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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> date: Thu, Jul 3, 2014 at 5:41 PM subject: In Memoriam: Eyal, Gilad and Naftali

In memoriam Eyal, Gilad and Naftali

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

July 1, 2014

This past Shabbat we read the parsha of Chukkat with its almost incomprehensible commandment of the red heifer whose ashes mixed with "living water" purified those who had been in contact with death so that they could enter the Mishkan, symbolic home of the glory of God. Almost incomprehensible but not entirely so.

The mitzvah of the parah adumah, the red heifer, was a protest against the religions of the ancient world that glorified death. Death for the Egyptians was the realm of the spirits and the gods. The pyramids were places where, it was believed, the spirit of the dead Pharaoh ascended to heaven and joined the immortals.

The single most striking thing about the Torah and Tanakh in general is its almost total silence on life after death. We believe in it profoundly. We believe in olam haba (the world to come), Gan Eden (paradise), and techiyat hametim (the resurrection of the dead). Yet Tanakh speaks about these things only sparingly and by allusion. Why so?

Because too intense a focus on heaven is capable of justifying every kind of evil on earth. There was a time when Jews were burned at the stake, so their murderers said, in order to save their immortal souls. Every injustice on earth, every act of violence, even suicide bombings, can be theoretically defended on the grounds that true justice is reserved for life after death.

Against this Judaism protests with every sinew of its soul, every fibre of its faith. Life is sacred. Death defiles. God is the God of life to be found only by consecrating life. Even King David was told by God that he would not be permitted to build the Temple because dam larov shafachta, "you have shed much blood."

Judaism is supremely a religion of life. That is the logic of the Torah's principle that those who have had even the slightest contact with death need purification before they may enter sacred space. The parah adumah, the rite of the red heifer, delivered this message in the most dramatic possible way. It said, in effect, that everything that lives – even a heifer that never bore the yoke, even red, the colour of blood which is the symbol of life – may one

day turn to ash, but that ash must be dissolved in the waters of life. God lives in life. God must never be associated with death.

Eyal, Gilad and Naftali were killed by people who believed in death. Too often in the past Jews were victims of people who practised hate in the name of the God of love, cruelty in the name of the God of compassion, and murder in the name of the God of life. It is shocking to the very depths of humanity that this still continues to this day.

Never was there a more pointed contrast than, on the one hand, these young men who dedicated their lives to study and to peace, and on the other the revelation that other young men, even from Europe, have become radicalised into violence in the name of God and are now committing murder in His name. That is the difference between a culture of life and one of death, and this has become the battle of our time, not only in Israel but in Syria, in Iraq, in Nigeria and elsewhere. Whole societies are being torn to shreds by people practising violence in the name of God.

Against this we must never forget the simple truth that those who begin by practising violence against their enemies end by committing it against their fellow believers. The verdict of history is that cultures that worship death, die, while those that sanctify life, live on. That is why Judaism survives while the great empires that sought its destruction were themselves destroyed.

Our tears go out to the families of Eyal, Gilad and Naftali. We are with them in grief. We will neither forget the young victims nor what they lived for: the right that everyone on earth should enjoy, to live a life of faith without fear.

Bila hamavet lanetzach: "May He destroy death forever, and may the Lord God wipe away the tears from all faces." May the God of life, in whose image we are, teach all humanity to serve Him by sanctifying life.

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> date: Thu, Jul 3, 2014 at 5:41 PM subject: In Memoriam: Eyal, Gilad and Naftali
INSPIRATION Eyal, Gilad, Naftali—The Daf on Crisis Response
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

July 2, 2014 Together with the entire Jewish people and all people of decency and good will, we were shocked and horrified to learn of the vicious murders of the three boys on whose behalf we had been praying so fervently, Eyal Yifrach, Gil-Ad Shaar, and Naftali Fraenkel. There are no words of comfort that can be said at this time, nor should there be; we are told by the Talmud not to attempt to express comfort when grief is still fresh, when the deceased is still "in front of us", as is literally and figuratively the case.

This week, I had to teach the Daf Yomi Shiur, and the page being studied is one that strikes too close to home at this moment. The tractate is Taanis, which in its whole is a volume devoted to the Jewish response to crisis, and today's page in specific addresses situations which provoke intense communal response. Included in that discussion are examples that are too painful to read today, including the death of children and the death of three individuals in one time period.

Also included in that discussion – in the middle of a mishnah, otherwise filled with technical details of halakhic procedure – is the story of Choni HaMeagel, a man who was perceived as particularly close to God, and was asked to pray on behalf of the Jewish people. The story is told of him going back and forth with God, making his supplication in one fashion and another, at times getting the result that he asked for, and at times not.

It may be that this story is interwoven within the mishnah's legalistic discussion in order to convey that an integral part of the mandated response to communal crisis is not only the halakhic details, but also the stories and the history of what Jews have done at these moments. Their ongoing struggle to find the words and deeds to express their fervent wishes towards God is a continuing component of what happens and what must happen during the darkest of times.

Choni's story had a happy ending, while our story of the past two and half weeks had the saddest ending imaginable. But perhaps Choni's experience is

instructive nonetheless in displaying Jewish prayer as an ongoing conversation, as a continuing effort to engage in an introspective experience where, independent of the outcome, we seek to progressively transform ourselves and to grow throughout the exchange so that we walk more perfectly with God, whatever His ultimate decision may be.

These past eighteen days have borne witness to what is widely acknowledged as an unprecedented unity among the Jewish people. At this moment, as we shift from a community that beseeches to a community that mourns, it is crucial that we continue and deepen the spiritual engagement that has been a source of national pride and partial solace. To continue to strive to walk more perfectly with God, in whatever way is most necessary and meaningful for us as individuals and as a community – whether it means to take tefilah more seriously; to engage more deeply and regularly with the study of Torah; to take greater pains to act with care and concern and sensitivity to the needs of those around us; to be more careful in the manner in which we speak about and to others – is the most we can do at this point to do honor to the memory of three innocent and holy boys.

