

BS"D



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BALAK - 5765

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From: TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org] Sent: Thursday, July 14, 2005

Subject: Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger - Broadening Impact by Strengthening the Core

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RABBI YAAKOV NEUBURGER BROADENING IMPACT BY STRENGTHENING THE CORE

Undoubtedly Bilaam's everlasting contribution to our liturgy and the décor of our shuls is the divinely rephrased blessing - (24:5) "How good are your tents, Yaakov, your dwelling places, Yisrael." Clearly, Bilam understood all too well just how important every home and shul is in shaping the individuals and communities of our people. It is thus not surprising that this is the only of Bilam's statements that will weather all of time as a blessing; long after every other blessing will have to come to haunt us in the form of their intended curse (Sanhedrin 105b). Perhaps we too can weather whatever comes our way as long as we can take refuge and retreat in our homes and our shuls. That is why Bilam ultimately advised Balak to tear apart the Jewish home through decadence and infidelity, explaining how this will distance us from Hashem and His mission for us.

Exactly what quality did Bilam see in our tents which impressed him so? Rashi explains that Bilam was not referring to our private homes but rather to the various places throughout time that would be set aside for the korbanos of kapara, services that would gain forgiveness for us. Apparently that ability to achieve forgiveness and its attendant qualities of new beginnings, would forever inspire us and bring to us strength and prosperity.

However, Rashi's first interpretation is that Bilaam was taken by our modesty and how out of respect for everyone's privacy we turned our tent flaps away from each other. To me this is all quite surprising that the values of privacy and confidentiality can be so important that we should allude to them as we begin to daven every day, and that a person as decadent as Bilaam should find them so impressive.

However, Bilaam himself, in the following pasuk, reveals to us just what he did see. "[These tents] stretch out like rivers, like gardens alongside the river, planted like spices, like cedars along the water." What is the point of comparing our homes to the span of a river bed, spices, and well nourished gardens and cedars? Perhaps all four share the quality that the breadth and depth of their impact is determined by the strength of their source, without in turn weakening that source. The length and strength of the river flow will heavily depend on the strength of its water source without threatening the source's ability to bring ever fresh water. The cedar will impress itself upon viewers far beyond its immediate environs, without in any way being diminished; the spices will, if the source is potent and pleasant, be enjoyed

by many without taking any scent away from any other. In this lies one of the great secrets of the home and the community. Our ability to impact on others will be far more dependant on the vibrancy of the core than on the calculated design of its reach.

Apparently, Bilaam was impressed not so much with the privacy per se but with the intensity of focus on one's own tent which was communicated by turning the entrances away from one another. We who are forever juggling our concern for the growth of the members of our own community with the concern for outreach can appreciate what intrigued Bilaam. Families, who are always balancing the energies we place into our own children as we extend ourselves beyond as well, understand that indeed Bilaam noted a magical event. He saw families so focused and so successful in creating an intensely fragrant lifestyle that it attracted effortlessly, from afar; shuls that stood so tall and strong with integrity and nobility that they readily impressed far beyond their immediate surroundings.

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From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: July 14, 2005 To: ravfrand@torah.org

"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Balak -
If It Can Happen To Bilaam, It Can Happen to Any of Us
Parshas Balak contains an incident which teaches a tremendous ethical lesson. I personally find it to be one of the scariest mussar [ethical] teachings in the Torah.

This incident involves Bilaam, who had a tremendous power of speech. Whoever he blessed was blessed; whoever he cursed was cursed. He was a very powerful man -- a person who did not command divisions of armies, but had an almost magical power of speech.

Bilaam is asked to employ this power against the Jews. He knows that G-d does not want him to go, but he decides to go nonetheless. While on the way, his donkey stops, refuses to move, and then the donkey suddenly opens up his mouth and starts talking to him. A donkey never talked to a man since the beginning of the history of the world, and such a thing will never happen again.

If a person had any doubts about whether what he was doing was right or wrong, and his car suddenly stopped and told him "Don't Go" (and not just one of those recorded voices saying "Your seatbelt isn't buckled...") -- would that not cause the person to at least stop and wonder whether he was doing the right thing?

We may ask this question even about a person who is not perceptive. But Bilaam was a wise person; he was a perceptive person. How would a perceptive person relate to his donkey talking to him?

Bilaam should have thought, "My strength is my speech. Who gave me that power? G-d gave me that power. The proof is that the same G-d who gave me the power of speech, just gave my donkey the power of speech! 'Who gives a mouth to man or who makes one dumb...' [Shmos 4:11] Where is my strength from? My speech is no bigger of a miracle than my donkey talking. It is the same strength from G-d."

What should Bilaam have concluded? He should have concluded that he was not using his power of speech correctly, and he should turn back. Is this not as clear as day? Is the message not clear? Should it not that make an impression? Yet it did not have any impact.

This is the lesson to be learned: how blind a person can be! When a person has some type of personal motive -- whether it is money or power or whatever it is -- a person can literally be completely blind. G-d can almost spell it out to him... G-d CAN spell it out to him, but he still will not see it!

That is what is so frightening. Something can be as clear as day to the objective observer, but the person on his way to sin can not see that which is in front of his own eyes! This is terribly frightening, because if it can

happen to Bilaam, it can happen to every one of us! If Bilaam can be blinded, we can be blinded as well.

This is the tremendous mussar to be derived from the incident of Bilaam: There are none so blind, as those who will not see.

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Kol HaKollel The Voice of the Milwaukee Kollel A Weekly Torah Publication

PARSHAS BALAK - 9 TAMMUZ 5765 HEAR WHAT YOU WANT
by RABBI MOSHE PERETZ GILDEN

As the Jews camped in the desert near the border of Moav a sinister plan was unfolding. Balak, King of Moav, sent messengers to Balaam asking him to curse the Jewish people, enabling him to then defeat them. Balaam received a command from G-d in a dream that he should not go with these people. When they arrived, Balaam said "G-d refused to let me go with you" (Numbers 22:13). Rashi comments that he was really sending a subtle message that G-d said, "I cannot go with you, but I may go with dignitaries of greater stature than you."

How could it be that G-d explicitly said not to go and yet he went? Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz (1) observes that although Balaam was a prophet, he interpreted the prophecy to fit his own designs. The root cause of error is that people ultimately hear what they want to hear.

The Talmud (Gittin 45a) relates a time that Rav Ilish was taken captive. One day a man who knew the language of birds sat next to him. A raven came and called to Rav Ilish who asked the man, "What is the bird saying?"

The man answered, "Ilish run, Ilish run!" Rav Ilish said, "Ravens lie so I will not rely on him." Meanwhile, a dove came and called out. Rav Ilish again asked the man, "What is the bird saying?" The man answered, "Ilish run, Ilish run!" Rav Ilish knew that the dove would not lie and so he escaped successfully.

Just as Rav Ilish did not want to trust the raven, why would he trust this stranger and risk his life by attempting to escape? Did he not need to be concerned that this stranger was misinterpreting, or even lying about, the bird's message? We may conclude that Rav Ilish knew bird language himself. Nevertheless, he consulted with the stranger to make sure that he heard correctly. He was afraid that perhaps he was hearing what he wanted to hear.

Throughout our lives we receive many messages that can help us improve. They may come from parents, teachers, mentors, and even from the environment in which we live. Most essential is to strip ourselves of our own personal agendas, so that we hear what they say, not what we want them to have said.

Have a Good Shabbos!

This issue of Kol HaKollel is dedicated in memory of Rebbetzin Devorah Rennert, Devorah Rivkah bas Shlomo haLevi

(1) Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of the Mir Yeshiva, who led his students from the ashes of the European Holocaust to the glory of Jerusalem

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

SIR JONATHAN SACKS

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From last year]

<http://www.chiefrabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Balak - The hardest word to hear

THE STORY OF BILAAM, THE PAGAN PROPHET, begins with a bewildering set of non-sequiturs - a sequence of events that seems to have no logic.

