saved your life, tell him to drive the old lady to the hospital and you wait for the bus with your bashert.

Now, if you didn't come to this conclusion, there may be various reasons why. But, quite likely, it is for the same reason all other three hundred and ninety-nine interviewees didn't either. It is because in your mind, the man sitting in the car remained sitting in the car. "I can only take one of them," he says to himself. "Who should I take?" But, if you would rewrite the script and think selflessly and outside the box, you would quickly realize that there is a much more effective way of solving your dilemma. If only the

man sitting in the driver's seat would tell himself, "I will get out of the car and get wet myself, but I will make everything else work," then you'll see, everything else will indeed work.

That is the difference between that one applicant and everyone else, and perhaps us as well. The man who got the job and the person who will think smart and be smart is the one who looks outside of themselves. The answer is precisely with you, and the answer is precisely without you. That is the key to unlocking many closed doors in life.

Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb - Needing to be Needed

***אם יתן לי בלק מלא ביתו כסף וזהב Even if Balak were to give me his houseful of silver and gold…* (Bamidbar 24:13)**



I remember once being approached by a psychiatrist with a problem. "Rabbi," he said, "I need your help. I have been through five relationships, and every one of them ended the same way. The other person left me. I cannot understand what happened though. I am well-to-do and very generous with my time, money and concern. I gave them my attention, shared my wisdom and we travelled together. But they all walked out on me."

Listening closely to this psychiatrist's dilemma, I turned the tables around. "Let me ask you something. You say that you did an inordinate amount for them; but what did they do for you?"

Within a heartbeat, he replied, "Oh Rabbi, I'm not a taker! They didn't do anything for me; I did everything for them." As soon as he said that, I knew the answer. "That's exactly your problem," I explained. "Everyone you entered into a relationship with felt like a fifth wheel. They felt useless and unvalued. And no one is happy if they are made worthless."

But he couldn't hear me. "Rabbi," he insisted, "I gave them so much!" "Okay," I said, "if that is the case, on to number six."

It has been said numerous times that people do not say to their spouses and children as often as they should the three very important words of "I love you." That is most certainly true. However, ask yourself when was the last time you told your spouse, "I need you." How often do we use this trio of words? In a marriage, these words are just as vital as "I love you."

Giving to another is one of the most important essentials of life and builders of self-esteem because it enables a person to feel that he is someone important and needed by others. Regrettably, this concept is misunderstood.

There is an entire organization devoted to integrating self-esteem into American society called NASE (National Association for Self-Esteem). And yet, surprisingly, when I looked through their materials to see what secular sources say about the causes for improved self-esteem and what threatens it, I was astonished. They do not mention that giving to others is a contributing factor.

What you may be wondering, though, is how everyone can always be a giver? For one person to give, a second person must take.

But that is not necessarily true. **Rav Eliyahu Dessler** (*Michtav Mei'Eliyahu* Vol. 1, pp. 48-49) brilliantly suggests that one can go through an entire lifetime as a giver. And that is because there is a very important distinction between taking and receiving.

Suppose someone approaches you for advice, and happily complying, you offer your guidance. Who gave to whom? We would likely argue that you gave to the person who came to you. You helped him because you shared with him your wisdom, suggestions and time. But did the other person give anything to you?

He most certainly did. He gave you a very important message. "I think you are smart, well-educated and experienced. I regard your opinion and think you are kind enough to share your wisdom with me." Doesn't that build your self-esteem and make you feel needed? While you gave him your advice, he gave you his validation. He received your advice and you received his admiration. We would be wise to redefine our terms as giving and receiving as opposed to giving and taking.

It follows that if giving builds a person up, allowing the opportunity for a person to give is equally important. And that is what this psychiatrist was missing. He recognized the importance of giving himself, yet failed to realize that receiving can also be an avenue for giving. He considered receiving to be taking and thus an expression of egotism and selfishness. But he had skewed his terms and his relationships suffered in consequence. Had he allowed these women to give to him, they would have felt useful. They wouldn't have viewed themselves as an extra fifth wheel.

At the very heart of self-worth and happiness is the feeling that you are needed. And as the old adage goes, "Everyone needs to be needed."

Shabbos teaches emunah; tzedakah expresses emunah; chesed spreads emunah. One who lives with trust in Hashem can rest, can give, and can love — all three are manifestations of the same inner recognition. ~ Ohr Gedalyahu.

Rabbi Daniel Staum - A Diamond Marriage

מה טבו אהליך יעקב How goodly are your tents, Jacob… (*Bamidbar* 24:5)



As has been the traditional custom amongst Jews, a *chattan* typically gives his *kallah* a diamond engagement ring. Why exactly is this so?

I once heard from Rav Moshe Wolfson a beautiful idea in explanation. In Kabbalah, every colour represents a different character trait. In the case of a diamond, any which way you turn it, all the colours of the rainbow can be seen in the prism. The same is true in a marriage. Every *middah* is necessary. One must mould him or herself into a person who possesses refined *middot* on all levels.

However, just as the base colour of a diamond is white, so must one's home be. White represents *chesed*, kindness, and that is what every Jewish home needs to be firmly built upon. When *chesed* permeates the house and each spouse looks to altruistically care for each other's needs, a beautiful family will flourish.

I remember feeling a bit sad on the last day before my first year anniversary. Although it had been a wonderful year since the time of my engagement through my wedding, *sheva berachot* and entire first year of marriage, I realized that it was now ending. The special feeling one has when he or she is a *chattan* or *kallah* cannot be captivated in words. Although my brother related to me that one of his teachers beautifully told him, "A *chattan* remains a *chattan* as

long as he treats his *kallah* like a *kallah*," I wished to ask my own Rebbe for some personal advice.

He told me that this special feeling one has when entering into marriage and which continues to last for some while can remain with a person forever. As long as you remember that everything your husband or wife does for you is a *chesed*, you will appreciate each other. If for every small action he or she does you express your gratitude and avoid glossing over, you will never lose that initial special spark. You will forever remain a *chattan* and your wife a *kallah* as long as you carry this attitude within your heart.

Shabbos Stories for Parshas balak

Water Sanctification By Rabbi Yosef Weiss Ztl



A large utility truck obstructed R' Aaron Yosef Berger's view as he left his house one morning on his way to the Kollel. "United Water," read the lettering on the side. As he passed, R' Aaron Yosef noticed utility workers emerging from the home of one of his neighbours down the block.

"Uh-oh," he thought to himself. "They must be shutting off the water. I knew they weren't doing so well financially." R' Aaron Yosef mulled unhappily over the situation. He remembered how, not too long ago; the water company had mistakenly cut off the water supply in his own home. How aggravating it had been! The lack of running water disrupted the entire household. No washing, no drinking, no cooking. Even the basic necessities were impossible. The entire day had just turned into complete havoc. "How can I just allow my

neighbour's water to be shut off? How can I allow him to go through such a frustrating experience?"

When he reached his neighbour's house, the truck was just pulling out of the driveway. "Wait!" R' Aaron Yosef called, waving his arms frantically as he tried to flag the driver down. "Please stop!"

The man stopped the truck, startled. He got out of the driver's seat and looked at R' Aaron Yosef in puzzlement. "What's the problem?"

"Did you shut off the water?' R' Aaron Yosef asked.

"Yes, that's right."

"I'll pay the bill. Please turn it back on!" he pleaded.

"What? What are you talking about?" the man asked in bewilderment.

R' Aaron Yosef hesitated. "Didn't you say that you shut off the water?"

"Yes, I did."

"So, if he didn't pay his bill, I'm going to pay it right now."

"Do you live here?" asked the utility worker.

"No."

You're just passing by, and you want to pay some stranger's bill?" the man clarified, incredulous.

"Well, yes, my neighbour's."

"Actually, we're not shutting off the water because of an unpaid bill. There's a water main leak, and we have to shut off the water to fix it. But I can't believe you were willing to pay his bill like that!"

R' Aaron Yosef watched, startled, as the utility worker pulled off the necklace around his neck. A stream of vulgar language spewed forth from his mouth as he cast his religious symbol to the ground

and stamped on it.- "This is no religion! You Jews are amazing! Unbelievable! You must have the right G-d!"

He called over his partner, who was still sitting inside the truck. "You hear this? This man wanted to pay his neighbour's bill!"

R' Aaron fidgeted nervously, anxious that his neighbour might emerge from the house and witness the scene. He apologized to the men for disturbing their work and made a quick getaway to his Gemara in the Kollel.

As R' Aaron Yosef settled into his seat, he began his learning with a feeling of joy at his merit to perform a true Kiddush Hashem. (Visions of Greatness 8)

That Special Shabbos Candle



One of the reasons that we grow up not focusing on our identity is that we lack a sense of adequacy and wholesomeness which allows a more satisfactory adjustment to life. One who does not feel good about himself hardly has the motivation to focus on establishing his identity.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski, M.D. relates a beautiful and meaningful thought which I feel applies to us all across the board. It was Friday night, and they had guests at their Shabbos table. One of the guests, who was apparently not very knowledgeable about Jewish tradition, asked his mother why six candles were burning on the Menorah, rather than the usual two.

It was explained that in most families, when one marries, she begins lighting two candles and, with the ensuing birth of each additional child, she adds another candle.

Rabbi Twerski, who was a young boy at the time, remembers how good he felt in the knowledge that one of the candles that his mother lit Friday night was for him. He realised that the world was now a brighter place because of him.

Rabbi Twerski did not feel the fulfilment of this powerful message until years later when, in the course of his psychiatric practice, it became evident that countless people suffer from emotional problems and varying psychological symptoms due to deep-seated feelings of inadequacy.

He poignantly sums it up: The weekly message to a child, conveyed at the initiation of Shabbos kodesh, that his/her existence has brought additional brightness into the home, can be a powerful stimulant for personal development.



The Power of Mezuzahs By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton

The telephone in Rabbi Rachamim Nimni's home rang. On the other end of the line was an almost hysterical woman pleading for help in Hebrew.

"Rabbi Nimni? Hello? Is this Rabbi Nimni? Ah, good! I'm calling from Israel. Rabbi, you have to help me! This is Rabbi Nimni, yes? You are in New York, yes? You are Chabad, yes? Listen, I am calling about my son. His name is Chezki. He is such a wonderful boy. He is twenty-two and, well, he met a non-Jewish girl here in Israel.

"At first we thought it would pass but it didn't. We told him we weren't so happy about it but it got more serious until . . . well, now, that is a few months ago. He says they want to get married. Rabbi, someone gave me your number and said that, well, maybe you can help. We are going crazy here!"

"But, why are you calling me?" asked Rabbi Nimni. "I live in New York. I mean, there must be rabbis in Israel who can talk to him face-to-

face. Why do it long distance? And why me? I don't think I even know your son? Do I?"

"No, no," she replied. "You don't know him. But I didn't finish. You see, his father and I, we tried everything. First we tried to talk him out of it. Then we sent his friends and teachers from school and then we sent rabbis, a lot of rabbis. But it got worse. He got mad and said he wanted us to leave him alone. Finally he left. Rabbi, he left Israel.

"He and his girlfriend moved to New Jersey. So, they're closer to you than me and they're making plans for the wedding. Rabbi, please help! Do you think you can help?"

Rabbi Nimni asked a few more questions, got Chezki's phone number, promised he would at least give it a try, and hung up.

He dialed the number. Chezki answered and surprisingly he sounded very friendly. Maybe it was because he was glad to speak to someone in Hebrew or maybe it was just a miracle but he and the rabbi hit it off and talked for a good ten minutes.

Of course, Rabbi Nimni was careful not to bring up the topic of the girl or the wedding. His plan was to first establish a rapport and then gradually approach the topic, but Chezki knocked that idea down at the end of the conversation. He said that he really enjoyed talking and would like to talk again. But only on the condition they never speak about his girlfriend or his upcoming wedding or he'll hang up and never answer again.

So every few days, sometimes every day, Rabbi Nimni managed to find a few minutes to call Chezki and talk.

They talked about sports, the weather, Israel, history, philosophy, hobbies, even family. But without being able to talk about the girl, the days and weeks went by, and the rabbi was getting nowhere. In fact, if the conversation ever got even close to the "forbidden"

topic, Chezki would interject with, "I hope you aren't going to make me close the phone, Rabbi."

After a month of this with no progress, Rabbi Nimni was beginning to get nervous. The wedding was approaching and there seemed to be no way to stop it. But on the other hand, he did have one foot in the door. It would be a shame to just give up.

Rabbi Nimni decided to ask his father, Rabbi Michael Nimni, a well-known Sefardic rabbi in New York, for advice. His answer was simple: "Did you write to the Rebbe?"

He was referring to the custom of many Chabad Chassidim to write questions to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, put them in one of the twenty-seven volumes of the Rebbe's correspondences to people entitled Igrot Kodesh, and see if the answer applies to them.

Rabbi Nimni almost slapped himself on the forehead. He had used Igrot Kodesh tens, even hundreds, of times before but this time it simply had slipped his mind.

He wrote a letter explaining the situation, pulled out one volume from his library, inserted it randomly between two of the pages, and then opened to see what was written there.

It was volume sixteen, page 55, and the letter there stressed the importance of fulfilling the commandment of having a proper mezuzah on every door, how mezuzah is equal to all the commandments, and how this commandment shows that one's house and possessions really belong to the Creator.

The next time Rabbi Nimni spoke to Chezki, he took the chance. Up to now he had steered clear of bringing up Judaism at all but with the Rebbe's answer now under his belt, he got bold.

"Hey Chezki! How are you today? Hey, I was just thinking. What about a mezuza on your door. Do you have mezuzahs?" There was a moment of silence. Would Chezki slam the phone shut? "Mezuzah?"

he answered. "Hey! You know, you're right! A mezuzah. Yeah! But where will I get a mezuzah?



"No problem!" answered the rabbi. I've got a bunch (which wasn't true). Tell me where you live, and I'll be right there!"

Rabbi Nimni got the address. He drove to the nearest scribe, bought a few good mezuzahs, and rushed to Chezki's flat.

A few minutes later the mezuzahs were up and a beaming Chezki was thanking the rabbi for the gifts.

As Rabbi Nimni drove home he began to think about what he had just done. He had spent some two hundred dollars for what? After all, he still didn't get a word in about the wedding nor did he even do anything at all to delay it! The more he thought about it, the more he began to wonder if he hadn't made a big mistake.

The next time he called Chezki, two days later, Chezki didn't even mention the mezuzahs. All he talked about was his girlfriend. "Wow! Suddenly she's all tense and unpleasant. In fact, we even had an argument about nothing . . . our first argument. I can't figure it out. I hope this isn't how it's going to be!"

Rabbi Nimni didn't say anything but he almost shouted aloud from surprise. He just tried to talk about something else and ended the conversation pleasantly.

The next time he called, Chezki complained bitterly. The arguing wasn't stopping and she was making his life miserable. Yesterday, she began yelling again and demanded that he remove the mezuzahs from the doors. "But," Chezki announced proudly, "I refused! I told

her that it was good luck and anyway Jews have been doing it for more than three thousand years, so it can't be so bad!"

"Three days later it was Chezki who called the rabbi. "Hey, Rabbi. How're you doing? Hey, don't call me on that other number because, well, I moved.

"That's right. I came home yesterday and, well, she took down the mezuzahs. Then, when I asked her why, she started cursing out me and all the Jews. I couldn't believe it! Anyway, I got the mezuzahs. Now I'm just looking for a door to put them on."

The Only Person Who Responded By Leibel Gniwisch



The Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn

Brownsville buzzed with Jewish life in mid-20th century. A modest neighborhood deep in Brooklyn, its denizens were Jewish immigrants who had lifted themselves up from the poverty-stricken tenements of Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Of course, there were synagogues. Homey Chassidic shtiebels, larger "Jewish center" types for "alrightniks," and even Sephardic congregations for the Jews from exotic places like Turkey and Syria.

One particular synagogue was led by a rabbi whose name we no longer know. What we do know is that he didn't like the chassidim. We aren't

sure why. It may have been a remnant of the age-old feud between chassidim and mitnagdim or personal animus. Whatever it was, the rabbi often mocked his Chassidic coreligionists. Most notably, the rabbi derided the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn.

But one day, the rabbi stood up to address his congregants, declaring a complete change of heart.

"I have something to say," he announced from the pulpit. "I was wrong about the Lubavitcher Rebbe and I want to apologize publicly for the way I've portrayed him in the past."

"Why? What happened?" asked the shul members in surprise.

The rabbi answered with a personal story. "As you know, I have a brother. Recently, he's been diagnosed with a serious illness. He needed money, a lot of it, and he reached out to me for help." The rabbi mopped the sweat that began to bead on his forehead.

"I thought about asking you, my congregants, but the sum was too large and I knew you needed the money for your families. So I did what seemed to be the only viable option: I placed a classified ad in the *Morgen Journal* with four words and my phone number. '*Ah Yid darf hilf* (a Jew needs help),' I wrote, hoping for the best. I was desperate.

"Do you know who was the only one to answer my classified? The Lubavitcher Rebbe. He called me and offered to donate the full amount.

"This is why I am apologizing. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak is a true leader of the Jewish people. He didn't know who I was or whether I belonged to his movement, he simply saw that a Jew needed help and that was enough for him."

More Important than A First Class Seat



Rabbi Shmuel Birnbaum, O"BM, was once sitting on a plane to Eretz Yisrael and was flying business class. He was sitting in a middle seat with two big fellows sitting on either side and their elbows pressed against his ribcage (because the two "brusiers" availed themselves of the armrest).

A former student of his was flying first class and he spotted the Rosh Yeshivah with a small Talmud book, learning peacefully. The student felt very guilty.

"Rebbi, I have a first-class seat and I wanted to give to the Rebbi," he offered. Rabbi Birnbaum politely declined. The student persisted: "I can't sit in first-class if my Rebbi is flying business class." Rav Birnbaum insisted that he was fine where he was. When Rav Birnbaum saw that the student was adamant, he finally made his counter-offer: "You really want to give me your seat in first class?" The student got excited and replied, "Yes, Rebbi, of course – it will be my pleasure." Rav Birnbaum said, "Okay, if you're ready to give up your seat, then give it to him (pointing to one of the big fellows). Then, you come sit here and we will learn Torah together!"

There is a story in which the Kaiser asks his chancellor Bismarck, "Can you prove the existence of G-d?" Bismarck replies, "The Jews, your majesty. The Jews.

Sharing the Kavod With a Talmid



Returning from a summer rest at a European hotel in the Austrian mountainside, the **Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Yehuda Zev Segal, zt"l**, and one of his Talmidim, flew to London and then boarded a train for Manchester.

As the train pulled into the Manchester station, the Talmid looked out and saw a huge assemblage of Yeshivah Bochrim who had come to welcome back the Rosh Yeshivah. The student reported this to Rav Segal, who reacted by lowering his head and immersing himself in his thoughts. As the two disembarked from the train, the crowd broke out in lively singing. The Rosh Yeshivah said to his Talmid, "Look at what they have done for you!"

The young man replied, "Why does the Rosh Yeshivah think that all this honor is for me? Surely all this is in honour of the Rosh Yeshivah!"

Rav Segal pointed into the crowd at a large sign that the boys had set up. He said, "Look at the sign, my dear Talmid. It says 'Bruchim Haba'im', which is a welcome in the plural tense. If they had only meant to welcome me, the sign would have said 'Baruch Haba'!" *(Torah U'Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.)*

Every act of kindness performed below arouses spiritual channels above; the smallest gesture in this world reverberates through higher worlds beyond human perception. ~ Nefesh HaChaim.

Just a "Poshuta Yid"



Rav Dovid Kaplan writes a story: Naming a baby is sometimes tricky. Baruch Hashem, Meir and Ahuva had a baby boy after having a few girls and decided to name him after Ahuva's grandfather. Ahuva then started having second thoughts about it.

She said, "My grandfather was a very nice man and a fine person, but he wasn't a Talmid Chacham. He was just a 'Poshuta Yid', a simple Jew. Maybe it would be better if we name the baby after a Gadol."

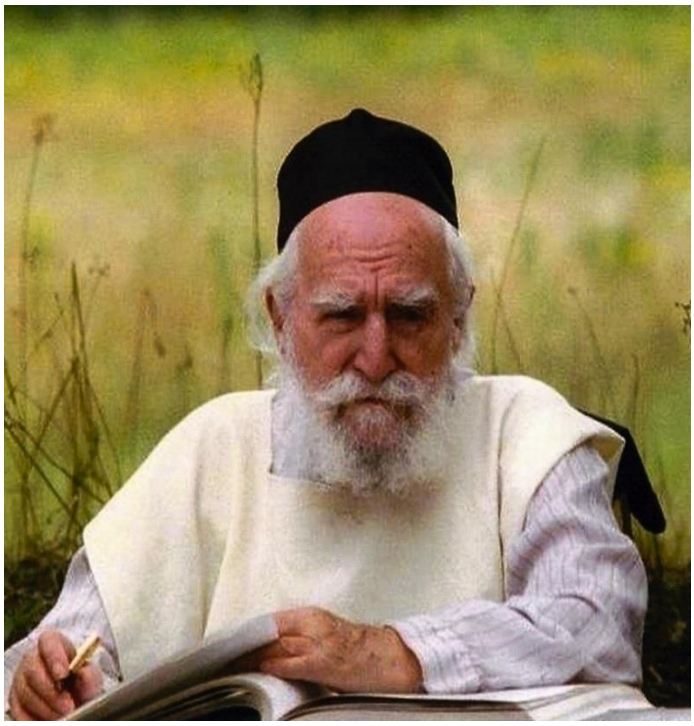
Meir went to ask his Rosh Yeshivah what he thought about it. The Rebbe asked, "When did her grandfather live?" Meir answered, "He came to America in the 1930's and worked in the curtain business."

The Rosh Yeshivah then asked, "And where are his children today?"

Meir replied, "All of them are Frum and all his grandchildren are Bnei Torah."

The Rosh Yeshivah gave Meir a serious look and said, "Anyone who lived in America in the 1930's and 40's, and raised a family that produced Bnei Torah, is not just a 'Poshuta Yid.' Name the baby after him. In fact, I think the same could be said for anyone who lived in America in the 50's, 60's, and 70's, and even through today!" *(Torah U'Tefilah: by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.)*

The Non-Jewish Employer Learns an Important Lesson



Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l

When Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, was young, his parents wanted to inspire him to trust in Hashem and serve Him with absolute devotion, and they would tell him a story about his great-grandfather which made a powerful impression on him. Rav Moshe's father was named after his own grandfather, Rav Dovid Feinstein, who was a man who worked as a common labourer but was full of Yiras Shamayim.

When Rav Dovid was hired to work for a non-Jew, he made the condition that every day he must be allowed time off to Daven Minchah. However, Rav Dovid's employer was not very happy about this condition. He was angry that precious time that could have been used for work would be 'wasted' because the Jew had to say his prayers.

But Rav Dovid was a good worker and the man needed him, so he agreed. The employer became even angrier when he saw that Rav Dovid's Shemoneh Esrei was recited carefully and with intense Kavanah, and lasted a very long time.

The man said, "Who does he think he is? This is not a synagogue where you can pray as long as you like. I only intended to allow him a couple of minutes off, and nothing more!"

Instead of speaking to Rav Dovid directly, the man decided to send the Jew a message to show how upset he was, and he wanted it to be a message that Rav Dovid would remember for a very long time.

One day, as Rav Dovid stood with his eyes closed Davening Shemoneh Esrei, his employer moved behind him, and held a shotgun in his hands. He waited for Rav Dovid to bow, because after watching him Daven a few times, he knew that there were times when he would bow his head, and when the moment came when Rav Dovid bowed, he shot his gun just above Rav Dovid, and a bullet whizzed right over him.

The goy watched with joy, expecting to see the Jew fall to the ground from fright or start running like mad for the door, but he was greatly disappointed. Rav Dovid simply continued to Daven as if nothing at all had occurred. His Kavanah was so intense that he may not have even heard the gunshot at all!

Later, the employer told Rav Dovid what he did and that he tried to scare him by showing that he had been angry enough to kill him for taking so long in his prayers, but when he realized how intensely Rav Dovid was concentrating on his prayer, he realized that Rav Dovid was truly a G-d-fearing man.

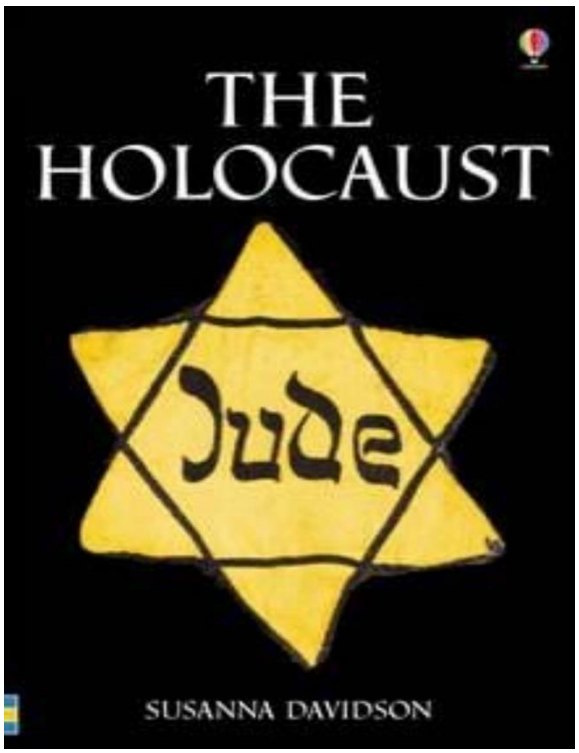
He said, "I see now that you really are not wasting any time at all as you are actually talking with G-d, and I am no longer angry about this. I thought you were trying to fool me just so you can take a break from work."

From then on, the man would refer to Rav Dovid as 'my Jew', and never again complained about the length of his Davening. When Rav Dovid Davened, it was as clear as day to him that he was standing directly before Hashem!

(Torah U'Tefilah: by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.)

"Torah is not education, it's transformation." – Rebbetzen Dena Weinberg.

