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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BALAK - 5768

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The Apter Rebbe Bends The Rules For Ahavas Yisrael

The Apter Rebbe was known by his sefer called Ohev Yisrael [lover of Israel]. The Apter Rebbe was, as the name of this sefer implies, an exceptional proponent of the mitzvah of loving one's fellow Jew. He was accustomed to say that in every single Torah portion there is an allusion to Ahavas Yisrael (the mitzvah of loving a fellow Jew).

One of his Chassidim came to him and asked where such allusion was to be found in Parshas Balak. A superficial reading of this parsha certainly turns up no such reference.

The Rebbe looked at the Chossid in surprise and told him there was an obvious allusion — the name BaLaK is an acronym for the words V'ahavta L'Reacha Kamocha [You shall love your neighbor as yourself] [Vayikra 19:18]! The Chossid looked at the Rebbe and protested, "But Rebbe, Balak is spelled Beis Lamed Kuf and the words in the pasuk [verse] teaching we should love our neighbor begin with the letters Vov Lamed Chaf? — You are matching a Beis with a Vov and a Kuf with a Chaf to make this allusion!" [The matched letters make the same sounds, but are different letters.]

The Apter Rebbe responded with something that was more than just a whimsical quip. He responded with a profound insight saying: "You have been my Chossid all these years. Haven't you learned yet that when it comes to 'Ahavas Yisrael', you can't be so precise about the exact lettering (ven es kumpt tzu Ahavas Yisrael ken mi'nisht medakdek zayn mitt de'oysiyos)?"

The Apter Rebbe knew very well how to spell Balak. But he was teaching his disciple the lesson that when it comes to Ahavas Yisrael, there must be an elasticity. We have to cut people flak. We have to be a little more tolerant, a little more open, a little more willing to bend.

If we go with strict justice (shuras haDin) one will not achieve Ahavas Yisrael. One has to go beyond the strict interpretation of the rules in order to achieve Ahavas Yisrael. One who is too precise will never be a true Ohev Yisrael and never come to complete fulfillment of the mitzvah "V'Ahavta L'Reacha Kamocha".

The Differences Between Avraham and Bilaam, and Avraham and Iyov
The Mishna [Avos 5:22] teaches: "Those who have a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul (ayin tova, ruach nemucha, nefesh shefalah) are

among the disciples of our forefather Avraham. Those who have an evil eye, an arrogant spirit and a greedy soul (ayin ra'ah, ruach gevoha, nefesh rechava) are among the disciples of the wicked Bilaam.

What does ayin tova (a good eye) really mean? It means a generosity of spirit and a generosity of dealing with people — to give and to give with an ayin tova.

Rabbeinu Yona asks how we know that Avraham Avinu had an 'ayin tova'. Rabbeinu Yona cites as proof the pasuk "and he took a calf, tender and good" [Bereshis 18:7]. When the 3 Angels came, Avraham went and slaughtered for each his own head of cattle and prepared for each his own tongue with mustard.

When we look at this part of Parshas Vayera, there seem to be many examples that Avraham had a generous spirit. Avraham had a whole hotel going — providing food, drink, and companionship. Why does Rabbeinu Yona specifically cite the above-cited pasuk to demonstrate that Avraham Avinu had an ayin tova?

Rav Matisyahu Solomon explains that there is a difference between a normal "baal chessed" [kind person] and a person who has an "Ayin Tova". If a person is a normal "baal chessed" and he sees a person who needs lunch, he gives him lunch. If he sees a person who needs a place to sleep, he'll find him a place to sleep.

"Ayin Tova" represents a higher level of generosity. A person with an "Ayin Tov" does not just look at the next person and ask "how might I fill his need?" Rather, the "Ayin Tov" asks himself "if I were in that situation — what is the thing that I would want the most?" This is "Ayin Tova", generosity of spirit: Not merely filling a void and not merely taking care of his needs, but looking at a person beyond his needs to determine what he really wants.

The hotel, the food, the water that Avraham provided represented an effort to satisfy the needs of the wayfarers. Providing each guest with his own tongue from a tender calf — that takes chessed to a higher level! This is "generosity of spirit" (ayin tova). This defines Avraham Avinu.

The disciples of the wicked Bilaam are at the opposite end of the spectrum. Ayin Ra'ah [evil eye] represents a certain kind of skimpiness — a person who is not able to tolerate the fact that someone else has something that he does not have.

Rabbeinu Yona cites the pasuk "If Balak will give me his house full of silver and gold..." [Bamidbar 22:18] as proof of the fact that Bilaam had an Ayin Ra'ah. This proves that Bilaam was desirous of that which belonged to other people. Bilaam did not merely say "if he will give me A house full of money". He said, "if he will give me HIS house full of money". There is more than just a concern that "I should have", but also that "he should not have" as well! This is the opposite of "ay in tova".

It is interesting to note that when the Mishna lists the key attributes of Avraham, it neglects to mention what most of us assume was his key attribute — Chessed. The reason for this is that the Mishna is specifying the root personality traits that allowed Avraham to be such a master of Chessed. Those root personality traits are a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul (ayin tova, ruach nemucha, nefesh shefalah).

Avos D'Rav Nassan [Chapter 7, Mishna 1] states: "Let impoverished people be members of your household" — like the practice of Iyov. However, when the tragedies befell Iyov he asked the Almighty 'Did I not provide food and drink and clothing to those who were hungry and thirsty and naked?' But the Almighty responded, 'Iyov you have not yet reached half the level of generosity of Avraham. You would wait in your house and a guest would come to your door. If it were his custom to eat wheat bread, you would give him wheat bread. If it were his custom to eat meat, you would give him meat. If it were his custom to drink wine, you would give him wine. But Avraham acted differently. He went out of his house and went looking around for people. When he found someone he would invite him in and inquire of his customary diet. If the person normally (only) had wheat bread, Avraham would give him meat. If he normally (only) ate

meat, Avraham would (also) give him wine. Avraham did not merely give the person what he needed. He gave him MORE than he needed."

What is the difference between Iyov and Avraham? Iyov was a Baal Chesed. He fulfilled people's needs. Avraham had the superior attribute of ayin tova. He did not merely fill a void, he would ask: "What would I want?" and provide that benefit as well.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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from **Rabbi Aryeh Striks** <striks@vths.org> reply-to striks@vths.org to internetparshasheet@gmail.com date Jul 10, 2008 4:40 PM subject Mussar HaTorah - Parashas Balak

Mussar HaTorah Torah insights into human nature from the weekly parasha. **Based on the talks of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l** (Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim - RSA) and dedicated in his memory.

"How goodly are your tents, Yaakov" (Bamidbar 24:5)

A simplistic reading of Parashas Balak might give the impression that Bilaam's attempt to curse the Jewish people was completely foiled by Hashem's intervention, and once he was rebuked, he tried to act righteously and blessed them wholeheartedly instead. A deeper reading, using the powerful searchlights of our Sages, reveals a different picture.

The Midrash (Devarim Rabbah 1:2, see also Rashi on Mishlei 28:23) tells us that while Bilaam was praising B'nei Yisrael, he was using these very same praises as a method to bring about their downfall. "Ma tovu ohalecha Yaakov...", Bilaam told the Jews that they were great – their tents were aligned in such a holy manner, modestly arranged to safeguard privacy so that no Jew would be able to look out the door of his tent and into the door of his neighbor. While on the surface this statement seemed to be sincere, our Sages teach us that Bilaam treacherously used this statement to inject the poison of haughtiness into B'nei Yisrael. Bilaam understood that feelings of conceit could bring the Jews to sin, and in fact his plan succeeded, when the Jews fell prey to the entrapment of immorality with the daughters of Moav.

How could praise of the B'nei Yisrael's tzniyus lead to a failing in the exact same area of modesty and morality? One would think that praise of this beautiful midah would reinforce their awareness of its importance and cause a greater focus on its observance. Imagine praising someone for their careful and safe driving technique. Would you expect that person to respond to such praise by driving without a seat-belt fastened and by running through red lights and stop signs? How then, could taking pride in their spiritual achievements, especially in matters of modesty, trigger such a terrible downfall of immoral behavior?