First, the background. The Israelites are approaching the end of their forty years in the wilderness. Already they have fought and won wars against Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan. They have arrived at the plains of Moab - today, southern Jordan at the point where it touches the Dead Sea.

Balak king of Moab is concerned, and he shares his distress with the elders of Midian. The language the Torah uses at this point is precisely reminiscent of the reaction of the Egyptians at the beginning of the book of Exodus.

Egypt: [Pharaoh] said to his people: "Here, The children of Israel is more numerous [rav] and powerful than we . . ." and [the Egyptians] felt a disgust at the children of Israel. Moab: And Moab was very fearful because of the people because it was numerous [rav], and Moab felt a disgust at the children of Israel. The strategy Balak adopts is to seek the help of the well known seer and diviner Bilaam. Again there is a literary evocation, this time of the words of G-d to Abraham:

G-d to Abraham: I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse. Balak to Bilaam: "I know that whoever you bless is blessed and whoever you curse is cursed." This time the parallel is ironic (indeed the Bilaam story is full of irony). In the case of Abraham, it was G-d who blessed. In the case of Bilaam, the power was thought to reside in Bilaam himself. In fact the earlier statement of G-d to Abraham already prefigures the fate of Moab - one who tries to curse Israel will himself be cursed.

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

The character of Bilaam remains ambiguous, both in the Torah and subsequent Jewish tradition. Was he a diviner (reading omens and signs) or a sorcerer (practising occult arts)? Was he a genuine prophet or a fraud? Did he assent to the divine blessings placed in his mouth, or did he wish to curse Israel? According to some midrashic interpretations he was a great prophet, equal in stature to Moses. According to others, he was a pseudo-prophet with an "evil eye" who sought Israel's downfall.

What I want to examine here is neither Bilaam nor his blessings, but the preamble to the story, for it is here that one of the deepest problems arises, namely: what did G-d want Bilaam to do? It is a drama in three scenes.

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

But G-d said to Bilaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed." Obediently, Bilaam refuses. Balak redoubles his efforts. Perhaps more distinguished messengers and the promise of significant reward will persuade Bilaam to change his mind. He sends a second set of emissaries. Bilaam's reply is exemplary: "Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the LORD my G-d." However, he adds a fateful rider: "Now stay here tonight as the others did, and I will find out what else the LORD will tell me."

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

That night G-d came to Bilaam and said, "Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you." Problem 1: first G-d had said, "Do not go." Now He says, "Go." Problem 2 appears immediately:

Bilaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. But G-d was very angry when he went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road to oppose him. 7 G-d says, "Go." Bilaam goes. Then G-d is very angry. Does G-d change His mind - not once but twice in the course of a single narrative? The mind reels. What is going on here? What is Bilaam supposed to do? What does G-d want? There is no explanation. Instead the narrative shifts to the famous scene of Bilaam's donkey - itself a mystery in need of interpretation: Bilaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Bilaam beat it to get it back on the road. Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Bilaam's foot against it. So he beat it again. Then the angel of the LORD moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it lay down under Bilaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff. Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Bilaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" Bilaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now." The donkey said to Bilaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?" "No," he said. Then the LORD opened Bilaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown. The commentators offer various ways of resolving the apparent contradictions between G-d's first and second reply. According to Nachmanides, G-d's first statement, "Don't go with them" meant, "Don't curse the Israelites." His second - "Go with them" - meant, "Go but make it clear that you will only say the words I will put in your mouth, even if they are words of blessing." G-d was angry with Bilaam, not because he went but because he did not tell them of the proviso.

In the nineteenth century, Malbim and R. Zvi Hirsch Mecklenberg suggested a different answer based on close textual analysis. The Hebrew text uses two different words for "with them" in the first and second Divine replies. When G-d says, "Don't go with them" the Hebrew is imahem. When He later says "Go with them" the corresponding word is itam. The two prepositions have subtly different meanings. Imahem means "with them mentally as well as physically," going along with their plans. Itam means "with them physically but not mentally," in other words Bilaam could accompany them but not share their purpose or intention. G-d is angry when Bilaam goes, because the text states that he went in them - in

other words he identified with their mission. This is an ingenious solution. The only difficulty is verse 35, in which the angel of G-d, having opened Bilaam's eyes, finally tells Bilaam, "Go with [im] the men." According to Malbim and Mecklenberg, this is precisely what G-d did not want Bilaam to do.

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

G-d does not change His mind. Therefore Bilaam's delay said something not about G-d but about himself. He had not accepted the Divine refusal. He wanted to hear the answer Yes - and that is indeed what he heard. Not because G-d wanted him to go, but because G-d speaks once, and if we refuse to accept what He says, G-d does not force His will upon us. As the sages of the midrash put it: "Man is led down the path he chooses to tread." The true meaning of G-d's second reply, "Go with them," is, "If you insist, then I cannot stop you going - but I am angry that you should have asked a second time." G-d did not change His mind at any point in the proceedings. In scenes 1, 2 and 3, G-d did not want Bilaam to go. His "Yes" in scene 2 meant "No" - but it was a No Bilaam could not hear, was not prepared to hear. When G-d speaks and we do not listen, He does not intervene to save us from our choices. "Man is led down the path he chooses to tread."

But G-d was not prepared to let Bilaam proceed as if he had Divine consent. Instead he arranged the most elegant possible demonstration of the difference between true and false prophecy. The false prophet speaks. The true prophet listens. The false prophet tells people what they want to hear. The true prophet tells them what they need to hear. The false prophet believes in his own powers. The true prophet knows that he has no power. The false prophet speaks in his own voice. The true prophet speaks in a voice not his ("I am not a man of words," says Moses; "I cannot speak for I am a child" says Jeremiah).

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

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

I decided that one way of doing so was to look at drug addicts. They had developed behaviour that they knew was self-destructive, but it was also addictive. To break the habit would involve immense reserves of will. They had to acknowledge that the life they led was harming them and they had to change. That seemed to me a secular equivalent of teshuvah.

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

lose faith in us, and that gives us strength. Here were people doing G-d's work.

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

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

From: Halacha [halacha@yutorah.org] Sent: Monday, June 27, 2005 3:16 PM To: Subject: The Weekly Halacha Overview BY RABBI JOSH FLUG

THE MITZVAH OF TOSEFET SHABBAT Parts I & II
Tosefet Shabbat: Accepting Shabbat Early Part I

The Gemara, Yoma 81b, states that there is a mitzvah to accept Yom Kippur upon oneself prior to the actual time of its arrival. This mitzvah is known as tosefet Yom HaKippurim. The Gemara states that this mitzvah applies to Shabbat and Yom Tov as well. Rambam, Hilchot Shevitat Asor 1:6, codifies the mitzvah of tosefet Yom HaKippurim but does not codify the mitzvah of tosefet Shabbat or tosefet Yom Tov. Magid Mishna, ad loc., notes that Rambam is of the opinion that there are other opinions in the Gemara that do not subscribe to the concept of tosefet Shabbat and tosefet Yom Tov, and Rambam follows those opinions. Nevertheless, most Rishonim (see Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim 261) are of the opinion that there is a mitzvah of tosefet Shabbat and tosefet Yom Tov. As such, Shulchan Aruch 263:2, writes that one must accept Shabbat upon oneself prior to sundown.

Rambam is not only of the opinion that there is no mitzvah of tosefet Shabbat, he does not even recognize accepting Shabbat early as a valid halachic mechanism. Despite his position, Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat 29:11, still allows one to recite kiddush before the actual start of Shabbat. Rambam explains that kiddush does not have to be recited on Shabbat, it may also be recited prior to Shabbat. Although Rambam's opinion regarding the concept of tosefet Shabbat (or lack thereof) is rejected, Rambam's explanation of how it is possible to recite kiddush before Shabbat will serve as an explanation for the more normative opinions of tosefet Shabbat as will be explained below.