The Australian Girl And the Holocaust Book By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton



Some fifty years ago in a small Australian town not far from Melbourne lived a wealthy gentile family with a thirteen-year-old daughter whom we will call Sally.

Besides lacking a brother or sister (she was an only child) she lacked nothing. She was young, intelligent, healthy, had good clothes, friends, her personal room with her own T.V. She and her parents were clean-living church goers and lived the happiest of lives until she saw that holocaust book.

She came across it in the school library. She was browsing around when it caught her eye. It was a large documentary book full of pictures called "The Holocaust; The Extermination of European Jewry 1939 -1945" written on a green cover over a picture of gaunt and skinny people behind barbed wire.

She opened it randomly to a picture of a huge pit filled with thousands of dead bodies and her mouth opened in horror. She couldn't believe what she was seeing, trying to make out one body from the other. Did they have faces? These were people! Who would do such a thing? Who would photograph such a thing? Why were they killed? Murdered!! What did they do? These were Jews! What did they do to get killed?

She sat down and read. It told about the Jews in Germany, in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Hungary, the list went on and on; who was killed, when they were killed, how they were killed, how many were killed ... page after page of gaunt pictures and text.

But it didn't explain WHY they were killed.

Over an hour later she closed it and walked home in a daze.

She told her mother about that book figuring they could discuss it. But her mother just said something about, yes, she heard there had been such a thing and changed the subject.

Sally had changed because of that horrifying book. She hid that transformation from her parents and acted the same as always. But from that day on it was different. She couldn't get the pictures off her mind.

She returned to the library hoping to find answers but in vain. What could the Jews have done that the Germans hated them so? And why kill them? And who are the Jews anyway?



Several weeks later she happened to see an article in a local paper about some Rabbi in New York called the 'Lubavitcher Rebbe' who received hundreds of letters a day from Jews throughout the world seeking help and guidance. Encouraged, she copied the address given in the article and that night wrote a letter to the Rebbe. Maybe he could at least tell her where to look for an answer.

She explained that although she wasn't Jewish the Holocaust book she saw was simply too much for her to handle. She apologized for taking the Rebbe's time but hoped that he could calm her troubled mind and answer her questions.

Two weeks later she received a reply in the mail! The Rebbe wrote that he was happy to receive her letter and told her to look up a Rabbi Chaim Gutnick in Melbourne and discuss these things with him.

That day she found Rabbi Gutnick's number in the phone book, called him and set a meeting for the next day.

When they met she was pleasantly surprised. The Rabbi was such a kind, friendly and intelligent person. He heard her questions and explained a bit about how the Holocaust really was beyond human understanding. But he told her he was puzzled as to why a Protestant girl would be so deeply affected by it and wondered if there wasn't someone Jewish in her family tree.

So, he asked about her background, her parents and grandparents. Perhaps she once saw her mother or grandmother light candles on Friday or say something about Judaism. But after the interrogation it was clear beyond any doubt that she wasn't Jewish. In fact, the first time she ever even saw a Jew was in that holocaust book.

Sally left the Rabbi's house as confused as when she had entered maybe more. Even this Rabbi couldn't help her. And Rabbi Gutnick had the same feeling. He could not figure out why the Rebbe sent her to him. After all, if anything he made matters worse.

It bothered both of them but while Sally went home and became more despondent Rabbi Gutnick, being a busy man, involved in very important community matters forgot the entire thing. Almost.

Three weeks later Rabbi Gutnick received a totally unexpected letter from the Rebbe inquiring about girl from Belgrade, or more precisely the JEWISH girl from Belgrade.

Without delay Rabbi Gutnick looked through his papers for her address, jumped in his car and drove to her house.

When he got there only her parents were home. He cordially introduced himself, told them of their daughter's letter to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Rebbe's reply to her that caused her to visit his home, and how he just now received a second letter from the Rebbe, this one was to him asking about how she was feeling.

Her parents told him that things did not look good. That for the last few weeks she was very withdrawn, but they had no idea why unless

that book had something to do with it. But they were bewildered; how and why such a thing as the Holocaust would set it off.

Rabbi Gutnick asked if perhaps she had been adopted. The answer was a definite no. Then perhaps her maternal grandmother was Jewish? "Certainly not" they replied and asked the reason for his strange questions.

He told them about the letter he just received from the Rebbe where the Rebbe called her Jewish. But they just shrugged their shoulders, and after several moments of uncomfortable silence and with nothing more to say he gave them his phone number, asked them to keep in touch, bade them goodbye and left.

A month later Rabbi Gutnick got a call from her mother. Sally had suffered some sort of stroke and was in the hospital in intensive care and the doctors had a dim prognosis.

He rushed to the hospital and when he arrived, he was shocked at what he saw. She was more dead than alive, totally unconscious, joined to all sorts of tubes and machines. Her mother and father were standing by her side, red-eyed from crying.

They were glad to see him. Sally's father was obviously crushed. The doctors had said there was nothing more they could do. Sally's mother motioned to the Rabbi that she wanted to speak to him in private outside.

They left the room and as soon as the door closed behind them, she turned to him and said, "Rabbi, I guess that according to you, well, I guess I am Jewish. I mean, I was born in England to Jewish parents. But when I was in my teens I left home, changed my religion and came to Australia. So according to me I'm not Jewish."

"But according to Judaism you are! "Said Rabbi Gutnick" So why don't you just tell your daughter? It might save her life, you have nothing to lose!"

"It's not so simple" she answered. "I'm worried about what my husband will say. I mean, he knows nothing about it. He's a religious man. I never told him. I can't tell her when he is around. And who knows if it will help. I mean, she's unconscious. I never thought it would come to this."

But Rabbi Gutnick calmed her down. "Listen, if the Lubavitcher Rebbe took an interest it's a sign that there is hope. Please, send your husband out here and I'll have a talk with him. And while I'm out here talking to him you can tell your daughter. It just may be your only chance."

Sally's mother dried her eyes, shook her head in agreement and entered the room. Seconds later her husband came out and Rabbi Gutnick had a warm and open talk with him.

Surprisingly he was very understanding, even supportive. He said he loved his wife and daughter and was willing to do everything and anything he could for them.

But when they re-entered the room, they were in for even a bigger surprise. Sally was sitting up in bed completely conscious and her mother was hugging her and weeping in joy!

The doctors were called and minutes later they took her off of the monitors and removed the infusion!

But Rabbi Gutnick still had a question: How did the Rebbe know she was Jewish? At his next *yechidut* (audience with the Rebbe) he mustered the chutzpah to ask.

The Rebbe replied that, the girl had written him a letter. "Such a letter," the Rebbe declared, "could only have been written by a Jewish girl."

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld Drawing Water at the Well



Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, *zt"l*, was a great *Talmid Chacham* and was always looking to help another Jew, regardless of who it was. One day, Rav Yosef Chaim was late in returning home from *Shacharis*. This was unusual, since he was a very punctual person.

His wife was concerned, and she sent their daughter to search for Rav Yosef Chaim. She went out looking and found her father drawing water from a well and pouring it into pitchers, which two little boys would then carry to their home. The boys emptied the water into a large barrel and then quickly returned to the well for more water.

The daughter asked her father what he was doing, and Rav Yosef Chaim explained, "As I was returning home from shul, I noticed these two little boys bending over the well trying to draw water. What they were doing was dangerous, and I told them so.

"They replied that they had no choice because there was no more water at home, and they couldn't afford to hire a water carrier. Their mother had recently given birth, and their father was sick in bed with a bad case of the flu."

Rav Yosef Chaim said to his daughter, "What could I have done? I had to help them. I immediately took off my *Tallis* and *Tefilin* and began to draw water for them. I will stop when their water barrel is full."

His daughter asked, "But what will people think when they see a great *Talmid Chacham* like you doing such lowly work?"

Rav Yosef Chaim replied, "I care much more about what they would say in *Shamayim* if I were to leave these small children who are putting their lives in danger trying to help their parents, while I go sit and eat breakfast!" (*Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Stories as Compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.)*

The Special Pair of Tzitzis for Rebbe Mordechai of Neshchiz By Mrs. Michal Horowitz



R' Mordechai of Neshchiz (1740-1800), Poland, deeply desired a pair of tzitzis from Eretz Yisrael. He wanted tzitzis from the wool of a sheep that ate from the grass of Eretz Yisroel.

Though in the 1700's in Europe, this was more likely to remain a dream than a reality, with much determination and hard work, R' Mordechai procured a woolen garment from Eretz"Yisroel.

He gave the garment to a talmid to make a pair of tzitzis for him. The talmid diligently worked at the task, when, to his horror, he realized he had cut two openings for the head of the tzitzis, instead of just one! The garment was ruined and could not be used for tzitzis.

When he shamefully brought the garment to R' Mordechai he expected a harsh rebuke. When R' Mordechai first saw his garment, which should have been his precious tzitzis, his face turned red, reflecting his anger and anguish.

After a few tense moments, he smiled and said, "This pair of tzitzis was indeed supposed to have two openings. One opening for putting my head through and one opening to test me whether I could control myself, or if I would fly into a rage! I will keep this pair of tzitzis to remind me every morning not to get angry at anybody throughout the day."

The Secular Doctor and The Talmid Chacham

Rabbi Falk told the story of a Talmid Chacham in Israel who did not have much money, and whose son became seriously ill one Shabbos, R"L. He desperately needed a doctor, and there was an excellent doctor, who happened to be a secular Jew, who lived down the block.

The doctor agreed to treat the boy, however, he demanded that he be given a check immediately. He said, "I don't trust religious Jews. I will tend to your son only if you give me a check for 500 shekels right now."



The father knew that Halachah clearly establishes that due to the concern for human life one can override Torah law, so he wrote a check— with an unusual manner and handed it to the doctor.

The doctor looked at the check and noticed that it was written out for 1,000 shekels. The doctor said, "Maybe you didn't hear me correctly, but I asked for 500 shekels, not 1,000. Besides, as I look around your apartment, it does not appear as though you can afford to pay me extra."

The Talmid Chacham explained, "To write a 500 shekel check, I would have to write three words: **שקל מאות חמש**, five hundred shekel, whereas giving 1,000 shekels required writing just two words: **שקל אלף**. In order to minimize the Chillul Shabbos, the desecration of Shabbos, I am prepared to double the amount."

The doctor was amazed. He had never seen anything like this in his life. A poor person paying an extra 500 shekels just in order to write one less word on Shabbos?! He gave the man 500 shekels change, treated the child, and brought the check home to show his wife.

After Shabbos, the doctor returned to the man's home and said, "I was so moved by what you did today, that I decided I wanted to learn more about Shabbos and Yiddishkeit." The Talmid Chacham said that he would be happy to help him if he would like, and they sat down and began studying. The doctor soon became a Ba'al Teshuvah.

Rabbi Falk explained that this is a Kiddush Hashem of the very highest level. This Talmid Chacham did not even plan on making a Kiddush Hashem, and was just living his life the way Hashem wanted him to. However, in this merit, the doctor and his children and grandchildren now observe the Torah and mitzvos!

(Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.)

The Power of a Broken Heart Rabbi Fischel Schachter

During a lecture, Rabbi Fishel Schachter related a story that a woman had told him. She said, "A number of years ago, I suffered a personal tragedy, and I was devastated. I became so depressed that I refused to leave my house. I was sure that I would never get over it and would never be able to get on with my life. Two months went by and things did not improve at all, in fact my misery and self-pity only deepened.

"I was invited to a wedding, but I told my husband that I wasn't going. I simply couldn't. My husband knew how badly I needed to get out, and when he saw that he could not reason with me, he literally pushed me out of the house and locked the door. I banged on the door, but my husband would not allow me back in. He called out that my dress and makeup were at a neighbor's house and that I had to go to the wedding.

"I saw that I had no choice, and I begrudgingly got dressed and went to the wedding. When I saw everyone dancing happily, I became very upset. I felt that they had no right to be so happy. With a complete feeling of dejection, I walked out of the hall. I saw a phone booth and walked over and picked up the phone. With tears streaming down my face, I said, 'Hashem, I don't want to be here. Please get me out of here!'

"While I was standing there crying, one of the elderly women who was sitting at the door of the hall collecting Tzedakah noticed me and came over to check on me. She placed her arms on my shoulder and gently asked me, "My child, why are you crying?"

"I responded, "You never suffered like I am!"

She gently replied, "I lost ten children during the Holocaust, but why are you crying?" I looked at her in astonishment and asked, "Did you ever cry over losing your children?"

"She answered, "Oh, I cried! But I learned that there is no point in crying over the past. I learned to take advantage of my tears and to use them to cry for others. Whenever I cry, I think about those who need Hashem's salvation and I daven for them with my tears."

Then she put her arms around me and said, "No one should tell you to stop crying. But use your tears and learn how to cry! Use your tears to daven for everyone you know who is suffering!" Then she walked away. For a few moments I just stood there lost in thought.

Then I picked up the phone again and began to cry profusely. I thought about everyone I knew who was going through a hard time and I cried for them. I thought about those who were in the hospital and I cried for them. I cried for Klal Yisroel and I davened for Hashem's salvation and redemption, and for Moshiach. When I finished crying, I never felt so happy in my entire life. I walked back into the chasunah and stepped into the center of the circle, and I danced like I never danced in my life!

Sefer Or Yesharim writes, "In a king's palace there are hundreds of rooms, and on the door of each room there is a different lock that requires a special key to open it. But there is also a master key which can open all the locks. It is the same with the doorways of Shamayim, and the 'master key' that opens all barriers is a broken heart. When a person sincerely breaks his heart before Hashem, his prayers can enter through all the gates and into all the rooms of the Celestial Palace of Hashem!" *(Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.)*

The Wonder of G-d's World By Rabbi Sholom Klass

What a wonderful world the Almighty has created! The magnificent blue sky; the golden sun that shines its warmth and its health upon us; the great mountains that tower up to the Heavens, their snowcapped peaks glistening; the lovely lakes and lush green fields – all these things attest to the majesty and grandeur of the Holy One Blessed Be He.

Then, of course, there are the creatures that roam the face of this wonderful world. Each one, be he small or great, has a definite place on this earth and a specific reason for being.

What? You question this? Do you wonder at times what possible purpose some little insect might have for being? This is exactly the question that David *HaMelech* once asked. He, too, wondered about

the need for a little spider in this world. He was soon to see, however, that there was a very good reason for her creation. Indeed, the answer was to save the life of the future King of Israel.

Before David became king he was the greatest general in the army of Shaul *HaMelech*. No man fought more bravely, no soldier more courageously than the Sweet Singer of Israel.

One day, however, after returning from a great victory over the Pilishtim, David, Shaul and the returning armies were greeted by a joyous group who ran out to meet them with dances and songs. And to celebrate the victory, as they danced, they sang:

"Shaul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands."

Shaul *HaMelech* was deeply insulted. The people considered David a better warrior than he! From that day on, his jealousy of the young David grew and grew until he decided that David posed a threat to the kingdom. He decided that David must die!

David was forced to flee for his life and he escaped to the deserted Cave of Adullam. There he crept into the furthest, darkest corner and lay on his back weak and exhausted. Little did he know, however, that a spy for the king had seen him and at that very moment was hurrying to inform on him.

As David lay in the dark, damp cave, he saw a little spider crawling about. Even in his suffering and discomfort David did not stop reflecting upon the world and the Almighty.

"I wonder," he thought, "why G-d created this ugly spider? What benefit does she offer the world that she should have merited being brought unto this earth?"

To his amazement, it was as if the spider had read his thoughts, for she said:

"Know you, David that nothing the Almighty ever made was created for naught."



"I know this, little spider," replied David, "but I must confess that though there must be some reason for your spinning your countless webs, I cannot see it."

"And yet there is, David. There is a very important reason as far as you are concerned."

"What do you mean, little spider?"

"I mean that the Holy One, Blessed Be He has sent me to this cave to save you from the hands of Shaul."

David could not refrain from laughing.

"The Almighty has sent you, little spider, to help me? Pardon me for doubting you but I need a great miracle now – lightning to strike the soldiers who pursue me – and not a little insect."

"And yet," insisted the spider, "you will see. I will be the one to save you."

And so speaking, the spider crawled to the mouth of the cave and began to spin a web, cleverly and swiftly. David watched in fascination as the little spider spun her delicate threads. Little by little, the mouth of the cave began to be covered with the silky strands until soon it was completely covered.

Just then, David heard the tramp of many feet coming down the path leading to the cave. "It is Shaul and his soldiers," he cried in panic. "I must try to escape while there is yet time."

"No, no," cried the spider. "If you try to leave the cave you will surely be seen. You must stay here. Have faith and you will see that you will be saved."

David saw that he had no choice but to obey the advice of the spider and he lay huddled in fear as the soldiers reached the cave.

"The spy said that he saw David in the area of the cave. Let us enter and see if he is still inside."

David shrank back, expecting the soldiers to enter momentarily. Suddenly, however, he heard the voice of *Shaul HaMelech* himself: "No, it is impossible for David to have entered this cave. Behold the web that covers the entire mouth. Had David entered, he would surely have broken the web."

To David's amazed relief he heard the soldiers turn around and continue on their way.

"I am saved! I am saved, little spider," he cried.

"Indeed, you are," replied the little insect. "And do you know what it was that saved you?"

"Yes, yes. It was you and the magnificent web that you wove. Now I see what you meant. It is indeed true that the Almighty in His great wisdom created nothing for naught. All – even the tiniest insect has a reason for being and a place on earth.

"Emunah is the lifeline that sustains us through the trials and tribulations of life, providing hope and strength to overcome challenges." – Sefer Chayei Olam.

One who gives tzedakah is not diminishing his wealth but transferring it to a safer treasury. What is kept may be lost; what is given endures eternally. ~ Orchos Tzadikim.

Shampoo and the Jewish Problem By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, zt"l



"You didn't shampoo your hair so we can't operate!"

This shocking statement was made by a nurse to the wife of the headmaster of a Day School who had not been given instructions on how to prepare herself for surgery.

The only way she would be able to avoid postponing the operation and remaining in the hospital an extra day was to rush out to a drugstore and purchase the required shampoo.

But when she reached the nearby pharmacy, she was disappointed to find it closed. After desperately banging on the door, she was relieved to see a clerk open it, only to inform her that there was no way he could sell her anything since all the computerized cash registers had been shut down.

Explaining her urgent need for the shampoo, the lady begged the clerk to give her a tube and promised that her husband would arrive at opening time the next morning to pay for it. Her appeal touched the clerk's heart and he consented.

The next morning her husband, a Slonimer *chassid* in traditional black garb, did indeed arrive at the designated hour to make payment. To his surprise, this created a hubbub among the clerks. They had made bets that morning as to whether he would actually come to pay. One clerk who lost the bet cried out, "It's not fair. You didn't tell us his wife was Jewish!"

The Last of the Kiddush Wine By Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

It's difficult for us to imagine, but not so long ago, there were ordinary-looking people who displayed extraordinary powers. There are literally hundreds of stories of Jews in the Second World War who risked and surrendered their lives, rather than transgress the smallest commandment of the Torah.

One of these holy souls was Rabbi Shemuel David Ungar, the spiritual leader of Nitra. Rabbi Ungar had a reputation as a holy person and a great teacher far beyond his native Slovakia.

In early 1944, Rabbi Ungar fled to the woods around Nitra to escape deportation by the Fascists. Even though he was faced by acute hunger, he refused to make the smallest compromise in his observance of Jewish law.



As the weeks went by, he became weaker and weaker. A friend managed to find some grapes (Heaven only knows from where) and begged him to eat them.

He replied, "How can I eat them now? If I use them now, I won't have wine to make Kiddush on Friday night. Should a Jew enjoy grapes if he has no wine to sanctify the next Shabbat?"

When winter came, his health started to fail. Nevertheless, he still spent hours learning Torah at the mouth of his bunker, despite the heavy snow and the bitter cold. Suffering from starvation and exposure, Rabbi Unger passed from this world a few weeks before the fall of the Third Reich.

The Jewish People are prepared to give up an equal fortune for a mitzvah that is infinitely beyond the grasp of human logic, merely because it is the Will of their Father in Heaven.

And a holy Jew, freezing in a Slovak winter, to whom logic says eat the grapes and worry about Shabbat later, has the power to ignore the gnawing pains of hunger in his stomach. All so that he will not miss the chance of sanctifying the day of Shabbat and He who created it.



Taking the Plunge

After the Second World War, most of the Jews who had survived the inferno of Europe went on to settle in Jewish communities around the world, most of all in Eretz Yisroel and in North America. However, some of the Jews ended up in far-flung countries with little or no Jewish community presence.

One such Jew was Solomon Fuchs (not his real name). Before the war, Mr. Fuchs was a chassid of the Gerrer Rebbe. Mr. Fuchs survived the war, however his dedication to Torah and mitzvahs did not survive with him. He left the ashes of Europe and made his way to New Zealand, which at that time in the 1940's hosted a tiny Jewish community.

Mr. Fuchs survived the war with a daughter. Although he himself was not religious, he felt that it was important for his daughter to receive a formal Jewish education. Being that New Zealand almost totally lacked formal Jewish educational institutions during the post-war years, Mr. Fuchs was forced to send his daughter to learn in the United States.

Sometime in 1949, Mr. Fuchs came to the United States from New Zealand to visit his daughter who was learning in a girls school in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. At the time, Crown Heights hosted a bustling Jewish community. One of the most prolific Jewish organizations in Crown Heights was, and is to this day, Chabad Lubavitch.



When Mr. Fuchs arrived in New York after a journey of several days, he made his way to Crown Heights to visit his daughter. Soon after his arrival, Mr. Fuchs entered a certain building and waited for the elevator to come. He entered the elevator with a Torah scholar who had a penetrating glance. The Torah scholar asked Mr. Fuchs from where he came and what his business was here in America.

The man also asked Mr. Fuchs about the extent of the Jewish community in New Zealand. Sadly, Mr. Fuchs admitted that New Zealand lacked the most basic of Jewish communal services. Specifically, the man wanted to know if there were a mikvah in New Zealand. Unfortunately, the answer was *"no,"* besides of course the ocean which surrounds the country.

Mr. Fuchs was very impressed by the Torah scholar, who happened to get off on the next floor. The two parted with exchanges of blessings and good will. After the man left, Mr. Fuchs asked another person in the elevator who the man was. *"That is the son-in-law of **Reb Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson**, the Lubavitcher Rebbe."*

Mr. Fuchs went on to meet his daughter. They enjoyed a nice visit together, before Mr. Fuchs returned home several days later. A few years after Mr. Fuchs had visited his daughter, the then Lubavitcher Rebbe Reb Yosef Yitzchok passed away, and his son-in-law, **Reb Menachem Mendel Schneerson** became the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Under the leadership of the Rebbe, Chabad grew tremendously, spreading out around the world to far-flung places

such as Nepal, Morocco, S. Monica, South Africa, Hawaii and even New Zealand!

Meanwhile, Mr. Fuchs's daughter married and began raising a religious family. Mr. Fuchs himself was inspired by the holiness of his daughter's orthodox family. And soon, he decided to return to his Jewish roots. He gradually increased his mitzvah observance and eventually became fully mitzvah observant.

Some 40 years later, in the late 1980's, when Mr. Fuchs was already a great-grandfather several times over, he made another visit to Crown Heights. For the first time in his life, Mr. Fuchs had the opportunity to visit 770 Eastern Parkway one Sunday morning, where the Lubavitcher Rebbe used to hand out one-dollar bills to those who came to visit. Mr. Fuchs entered the shul alone and joined the large throng of Jews who had gathered that morning to take a dollar. Mr. Fuchs was alone with his thoughts, and he spoke with nobody as the line moved along. When it came Mr. Fuchs's time to take a dollar from the Rebbe, the Rebbe motioned for him to stop. Immediately, the Rebbe asked Mr. Fuchs, *"Nu,"* Asked the Rebbe sweetly in Yiddish: *"Is there a mikvah in New Zealand yet?"*

Mr. Fuchs was floored. He nearly fainted. The Rebbe had remembered the aged Mr. Fuchs who now wore a beard and sported a black hat. The elevator ride some 40 years previous must have lasted for no more than one and a half minutes.

What Has G-d Wrought? By Rabbi Reuven Semah

כָּעֵת יֵאָמֵר לְיַעֲקֹב וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מַה־פָּעַל קל *"Like this time it will be said to Jacob and Israel, 'What has G-d wrought?'"* (23:23)

On May 24, 1844, Samuel Morse sent the first telegraph message in history. What phrase from our parshah did he use? The text of Morse's historical message was the English translation of a verse in

Parashat Balak. Bilaam said, "Mah pa'al Kel," which in English means, "What hath G-d wrought (made)?"

An appropriate message for the inventor of the telegraph to convey, in recognizing the true Source of his inventing prowess (Rabbi Ozer Alport).



The telegraph was the beginning of today's communication explosion. What followed was the telephone, cell phones, fax machines, e-mails, texting, internet, etc.

As Samuel Morse recognized, all of this is truly a miracle from Hashem. A person can send a message to China in less than five seconds. If it is true that this is a G-d sent power, let us use it the right way: in purity and for good things only.