Arrogance is a spiritual illness that can have drastic and far-reaching effects on one's neshama. Among them, the Orchos Tzaddikim teaches us in Shaar Ha Ga'ava, "And furthermore, ga'ava leads to ta'ava, because one who is arrogant, his heart is wide and he desires all types of things." Simply put, an arrogant person has a greater lust and desire. It makes sense logically that feelings of self-importance should increase one's desire for forbidden activities: "I am great and I deserve to have all my desires fulfilled!" Despite their superior accomplishments in morality and purity, the conceit that Bilaam planted in the hearts of B'nei Yisrael took root, and ignited the fires of desire, immorality and sin.

It is certainly proper and even important to recognize our own accomplishments as well as those of our family members and students. We all need reinforcement and a feeling of progress to motivate us to strive further. At the same time, let us beware of the dangers of arrogance. Pride, even from positive achievements, can lead to heinous sins if not kept in the proper perspective. As we walk the tightrope of life, we can avoid slipping into complacency and conceit by keeping our eyes focused on the goal, on how much more we have to accomplish.

True, we must acknowledge our progress and be grateful to Hashem for helping us succeed thus far, but we must also feel the continued responsibility to go further and use the gifts He has granted us to achieve higher levels of perfection. May we protect ourselves and our families from negative influences, from messages of arrogance and self-indulgence, and may we nurture and cultivate feelings of humility, self-control and constant spiritual growth.

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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 - 5767]

<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. 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 *im* 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.

http://www.ou.org/shabbat_shalom/article/brander_balak_holy_jews/
July 10, 2008 Balak: Holy Jews

By Rabbi Asher Brander

Ironically and sadly, we need our enemies to remind us of our greatness. Perhaps this is why we walk into shul everyday with Bilaam's prophetic observation, mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov (24:5 - How goodly are your tents, O Jacob) on our lips. Even as other motivations might also be at play(1), it worth considering the notion that we must try harder to internalize mah tov chelkeinu - how wonderful it is to be a Jew.

Yet another Bilaam line seizes an even more prominent liturgical location (Rosh Hashana Mussaf). It is a line that for me carries a poignant message (23:21):

Lo hibit aven b'yaakov - v'lo ra'ah amal b'yisrael. Hashem Elokav imo uteras melech bo. He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov; and He has seen no transgression in Yisrael; Hashem his G-d, is with him, and he has the King's friendship

One may justifiably wonder - what type of rose colored glasses is the Lord wearing? Does G-d see no iniquity amongst the Jewish people - and what shall we make of all the chastisements and punishments that are the leitmotif of the Prophets, a recurring theme in the Torah and make more than an honorable mention in the Writings?

The secret, says Ohr Hachaim lies not in the sin - but rather in its residual effects; Sin may sully the neshama (soul) and distance it from her Creator - but at its core, the yiddishe neshama remains pristine. Shechora Ani v'naava says Israel: I am blackened -but penetrate the top layer, remove the crusted dirt and you will see- v'naava(2), that I am beautiful. Bilaam, in his quasi prophetic state, teaches us that G-d is a mabit, i.e. He gazes deeply(3) and is able to see the neshama tehora (pure soul) that resides within every Jew.

In a real live example of imitatio dei, Heilige (holy) Yitzchak, a paradigm of absolute Divine judgment, is somehow able to embrace Eisav. How? Shem Mishmuel argues that precisely because Yitzchak was so soul focused, he was able to peer beyond Eisav's exposed coarseness to uncover a brilliant soul; one that that would ultimately yield the prophet Ovadiah and the holy Tannaim, Rabbis Meir and Chanina ben Teradyon. How ironic and yet precise it is that Yitzchak whose eyes were dim had such keen insight(4).

To a neshama aficionado then, a bit of crusted surface dirt is insignificant in his journey to expose the dazzling diamond that is a soul. No wonder then, that time and time again incredible Jewish heroism springs from the most surprising sources.

In her modern Classic, Chassidic Tales of the Holocaust, Yaffa Eliach relates the story of Yom Kippur (1942?) the Bluzhever Rebbe and the notorious Jew, Schneeweiss, a flagrant Torah violator (before the war) and a kapo in the Janowska concentration camp known for his cruelty. (what follows is a slightly adapted version)

Yom Kippur was nearing and fears in the camp mounted - for everyone knew that the Germans especially liked to use Jewish holidays as days for inflicting terror and death. In Janowska, a handful of "old-timers" remembered large selections on Simhat Torah and Purim. On the eve of Yom Kippur, at the height of tension a few Hasidim, approached the Rebbe and asked him to approach Schneeweiss and request that on Yom Kippur his group not be assigned to any of the thirty-nine main categories of work, so that their transgression of the law by working on Yom Kippur would not be a major one. The rabbi was very moved by the request of his Hasidim and despite his fears, for he would have to disclose his identity, went to Schneeweiss. He knew quite well that Schneeweiss did not have much respect for Jewish tradition. "You probably remember me. I am the Rabbi of Pruchnik, Rabbi Israel Spira." Schneeweiss did not respond. "You are a Jew like myself," the rabbi continued. "Tonight is Kol Nidrei night. There is a small group of young Jews who do not want to transgress any of the thirty-nine main categories of work. It means everything to them. It is the essence of their existence. Can you do something about it? Can you help?"

The rabbi noticed that a hidden shiver went through Schneeweiss as he listened to the rabbi's strange request. The rabbi took Schneeweiss's hand and said, "I promise you, as long as you live, it will be a good life. I beg you to do it for us so that we may still find some dignity in our humiliating existence." The stern face of Schneeweiss changed. For the first time since his arrival at Janowska, there was a human spark in it. "Tonight I can't do a thing," said Schneeweiss, the first words he had uttered since the rabbi had come to him. "I have no jurisdiction over the night brigade. But tomorrow, on Yom Kippur, I will do for you whatever I can." The rabbi shook Schneeweiss's hand in gratitude and left. That night they were taken to work near the Lvov cemetery. To this very day, the rabbi has scars from the beatings of that night. The next day he (Schneeweiss) took them to the S.S. Quarters in the camp, to a large wooden house. "You fellows will shine the floor without any polish or wax. And you, rabbi, will clean the windows with dry rags so that you will not transgress any of the thirty-nine major categories of work." He left the room abruptly without saying another word.

The rabbi was standing on a ladder with rags in his hand, cleaning the huge windows while chanting prayers, and his companions were on the floor polishing the wood and praying with him. "The floor was wet with our tears. You can imagine the prayers of that Yom Kippur," said the rabbi to the Hasidim who were listening to his tale while he was wiping away a tear.

"At about twelve o'clock noon, the door opened wide and into the room stormed two angels of death, S. S. men in their black uniforms, may their names be obliterated. They were followed by a food cart filled to capacity. "Noontime, time to eat bread, soup, and meat," announced one of the two S. S. men. The room was filled with an aroma of freshly cooked food, such food as they had not seen since the German occupation: white bread, steaming hot vegetable soup, and huge portions of meat. The tall S. S. man commanded in a high-pitched voice, "You must eat immediately, otherwise

you will be shot on the spot!" None of them moved. The rabbi remained on the ladder, the Hasidim on the floor. The German repeated the orders. The rabbi and the Hasidim remained glued to their places. The S. S. men called in Schneeweiss. "Schneeweiss, if the dirty dogs refuse to eat, I will kill you along with them." Schneeweiss pulled himself to attention, looked the German directly in the eyes, and said in a very quiet tone, "We Jews do not eat today. Today is Yom Kippur, our most holy day, the Day of Atonement." "You don't understand, Jewish dog," roared the taller of the two. "I command you in the name of the F?hrer and the Third Reich, fress!" Schneeweiss, composed, his head high, repeated the same answer. "We Jews obey the law of our tradition. Today is Yom Kippur, a day of fasting." The German took out his revolver from its holster and pointed it at Schneeweiss's temple. Schneeweiss remained calm. He stood still, at attention, his head high. A shot pierced the room. Schneeweiss fell. The rabbi and the Hasidim stood as if frozen in their places. They could not believe what their eyes had just witnessed. Schneeweiss, the man who in the past had publicly transgressed against the Jewish tradition, had sanctified G-d's name publicly and died a martyr's death for the sake of Jewish honor. "Only then, on that Yom Kippur day in Janowska," said the rabbi to his Hasidim, "did I understand the meaning of the statement in the Talmud: 'Even the transgressors in Israel are as full of good deeds as a pomegranate is filled with seeds(5).