The Scope of Tosefet Shabbat

R. Yosef D. Soloveitchik, in Nefesh HaRav pg. 155, presents two approaches to the concept of tosefet Shabbat. One can understand tosefet Shabbat as a limitation. By accepting Shabbat early, one prohibits oneself from any melacha that is prohibited on Shabbat. Alternatively, one can understand that tosefet Shabbat creates kedushat Shabbat (the sanctity of Shabbat) and by accepting Shabbat early one actually extends Shabbat.

R. Ya'akov B. Zolty, Mishnat Ya'avetz, Orach Chaim no. 29, makes a similar presentation, and notes that there is a practical difference regarding whether one may recite kiddush during the time of tosefet Shabbat. If one assumes that tosefet Shabbat is merely a limitation in which one prohibits oneself from melacha, one may not recite kiddush during this time. However, if tosefet Shabbat creates kedushat Shabbat, one may recite kiddush during this time. Nevertheless, R. Zolty suggests that even if one assumes tosefet Shabbat to be limited in scope, one may still recite kiddush during this time based on the opinion of Rambam. As mentioned previously, Rambam allows recitation of kiddush even prior to Shabbat. Therefore, it makes no difference whether tosefet Shabbat has the actual status of Shabbat, one may recite kiddush during this time.

R. Zolty adds that within the approach that tosefet Shabbat produces a full kedushat Shabbat, one can further question whether tosefet Shabbat imposes kedushat Shabbat onto Friday afternoon, or whether tosefet Shabbat transforms Friday afternoon into Shabbat. A practical application to this question lies in a discussion regarding a fast day that occurs on a Friday. Maharam (cited in Mordechai, Eruvin no. 494) is of the opinion that if one accepts Shabbat early on a fast day, one may eat before the actual conclusion of the fast. Ra'aviah no. 858, disagrees and maintains that one must wait until the actual conclusion of the fast. Apparently Maharam is of the opinion that tosefet Shabbat transforms Friday afternoon into Shabbat. Therefore, once one accepts Shabbat, it is no longer Friday and the fast is complete. Ra'aviah is of the opinion that tosefet Shabbat merely imposes kedushat Shabbat onto Friday afternoon. Although one is observing Shabbat, one must concurrently observe the laws that relate to the actual day and therefore may not eat until the completion of that day. Rama, Orach Chaim 249:4, rules that one may rely on the opinion of Maharam for a private fast day, but one must be stringent on a public fast day. [See also Rama, Yoreh Deah 196:1, regarding another dispute that relates to this question.]

Bach, Orach Chaim 472, quotes the opinion of Maharal that one who accepts Shabbat early cannot fulfill the mitzvah of eating the Shabbat meal until nightfall. He claims that the three Shabbat meals must be eaten on the actual day of Shabbat. Taz, Orach Chaim 491:6, disagrees and contends that there should be no difference between eating the meal during the time of tosefet Shabbat, and eating the meal during the actual day of Shabbat. R. Zolty explains that Bach is of the opinion that tosefet Shabbat merely imposes kedushat Shabbat onto Friday afternoon. Therefore, if one assumes that the Shabbat meals must be eaten on the actual day of Shabbat, tosefet Shabbat would be excluded. However, Taz is of the opinion that tosefet Shabbat transforms Friday afternoon into Shabbat. Therefore, tosefet Shabbat is considered the actual day of Shabbat, and there can be no specific requirement that the meal be eaten after nightfall. Mishna Berurah 267:5, writes that ideally one should follow the opinion of Bach and eat a k'zayit of bread after nightfall.

The Proper Time For Tosefet Shabbat

Rosh, Berachot 4:6, writes that one may not accept Shabbat before plag hamincha (one and one quarter halachic hours before the end of the day). Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 267:1, codifies Rosh's opinion as normative. Mishna Berurah 263:18, rules that if one accepts Shabbat before plag hamincha, the acceptance is invalid.

There is a dispute among the Rishonim regarding the latest time one may accept Shabbat. Tosafot, Beitzah 30a, s.v. De'ha, note that tosefet Shabbat must be a significant amount of time prior to sundown. However, Tosafot do not know exactly how much time is necessary in order to fulfill the mitzvah of tosefet Shabbat. Ran, Shabbat 15a, s.v. Amar quotes Ramban that one can even fulfill tosefet Shabbat by accepting Shabbat a short amount of time before it is actually prohibited to perform melacha. Shita Mekubetzet, Beitzah 30a, s.v. VeLo quotes Rabbeinu Yitzchak that one should accept tosefet Shabbat one-half hour prior to sundown.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 261:1, rules in accordance with the opinion of Ramban that one can fulfill the mitzvah of tosefet Shabbat by accepting Shabbat a short amount of time prior to Shabbat. Mishna Berurah 261:23, (based on several considerations) recommends that one accept Shabbat one-half hour prior to sundown. If that is not possible, he suggests that one accept Shabbat twenty minutes prior to sundown.

Both R. Moshe Feinstein and R. Shlomo Z. Auerbach suggest that there may be a difference between women and men regarding the amount of time set aside for tosefet Shabbat. R. Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 2:6, notes that the traditional candle lighting time of eighteen minutes prior to sundown is based on a minhag that women accepted upon themselves to keep eighteen minutes of tosefet Shabbat. R. Feinstein implies that men can accept Shabbat a few minutes later. [See however, Igrot Moshe, Orach

Chaim 4:62, where R. Feinstein implies that everyone should accept Shabbat at least eighteen minutes prior to sundown.] Similarly, there is a minhag in Jerusalem to accept Shabbat forty minutes prior to sundown. R. Auerbach, in *Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata* ch. 46, note 20, suggests that the minhag applies to women, and not to men.

Tosefet Shabbat: Accepting Shabbat Early Part II

Last week's issue discussed the concept of Tosefet Shabbat, accepting Shabbat early, its scope and its proper time. This week's issue will discuss the various ways in which one can accept Shabbat, and the practical differences between them.

Accepting Shabbat at Candle Lighting

Ba'al Halachot Gedolot (Bahag), *Hilchot Chanukah*, rules that on Erev Shabbat Chanukah, one must light the Chanukah candles before lighting the Shabbat candles. This is because once one lights the Shabbat candles one may no longer light the Chanukah candles. It is clear from Bahag's ruling that upon lighting Shabbat candles one accepts Shabbat. The Rishonim have a dispute about which feature of candle lighting entails acceptance of Shabbat according to Bahag. Ran, *Shabbat* 10a, s.v. U'mid'amrinan, posits that Bahag is of the opinion that lighting the Shabbat candles must be the last melacha performed on Erev Shabbat. Therefore, implicit in lighting the Shabbat candles is acceptance of Shabbat. R. Shimshon Ben Tzadok, *Tashbetz Katan*, no. 14, writes that the recitation of the beracha is an explicit declaration of acceptance of Shabbat.

There is an important practical difference between Ran's explanation and R. Shimshon's explanation. *Hagahot Maimoniyot*, *Hilchot Shabbat* 5:200, cites Maharam as ruling that when a woman lights candles, she should light on condition that she does not accept Shabbat until after she puts down the match that she uses for lighting. If she doesn't make this stipulation, Shabbat will be imposed upon her by the mere lighting of the candles, and she will violate the prohibition of muktzeh by holding the lit match. There are two ideas apparent in Maharam's ruling. First, he concurs with the explanation of Ran that the acceptance of Shabbat is achieved through the candle lighting itself, and not through recitation of the beracha. Second, he allows one to make a stipulation in the candle lighting, that it should not constitute acceptance of Shabbat.