The Kiss and the Smile by Yerachmiel Tilles

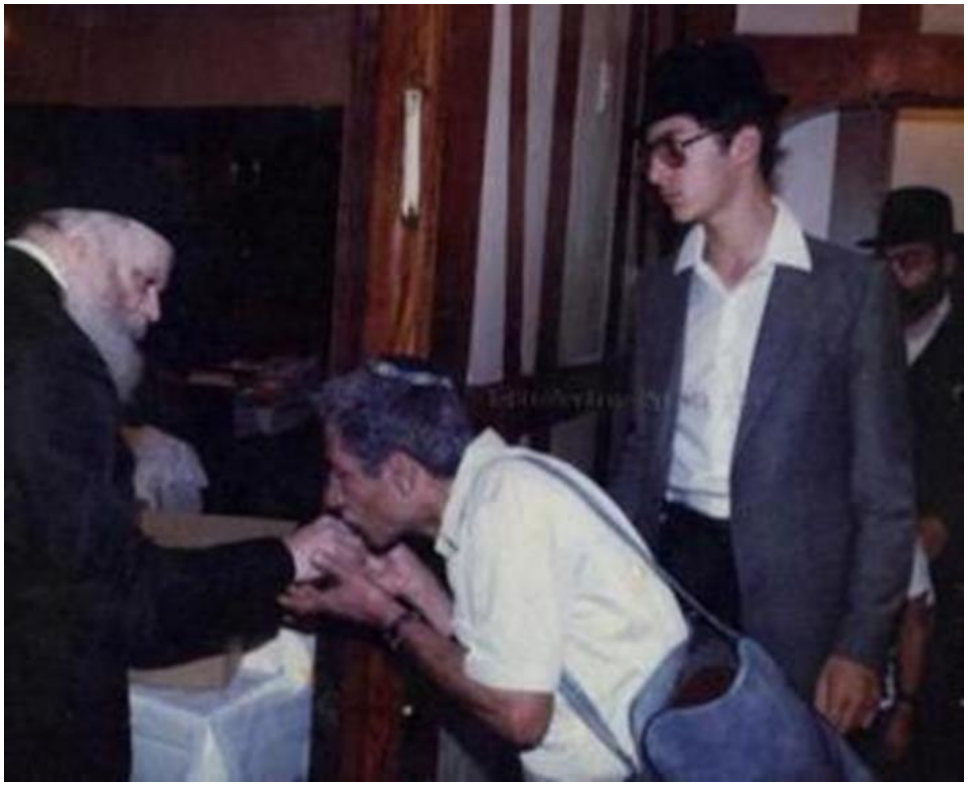
"It was 1982, and this was now my second Rosh Hashana that I would be traveling from South Africa as a teenage yeshiva student to spend with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Before I departed from Johannesburg, my father Rabbi Nachman Bernhard, who was a very close confidant of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, pulled me aside at the airport and shared the following with me:

"There are many rabbis, rabbeim, teachers, sages and mentors the world over. But Kivi, a Rebbe is an entirely different thing altogether. As you go now to be at the Rebbe for the Yomim Tovim,

you have the opportunity to observe what a Jew is in its essence. Watch the Rebbe intently and study the details. You will glean gems of Judaism."

My father had given me a mission, not just an instruction, and I was now on my way. His words were almost prophetic, as the following small but profound encounter took place while I was privileged to be nearby the Rebbe.

There is a well-known tradition amongst Jews to share honey cake with one another the days before Rosh Hashana to induce a sentiment of sweetness as we head into the days of judgment. The day before Rosh Hashana [and before Yom Kippur] the Rebbe would distribute lekach [honey cake] and a short blessing for success, to many thousands of people for hours on end.



For me, as a visitor to Crown Heights (the Rebbe's headquarters), Brooklyn, this was a major opportunity to have some private time with the Rebbe, and I made sure to be there early and assume my place in line. I found myself behind a very nice man who was clearly of Sefardi tradition. We spoke awhile and he shared with me that he was a Yemenite Jew living in Brooklyn who made an effort to see the Rebbe of Lubavitch whenever possible. We stood on line for about an hour before finding ourselves in the Rebbe's chambers about to receive lekach and a blessing from him.

My new friend was now up and stood in front of the Rebbe. In keeping with his Sefardi tradition, he instinctively sought to take the Rebbe's hand to kiss it (a well known practice among many Sefardi Jews when greeting a great Torah sage and personality).

Suddenly however, my friend withdrew in response to verbal and some light physical pressure that was suddenly thrust on him from some of the young organizers that were helping out the Rebbe.

They felt they were doing the Rebbe a big favour by zealously discouraging anything that was not in keeping with the Chabad tradition. Even though there were many occasions where Sefardi leaders and Jews did in fact kiss the Rebbe's hand, it was not a custom of Chabad and might be seen as inappropriate amongst the passionate followers of the Rebbe.

The Rebbe was clearly frustrated by this misplaced display of righteous fervour and the following fascinating and penetrating lesson unfolded. As this Sefardi man responded to the pressure and retracted his hands that had reached out to kiss the hand of the Rebbe (in an effort to simply behave like everyone else), the Rebbe engaged him with a penetrating look and said, "Nu?" The Rebbe himself then extended his right hand back to the man, who then took it and kissed it.

The Rebbe then smiled at him, while all around registered what the Rebbe had just taught us. It was not only about the Rebbe ensuring that another human being should not be embarrassed, but it was a critical message to validate the importance and bona-fide of a minhag klal Yisroel, even though not the personal custom of the Rebbe or Chabad.

This is why you see the Rebbe looking at the gentleman so intently while kissing his hand. The Rebbe wanted him to practice his tradition as a Sefardi Jew and to do so with joy, with passion and with completeness. A Jewish custom and tradition is a holy thing.

Through this encounter I had, the Rebbe certainly taught me, at least, that as we love our fellow Jews and draw them near, we must respect other Jewish traditions and practices, clearly understanding that they are not to become subject to our own personal interpretation or cultural whim and wham.

My father was absolutely right: the essence of the Rebbe served to show us who we are as Jews, not just what to do as Jews.

Yishuv HaDaas



Imagination has the power to cause something unreal to appear very true, and it robs people of their *yishuv hadaas*. *Yishuv hadaas* is essential. When one has a calm, rational mind, he can find solutions to his problems, and he can cope. But when one loses his peace of mind, he is liable to become angry, get into machlokes, and act unwisely. Furthermore, without *Yishuv hadaas*, he doesn't have a settled mind to learn or daven. Therefore, yishuv hadaas is essential.

The *Zohar* (vol.3 199:) states that the first two letters of **בלק** and **בלעם** spell **בלבל**, - confusion. The final letters spell **עמלק**. This is because when one is confused, one falls into the hands of Amalek. Our goal is to strive to attain yishuv hadaas at all times.

Reb Moshe Kobriner *zt'l* wrote in a letter, "All the wealth of the world doesn't equal one moment of *yishuv hadaas*..."

About Bilaam, it states (22:21), **ויקם בלעם בבקר**, and about Avraham it states (*Bereishis* 22: 3), **וישכם אברהם בבקר**. Both mean that they woke up early in the morning, but there is a difference between **ויקם** and **וישכם**.

As the **Lev Simchah *zt'l* (of Gur)** explains; when it states **וישכם** it means that he *woke* up, and **ויקם** means he *stood* up.

About Avraham it states **וישכם**, "he woke up early," which means Avraham slept that night. About Bilaam it states **ויקם בלעם**, "Bilaam stood up," but he didn't wake up, because he was awake all night.

Avraham always maintained his Yishuv hadaas, while Bilaam couldn't control his emotions. Therefore, when Hashem told Avraham to make the akeidah, Avraham didn't lose his peace of mind, and he was able to sleep at night. As opposed to Bilaam, who was so happy to have the opportunity to curse the Yidden, he lost his tranquil mind, and he couldn't fall asleep. Therefore, it states **ויקם** - He got up in the morning, but he didn't wake up because he was awake all night long.

The Lev Simchah *zt'l* (of Gur) explains that Avraham had the attribute of **השתוות**, which means he believed everything was for the good, and therefore, he remained calm and relaxed when good things happened to him and also when going through hardships. The knowledge that he must slaughter his son didn't disrupt his life.

L'havdil, when Bilaam conspired to curse the Jewish nation, he was so excited with the *aveirah*, he couldn't sleep that night.

"Emunah is the antidote to fear and anxiety, allowing us to place our trust in Hashem's loving care and surrender our worries to Him." – Sefer Chovos Halvavos.



Chabad.org

מַה־טֹּבוּ אׇהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! 24:5

The Jewish people had many prophets, but Moshe Rabbeinu was the greatest that will ever be. Prophets and prophecy was not only limited to the Jewish people, but existed also among the gentiles. Their greatest prophet, though inferior to Moshe, was Bilaam (see Midrash Rabbah, Bamidbar 14:20). We become acquainted with him in the Torah portion of Balak which is the assigned reading for this week.

He was a prominent personality and an individual who would communicate with a Hashem. Nevertheless, his anti-Semitism and hatred for the Jews so blinded him that for the right price he forsook all his morals and integrity, and ventured out to curse them on behalf of Balak the king of Moab, who feared the very existence of the Jewish people. Simple logic dictates that such a person should be despised and rejected by us. He should be placed together with other notorious anti-Semites such as Amalek, Haman and Hitler *yemach shemam* — their memory should be eradicated — and of course never be given any prominence by the Jewish people.

If so, how is it that the authors of our *Siddur*, open our daily prayers with the words of the vile Bilaam which he offered when he attempted to annihilate the Jewish people? I am referring to his statement **מַה־טֹּבוּ אׇהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל** — "How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Israel" (24:5).

Rashi in his commentary attaches a lofty interpretation to his words. Either that *Bilaam* saw that the entrances to their tents were not aligned, and he was immensely impressed with their modesty or that he was referring to the Tabernacle situated in Shiloh for 369 years and the *Beit Hamikdash* where the Jews had the possibility to bring offerings and gain atonement.

Moreover, Bilaam was emphasizing that our Holy sites even when they are in a state of destruction serve as a collateral security for the Jewish people.

Nevertheless, it still doesn't make sense to quote this despicable individual. Was it difficult for the *Siddur* authors to find a beautiful passage to quote as an opening to our daily prayers from Moshe *Rabbeinu*, or from one of our many great and holy prophets, who even when they rebuked and admonished the Jewish people, did it with the greatest love?

Perhaps we can explain it in the following way:

A popular adage states: "A stranger for a while sees for a mile." One who is familiar with "both sides of the fence" is in the best position to honestly appraise one's virtues.

Bilaam, the non-Jewish prophet, had a profound insight of the secular world. When he took a close look at the Jewish people, he was stunned and flabbergasted at their beauty. Knowing keenly the shortcomings and faults of the gentile world, he involuntarily proclaimed, "How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov."

He was saying, "You Jews really have something to be proud of. Your houses of study and holy places have provided for you a lifestyle that gives you meaning and happiness." Bilaam was telling them that it may be difficult at times to be a Jew, but it is worth all the hardships.

When a Jew rises in the morning, the first thing he does is he runs to *shul* to offer prayers to Hashem. Sometimes, one may have

doubts and think "Why do I need all these limitations and restrictions? Perhaps it would be better to throw off the yoke and live a life free of Torah and *mitzvot*, G-d forbid."

In order to dispel any doubts about our convictions of G-dliness and Judaism, we proclaim these words at the very beginning of prayers. We recall that even the great gentile prophet Bilaam, who had a vivid insight about all the nations that do not have the Torah to guide their lifestyles, attested to the beauty and superiority of our religion.

Don't permit yourselves to be disillusioned or discouraged by the false worldly glitter or some difficulty that may confront you. Remember the words of our non-friend, "How goodly are your tents O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Israel."

He envied us, and with a pang in his heart he sincerely declared **תָּמֻת נַפְשִׁי מ֣וֹת יְשָׁרִ֑ים וּתְהִ֥י אַחֲרִיתִ֖י כָּמֹהֽוּ** "May my soul die the death of the upright, and may my end be like this" (23:10).

Bilaam wanted the rewards of the World to Come without the commitment to Torah and *mitzvos* in this world. He was seeking an "easy pass" to Paradise.

We should all strive for the future destined for our people, and also live in this world like our people. Should you ever have doubts, remember that even Bilaam said *"Mah tovu oholecha Yaakov"* — "How goodly are your tents O Yaakov" — if it was good for him, it is definitely good for us.

R' Shloime Wolbe ZT"L (Alay Shur) would say: "Shabbos was not merely given to Bnei Yisroel for the performance of a mitzvah. The essence of Shabbos is a gift - the gift of peace of mind!"

Chabad.org - "ויראבלק" "And Balak saw." (22:2)

The names of the three *parshos*, Korach, Chukat and Balak each contain the letter "ק". Of what significance is the fact that in Korah the ק is at the beginning (קרח), in Chukat it is in the middle (חקת), and in Balak it is at the end (בלק)?

The letter "ק" is the first letter of the word *kedushah* — holiness. The *kufs* at the beginning, middle and end represent past, present and future.

Korach's attachment to holiness was a thing of the past. His genealogy is traced to Yaakov. When one is defiled, he is detached from holiness. Through being sprinkled with the ashes of the red heifer he *now* becomes cleansed of his defilement and thus regains his sanctity. Balak's attachment to holiness was a matter of the future. Among his future would be his granddaughter Ruth, who was the ancestor to King David and *Mashiach*. **(ר' שמעלקא ז"ל טויבענפעלד)**

Chabad.org (ר' חיים ז"ל סאלאווייטשיק)

ויראבלק בן צפור את כל אשר עשה ישראל לאמרי...ובלק בן צפור מלך למואב בעת ההוא "And Balak saw all that Israel had done to the Amorite...And Balak was king of Moav at that time." (22:2,4)

Why isn't he referred to as "king" in the first *pasuk*?

Balak was not actually the king of Moav, but rather an exceptional Jew-hater who only "saw" what the Jews did to the Amorites. He refused to understand that the Jews only acted in self-defence against the Amorites, who, for no reason, declared war against the Jews.

Balak began to agitate among the people of Moav and make them afraid of the "Jewish peril." Because of his intense anti-Semitism, the people of Moav then decided to make him king.

Fascinating Insights -The Greatness Within Us



Many years ago there was a unique manuscript from a *Rishon* that was discovered in the Cairo Geniza. This came to the attention of a wealthy Jew named R' Yosef, who made it his mission to procure and publish it. This would be the first time this manuscript would be seen in centuries. Although it was difficult, in the end he was able to acquire it, at a cost of $750,000. R' Yosef gathered a team of experts to study the manuscript.

Then the unthinkable happened. While the manuscript was opened, one of the people present leaned over to see a certain line and in doing so, his coat brushed against a cup of hot coffee causing the entire cup to spill. The spilled coffee ruined the manuscript, making it undecipherable.

R' Yosef's response to the man who spilled the coffee who was so embarrassed was: "Don't worry. I'll get you another cup of coffee." R' Yosef explained that he went to such lengths to retrieve this manuscript because he felt it was the will of Hashem to spread this Torah to the world. Now the will of Hashem is not to be angry. So what is the difference? Either way, I am just doing the will of Hashem.

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman- Torah Wellsprings -The Joy of Mitzvos



The donkey said to Bilaam (22:28) **מה עשיתי לך כי הכתני זה שלש רגלים** , "What did I do to you that you hit me, **שלש רגלים**, three times?"

שלש רגלים alludes to the three holidays, Pesach, Shavuos, and Succos.(Because if the pasuk solely means **שלש רגלים**, "three times," it would say **שלשה פעמם**, which is a more common way to express it. **שלש רגלים** alludes to the mitzvah of **עליה לרגל** , to go to the Beis HaMikdash on Pesach, Shavuos, and on Succos.) As Rashi writes, "You are trying to uproot a nation that celebrates the three *regalim* (Pesach,Shavuos, and Succos)!"

The donkey was implying, "How can you even think of uprooting the Jewish nation? They celebrate the *yomim tovim* in the Beis HaMikdash, three times a year!"

The Jewish nation performs many mitzvos. The donkey could have said something like, "How dare you try to uproot a nation that wears tefillin" and the like. What is unique about the three *regalim*?

The Kotzker Rebbe *zt'l* explains that during the **שלש רגלים** Yerushalayim was crowded, and miraculously, no one complained. As the Mishnah (*Avos* 5:5) states, **ולא אמר אדם לחברו צר לי המקום שאלין בירושלים** , "No one ever said, 'There's no place for me to sleep in Yerushalayim.'"

Generally, this is understood to mean that there was miraculously enough room for everyone in Yerushalayim.

However, the **Chasam Sofer zt'l** (vol.2 234) explains that it was in fact crowded in Yerushalayim due to the millions of people who came to be **עולה לרגל**. The miracle was that no one ever complained.

As the Chasam Sofer writes, "The miracle was that no one ever complained about their cramped accommodations. They loved Hashem immensely, and Hashem planted a lot of joy in their hearts when they were in Yerushalayim. Therefore, no one ever said it was crowded. As the saying goes, 'When our love was strong [we were able to sleep on a knife's blade]'"

Now we understand why the *malach* rebuked Bilaam for trying to uproot a nation that celebrates the three *regalim*. As the Kotzker *zt'l* explains, Bilaam complained when he was in a **מקום צר**, narrow place, and felt some discomfort. That discomfort prompted him to hit his donkey. The *malach* chastised him, "You don't compare to the Jewish nation? They are in far more cramped quarters, but they don't complain. They don't feel the difficulties because of their love for Hashem and their joy when performing the mitzvos. And look at yourself and how you react when you have some discomfort.

Living Jewish

There are six Parshiot which have the names of people. They are Noach, Chayei Sara, Yitro, Korach, Balak and Pinchas. Four of these individuals were truly outstanding people: Noach, Sara, Yitro and Pinchas.

One can also understand the choice of Korach to be a title for a Parsha. Thanks to this Parsha, throughout all ages we remember the dangers of machloket; what divisiveness within communities and within our nation can cause.

But what can be said about Balak, the title of this week's Parsha? Balak was a **רשע**, an outright, evil individual who sought to destroy

the Jewish people, so why did he merit having a Parsha named after him?



Our sages differentiate between Bilam and Balak. With regard to Bilam we read how when visitors came to him, he presented himself to them as a worthy, outstanding, upright, dignified, G-d-fearing individual. But when you read the text with closer scrutiny, when you see what he said and what he did, you will quickly conclude that the real Bilam actually was a very different person.

Not so Balak. With regard to Balak, what you saw was what you got. He was a bad person, and he didn't hide that from others.

In the laws of kashrut, the archetypal food which we associate with non-kosher is swine. And that's actually very interesting, because according to Torah law, there are two requirements for an animal to be kosher: it needs to have cloven hooves and it needs to chew the cud.

The pig actually ticks one of these two boxes. It scores fifty percent because it does have cloven hooves. And then there are animals who tick neither of the boxes, so why is the pig, more than any other animal, associated with that which is not kosher?

Our sages explain, the pig lies on its back, it dangles its feet, it pronounces to the world 'look I've got cloven hooves, I am kosher!' But internally, there's a very different story there. That is the type of person Bilam was; he deceived people, he was totally insincere. Balak however was different; his saving grace was the fact that at least he was a sincere person. You know, even a broken clock tells the right time twice a day.

With all of Balak's evil, nonetheless we can identify one characteristic of his which was good, and that was his sincerity. And that is why our Parsha carries his name.

On a side note, Moshiach comes from King David and Ruth who are direct descendants of Balak. So let us learn from Balak of this week's Parsha, remember how important it is for us to always be genuine and sincere.

"How Good are your Tents" – The Mitzvah of being in a Beis Medrash



It states (24:5) **מה טובו אהליך יעקב**, "How good are your tents, Yaakov." Similarly, it says (*Bereishis* 25:27) **ויעקב איש תם יושב אהלים**, "Yaakov was a righteous person, who sat in the tents."

These *pesukim* are referring to the tents of Torah, and as the **Rema m'Pano** explains, the praise is for **יושב אהלים**, sitting in the tents.

Even if one doesn't daven or learn Torah, he deserves reward just for being in the beis medrash. As the Rema m'Pano writes, **גדולה היא ישיבת בתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות אפילו [מבלי] תורה ובלא תפילה**, "It is a great deed to sit in beis haknesses and beis medrash, even without Torah and tefillah."

Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim* 151:1) states that if someone comes into a beis medrash for his own purpose, such as to call out someone, he shouldn't leave immediately. Rather, **ישהה מעט ואחר כך יצא שהישיבה בהם מצוה שנאמר אשרי יושבי ביתך**

"He should stay in the beis medrash for a short time and then he can leave because sitting in a beis medrash is a mitzvah. As it states, **אשרי יושבי ביתך** fortunate are those who sit in Your house."

Rabbeinu Yonah (*Brachos* 3.) quotes the Gemara (*Brachos* 6:), **היוצא מבית הכנסת אל יפסיע פסיעה גסה** "When one leaves the beis haknesses, he shouldn't take large steps," and explains that this is because by taking large steps it would appear that he is leaving a place where he doesn't want to be to go to a place of relaxation, but the opposite is true, because the beis haknesses, the place of tefillah, is *menuchah*, and one must be happy that he is there."

Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 105:) say that we can learn from Bilaam's *brachos* what he truly wanted to say. He wanted to say precisely the opposite of what he said, only Hashem prevented him and turned his words around to be a blessing for the Jewish nation.

For example, when he said, **מה טובו אהליך יעקב**, he wanted to say that there shouldn't be batei midrash, *chas veshalom*.

The Ben Ish Chai *zt'l* explains that Bilaam's plan wasn't to curse that Yidden shouldn't learn Torah, or daven, instead, they should do these deeds outside of the beis medrash. This is because Bilaam knew the incredible power of Torah and tefillah in the beis medrash.

It is told that when the **Yesod v'Shoresh HaAvodah** was old, it was hard for him to go to the beis medrash to daven, but he would go there with mesirus nefesh. His Rebbetzin asked him why he doesn't bring a minyan to his home. He replied, "When you bake a kugel, you use your old pot because its walls have a taste of all the kugels you made in the past, and you want that taste to enhance the kugels you make.

The walls of the beis medrash are also saturated with tefillos, and they improve the tefillos we say there. Therefore, I prefer to daven in the beis medrash, despite the hardships involved.

Don't Sweat It-Rabbi Dr Abraham Twerski -aish.com

לֹא־הִבִּ֥יט אָ֙וֶן֙ בְּיַעֲקֹ֔ב וְלֹא־רָ֥אָה עָמָ֖ל בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל He perceived no iniquity in Jacob, and saw no perversity in Israel" *(Bamidbar, 23:21).*

The Hebrew word **עָמָל**, translated here as "perversity," has a second meaning, "toil." It is an expression for work, especially laborious and exhausting work.

The Ohr HaChaim uses this translation to give a unique interpretation to Balaam's words: "He saw no exhaustion in Israel." Balaam perceived that even when Israel devotes itself wholeheartedly to the observance of Torah and mitzvot, it does not exhaust them.



It is a well-known fact that when someone has an overwhelming desire for something, he may be tireless in its pursuit. We have numerous accounts of the indefatigable study of Torah of our great scholars. It was not unusual for them to study Torah for eighteen hours each day. - The prophet says, "You did not call upon Me, Jacob, because you became weary of Me, Israel" (Isaiah 43:22).

The Dubno Maggid explained this verse with a parable:

A merchant alighted from a ship and hired a porter to deliver his merchandise to his home. When the porter knocked at his door, sweating profusely and breathing heavily, the merchant promptly said, "Those were not my packages that you brought!"

The porter asked, "You haven't even seen what I brought. How can you say they're not yours?"

"Because," the merchant said, "I deal in jewellery. My packages are light. They never would have caused you to sweat profusely."

The Maggid said, "This is the thought that the prophet is conveying. Hashem says, `How do I know that you are not calling upon Me? Because you become weary and exhausted with your praying. You may be just going through the motions of prayer. Praying to Me would not cause you to be fatigued.' "

Our devotion in prayer, our passion for Torah and our love for mitzvot should be such that we never tire in their performance.



Vechol Maaminim

'Venihiyeh Anachnu' and Through That 'Tze'etzaeinu'

תמת נפשי מות ישרים ותהי אחריתי כמהו (כג י) ***"That my end and that of my offspring should be like Yisrael, because a person's children, and his progeny are call his acharis – his end…"*** (Seforno)

Harav Shimshon Dovid Pincus said: Bilam made a ridiculous request: He wanted to live like a lowly gentile, while his progeny should live like lofty people and offspring of Am Yisrael. This reality contravenes the nature of creation, because the nature of children is to follow in the ways of their fathers. The only way to merit good children is to be a role model. When children see their parents following the path of Torah and mitzvos, they are likely to follow that path. That is the reason we bind the request in Birchas HaTorah for ourselves and our children into one – "Venihiyeh anachnu vetze'etzaeinu…yodei Shemecha velomdei Torasecha." To teach us that in order to merit good children, as we aspire to do, we must try ourselves to be "yodei Shemecha velomdei Torasecha." (*Tiferes Shimshon*)

Essential Rabbi Nachman - The Power of Tehilim



Everybody wants to revere Hashem's Name but not everyone is able to repent. Sometimes a person feels no arousal whatever. Even one who is aroused to repent may not reach his unique gate of Teshuvah, and even if he does, it could be that the gate is closed.

This is why not everyone attains repentance. But through reciting tehilim, even one who feels no arousal can be inspired to repent. The tehilim can take him to his unique gate and open it up, thereby bringing him to Teshuvah.

For this reason King David called himself "the man who raised the yoke... the sweet singer of Israel " (II Samuel 23:1) . Our sages explain that David called himself "the man who raised the yoke" because he elevated the yoke of repentance through his own Teshuvah.

Dovid Hamelech was a great Tzaddik and should not have sinned, but Hashem caused him to sin in order to teach everyone the way of Teshuvah.

King David was the prime exemplar of Teshuvah and his pathway is set forth in the tehilim, which he wrote with such a spirit of holiness that everyone can find himself in them and thereby return to Hashem. (Likutey Moharan II, 73)

Barina Yiktzoru

וַיִּפְתַּח ה׳ אֶת־פִּי הָאָתֹן "And Hashem opens the mouth of the donkey…". (22:28)



Why was it necessary to do this miracle of the donkey opening its mouth and speaking like a human? We know the words of the Mishnah (Ethics of the Fathers, 5, 6), *"Ten things were created on Erev Shabbat, at twilight and these are… and the mouth of the donkey".*

A lot of people try to explain the significance of the fact that the mouth of the donkey was created specifically at this time. We know that a person is greater than an animal because he has The gift of speech as Onkelus explains (Bereishit 2, 7) "And man became a living soul" – a speaking spirit. From here we see that if a person sanctifies his speech, he is better than the animal, but if he desecrates his speech, then he is not better than the animal. We learn this in Ethics of the Fathers (5, 9) "A wild animal came into the world because of false oaths".

If a person desecrates his speech by making a false oath, then he drops down to the level of the wild animal; therefore, the people themselves became wild animals (Shabbat 121).