The period of the three weeks has begun early for us this year. The time in which we as a nation are bidden to introspect upon our communal unity and how it must be repaired and enhanced has been moved up, and the challenge to see through the tears to a path towards individual and communal elevation is a profound one. It is my fervent hope and prayer that our leaders, both in Israel and America, will do what is necessary to bring justice for what has taken place and to prevent any future horrors and suffering, and that we, for our parts, will through our own behavior and our very lives bring some measure of comfort, when it is appropriate, to three grieving families and one grieving nation.

http://www.chabad.org/generic_cdo/aid/142232/jewish/3-Tammuz.htm

The **Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson**, of righteous memory, passed away [20 years ago] on the 3rd day of Tammuz, in the year 5754 from creation (June 12, 1994).

https://www.meaningfullife.com/torah/holidays/11b/On_the_Non-Existence_of_Evil.php

On the Non-Existence of Evil

Based on an address by the Rebbe, Av 20, 5711 (August 22, 1951)[15]

Adapted from the teachings of the Rebbe by Yanki Tauber

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad Chassidism, served as reader of the weekly Torah section in his synagogue. One year, Rabbi Schneur Zalman was away from home on the Shabbat on which the section of Ki Tavo (Deuteronomy 26-29) was read. In the Rebbe's absence, someone else did the reading.

Ki Tavo includes the "Rebuke" (tochacha), a harsh description of the calamities destined to befall the Jewish people should they forsake the commandments of the Torah. Rabbi Schneur Zalman's young son DovBer[1] was so greatly affected by the curses of the Rebuke that he fell ill. Three weeks later, when Yom Kippur approached, he was still so weak that his father was hesitant in allowing him to fast.

When the youngster was asked, "Why did the reading affect you so? Don't you hear the Rebuke every year?" he replied, "When father reads, one hears only blessings, not curses." [2]

Another Two Stories "From the Supernal," proclaims the prophet Jeremiah, in the midst of his lament over the destruction of the Holy Temple and the exile of Israel, "do not emerge both evil and good." [3] This is a basic tenet of the Jewish faith: G-d is the essence of good, and since everything in existence derives solely from Him, evil has no true existence. There is only "revealed good" and "hidden good." What we experience as "evil" is, in truth, hidden good—good that we, because of the limits of our perception, are incapable of perceiving as such.

The Talmud cites two stories that illustrate this point. The first involves Rabbi Akiva:

Rabbi Akiva taught: A person should always say: "Everything that G-d does, He does for the good." Rabbi Akiva was once traveling, when he arrived in a certain town. He asked for lodgings and was refused. Said he: "Everything that G-d does, He does for the good," and went to spend the night in a field.

He had with him a rooster, a donkey and a lamp. A wind came and extinguished the lamp, a cat came and ate the rooster, a lion came and ate the donkey. Said he: "Everything that G-d does, He does for good." That night, an army came and took the entire town captive. Said Rabbi Akiva to his disciples: "Did I not tell you that everything that G-d does, He does for good?" [4] (If the lamp had been lit, the army

would have seen me; if the donkey would have brayed or the rooster would have called, the army would have come and captured me.) [5]

The other story is about Nachum Ish Gam Zu:

Why was he called Nachum Ish Gam Zu ("Nachum This Too") [6]? Because whatever happened to him, he would say: "This, too, is for the good." Once the Jews wanted to send a gift to the [Roman] Emperor. "Who will go?" they asked. "Let Nachum go, for he is well acquainted with miracles." They sent along with him a chest full of precious stones and pearls. On the way, he stayed at an inn. During the night, the innkeepers took the contents of the chest and filled it with earth. In the morning, when Nachum saw [what happened], he said: "This, too, is for good."

When he arrived there, he gave the chest to the king. When the king saw that it was filled with earth, he wanted to kill all [the Jews] and said: "The Jews are mocking me!" Said Nachum: "This, too, is for good."

Elijah the Prophet appeared disguised as one of the king's ministers and said: "Perhaps this is the dust of their father Abraham, who would throw dust that turned into spears and straw that turned into arrows [7]?" There was a country which [the Roman armies] could not conquer; they tried [the earth brought by Nachum] and succeeded in conquering it. So they took Nachum into the Emperor's treasury, filled his chest with precious stones and pearls, and sent him off with great honor. [8]

This There is a significant difference between Rabbi Akiva's experience and that of Nachum Ish Gam Zu. Both reacted to seemingly negative events with the confidence that G-d is doing them good rather than evil. But in the case of Rabbi Akiva, the events themselves remained negative: he was left without a roof over his head, in the dark, and he lost his rooster and donkey. The value of these negative events was only that they prevented a greater evil—falling into captivity. Seen in this light, they do not constitute a calamity but a salvation. The fact remains, however, that these experiences were not themselves good, only the implements of good.

In the case of Nachum Ish Gam Zu, the "negative" event itself was revealed as a positive occurrence. The earth the thieves exchanged for the contents of his chest was more valuable than what they took, achieving far more than would a simple gift of gems to an emperor whose treasury was already filled with the same. The only possibly negative element in the whole affair is the anxiety and fear a person of lesser faith might have experienced; Nachum, of course, experienced nothing of the sort, since at no time did he doubt that only good transpires in G-d's world. Upon waking in the morning and finding the chest filled with earth, he proceeded to the palace to deliver his gift, confident that all would be shown to have been for good.

This difference between the outlooks of Rabbi Akiva and Nachum Ish Gam Zu is also evident in the words they used to express their faith in the goodness of G-d. Rabbi Akiva said, "Everything that G-d does, He does for good." This implies that while a person might experience certain things as bad, he knows that they are for the sake of a greater good—a good that justifies the negative experience. It does not include the recognition that the event itself is good. Rabbi Akiva did not say that "Everything that G-d does is for good"—meaning that the things He does are positive—only that "Everything G-d does, He does for good"—that G-d's doing of these things is for a positive end, even if the things themselves are less than good.

But Nachum Ish Gam Zu would say, "This, too, is for good." Not only am I confident that good shall result from this, but I also perceive this, the event itself, as positive. [9]

Two Generations The difference between them reflects the different spiritual environments in which the two sages lived.

Rabbi Akiva lived a generation after the destruction of the (second) Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple) in Jerusalem, which had served as the center of G-d's manifest presence in the physical world. His was a time of galut—a time of spiritual darkness, a time in which the divine face recedes from view and the divine providence is obscured by hardship, strife and tragedy. [10] Under such conditions, a person is incapable of perceiving the positive essence of every event. At most, he can affirm that there is more to reality than meets the eye—that while an event might remain negative in his perception, he can appreciate that it leads to a greater good. But to comprehend that the event itself is positive is beyond the capacity of one who inhabits a reality that so blatantly belies this truth. He might believe that it is so, but he cannot envision it or relate to it in any way.