It would seem that these two ideas are contingent upon each other. One can only make a stipulation in the acceptance of Shabbat if it is an implicit acceptance of Shabbat (for example, lighting candles without explicitly mentioning Shabbat). If the acceptance is explicit, no stipulation can be made. This is evident from the ruling of Kol Bo, no. 31. Kol Bo writes that a woman cannot place any stipulations in her lighting. He explains that since she recites a beracha that mentions Shabbat, there is no greater form of accepting Shabbat. Apparently, Kol Bo understands that the reason why one accepts Shabbat upon lighting candles is because the recitation of the beracha is a declaration of acceptance of Shabbat. Since Kol Bo considers this an explicit acceptance of Shabbat, one cannot make any stipulations. However, according to Ran that it is the lighting itself that implies acceptance of Shabbat, one can entertain a conditional acceptance of Shabbat.

Mordechai, *Shabbat* 293, writes that acceptance of Shabbat at candle lighting is a function of the recitation of the beracha. Nevertheless, he allows one to stipulate that she will not be accepting Shabbat upon reciting the beracha. Apparently, Mordechai is of the opinion that recitation of the beracha is an implicit acceptance of Shabbat, and not an explicit acceptance. Therefore, one can allow for this stipulation. Rama, *Orach Chaim* 263:10, rules that the normative practice follows the opinion of Mordechai. *Mishna Berurah* 263:44, adds that one should not make any stipulation unless there is a pressing need to do so.

Acceptance of Shabbat Through the Ma'ariv Prayer

An alternative method of accepting Shabbat is through the Ma'ariv prayer. Mordechai, *Shabbat* no. 290, rules that the recitation of Barchu is considered acceptance of Shabbat. R. Yosef Karo, *Beit Yosef*, *Orach Chaim* 261, notes that those congregation that recite *Mizmor Shir* accept Shabbat upon recitation of *Mizmor Shir*. *Mishna Berurah* 261:31, adds that those congregation that recite *Lecha Dodi* accept Shabbat upon reciting *bo'i kallah*.

There are numerous practical differences between accepting Shabbat by lighting candles, and accepting Shabbat at Ma'ariv. First, R. Yosef Karo, *Beit Yosef*, *Orach Chaim* 263, writes that if an individual recites the Ma'ariv prayer, he must accept Shabbat unconditionally, and may not make any stipulations. R. Karo considers Barchu and the ensuing Ma'ariv prayer to be an explicit acceptance of Shabbat.

Second, *Levush* 263:17, writes that acceptance of Shabbat operates like a neder, a vow. Therefore, in extraordinary circumstances one can annul the vow. R. Yosef S. Nathanson, *Teshuvot Sho'el U'Meishiv*, *Tinyana*, 2:23, states that this leniency would apply to a woman who accepts Shabbat at candle lighting. R. Yehoshua Y. Neuwirth, *Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata*, ch. 46, note 11, suggests that this leniency would not apply to someone who already recited the Ma'ariv prayer.

Third, Mordechai, *Shabbat* 297, rules that the recitation of Barchu in the synagogue in the presence of majority of the community is considered an acceptance of Shabbat for the entire community. Even those who are not present in the synagogue, are bound by this communal acceptance. R. Shlomo Z. Auerbach (cited in *Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata*, ch. 46, note 11) notes that acceptance of Shabbat by the majority only compels the minority to accept Shabbat when the majority accepts Shabbat as a communal venture (i.e. recitation of Barchu). Therefore, if majority of the congregation accepts Shabbat by lighting candles, the minority is not bound by the actions of the majority.

Is a Husband's Acceptance Binding on His Wife?

R. Moshe Feinstein, *Igrot Moshe*, *Orach Chaim* 3:38 was asked whether a woman whose husband accepts Shabbat early (by praying Ma'ariv early) must also accept Shabbat at the same time. R. Feinstein notes that if there is only one synagogue in the community, all the members of the community are bound by the communal acceptance. If there is more than one synagogue, then according to *Mishna Berurah* 263:51, the members of one synagogue are not bound by the acceptance of another synagogue, even if most of the community already accepted Shabbat. Can the wife claim that she is not bound by the acceptance of her husband's congregation, but rather by a different congregation, or no congregation at all?

R. Feinstein suggests that there are three instances where a congregation accepts Shabbat early. The first instance is where the congregation accepts Shabbat early on a weekly basis - even in the winter - in order to fulfill the mitzvah of tosefet Shabbat. If the husband regularly attends services in that congregation, it is considered a family minhag, and his wife is also bound by this minhag. The second instance is where the congregation normally does not accept Shabbat early, but one time they decide to enhance their kedushat Shabbat by accepting Shabbat early. In such a situation the wife is not bound by her husband's acceptance of Shabbat, as this is not considered a family minhag. If however, that congregation is the only congregation in the community, the entire community is bound by the congregation's acceptance of Shabbat. The third instance is where the community accepts Shabbat early for convenience purposes. In such an instance, the wife is certainly not bound by her husband's acceptance of Shabbat. R. Feinstein suggests that perhaps in this instance, the minority is not bound by the majority, as the majority does not accept Shabbat for mitzvah purposes, rather for convenience. R. Feinstein adds that although in the second and third instance a wife is not bound by her husband's acceptance, it is proper not to perform any melachot from which her husband may benefit. She

may however, perform melachot for herself that do not benefit her husband.

The Weekly Halacha Overview, by Rabbi Josh Flug, is a service of YUTorah, the online source of the Torah of Yeshiva University. Get more halacha shiurim and thousands of other shiurim, by visiting www.yutorah.org.

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EMES LIYAAKOV
Weekly Insights from MOREINU
HORAV YAAKOV KAMENETZKY zt"l
[Translated by Ephraim Weiss <Easykgh@aol.com>]

It is well known that the magic that Billam was capable of performing is totally unrelated to today's entertainers that can create illusions of magic by using hands that move quicker than the eyes. In the times of Moshe, and even later on, there was such a concept of witchcraft and black magic that was practiced by various members of other nations, and that was outlawed by the Torah.

HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt'l offers an explanation as to why in our days, there is no longer such a reality of this type of magic. There is a concept that Hakadosh Buruch Hu created the world in the fashion of, "This corresponding to that." This means that for everything in the world that will compel a person to believe in Hashem, there must be some sort of equivalent force that will induce a person not to believe, should he actively choose to do so. The Ramban writes that for this reason, at krias Yam Suf, Hashem caused a wind to blow throughout the night, so that if Pharaoh would choose not to recognize the hand of God, he could attribute the miracle to the wind. Even though such reasoning defies all logic, in order for bechira to exist, there must be something that allows a rasha to deny the existence of God. Similarly, we know that Billam had powers of nevuah that were at least as great as those of Moshe. This was done for the same reason; to afford every person the choice between good and evil. For the same reason, during the time that Moshe and the neviim that followed him were performing miracles, there had to be some other way for miracles to be preformed, as without this Pharaoh, and the reshaim of all generations would have had no choice but to believe that Moshe and the rest of the neviim were messengers of God. As such, the power of kishuf had to be introduced. Now that we are no longer zocheh to see open miracles, the power of black magic has also ceased, for that is the way in which the world is run. The stronger the power of kedushah is, the stronger the power of tumah must be, and vice versa.

Rav Yaakov uses this idea to explain a very difficult shita of the Rambam. The Rambam maintains that the sheidim, or so called demons that the Gemara discusses have no place in reality, and do not exist altogether. This is extremely hard to understand, as we find many places where the Gemara relates detailed stories about sheidim. How then does the Rambam understand these Gemaras?

Rav Yaakov answers this dilemma based on the aforementioned explanation, that in the time of the Gemara, when some of the Amoraim were capable of performing techiyas hameisim, there were indeed negative spiritual forces capable of performing miracles, in order to detract from the authenticity of the Amoraim. However, the Rambam was talking about his generation, at which time the power to perform miracles had already ceased. As such, according to the Rambam, there are no more sheidim, as their existence now would tip the scales in favor of the negative, and would ruin the balance on which the world is based.