Bilam wanted to desecrate his power of speech and curse Bnai Yisrael – Hashem opened the donkey's mouth to hint to Bilam that an animal can also speak and therefore there is no greatness to man.

All the days of the week are mundane; Shabbat is holy and twilight on Friday hangs between mundane and holy. So too, the mouth of an

animal hangs and stands: If a person merits to make his speech holy, then only he will speak and not the animal, but if man desecrates his speech, then an animal is also worthy of speaking. This is why the mouth of the donkey was created at twilight on Friday. [*Luach Erez*]

תָּמֻת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יְשָׁרִים וּתְהִי אַחֲרִיתִי כָּמֹהוּ: ***"May my soul die the death of the upright and let my end by like this".*** (23:10)



In the Gemara (Sanhedrin 105) it is written, "From the blessing of this wicked person we see what curse was in his heart. He said how great are your tents Yaakov. Hashem changed the bad intentions of his curses to blessings."

There is a story of a Jew who came to the **Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh** and said, "I want to repent, but the condition is that I die right away after I repent because I cannot live another fifty years without desecrating Shabbat or eating without a blessing.

So the Ohr HaChaim replied to him, ***"You think you are being smart to die as a Jew. You need to be smart to live as a Jew***. Live fifty years without desecrating Shabbat. Live fifty years saying blessings before and after you eat. Live fifty years putting on Tefillin every day. This is what it is to be a Jew. To die as a Jew does not prove anything".

The same thing was with Bilam. He knew that the end of a Jew is great as he merits Gan Eden and one hour in Gan Eden is more beautiful than all of this world. Bilam wanted to be a Jew, but only at the end of his life right before he died (he wanted to die like the forefathers), but he was not ready to live a life without sinning.

Therefore, he said, "And let my end be like his," specifically "my end;" however, because he was completely bad, he did not merit this and in the end Bilam was killed by a sword. (Kol Yehudah)

Weekly Wisdom

"מה טבו אהליך יעקב משכנתיך ישראל" ,*"How great are your tents, Yisrael, your dwelling places, Yisrael* (24:5)"



Rashi brings the Gemara (Bava Basra 60a), which states, **מה ראה - ראה שאין פתחי אהליהם מכוונין זה לזה אמר ראוין הללו שתשרה עליהם שכינה** What did Bilaam see? " He saw that the openings of their tents weren't exactly facing each other and said that they are worthy of the Shechinah resting upon them." Why did he focus on the openings of their tents? Why was this a significant praise?

The Midrash (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 5:2) tells us that to get Klal Yisrael to do Teshuva, Hashem tells them **בני, פתחו לי פתח אחד של תשובה כחדה של מחט, ואני פותח לכם פתחים שיהיו עגלות וקרוניות נכנסות בו** -"***My children open for Me one opening," of Teshuva, as small as the head of a needle, and I will open for you through which wagons and caravans can enter."***

In other words, a Yid only needs to begin the process of Teshuva and the Ribono Shel Olam will help him attain the rest. We see that the "openings" of Klal Yisrael and Hashem's reciprocal "opening" are not comparable. Therefore, in praise and in envy Bila'am said, "You Jews are so lucky; your opening and Hashem's opening are not 'facing' – identical to each other. You only must put in a little effort and

Hashem opens for you the gates of Teshuva. If your G-d loves you so much, how can my curse possibly have an effect?"

Perhaps this is also the reason that many have the custom to begin their Tefillos in the morning with this pasuk. We must recognize the power of our Teshuva, and the power of Hashem to help us with our Teshuva. We are recognizing that the help that Hashem gives us in our Teshuva is so much so that even the biggest Rasha acknowledged it and was stunned and flabbergasted at the superiority and beauty of Klal Yisrael.

You Lose – I Win



What does a Jew do when he finds himself in trouble? He goes to a big tzaddik and asks him to give him a beracha. He davens to the Creator of the world to save him. But how do other nations react to trouble?

When Balak ben Tzipor, the king of Moav, was frightened of the Jews, he went to Bilaam and asked him to do something. He didn't ask him to bless him, but rather to curse the Jews!

This is the way of the wicked, explains the **Chafetz Chaim**. Rather than seek a blessing for themselves, they would prefer a curse for someone else! *(Ohrnet, the Ohr Somayach Torah Magazine)*

For over 40 years!

Someone's approached his Rosh Yeshiva, **Reb Yehuda Zev Segal zt'l** of Manchester, and said, "As the Rosh Yeshiva knows, my father was recently niftar. My mother requests that I leave the yeshiva to run my father's food factory, so I can support the family."

Reb Yehudah Zev replied, "You should certainly help your mother, the almanah. I have only one request from you: every day, by Maariv, when you say 'al nisecha shebechal yom imanu – the miracles that You perform for us each day,' I want you to stop at these words and ask yourself, 'what miracle did Hakadosh Baruch Hu do with me today…?"

This man says that he has followed his Rosh Yeshiva's counsel for forty years now, and he can testify that there has never been a day where he hasn't experienced a miracle. ~ **R' Elimelech Biderman**



whY I Matter - Young Israel of Midwood

"Amalek is the first among nations" (24:20)

Amalek was the first nation to attack Bnei Yisrael and thus represents the epitome of evil. Appropriately, **R' Shlomo David Yehoshua Weinberg z"l hy"d (the "Slonimer Rebbe"**; killed in the Holocaust) taught that the above phrase alludes to a common trait which is one of the foremost tools of the evil inclination. The initial letters of the phrase "Reishit goyim Amalek" spell the Hebrew word "rega" / "one moment."

When a person knows that it is time to repent, the yetzer hara tells him, "One moment! There will time to repent later."



וַיִּפְתַּח ה׳ אֶת־פִּי הָאָתֹון וַתֹּאמֶר לְבִלְעָם מֶה־עָשִׂיתִי לְךָ כִּי הִכִּיתָנִי זֶה שָׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים
Hashem opened the mouth of the she-donkey and it said to Bilaam, "What have I done to you?" *(22:28)*

Bilaam struck his donkey three times – unaware that it was Hashem who was impeding Bilaam's path. The donkey just stood and refused to go forward. Bilaam was clueless to this, therefore, like most arrogant people who are incapable of accepting the truth, he lashed out at his donkey.

Three words – **מֶה־עָשִׂיתִי לְךָ** - "What have I done to you?" was all the donkey said in admonishing Bilaam. His reaction was, "If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you!" (Ibid. 22:29). All Bilaam could think of was the donkey's impertinence to him. After all, he was the greatest pagan prophet to have lived, and this was a simple brainless donkey. How dare he speak to him so impudently!

The entire scenario speaks volumes about Bilaam's evil arrogance. As the ***Brisker Rav, zl***, was wont to say, "How low can a person become, how debased, to expect and demand honour from a donkey – who is not known for its sharp acumen?"

Its reproof to Bilaam, "What did I do to you?" has become the example of even the simplest rebuke which an arrogant person could not tolerate. The truth hurts, because it makes us confront something which we have relegated through the medium of denial to a corner of our mind. Truth reveals the hidden lies we have denied or covered up. Bilaam could not deal with the sudden exposure to the fact that a simple animal could put him in his place. His response was to threaten to kill the donkey. He would rather destroy than chance exposure.

As someone once said, "***Arrogance is fear in denial***." An arrogant person cannot – or will not – confront a realistic evaluation of himself, for fear of confronting the truth: he has been living an imposter's life. He is not really the person he presents himself to be. One can have no greater shame than that. Thus, Bilaam felt the need to kill the donkey – all because of three truthfully spoken words, מֶה־עָשִׂיתִי לְךָ, "What did I do to you?"

From our Sages

מִי מָנָה עֲפַר יַעֲקֹב ***Who can count the dust of Yaacov*** (23:10)

Why are Jews likened to the dust of the earth?

As the **Baal Shem Tov** explained, in the same way that the earth contains vast underground treasures and natural resources, so too does every Jew contain an immeasurable wealth of faith, love and awe of G-d - if only one digs deep enough... (**Keter Shem Tov, Hosafot**)

וְעַתָּה לְכָה־נָּא אָרָה־לִּי אֶת־הָעָם הַזֶּה ***And now come, I pray you, and curse me this people*** (22:6)

It is interesting the language Balak used when he asked Balaam to curse the Jewish people: "Curse me" he said, words which can also be interpreted to mean that he himself should be cursed, which is exactly what eventually happened.

One must always think before speaking and pay attention to the words we use. (**Shaloh HaKodesh**)



Everything is from Hashem



One of the main messages from this week's parashah is that we can't do anything without Hashem. We think that we earn parnassah on our own, heal ourselves with doctors and medicine, go places, and say things as we desire, and this week's parashah reveals to us a drop of just how much we are in Hashem's hands, and how everything is from Him.

In the zemiros of Shabbos we sing, **שכרו הרבה מאוד על פי פעלו**

The Divrei Yisrael zt'l explains that the song alludes to the reward for *emunah*. **שכרו הרבה מאוד** , he will receive a great reward because he believes **על פי פעלו** that everything happens **על פי** , by Hashem's decree.

It states (113:5-6) **המגביהי לשבת המשפילי לראות**. **The Chida** says that the roshei teivos spell **הלל** and implies that we should praise Hashem both when we are **המגביהי לשבת** when Hashem places us on a high pedestal, and also **המשפילי** , when Hashem lowers us. We should always praise Hashem because everything is for the good.

The Chida adds that **הלל** is gematria 65, the same as Hashem's name **אדנ״י**, which represents Hashem's name of compassion, and **הללו״ה** is gematria 86, **אלקים**, the name of din. This tells us that no matter whether Hashem treats us with chesed or din, we should always praise Hashem because it is always for our benefit.

Furthermore, it states **הרופא לשבורי לב -147:3** , "Who heals the broken-hearted," and the roshei teivos spell **הלל**.

נהלל is roshei teivos **הוא נותן לחם לכל** , "He gives bread to all" (from birkas hamazon). These are all reasons to praise Hashem because everything is from Him.



The Greatness of Bnei Yisrael

It states (23:10) **מי מנה עפר יעקב**, "Who counted the dust of Yaakov." Rashi explains, **אין חשבון במצות שהם מקיימין בעפר**, "The number of *mitzvos* they fulfil with dust is innumerable: (Devarim 22:10)

The Be'er Mayim Chaim writes that **מי מנה עפר יעקב** means, "Who can express the greatness of even those Yidden who are on a low level and are compared to the earth?"

Reb Tzaddok HaKohen (Resisei Laylah 44) writes that the purpose of this week's parashah is to teach us the greatness of Klal Yisrael (even the sinners of Bnei Yisrael) over the goyim.

The Mishnah Sanhedrin (10:2) lists people who lost their portion in Olam HaBa. For example, it states there, "Four regular people [don't have a portion in Olam HaBa. They are] Bilaam, Doag, Achitofel, and Geichazi."

The question is, why is Bilaam in this group? He wasn't even a Yid!

Rebbe Tzaddok HaKohen zt'l (Pri Tzaddik, Yisro, Risisei Laylah 44) explains that Bilaam prayed that he be like a Jew. He said (23:10) **תמת נפשי מות ישרים ותהי אחריתי כמהו** - "May my soul die the death of the upright and let my end be like his." He prayed to be with the Jewish people at the end of his life, and his tefillah was answered.

Reb Tzaddok writes, "It is a great zechiyah (merit) for Bilaam to be counted among those who don't have a portion in olam haba…"

Reb Tzaddok explains that he couldn't perceive the holiness of the Yidden who merit Olam HaBa. That was a madreigah that he had no notion of. But he did perceive the **רשעי ישראל**, the sinners of Bnei Yisrael, those who don't even have a portion inOlam HaBa.

Bilaam davened **תמות נפשי מות ישרים**, that in his death, he should be together with them. His tefillos were answered, and this is the reason his name is mentioned together with the sinners of Bnei Yisrael.

One lesson we take from this is the power of tefillah. Even Bilaam's tefillah was answered. But there is another lesson here: to recognize the greatness of Bnei Yisrael.

In one opinion in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 104:), all of the people mentioned (Doag, Achitofel, and Geichazi) received Olam HaBa in the end. Their aveiros turned around and became virtues, and they received Olam HaBa. But Bilaam isn't mentioned. He will never receive Olam HaBa.

Reb Tzadok HaKohen (Resisei Laylah 44) explains, "This is the difference between Yisrael and the nations, and even the sinners of Yisrael who did aveiros, without an end because although he sinned, he remains a Yisrael…. In the depths of their heart, they are attached to Hashem…

Deep down, a Yid wants to serve Hashem. This is every Yid, including those who sin. No one can perceive this other than Hashem Himself, but Hashem revealed that it is so. Therefore, even the sinners have a tikkun at the end, however, Bilaam remained without a portion in Olam HaBa.

"Never in my life, from the time I was young and now that I am old, have I ever seen anyone who gave up something for another and lost because of it." ~ Rav Aharon Yehudah Leib Steinman.

Rabbi Yechiel Emanuel- Leil Shishi Series



There are 10 times in this week's parsha where it mentions **מַלְאַךְ י-ה-ו-ה** corresponding to Bilaam's 10 tests. Rashi says **מַלְאָךְ שֶׁל רַחֲמִים הָיָה, וְהָיָה רוֹצֶה לְמָנְעוֹ מִלַּחֲטֹא, שֶׁלֹּא יֶחֱטָא וְיֹאבַד** ***It was an angel of mercy and he wanted to prevent him from sinning, for should he sin, he would perish. (22:22)***

This is mind boggling. A non-Jewish *rasha* who is coming to curse the Yidden – and Hashem sends an angel of mercy to thwart him? 10 times?

Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Sher (Rosh Yeshiva of the Slabodka Yeshiva in Lithuania and Bnei Brak. He was the son-in-law of **Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel**.) says look at the difference between the 10 tests of Avraham Avinu and Bilaam's 10 tests.

Avraham's tests were all about whether he would accomplish the will of Hashem – Whereas the 10 tests of Bilaam were in order to impede him in going against the will of Hashem.

Sometimes in life, our plans do not go according to how we want – this is all Hashem's intervention on our behalf - B'rachamim. He is sending us a **מַלְאַךְ י-ה-ו-ה**.

Rabbi Yechiel Emanuel- Leil Shishi Series

The Chasam Sofer says in the name of **Rabbi Akiva Eiger** (Sefer Chesed L'Avraham): There are 354 days in the lunar year. 222 of them (**רכב**) are days when we say Tachanun. 132 days (**קלב**) are when we don't say Tachanun.

Bilaam came and wanted to utilize the days of Tachanun, which are days of din, and additionally turn the 132 days (**בלק - קלב**) when we don't say Tachanun into days of din.

Hashem thwarted his attempts, and the 132 days remained as days of beracha, and the 222 days transformed into days of beracha as well.

This is hinted to in the Pasuk: **וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל־בִּלְעָם מֶה עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לָקֹב אֹיְבַי לְקַחְתִּיךָ**– *Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies"* (with the 132-**קלב** days) [**לָקֹב** means to curse = **בָּלָק**] And all you have ended up doing is **וְהִנֵּה בֵּרַכְתָּ בָרֵךְ** – "*but you have blessed them!"(23:11)* – 'Not only have you not cursed the 132 days, but you have even changed the 222 days into days of rachamim!'

Rabbi Yechiel Emanuel- Leil Shishi Series

וַתֵּעָצַר הַמַּגֵּפָה מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל 'And the plague ceased from the children of Israel.' (25:8)

וַיִּהְיוּ הַמֵּתִים בַּמַּגֵּפָה אַרְבָּעָה וְעֶשְׂרִים אָלֶף Those that died in the plague numbered twenty four thousand. (25:9)

These pesukim seem not to be written in order. First it should have said that there were 24,000 people killed in the plague, and then the plague stopped?

The Mamarei Rama Mipanu says that these 24,000 people from shevet Shimon were misgalgel to the 24,000 talmidim of Rabbi Akiva who died in the plague that struck them.

This explains why the Pasuk says - וַתֵּעָצַר הַמַּגֵּפָה מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל **'And the plague ceased from the children of Israel.' (In the midbar)**

וַיִּהְיוּ הַמֵּתִים בַּמַּגֵּפָה אַרְבָּעָה וְעֶשְׂרִים אָלֶף **Those that died in the plague numbered twenty four thousand.**- This is referring to the 24,000 talmidim of Rabbi Akiva that died in a later plague!

Fascinating INSIGHTS

Soul Music



Music has the power to bring us close to Hashem. In fact, **R' Uri, the Saraf of Strelisk**, writes that if a person is incapable of drawing himself close to Hashem, then through the **היכל הניגון**, Chamber of Music, it is possible for him to draw close.

The Sefer Hachinuch writes that since a man is of a physical nature, he needs spiritual awakenings to connect to the spiritual. Otherwise, in his natural state, he will remain asleep. There is nothing greater than a nigun to accomplish this.

The Vilna Gaon tells us that if our souls have stooped to the dust through pain and despair that have descended upon us, we can still invigorate our hearts through **זמר**, song.

To unshackle oneself from sadness and despair, music is a useful technique to use as the **Shomer Emunim** writes that one who is consumed with sadness and wants to become stirred to happiness should strengthen himself and sing a joyous song for some time, until his heart will transform — against its will — to joy. He will see wonders from this.

Why do we get such pleasure from music? **R' Aharon Berachya of Modena** writes that the soul derives pleasure from music because it

is accustomed to music through the songs of the **מלאכי השרת**, ministering angels, and the song of the Heavenly circuits. Due to this, when it is in the body and hears music, it gets pleasure, just as it was accustomed to when it was attached to its Source.

In a similar vein, **R' Shlomo Alkebatz** writes that music is something **יערב לנפש**, pleasing to the soul because it was accustomed to listening to it while it was still up on high.

Let us conclude with the unbelievable words that **R' Yisrael of Shklov** (1770-1839) writes from his rebbe **the Vilna Gaon** (1720-1797). The Vilna Gaon praised greatly **חכמת מוסיקה**, the wisdom of music. He would say that most explanations of the Torah, the secrets of the songs of the Leviyim and the secrets of the Tikunei Zohar cannot be comprehended without it. One can revive the dead with its secrets that are concealed in the Torah.



In 1913, on Shabbos morning after davening, a raging fire broke out in the town of Radin. Within a few hours, the leaping flames destroyed nearly 200 homes. As it was a matter of pikuach nefesh, the boys of Radin all gathered to help put out the fire. They all lined up to pass the water from the well to the fire. The fire was controlled as the flames approached the home of the **Chofetz Chaim**. He and those whose homes weren't affected welcomed in those who had lost their homes.

A year later, another fire broke out in Radin. This fire took away the twenty-six houses that hadn't been affected the first time, including that of the Chofetz Chaim. Again, the boys lined up to pass water from one to another until they reached the fire.

Chaim Tzvi Sinai, one of the boys in the Yeshiva of Radin and a talented individual with extraordinary strength, was appointed to stand on the roof nearby to pour water down onto the fire. "On the roof," recalls Chaim Tzvi, "I saw the Chofetz Chaim while his very own house was going up in flames. Understandably, I had a tremendous urge to see how he was reacting to such a situation, and so I got a replacement to fill in my position so I could see what the Chofetz Chaim was doing.

"During this turbulent time," said Chaim Tzvi, "the Chofetz Chaim was at total peace with the situation. This is especially outstanding, as the Chofetz Chaim held that the reason his home burned down was due to purchasing fire insurance, which he disproved of. He held that it was a punishment at Hashem's great chessed!' the Chofetz Chaim was saying - 'He didn't burn the entire city at once but split it into two. He gave half the city their turn and gave them a year to rebuild. Now their neighbours in need can be helped. Imagine the first fire had burned the entire city; there would be no place to find shelter. Hashem split it into two so that each part of Radin can help the other!'"

Can we imagine: The Chofetz Chaim's very own home was on fire, and he had the power and clarity of mind to focus on the happy side of it and see the good.

Seeing The "Good"!

Life is wonderful! Life is filled with so much "good." There's unlimited "good" in life. There are situations that we see the "good" clearly, and there are situations when it is masked, and we need to look for it. The decision is up to us whether we'll explore, investigate, and examine the "good" that's in life or to complain. There's always "good" to look at and vice versa. It's solely up to us where we place our focus.

An optimist isn't one who he has everything in life worked out. Rather, an optimist is one whose focus is on the positive. The

perspective of being optimistic is the side of the story that he chooses to focus on. The brain is limited to one thought at a time, and therefore, by concentrating on the "good," we will see only that.

The outcome of optimism is fabulous. Aside for blissful cheerfulness and joyful happiness, it also brings more brachah into the world and into our personal lives. By pondering the "good" in life, we bring more and more "good." When a person dwells on the "good" in life, Hashem brings forth more of that. The place where he focuses is on what he's given. Focusing on "good" brings "good." Focusing on "bad" brings "bad." (Sefer Mitzvas Habitachon – R' Shlomo Hominer)

Therefore, aside for the actual benefit that comes from seeing the "good," we'll be granted a more meaningful and productive life filled with accomplishment, brachah, and success.

More Brachah!

The Rizhiner Rebbe once heard his daughter krechtz, moaning. "Don't moan," he told her. "One krechtz brings on the next one. However, one 'joy' and 'praise to Hashem' brings more 'happiness' and 'goodness'. To bring out this point, I'll tell you a story:

A wealthy person was going through hard times, and he moaned and krechtzed all day about his lot. Shortly after, he lost all of his money. As a result, he complained even more, since he had to go collecting door-to-door. Shortly after that, he came down with tzaraas, leprosy. Nobody wanted to see him at their doorstop, as they were afraid to catch his disease. So aside for his poverty, he couldn't even go collecting anymore. But he didn't learn his lesson. He just continued moaning and complaining about his misfortune.

It doesn't stop here. On top of that, he became a hunchback and his health deteriorated to the point he couldn't even eat. At that point, he changed his thinking and said, "Well, at least I'm alive. Many people in my situation wouldn't be alive. No food. No money. Rejected from society. Baruch Hashem, I am alive!" Now, instead of

complaining, he began 'praising' and 'adoring' Hashem. After hearing this, his situation suddenly made a turnaround for the good.

Hashem said, "You think that your situation is 'good'? I'll show you what is 'good.'" His hunchback healed and he regained his ability to eat. With much joy, he thanked Hashem for his salvation. Then Hashem said, "You think that was 'good'? I'll show you what is 'good.'" His tzaraas went away, and he was able to raise money again. He was delighted with his "good" fortune and praised Hashem with all his heart and soul. Hashem said, "You think that is 'good'? I'll show you what is 'good.'" A wealthy person lent him a large sum of money, which he invested, and he became rich again.

There's always a reason to be happy. There is always the half-cup that is full, which we should focus on (Torah Wellsprings).

Happiness

As a closing to this topic, the words of the **Imrei Emes** stand as very encouraging. He says the following: Chazal (Taanis 29) say that "the report of the meraglim was on Tishah B'Av night. Hashem told them, 'You cried for no reason. I, in return, will establish this day as a day of crying for generations to come.'"

The Imrei Emes noted that if crying for no reason resulted in such a bitter crying for generations — that we lost the Beis Hamikdash — how much more so when one is happy when he's feeling down will the result be joy and salvation! Be happy, even if you're no up to it. This will result in many good reasons to be happy.

"When I see a pile of little shoes in a store window, I am moved to tears of happiness picturing the feelings of intense joy a mother will have buying that first pair of shoes for her beloved child." ~ R' Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l

The Chozeh of Lublin

The Chozeh of Lublin once wanted to arrive early in the morning to take care of an important matter. The day before, he asked his wife to prepare his evening meal earlier than usual. But it turned out that the meal was prepared much later than usual.

He commented, "It would be natural for me to become angry now. But the only reason I wanted to have the meal early was to do the will of my creator. This too is the will of my creator that I should not become angry." ~ **Niflaos HaRebbe**

How do I get to Rechov Jaffa?

Rav Elya Lopian zt"l once asked **Rav Moshe Aharon Stern zt"l** to accompany him to mincha on Shabbos afternoon to Yeshivas Chevron. As they walked, they witnessed cars driving down the roads in flagrant violation of Shabbos. Rav Elya, in clear agitation, said to Rav Moshe Aharon, "Woe, a rachmanis on these people, for no one has taught them the severity of the prohibition. Let's turn back to avoid seeing all this chilul Shabbos."

Rav Moshe Aharon replied, "We're already more than halfway to the Yeshiva. Rather than turn back, isn't it better to just walk quicker and get there faster? We'll probably encounter less chilul Shabbos this way." Rav Elya agreed but emitted a heartbreaking sigh.

At that moment, a car pulled up to the two rabbonim and the driver poked his head out the window. "How do I get to Rechov Jaffa?" he asked. Hearing the question, Rav Elya burst into tears. "How can I tell you something that you are forbidden to do – drive on Shabbos? Yet, how can I refuse to answer you and decline a Jew's request for help?" Rav Elya continued to cry.

The man stopped his car, turned it off and got out. He blurted out, "Rabbi, I never before heard sincere rebuke like this. My mother also observes Shabbos and every week she screams at me for my

lack of observance, but never have I seen her cry. I see that you really care for my benefit. Rabbi, I promise you, that from today on I will never again drive on Shabbos."



Spoiling Them

When one of his more ascetic students questioned **Reb Yisroel Salanter's** caring for others' material needs to the point of indulging them, in total contradiction to his personal practice of self-denial ("You're spoiling them, Rebbe!"), Reb Yisroel responded:

"***Yenem's gashmiyus iz mein ruchniyus*** – taking care of the other fellow's material needs is my spiritual need." ~ **The Torah Personality**.



R' Elimelech of Lizhensk Zt"l

R' Elimelech of Lizhensk said, "I am confident of being admitted to Gan Eden. The Heavenly Court will ask me, 'Melech, did you study adequately?' and I will say, 'No.' They will say, 'Did you daven properly?' and I will say, 'No.' They will say, 'Did you give adequate tzedakah?' and I will say, 'No.' They will say, 'He is truthful. Let him into Gan Eden.'"