Nachum Ish Gam Zu, on the other hand, who was one of Rabbi Akiva's teachers, was of the previous generation—a generation that experienced the revelation of G-dliness that was the Beit Hamikdash. To them, the quintessential goodness of everything in G-d's world was close to the surface, and the illusion of evil readily penetrable by a firm faith and unwavering trust in G-d.

The languages in which Nachum and Rabbi Akiva expressed their faith in the ultimate goodness of G-d are indicative of their different perceptions. The Talmud quotes Nachum as proclaiming, "This, too, is for good" (gam zu l'tovah) in the Holy Tongue, while Rabbi Akiva's words, "Everything that G-d does, He does for good," (kol d'avid rachmana l'tav avid) are quoted in Aramaic.

The Holy Tongue is the language with which G-d created the world—the language whose words and letters embody the divine essence of creation. A word in the Holy Tongue is much more than an agreed-upon appendage by which to refer to an object or phenomenon; rather, it represents the particular configuration of divine energy that supplies that object or phenomenon with being and life. Words spoken in the Holy Tongue imply a perception of a thing's essence. Nachum, who lived in an era of divine revelation, was able to say *gam zu l'tovah*—to express the ultimate nature of every reality.

Aramaic, on the other hand, while closely related to Hebrew, represents a departure from the Holy Tongue's clear and concise definition of a thing's essence. When Rabbi Akiva proclaimed the ultimate goodness of everything G-d does, he did so in Aramaic, for his was a more limited perception, a perception veiled by the encroaching *galut*.^[11]

Singing in the Dark While the (first) Beit Hamikdash was being consumed by flames, Assaf (one of the Levites who served in the Holy Temple) was composing a psalm:

A song to Assaf: O G-d, Aliens have entered Your estate They have defiled Your Sanctuary They have laid Jerusalem in heaps...^[12]

Asks the Midrash:

Should not the verse have said “a wail to Assaf,” “a keen to Assaf,” “a lament to Assaf”? Why does it say “a song to Assaf”? But this is analogous to a king who built a nuptial home for his son, beautifully plastered, inlaid and decorated. Then the son strayed off to an evil life. So the king came to the nuptial canopy, tore down the tapestries and broke the rails, upon which the prince's tutor took a flute and began to play. Those who saw him asked: “The king is overturning the nuptial canopy of his son, and you sit and sing?” Said he to them: “I am singing because the king overturned his son's nuptial canopy and did not vent his wrath upon his son.” So, too, was asked of Assaf: “G-d destroyed the Temple and Sanctuary, and you sit and sing?” Replied he: “I am singing because G-d vent His wrath upon wood and stone and did not vent his wrath upon Israel.”^[13]

This reflects an “Everything that G-d does, He does for good” conception of evil and suffering, as experienced by Rabbi Akiva. The destruction of the Beit Hamikdash is a terrible tragedy; but it is a positive event in the sense that it prevented the destruction of the Jewish people.

This is the ultimate level of perception of which we are capable in *galut*: the understanding that despite how terrible and tragic something is in our experience, we know that there is a higher truth, a greater good which it serves. We might eventually discover this greater good, or perhaps never learn what it is; nevertheless, our faith in the goodness of G-d enables us to bear the hardship and pain of the perceived evil in our lives. But we are incapable of recognizing, or even conceiving of, the intrinsic goodness of the “evil” itself.

But there will come a time when the veil of *galut* will lift, when the divine essence of existence will shine forth, unobscured by the shell of darkness that encases it today. On that day we shall proclaim, “This, too, is for good.” In the words of the prophet Isaiah, “I shall thank You, G-d, for having afflicted me,”^[14] for the quintessential goodness of the “affliction” itself will be revealed.

[1], Rabbi DovBer (1773-1827) succeeded his father as Rebbe and leader of the Chabad Chassidic movement upon the latter's passing in 1812. [2]. Hayom Yom, quote for Elul 17. [3]. Lamentations 3:38. [4]. Talmud, Berachot 60b. [5]. Rashi, *ibid*. [6]. *Gam zu* (“this too”) is a play on the word *Gimzu*, the name of Nachum's hometown in the foothills of Judah. [7]. When he fought against the Four Kings—see Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 43:4. [8]. Talmud, Taanit 21a. [9]. In Hebrew, the word “this” (*zeh* or *zu*) connotes an explicit and directly perceived reality (Rashi on Exodus 15:2 and Numbers 30:2. See The Awareness Factor, WIR vol. IV, no. 1). [10]. Rabbi Akiva lived in the time of the failed revolt against the Romans led by Bar Kochba (whom Rabbi Akiva had initially believed to be the Messiah); in a time when the study of Torah and the practice of Judaism were outlawed by the Romans and many Jews were tortured and killed. Rabbi Akiva himself met a martyr's death in the year 134 c.e. (65 years after the destruction of the Holy Temple). [11]. Rabbi Akiva and Nachum's different conceptions of “suffering” is also reflected in the exchange between them related in the Jerusalem Talmud, Pe'ah 8:8. [12]. Psalms, psalm 79. [13]. Midrash Rabbah, Eichah 4:14. [14]. Isaiah 12:1. [15]. Likkutei Sichot, vol. III, pp. 393-395; Hitvaaduyot 5751, vol. II, pp. 267-274.

http://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/110657/jewish/Torah-Studies-Balak.htm

[The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, passed away [20 years ago] on the 3rd day of Tammuz, in the year 5754 from creation (June 12, 1994).]

Torah Studies: Balak Adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe Published and copyrighted by Kehot Publication Society

Balak contains an episode where some Israelites have illicit relations with women of surrounding heathen tribes; and this is brought to a climax when Zimri sins openly with a Midianite woman in front of Moses and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aaron, though not himself a priest is seized with righteous anger and kills them both. For his zeal, G-d's punishment of the Israelites is stayed and Pinchas is granted the priesthood. The language of the narrative and the comments of the Talmud and Rashi make it clear that this was no ordinary sin; and Pinchas' act was of a special order of virtue. The Rebbe explores these themes, culminating in an inquiry into the philosophy of sin, punishment and reward.