Much is remarkable about this story. To me, it was the Bluzhever Rebbe's ability to evince the spark of soul that inspires. Our job in this world is to coax greatness from those whose heights are only limited by the smallness of their self perceptions, and are clueless of the incredible treasure that lies within. May we be up for the challenge.

Good Shabbos Asher Brander

FOOTNOTES: 1. Cf. Baruch Sheamar by Rav Baruch HaLevi Epstein who employs the objective verification notion to explain mah tovu's prominence inclusion in the service 2. Shir HaShirim, 1:5 3. The verb hibit, as distinguished from reiyah classically means more intense gazing – cf. Onkelos who translates the former istakeil and the latter chaza 4. Ultimately, Eisav was a tragic failure, but that was of course Eisav's choice. 5. Berachos 57a, Eruvin 19a. Additionally, there is some Rabbinic source that teaches that a pomegranate has 613 seeds. (I have not been successful in locating it) The natural cynic in me assumes that this homiletics. Please note however the following chart that I found on <http://www.aquaphoenix.com/misc/pomegranate/>

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PARSHAS BALAK So the she-donkey turned away from the road. (22:23) >From among the many gifts and opportunities with which Hashem has graced us, teshuvah, repentance, its process, efficacy and acceptance by Hashem is one of the most significant. Clearly, as Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Shlita, points out, its meaning to Hashem is extremely impressive. The Gaon, zl, m'Vilna writes that Hashem tested Bilaam ten times before he was killed. In other words, Hashem gave Bilaam ten chances to see the error of his ways and recant. He did not; thus, he forfeited his life. This is Hashem's way with everyone. He gives us a chance, an opportunity to change, to repent our ways. He does not take out the "big guns" right away. As the case of the metzora, leper, illustrates, the plague first strikes his house, then his clothes. Only after nothing has turned him around, does Hashem plague his body.

Hashem gives even an individual as evil as Bilaam every opportunity to repent. Hashem even sent him a special "messenger," a talking donkey, to convince him that it would be prudent to repent. Bilaam, of course, ignored it all, because that is the pattern of evil: to repudiate any stimulus for

positive action, to eschew any efforts that would spur our repentance. To delve further into the matter, Rav Shteinman notes that the "talking donkey" was one of the creations that took place during bein ha'shmashos, after sundown prior to nightfall. It is almost as if Hashem wanted to "squeeze" in one more opportunity to catalyze Bilaam's repentance.

Imagine, the entire universe was already in place. Everything was ready to go forward. Hashem still was not ready. The opportunity to "bring back" Bilaam was not yet in place. One more chance, one more opportunity. It seems, perhaps, a bit unusual, a bit extreme - especially for such an evil man. Just think: we now understand how much teshuvah means to Hashem, how much He waits for it, to what lengths He will go to avail us the opportunity to return. Let us learn from Bilaam and the "talking donkey" how valuable teshuvah is. Let us also learn to give others the chance to return - and to accept their sincere contrition. Let us learn from Hashem's model.

And it stood in a narrow place, where there was no room to turn right or left. (22:26)

He could not move to the right or to the left. He was literally between a "rock and a hard place." Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, remarks that people, at times, confront the emotional challenge of not having a place in which to turn. They cannot go back, and the road forward also seems to be blocked. After the Holocaust, survivors who had miraculously been spared from death, came home to towns and villages that were gone. Evacuated of its people, void of its life, there was nothing but emptiness. Where were the survivors to go? What would they do? They were the living dead.

A Jew, however, does not give up hope. Hopelessness and despair are words that should not be found in the Jews' lexicon. As long as there is life, there is hope. Rav Zilberstein relates how Horav Chizkiyahu Mishkofsky, zl, who served as Rav in Kiznik, Poland before the war, contemplated, "I survived. I had friends who were probably more erudite, more righteous, and more diligent than I. Yet, they perished under the most brutal and heinous circumstances, their bodies not even meriting the privilege to reach kever Yisrael, Jewish burial, and I lived. Why? Apparently, for some reason, Hashem saw fit to permit me to live, so that I would devote myself to the great and noble work of helping my brethren and assisting in the rebuilding of our People."

>From that day on, Rav Mishkofsky's family saw very little of him, as he dedicated himself wholeheartedly and with great mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, to the material and spiritual sustenance of the beleaguered Jewish survivors.

This is the true Jewish attitude concerning one who is stuck between the proverbial "rock and a hard place." If Hashem has placed you there, He is indicating that He considers you capable of surmounting the challenges and even being able to help others. Indeed, a person should always ask himself, "How can I use this situation as an opportunity for helping others?"

He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no falsehood in Yisrael, his G-d is with him. (23:21)

One word is missing from the pasuk which would present a whole new meaning. The word "because" at the beginning of the pasuk would relate to us the reason "his G-d is with him." It is "because" he perceives no iniquity or falsehood in the Jewish people. As a reciprocal reward for his outstanding love for the Jewish people, Hashem is with Yaakov Avinu. Indeed, contemporaries of the Berditchever, the famous Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, would apply this pasuk to Klal Yisrael's venerable advocate, the unique individual who always found something positive to say about a Jew - regardless of appearances that would compel one to think differently. He once attended the sermon of an itinerant maggid who traveled from city to city exhorting the populace to repent and return to mitzvah observance. After the sermon, Rav Levi Yitzchak approached the Aron Kodesh, opened its doors and cried out, "Hashem! Ribono Shel Olam! Do not listen to that dear man. Do not believe what he is saying about Your children. He means well, but he is wrong. It might be true that Your children are derelict in their mitzvah observance, and they might lack alacrity and enthusiasm in

carrying out the most basic mitzvos, but it is because they are oppressed. They are hounded by anti-Semites, deprived of their means to earn a decent livelihood. They do not have the time, energy or appropriate mood to perform mitzvos properly. It is not as if they do not want to. They simply cannot! As soon as You send Moshiach to relieve them of their misery, they will certainly return and carry out Your mitzvos with fervor and excitement."

One wonders what it takes to manifest such moderation, to maintain a positive outlook on everything and everybody. Clearly, it is the result of love - love for Hashem and His children. If an individual truly achieves the love of Hashem that every Jew should possess, then loving His children, Klal Yisrael, is an extension of that love. The son of the Chofetz Chaim interprets the pasuk, "You shall love Your fellow as yourself - I am Hashem" (Vayikra 19:18), to mean that one is exhorted to love all Jews - regardless of their shortcomings. If one questions, "How can I love him, he has chesronos, deficiencies?" The answer is: "Kamocha", like yourself - I am Hashem. Just as Hashem still loves you - despite your insufficiencies, you should likewise overlook your fellow Jew's imperfections and nonetheless love him.

To go one step further, I cite the Komarner Rebbe, zl, the Otzar HaChaim who says that the words, V'ahavta l'rayecha kamocha Ani Hashem, have the same gematriya, numerical equivalent, as V'ahavta es Hashem Elokecha. ("You shall love your fellow as yourself - I am Hashem.") These both equal 907, which is also the numerical equivalent of, "You should love Hashem, your G-d."

He explains that regarding ahavas Hashem, love of the Almighty, one can always fool himself, convincing himself that he truly loves Hashem. The determining factor, the litmus test which defines true love, is the ability to manifest love for all of Hashem's children. To love the Jewish people is to love Hashem. Those who claim to love Hashem, while not displaying a similar attitude towards Klal Yisrael, love neither.