Baseless Love

Rav Kook was well-known for his profound love for all Jews, even those far removed from Torah and mitzvot. When questioned why he loved Jews distant from the ideals of Torah, he would respond, "Better I should err on the side of baseless love, than I should err on the side of baseless hatred."

Stories abound of Rav Kook's extraordinary love for other Jews. Once Rav Kook was publicly humiliated by a group of extremists who showered him with waste water in the streets of Jerusalem. The

entire city was in an uproar over this scandalous act. The legal counsel of the British Mandate advised Rav Kook to press charges against the hooligans, promising that they would be promptly deported from the country. The legal counsel, however, was astounded by the Chief Rabbi's response.

"I have no interest in court cases. Despite what they did to me, I love them. I am ready to kiss them, so great is my love! I burn with love for every Jew."



The Lottery Ticket and the Chofetz Chaim

A man once said to the **Chofetz Chaim**, "Rabbi, I have just bought a lottery ticket. The winner of the lottery will receive a very large amount of money. Could I please have a blessing from you that I will win, since the money I acquire will enable me to study Torah with peace of mind." -The Chofetz Chaim gently blessed him, "May the Almighty help you study Torah with peace of mind."

The man was disappointed the Chofetz Chaim did not bless him he would win. It occurred to him that perhaps the Chofetz Chaim did not hear exactly what he had requested, so he repeated once more he would like a blessing he should win the lottery, this time in a louder voice. Very calmly, the Chofetz Chaim reiterated the same blessing, word for word as before. **~ Hachofetz Chayim as quoted by R' Zelig Pliskin**



The Shining Sun

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter often expressed his feelings of great joy on the benefit he has from the shining sun which helps mankind in so many ways. Rabbi Rosenstein would ask why don't other people also feel the same joy as Rabbi Salanter? The main reason is that people feel happier when they have something others are missing. When everyone else in the world has the same thing, they do not feel they

have anything special. Rabbi Salanter felt great love for other people. Therefore, the fact that others also benefited increased his pleasure. Just as a person feels more pleasure when his children also have pleasure, so too, one who sincerely loves other people feels increased pleasure when others also benefit. ~ **R' Zelig Pliskin**



Turning Side to Side Until You Fall Asleep?

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz related, "Someone once asked me how many times I turn from side to side in my bed at night before I finally fall asleep. At first I was surprised by the such a strange question. Then the person told me he recently visited a very ill person and witnessed how that man was unable to turn from side to side by himself. I gave the matter some thought and realized something important that I had not been aware of previously. A healthy person turns around in his bed many times until he falls asleep. When he feels uncomfortable in one position, he automatically changes positions without thinking about it." ~ **Daas Chochmah Umussar**



Letter to Mothers

At the end of a letter that the **Maharam Shick** wrote to his son when he was learning in yeshiva in the city of Tzahalim, he writes: "Write to your mother in German a separate letter or at the bottom of a letter because she will be delighted in reading it herself since she doesn't understand the language Lashon Hakodesh that you wrote me."

R' Mordechai Aryeh Halevi Horowitz in his sefer B'shem Mordechai, writes about his father **R' Avraham Halevi Horowitz** (1864-1942): "Every Erev Shabbos my father would write to his mother. Once he wrote to her that he is careful in doing this (i.e., writing letters to her) like putting on tefillin.

I remember times when there weren't any cards in the house. He would then stand outside in the rain and snow to find someone that could bring him cards in order to fulfil the mitzva of kibud av v'eim. It's the right thing for you to also be careful to write each week a letter to us."

His grandson added that the great Belzer chassid, **R' Eliezer Rosen**, who was a student of the **B'shem Mordechai**, related that during World War One there was no mail and he wasn't able to send letters to his mother. What did he do? He wrote a letter each week to his mother like he was accustomed. He would then put them in a closet for safekeeping until he was able to show these letters to his mother.



The Munkatcher Rebbe related that **R' Nosson Dovid Rabinowitz of Partziva** (1866-1930) was accustomed to sending a letter each week to his mother who was the Biala Rebbitzen. In the letter, he would ask her how she was doing and wished her a good Shabbos.

On the day he passed away, R' Nosson Dovid called his daughter and showed her a package of letters that were written and prepared a while before. He instructed her to continue sending a letter each week to his mother in order that she shouldn't feel that he was gone which obviously would cause her pain.

The package of letters that he prepared was exactly enough for three months. After those three months, when the letters were all sent, his mother passed away.

Rabbi Shimon Kaplin

A **איד** once came to **ר׳ משה הלברשטם זצ״ל**, and asked if he can buy an **אתרוג** in a closed box – to take the lucky dip, "as I will save so much more time like that…" **על פי השקפה** is it right to buy an **אתרוג** in a closed box ?

Look how an **אדם גדול** answers such a question: He answered so cleverly: "If you buy your Borsalino hat in a closed box – off the shelf, you can buy an **אתרוג** in a closed box."

When it comes to buying a hat, you try on twenty hats in three different mirrors on all ten angles, till you know which one suits you!

What are we trying to do in this world? Are we just trying to tick the boxes or are we trying to also do the **רצון ה׳**? This is an extremely important factor in our **עבודת ה׳**.

Parshah Pearls - If Avraham Didn't Succeed … !

וַיָּ֤קָם בִּלְעָם֙ בַּבֹּ֔קֶר וַיַּחֲבֹ֖שׁ אֶת־אֲתֹנ֑וֹ ***"And Bilam arose in the morning and he saddled his ass*** … " (22:21).



Based on the dictum 'Hatred causes people to act irrationally', Bilam saddled his own ass, Rashi explains, despite the fact that he had many servants. But G-d reminded him that Avraham Avinu had already beaten him to the draw, when before setting out to the Akeidah, to slaughter his own son, on Hashem's behalf, he too, arose early and saddled his own ass.

Simply understood, this means that Avraham too, acted irrationally by saddling his own ass, in spite of

his many servants, but he did it out of love, rather than out of hatred. That act earned his children G-d's eternal Divine protection, so Bilam's attempts at cursing them were bound to fail.

The Kotzker Rebbe however, offers a more profound explanation. Avraham Avinu, he explains, set out on that fateful journey, to Shecht his son Yitzchak. Had he succeeded in his mission, Yisrael would not have existed (and there would have been nobody for Bilam to curse).

Hashem intervened on that occasion, in spite of Avraham's love-based intentions, because He wanted K'lal Yisrael to exist in His world. Consequently, He now wanted Bilam to know that he was wasting his time in trying to destroy Yisrael with his hate-filled plans, since He (G-d) still wanted K'lal Yisrael in the world and would most certainly put a spoke in his wheel.



Now You Know!

There is an unusual word which appears only twice in the Chumash with this precise vowelisation, once in Parshas Chukas and once in Balak. (It also appears twice in Tehillim.) The word is '**הִבֵּיט**' and refers to looking at and contemplating something.

In Parshas Chukas, it refers to the copper snake Moshe put on a post so those who'd been bitten by the poisonous snakes could be healed. - **וְהִבֵּיט אֶל־נְחַשׁ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת וָחָי**. When they gazed at the snake, they were to see beyond its physical form to understand the message it was conveying. The people had spoken ill of Hashem and Moshe so they were sent snakes, representative of the primordial snake who spoke ill.

In Parshas Balak, Bilaam prophecied, "**לֹא־הִבִּיט אָוֶן בְּיַעֲקֹב**," Hashem did not perceive iniquity in Jacob. Hashem looks at the Jews and though

we are flawed, He sees deeper than the surface and doesn't recognize the sins as being who we are.

As we approach the Three Weeks, when we mourn for the Bais HaMikdash we've lost, we ought to take this lesson to heart. We have the choice of what we see and whether we look for good or bad. The difference will be witnessed in the final outcome. If we see the good in others, we are emulating Hashem. If we only see bad, we're no better than the snake.

Parshah Pearls - Bilam's Chutzpah… !

תָּמֻת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יְשָׁרִים וּתְהִי אַחֲרִיתִי כָּמֹהוּ ***"Let my soul die the death of the righteous and may my end be like theirs***" (23:10).

Now surely, asks the **Ma'ayanah shel Torah**, citing the **Imrei Emes of Gur**, the Pasuk should have ended with the word 'like them', with reference to the Avos (to which "the righteous" refers), and not "like him"?

The word for "like him" is actually "komohu", and when we bear in mind that Gerrer Chasidim (among many) pronounce this as 'komohi', the answer he gives, based on the Gemara in Nedarim (10), which, in the realm of Nedarim, equates the word 'Mohi' with Moshe Rabeinu, is a classic.

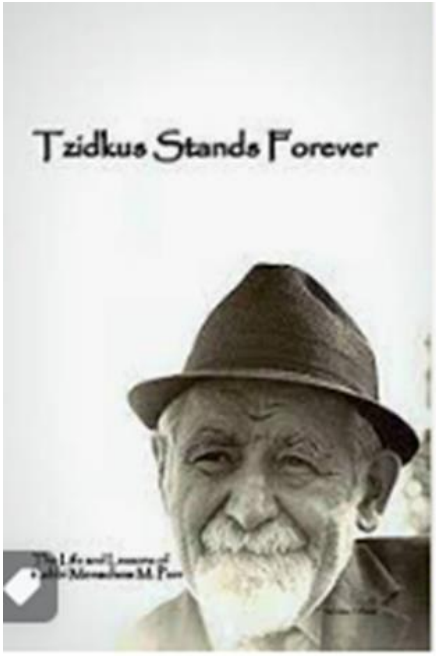
What Bilam was in fact, saying, was that he wished in his death, to attain the level of the Avos on the one hand and of Moshe Rabeinu, on the other.

The Chutzpah of Bilam; he lived the evil life of Bilam, but he aspired to die like a saint!

The Loyal Shepherd – Rabbi Menachem Perr By Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn

For more than 40 years, R' Menachem Perr served as the rabbi of Cong. Bnei Israel in South Ozone Park, Queens. When he assumed his position in the 1930's, the membership consisted of both religious and non-religious people.

R' Perr made a concerted effort to bring each member of the shul closer to Torah and mitzvos. He tried to convince children from secular homes to attend yeshivos or Talmud Torahs; he tried to influence nonreligious people to observe Shabbos.





For years, he would walk every Friday to each Jewish store, reminding people of candlelighting time and asking, or pleading with, them to close before sunset. In the 1950's the neighborhood began changing and there were soon few Jewish families left in South Ozone Park. Those who remained were the elderly who could not afford to move. Though R' Perr had been offered positions elsewhere, he told his family that he would not abandon the shul as long as there was even one person who came to daven there.

When he was quite elderly, he one day told his son, R' Yechiel Perr, that after he passed away he wished to be buried in the Beth David cemetery in Elmont, Long Island. R' Yechiel asked about the plot that his father had with the Rayim Ahuvim group, which was reserved only for prominent Torah scholars and outstanding lay leaders.

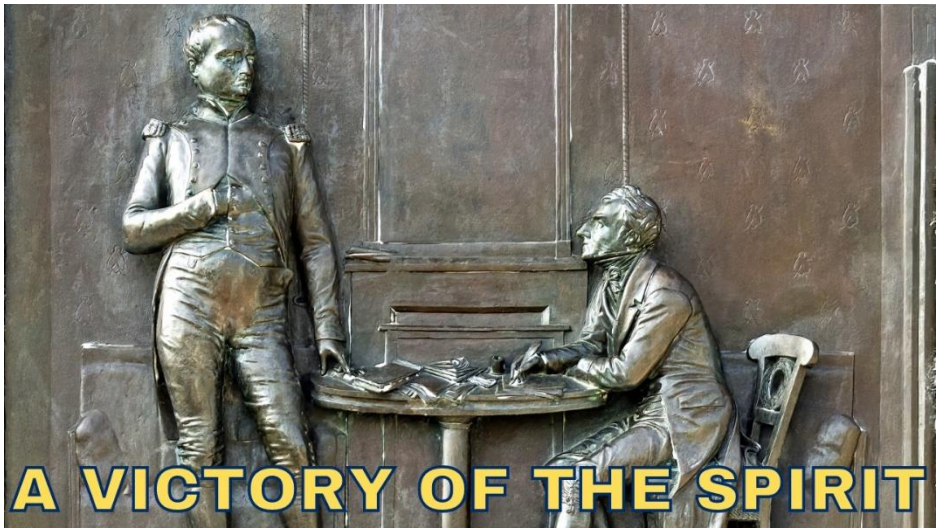
R' Perr told his son, "I have decided against that. Our shul has a plot in Beth David, where many of the members of our shul are buried. I know their children; they are no longer religious, but they will, from time to time, come to visit their parents' graves.

"If I am buried in that area, they will see my grave and maybe they will remember something that I taught them about Shabbos or kashrus or the importance of learning Torah. Maybe it will ignite in them a spark of Yiddishkeit. For the sake of that possibility, it is important that I be buried there."

Indeed, R' Perr lies among his people. He taught them when he was alive, and hopefully continues to teach their children after his passing. (**Along the Maggid's Journey**)

RABBI PINI DUNNER

הרב פינחס חליעזר הלוי דונר



Emmanuel-Auguste-Dieudonné, better known as Emmanuel, comte de Las Cases (1766-1842), was a French naval officer and the esteemed author of a bestselling atlas. But his most enduring legacy lies in his close association with Napoleon Bonaparte, as one of his trusted confidants.

In 1823, de Las Cases published "Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène," a remarkable record of his time with Napoleon between 1815 and 1816 on the remote island of St. Helena, where the former Emperor had been exiled by the British.

This extraordinary work contains a comprehensive and intimate – if somewhat controversial – account of de Las Cases' extensive and frequent conversations with Napoleon over a period of eighteen months. Readers are immersed not only in the intricate details of Napoleon's life and illustrious career, as recalled by the former Emperor himself, but also in Napoleon's political philosophy and his poignant reflections on the human condition.

Napoleon Bonaparte's unquenchable thirst for knowledge and his profound appreciation of history resonated throughout his reign as the leader of France. Despite revelling in the present moment and in achieving resounding success in his military campaigns, politics, and diplomacy, he always remained acutely conscious of the ever-present spectre of the tides of history.

This consciousness reached its pinnacle during his exile on St. Helena, where his days as Emperor were irrevocably behind him. It was in his agonized conversations with de Las Cases that Napoleon's convictions regarding the relentless course of history became fully crystallized.

One of Napoleon's oft-cited statements, which appeared in de Las Cases' book, reveals his profound understanding of the strategic reach of G-d and human goodness: "***There are only two powers in the world: the sword and the spirit. By the spirit, I mean civil and religious institutions. And in the long run, the sword is always defeated by the spirit***."

This stunning declaration – stunning, principally because of who Napoleon was and what he represented – exemplifies his penetrating insight that there is an enduring power that transcends mere military might and physical strength, as symbolized by the sword. Ultimate power resides in the unwavering influence, resilience, and fortitude of ideas, religion, values, and the societal institutions encompassed by the spirit.

Napoleon's words reflect a deep recognition that while military conquests and triumphs may shape the present, it is the intangible forces of the human spirit, embodied in civil institutions and religious belief, that wield the true power to shape the course of history.

Enduring faith in G-d and the unwavering pursuit of human dignity always prevail over the transient nature of brute force. Napoleon, despite his irrepressible tendency to prioritize might over what was right, held a profound understanding of this truth, even as he grappled with his own contradictions while atop France's power pyramid.

This powerful idea, might explain the anomaly of the opening prayer said each morning in every synagogue across the world – a verse that also often adorns the exterior of synagogue buildings or is displayed over the ark at the front of the sanctuary that is home to the Torah scrolls.

The verse is taken from Parshat Balak, and records the words of the gentile prophet, Balaam, as he attempted, for the third time, to curse the Jewish nation from afar, but was instead forced to utter a series of remarkable statements regarding the incredible endurance of his oblivious interlocutors (Num. 24:5): **מַה טֹּבוּ אֹהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל** – "How goodly are your tents Jacob, your dwellings Israel."

The disturbing inclusion of this malicious character's words in our prayers is jarring enough, but to include them as the day's opening prayer seems positively obnoxious. Surely there are numerous verses from the Psalms that are just as suitable, if not more so, to launch our devotions each day; why resort to using a statement uttered by an irredeemably degenerate miscreant – Balaam.

The first explanation, cited by Rashi, draws upon a passage from the Talmud found in Bava Batra 60a. Balaam's observation of the entrances and openings of the Israelite tents and dwellings revealed

a deliberate lack of alignment, allowing for each family to maintain their personal privacy. This recognition led Balaam to declare, "These people are truly worthy of having the Divine Presence rest upon them."

Despite Balaam's own morally compromised life, he was deeply moved by the dignified living conditions of the Jewish nation, even amidst their temporary dwelling structures in the harsh wilderness. His words of praise reflected an appreciation for their societal civility, which boded well for the nation's long-term survival, contrary to his intended curse.

The second explanation, proposed by Rabbi Obadiah Sforno (1475-1550), takes a different approach and focuses on Balaam's prophetic powers. Sforno associates "your tents" with Torah academies, likening them to tents and drawing upon the example of Jacob, who was described as a constant student of the word of G-d, dwelling in the metaphorical tents of learning.

The significance of the term "tent" is also apparent in the Book of Exodus, where the "Tent of Testimony" symbolized the presence of G-d. Additionally, Sforno interprets "your dwellings" as synagogues, encompassing local places of worship and the ultimate synagogue, the Jerusalem Temple.

Balaam's deliberate choice of these specific definitions highlights his understanding that the Jewish people were unassailable, despite attempts to annihilate them, due to the existence of Torah academies and synagogues, which serve as their enduring protection.

These two explanations shed a revealing light on Balaam's iconic words. The first explanation emphasizes the dignified living conditions and societal civility of the Jewish people, while the second explanation underscores the significance of G-d's omnipresence within the nation, which provided them with long-term protection and resilience.

And so, millennia before Napoleon spoke of "the spirit" as meaning "civil and religious institutions" – a spirit that he understood would always endure despite efforts by brute power to extinguish it – Balaam got there first.

We include Balaam's words at the beginning of our daily prayers not in spite of his wicked intentions and debauched immorality, but deliberately because of it. Balaam's recognition of the enduring potential of the Jewish people underscores the power of faith, humanity, and the institutions that uphold them, specifically because of who he was.

His insights echo throughout history, from the words of Napoleon Bonaparte recognizing the enduring power of the spirit over the sword, to the understanding of great warriors who grasped that military victories are ephemeral compared to the lasting influence of faith and humanity. And they serve as a reminder that true power lies not in the transitory realm of physical might, but in the enduring strength of G-d, belief and the civil values that shape our societies.



Parsha Points to Ponder

What weapon appears in Parshas Balak but is not mentioned anywhere else in the entire Torah?

At the end of Parshas Balak, Pinchas killed Zimri using a רמח spear – Bamidbar 25:7), a weapon that is not mentioned anywhere else in the Torah.

Rav Shach — Chesed & Ahavas Yisrael

"The greatest kavod you can give a Jew is to listen to him." - Rav Shach emphasized that listening is an act of chesed.

17th of Tamuz

The coming fast is called "**שבעה עשר בתמוז**" – and we fast because of 5 misfortunes that happened on that day. 1) The luchos were broken on this day 2) the Tamid was **נתבטל** on that day. 3) By **חורבן בית שני** the enemy managed to break into the city on that day 4) It was also the day that **אפוסתמוס הרשע** burned our heiligeh Torah 5) Lastly, it was the day that the **רשעי ישראל** put a **צלם** in the **היכל** which resulted in the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and the exile.



Letters Of Hope - The Story Begins… By Rabbi Yechiel Spero

In the final pages of the sefer Yesod HaAvodah, the **Slonimer Rebbe** shares a story. A story with a message so strong, so clear, that it could lift a broken heart off the ground and send it soaring back toward Hashem.

It happened during the days of Napoleon's war against Russia. Napoleon had set his sights on Moscow. His army was huge, his generals were brilliant, and his strategy was terrifyingly precise. Each group of soldiers had a mission. Each battalion had orders. But behind it all stood one man, Napoleon, the master of war.

The Russians were doing everything they could to hold him off. Their top general waited anxiously in his command post, hoping to hear good news from the front lines.

Soon, the messengers started arriving… The first one handed over a letter. The general tore it open and read it. The line of defence had been shattered. The enemy had broken through. Many, many Russian soldiers had fallen. He dropped the letter onto his desk.

The second messenger came. More terrible news. A whole unit had been taken captive. The French were advancing without resistance.

A third. A fourth. A fifth. One letter after another. One crushing defeat after the next. - The general sat at his desk, his head in his hands, surrounded by messages of disaster.

That's when his wife entered the room. She took a quick look at his face. "What happened?" she asked.

He didn't answer. He just handed her the stack of letters.

She read through them slowly, one by one. Her eyes filled with sadness, but her face stayed calm. When she finished the last letter, she looked up and said something strange.

"That's it?"

"Isn't that enough?" he asked bitterly. "We're losing everything. What more do you want to hear?"

His wife disagreed. "There's one message worse than all the rest. One letter you haven't yet received. One line you haven't read."

He couldn't follow her line of reasoning. "Worse than all of this?"

"Yes, the worst message would be this: ***The spirit of the army has fallen. The men have given up hope***."

The general realized the truth. As long as his soldiers still believed, as long as they still held onto hope, as long as they still had fire inside them, the war wasn't over.

He rose, called for his staff, and began planning a counterattack. And slowly, slowly, the tide turned. In the end, against all odds, Russia held strong and pushed back the greatest army in the world. Why? - Because their spirit never fell.

That, says the Slonimer Rebbe, is our story. There are times when we've messed up. Badly. Times we've lost battles. We've made mistakes. We've fallen. We've strayed. We've wandered far from our

goals. But those are only letters. They tell the story of what happened. They don't tell the story of who we are.

The one thing that can never be written for us, the one thing that we must protect at all costs, is our ruach, our spirit. If we still want to come back, if we still believe that Hashem is waiting for us, then nothing is over. - We can fight back, and we can win.

SHABBOS STORIES

Poverty is Not an Excuse

The following vignettes are about our gedolei Yisrael of the past generation and what they went through – without complaint – to achieve their greatness.

Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl, was a young bochur learning in Switzerland after the war, living in extreme poverty. His room was unheated during the freezing European winters. To keep warm, he had only a thin blanket – so thin that, when snow would fall through the cracks of the roof and land on his bed, he would be covered in snow.

However, he refused to leave, saying, "If I move to a warmer place, I might lose the hasmadah, diligence, I have here."

He would rather shiver through the night than lose his geshmak in learning. Years later, when he was already a revered lead of the generation, he once remarked to a talmid: "The warmth that a person feels in Torah never comes from the blanket – it comes from the fire inside."

When Horav Shmuel Rozovsky, zl, was a bochur in Europe, he was so poor that he couldn't afford bread. He would live on scraps of food given to him by kindhearted neighbors. Yet, he once said that those were the happiest days of his life.

"I was hungry," he said, "but I was filled with Torah. And that hunger made every word of Torah taste sweeter."

He used to say that the letters of the Gemarra became engraved on his heart during those days of hardship.

Horav Chaim Kanievsky's life was a constant expression of sacrifice of Torah, but one small story captures it best.

A relative once entered his home and found him eating a small piece of bread with sardines – standing up. When asked why he didn't sit down to eat properly, Rav Chaim replied simply: "If I sit, it takes longer."

Even the extra seconds of sitting were too precious to waste when they could be used for Torah. Every moment, every breath, was sacrificed to learning.

Sorry, We're Closed By James David Weiss

Rabbi Berel Wein tells the story of a man who was a mortgage broker. He owned a business which serviced mortgages too small for the giant firms to handle. One day he received a call from the president of his largest client, the Equitable Life Insurance Company. "Joe," he announced, "I am going to be in town on Tuesday and I'd like to meet with you. We're thinking about enlarging our small policy sector. What is a good time for you?"

Now, Joe was put on a spot. Succot was slated to begin on Tuesday and Joe wondered how this man would take the postponement. "Actually," he replied, "Tuesday is impossible for me."

"No problem, let's make it Wednesday," came the accommodating counter-offer.

Joe wished he hadn't said that. "You know, come to think of it, Wednesday is not very good either."

The president of Equitable became annoyed. "What do you mean?" he asked. "I am giving you two days from which to choose. You know, I don't fly to your town that often."

Joe decided to play it straight. "Let me explain. Perhaps you didn't know but I am an observant Jew and the holiday of Succot falls on Tuesday and Wednesday - my offices are closed on both days."

The president was incredulous. "Surely, you don't mean to tell me there is no one around your offices for two consecutive business days?"

Joe told him the truth, "That's our policy."

"But what if there's an emergency? What if a vital call comes through? We deal in a service business and accessibility to our customers is of prime importance. Joe, if what you're telling me is so, then I'm going to have to reevaluate our whole relationship." With that the president hung up.

Joe attended synagogue that Succot as he did every other Succot. On Thursday morning, upon his return to the office, the first phone call he received was from the president of Equitable.

"Joe, I flew into town on Tuesday and I checked you out. Sure enough, you were closed, so I did some other business. To tell you the truth, I was feeling pretty hot that you couldn't find time for me. Now, I don't know why I did this, but I stayed over and on Wednesday afternoon I called again. I was told by your service that you wouldn't be in until Thursday because of religious observance. Two whole days off when the rest of the world is doing business! Imagine that.

"In this day and age, it's got to take a lot of conviction for someone to do that. Joe, I've changed my mind about you. I'm coming to town next Friday to review our position. I think anyone who has the courage to stand up to the world and stay closed when everyone else

is open is my kind of man. I think we're ready to expand in your direction. What do you say?"

"That sounds great. Friday morning is fine," gulped Joe, deeply grateful the president hadn't designated the days of Shemini Aseret and Simhat Torah.

The two have enjoyed a cordial business relationship ever since. (Excerpted from the Shaar Press book – "Vintage Wein.")

Saving an Endangered Shidduch



A boy from Yeshivas Ponovezh in Bnei Brak became engaged to a girl from Tel Aviv, and as was customary, he spent Shabbos at his *kallah*'s home. On Shabbos morning he went to shul with her father, and something terrible occurred there, something he later found difficult to recount with composure.