1. The Zealousness of Pinchas

“And when Pinchas... saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a spear in his hand.”¹

On this verse the Talmud² (cited in Rashi's commentary) comments “He (Pinchas) saw the deed and remembered the law (about it). He said to Moses, ‘I have received a tradition from you: That he who has sexual relations with a heathen, zealous people may attack him.’”

Even though this law is not stated explicitly in the Bible, it can nonetheless be inferred from it, namely from the episode of Pinchas stabbing Zimri.³

And thus we can understand why the Torah tells us, “and he (Pinchas) stabbed both of them, the man of Israel, and the woman in her stomach,”⁴ on which Rashi comments, “He struck exactly at Zimri's male and her female parts so that everyone could see that he had not killed them without just cause.” For apparently the Torah need not have mentioned where Pinchas stabbed the woman; nor did Pinchas need to show the Israelites that he had just cause for his action: For the Talmud tells us that Zimri was openly defiant of Moses.

The reason is that the Torah is alluding to the details of the law about punishing one who has relations with a heathen woman: That the zealous may punish the offender only at the time of his act, and not subsequently.

But why this allusive manner? Why does the Torah not state the law explicitly and directly, instead of weaving it into a narrative?

The Talmud⁵ tells us that “if someone comes to inquire about this particular law, we should not instruct him to act upon it,” and this would be impossible if the law were mentioned explicitly in the written Torah. For, because of the very nature of the written Law, that which is written is a continual instruction and command. Indeed, the oblique way in which Torah informs us about this law itself suggests that “we should not instruct” the one who inquires about it.

2. The Location of Guilt

There is a division of opinion amongst early legal commentators as to whether the law about one who sins with a heathen woman is a law about the offender, or about the zealous who are charged with inflicting punishment.

One side⁶ holds that the offender, since he is not to be executed by the Beth Din, is not himself condemned to death; it is rather that the zealous person is commanded to kill him. And thus they maintain that had Zimri turned around and killed his assailant Pinchas, he would not be guilty of murder,⁷ since he himself was not sentenced to death and yet Pinchas was seeking to kill him, so that his act would have been a justified case of self-defense.

But the Talmud states: “Who is there that G-d would pardon, and yet we should kill him?” From this it seems clear⁸ that Zimri (and in general, he who sins with a heathen woman) was himself liable to death. And it is merely that this death-sentence differs from all others in that its execution is: (i) entrusted to the zealots (and not to the Beth Din) and;

(ii) at the very time of the offense (and not, as otherwise, subsequent to it).

There is evidence that Rashi holds this second view, for his commentary says that Pinchas thrust through the offenders in their male and female parts “so that they (the Israelites should all see that he did not kill them without just cause.”

Now, Rashi seems to be telling us that this act of Pinchas was to demonstrate that he had killed them at the moment of their sinning. For, if he had not done so, he would have killed them unlawfully. But if so, why does

not Rashi say simply “so that all should see that he killed them according to the law” instead of his indirect, weaker phrase, “not without just cause?”

The explanation is that on certain occasions a Beth Din must exact exemplary punishment, where the offense in itself does not merit it but where a “fence must be made around the Torah”⁹ to prevent widespread abuse. And this was such a situation; where the Israelites en masse were beginning to stray into illicit relations with the Moabite women,¹⁰ and where Pinchas would have been justified in punishing Zimri even after his act. But had this been Pinchas’ reason, Zimri would have been killed “without just cause” (i.e., for the exemplary effect, rather than because of the intrinsic act). So that Rashi’s phrase “not without just cause” is intended to convey that Pinchas was not merely acting within the law, but that Zimri himself merited death; not as an example, but for his own sin. This indicates that Rashi is of the opinion that one who sins with a heathen woman is himself liable to death.

3. The Execution of Sentence

But we still have the difficulty that if the man deserves death, why should the sentence be executed (i) by the zealous only, and (ii) at the time of his act?

And this is complicated by the fact that the Talmud holds that this sin also bears the punishment of excision (karet);¹¹ and his liability remains even after the act.

We are forced, therefore, to say that the sin has two aspects, one which deserves excision and remains after the act has been done; the other which lasts only during the act and which merits death at the hands of the zealous.

4. The Gravest of Sins

To understand this we must first consider what the Torah tells us about Pinchas: “Behold I give unto him My covenant of peace. And he and his seed after him shall have it; the covenant of priesthood, for ever; because he was zealous for his G-d.”¹²

Now this presents two difficulties:

(i) It is apparent from the wording of the text (“because he was zealous for his G-d,” “when he was zealous with my jealousy”¹³) that this sin (illicit relations with a heathen woman) is above all others relevant to G-d. As Rashi comments “he (Pinchas) displayed the anger that I (G-d) should have displayed.” Why this of all sins?

(ii) Because of his virtue, Pinchas was certainly entitled to a great reward, but not, surely, that of the priesthood, which was allocated to Aaron and his sons as a natural quality, to be transmitted eternally, just as time had been allocated into day and night (as Rashi comments in a previous Sidra).¹⁴ And, as Pinchas had not until that time been a priest,¹⁵ how could he suddenly become one?

The explanation is that of all sins, forbidden sexual unions are the most grave. Sexual union involves, as it were, the whole essence of a man,¹⁶ for from it a child may be born, with perhaps greater powers than his father.¹⁷ For, although the revealed faculties of the father are not so great, the sexual union draws from his essence. And on this level, his powers are greater. So he can beget a child with superior faculties to his own.

So that an illicit union involves a transference of a man’s very essence to the realm of the unlawful, unlike other transgressions which involve only certain of his capacities. And of these, union with a non-Jewish woman “involves a loss greater than all other sexual sins”¹⁸ for it alone transgresses the boundary which G-d has set between Jews and all other peoples (a boundary also compared in the Midrash¹⁹ to that between light and darkness). The Jew who sins within his people remains a Jew, and his son, though illegitimate, is still a Jew and can rank higher than the High Priest in wisdom and the respect which attaches to it.²⁰ But he who sins with a non-Jewish woman begets offspring who are not Jewish, and all his powers and the essence of his soul are used for this.

It is even worse than this, in fact. For birth is a miraculous event; as the Talmud says,²¹ “three partners produce a man: His mother, his father, and G-d who gives him his soul.” Even as a physical process, birth is manifestly

miraculous. And for this open disclosure of G-d’s presence to be turned to sin is something in which we can understand the phrase, that Pinchas “was jealous for his G-d.”