The Second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed as a result of sinaas chinam, unwarranted hatred, among Jews. The tikkun, manner in which to repair this breach, is through ahavah, love, between Jews. In his commentary to Parashas Kedoshim, the Ahavas Shalom notes that, in gematria, the word ahavah is thirteen. Thus, when two Jews love one another, this "ahavah" is doubled, totaling twenty-six, which is the numerical equivalent of Yud Kay Vav Kay, Hashem's Name. In other words, by increasing love among Jews, we thereby encourage the Shechinah's repose among us, which will catalyze an end to our bitter exile. What a practical and timely thought!

The saintly Chafetz Chaim, zl, was an individual who exemplified ahavas Hashem and ahavas Yisrael. Many episodes illustrate this reality. I recently reminded myself of a story that I wrote awhile ago, but is especially poignant in that it emphasizes both lessons: love of Hashem and love of His children.

It was the beginning of the twentieth century, and the wave of modernity was washing away many yeshivah students. They had the will to remain true to Torah, but their stoicism could not withstand the pressure of the times, so that some capitulated. They were drawn to greener, more lucrative pastures. A life of Torah did not seem to harmonize with the times. One of the students in the Chafetz Chaim's yeshivah in Radin was caught smoking on Shabbos, a sacrilege that had heretofore been unheard of. The Chafetz Chaim was immediately informed, and the student was summoned to the sage's study. The student nervously entered the room and was in the room for two minutes. He then walked out quietly. From that day on, he observed Shabbos scrupulously.

The students who "happened" to be milling around in the hall wondered about the Chafetz Chaim's rebuke. They had no clue concerning the content of his reproach, but they did not doubt its efficacy.

Many years later, an American rabbi was speaking to a group of senior citizens. After relating this story, the same question arose: "What was the gist of the Chafetz Chaim's rebuke?" One of the older men who was in the audience, slowly rose to his feet, shuffled over to the rabbi, and with a

choked-up voice said, "Rabbi, I can tell you what took place in that room. I know what the Chafetz Chaim said to that boy."

The Rabbi looked at the man incredulously and asked, "How could you know?"

"You see, Rabbi, I know because I was there. I was that boy!" the old man said, amid loud sobbing.

The man continued, "When I was summoned to the Chafetz Chaim's room, I was terrified. What excuse could I give to the gadol ha'dor, preeminent Torah leader of the generation? There was no place for excuses. How could I justify smoking on Shabbos? I entered his room, and the sage looked at me with a grimace of pain on his face. He then took my hands in his and said, "Shabbos." Still holding my hand, he began to weep. One minute went by, and he looked at me again and said, "Shabbos." His hot tears dripped onto my hands, as the sound of his weeping pierced through my heart. And then it was over. Two minutes of the Chafetz Chaim's sincere pain and burning tears. Two minutes that changed my life. He did not raise his voice. He did not berate me. He wept - and so did I."

The Chafetz Chaim's love for Hashem, his hurt at the desecration of His mitzvos, and his boundless love for a young errant Jewish boy saved a Jewish soul.

How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Yisrael. (24:5)

The Targum Yonasan interprets this pasuk in a novel manner. "How goodly are your batei medrash, houses of Torah study, in which Yaakov Avinu, the Patriarch, served." Additionally, the Targum Yerushalmi makes a similar interpretation with a slightly different focus: "How goodly are your dwelling places where Yaakov Avinu prayed." One interpretation emphasizes Torah study in the wilderness, while the other one stresses Klal Yisrael's avodah, service to Hashem, through tefillah. Interestingly, both incorporate the Patriarch Yaakov into the equation. This begs elucidation, since Yaakov was not in the wilderness. He studied in the yeshivah of Shem and Eiver, and he certainly prayed to Hashem, but neither of these services took place in the wilderness. To what is Bilaam referring?

Horav Moshe Shapiro, zl, derives from here that the unique feature which allows for the Torah studied in a bais medrash to be profoundly understood, its depth assimilated into our psyche, and for the tefillos recited in shuls throughout the world to be accepted by Hashem is that Yaakov studied Torah in a yeshivah, and prayed to Hashem in a designated place, the place where his ancestors, Yitzchak and Avraham, davened. Yaakov's dedication to Torah study, his devotion to prayer, is what has imbued the batei medrash and batei knesses throughout the generations with that segulah, unique character. Every place that is designated as a bais medrash or bais haknesses becomes inspired by Yaakov as if the Patriarch were there. This feeling should permeate us when we study Torah in a bais medrash. This is where Yaakov Avinu studied! This is where Yaakov davened! How different would our davening be if we were to infuse this emotion into our prayers. There is one mitigating thought, however. We must make sure that our shuls and batei midrash are worthy of the Patriarch's presence. We must ask ourselves: Is this where Yaakov Avinu would have davened? Is this where he would have learned?

A star has issued from Yaakov, and a scepter bearer will arise from Yisrael. (24:17)

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh notes that at the beginning of this pasuk, Klal Yisrael is referred to as Yaakov, a name which is considered to be on a lower level than the name Yisrael. He explains that if Klal Yisrael were not to achieve the correct level of spirituality, if they were to remain on the "Yaakov" level, then Moshiach ben Yosef /Ephraim would be killed in war by Romulus. If, however, Klal Yisrael were to be righteous and worthy of being referred to as Yisrael, then even that shevet, tribe, which represents Moshiach ben Ephraim, would arise and triumph over their enemies. (Chazal spoke of the Redeemers, each one called Moshiach: Moshiach ben David; and Moshiach ben Yosef, a descendant of the tribe of Ephraim. Moshiach ben Yosef will come first, acting as a precursor to Moshiach ben

David. His function is primarily of a political and military nature, whereby he will wage war against the forces of evil that oppress Klal Yisrael. More specifically, he will do battle with Edom.) Romulus will be powerful enough to vanquish him.

The Ohr HaChaim's interpretation is steeped in esoteric knowledge and eludes our understanding. Simply, Romulus is a reference to Rome, since, as the fable goes, he was its forefather. There was a time, however, as recorded by Rabbi Yisrael Besser in his book, "Warmed By Their Fire," when this term had a different meaning. It was during World War II and the German enemy, led by General Irwin Rommel, was advancing on the Holy Land. The Ohr HaChaim's statement became a portent which now sent a powerful message: If Klal Yisrael would be righteous, they would merit to triumph over the forces of the evil Rommel.

The rest of the story is fascinating and noteworthy. Aware of the critical portent of the Ohr HaChaim's words, the rabbanim in Eretz Yisrael declared a fast on his yahrtzeit, anniversary of his death, the fifteenth of Tammuz. Twenty thousand Jews joined in prayer at the grave of this holy sage. Among them was the venerable Husyanter Rebbe, zl, who seemed transfixed as he gazed at some point in the distance, while the thousands around him poured out their hearts in prayer. After awhile, the Rebbe turned to those closest to him and said that it would be good. Apparently, as it was discovered later on, the Rebbe had seen Hashem's Ineffable Name spelled out in gold letters, floating in the air above the tombstone. The Rebbe's optimistic prediction spread through the country, electrifying and inspiring the people, encouraging them to return to life as usual and not to live in fear of the quickly approaching column. They were confident that once again Hashem would redeem them from travail.

Little did the people know how close they had come to destruction. They davened at the Ohr HaChaim's gravesite, and Romulus was turned back. How did it happen? As Rommel was poised to push into the Holy Land, he was confronted with an immense sandstorm which made travel impossible. He figured that by redeploying his troops to a different position, his tanks would have the protection of the hills, allowing them to move forward. There was one problem. Hitler did not allow for retreat. The German Army only moved forward. They never backtracked without express permission from Hitler. Rommel wired Hitler for permission, explaining that this was not a retreat, but rather, a tactical deployment. Hitler wired back: "No retreat."