After *davening*, one of the men approached the *kallah*'s father and said, "This is your *chosson*? Have you seen how he *davens*—like an *am ha'aretz*. It's hard to believe a *Yid* could daven like that."

This was said about a serious learner, a *ben Torah* with *yiras shomayim*, and the boy could not understand what he had done to provoke such words, especially spoken in front of his *mechutan*. He was deeply humiliated, and naturally the *kallah*'s father began questioning whether his daughter had made the right *shidduch*, with the rest of Shabbos passing in an atmosphere of gloom and despondency.

After Shabbos, a young man who learned in the yeshivah heard what had happened and went to R' Dovid Frankel to relate the incident.

Rabbi Frankel said, "Only one person in the world can save this *bochur* from what may happen, and that is R' Shach—go to him and tell him everything."

The young man followed his advice and went to R' Shach, who asked, "Do you know the *kallah*'s address in Tel Aviv? We are going there right now."

When the family opened the door and saw who stood at the threshold, they were stunned—it was R' Shach, the *Gadol HaDor* himself. The father trembled as he greeted him and asked what brought him such a privilege. R' Shach replied that he happened to be in Tel Aviv, heard that they lived there, and felt he could not pass by without telling them what a gem they had merited in their *chosson*, praising him for his brilliance in learning, in *davening*, in *yiras shomayim*, and in *middos*.

In an instant, all the father's anxiety and doubts about his future son-in-law vanished, replaced by tremendous relief. Today the couple has several grandchildren, and to this day the son-in-law has no idea how R' Shach saved his *shidduch*. (Excerpted from the book – "Meant To Be")



The Best Guarantor

Rabbi Avraham Krupnick, author of *From the Desk of Rabbi Avraham Krupnick*, shared an unforgettable story that **Rabbi Gershon Meltzer** once told him.

Late Friday night, Rabbi Gershon was seated at a *shalom zachor* when **Rabbi Yisrael Zicherman**, a revered *rav* in Kiryat Sefer, related an incident he knew firsthand.

Mr. Gerstone* was a respected and trusted figure. People placed their money in his hands with confidence; he invested it wisely, and for years success followed him.

Until the day it didn't.



One of his major investments collapsed. Cash flow dried up. He could barely put bread on the table. To survive the next six months until other ventures would hopefully mature, he needed 100,000 pounds. He went to a close friend, opened his heart, and asked for the loan.

The friend didn't hesitate. He was ready to help. "There's just one thing," he said gently. "I need a guarantor."

A guarantor?! For Mr. Gerstone, that word was terrifying. If anyone discovered he required backing, the rumor mill would devour him. Investors would flee. His business would crumble overnight.

"So who will guarantee the loan?" the friend asked.

Mr. Gerstone went pale.

Then he answered. "I have a guarantor: Hashem. He will back the loan — in full." It was a shocking declaration. But the friend, moved by the man's sincerity, agreed. The loan was issued. Mr. Gerstone walked away relieved, hopeful that within months the nightmare would pass.

But six months came, and six months went. The hoped-for income never arrived.

Yet, Mr. Gerstone was not the type to hide from a debt. He put on his coat and walked to his friend's house. "It's been six months," he

said. "I came because I want you to know I'm not ignoring what I owe you. But I still don't have the money."

The lender nodded understandingly. When Mr. Gerstone had left, the lender went into his study and closed the door. He turned upward. "*Ribbono Shel Olam*," he whispered, "You were taken as the Guarantor. The time has come, and the borrower cannot pay. So, I am turning to You. But, here is my request. I don't want repayment in cash. I have two daughters of marriageable age. Please — let them become engaged and married. That is worth more to me than the money."

It did not take a month, and the older daughter became a *kallah*. And soon after, the second. The lender overflowed with gratitude. Heaven had answered.

Several months later, there was a knock at the door. Mr. Gerstone stood there holding a thick envelope. "I've come to repay the loan."

The lender shook his head. "There is no loan. The Guarantor already paid."

"But I owe you," Mr. Gerstone insisted.

"I can't take it," replied the lender. "I don't want to give back what the Guarantor gave me — the two *shidduchim*. Please, keep the money."

But Mr. Gerstone refused to leave. Money owed must be repaid.

After much back and forth, they agreed to ask a *rav*. A distinguished *rav* from Eretz Yisrael was visiting, and they presented the question to him. After hearing both sides, he said, "This is beyond me. You must ask my *rebbi*, **Rabbi Shmuel Wosner** (1913–2015)."

Rabbi Wosner ruled that since it was a *shemitah* year (2001), the funds should be given to *Keren Hashevi'is* to support the farmers who faithfully observe *shemitah*.

And with that, both men found peace. The lender kept his gratitude, and the borrower fulfilled his obligation.

When Mr. Gerstone declared, "Hashem is my Guarantor," it sounded almost poetic — maybe even desperate. But in Heaven, it was treated as a contract. Because when a Jew truly places his trust in the Ribbono Shel Olam, the guarantee is not symbolic. It is collectible.

Medically Necessary

One of the *neki'ei ha'daas* of Yerushalayim, **Rabbi Meir Shutland**, shared the following remarkable story on his hotline.

Chaim was a wealthy man. His generosity was well known; he supported many worthy causes with an open hand. Yet, there was one glaring omission: Torah. That he did not support. No *yeshivos*. No *kollelim*. Not even *hachnasas kallah* for those who devoted their lives to learning. (As the *Chofetz Chaim* teaches, to merit supporting Torah one needs special *zechusim* — and this was a privilege Chaim had not yet earned.)



One day, Chaim traveled to Eretz Yisrael and went to daven at the *Kosel*. He carried a heavy burden in his heart. His daughter was getting older, and no *shidduch* was on the horizon. As if that were not enough, she suffered from a rare medical condition. It wasn't life-threatening, but it meant she would need to find a match with the very same issue. A daunting task.

Months turned into years, and yet nothing materialized.

Standing in that sacred place, Chaim felt certain that his heart would open. Surely here, of all places, he would be able to pour himself out in an emotional *tefillah*.

He was wrong. He stood there like a cold, dry towel.

He tried. He concentrated. He pushed himself. Nothing moved.

Until…he noticed a *yungerman* nearby, standing with tears streaming down his face. The man's whispered *tefillos* burned with sincerity. Watching him, something inside Chaim began to thaw. Slowly, his perspective shifted…until he too was sobbing.

After a long while, Chaim finished. Ready to leave, he glanced again at his newfound "friend" — who was still aflame in prayer. So Chaim remained.

When the *yungerman* finally concluded, Chaim approached him. "Thank you," he said quietly. "You warmed me up. And tell me — what were you davening for? Maybe, just maybe, I can help."

The man hesitated, but Chaim's sincerity broke through. He admitted that he was about to make a *chasunah* and lacked even the basics. He had no family, and no friends to turn to.

Only to Hashem.

"Well," Chaim replied, "let me tell you a thing or two. I don't usually give money to support Torah learners. But you are an exception. You turned me on. Out of gratitude, I will cover the entire wedding. How much do you need?"

"200,000 NIS," the *yungerman* answered.

On the spot, Chaim wrote out a check for the amount needed and handed it to him.

The *yungerman* beamed.

When he brought the check to the bank, the teller was stunned to see such a simple fellow depositing such a sum. He gently prodded, clearly curious about the story behind it. So, the young man shared what had just transpired at the *Kosel* — and he mentioned, almost in passing, that the benefactor had a daughter struggling to find a match because of a rare condition.

The teller's jaw dropped. "My nephew," he said slowly, "has that exact disease. We've been searching for someone like this. Let me meet Chaim. Maybe we can get something rolling."

That very night, the teller and Chaim met.

Within three weeks, they were breaking a plate. (Rabbi Meir's hotline can be heard by calling: 518 329 9156)

By supporting Torah learning, Chaim finally earned the zechus he had once lacked — the privilege of walking his daughter to her chuppah and watching her build a home of her own.

Sometimes, the salvation we beg for is waiting on the other side of the check we hesitate to write.

Humour = More You



Laughter has the power to make Torah enter people more easily. Just as a parent trying to give medicine to a baby might use laughter to open the child's mouth and slip the medicine in, so too, humour can open a person's heart and make them more receptive to Torah.

This explains the practice recorded in the gemara that Rabba would begin his shiur with milsa d'bidichusa, a humorous remark, and his students would laugh. Through this, they were receptive to more Torah.

Dazzling Facts About Jews and Jewels - Yehuda Altein



Jews have a strong history of dealing in diamonds and other precious stones. But beyond the world of business, what role do jewels play in Jewish life? Quite a significant one, it turns out. Read on for 13 dazzling facts about jewels in Jewish literature and tradition.

1. The High Priest's Garments

The most celebrated mention of jewels in Jewish literature appears in the magnificent uniform of the High Priest. The Ephod, a special apron worn behind the back, featured two Shoham (onyx) stones on the shoulders, each inscribed with the names of six of the Twelve Tribes.

The ch'oshen, or breastplate, was even more spectacular—it included twelve different gems, each inscribed with the name of a different tribe. While the Torah tells us the names of these stones, scholars still debate their exact identities, with many theories proposed over the centuries.

2. The Tablets and Moshe's Staff

After the first set of Tablets was shattered following the sin of the Golden Calf, G-d instructed Moshe to carve new ones. What were they made of? According to tradition, G-d revealed a quarry of sapphire beneath Moshe's tent. Moshe was told to carve out the new tablets from there and was allowed to keep the leftovers, which provided him with great wealth. Tradition tells us that Moshe's staff was also formed from sapphire.

3. Manna Accompaniment

During the forty years the Jewish people wandered through the desert, they were sustained with heavenly bread called manna.

According to one tradition, precious gems and pearls would fall from heaven along with the manna.

4. Imagery in Scripture

Scripture frequently uses precious gems and jewels as vivid, beautiful imagery. Here are some examples:

● King Solomon describes the Torah as "more precious than pearls." He uses similar imagery for a righteous wife, asking, "Who can find a woman of valour? Her value surpasses that of pearls!"

● Describing the manna, the Torah writes, "The appearance of the manna was like seeds of coriander, and its colour was like that of the Bedola'ch gem" (identified by some as rock crystal).

● Lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah writes: "Its Nazirites were purer than snow and brighter than milk. Their complexion was ruddier than Peninim gemstones; their form was like sapphire. But now, their appearance has darkened …" (Though Peninim is usually understood to mean pearls, here it seems to refer to a red gemstone, perhaps rubies.)

● In Song of Songs, the woman describes her beloved: "His hands are like rolls of gold inset with the blue Tarshish gemstone. His innards are like pieces of ivory adorned with sapphire."

On a deeper level, the hands represent the Tablets, and the Tarshish symbolizes the Ten Commandments. The innards represent the Book of Vayikra, and the sapphire represents its intricate, detailed laws.

5. Finding Jewels as a Reward

The Talmud shares a story about a Jew named Yosef who was famous for honouring Shabbos. His dedication was rewarded when he discovered a precious gem hidden in a fish he'd bought for the holy day. In a unique twist, that very gem had been purchased (and lost) by his non-Jewish neighbour at the cost of all his possessions.

In another story, a Jewish tailor in Rome paid an exorbitant price for the only fish available at the market to eat before Yom Kippur. Inside, he found a precious stone worth a fortune, which sustained him for the rest of his life—a Divine reward for his efforts to honour the Day of Atonement.

6. Baby Boy Jewellery



A pidyon haben is a special ceremony in which a thirty-day-old firstborn son is redeemed from the Kohen (Priest) for five silver coins. There's a lovely custom to bedeck the baby with jewellery and place him on a silver tray in honour of the occasion.

7. The Diamondless Wedding Ring

At a Jewish wedding ceremony, the groom consecrates his bride by giving her a plain gold wedding band. The simplicity is deliberate: Jewish law is concerned that if the ring had a stone, the woman might accept the marriage based on her assumption of the gem's value. This could put the marriage's legal validity in question if the stone turns out to be worth less than expected.

8. Jewellery for Women

The Torah recognizes jewellery's importance to most women, teaching us that "Jewellery is more precious to a woman than all pleasurable things." Before each festival, Jewish law even instructs a husband to buy clothing and jewellery for his wife according to his means.

9. Talisman to Prevent Miscarriage

The Talmud mentions a stone called an '*even tekumah*' that women would wear to help prevent miscarriages, saying that it may be worn outdoors on Shabbat. While scholars aren't certain about the exact identity of this stone, other traditional sources suggest that rubies have this protective property, and some wear them during pregnancy as a prayerful wish for a healthy birth.

10. Holy Jewellery

One of Morocco's most saintly and venerated figures was Rabbi Yehuda ibn Attar (1655–1733). While he devoted most of his day to Torah study and prayer, he was also a skilled goldsmith—a craft he developed to support his family. The jewellery he created was believed to have special spiritual powers. Generations later, the local Arabs treasured his rings and earrings as powerful amulets with a reputation for being genuinely effective.

11. G-d's Crown Jewel

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Rebbe of Chabad, used a parable to explain the need for spreading Chassidic teachings: A prince once fell gravely ill, and the only available cure required using the most precious jewel in the king's crown. Despite the jewel's tremendous value, the king immediately instructed that it be ground into powder for even the slightest chance it might save his son's life.

Similarly, the teachings of Chassidism are G-d's crown jewel. Despite their sublime, elevated nature, G-d is ready to have them revealed and widely shared to help sustain us during this current age of spiritual darkness.

12. Names That Dazzle

You can find jewels sparkling throughout many Jewish given names and surnames! Among female given names, the pearl reigns supreme, appearing in names like Peninah, Margalit, and Pearl. (The first two are Hebrew, and the last is Yiddish—which happens to match the

English word.) Jewel-inspired surnames include Diamond, Rubinstein (ruby), Sapirstein (sapphire), Garfinkel (carbuncle), and Perlstein (pearl).

13. Diamonds of the Future

Describing the Messianic Era, the prophet Isaiah conveys G-d's promise: "I will pave your floors with '*puch stones*', and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will place '*kadchod*' as your windows, and your gates will be of '*ekdach stones*'; your borders will be filled with valuable gems." The Talmud provides more detail, telling us that G-d will carve passageways in huge gemstones 30 cubits tall and place them at the gateways of Jerusalem.

These predictions are about much more than just wealth and extravagance. The Talmud explains that kadchod is actually a combination of two precious stones, one that produces its own light and another that reflects light from the outside. - Chassidic teachings explain that kadchod thus reflects two types of Divine reward in the future era: one that mirrors our good deeds, and one that is G-d's own light, transcending anything we could ever earn through our own efforts.





"If this Kollel isn't producing middos, it's missing the point"

Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum wrote an article in the Yated a few months ago with this powerful story:

Rav Neuhaus, a talmid of Rav Matisyohu Salomon, became the rov of a prominent shul that had a vibrant night kollel. The shul was located on a narrow road near a fire station, a street frequently used by fire trucks.

Unfortunately, some of the kollel members would park along the side of the street but failed to pull up close to the curb, making it

difficult for fire trucks to pass quickly. This became a serious problem. The fire chief eventually sent a letter to the shul asking that cars be parked properly. He concluded with a warning: If the situation didn't improve, he would issue an ordinance banning parking on that street altogether.

Rav Neuhaus posted the letter in the shul, but it had little effect. People continued parking carelessly.

Soon after, the mashgiach visited the city, and Rav Neuhaus brought the matter to his attention.

Without a moment's pause, Rav Matisyohu said, "You must close the kollel!"

"What?" Rav Neuhaus asked in disbelief. "But it's a thriving kollel. So much Torah is being learned there!"

The mashgiach stood firm. "The Gemara says about someone who learns Torah without the intent to fulfill it that it would be better had he never been born. Torah must lead to action. If this kollel isn't producing proper dei'os and middos, then it's missing the point."

Another excerpt from the article:

"What animated Rav Matisyohu most during those talks was the topic of driving habits. It pained him deeply when people who identify as bnei Torah ignored traffic laws, driving recklessly or aggressively. To him, such conduct was both a breach of the proper golus demeanor and a contradiction to the middos tovos that bnei Torah are supposed to embody. In his view, it was no small matter."

I remember when Rav Matisyohu later moved to Lakewood and became the mashgiach in Bais Medrash Govoha, he often spoke about the difficult driving situation on the streets of Lakewood. He would say: "You're rushing to seder so you can learn a full seder, but what is that learning for? Don't forget: its ultimate purpose is for Kavod Shamayim.

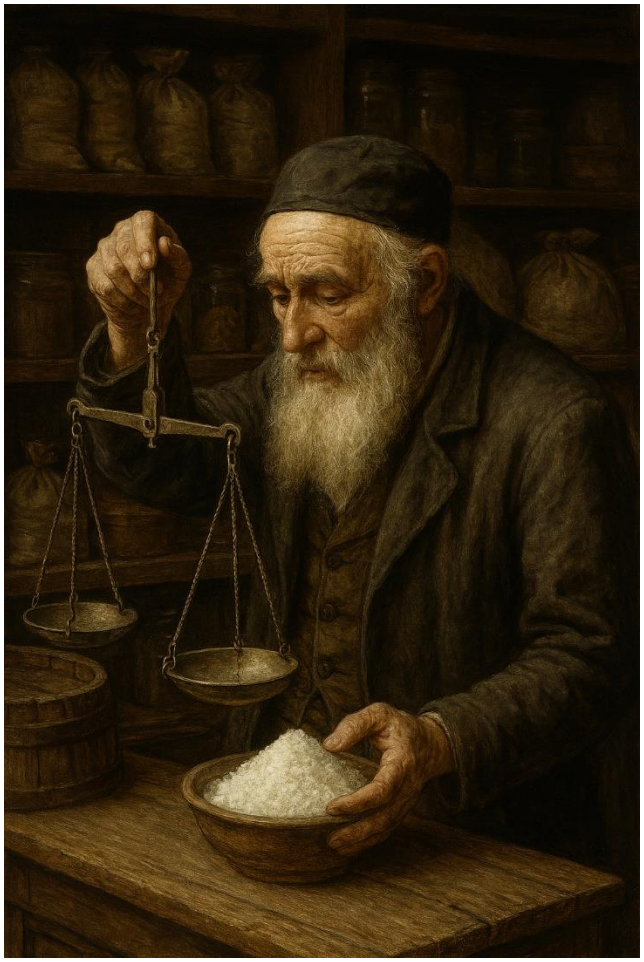
If you're driving aggressively and cutting people off, what do people say? 'Woe to the ben Torah, look at his middos, he has no derech eretz!' You are undermining your purpose. Your Torah can turn into chillul Hashem. That's why derech eretz kadma laTorah. The entire purpose of Torah is Kavod Shamayim. Without derech eretz, Torah can become a chillul Hashem."

Have a wonderful Shabbos,

Rabbi Shraga Freedman

Chizuk - Inspiration

At the edge of the town of Radin stood a small store, regularly filled with customers.



The reason for its popularity was not merely the products it offered, but the reputation of its owners: Rabbi Yisrael Meir of Radin, renowned as the "Chafetz Chaim," and his wife. Both Jews and Gentiles preferred shopping there, confident they would be treated with honesty and fairness. The Chofetz Chaim's reputation for integrity was so widespread that no one doubted the fairness of their transactions. Additionally, many considered it an honor to support such a distinguished Torah scholar through their purchases.

The store sold many items by weight, using a traditional balance scale with two arms—one for the merchandise, the other for

standardized weights. Every morning, the Chofetz Chaim would carefully check each weight to ensure its accuracy. If he found a weight that had worn down and was no longer correct, he would immediately discard it and replace it with a new one. He was concerned that using a deficient weight, even unintentionally, would mean taking money unjustly from a customer, as the customer would receive less product than paid for.

One day, the Chofetz Chaim entered the store at midday. The shop was, as usual, busy with customers, and his wife was serving them. As he looked around, he noticed a small quantity of salt remaining in the balance of the scale. It was clear to him that a customer had purchased salt, but some had accidentally been left behind on the scale during the transaction. Deeply troubled, the Chofetz Chaim declared, "What have we done? Our customer paid for a full kilo of salt but did not receive all the salt that he was entitled to! We have stolen from one of our customers!" He carefully measured the leftover salt and, although it was only worth a few pennies, was determined to return it. The challenge now was to identify the customer.

The Chofetz Chaim and his wife proceeded to investigate the situation and after considerable effort, including consulting with other patrons present at the time, the Chofetz Chaim's wife recalled that a Gentile woman from a nearby village had recently bought salt. Further inquiry revealed that she was from Kujnitza, approximately forty kilometers from Radin, and had visited Radin to participate in the weekly regional market.

Without delay, the Chofetz Chaim hired two messengers and sent them to the market, hoping to find the woman. They asked merchants and villagers alike but found no one who could identify her.

With no other options, the Chafetz Chaim himself loaded a sack of salt onto a wagon and traveled to Kujnitza. After hours of travel, he

arrived and began inquiring among the villagers about the woman who had bought salt from his store the previous day. Unable to identify her, he measured out small packages of salt, each equal to the amount that the woman left behind on the scale, and distributed the packages free of charge to every family in the village. By the end of the day, the sack of salt was empty, and the Chofetz Chaim was satisfied that the customer who had been shortchanged the day before had been repaid, even if he could not be certain exactly who it was.



מה-עשיתי לך, כי הכיתני, זה שלש רגלים (כב/כה) - [She was **רמז** to him: you seek to uproot a nation that celebrates the **שלש רגלים**]

Why did **ה'** choose to bring a **רמז** to the **מצוה** of **רגל עולה** out of all the **מצות** which the **אידן** keep?

The **גאון ווילנא** answers this with a **קשיא**. The **מדרש** writes that **ה'** said to **בלעם**: "If you destroy **כלל ישראל** who keep the **תורה** and **מצות**? I went to all the nations before **תורה מתן** and no other nation accepted the **תורה**." **בלעם** replied, "Don't worry, I will keep the **תורה**."

That may have been possible with all the **מצות** of the **תורה**, but could he keep the **מצוה** of **עולה רגל**?

The **הלכה** is that someone who is blind or limps is **פטור** from **עולה רגל**. The **גמ' סנהדרין קה** writes that **בלעם** was blind in one eye and he limped. That is why **ה'** told **בלעם**: 'You want to destroy a nation which keeps the **מצוה** of **עולה רגל**? How and by whom will that **מצוה** be fulfilled if you destroy them?" (**מקה טוב**)

חָטָאתִי--כִּי לֹא יָדָעְתִּי (כב/לד) [I have sinned for I did not know]



The של״ה הקדוש learns out from here that "I did not know" is not an acceptable excuse. A person should learn and find out.

After seeing the donkey acting strangely, בלעם should have stopped to think: Why are these things happening?

Since he did not use his brain to think and find out he was at fault. (יגדיל תורה)

But You Told Me!

כִּי מֵאֵן ה׳ לְתִתִּי לַהֲלֹךְ עִמָּכֶם (כב/יג) [for Hashem refuses to allow me to go with you]

אֶלָּא עִם שָׂרִים גְּדוֹלִים מִכֶּם. (רש״י)— [only with officers greater than you]

רבי חיים שמואלביץ זצ״ל points out that בלעם was a נביא. He was on a מדריגה to communicate with ה׳ש. Chazal tell us that בלעם was on the same level as משה רבינו with regard to נבואה. How can it be that when Hashem told בלעם not to go with בלק's messengers to curse the אידן, he understood that Hashem said it was not fitting for בלעם to travel with these low-ranking officers?!

Hashem simply told him not to go. Why did בלעם not think that perhaps ה׳ש simply didn't want him to go at all?

Answers רבי חיים: A person hears what he wants to hear and sees what he wants to see. Since בלעם was constantly thinking about his own כבוד, he saw in Hashem's words concern for his own כבוד!

The **גמ' גיטין מ"ה** brings down that **עילוש** was once imprisoned and his cellmate was a **גוי** who understood the language of birds. One day a raven perched on the windowsill of the cell and chirped its song. **עילוש** turned to the **גוי** and asked him, "What did the raven just say?" The **גוי** replied "The raven just said, '**עילוש** flee! **עילוש** flee!'"

עילוש chose not to listen to the raven since the ravens are known to be liars. Later, a dove chirped its song outside the cell. Once again **עילוש** turned to the **גוי** and asked, "What did the dove say?" He replied, "The dove said, '**עילוש** flee! **עילוש** flee!'"

עילוש felt that since **כנסת ישראל** is compared to a dove, it seemed that he should try to escape and would be successful. He escaped and he was successful.

גליון הש"ס רבי עקיבא איגר in brings down a **קשיא**: The **ערוך** writes that **עילוש** understood the language of birds. From this **גמ'** it seems that he did not understand the birds as we see that he asked his cellmate to translate for him what the birds had said.

Furthermore, asks the **מהרש"א**, if **עילוש** didn't trust the **עורב** why did he trust his cellmate?

רבי חיים answers both **קשיות** with this **יסוד**: Of course **עילוש** understood the language of birds! However, he was afraid that it was only he who had heard the bird saying, "**עילוש** flee! **עילוש** flee!" Because that was what he wanted to hear. He asked his cellmate in order to check that they had both heard the same thing. (**שיחות מוסר לא-כז**)

"The moment we stop seeing the faults of others and start seeing the struggles of others, the love will flow naturally." ~ Inspired by the teachings of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov (1745-1815)

הן-עם לבדד ישכן, ובגוים לא יתחשב (כג/ט) - [Behold! It is a nation that will dwell alone and not be reckoned by other nations.]

It was **ערב שבת** and the **בעל שם טוב** was on his way back from **מקוה**. As he was walking down a narrow alleyway he noticed two **גוים** coming towards him. He began to feel nervous. Perhaps one of the **גוים** might brush against him as they walk past. As he had just been to **מקוה** he did not want to come into contact with a **גוי**. As they drew closer, the **בעש"ט** heard one **גוי** saying to the other, 'Look! There goes a lowly, dirty Jew. We had better make sure not to touch such filth.' And they proceeded to push themselves against the wall so as not to touch the Jew!