Rav Yaakov concludes by relating that during the time that he was learning in the Yeshiva of Kelm, he saw that HaRav Elchonon Wasserman zt'l had written in the name of the Chofetz Chaim zt'l that the story of the dybbuk that happened in Radin during his lifetime would

presumably be the last of its type, for as the power of Torah is reduced, the power of tumah decreases at the same rate. As such, Rav Yaakov concludes that even in our generation, in places where there are people living that are complete in their emunah and in their actions, the power of tumah has increased power, as the world was created

From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: July 14, 2005 To: Peninim Parsha
PENINIM ON THE TORAH BY
RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM
Balak

In this week's parashah, we read of King Balak's disappointment in Bil'am, the prophet of the Nations. Balak thought that Bil'am could curse the Jews, and Hashem would be obligated to comply. However, Bil'am explained to him that he is only a servant of the Almighty and can only say what Hashem puts into his mouth. Consequently, although Balak had offered to pay him very handsomely, not only wasn't he able to curse the Jews, but he was even forced by Hashem to bless them instead. At first thought, Balak's wish seems silly indeed. Did he actually think that a human being, a mortal man, had so much influence on Hashem? In reality, though, he was quite right. It says in Iyov (22:28); "You shall decree something and it shall be established to you; and the light shall shine upon your ways." The Gemara (Ta'anis 23a) applies this to Choni Hameagel who was able to cause Hashem to send rains according to his request. Similarly, the Gemara says (Bava Metzia 85a), "One who teaches Torah to the son of a boor, even if Hashem decrees a decree, he can abolish it, as it says, (Yirmiyahu 15:19), "If you take out the precious from the vile, you shall be as my mouth." From this we see that Tzaddikim (Saints) actually do have the power to "bind Hashem" by their words. Balak's mistake was in thinking that Bil'am was of that stature.

At our daughter Shevy's wedding, Rabbi Eliezer Rosner told me the following story.

"After our grandson had been married for several years, he and his wife visited me. They told me that since they had not succeeded in having a child yet, they were planning to begin a series of treatments. I asked them to wait a while and to meet me at the Aperia Hall in Jerusalem, at a designated time, when I knew that Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid Grossman, shlita, Founder and Dean of Migdal Ohr, would be there attending a bris (circumcision ceremony).

"Once we were all there, I brought them over to the Rabbi and asked him to give them his blessing. Without hesitation, the Rabbi agreed and began to bless them: 'May Hashem help that....' To the Rabbi's surprise, I interrupted him and said, 'Honorable Rabbi. That is not the kind of blessing I had in mind. I don't want you merely to wish them that Hashem should help them. I have done so much to help you make Migdal Ohr the tremendous institution it is today, serving over six thousand underprivileged students from Israel and around the world. I believe I have the right to ask you to say the following: "I, Yitzchak Dovid Grossman, hereby decree that by one year from today, you will be pregnant!"' The Rabbi was taken aback, but he knew that I meant business. After giving it some thought, he acquiesced and said what I had requested of him.

"Ten months later, the couple returned to me. She had not yet become pregnant, they said, and they were going to begin the treatments immediately. I asked them why in the world they would want to begin a complicated process, when there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that within two months she would be naturally pregnant. Why didn't they have the patience to wait a little longer, I asked. But they were adamant. They said that they would wait only one more week, and would begin the treatments the following Monday.

"The following Sunday, my granddaughter was informed that she was, thank G-d, pregnant; and my newest great-granddaughter was born today."

Replying, I told Rabbi Rosner that I would like to explain his own story to him.

Chassidim tell of a great Rebbe who was once asked by a couple for a blessing for a child. The Rabbi gave them his blessing and they immediately went out and bought a baby carriage, a crib and other necessities for the blessed event they expected. Before the year's end, the woman gave birth to a child.

Everyone was thrilled with the good tidings, but the Rebbe's personal attendant was very upset. He approached the Rebbe and complained. "Holy Rabbi," he said. "I have been serving you faithfully for over twenty years. Over this period of time, I have asked you often to bless me and my wife with children. And you, indeed, gave us your blessing. Yet we are still childless. How can it be that to a couple off the street you gave such a strong blessing that worked instantly, and to me you apparently gave a much weaker one which still has not worked to this very day?"

The Rebbe listened compassionately to his Chossid's complaint against him. Then he replied. "The difference, my dear son, does not lie in me or in my blessings. The difference lies in you and them. Tell me, after I blessed you and your wife, did you ever go out and buy a baby carriage like they did? It is their absolute belief in the power of the one who blessed them which gave my blessing the power to be successful."

"Similarly," I told Rabbi Rosner, "it was because you had absolutely no doubt that Rav Grossman could make such a decree, that he, the great Tzaddik that he is, was able to help you and your grandchildren."

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From: Torah MiTzion [<mailto:DONT-REPLY-TO@torahmitzion.org>]
Sent: Wednesday, July 13, 2005 11:34 AM Subject: E-Bulletin: Parshat Balak

...
Family Learning: Parshat Balak
Esther Gross

- 1) Why does HaShem ask Bilam "Who are these men with you?" (22:9). When has HaShem used this same tactic before?
- 2) How come HaShem allowed Bil'am to go with Balak's officers after all?
- 3) We see that HaShem does a miracle in 22:28- what was the miracle that occurred, and what was the purpose of it according to the Ramban?
- 4) What happened when Bilam tried to curse Israel, and how did Balak react to the result that took place?
- 5) In 22:21 we see that Bilam saddles his donkey in order to start on his journey with the officers of Balak. Such an act is not fitting for a man of Bilam's stature, so how come he did it on his own anyway? (see Rashi). Who else saddled his donkey, but for a different reason?

Answers: Family Learning:

1. HaShem wants to start a discussion with Bilam (Rasag and others). The same is said for HaShem's question to Adam HaRishon "Eyecka" (Where are you?) after the sin (Breishit 3:8). HaShem obviously knows the answers to all questions!!!
2. HaShem gave the greedy Bilam permission to go if he felt that it was to his financial advantage to do so
3. The miracle was that HaShem opened the donkey's mouth, and it spoke to Bilam. The purpose was to show Bilam that if a beast could speak intelligently, then surly Bilam could be forced to say what HaShem wanted him to.
4. Instead of cursing, Bilam blessed them. Balak was very angry in response to the blessing, since he originally sent for Bilaam in order to curse Israel
5. Bilam hated Israel so much that he did not let dignity stand in his way. Avraham – also Saddled his donkey, but for the opposite reason – He

loved HaShem so much, and wanted to carry out His mitzvah. See Breishit 22:3 and Rashi there

From: Aish.com [newsletterserver@aish.com] Sent: Monday, July 11, 2005 11:59 AM
To: Subject: Kol Yaakov - Balak
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Kol Yaakov
By RABBI BARUCH LEFF
Parsha Insights based on and inspired by the teachings of Rav Yaakov Weinberg of blessed memory
Success That Hurts

The headlines shock us. It seems like every few weeks the newspapers report more and more crime scandals involving famous athletes or Hollywood celebrities. Some of the "heroes" that many of us grew up admiring turn out to be abhorrent criminals. In fact, it appears that involvement with drugs, alcohol, DWI, theft, murder and the like, is far more prevalent proportionally in celebrity circles than in the rest of society.

Why do so many of the rich and famous have such a difficulty living moral lives?

The explanation has many facets. But the most significant one is discussed in Parshat Balak.

Parshat Balak describes the story of the gentile prophet, Bilaam, and his failed attempt to curse the Jewish people. Rashi (Bamidbar, 22:5) inquires as to God's purpose in making the evil Bilaam a prophet in the first place:

"Why did the Holy One rest his Divine Presence upon a wicked gentile? So that the nations of the world should not have an excuse (as to why they didn't serve God). They would have said, 'If we had prophets, we would have repented.' So G-d established prophets for them."