This battle of egos was escalating. Rommel was angry and frustrated. He smelled victory. It was almost palpable. Hitler was intractable. He was denying Rommel his moment of glory. The general was insulted and furious. He embarked on a lengthy trip to the Fatherland, as the Ohr HaChaim had foreshadowed in his commentary.

Arriving in Berlin, he was "allowed" to wait outside Hitler's door for eight hours. After cooling his heels, he was finally allowed to enter into the despot's office, only to hear him shout, "No retreats!" Rommel did not give up, and he attempted to explain the reason for his request. Finally, Hitler relented, but it was too late. Three crucial days had elapsed before General Rommel joined his army at the front lines.

Since desert advances are made at night, under the light of a full moon, they lost more time. They waited for July. Then a miracle occurred. The usually dry month of July gave way to steady - and at times torrential - rains which delayed the battle for another month. By this time, the British had a new commander, Bernard Montgomery, who was able to prevent Rommel and his Africa Korps from advancing further.

It was after the war that Field Marshall Keital, the German Army Commander, wrote in his memoirs that June 30, 1942, was the high point of the German military campaign in the desert. It was downhill after that, until the total collapse of their campaign.

June 30, 1942, was the yahrtzeit of the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh, the day that the Husyatiner Rebbe, had stood at the gravesite of this holy sage and, together with thousands of Jews, entreated Hashem to spare the Jews of

Eretz Yisrael. They succeeded in turning back Romulus, just as the Ohr HaChaim had presaged in his commentary.

Va'ani Tefillah Ashrei ha'am she'kacha lo.

I once heard an inspiring explanation of this pasuk. In the Talmud Menachos 29b, Chazal relate that when Moshe Rabbeinu ascended on high, he found Hashem sitting and tying tagin, crowns (crownlets of a Sefer Torah), to the letters. Moshe asked why Hashem found it necessary to add more to what is a perfect Torah. Hashem replied that one day there would be a great Tanna named Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef who would expound upon each and every stroke mounds and mounds of halachos. Chazal expound how Moshe joined Rabbi Akiva's lecture and was ill at ease when he had difficulty understanding the lecture. It was only after Rabbi Akiva said concerning a certain halacha that it was halacha l'maaseh mi'Sinai, that Moshe became settled. When Moshe questioned Hashem about why he had been chosen to be the intermediary to give the Torah, rather than Rabbi Akiva, Hashem responded, "Kach alah be b'machshavos." Thus has the thought risen before Me."

Similarly, when Moshe asked to see Rabbi Akiva's reward, he was shocked to see Rabbi Akiva's skin which had been flayed with iron combs, being sold in the meat market. Moshe's reaction was natural: "This is Torah, and this is its reward?" Hashem responded, "Be still! Thus has the thought risen before Me."

The bottom line is, Hashem's thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. Given the ontological distinction between Man's level and G-d's, the thought of G-d is inherently unknowable. We must accept it, because we cannot possibly understand. This acceptance of Kach alah bi b'machshavah, "Thus, has the thought risen before Me," is behind the meaning of the pasuk, Ashrei ha'am she'kacha lo, "Praised is the nation that accepts the kacha / kach alah b'machshavah. Things happen which we do not understand, but we nonetheless accept, because that is our level of emunah, faith, in the Almighty. We accept the kacha that Hashem tells us.

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If Balak and Bilaam Were Here Today...

Poor Balak and Bilaam. If they would have lived in our generation they would have undoubtedly received great and favorable media coverage, interviews on CNN and invitations to speak at the Hebrew University to tell their side of the story.

The part about the speaking donkey would certainly have made for great feature articles where it would be pointed out that Bilaam is not to be blamed for beating his animal - rather it is all the fault of that conquering, occupying, bullying angel that inserted himself into the picture.

Yet, no matter what the revisionist historians will say, Balak and Bilaam remain the guilty villains in Jewish tradition and minds. There was no justification to demonize and curse an entire people who intended to do you no harm. Bilaam is a non-governmental, allegedly not-for-profit, one man organization, proclaiming great ideals while at the same time condoning enslavement and murder of thousands. And, in spite of his protestations of idealism and even-handedness, he is for hire.

He is the original spin artist, the public relations genius, the amoral unprincipled guru looking always for new clients. He is so good and effective at his task that apparently only the Lord Himself is able to rein him

in and make his speak truths and blessings when that was not his original intent.

Bilaam is toppled from his self-importance by the G-d that he claims to represent and have contact with. His ultimate punishment is not so much his death at the hands of the Jews but it is the humiliating experience of being forced to bless when he intended and promised his employer to curse. Poor Bilaam - he should have waited a few millennia to ply his trade.

The Talmud teaches us that Bilaam's antipathy to the Jewish people was already apparent at the beginning of the Jewish sojourn in Egypt. He was the advisor to the Pharaoh who recommended that Pharaoh enslave the Jewish people and kill all of their male children. When God, through Moshe, thwarted that evil design and Israel emerged triumphant from Egypt in great numbers Bilaam tried a different tack using Balak in his effort to destroy the Jewish people.

And finally when this scheme is stopped by Divine intervention, he advises the use of lust and sinfulness to destroy Israel. His advice costs the lives of twenty-four thousand Jews. No wonder Jews throughout the ages have characterized Bilaam as 'Bilaam harasha' - Bilaam, the evil one. He has no reason or justification for his malevolence and enmity.

It is just there, like much of the anti-Semitism that infects a great deal of the supposedly civilized intellectual world today. It is difficult to deal with such baseless yet intense hatred and venom.

I think it obvious that G-d intervenes to spare us from many of the actions of our enemies and friends. Thus the story of Balak and Bilaam remains relevant and current as the topics and events in our world today. Balak and Bilaam are able to exact a price from us in lives, fortune and social standing. But now, as then, they are unable to defeat us.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

from **Rabbi Menachem Leibtag** <tsc@bezeqint.net> hide details 6:51 pm (6 hours ago) Pareg <par-reg@mail.tanach.org>, Lite1 <par-lite@mail.tanach.org>, NEW1 <par-new@mail.tanach.org> date Jul 10, 2008 6:51 PM subject [Par-new] HAFTARA - Parshat Balak mailed-by www.atlchai.org Dedicated in loving memory of Morris Novetsky, Z"L, on the occasion of his third yahrzeit 8 Tammuz, by his children: Jay and Paula Novetsky, Terry and Gail Novetsky, Danny and Nina Butler.

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HAFTARA - PARSHAT BALAK

"With what shall I come before the Lord, bow before the Most High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with myriad streams of oil?" [Micha 6:6-7]

Based on this battery of rhetorical questions [found towards the conclusion of this week's Haftara], it certainly seems as though G-d finds little value in the offering of 'sacrifices', at least according to the prophet Micha!

So why does the Bible dedicate so many laws regarding "korbanot" [sacrifices]? And why are we going to spend the next 'three weeks' lamenting the destruction of the Bet Ha'Mikdash?

In the following shiur, as we study this week's Haftara, we will attempt to answer these questions.

INTRODUCTION

To better appreciate any Haftara, it is always important to take into consideration its historical setting, as well as its context within the entire book. Therefore, we begin our study with a quick overview of the navi Micha and his time period.

THE 'BIG FOUR'

Micha is one of the 'Four Prophets' - Hoshea, Amos, Yeshayahu, and Micha - who prophesied during the same time period. Based on the opening verses in each of these four books, their careers spanned the reigns of Kings Uziyahu, Yotam,

Achaz, & Chizkiyahu - of Yehuda, and Yerovam ben Yoash - the Ten Tribes (= approx. 8th century BCE).

It is not coincidental that we find so many prophets during this time period. To understand why, we will use what we refer to as 'the sine-wave model' to highlight how the Prophets identified a correlation between Am Yisrael's behavior and the 'ups & downs' of the first Temple period.

BAYIT RISHON / its UP's & DOWN's

In our 'sine-wave model', the highest point on the graph corresponds to when the overall state of the country is best; i.e. when we find economic growth, prosperity, unity, security, and peace with neighbors etc. In contrast, the lowest point on the graph reflects a pitiable state of affairs, i.e. when there is famine, poverty, internal strife, and a state of war with neighboring countries etc.