When the **בעל שם טוב** heard these words he rejoiced and said, "Now I understand in **פשט** the **פסוק**: **הן-עם לבדד ישכן**- they live as a nation on their own without assimilating amongst the **גוים**. How do the **אידן** achieve this? Because **ובגוים לא יתחשב**- we are not **חשוב** in the eyes of the **גוים**. On the contrary, they look at us as dirty and unfit for companionship. Therefore, they keep their distance from us. That is our best safeguard not to **ח"ו** assimilate amongst them."

וְיֹדֵעַ דַּעַת עֶלְיוֹן (כד/טז) - [and knows the mind of the Supreme One]

The **גמרא** in **עבודה זרה (ד:)** writes that the power of **בלעם** was that he knew precisely at which moment Hashem gets angry, and at that precise moment **בלעם** would then **ח"ו** curse the yidden.

תוספות asks, 'what could **בלעם** already say in that one moment?' And **תוספות** answers that he could say one word "**כלם**" – destroy them. However, Hashem turned the word around to **מלך** as the **פסוק** writes: **ותרועת מלך בו (כג/כא)**.

Rebbe Chaim Kaufman זצ"ל says over from **ספרים** another meaning in the intention of **בלעם** with the word "**כלם**".

There are three 'advisors' in a person's body; we have the **מוח** – the brain which is the logic of a person and then we have the **לב** (heart)

and the **כליות** (kidneys) which are the desires and emotions of a person [as the **פסוק (ירמיה יז/ז)** writes **אני ה' חקר לב, בחן כליות**]. By the **גוים**, it is their desires and lusts that control their bodies; even if their brain tells them that their actions are wrong, they will still do it. However, with a **איד**, it is the **מוח** that is in the driving seat. The **איד** has self-control and if he knows something is wrong, even if he desires it, he will not do it.

It was this terrible trait of the **גוים** that **בלעם** tried to implant in the yidden. The **ר"ת** of **כלם** = **כליות, לב, מוח** -their desires and lusts should come before their logic and control their actions. The **מוח** should be last and least powerful. But Hashem changed the word **כלם** to the **מלך** - which is the **ר"ת** of **מוח לב כליות** -the logic should be at the forefront and in control. [It could be that we can add; someone who has self-control is a true **מלך** and not an **עבד** to his **תאוות**]

I find this the most remarkable story of someone whose **מוח** had full control over him even at a time when many people would be unable to think straight.

During the Second World War, a group of bochurim were hiding from a mob of murderous German soldiers who were conducting a house-to-house search for yidden. The young boys heard the noise of the Nazis **ימ"ש** approaching. They all realized that there was no escape and they crowded into the small bathroom and locked the door, as a last weak attempt at staying alive.

Only one young bochur called **[Rebbe] Dovid Povarsky** declined joining them and instead he pressed himself under a bed. Only much later, when the future Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevezh had made his way to safety, did he explain his decision.

"I saw that my moments were numbered; that I was not likely to leave that house alive. I was ready for them and had only one desire: to recite the **ברכה** of **על קידוש הש'** with proper intent and concentration as befitting this sacred **מצוה**.

When I saw the bochurim's plan, I thought to myself, "How can I join them? One is not allowed to recite a **ברכה** in a bathroom". I was ready to give up my life, but I was not ready to forfeit the **ברכה**.

Next time you have an urge to do something which you know is wrong...remember a true **מלך** is someone whose **מוח** can control his urge and he holds himself back.



A Letter from Heaven



Recently, the daughter of a renowned *talmid chacham*, **Rav Sholom S.**, from Kiryas Yoel, got engaged to Shneur Zalman A..

When the *shidduch* had first been suggested, Rav Sholom's daughter was not yet eighteen years old. The *chosson* was older, highly respected, and widely admired. Everyone who knew him spoke glowingly of his character and refinement.

Rav Sholom sat down with his daughter and spoke to her openly. "Listen," he said gently, "they are suggesting an exceptional young man from a wonderful family. But you are much younger. What do you think?"

His daughter hesitated. "What can I say?" she answered softly. "Were Mommy alive, I would ask her what to do. But now I must make this decision alone, and it's very hard."

Rav Sholom looked at his daughter. "It may seem that your mother can no longer help you. But you still can speak to Hashem. Go up to Mommy's *kever*. Stand there, pour out your heart to the *Ribbono shel Olam*. Cry, daven, and ask Hashem to guide you to the right decision."

The young woman traveled to the cemetery, hoping to find clarity. About an hour later, she returned home with a smile radiating from her face. "Tatty," she said, "this is my *shidduch*."

Rav Sholom was startled.

His daughter explained: "I arrived at Mommy's *kever* completely broken. The pain of being motherless overwhelmed me. As I stood there crying, I noticed a small rolled-up paper resting near Mommy's *matzeivah*. I picked it up and opened it. Inside were the words: *'B'ezras Hashem: Zivvug hogun l'Shneur Zalman ben Shaindel.'*"

She had no idea who this boy was, only that the boy they had been discussing that very day was named Shneur Zalman.

The story only became more astonishing afterward. Rav Sholom knew that the mother's name was Shaindel.

Her smile only widened even more.

Shortly after, the story emerged: The *chosson*'s mother, had visited her mother's grave in Kiryas Yoel to daven for her son's *shidduchim*. Before leaving, she placed a small note on the *kever* with the aforementioned heartfelt *tefillah*.

Her mother was buried directly beside Mrs. S.. At some point, a gust of wind had swept through the cemetery and carried the folded note from one grave onto the neighboring one — the grave of Rav Sholom's late wife. And there it remained, waiting to be discovered by an orphaned daughter searching for guidance.

To her, it was nothing less than a letter from Heaven.

There is tremendous comfort and strength to be gained from this story for every Jew — especially for those who feel alone. The *Ribbono shel Olam* watches over His children constantly. No tear goes unnoticed. No lonely heart is forgotten.

Sometimes, Heaven sends answers in ways no human being could ever orchestrate.



102 Stories That Changed People's Lives – Rabbi Tzvi Nakar - To Change the Decree

Rav Moshe Boyer tells a personal story that shows the power of tefillah and emunah:

His grandfather once had fever for six weeks. He was given antibiotics, the fever went up and down, and the doctors saw that he had an infection in his leg. Because he wasn't responding to the antibiotics, they decided that they had to amputate his leg.

His wife told the doctors, "I married a husband with two healthy legs, and my husband will leave this hospital on two healthy legs." She did not agree to sign on the amputation.

The doctors requested that she call their children to the hospital. Reb Moshe's father got there, and he also refused to allow them to amputate. The doctors, of course, were very angry at the family; they said that if they refused to sign, the hospital would take no responsibility for the patient.

Reb Moshe's father said to the doctors, "Give me sixty minutes."

"What will you do during that time?" the doctor asked.

"I want to ask our rabbi for advice," he replied.

The doctor agreed. Reb Moshe's father went to the home of **Rav Chaim Kanievsky, zt"l**. It was six o'clock in the morning on Erev Yom Kippur. Reb Moshe's father and uncles knocked and Rav Chaim

opened the door. They told him that the doctors said they need to amputate their father's leg, and they asked his advice.

Rav Chaim opened up a sefer and read them the halachah: "If the doctors say they need to amputate someone's leg and he refuses, one must tie him down and amputate the leg."

It was very hard for them to accept the decision, and they left his house feeling very dejected.

Rav Chaim saw that they took it very hard and called them back upstairs. He quoted to them, from the words of Selichos, Ulai yachus am ani v'evyon, ulai yerachem - "Perhaps [Hashem] will pity a poor and destitute nation, perhaps He will have mercy."

The Boyer brothers didn't know what to do. They went to a different rav in Bnei Brak and told him what Rav Chaim Kanievsky had said. He told them, Yishlach d'varo vayirpa'eim v'yimaleit mishchisosam - "Hashem will send His Word and heal them, and they will be saved from their (the doctors') destructive behavior" (Tehillim 107:20)."

They got to the hospital. Reb Moshe's father said to his younger brother, "You go upstairs to the ward; I'm coming in another five minutes."

He went up to the ward, and meanwhile, Reb Moshe's father went to the hospital's shul. He opened the aron kodesh, put his head inside among the sifrei Torah, and started to cry and beg Hashem to heal his father. He screamed and cried that Hashem should cancel the terrible gezeirah, until he ran out of strength.

After that broken-hearted tefillah, he left the shul and said, "After that kind of tefillah, they will not amputate my father's leg."

When he got to the ward, the doctor who was supposed to amputate the leg approached him. He told him that after a whole hour had gone by and they hadn't yet returned, the doctors had decided by themselves to amputate the leg; they were afraid that the infection

would spread throughout their father's entire body and endanger his life.

When they went to amputate, they saw that the leg suddenly looked healthy and that the sick man had pneumonia, which was probably why the antibiotic hadn't worked. Now, the leg was healthy, and the danger to the patient's life had passed.

"We have to eat the seudas hamafsekes," Reb Moshe's father said. "Yom Kippur is very soon. Is the situation still very serious? Can we go home now or should we stay here?"

The doctors replied, "No, it's enough if your mother or sister stays here."

The two of them left the hospital and decided that before going home, they would stop at Rav Chaim Kanievsky's house to tell him about the great miracle. They wanted to make him happy after they saw how sorry he was that morning.

When they came, Rav Chaim was in the middle of the seudas hamafsekes. They told him the whole story.

"You believed that there was more to do, and it was this belief that 'tore up the decree," Rav Chaim told them. "Because of that, your father's leg was not amputated."

Indeed, Yeshuas Hashem k'heref ayin - "Hashem's salvation is like the blink of an eye." In the hardest moments, during the most painful challenges, we need to recognize the power of tefillah. Tefillah is a very powerful weapon. When a Yid davens, he needs to believe that the tefillah has the great power to change difficult gezeiros, R"l, and then, the tefillah works its wonders and tears up the decree.

We need to contemplate this, internalize it, and strengthen ourselves, exactly during the most difficult moments: Ein od milvado - "There is no one but Hashem," and He can do everything!



Kiddush Hashem Behind Closed Doors

Chacham Ovadia Yosef zt"l shared the following:

The author of Reishis Chochmah, a holy and saintly man, writes of an incident that occurred:

"I knew a certain man who was not among the greatest Torah scholars, just an ordinary person, a G-d fearing Jew. He passed away, and within three months I saw him in a dream.

I asked him, 'What happened with your judgment in the Next World?'

He answered, 'My rebbe, know that in Heaven they paid no attention at all to my mitzvos or my aveiros. As soon as I arrived, they opened my record and examined how I behaved toward my household and how I treated the members of my family.

I honored my wife, honored my children, and did not raise my voice at them. I spoke to them only with respect.'

He conducted himself with genuine humility.

He continued, 'Because of this, they were not exacting with me in Heaven. I do have sins, but they did not even look at the record of my aveiros. They said: "Midah k'neged midah, measure for measure. Just as he behaved humbly with the members of his household, even when they upset him, and just as he overlooked offenses and forgave wrongdoing, so too we will overlook for him." - And they sent him directly into Gan Eden.

With everyone, he related with love, understanding, and respect, never harshly or oppressively. He always interacted pleasantly and affectionately. He disciplined when necessary, but he did not act like an angry ruler. There was no quarreling or strife.

"May my soul be like dust to all," is referring to being humble even before his own children.'"

This story is a powerful reminder that our greatest Kiddush Hashem often takes place behind closed doors. The truest measure of our midos is not how we act in public, but how we speak and behave within our own homes. The most authentic version of a person is revealed in the way he treats his spouse, his children, and the people closest to him.

True humility is expressed specifically in the home, where a person feels a sense of authority and control. It is there that patience, restraint, respect, and compassion become the clearest reflection of one's neshama.





We Never Give Up on a Soul

Hashem created the world in six days. The universe and all of its grandeur and beauty has been completed. We're ready to welcome **שבת**, but Hashem says wait, wait, wait. What? The world is incomplete.

I have to create one last thing. The donkey's mouth. Wait till Saturday night? No. The world is not complete without the donkey's mouth.

Why? Because in 2,488 years there's going to be a Gentile by the name of **בלעם**, a moral failure and I want to inspire him to mend his ways and do **תשובה**, so I want to create something which may be able to have a positive and transformative impact on him.

We often write off people and say this guy, nah, forget it. He's a pathological liar, he's an addict beyond repair. But this is what the **תורה** is teaching us.

Don't spare any efforts to kindle a heart, to ignite a spark, to try to bring a human soul back to his or her true divine self.

בלעם, who was not Jewish, who did not like the Jews, who had deep, deep moral failure. How much more so, infinitely more so a **יידישע נשמה** that contains infinite divine power and potency.

You and I could learn from Hashem.

To be ready to change the world and get out of my own comfort zone. Even let my own donkey, the donkey inside of me, speak to save a soul from the abyss. To help a soul return to its father and mother in heaven.

Miracle!



An IDF soldier serving in the Military Rabbinate installed an eruv at a northern outpost six weeks ago. When a Hezbollah explosive drone approached, it became entangled in the eruv and detonated harmlessly above the soldiers, preventing what could have been a deadly attack. Many are calling it a remarkable reminder of Hashem's protection.

"Balak feared the tents of Israel because they represented moral independence. A nation that sanctifies its private life cannot be conquered by armies." ~ Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch.

The Mistake That Changed Fashion By Rabbi Duvi Bensoussan

Rabbi Duvi Bensoussan shared an incredible story about emunah, perseverance, and how Hashem can turn what appears to be a disaster into an unimaginable blessing. The story was told to him by the son-in-law of a man named Barry Moskowitz. A businessman who lived in Eretz Yisrael and whose journey began many years earlier in the United States.

As a teenager learning in Yeshivah Chaim Berlin, Barry already displayed an extraordinary talent for business. While most boys his age were focused solely on their studies, Barry was finding creative ways to earn money. He arranged to place candy machines in the yeshivah. He worked out agreements with the administration so that the yeshivah would receive a percentage of the profits, while he would keep the rest.

The idea was a success. Soon one yeshivah became two. Two became three. And before long, Barry had built a small but respectable business.

He took every dollar he earned and made a commitment to Hashem. He would always give twenty percent of his profits to tzedakah. "Aser bishvil shetisasher." Give maaser and Hashem will bless you with success.

It was a modest beginning, but Barry dreamed big. As he looked around for opportunities, one industry caught his attention. The clothing business. This was the 1970s. A new product was beginning to gain popularity. Jeans. The rugged denim material was durable, comfortable, and becoming fashionable across America.

Barry decided to take a chance. He invested virtually everything he had. Every dollar he had saved. Every profit he had earned. Everything. He purchased a massive quantity of raw denim material from Mexico. The material was shipped to a warehouse in New

Jersey, where a complicated production process would transform it into finished jeans.

The denim first had to be softened. Large vats filled with chemicals were used to break down the rough fabric until it became workable. Once softened, it could be cut, sewn, and turned into clothing. The process required constant supervision. Workers monitored the material around the clock.

Everything was ready. The denim was soaking. Production was about to begin. Then disaster struck. At two o'clock in the morning, Barry's phone rang. One of his foremen was screaming. "Mr. Barry! Mr. Barry! Come quickly!"

Barry immediately feared the worst. Maybe there had been a fire. Maybe the warehouse had been destroyed. Still in his pyjamas, he jumped into his car and raced to New Jersey. When he arrived, he could hardly believe what he saw. The chemicals used in the manufacturing process were stored on a floor above the vat. Sometime during the night, that upper level had collapsed. All of the chemical containers had crashed directly into the vat where Barry's denim was soaking. The impact released an enormous amount of chemicals into the water. Far more than the formula called for. The workers were devastated. They apologized repeatedly. But there was nothing they could have done.

Barry looked into the vat. His life savings were gone. The denim's color had been completely destroyed. Parts of it were light blue. Parts were white. Parts were gray. The entire shipment looked ruined. He screamed for the workers to pull the material out immediately. But they couldn't. The mixture had become so hot that the denim couldn't be removed safely for many hours. All Barry could do was stand there and watch. Everything he had worked for. Everything he had invested. Everything he owned. Gone.

The odds of such an accident were almost impossible to comprehend. An entire floor collapsing. The chemicals falling into that specific

vat. At that specific moment. Destroying the exact shipment that represented his entire future.

That night Barry went home devastated. For a brief moment, he felt completely broken. His dream was over before it had even begun. But then he turned to Hashem."Ribbono Shel Olam," he said, "You brought me this far. I'm relying on You. Only You can save me now."



The next morning he returned to the warehouse. The workers had finally removed the material. It looked terrible. The colors were completely washed out. But there was one surprising detail. The fabric itself felt incredible. Because of the excessive chemicals, it had become unusually soft. Much softer than ordinary denim.

Barry stared at the strange-looking material. Then he smiled. He looked upward and said: "Start production."

The workers thought he had lost his mind. "Mr. Barry, look at it!" "It's ruined!" "No one will buy this!" But Barry insisted. "Start production."

And so they did. The workers cut it. Sewed it. And produced jeans from the bizarre, washed-out fabric. Then Barry did something even crazier. He began calling clothing stores. He told buyers that he had an exclusive new product. The hottest thing on the market. A revolutionary style no one else had.

The buyers asked for samples. Barry refused. He was convinced that if they saw the material, they would reject it immediately. So he asked them to place blind orders.

Most thought he was crazy. Macy's laughed at him. Bloomingdale's laughed at him. Lord & Taylor laughed at him. One rejection after another.

Finally, a store owner on the Lower East Side agreed to take a chance. "Barry," he said, "you're meshugah." "But I like you." He placed an order. The jeans arrived. The owner hung them prominently outside the store. And something unbelievable happened. People loved them. The faded look. The washed-out appearance. The unique coloring. Customers thought it was exciting. Modern. Different. They bought everything. Within days, the store sold out.

The owner called Barry back. "Barry!" "You were right!" "Send more!" The orders doubled. Then tripled. Word spread rapidly. People everywhere wanted these jeans. Soon the major department stores that had laughed at Barry were calling back. Macy's wanted in. Bloomingdale's wanted in. Everyone wanted in. Large orders poured in.

Within a short time, Barry's "ruined" denim had become a sensation. The style spread throughout America. And eventually throughout the world. What began as a catastrophic accident became one of the most successful trends in fashion history. The washed-out jean look that people would wear for decades was born from a disaster.

Looking back, Rabbi Bensoussan said the lesson is unforgettable. Hashem wanted Barry to understand something. Success is never solely about talent. It's never solely about strategy. It's never solely about business plans. We are obligated to make our efforts. We must do our hishtadlus. But the results belong entirely to Hashem. Sometimes Hashem sends blessing through the very thing that appears to be a mistake. Sometimes the setback is actually the setup. Sometimes the disaster is the doorway. And sometimes the blessing finds us through the very event we were certain had destroyed everything.

As the Torah promises: "U'vracha yisigucha." The blessings will pursue you. If Hashem wants a blessing to reach you, it will find you.Even through your mistakes. Even through your failures. Even through a collapsed floor and a vat full of ruined denim. Because ultimately, Hashem is the One who creates success. And no mistake is bigger than His plan.

מעשה אבות .... סימן לבנים

Yoav, a young IDF soldier was stationed in the ancient city of Chevron. One late night out on military patrol, he was caught by surprise, shot by an Arab sniper and left for dead. As it was four o'clock in the morning, and no imminent attack was expected, no one was awake to hear the shot and rush to his aid. It appeared as though Yoav was doomed to bleed to death before anybody would ever find him.

One other soldier however, did happen to hear something. Though not totally sure, he suspected it might be a rifle shot so he went to investigate. He spotted Yoav, who was lying on the ground, bleeding to death. He immediately began to stabilize Yoav's wound and arrange for emergency transport to a medical facility. It took time for help to get to the scene, so he needed to apply manual pressure and any other trick he could think of to keep Yoav alive in the interim – he was literally holding Yoav's life in his hands.

Eventually, Yoav arrived at a proper medical facility where he was treated by surgeons. Yoav's parents were notified and rushed to the hospital. The doctors told them that had it not been for the immediate and appropriate actions of the other soldier, their son Yoav would definitely not have survived. It was indeed a miracle that the other soldier heard what no one else heard, and managed to locate Yoav as quickly as he did. They went to thank him, but he had already left the hospital.

After Yoav recuperated, they called the army to find out the name of the other soldier so they could thank him personally. Unfortunately, the other soldier's name had not been recorded in the incident report, so they had no way of contacting him.

Yoav's parents owned a *makolet* - grocery store, in Kiryat Malachi, and they put up a poster in their store, describing the miracle that occurred and asking if anyone knew the identity of Yoav's savior. They figured that Israel is a small country and someone might know someone who knows something.

Months passed with no response. Finally after a year, a woman entered the store and saw the sign. She was positive that her son Doron had mentioned such an account. She took out her cellphone and called Doron on the spot. Sure enough, he remembered the incident quite well - it was he who had saved Yoav's life. Soon all the families gathered together for a joyful, tearful reunion.

Doron's mother pulled Yoav's mother aside and told her, "There is a specific reason why I came to your store today. You don't remember me, but twenty years ago, I was standing in your *makolet* feeling lost and forlorn. You and your wonderful husband noticed how sad I looked and asked me what was the matter. I explained that I was expecting my first child and was feeling overwhelmed. There were so many unbearable difficulties, financially, socially and emotionally. I was losing my mind!

"You both stopped everything, and calmly and lovingly sat with me. You listened to me. Then you offered so much encouragement and support. Because of you, everything began to look different and I felt more secure with having my baby. I no longer live around here, but I happened to be passing through and I figured it would be nice to visit your store to thank you once again for all that you did for me." She paused, welling up with emotion, "My baby, my beloved Doron, was born and grew up to save your son Yoav's life!"

הואהית אמר

R' Yehudah Leib Chasman ZT"L would say:

"A person who thinks poorly of himself because he is unaware of his strengths, is not humble. No, he is indeed a fool."

R' Chaim Soloveitchik ZT"L (Brisker) would say:

"The gemara of a Talmid Chacham who will not close it in order to do a chessed for someone else, is essentially closed even when it is open. The gemara that he closes to perform an act of kindness for others, is actually open even when it is closed!"

R' Hirsch Michel Shapiro ZT"L would say:

"Indeed, my jacket is old and threadbare, but I am grateful to my jacket. It instills in me humility far more so than all the mussar sefarim that have been written on the subject!"

R' Moshe of Kobrin ZT"L would say:

"When a tzaddik eats bread, he tastes the unique goodness that Hashem puts in it. If the greatest ba'al taveh could only know how much pleasure the righteous tzaddikim are enjoying in this world, they would trade everything away and become the biggest tzaddikim!"

R' Yisroel Meir Kagan ZT"L (Chofetz Chaim) would say: "Lack of happiness is dangerous to one's health. The Torah prohibits us from endangering our health. We must be more stringent in these matters than other prohibitions."

Parshah Pearls *(Adapted from Rabeinu Bachye)*

Asses Can't See Angels

וַתֵּרֶא הָאָתוֹן אֶת־מַלְאַךְ ה' נִצָּב בַּדָּרֶךְ וְחַרְבּוֹ שְׁלוּפָה בְּיָדוֹ - "And the ass saw the Angel of Hashem standing on the road … ." (22:23).

Even people cannot generally see angels, and certainly not asses, points out R. Bachye. Nor, for obvious reasons, can the Pasuk refer to the animal 'seeing' the angels with the eyes of wisdom.

Consequently, what the Pasuk must mean is that it sensed, rather than saw, the presence of the angel, and moved from the road to avoid making contact with it.

One Ass Confronts Another

וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם לָאָתוֹן כִּי הִתְעַלַּלְתְּ בִּי -"because you mocked me" (22:29).

Bil'am should have been startled out of his wits when the ass began to speak. He should have realized that this incredible miracle was a sign from Heaven to upset his plans to curse Yisrael. So wicked was he however, and so stubborn, that he simply glossed over the unique phenomenon, and answered the creature as if he was talking to a friend.

The delegation and the servants who were accompanying him, must have been overawed by what they saw, says R. Bachye - assuming that is, that they had not gone on ahead and were not witness to the entire event (bearing in mind that the Torah says nothing about their reaction).

The Zohar however, specifically writes that they saw and heard everything - and came to the conclusion that Bil'am was nothing but a fool (as much an ass as the 'friend' he was talking to).

Can We Still Be One?

These days, when tensions between the secular and Haredi communities have reached extreme levels — we need to talk about what happened under a chuppah last Thursday.

"My best friend Maor married the love of his life. Among those called up to recite the Seven Blessings was Rabbi Angerled — long beard, Hasidic hat, traditional sidelocks — who rose, said the first and second blessings, and quietly stepped down.

To most of the guests, it looked like a routine wedding moment.

It was anything but.

A few years ago, Rabbi Angerled lost TWO of his children in the Meron disaster. Moshe and Yehoshua, of blessed memory — both gone before they ever reached bar mitzvah age.

When it happened, Maor and I felt the grief as our own. We didn't know much about the Haredi world. - We went anyway. Drove to the Hasidic neighborhood, showed up at the shiva in jeans and t-shirts, surrounded by dozens of Hasidim — standing out completely, unsure of ourselves, not knowing what to say.

Within seconds — like a whirlwind — we were seated directly in front of the grieving rabbi himself. He looked at us and said:

"I'm so happy you came. You're giving me strength. Know that just as you came to console me, I will want to be at your celebrations. Don't forget to invite me."

And then, almost to himself, he whispered: **מִי כְעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל** - "Who is like Your people, Israel..."

We left that shiva with a promise to ourselves — he would be at our weddings. An honored guest. No question.



And then Thursday came. Maor standing under the chuppah. And there — right beside him — Rabbi and Rebbetzin Angerled. Blessing him. Rejoicing with him. Dancing around him.

I had the honor of telling this whole story out loud, right there under the chuppah. And afterwards, person after person — secular, religious, strangers — walked up to the rabbi. Hugged him. Thanked him for coming."

THIS is Israeli society. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

And as the rabbi himself said best: **מִי כְעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל** - "Who is like Your people, Israel."