But how, if the division between the nations and Israel is one of G-d’s laws of nature, is it possible for it to be transgressed? The answer is that man’s free will makes him, as it were, like G-d in being able to choose his own path (“Behold man is become like one of us”²²), even where it crosses the natural boundaries which G-d has set, just as G-d Himself is not bound by any natural law at all.

And, since reward is given “measure for measure,” and Pinchas had atoned for this crossing of G-d’s boundaries, so he was rewarded by the priesthood: He himself crossed the boundary that G-d had set between priest and people.

5. The Endurance of Guilt

Now we can understand why guilt attaches to this forbidden union only at the time of the act. In all other sins, the Jew’s sanctity remains, even though embedded in the realm of the forbidden. This is why it can be rectified by subsequent repentance. Even in illicit unions amongst Jews, the offspring, though irrevocably illegitimate, is still holy: A member of the Jewish people. So, until the repentance, the guilt remains (holiness is still trapped in forbidden domains). But union with a heathen woman severs the offender from his sanctity: So the guilt ceases with the act. Or to put it more precisely:

(i) as a forbidden act, involving a man’s human capacities, it shares the lasting guilt of other sins, and bears the punishment of excision.

(ii) as the unique act of transferring the most Divine and essential power to unholiness, it carries the sentence of death, and its guilt lasts no longer than the act. This is why punishment for this aspect must be executed at that very moment, or not at all.

6. The Task and Reward of the Zealous

Why though must death be at the hands of the zealous and not the Beth Din? The freedom of choice which man is given through the Torah, is the choice between good and evil, life and death.²³ But not the power to turn good into evil or evil into good. This is something which transcends Torah and which a Jew has in his ability, by repentance, to turn (intentional) sins into merits; or conversely, as in the case of Zimri, to turn the most holy into the most profane by forbidden union.

The punishment must match the crime; and since Zimri’s was a misuse of a power higher than Torah, it could not be punished by the representatives of Torah: The Beth Din; but had to be executed by the person whose attachment to G-d transcended Torah: The zealous Pinchas.

The Torah sets boundaries, good and evil, permitted and forbidden, Israel and the nations. But the Jew has resources in his soul to cross the boundaries, for good or for bad, and to rescue holiness from the lowest reaches of the profane.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. VIII pp. 150-158)

FOOTNOTES 1. Bamidbar 25:7. 2. Sanhedrin, 82a, also Bamidbar Rabbah, 20:25. 3. Rambam, Hilchot Issurei Biah, 12:4. 4. Bamidbar 25:8. 5. Sanhedrin, Ibid. 6. Ran, Sanhedrin, Ibid. 7. Sanhedrin, 82b. 8. As is the opinion of Ramban, in Sefer Hamitzvot, Shores 3. 9. Rambam, Hilchot Sanhedrin, 24:4; Sanhedrin, 46a. 10. Bamidbar 25:1. 11. Sanhedrin, 82a, based on Malachi 2:11-12. Rambam, Hilchot Issurei Biah, 12:6. 12. Bamidbar 25:12-13. 13. Ibid., v. 11. 14. Bamidbar 17:5. 15. Rashi, Bamidbar 25:13. 16. Cf. Reishit Chochmah, Shaar Hakedushah, chs. 11:16. 17. Cf. Shavuot, 48a; Chullin, 49b, 63a. 18. Rambam, Hilchot Issurei Biah, 12:7. 19. Bamidbar Rabbah, 18. Cf. Shemot Rabbah, 36:1. 20. Horiot, 13a. 21. Kiddushin, 30b. 22. Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah, beg. of ch. 5. Bereishit 5:22. 23. Devarim 30:15.

from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org> to: weeklydt@torahweb2.org date: Thu, Jul 3, 2014 at 4:22 PM subject: Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger - The Eloquence of Silence. The Value of Words.

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

The Eloquence of Silence. The Value of Words.

The enormity of the pain of losing a child, the added hurt of the abruptness of his murder and the questions that surround it, should signal to all of us the eloquent restraint of Aharon Hakohen when he suffered the sudden double

death of Nodov and Avhiu. Indeed there are times when words are at best meaningless.

The forceful counterbalance to that silence for us is the fear that without words, the "powerful stream of life" that Prime Minister Netanyahu referred to in his eulogy yesterday could move us on and return us to routine, without moving us inside and without forging a singular memory within.

This fear threads its way throughout the story of Bilam as we will read this Shabbos. "And Hashem became angry because [Bilam] went, and Hahsem's angel stood on the road to be against him. And Bilam rides on his donkey and his two servants were with him" (22:22.) The hanging redundancy that closes the pasuk - "and bilam rides his donkey" - begs comment.

I believe the Torah wants us to appreciate that life was screaming out to Bilam, Hashem was distanced and close all at the same time, an angel was literally in front of his nose, Bilam was en route to the event that ultimately would bring about his failure and death, "and Bilaam rides on his donkey" in total obliviousness. To him it's another day, another mission, another stroll on his donkey.

Rav Schwab z"tl points out (Mayan Bais Hashoeva p. 355) that Bilam had become entirely unimpressionable. Nothing, not even his talking donkey, could cause him a moment's pause. How does a person remain saddled, maintain total composure, and simply respond to his talking donkey without missing a beat and without any question or curiosity? How does a person see with his own eyes the people who miraculously thrived in the desert with the manna and the well and all the while remain unmoved, totally unimpacted, and ready to deliver the very same curses he had prepared earlier? "And Bilam rides on his donkey."

Bilaam's folly charges us with the mandate to maintain open, sensitive and responsive hearts. This week we are reminded of that, in the face of the ongoing drumbeat of disappointments, fears and tragedies that could so easily numb all feelings and stymie any empathetic outreach.

Indeed this week's breathtaking outpouring of concern, sympathy, and generosity of heart and soul that knew no geographical or philosophical distance should undoubtedly find its way into the fiber of every Jew.

Consoling? Hard to imagine. An instructive memory? To be sure.

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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org> reply-to: ryfrand@torah.org, genesis@torah.org to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Fri, Jun 21, 2013 [Last Year] subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Balak

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Balak These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #644 -- Makom Kevuah Revisited. Good Shabbos!