If you are familiar with the history of the first Temple period, you'll understand why the chart of the four hundred years of Bayit Rishon would look something like a sine-wave, as we will now explain:

The establishment of the monarchy in the time of King David is indeed the first 'high point' on our graph. The country was united, its borders secure and its economy strong. Even the religious level of the people was at a high, as reflected in the construction of the first Bet Ha'Mikdash by Shlomo ha'melech.

Unfortunately, only one generation later, the monarchy split between YEHUDA (Rechavam) and YISRAEL (Yerovam), causing the country to basically 'fall apart'. Egypt attacked Yehuda and plundered the Mikdash. The ten tribes were plagued with internal strife. Not only did security and prosperity suffer, so too the religious level of the people. Hence, this time period is marked by a 'low point' on the graph.

About one hundred years later, during the time period of Yehoshafat (King of Yehuda) and Achav (King of Yisrael), the country unified itself once again (the second 'high point') and began to thrive. However this prosperity was short-lived. Despite the efforts of Eliyahu & Elisha, the Ten Tribes did not return to worship G-d properly. God's anger was reflected by the revolt of Yehu, the fall of Achav's dynasty, and once again civil war between Yehuda & Yisrael (the second 'low point').

It was only several generations later, during the reign of YEROVAM ben Yoash, King of Israel, and UZIYAHU, King of Yehuda, that harmony, prosperity and security finally returned (see II Melachim 14:23-28 & II Divrei Ha'yamim 3:1-15) - and yet another 'high point' was reached. Idol worship, in the likes of Ashetra & Baal - were no longer sanctioned in Yisrael, while Yehuda showed respect for their Temple in Jerusalem (even though the BAMOT remained).

THE BIG OPPORTUNITY

During this prosperous time of the united kingdom of UZIYAHU and YEROVAM, the prophets had high hopes for Am Yisrael to return to God. Finally, after several hundred years, the potential existed for a return to the glorious days of Shlomo ha'melech (King Solomon). It is during this time period that these Four Prophets began their prophesy. This time, G-d did not want this 'golden opportunity' to slip by.

This potential is reflected in one the opening prophesies of Yeshayahu - delivered during the reign of Uziyahu (see 1:1-3):

"The words of Yeshayahu concerning Yehuda and YERUSHALAIM: it shall be in the 'end of days' - [or the days that may soon come] - the Temple Mount shall stand firm above all mountains and tower above all hills; and all the nations shall flock to it saying: Come let us go up to the Temple Mount to the house of the G-d of Yaakov, that He may teach us His ways, and that we may walk in His paths... nation shall not lift sword against nation... (see Yeshayahu 2:1-4)

[See also inscription outside the United Nations]

Yeshayahu, in the time period of Uziyahu, foresees the unfolding of a messianic era, when Am Yisrael can realize its Biblical destiny to become a source of guidance for all mankind. It is BECAUSE Yehuda and Yisrael have achieved the status of a 'superpower', and BECAUSE the Temple & Jerusalem have become its national and religious center, that Yeshayahu anticipates this potential fulfillment.

It was God's hope that Am Yisrael would utilize their newfound prosperity towards achieving this messianic goal - the ultimate 'high point' on the sine wave. After all, it was for that purpose that He had blessed Israel with wealth and security. The prophets of this time first try to help Am Yisrael reach this goal. Upon their failure, they explain God's anger with His nation, for they failed to listen - and didn't grab this opportunity.

ENTER MICHA

Micha, a contemporary of Yeshayahu, delivers a very similar prophecy in chapter 4 [compare Yeshayahu 2:1-5 to Micha 4:1-5], reflecting this same hope. However, by then (the time period of Yotam & Achaz), both Micha & Yeshayahu had realized that the people were far from worthy for the prosperity that G-d had

bestowed upon them. They both foresee yet another 'low' before this messianic 'high' would finally materialize. They also both explain HOW and WHY this would come about:

Yeshayahu explains that Ashur will come and punish both Yisrael & Yehuda (see 7:18 & 10:4-11); Shomron will be totally destroyed, while in Yehuda only Yerushalayim will be spared, and at the last moment and only in merit of a king who will act righteously (see 10:20->11:9). [See also Hoshea chapter 1.]

Micha's opening prophecy foresees a similar fate, however he describes Am Yisrael's fall to their enemies as though G-d Himself is leaving His Temple to punish His nation for their sins (see Micha 1:1-11).

However, most important is the reason that both these prophets give for Bnei Yisrael's forthcoming punishment. Both Yeshayahu and Micha focus their rebuke on social injustice, corruption, dishonesty, etc. It would not be fair to cite only one example - for there are so many, simply read from Micha chapters 2->3 & Yeshayahu chapters 2->5. Note their call for "tzedek u'mishpat" - justice & righteousness. [Even though "avodah zarah" is mentioned, it does not appear to be their primary sin.]

THE DANGER OF RITUAL

We will quote however one short section from Micha, as it reflects not only this moral corruption, but more so the people's haughtiness. Their false security, as they feel that 'nothing is wrong'; all is fine; G-d is on 'our side':

"Hear this, you rulers of Yaakov... who detest justice and crooked look straight, who build Zion with crime, Jerusalem with iniquity! Her rulers judge for gifts, Her priests [i.e. rabbis] give rulings for a fee, and her prophets divine for pay, YET they RELY UPON G-d saying: HASHEM IS WITH - nothing bad will happen! - Therefore: because of you - Zion will be plowed as a field and Yerushalayim will become a heaps of ruins, and the Temple Mount a shrine of woods." (3:9-12)

This prophecy of Micha implies that even though the people are corrupt, THEY think that they are fine - because everyone feels 'frum' - they are sure that G-d is with them. After all, all of them frequent the Bet Ha'Mikdash - they all offer their necessary sacrifices, and even volunteer some 'extras'.

Nonetheless, they had become affluent and haughty. It is this hypocrisy that so angers G-d that He decides that the Mikdash must be destroyed.

This topic emerges as the primary thrust of the first three chapters of Micha. After this harsh rebuke and warning of imminent punishment, chapter four provides us with some hope as Micha reminds Bnei Yisrael that one day ["b'acharit ha'yamim"] a true redemption will take place - the remnant will return, but only when Bnei Yisrael will become truly deserving (see 4:1-7).

Afterward, Micha speaks about how Israel will one day counter and defeats its enemies (4:8->5:5) - even Ashur!

At this point our Haftara begins (see 5:6). Micha speaks of this 'remnant' who will no longer be dependant on any other nation, rather on G-d alone (see 5:6-7).

[Note the textual parallel to "shirat ha'azinu" (Devarim 32:1-2/ "tal", "rvivim" etc.). There are numerous parallels to Shirat ha'azinu in both Yeshayahu & Micha, most probably because God's impending punishment and later redemption of Am Yisrael during this time period reflects the principles which 'shirat ha'azinu' discusses. Note especially the aspect of affluence and indulgence after G-d had granted prosperity (see Devarim 32:13-15), and how G-d will punish (32:16-22!).

Note also how G-d will finally redeem His nation (see 32:36).

[Compare 32:19-21 with Micha 3:1-4!]

Micha continues in 5:9-14 to describe how (at this ideal time) after their victory, Am Yisrael will no longer need their weapons and fortified cities, nor any type of 'future-tellers'

In chapter 6, Micha returns to his own generation, explaining to them WHY G-d is so angry. Again he reminds them that all that G-d asks from them is to follow the ways of "tzedek u'mishpat". However, it is interesting to note how the prophet refers to this as a "riv" - a 'quarrel between G-d and His people' [see 6:1-8].

When two sides quarrel, usually BOTH sides think that they are right. Again, Micha's description reflects the people's misunderstanding that things aren't so bad, and if they do sin, why offering a korban can 'fix' any transgression.