The Tiferes Shlomo explains that the Zohar Hakodesh brings down that Balak and Bilaam together was like a hydrogen bomb. The danger to the Jewish nation was immense. The Zohar writes that this was an unprecedented threat.

Rav Moshe Shapiro, ZT"L, brings (also based on the Zohar) that the last two letters of Bilaam and the last two letters of Balak form the name עמלק -'Amalek' (Bilaam/ עם-בל and Balak/ לק -ב). Their union was deadly, but Hashem stopped them from impacting us.

Burst of Inspiration – Rabbi Jeremy Golker

There's always a lot of discussion: what is the connection between the **הפטרה** and the **פרשה**? And there are many in this week's **פרשה**. Of course, we make reference to **בלעם** and to **בלק** in **פרשת בלק** in the **הפטרה**, the beautiful **הפטרה** of **מיכה**. But let me share with you another idea that perhaps connects the **הפטרה** and the **פרשה**.

The **משנה** in **פרקי אבות** categorizes this enigmatic character of **בלעם** as being **עין רעה, רוח גבוהה ונפש רחבה**. An arrogant person, a critical person who is negative. Then, his **תלמידים** of **בלעם הרשע**. That is the characterization of **בלעם** a negative, critical, arrogant person. The **גמרא** says in **בבא מציעא**: If you want protection from **עין הרע, אין הברכה מצויה אלא בדבר הסמוי מן העין**. Bracha will only be found in something which is hidden from the eye.

The **מכתב מאליהו** of **רב דסלר** writes the following amazing thing. The **גמרא** says in **עירובין: מי שנתעשר**, someone who became wealthy and he's scared, "How many am I not going to attract jealousy? People are going to give me an **עין הרע**."- **צריך לעשות מצוות בממונו** - He should do **מצוות** with his money, **לבל תשלוט בו עין הרע**.

And then **רב דסלר** continues: **הרי בדוק ומנוסה שמי שאינו חי בעד עצמו**, someone who doesn't live for himself, **והוא נותן ולא נוטל**, he's a giver not a taker **בכל ענייניו**, in all aspects of his life.

איש כזה אינו מעורר קנאה כלל. Someone who is that, who is not selfish, he's a selfless person, he's giving, then **בדוק ומנוסה** he will not attract jealousy and there'll be no problem with **עין הרע**. Perhaps that is the connection with the **הפטרה**.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful **פסוקים** in the whole of **נביאים** my father's, one of my father's favorite pesukim - **הִגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם מַה טּוֹב וּמָה ה' דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמְּךָ, כִּי אִם עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהַצְנֵעַ לֶכֶת עִם אֱלֹקֶיךָ**. (Micha 6:8) - Let me tell you, says the **נביא מיכה**, what **הקדוש ברוך הוא** wants: **כי אם עשות משפט**, you do justice, **ואהבת חסד**, and love kindness, **והצנע לכת עם אֱלֹקֶיךָ**, and act modestly. If a person behaves

in that refined, modest way, doesn't attract attention, doesn't attract jealousy to others, then that is protection from **עין הרע** and perhaps that is the antidote to the **עין רעה, רוח גבוהה ונפש רחבה** that is displayed by **בלעם** in this week's **סדרה** and perhaps that is the connection with the **הפטרה**.



❖ High Levels But How Can It Stay With Me

לא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה – 'no one has ever reached the level of Moshe Rabbeinu.' Yet, the Midrash notes that there was someone who did arise among the gentile nations: Bilaam. The Torah describes him as one who **יודע דעת עליון** – he knew what went on in the heavens. The Posuk further depicts Bilaam as reaching the state of **ומחזה שקי יחזה** - he witnessed profound revelations and extraordinary sights that few could receive.

This represents the lofty facet of Bilaam HaRasha. On the other hand, the Gemara in Maseches Avodah Zarah characterizes him as one who **פרץ גדרו של עולם** - Bilaam was a man who breached the basic barriers of human decency, becoming the most degraded individual since the time of creation.

Reb Chaim explains that while a person may ascend to great heights, these moments remain fleeting if they are not followed by personal effort. If we merely revel in spiritual gifts without investing ourselves in the process, the resulting inspiration lacks a foundation in reality. He emphasizes that true success is only attainable through "yegiah", diligent toil and internal work. Without this active engagement, even the most profound spiritual experiences cannot be sustained; one will inevitably slide back down the mountain they just scaled.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, the renowned Rosh Yeshiva of Mir, poses a profound question: How can a single person embody such a stark contradiction? How is it possible to converse with Hashem and witness heavenly visions while simultaneously descending to the depths of immorality?

This was the tragic downfall of Bilaam. Though he reached a level of prophecy nearly equal to Moshe Rabbeinu, his failure stemmed from a refusal to exert himself. He sought only to receive, unwilling to invest his own essence into his spiritual growth.

This serves as a vital principle for our own lives. To truly connect with Hashem, find lasting happiness, or experience the transformative power of a mitzvah, we cannot rely solely on heavenly gifts. We must be prepared to toil and invest our hearts, for only through this investment do spiritual heights become permanent acquisitions.

The necessity of personal investment is further illustrated by a famous observation regarding Krias Yam Suf. **ראתה שפחה על הים מה שלא ראה יחזקא-ל** - The Midrash notes that at Kriyas Yam Suf, even a simple maidservant reached such - holiness and clarity beyond those of the greatest neviim, including Yechezkel HaNavi.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz asks: Why is she still called a **שפחה**, maidservant? If she experienced such incredible light, shouldn't her status have been elevated to that of a "Rebbetzin"?

He explains that because they did not build upon the nes through personal effort, their spiritual essence remained unchanged. Despite briefly surpassing the greatest neviim, their lack of follow-through meant the inspiration was never internalized; consequently, they remained maidservants.

Yechezkel, by contrast, achieved his heights through intense labor. When he received nevuah, he did not passively receive it, he understood that such revelations demanded even greater effort.

Consequently, those spiritual lights became a permanent part of his being, serving as a foundation for even loftier ascents.

This principle applies to our daily routines throughout the year. Often after Shabbos, we feel as though we have suddenly plummeted. We may have had an inspiring Shabbos and felt elevated - with tefillos, festive meals, zemiros, stories of tzaddikim, and beautiful divrei Torah - yet by Motzei Shabbos or the following week, we don't feel the elevation anymore.

How can we reconcile being so elevated on Shabbos and feeling so disconnected during the week?

The answer lies in the lack of immediate investment. While we received immense gifts through davening and seudos, we must ask ourselves: On Shabbos afternoon did we learn something to ensure those moments lasted? Did we make a cheshbon hanefesh on Motzei Shabbos to implement changes, or did we simply move on?

This is what Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz teaches us: when we reach higher levels, we must invest effort. Consider the spiritual heights reached during days like Yom Kippur or the seder. Did we truly integrate those moments, or did we return to our routines unchanged?

Often, we experience profound elevation; during davening, Shabbos meals, or joyous occasions, yet the inspiration fades because we fail to anchor it in concrete action. We must view these experiences not as finished gifts, but as opportunities to restructure our lives. By reflecting on where to invest our effort after such moments, we turn fleeting inspiration into lasting growth.

As Chazal say, **יגעת ומצאת תאמין** - if you have toiled, you will succeed. With Siyata Dishmaya, that personal investment will transform the temporary light into a permanent acquisition.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Hoff Shlita

בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך — מוליכין אותו

The Gemara in Makkos דף י עמוד ב teaches a yesod we've quoted before: אָמַר רַב הוּנָא אָמַר רִ' אֶלְעָזָר: מִן הַתּוֹרָה וּמִן הַנְּבִיאִים וּמִן הַכְּתוּבִים בַּדֶּרֶךְ שֶׁאָדָם רוֹצֶה לֵילֵךְ בָּהּ מוֹלִיכִין אוֹתוֹ —. The derech a person *truly* wants — that becomes the derech he is led in.

Bilam as the model

From Bilaam we see this clearly. First the Torah says: לֹא תֵלֵךְ עִמָּהֶם — don't go. Later it says: קוּם לֵךְ אִתָּם— go with them. Of course, הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא didn't "change His mind". Rather, Bilaam's *own* ratzon shaped the path he was allowed to take. His inner direction became the direction he was led.

This is the Gemara's chiddush: בַּדֶּרֶךְ שֶׁאָדָם רוֹצֶה לֵילֵךְ — מוֹלִיכִין אוֹתוֹ.

The Maharsha — every machshavah creates a malach

The Maharsha adds a powerful, *mechudashdike* explanation:

כָּל מַחֲשָׁבָה וְדִבּוּר וּמַעֲשֶׂה שֶׁל אָדָם — בּוֹרֵא לוֹ מַלְאָךְ לְפִי עִנְיָנוֹ, אִם לְטוֹב וְאִם לְרָע. Every thought, word, or action creates a malach — a real force in the world. And מוליכין אותו means: the malachim created by a person's intentions are the ones who lead him.

If his intentions are good, he creates malachim that help him move in that direction. If chalilah the intentions are negative, those too create a derech.

And this fits with הַכֹּל בִּידֵי שָׁמַיִם חוּץ מִיִּרְאַת שָׁמַיִם— the direction of one's yiras shamayim is always in his own hands. So the Maharsha concludes: כְּפִי רְצוֹנוֹ וְדַעְתּוֹ מוֹלִיכִין אוֹתוֹ אוֹתָם הַמַּלְאָכִים.

Ratzon is not imaginary — it creates kochos

People sometimes think: "I have ratzonos, but they don't mean anything." **The Maharsha** says the opposite. *A* רָצוֹן אֲמִתִּי creates kochos, creates malachim, creates a derech.

If a person is **קובע** within himself a real machshavah tovah, a real direction — he will get there. The derech begins the moment the ratzon becomes real.

And the startling truth of the Gemara is: **Where we are is usually where we truly want to be.** If we *really* wanted to be different, we would be different. So we must strengthen the ratzonos and machshavos that point us toward the right place.



"מַה־טֹּבוּ אֹהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב" — what was so "tov"?

Rashi explains that Bilam saw: **עַל שֶׁרָאָה פְּתָחֵיהֶם שֶׁאֵינָם מְכוּוָנִים זֶה מוּל זֶה**— the tents were arranged so no one looked into another's home.

But the pasuk says **מַה־טֹּבוּ אֹהָלֶיךָ**, implying the *ohel itself* is "tov". What was "tov" about the inside?

I once heard a beautiful pshat:

The reason the entrances weren't facing each other is because **each person was content inside his own ohel**. "My home is tov. My environment is right for me. I don't need to look elsewhere."

When a person feels **tov** in his own bayis, his own matzav, his own family situation — he naturally doesn't look into someone else's life.

So **מַה־טֹּבוּ אֹהָלֶיךָ** means: the *tov* is inside — the contentment, the appreciation of one's own circumstances. And **ממילא** the tents weren't facing each other.

A person who sees the tov in his own ohel doesn't need to compare, to look next door, to measure himself against others.

Bilam's klalos become brachos

This parsha is the parsha of **הפיכת הקללה לברכה**. As the pasuk in Devarim says: **וַיַּהֲפֹךְ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ לְךָ אֶת הַקְּלָלָה לִבְרָכָה — כִּי אֲהֵבְךָ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ.**

The Ribono Shel Olam's love is expressed in turning klala into bracha — and that koach is rooted in this week's parsha.

Strengthen the machshavah and value your own ohel

Let us remind ourselves:

- **בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך — מוליכין אותו** - Strengthen the machshavos and ratzonos that create the right malachim.
- **מַה־טֹּבוּ אׇהָלֶיךָ** - See the tov in your own home, your own environment, your own life.

May the Eibershter help that everything should be **לברכה**, and that our ratzonos should lead us to the places we truly want to reach.

A gut Shabbos.



The Tremendous Power of Tefillah

A common question often arises: If Hashem created and governs the world, and **כל מה דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד** - everything He does is for the best — then why must I daven? What is accomplished through davening if everything that occurs is undoubtedly for my benefit? Since we are not attempting to alter His divine plan, what is the true purpose of tefillah?

The Degel Machaneh Efraim (**פרשת וירא**) cites a posuk in Tehillim: **הראנו השם חסדך** - Ribbono Shel Olam, show us Your kindness. This raises an obvious question: Dovid HaMelech was one of the **שבעה**

רועים (seven shepherds) and the **רגל רביעי במרכבה** (the fourth leg of the Divine Chariot) following the Avos. His gadlus is beyond our grasp, and he surely possessed emunah and bitachon far exceeding our comprehension. Why, then, was it not enough for him to simply trust that everything Hashem does is for the best? - Yet, Dovid HaMelech asks Hashem to show him His kindness.

The Degel Machaneh Efraim explains that Dovid HaMelech was teaching a vital lesson regarding the power of tefillah. While everything Hashem does is for our ultimate good, that goodness is sometimes hidden.

When we daven, we ask the Ribbono Shel Olam to reveal these hidden brachos so we can witness and experience them in the present. Through our tefillos, we have the power to unveil that concealed kindness.

This is what Dovid HaMelech asks of the Ribono Shel Olam: "Show us Your kindness." I want to see it and feel it now. I don't want to just believe it or say, **כל מה דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד** while struggling internally - I want to see it now.

How does this happen? Through the power of tefillah.

In his sefer, Amud HaAvodah, **Reb Baruch'l Kossover** asks: Why do we say daily,**ותגמלנו חסדים טובים** - Ribbono Shel Olam, bestow upon us good kindnesses? Since kindness is inherently good, the phrase **חסדים טובים** (good kindnesses) seems redundant. What is the deeper significance?

While everything Hashem does is good and He only gives us **חסדים**, we must believe it even when we are in pain or distress. In such difficult situations, we daven and ask that even if it is kindness from Hashem, I want to see it clearly. I want to feel that the goodness is present here and now. It should be **חסדים טובים** - pleasant and sweet. It should not be concealed, and I should not have to endure trauma to experience those hidden blessings.

But, does this truly work? Will saying a few words really change everything? Our motto should always be: "I don't understand how it works, and I don't need to understand." All we know is that the Ribbono Shel Olam told us that tefillah works.



The gemara in Maseches Sukkah states that Reb Elazar says: An ***eser*** (pitchfork) is a tool that turns produce and stalks from one side to the other. Similarly, the tefillos of tzaddikim have the power to turn middas hadin to middas harachamim - from judgment to compassion. Tefillah turns circumstances upside down. How, when, or where it works is not the point; the Ribbono Shel Olam commanded us to daven.

According to the **Rambam**, tefillah is a daily Torah obligation; every time we daven, we fulfill a mitzvah similar to eating matzah. The **Ramban**, on the other hand, holds tefillah to be a derabbanan. But he agrees with the Rambam that whenever a person is in need, tefillah becomes a mitzvah min HaTorah.

For whatever we need - and our daily lists are long - we should know there is a mitzvah to daven. The mechanics of how it works are not our concern. We simply do as the Ribbono Shel Olam requested, and it will shift things from din to rachamim.

The Rabbeinu Bachaya in his sefer, Kad HaKemach, explains that when one davens, praises, and thanks Hashem, and those tefillos reach the Heavens, Hashem summons the malachim and the tzaddikim. He points out the devotion of an ordinary Yid who, despite facing personal hardships, continues to daven with sincerity. Hashem notes how they sing His praises and acknowledge the miracles He performs for them, remaining focused on gratitude rather than complaint even in times of struggle.

Tefillah serves as a powerful expression of emunah and bitachon. By offering praise and thanks amidst difficulty, one gains the ability to

transform middas hadin into middas harachamim. Because we choose to thank Hashem during our struggles, we invoke His compassion.

May we all merit His abundant kindness. May we daven with complete sincerity for wonderful and positive outcomes, asking Hashem to reveal His goodness to us.

The Power of Our Words - Gabriel Benady



Parashas Balak tells the story of Bilam, who was hired to curse כְּלַל יִשְׂרָאֵל. In his heart, he wanted to harm them, and his intentions were far from pure. Yet every time he opened his mouth, blessings came out instead of curses.

This teaches us a powerful lesson. While we cannot always control the thoughts that enter our minds, we can control the words that leave our mouths.

Everyone experiences moments of anger, jealousy, or frustration. The real test is not whether we have those feelings, but what we choose to do with them.

Bilam's story reminds us that words have tremendous power. A single comment can hurt someone deeply, while a few kind words can lift a person for days. Even when our thoughts are negative, we have the ability to choose speech that brings positivity, encouragement, and blessing into the world.

The Torah teaches us that greatness is not measured by what we feel, but by how we act despite those feelings.

We may not always control our first thought, but we can always control our next word.

"A person's character is revealed not by the thoughts they have, but by the words they choose to speak."



Nobody Has To Know!

There is an incredible vort that I heard from my shver, Reb Menachem Kantor Shlit"a, from his father Hagaon **HaGadol Rav Yosef Meir Kantor זצוק"ל**

Bilam said, "**מי מנה עפר יעקב**" - "Who can count the dust of Yaakov?" The *gemara* learns a *halacha* from here that we bury the **ערלה** in **עפר**. The question is, [Tosfos asks]; The *yidden* did not do mila in the midbar. According to some opinions, only shevet Levi did mila. [see Tosfos]. The reason was because there was no northern wind and in order for the mila to heal it needed a northern wind. Shevet Levi were moser nefesh. If so, why was Bilam so amazed about the **עפר** covering the **ערלה** if only shevet Levi did it?

The answer is that **שבט לוי** thought that if they would make it known to all the other **שבטים** about the **ברית**, it might cause them pain that they were not able to be **מל**. Therefore, they covered the **ערלה** with **עפר** so no one should know that they made a **ברית**. - It was a Mitzvah done with extreme sensitivity to the other tribes!

בלעם הרשע was so impressed by this nekuda that **שבט לוי** were **מוסר נפש** yet at the same time made sure that no one should know about it and they were sensitive to the other shevatim.

WOW! And this is also the reason why we give a **ברכה** to the **רך הנימול –כשם שנכנס לברית כן יכנס לתורה לחופה ולמעשים טובים**

See the last Pasuk in the Haftorah (Micah 6:8) - **עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהַצְנֵעַ לֶכֶת עִם־אֱלֹקֶיךָ** - ***to do justice, to love loving-kindness, and to walk discreetly with your G-d.***

It is very natural that when one does a Mitzvah, that they feel a need for everyone to know about it because they want recognition. And when we see someone do a Mitzvah it is vital and important to give them recognition.

The Chofetz Chaim says a rule about this. The Chofetz Chaim writes that in general one should not publicize his Mitzvos unless he believes that people around him can be influenced by what he did or does. But in general, **nobody** needs to know about our Mitzvos except for us and Hashem. - Shevet HaLevi had an extra cheshbon to keep it quite - not to shame the other tribes that were **not** able to perform the Mizvah.

A mitzvah is between you and Hashem is precious even if you **think** you're doing a Mitzah.

Rav Avrohom Chaim Foyer Shlit"a once met an old sofer in Yerushalayim Ihr Hakoidesh who told him the following story. There was someone who was causing a major commotion in shamayim and the malachim wanted to know what special thing this mortal was doing down here that was causing such a nachas ruach to Hashem. Eliyahu came down to ask the person what he was doing, and the person did not agree to say what he was doing until he was promised to be taught all chochmas HaTorah that there is and Eliyahu agreed.

The secret was that since the day of his Bar Mitzvah he was mekabel on himself to do a mitzah every day that was between him and Hashem without any fanfare and just as his personal matana to Hashem.

After he was granted his wish and he was taught all the chochmas haTorah, nigla and nistar. This person came in his next gilgul as the neshama of the **Arizal** who was fluent in every single chochmah shayech.

In fact, the Arizal knew what a tree was saying when it moved a certain way, as well as chochmas hashalheves if a fire moved a certain way… this is just a drop in the bucket of the chochmah that that the Arizal had and according to this story it all began by creating a secret bond with Hashem by doing a Mitzvah just for Hashem! Have a great Shabbos!



The Uniqueness of Klal Yisrael - Dr. Sholom Springer

In Parshas Balak, Bilam unexpectedly becomes one of the Torah's greatest spokesmen for the uniqueness of Klal Yisrael. He declares:

"כי מראש צורים אראנו ומגבעות אשורנו" — "*From the mountain peaks I see them, and from the hills I behold them.*"

Rashi explains that Bilam is looking not merely at the Jewish people themselves, but at their origins: **"אני מסתכל בראשיתם"**. He sees a nation firmly rooted in the merit of the Avos and Imahos, strong and enduring like mountains and rocky heights.

Bilam then continues: **"הן עם לבדד ישכון ובגוים לא יתחשב"** — "*Behold, it is a nation that dwells alone and is not reckoned among the nations.*"

Rashi explains that this separateness is part of the inheritance bequeathed to us by our forefathers. Klal Yisrael will always remain distinct. Furthermore, unlike other nations, the Jewish people will never be annihilated. As the prophet Yirmiyahu says:

"כי אעשה כלה בכל הגוים... אך אותך לא אעשה כלה" — "*I will make an end of all the nations... but of you I will not make an end.*"

Empires such as Rome, Greece, and Persia rose to greatness and eventually disappeared from the stage of history. Klal Yisrael, despite persecution, exile, and suffering, remains.

Why?

Other nations are judged primarily on their past. When their corruption reaches a certain point, they are swept away. Klal Yisrael is judged according to its future. As long as there remains a faithful remnant loyal to Torah and mitzvos, the Jewish people have a future and therefore survive.

The nations of the world also judge us differently. Today we call it "double standards," but it is an ancient reality. Klal Yisrael has always been measured by a different yardstick.

The Netziv's Insight

The Netziv offers a remarkable interpretation of **הן עם לבדד ישכון ובגוים לא יתחשב**. Every nation conquered by another generally assimilates into the dominant culture. It abandons its own traditions and adopts the values of the conqueror.

But Israel is different. **"בשעה שהוא לבדד"** — when the Jew remains distinct, faithful to Torah and unwilling to surrender his identity, **"ישכון"** — he dwells securely.

However, says the Netziv, place a pause after **"ובגוים"**:

If Jews seek to become indistinguishable from the nations, **לא יתחשב** — they will not be accepted as equals. Instead, they will be viewed with suspicion and hostility.

Writing decades before the Holocaust, the Netziv observed that whenever Jews attempted to imitate surrounding cultures and blend in completely, their virtues were often reinterpreted as faults. Good qualities were twisted into accusations.

This pattern goes all the way back to Pharaoh. The Jews in Egypt were peaceful and loyal citizens, yet Pharaoh imagined that they would join his enemies. The Torah itself commands: **"לא תתעב מצרי"**

Even after all Egypt did to us, we are not permitted to hate them. Yet they viewed us as a threat.

The Netziv points to the phrase: **"וירעו אותנו"** Not merely "they did evil to us," but, as **Rabbi Isaac Bernstein** explained, "they *eviled* us" — they transformed us into villains in their imagination. Our virtues were recast as dangers.

Why Is Hashem So Insistent on Separation?

The Netziv asks why the Torah is so emphatic about maintaining a distinct Jewish identity.

His answer is profound.

Whenever mankind undermines the basic structure and purpose of creation, Divine Providence reacts strongly. The world was created with a specific order and purpose, and when that order is threatened, Hashem acts to restore it.

He illustrates this with the generation of the Flood. Chazal teach:

"לא נחתם גזר דינם אלא על החמס" Although they committed many terrible sins, the decree was sealed because of chamas—robbery.

Why?

Because widespread theft destroys society itself. Human beings can no longer live together in trust and stability. Society becomes a jungle where the strong prey upon the weak.

The same idea appears in Sedom, where selfishness became institutionalized. A society cannot survive if everyone says:

"שלי שלי ושלך שלך"

On an individual level this may seem reasonable, but when it becomes the governing philosophy of society, it becomes **"מידת סדום."**

Klal Yisrael's Unique Mission

The Netziv explains that from the moment of Matan Torah, Klal Yisrael was given a unique role:

"לשמור משמרת תורתו" — to guard the Torah, and

"להיות מתקנים ומשלימים בני אדם" — to elevate and perfect humanity.

We are meant to be a **"ממלכת כהנים"**—a kingdom of priests. Just as the Kohanim serve Klal Yisrael, Klal Yisrael serves the world, bringing light, morality, and Torah values to humanity.

To fulfil that role, we must remain distinct. A teacher cannot teach if he becomes indistinguishable from his students. When Jews abandon their identity and seek complete assimilation, they abandon the very purpose for which they were chosen. And when we forget who we are, history has shown that the nations of the world often remind us.

The Kuzari and the Jewish Difference

The **Kuzari** famously describes five levels of existence:

דּוֹמֵם (Inanimate) - **צוֹמֵח** (Vegetation) **חַי** (Animal) **מְדַבֵּר** (Human) **יִשְׂרָאֵל** (Yisrael).

Just as a human being is fundamentally different from an animal, so too Klal Yisrael possesses a unique spiritual dimension.

Rav Eliyahu Lopian noted that the nations often accuse Jews of two traits: being overly strong-willed and being overly acquisitive. In truth, he says, both traits are strengths when used properly.

The Gemara states:

"מפני מה ניתנה תורה לישראל? מפני שהן עזין." - Why was Torah given to Israel? Because they possess inner strength.

Without that stubborn determination, we could never have survived centuries of persecution while remaining loyal to Torah. The very

quality that critics call arrogance is often the strength that preserved Jewish continuity.

Similarly, the Jewish drive for achievement and knowledge is what enables an endless commitment to Torah learning. Torah is an infinite project. Only a nation with an insatiable desire to know more could undertake such a mission.

Of course, when these qualities are misdirected, they can be destructive. But the traits themselves were given for a holy purpose.

Conclusion

Bilam's prophecy remains true: **"הן עם לבדד ישכון ובגוים לא יתחשב."**

Klal Yisrael is different—not because of privilege, but because of purpose. We were entrusted with Torah and charged with being a **ממלכת כהנים**, a nation that brings light and moral direction to the world.

The nations may criticize us, fear us, or misunderstand us, but our task remains unchanged. As long as we remain loyal to Torah and remember our unique mission, Klal Yisrael will continue to endure and fulfil its role in Hashem's plan for creation.

במהרה בימינו, אמן.