We are left dissatisfied. Did Rashi answer his question? Can't the nations of the world still claim that G-d didn't play fair? To the Jews, G-d gave the holy and righteous Moshe to lead, but to the gentiles, G-d gave the evil Bilaam! The nations will still say that had G-d given them a holy and righteous prophet, they would have served G-d properly. Instead they had a wicked leader and prophet in Bilaam, so is it any wonder that they didn't serve God? What does Rashi mean?

Inescapably, we must understand the following. It is impossible that G-d would give the gentiles a leader who is corrupt, inept and downright evil in Bilaam. If He would do so, He would not be addressing the concern that the gentiles raised, as Rashi mentioned. Therefore, it must be that G-d searched all over the world for the right person to become the prophet of the gentiles. The best person for the position was Bilaam.

This is because the Bilaam that we know of post-prophecy is not at all the same Bilaam pre-prophecy. Before Bilaam became a prophet, he was super-righteous, holy, kind, and godly. He would analyze and criticize his own actions and continually work to grow spiritually. As Maimonides says (in his Laws of the Foundations of Torah, Yesodei Torah, Chapter 7):

"Prophecy can only be received by one who is extremely wise and learned, has mastered proper character traits, and battles and defeats his evil inclination constantly."

This would be true for Bilaam as well. Otherwise, he could not have merited prophecy.

Bilaam was the best potential leader the gentiles had to offer paralleling Moshe in his supreme righteousness. This is why G-d chose him to be the prophet and leader of the gentiles. But this was all before he became a prophet. Once Bilaam became a prophet, he was spiritually destroyed. He was not able to handle the powerful experience of prophecy and it was at this point that he came to be the wicked Bilaam that we know.

Becoming a prophet corrupted him. At Sinai, G-d chose the Jewish People to be His holy nation and nation of priests, leading humanity to ethics, morals, and proper beliefs. The entire world is expected to fulfill God's will and the Jews have the responsibility to lead the world on this path. This is the idea of the "Chosen People." As such, the Jews received prophets to guide them on their journey and responsibility. But how did they achieve the gift of prophets and prophecy?

Prophets are not created in a vacuum. Prophecy is not an artificial, superficial magic trick. It was only because Abraham was as great as he was, and he passed on his spiritual greatness to Isaac, who transmitted it to Jacob, and so on, that the Jewish people merited great prophets as leaders. Moshe may have been on the highest levels possible and may have received the clearest of prophecies (see Bamidbar 12-6:8), but he owed it all to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who established the roots of the nation that could produce a great prophet like Moshe. Prophecy only comes as a reflection of the entire nation. It will not come to an isolated individual who does not have the spiritual levels and backing of his/her nation.

Great people may individually merit becoming prophets but will not be able to do so if their nation and generation is not holy enough. If we lack prophets in modern times, it is not because individuals do not exist who are worthy, but is due to the nation's and generation's unworthiness. Prophecy cannot be achieved in a vacuum.

Balaam was unable to handle prophecy because he had no nation backing him that was deserving of receiving it. Only the Jewish nation had a history as rich and as holy as it did, firmly rooted in the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, and only they could receive prophecy.

God's answer to the nations, according to Rashi, was: "Alright. I will give you a prophet chosen from your finest and most holy, and that person is Bilaam. But you will see what will happen to Bilaam and how much he will transform from holy to evil, when he becomes a prophet. He will be unable to control and gear his special power of prophecy and it will corrupt him because he is not designed for it. Only the Jewish people can produce prophets that remain responsible and sane as a result of the power of their heritage. This is exactly the lesson that I want to teach. I never sent a viable prophet to the other nations, not because I didn't want to or I was being unfair. Rather, it was impossible to send you such a prophet. If you receive something that is not designed for you, it corrupts you because it is too difficult for you to handle properly."

A power and gift that is given to a person that he cannot handle or maintain will corrupt him, making him into an evil person such as Bilaam.

Now back to our original question. Many celebrities have far too much money, power, and fame than they can handle. In addition, these gifts and blessings come to them so quickly that some of these stars have a tendency to abuse and misuse their money and fame. Instead of investing their millions wisely, they spend and indulge like there is no tomorrow until they feel empty and bored. Thereafter, any pleasure becomes worth the price even if it means breaking the law, hurting others and even hurting themselves. They are given blessings that they are not adequately prepared for and inevitably, like Bilaam and his prophecy, they become corrupted.

There are many things in life that we wish we had. But if we were to attain these things, would it make us better people or would it corrupt us? How many people do we know who used to be great and kind but as soon as they became wealthy transformed into nasty and selfish beings?

G-d knows what we can handle and He gives us the things we need for our individual, personal service of Him. Let's appreciate what we have been given and not hope for things that may be out of our league.

This article can also be read at:

http://www.aish.com/torahportion/kolyaakov/Success_That_Hurts.asp

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From: RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN'S SHABBAT SHALOM PARSHA COLUMN [Shabbat_Shalom@ohrtorahstone.org.il] on behalf of Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column [parshat_hashavua@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: Wednesday, July 13, 2005 5:22 AM To: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column Subject: Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Balak by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Balak (Numbers 20:22-25:9) By Shlomo Riskin "TORAH LIGHTS" WEBCAST VIDEO Rabbi Riskin's insights on the Parsha now live online @ www.ots.org.il

Efrat, Israel - Balaam, the famous Gentile prophet of the Bible, is called by our Talmudic Sages Balaam the wicked (HaRasha). Why is this so? True, he went along with Balak the King of Moab to curse the Israelites, but at the end of the day he blessed us, with the majestic blessing which opens our Daily Prayer Books: "How goodly are your tents O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel" (Numbers 24:5). And he even prophesied our messianic victory at the end of the days: "I see it but not now, I look at it, but it is not near. A star has stepped forth from Jacob and a scepter-bearer has risen from Israel... He (Israel) will pierce and vanquish the nobles of Moab... Edom will become (Israel's) inheritance... Israel will emerge victorious.... Amalek, the first among nations, will have an end of eternal destruction" (Ibid 17-20). These stunning words could hardly have emerged from the mouth of an enemy!

To add to the mystery of the negative assessments of Balaam's character by the Talmud, the classic Targum (Aramaic interpretation) of Yonatan ben Uziel, identifies Balaam with none other than Laban the Aramean, uncle of Jacob-Israel, who "desired to envelop and assimilate the nation of Israel" (Numbers 22:5, Targum Yonatan there). The Talmud, basing itself upon the "advice" which Balaam is about

to give – but which is never recorded – towards the end of his prophetic visions (Ibid 24:14) as well as upon the act of public cohabitation between the Prince of the tribe of Shimon, Zimri ben Salou, and the Midianite aristocrat Kozbi bat Tsur, which is graphically described at the end of our portion of Balak (25:1-9) rather than at the beginning of next week's portion of Pinhas where it really belongs, concludes that Balaam's advice was that the young women of Midian and Moab entice the Israelite men (B.T. Sanhedrin 106a). In other words, just like Uncle Laban certainly admired his nephew Jacob and desperately wished to prevent his return to the land and faith of his father and grand-father by incorporating him into Laban's pagan Nahorite clan ("the daughters – your wives – are my daughters, the children – your children – are my grand-children" Gen 31:43), so did Balaam, a sincere admirer of Israel, wish to set us off at the pass by incorporating us into Moab and Midyan.

The fundamental question however, still remains to be answered: When Israelite meets Gentile in such close proximity, who influences whom? Balaam apparently banked on Moab's assimilating Israel, although his prophetic vision suggested the opposite, that Israel would trounce Moab; and indeed, the descendant of Moab, Ruth, converted to Judaism, settled in Israel, and became the great grand-mother of King David, progenitor of the Messiah. And the true model of the midrashic picture of the "end of the days" is provided by a cryptic comment found in the Heses L'Avraham, a marvelous study penned by R. Avraham Azulai, grand-father of the Hida: "R. Akiva was the repair (tikkun) for Zimri ben Salou." What possible relationship can there be between the penitent master-teacher of 24,000 disciples who was a major architect of the Mishnaic period and the Simeonite Prince who publicly fornicated with a Midianite beauty right in front of Moses?