This can explain Micha's rhetorical question:

"With what can I approach G-d - to pay Him homage -

Shall I approach Him with burnt offerings?

With calves a year old?

Would not G-d be pleased with thousands of rams, with myriads of streams of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my TRANSGRESSION, the fruit of my body for my sins?" (see 6:6-7)

This question reflects the people's understanding that no matter how they act, no matter what they may do wrong, to appease G-d they need only bring a 'korban'.

According to the navi - this attitude reflects a total misunderstanding of korbanot [& in fact most any type of ritual]. If G-d has allowed us to offer korbanot, it is not simply to counter- balance any bad deed or behavior. Rather, the primary purpose of korbanot (and the Bet Ha'Mikdash) was to serve as a vehicle through which Am Yisrael can perfect their relationship with God. But when the essentials of Judaism are missing, if there is no "tzedek u'mishpat" - then korbanot become a farce and even counterproductive. If man allows himself to become slack in his behavior towards his fellow man, thinking that he can balance his flaw simply by offering G-d some extra korbanot - then he has totally misunderstood what korbanot are all about.

Therefore, Micha concludes this section [and this week's Haftara] with his famous statement concerning what G-d truly wants from man:

"He has told you what is good and what G-d requires of man:

Only to do JUSTICE [mishpat],

and to love KINDNESS [chesed],

and to walk modestly with your God" (6:8)

SO WHY BILAM?

So why (in the middle of all this) does Micha mention Bilam. Why does he remind Am Yisrael to:

"...Remember what Balak plotted against you, and how Bilam responded to him..." (see 6:5)

In our study of Parshat Balak, we noted Bilam's 'protocol' of building a mizbayach [an altar] and offering korbanot to G-d - before each attempt to curse Bnei Yisrael. It certainly seems as though Balak assumes that a few choice korbanot can appease G-d in such a manner that He would actually allow Bilam to curse Bnei Yisrael.

Here again, we find a similar misunderstanding of korbanot. Bilam sees G-d as working in a 'mechanical' manner - like a 'vending machine'. You can achieve any result you wish with God, as long as you 'pump in' enough korbanot [sort of like how money works with man]. Bilam understands that G-d is PRIMARILY interested in korbanot, and hence - for enough korbanot - G-d would be willing to 'bend a few rules'.

During the time period of Micha, Am Yisrael suffered from a similar misunderstanding, thinking that by offering korbanot they could 'counterbalance' their haughty behavior.

Micha's conclusion is not to abolish the concept of korbanot altogether (note 4:1-5). Rather, he wants to make sure that their purpose is properly understood. After all, what good are korbanot if they hinder the perfection of that relationship - rather than enhancing it?

TAKING A CLIENT 'OUT TO LUNCH'

In Parshat Balak, there is a very interesting (but often overlooked) pasuk that serves as the introduction to Bilam's three blessings. Recall the basic 'format' of each blessing routine:

A. Balak takes Bilam to a 'high place'

[see Bamidbar 22:41, 23:13, and 23:27]

B. Bilam instructs Balak to build 7 altars & offer sacrifices

[see 23:1, 23:14, and 23:29]

C. Bilam delivers a blessing instead of a curse

D. Balak is angered, and Bilam responds 'I told you so...'

[Note how the 'aliyah' division reflects this format]

However, right before this entire unit begins, we find a different type of a "zevach", for as soon as Bilam arrived in the land of Moav, Balak takes him 'out to (a fleishig) lunch':

"Balaam went with Balak, and they arrived at Kiryat Huzoth - va'yizbach Balak baker v'tzon - then Balak slaughtered/offered cattle and sheep and sent them to Balaam and to the dignitaries with him..."

[see Bamidbar 22:39-40]

Note that even though the Torah uses the word "zevach", it is not referring to a sacrifice to God, rather this is simply the story of how Balak sends a 'proper meal' to the important guests who have just arrived. But why should the Torah bother to tell us this detail?

We know how hard Balak was trying to convince Bilam to come, but also how he worried that Balak may not want to curse Am Yisrael. Balak makes a very logical assumption; that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. For the same reason that a businessman invites a potential client 'out to lunch' (in the hope that a nice meal will help 'close the deal') - so too Balak hopes that by honoring

Bilam with a fancy meal - there would be a better chance that he would agree to curse Am Yisrael.

And sure enough, the same logic that Balak uses to entice Bilam, Bilam himself uses to 'entice' G-d - he also takes G-d 'out to lunch', before each one of his attempts to cause G-d to allow him to curse Am Yisrael. [Recall how each unit began with building 7 altars, and then offering a "par v'ayil" on each mizbayach / see chart above.]

'GODS' ACT LIKE MAN - or MAN ACTS LIKE G-d !

This assumption, that one can 'buy' God, just like he can 'buy' his fellow man - stems from a very basic misunderstanding of G-d [or 'gods'] in the ancient world - that gods, even though they carry great powers - act like humans. Therefore, I can affect their behavior by bribe and false flattery etc.

Micha is worried that even the G-d of Israel may be misunderstood by His own people to act in a human fashion; Just feed Him & flatter Him, and He'll be on 'my side'. Instead, Micha insists exactly the opposite - that G-d created man - so that he would act like G-d - to emulate Him. As Moshe Rabeinu explains in Sefer Devarim:

"...For the Lord, your God, is G-d of gods and the Lord of the lords, the great mighty and awesome G-d ["ha'Kel ha'gadol ha'gibor v'hanora..."], Who will show no favor, nor will He take a bribe. He executes the judgment of the orphan and widow, and He loves the stranger, to give him bread and clothing.

[THEREFORE - you must emulate Him:]

You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord, your God, worship Him, and cleave to Him and swear by His Name. He is your praise and He is your God..."

(see context in Devarim 10:12-21, note how the first bracha of shmoneh esray is based on these psukim!)

To find favor in God's eyes, we must 'walk in His ways' (see Devarim 10:12-13 & Breishit 18:19). And if we are instructed to offer Him sacrifices, it is not because G-d behaves like man, rather it is a symbolic act (like Tefilla) to remind ourselves that we must act like God.

[See also Yirmiyahu 7:21-25 (& 7:1-12) & 9:22-23, Hoshea 2:21-22, Yeshayahu 1:11-17, 1:21-27 - etc.]

THE FAST DAYS

The same is true in relation to our mourning for Jerusalem today. Do we pray for the Bet HaMikdash to be rebuilt so that we gain yet another avenue for 'instant spirituality'? Are we looking for the 'easy life'? - Or are we looking for an avenue to perfect a relationship built on solid pillars of "tzdek u'mishpat"? If we can answer that question properly, then hopefully G-d will answer our prayers properly.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

From: yatedusa@yated.com Date: Thu, 3 Jul 2008 15:08:58 -0400 (EDT) To: <usa-weekly@yatednews.com> Subject: YATED USA WEEKLY 07-04-08

Halacha Discussion by Rabbi Daniel Neustadt

The Yoledes on Shabbos Part I A woman giving birth is considered in Halachah to be a dangerously ill person, and it is permitted, indeed it is a mitzvah, to desecrate the ShabbosI on her behalf. Once a woman is in labor, she, her husband, or anyone else who is in a position to do so must do everything they can to ensure the safety of mother and baby. Nevertheless, whatever can be done before Shabbos to minimize the desecration of Shabbos must be done in advance.2 Indeed, an early authority3 mentions that a person should pray that his wife not give birth on Shabbos so that the Shabbos need not be desecrated on her behalf. Accordingly, a woman who enters the early stages of labor before Shabbos, although she would normally delay going to the hospital for as long as possible, should travel to the hospital before Shabbos begins so that she will not have to travel on Shabbos.4 Once a woman enters her ninth month of pregnancy, she should prepare herself for the possibility of a Shabbos delivery. The following can and must be done before Shabbos: ? The phone number of the doctor and of a non-Jewish neighbor, ambulance or taxi service should be noted in an easily accessible, non-muktzeh location. ? Make available for use a phone that has the fewest number of "gadgets" possible, e.g., no lights, unnecessary sound effects or digital readouts. If possible, avoid using a cell phone, since a light turns on as soon as it is opened. ? Program the phone numbers for the doctor and the non-Jewish driver into the phone memory, so that on Shabbos you need only press the memory button to complete the call. ? When possible, payment for transportation should be arranged before Shabbos. If one cannot pay in advance, money should be placed before Shabbos in an envelope, which the driver can be instructed to pick up himself before driving to the hospital. ? Whatever house, garage or yard lights that would be needed to facilitate leaving for the hospital in the middle of the night should be

turned on before Shabbos.5 ? Personal items the woman will need at the hospital should be packed in a bag before Shabbos. ? Arrangements for a baby-sitter to stay with other children should be made before Shabbos.