Love Makes the World Go Around – But a Counter-Balance Is Required As Well

In Parshas Balak, Balak hired Bilaam the sorcerer to come curse the Jewish people. He came at a high price because he apparently had a track record. He was a very successful sorcerer. He was like a high-priced lawyer who can charge 800 to 1000 dollars an hour. Why can such a lawyer charge so much? Because he has a reputation and he gets his clients off, so he can charge what the market will bear. Balak did not want to go on the cheap. He wanted to go with someone he knew could get the job done, so he went after the best sorcerer that money could buy – Bilaam.

Bilaam was unsuccessful in cursing Klal Yisrael. But, as a last ditch effort, he told Balak, "Balak, I have a plan for you. The G-d of the Jews cannot tolerate promiscuity. I recommend that you hire the daughters of Midyan to seduce the Jewish men. They would then be in violation of the will of their G-d, which will cause Him to become angry against them." In this plan, he was indeed successful and there was a plague in which thousands of people died. This was his parting shot against the Jewish people.

What made Bilaam think that the daughters of Midyan would be successful in seducing the Jewish men? We know that Bilaam was impressed with the modesty and morality of the Jewish people. He uttered the words "How goodly are your tents O' Jacob; your dwelling places O' Israel." Chazal say he was impressed with the privacy that each tent provided their neighbors – no door was open opposite the entrance of the neighboring tent.

Given that, what gave Bilaam the impression that the daughters of Midyan would have success in their immoral attempts to seduce the men of Israel?

The Sifrei Kabbalah cite Sanhedrin 105b, which asks why Bilaam, this high priced sorcerer, was unable to curse Klal Yisrael. The Gemara explains that Bilaam's power in "knowing the Mind of the High One" was that he could sense the fleeting moment in each day that G-d became angry. The Sages say there is a brief "regah" [instant] in every day when the Almighty becomes angry at the Jewish people. Bilaam knew how to pinpoint that moment. But Hashem granted them special protection by not allowing Himself to become angry during the entire period when Bilaam was hired to curse them. About this the prophet teaches: "My nation, recall please what was the plan of Balak King of Moav and what Bilaam son of Beor responded to him. From Shitim until Gilgal, in order to know the righteousness of Hashem." [Micha 6:5]. The Talmud teaches, "What was the righteousness of Hashem (referred to by the prophet)? G-d told the Jews: 'You should know this entire period in which Bilaam tried to curse you, I changed My Behavior which I have practiced from the 6 Days of Creation and I never became angry during this time frame. Had I become angry during the period like I normally do (albeit for an instant) there would not have remained a single Jew left!'"

Bilaam's great power was thus neutralized. His power was to determine the moment of G-d's Anger. Since G-d did not allow Himself to become angry during this period, Bilaam was powerless.

We need to understand, however, what is the meaning of this idea that the Master of the Universe becomes angry every single day. What need is there for this? The Sifrei Kabbalah explain that G-d is a G-d of tremendous Love. There is thus a tremendous capacity of Love that flows down to this world, which is the reason that human beings have the capacity to love each other. The fact that husband and wife, parents and children, people in general can love each other all stems from the flowing of this Divine Love down to earth. What can be better than Love?

The answer is that too much love is not a good thing either. Unbridled love, unchanneled love, unchecked love can lead to disastrous results. It can lead to promiscuity. It can lead to love relationships between two people that are not appropriate. Therefore, this tremendous emanation of this spirit of Love can be perverted. What is the antidote? The antidote is that "G-d becomes angry every single day" (Kel Zoem b'chol yom). This anger serves as a counter balance to the feelings of uninhibited and unchecked love. This Divine emanation of momentary anger is what keeps the world in equilibrium. That is why there can be the proper love and the channeled love, and the love to the right people.

When Bilaam saw that his curses were not getting through and he realized that G-d was not getting angry, he said "Aha! When there is no counterbalance to the love, the situation is ripe for promiscuity." Based on that he understood that the time was ripe for this very private, very modest Klal Yisrael to be seduced and corrupted by the daughters of Midyan.

When the Torah in Achrei Mos describes the prohibited relationship between sister and brother, it uses a very peculiar language: "Chessed Hu". Is it not strange that an illicit relationship should be called "Chessed" (which normally means 'kindness'). The answer is that when there is illicit love in inappropriate places, the love has gone wild. It is Chessed – kindness, love; but it can exceed appropriate boundaries and be forbidden.

This is why Bilaam was confident that he would be able to entrap Klal Yisrael.

This Kabalistic idea has an application to us as well. Love must be checked and balanced. We need to maintain the "right hand which draws near and the left hand which pushes away." We need to employ this principle with our

children. We love our children immensely. We want to shower them with love and give them as much as we can and treat them as well as we can. But again, if that "Ahava" [love] is unchecked without a counter-balance of appropriate discipline and appropriate putting them in their place when the situation demands, it can be as destructive as the lack of 'Ahava'.

I recently read a secular book about children's memories of their fathers. It is ironic that there is an entire chapter about how children looking back at how they were raised and disciplined by their parents. At the time when they were being disciplined, they thought their parents were cruel and mean. However, looking back at it and seeing how they lived their lives based on the discipline their parents provided when they steered off the proper course, they realized that if they had not had that firm hand, they would have grown up to be wild animals.

One person wrote that when he was a teenager, he used to hang out with a bunch of teenagers who had rifles in their cars. They were arrested. The police called the different parents to come down to the jailhouse to bail out their kids. Every father came down and bailed out his kid. They took the kids home, gave them a lecture, grounded them, etc. When this one boy's father came down, the police told him his son was carrying a rifle in his car. The father said to the police "keep him!" and he left him there. The kid had to spend the next few days with the road crews, cutting the weeds and grass with other prisoners.

At the time, this son thought he had the most horrible father in the world. But he later admitted that the experience changed him for life and shaped him up.

I am not suggesting that if such a thing should ever happen, a parent should leave his child in jail. But the point is Love is wonderful and we need to shower our children with love. But like everything else in life, Ahava which is not channeled and which is not counter-balanced, can have corrosive effects, just like the lack of Ahava.