Rashi (commenting on B.T. Nedarim 50b) records the following incident towards the end of the life of Rabbi Akiva:

"There was one Roman personage whose name was Rufus, and he would often debate on matters of Torah against R. Akiva; R. Akiva always bested him in argument. The Roman personage became embarrassed, and – upon his return home – told his wife. She said to him, "I will tempt R. Akiva and cause him to stumble! She was a very beautiful woman; she came before R. Akiva and (when they were alone), she revealed her (naked) thigh before him. Rabbi Akiva spat, and laughed and wept. She said to him, "Why did you act in such a (strange) manner?" He said to her, "I will explain to you two out of my three activities. I spat, because you came from a fetid drop (of sperm, of which I had to remind myself). I wept, because in the end your beauty will decay beneath the earth." But why he laughed, he did not wish to tell her. Nevertheless, after she entreated him many times, he explained that it was because she would eventually convert to Judaism and would marry her. Whereupon she said to him, "And is there the possibility of repentance?" He said there was, and after her husband died, she married R. Akiva and brought him great wealth."

Messianic movements all see an end-of-world order in which all of humanity will become unified. False messianism, however, sees a coming together of many different peoples without the clear and consistent ideological goals of freedom for every individual and world peace. Stalinist Communist wanted the world union of workers to unite, but under the banner of totalitarian enslavement; Peres' New Middle East was and is devoid of individual human rights and has not yet abandoned terrorism; Laban's only commitment was to wealth and self-aggrandizement, despite his clichés about family togetherness; and Balaam, heir to Laban, was willing to curse the people of redemption if only he would be paid off in large amounts of gold and silver.

Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, believed in true messianism, an ideal founded upon the principle of "You shall love your neighbor because he is like you; (both of you share in Me, each of you is created in My image with a spark of my Divinity within your respective beings, because) I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18). And R. Akiva came from the tradition which insisted that Israel is the nation of the covenant, through whom "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" when "nations will no longer learn war anymore." R. Akiva's tradition teaches that in our meeting with the Gentile we must love him because we love ourselves, and we must – at the very least – enlighten him as to the crucial importance of the seven laws of morality. You need not be Jewish to eat Levy's Rye or to have share in Divine eternity, but you do have to be moral and humane, placing "Thou shalt not murder" and "your man-servant and maidservant are entitled to a slavery-less and restful existence, just like you" as the basis for human conduct. These ideals – and not animalistic fornication – are the love expressions which led to Akiva-istic messianism, and not the Balaam-ist debauchery of Zimri ben Salou.

Shabbat Shalom

From: Aish.com [newsletterserver@aish.com] Sent: July 12, 2005 To: Subject: MiOray HaAish - Balak
<http://www.aish.com> http://www.aish.com/torahportion/moray/Friends_and_Family.asp
By Rabbi Ari Kahn
Friends and Family

The Children of Israel have been drawing steadily closer to their destination, the land of their dreams: the Land of Israel. In the Parsha of Balak, a catastrophe is narrowly averted: A professional hit-man of sorts is hired to curse the People of Israel. In the end his nefarious plan is thwarted and the curses are turned into blessings. In order to fully understand this episode we must appreciate the context - what happened prior to this episode, and more importantly, who the protagonists are.

The forty years of wandering are all but over. Those who have been sentenced to death have perished; the survivors, their children, march on. As they near the Land, the exact route needs to be clarified: As many travelers know, the shortest distance is not always the best route. In Parshat Chukat, Moshe sends messengers to some of the locals seeking permission to pass through their land. Permission is denied:

And Moshe sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom: "Thus said your brother Israel: You know all the adversity that has befallen us. How our fathers went down to Egypt, and we have lived in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians dealt harshly with us, and with our fathers. And when we cried to the Lord, He heard our voice, and sent an angel, and has brought us out of Egypt; and, behold, we are in Kadesh, the border city of your domain. Let us pass, I pray you, through your country; we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, nor will we drink of the water of the wells; we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed your borders". And Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through me, lest I come out against you with the sword." And the People of Israel said to him, "We will go by the high way; and if I and my cattle drink of your water, then I will pay for it; I will do you no injury, only pass through by foot" And he said, "You shall not go through." And Edom came out against him with many people, and with a strong hand. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border; therefore Israel turned away from him. (Bamidbar 20:14-21)

Edom, of course, is another name for Esav. Moshe feels it necessary to regale the Edomite king with the trials and tribulations of the sons of Yaakov, and to tell them the story of the great miracles by which G-d saved their tribal cousins. Perhaps still smarting over the stolen blessings, the children of Esav respond that if they even attempt to approach there will be war. The Children of Israel wish to return home, but Edom has no interest in helping them.

The next nation along the proposed route doesn't even wait for Moshe's messengers: they send troops as soon as they hear that the Israelites are near:

And when King Arad the Canaanite, who lived in the Negev, heard tell that Israel came by the way of Atarim; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners. And Israel vowed a vow to the Lord, and said, "If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. And the Lord listened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities; and called the name of the place Hormah. (Bamidbar 21:1-3)

From there they continued north:

And the people of Israel set forward, and camped in Ovot. And they journeyed from Ovot, and camped at Iye haAvarim, in the wilderness which is before Moav, toward the sunrise. From there they moved, and camped in the Valley of Zared. From there they moved, and camped on the other side of Arnon, which is in the wilderness that comes out of the borders of the Emorites; for Arnon is the border of Moav, between Moav and the Emorites. (Bamidbar 21:10-13)

Now they find themselves between two tribes, the Moavites and the Emorites. Once again they send messengers who are rebuffed, but this time they are attacked. In defending themselves, Israel captures the enemy's cities. The conquest had begun:

And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Emorites, saying, "Let me pass through your land; we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well; but we will go along by the king's high way, until we are past your borders." And Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his border; but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness; and he came to Yahaz, and fought against Israel. And Israel struck him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon to Yabbok, to the sons of Ammon; for the border of the sons of Ammon was strong. And Israel took all these cities; and Israel lived in all the cities of the Emorites, in Heshbon, and in all its villages. For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Emorites, who had fought against the former king of Moav, and taken all his land out of his hand, to Ammon. (Bamidbar 21:21-26)

The text indicates some intrigue regarding the land captured, for it contained tracts which had belonged to the neighboring tribe, Moav. All this information-military, territorial, tribal, provides the backdrop for this week's parsha.

And the people of Israel set forward, and camped in the plains of Moav on this side of the Jordan by Jericho. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Emorites. And Moav was very afraid of the people, because they were many; and Moav was distressed because of the People of Israel. And Moav said to the elders of Midian, "Now shall this company lick up all who are around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moavites at that time. (Bamidbar 22:1-4)

The larger picture has various tribes in the mix: Edom, Canaan, Emori, Moav and Midian. Edom was approached with words of peace; they responded with venom. The Canaanites waged a preemptive strike but were foiled. The Emori were also approached but chose battle. Now Moav feels that they are next. Apparently, they feel battle will be futile, yet they still wish to resist in some way.