Question: What is permitted to be done once a woman feels she is getting close to giving birth? Discussion: As soon as a woman experiences steady contractions or her water breaks, even though she is not quite sure that she is ready to give birth, she (or any other person) may call the doctor and follow his instructions. If the doctor instructs her to go to the hospital, she should prepare herself to travel as soon as possible. She should not wait for the latter stages of labor before going to the hospital.6 When making the phone call7 on Shabbos to the doctor, the receiver should be lifted off its cradle in an unusual manner, e.g., with one's elbow or teeth8 — time permitting. The conversation should be limited to a bare minimum, although it is permitted to say "hello" and "thank you", etc.9 After the conversation is over, the receiver may not be returned to the cradle unless the phone line is needed for the sake of the patient. Then, too, the receiver should be replaced in an unusual manner, as described above.10

Question: What is the best way of transporting a yoledes to the hospital on Shabbos? Discussion: From a halachic standpoint, the two choices are: a) a non-Jewish driver, e.g. a neighbor, ambulance or taxi service may bring her; b) a Jewish driver, e.g., her husband, a neighbor or hatzalah may drive her. If a woman can be driven to the hospital by a non-Jew without compromising her safety or peace of mind, the Halachah requires her to arrange — before Shabbos — for a non-Jew to drive her on Shabbos regardless of the expense entailed.

Question: What are the halachos pertaining to a yoledes being driven to the hospital by a non-Jew? Discussion: As soon as the doctor instructs her to go the hospital, she (or any other person) should call the designated driver. The halachos mentioned earlier in regard to making a phone call to the doctor apply here as well. When time allows, the door to the vehicle should be opened and closed by the non-Jew. If no baby-sitter for the other children is present, it is permitted to ask the non-Jewish driver to drive the children to another person's home or to pick up a baby-sitter from another location.11 Any item which the yoledes will need on Shabbos may be taken along. If there is no eiruv or if the item is muktzeh, the non-Jew should be asked to carry the woman's bag to the vehicle. If it is the expectant mother's wish and it would help to relax her, her husband, her labor coach or another person may accompany her to the hospital, even if their assistance is not medically warranted.12 The person going along may also bring with him basic food necessities that will be required on Shabbos.13 The non-Jew should be asked to carry the items into the vehicle and from the vehicle into the hospital. If, during the drive, labor stopped and the woman feels that she does not need to go to the hospital, it is permitted to tell the non-Jew to take her and her companion back home if they cannot return safely and comfortably on foot — which is almost always the case.

Question: What is the procedure for traveling to the hospital on Shabbos with a Jew? Discussion: In the absence of any other alternative or when arrangements were not made in advance, it is permitted for a Jew (the husband or any other person14) to drive the woman to the hospital. A couple who is aware before Shabbos that the driver may be a Jew, should prepare before Shabbos for that eventuality. Therefore: ? The shortest possible route to the hospital must be checked and planned. Exact change for any possible tolls should be prepared and placed in the car. Wherever EZ Pass is available, it is preferable to paying the toll with cash. ? The car which will be driven must not be blocked by other cars or other obstructions. ? The dome light bulb in the car should be loosened or removed before Shabbos; the air conditioner, radio and tape recorder should be on the "off" position. ? Driver's license, registration, and other papers that are required for driving or that will be needed at the hospital should be placed in the car before Shabbos. ? Where there is no eiruv, clothing, food, and other items that will be needed at the hospital15 should be placed in the car before Shabbos. [Unless an eiruv exists, a sefer Tehillim should not be taken to the hospital on Shabbos, for the merit of keeping Shabbos is greater than saying Tehillim. This should be explained to the woman.16] ? If the hospital is out of the techum Shabbos, any belongings which are in the car [especially those that do not belong to the yoledes or her family17] that are not necessary for the woman (car seat, tapes, maps, etc.) should be removed from the car.18 One who failed to properly prepare himself or the car as outlined above must nevertheless proceed to the hospital in the safest,19 quickest way he can.20 If he did not unscrew or remove the dome light bulb before Shabbos, then while the door is still open and the light is on, the control knob should be turned (in an unusual manner) so that the light will remain on after the door closes. One may drive to any hospital that he wishes, as long as the preference is not determined by the desire to save money. If, during the drive, labor stopped and the woman feels that she does not need to go to the hospital, it is not permitted for the driver to continue driving. They must find a non-Jew who will take her (and her companion) back home if they cannot return safely and comfortably on foot — which is almost always the case. Once the driver arrives at the hospital emergency room, the car may be placed in the "park" position, but the ignition and the lights may not be turned off.21 The car door may not be closed upon

leaving the car, if closing the door will cause the light to be turned off. The driver may ask a non-Jew to take the car,²² park it, and return the keys to him after Shabbos or leave them at the front desk or nurse's station. To be continued next week

Footnotes

- 1 Many of the following halachos pertain to Yom Tov as well.
- 2 Mishnah Berurah 330:1.
- 3 Sefer Chasidim 793, based on the Talmud, Niddah 38a.
- 4 Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 36:7 quoting Ketzos ha-Shulchan. See similar ruling in Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:131 concerning a doctor who may be needed for Shabbos duty.
- 5 Kaf ha-Chayim 330:1.
- 6 Mishnah Berurah 330:9.
- 7 When possible, the phone call should be made by a non-Jew or a minor. When using a minor, it is better not to use one's own child; see Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 334:54.
- 8 Another option is to tie a string to the receiver before Shabbos, and then lift (or hang up) the receiver on Shabbos by lifting the string. When these options are not workable, the next best method is to use the telephone with two hands or to have two people dial. See Nishmas Avraham vol. 5, pg. 44-45 for an explanation.
- 9 Rav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 32:111).
- 10 It is important to stress, though, that all of the halachos that pertain to making the phone call, hanging up, driving on Shabbos, etc., are to be followed only when time allows. Once heavy labor is under way, everything should be done in the speediest, safest manner, as if the labor were taking place on a weekday.
- 11 This is permitted both for the safety of the children who will fear staying alone (see Mishnah Berurah 328:38) and for the peace of mind of the mother.
- 12 Igros Chazon Ish 1:141; Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:132.
- 13 Minchas Yitzchak 8:30-1. It is questionable, though, if one may take along a siddur, etc.
- 14 Some poskim say that it is preferable to use an observant Jew rather than a non-observant Jew; see Toras ha-Yoledes, pg. 81.
- 15 Only items needed for Shabbos may be taken on Shabbos. Items that will be needed for after Shabbos, may not be taken on Shabbos.
- 16 Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Toras ha-Yoledes, pg. 94). If the woman insists on taking a sefer Tehillim or any other item, she is permitted to do so.
- 17 See Minchas Shlomo 1:15.
- 18 Toras ha-Yoledes, pg. 20, 25, 101.
- 19 Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Nishmas Avraham, vol. 5, pg. 176) advises that in order to avoid possible accidents, normal driving procedures should be followed.
- 20 If time allows, any carrying that needs to be done should be done with a shinui, such as carrying the required papers under his clothing or hat, etc.
- 21 Whenever possible, one should explore before Shabbos the available choices for parking and figure out the best solution for his particular case.
- 22 Hinting, when possible, is preferred to asking directly; see O.C. 307:19.