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: Tape # 018 -- Rending Garments on Seeing Yerushalayim Tape # 063 -- Inter-marriage Tape # 107 -- Rabbonim and Roshhei Yeshiva -- Do Sons Inherit? Tape # 153 -- Matrilinial Vs Patrilineal Descent in Determining Jewish Identity Tape # 200 -- Reading Someone's Mail and Other Privacy Issues Tape # 335 -- Postponing a Funeral Tape # 380 -- Bishul Akum I Tape # 424 -- Tircha D'Zibura Tape # 468 -- Birchah Hamapil Tape # 512 -- Pinchas and Eliyahu Hanavi Tape # 600 -- Ayin Harah Tape # 644 -- Makom Kevuah Rev isited Tape # 687 -- Water, Coffee, and Tea Tape # 731 -- Shika 7:02: Mincha: 7:00 -- A Problem? Tape # 775 -- Wine At A Shul Kiddush Tape # 820 -- Krias Shemah Without Tephillin Tape # 864 -- Davening: How Specific Must You Be? Tape # 907 -- Bracha Achrona on Coffee and Ice Cream Tape # 908 -- Krias HaTorah and Tircha D'Ziburah Tape # 951 -- The Body Works Exhibit Tape # 952 -- Beer: Is This Bud For You? Tape # 994 -- Bilam and his Donkey: A Problem of Tzar Ba'alei Chaim? Tape #1038 -- Flowers at the Cemetery? Tape #1039 -- The Maid Who Made the Cholent Tape #1082 -- Should You Buy An Expensive Esrog Box? Tape #1083 -- Krias Shema She'al haMittah: Why?

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Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

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subject: In Memoriam: Eyal, Gilad and Naftali

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

God Does Not Work For Us

Rabbi Ari Kahn

For the past three weeks, the People of Israel – both in the Land of Israel and in the diaspora – have swung violently from despair to hope and ultimately to mourning

We despaired at the report that three of our sons, three teenage boys, were missing. Reports that they had been kidnapped threw us into swirling, relentless worry and angst. Knowing this part of the world as we do, knowing our adversaries as we do, logic told us that there was little reason for hope; the silence of the perpetrators, their failure to make contact, even to make demands, made things even worse.

Yet we continued to hope, especially after seeing the boys' families: holy families, held together by dignified, spiritually aristocratic mothers who brought the entire nation together. They got us to pray, to add more holiness to our lives, to start Shabbat a little earlier, to light extra candles. These families inspired us to be our best. They brought out the powerful unity that is the secret of this great and awe-inspiring People. And still, Racheli Fraenkel warned us, "God does not work for us" and there may not be a happy ending. For some of us, her reminder gave us further reason to look up to these families, as they maintained perspective when many others did not. We continued to pray: Bring our boys home.

The report that the bodies had been found thrust the entire nation into mourning. For some, this tragic end raised questions of faith: What of all of those prayers and good deeds? What of our unity? Was it all for naught? We realized that we had been praying for a miracle that was impossible: Apparently, the boys had been killed before any of us were even aware that they had been abducted. The prayer for their safe return was an impossible prayer, yet we all prayed – and I believe that those prayers did have an impact.

We prayed for a very different ending, yet there are a number of even more gruesome possibilities for how this might have played out. We were spared the gut-wrenching decision of trading live terrorists with blood on their hands in exchange for the boys' remains. We were spared harm to our soldiers who courageously, untiringly searched for the boys. October 14th 1994, the day kidnapped IDF soldier and American citizen Nachshon Waxman, and Nir Poraz, commander of the Sayeret Matkal unit sent to free him, were killed (on the very same day it was announced that Yasir Arafat had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize), serves as a reminder that the end could have been very different.

Yet I am specifically reminded of three other boys who went missing in this same time of year in 1982: Zvi Feldman, Yehuda Katz and Zachary Baumel. On June 10th, 19 Sivan 1982, in the battle of Sultan Yacoub, we lost some thirty soldiers, and three went missing: Zvi, Yehuda and Zach – who also held American citizenship.

I knew Zach. We studied together in Yeshivat Har Etzion; we played basketball together in a kibbutz near the yeshiva – in close proximity to where Naftali Fraenkel and Eyal Yifrach went to school.

Until the end of his life, Zach's father searched endlessly for information regarding the fate of his missing son, and went to his own grave without having found any answers. Nobel Peace Prize -winner and arch-terrorist Yasir Arafat did return Zach's "dog tags" but never bothered to explain how they came into his hands, nor did he share any other information regarding Zach or the other missing soldiers.

There were no funerals for Zvi, Yehuda or Zach. Their parents never sat shiv'a. Their families never attained the emotional respite that comes from closure. These families were devastated.

Indeed, as Racheli Fraenkel reminded us, God does not work for us. At times we pray, and we do not know what we pray for. Had we all known that the boys were already dead, perhaps we would not have prayed with such fervor to "Bring the boys home," yet we did pray and God brought them home, without our being forced to negotiate with terrorists, to free murderers, or to forfeit the lives of our sons in uniform. The funerals for these three boys gave the entire nation a time and place to cry, to come together and vent our grief and frustration. The families are sitting shiv'a, processing their emotions and collecting themselves to face the coming days and years. Hopefully, this will help them achieve some closure, and eventually, peace of mind.

God does not work for us, and so I thank Him for listening, for redirecting our prayers, and for comforting the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. I thank Him for bringing the boys home.

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Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Modernity And Tradition

The major challenge to all religions and certainly to Judaism over the past two centuries has been the religious reaction to the problems raised by modernity. Modernity encompasses but is not limited to technological progress, a global economy, ideas of personal and national freedom and a search for a more equitable distribution of wealth and well being amongst all human beings.

This centuries-old struggle of modernity to improve the lot of humans has created a much more literate world, a better educated population, wealth and a leisurely life never before known in the history of civilization and a much more powerful citizenry dealing with government leadership.

Modernity has also brought catastrophic wars of devastation and death of tens of millions of seemingly innocent people. In many cases, its search for equality and fairness has only resulted in dictatorship and stifling cruelty.

The expected lifespan of human beings has been greatly, though unequally, lengthened and has now more than doubled over the past century alone. But the modern world is certainly not a happy place.

Psychological dysfunction abounds in all levels of human society. Sexual freedom is destroying any sense of family loyalty and moral behavior.

Automobiles kill tens of thousands of people every year. The specter of nuclear annihilation overrides all political and diplomatic as well as military decisions and policies.