Moav, who most likely were waiting for the opportunity to regain their captured lands, find that someone else has beaten them to it. Yet instead of taking pleasure in the defeat of their enemies the Moavites take a different strategy: they reach out to Midian, forming a confederation with their erstwhile conquerors against their new common enemy, the Israelites. Anyone familiar with biblical history can appreciate the irony of this union; these two tribes did not always get along:

"And Moav said to the elders of Midian": But did not these (Moav and Midian) always hate one another, just as is stated, (Bereishit 36:35) "who had smitten Midian in the country of Moav", from which it is evident that Midian had come against

Moav in war? But out of fear of Israel they now made peace between themselves. [Rashi Bamidbar 22:4 (see Sanhedrin:105a)]

Midian's motivation to join the fray at this juncture is interesting: Even a cursory glance at a map of the region makes it clear that while Moav may be the next tribe Israel will encounter, the Midianites were at least one tribe removed, and would meet the Israelites only after Moav. Thus, Midian's interest is to head off the Israelites, to bring their advance to a halt before it reaches their own soil. The mode of action they choose to accomplish this goal is intriguing; they attempt to "curse" the people instead of fighting them. This choice of action displays certain insight into the community of Israel. Rashi explains:

And what induced Moav to take counsel of Midian? When they saw that Israel was victorious in a supernatural manner they said, "The leader of these people grew up in Midian; let us ask them what is his chief characteristic." They replied to them; "His power lies only in his mouth (in prayer)"; Whereupon they said, "Then we must come against them with a man whose power lies in his mouth" (Rashi, Bamidbar 22:4)

Moav has done excellent intelligence gathering: they discover that Moshe spent many years in Midian, and had lived with the "priest" of Midian. They perceive the problem as spiritual, and therefore seek a solution in the occult.

However, the issues may run even deeper. Who are the Moavites? The Midianites? Where did they come from? Are these tribes well-established in the lands in question? What is their belief system? Are they simply generic pagans, or do they both come from a more evolved heritage? The other tribes mentioned --the Canaanites and Emorites-- have been living in the region for generations; they are 'locals' who will not tolerate the infiltration of this new tribe. Canaan is as far removed from the Israelites as anyone could be in those days. Canaan was the son of the Cham, a family line cursed for all time:

And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. And he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers". And he said, "Blessed be the Lord G-d of Shem; and Canaan shall be his slave." (Bereishit 9:22-26)

Beyond the security and economic concerns, Canaan could not have been overjoyed by the prospect of the descendants of Shem making their way to their land. Who are the Emorite? They are none other than the sons of Canaan:

And Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn, and Het, and the Yevusite, and the Emorite, and the Girgashite, and the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite, and the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite; and afterwards were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad. (Bereishit 10:15-18)

Despite whatever strife there was between these families, they shared a common ancestral heritage and, as a result, a common enemy against whom they were willing to fight. Moreover, the Emori received special mention in the Covenant between G-d and Avraham, in which Avraham is told that his descendants would be exiled yet one day return:

And he said to Avram, "Know for a certainty that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great wealth. And you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come here again; for the iniquity of the Emorites is not yet full. (Bereishit 15:13-16)

The land of Israel does not tolerate wickedness, though G-d apparently allows some "slack" to sinners, giving them ample opportunity to mend their ways. Only upon extreme neglect does their collective punishment follow; hence, the unfolding of the intertwined histories of the descendants of Shem and the Canaanites/descendants of Cham.

But who are the Moavites and Midianites? Moav was the illicit son of Lot, the product of his incestuous dalliance with his daughter. Lot was Avraham's nephew, the orphaned child whom Avraham took under his wing. Lot was raised under Avraham's roof; he was well-acquainted with the moral and spiritual greatness of Avraham. He and his descendants knew of the promise made by G-d to Avraham. They knew that the power of the Israelites was not only physical. So why did they turn to Midian? The answer lies in the identity of Midian, a tribe even more closely related to Avraham:

Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bore him Zimran, and Yokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. (Bereishit 25:1,2)

Midian was the son of Avraham! When Avraham was old and he put his affairs in order he gave his children gifts:

And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But to the sons of the concubines, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, to the east country. (Bereishit 25:6,7)

Avraham saw Yitzchak as his only true son - he being the son of his soul-mate Sarah, and he bequeathed to him all he had. To his other sons he gave no land, only "gifts", and sent them away, east of Israel. What gifts were these?

What gifts [did he give them]? - R. Jeremiah b. Abba said: This teaches that he imparted to them [the secrets of] the unhallowed arts (impure names). Sanhedrin 91a (see Rashi Bereishit 25:6)

As the Israelites march back toward the land bequeathed to them by Avraham, Midian appears. They realize that to defeat the Israelites they require spiritual acumen as well. These children of Keturah are aware of their own spiritual powers, but feel inadequate, and create a confederation of the larger Abrahamic family. Armed with their magical powers (verse 7), they undertake a non-conventional strategy to defeat the Israelites, turning to a prominent spiritual figure, Bil'am the son of Beor, an outsider to the conflict from a more distant territory:

He sent messengers therefore to Bil'am, the son of Beor, to Petor, which is by the river of the land of the sons of his people, to summon him. (Bamidbar 22:5)

The geographical reference is obscure: Where is Petor? Which river is this? From the context, the river in question seems well-known. The Ibn Ezra takes this entire reference as indicating Aram Naharaim, the Aramite "city between the rivers" (i.e., in the delta formed by the meeting of the Tigris and Euphrates: Mesopotamia). The Ibn Ezra utilizes another verse to make this identification:

An Ammonite or Moavite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever; Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when you came out of Egypt; and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Aram Naharaim, to curse you. (Dvarim 23:4,5)

Here the place of origin of Bil'am is described as Aram Naharaim, which is also Avraham's birthplace. When asking his servant to bring back a wife for his son from his hometown Avraham sends his servant to the same place, Aram Naharaim:

And I will make you swear by the Lord, the G-d of heaven, and the G-d of the earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live; But you shall go to my country, and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac. (Bereishit 24:3,4)

And the servant took ten of his master's camels, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand; and he arose, and went to Aram Naharaim, to the city of Nahor. (Bereishit 24:10)

In fact, this River is actually an important element of Avraham's identity, who is described as having come from "the other side of the river". This defining characteristic has always been understood as more than a geographic quirk; Avraham was known as "halvri" (Bereishit 14:13)

"...and told Avram the Hebrew (ha'ivri)..." R. Judah said: [ha'Ivri signifies that] the whole world was on one side ('ever) while he was on the other side ('ever)... The Rabbis said: It means that he came from across the river (Midrash Rabbah - Bereishit 42:8)

The children of Lot and the children of Keturah knew of the spiritual power of the People of Israel. They knew that a conventional attack against them would be futile. They conjectured that the only way to defeat those who bore the blessing of Avraham would be to procure a new "Avraham". They return to the same breeding ground, Avraham's hometown beyond the River, and seek out the legendary Bil'am, known for his spiritual prowess, in the hope that he could undo the blessings and merit accrued by Avraham.

Unfortunately for them -- fortunately for us - Bil'am was merely an "Avraham wannabe" . He was a counterfeit. The careful reader will note numerous literary references to Avraham in Bil'am's soliloquies, as well as narrative parallels between the Torah's discussion of Avraham and the story of Bil'am. These are not accidental: they are part of the image Bil'am carefully cultivated as the "second coming" of Avraham. Bil'am, like Avraham, rises early in the morning and mounts his donkey, though while Avraham prayed for his enemies, Bil'am wishes to curse his. The conclusion is equally fitting: G-d forces Bil'am to bless the Israelites, leaving him (and us) with some important lessons: If you wish to be like Avraham, bless the people as he would have. Avraham's power is in his essence as a blessing to the Jews and all of humanity, the source of spiritual enlightenment that cannot be twisted or perverted. The truth Avraham sought and found, the direct and continuous relationship with G-d he established, will always shine through the darkness spread by spiritual pretenders, false messiahs, bankrupt philosophies. This truth and spiritual stature are the legacy of Avraham's sons Yitzchak and Ya'akov and of their descendants, and are available to any of the descendants of Shem, Cham and Yefet who seek it in earnest.

This article can also be read at:
http://www.aish.com/torahportion/moray/Friends_and_Family.asp

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