The modern world is terribly complicated and its horrors and failures are too well documented to be ignored. Yet none of us would be willing to revert back to life as it was known in pre-modern times. Hence, the unease and frustration that are the hallmarks of our time and society.

In the religious Jewish world, coming to grips with the issues and challenges that modernity poses has proven to be a nettlesome problem. No universal satisfactory, one size fits all, answer to the clash of traditional Jewish life with the new modern world has proven completely effective - and as a result, there is a very wide spectrum of responses to the modern world within the religious Jewish camp.

These range from an attempt – really impossible on a practical level but nevertheless championed as being the panacea to all our problems – to ignore, or at the very least, oppose the introduction of the ideas and tools of modernity into religious Jewish society. Banning television and the Internet – seemingly good ideas in theory - from our homes seems to have accomplished little as far as alleviating the problems and weaknesses that persistently exist within religious Jewish society.

Embracing modernity in all of its aspects and culture has been adopted by other sections of Orthodox society. While these policies that encourage the abandonment of traditional mores and demand more leniency in halachic decision-making bring journalistic approval and noisy notice to those who push this agenda, in truth very little is accomplished for Judaism or Jews on a meaningful personal level.

So most of Orthodoxy finds itself somewhere in the middle. We live in a modern world, but with great reticence and unease. We are disturbed by the excesses of modernity that we witness daily and yet we realize that we cannot go back to the world of the shtetl and the mellah. And we therefore feel trapped and frustrated, dissatisfied with our religious and general behavior and looking for some sort of panacea that will comfort our angst. There have been numerous attempts to reconcile Jewish traditional life with the values and even lifestyle that modernity introduced into the world.

German Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century led by rabbis Hirsch,

Bamberger and Hildesheimer, each in his own way, attempted to square the circle of modern German life and continue Jewish tradition and Torah observance.

Though these great leaders were successful on a local level in their communities their attempts and solutions did not resonate in the rapidly secularizing Eastern European Jewish society and certainly not in the Sephardic world. Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant attempted to face up to modernity with his Mussar movement. Though again successful on a local level and for a period of time in the Lithuanian yeshivot, it has all but completely disappeared in our time.

The Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, both products of modernity and examples of the horrors and wonders that the modern world can create, have only complicated the issue of how to deal with modernity. Banning higher education for women, while at the same time expecting them to be major breadwinners, hardly seems to be a logical or practical policy. It may very well be that there is no general national or communal answer to this difficult problem and that dealing with the modern world and all of its complications, and yet retaining tradition and Jewish values and observances as the core of our essence, is a personal matter that each and every individual will have to decide for one's self. Sometimes it is most challenging to be Jewish.

Shabat shalom

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein

Balak

This week's parsha offers us the opportunity to meet the unofficial founders of the Human Rights Organizations of our time. Here we see the ancestors of Kathleen Ashton, who is the head foreign affairs person of the European Union, the leaders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the left-leaning anti-Semitic professors of academia the world over, the neo-communist Putin and the rest of the well-meaning, ever protesting "friends" of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

Bilaam is engaging in public prophecy concerning the Jewish people, and all for our own good. He, like his diplomatic descendants of our time, is the one person that really knows what policies we should follow in order to guarantee our long-range future survival and success. Therefore, his words are soothing, beautifully phrased and dripping with friendship and compliments.

But in his heart of hearts Bilaam and certainly Balak mean us no good. They protect terrorism, educate generations to hatred and violence and yet hypocritically cluck in amazement when violence, kidnapping and rocket attacks against Jews continue. On the surface one can find almost no fault in the words of Bilaam.

The Jewish people were and are so enamored by his compliments that our prayer services every morning begin with his statement of how goodly are the tents of Jacob. Jews love and treasure every complement, no matter how patently insincere and begrudgingly given, from non-Jewish sources and persons.

King Solomon in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes cautioned us that it is much more beneficial to hear criticism from a friend than complements from those who do not really like us. Nevertheless, we have always been naïve when it comes to Bilaam and his intellectual and diplomatic descendants.

The Torah itself tells us that the Lord reversed the curses of Bilaam and turned them into blessings. What curses are meant in this statement? We do not read in the Torah of any direct curses or even sharp criticisms aimed at the Jewish people uttered by Bilaam. So why does God have to interfere, to reverse seemingly nonexistent curses? The answer to this is a relatively simple one. The Lord Who not only hears what we say, but more importantly knows what we mean, sees beyond the beauty of the words of Bilaam.

There is a well-known story that I have often related of two women that constantly fought and cursed each other. The rabbi of the community intervened and on Yom Kippur eve forced a reconciliation and extracted a promise that they would only say nice things to each other hereon in. The women were forced to agree to the rabbi's terms. However, walking home after Yom Kippur services one of the women turned to the other and said: "Blessed may you be, but you know what I mean!"

The Lord fully understood what Bilaam meant with his "blessings" and compliments to Israel. Hence, His intervention and the reversal of the unspoken curses into spoken and eternal blessings and compliments. Not much has changed in the world since the days of Balak and Bilaam. Jews the world over and here live in a hateful and dangerous environment. We would do well to realize that we should be wary not only of those who openly curse us and even of those who claim that they have our best interests in heart when they advise and criticize us.

Shabat shalom

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

date: Thu, Jul 3, 2014 at 5:41 PM

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Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Leadership and Loyalty

Is leadership a set of skills, the ability to summon and command power? Or does it have an essentially moral dimension also? Can a bad man be a good leader, or does his badness compromise his leadership? That is the question raised by the key figure in this week's parsha, the pagan prophet Bilaam. First, by way of introduction, we have independent evidence that Bilaam actually existed. An archeological discovery in 1967, at Deir 'Alla at the junction of the Jordan and Jabbok rivers, uncovered an inscription on the wall of a pagan temple, dated to the eighth century BCE, which makes reference to a seer named Bilaam ben Beor, in terms remarkably similar to those of our parsha. Bilaam was a well-known figure in the region. His skills were clearly impressive. He was a religious virtuoso, a sought-after shaman, magus, spell-binder and miracle worker. Balak says, on the basis of experience or reputation, "I know that whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse is cursed" (Num. 22: 6). The rabbinic literature does not call this into question. On the phrase "no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34: 10), the sages went so far as to say: "In Israel there was no other prophet as great as Moses, but among the nations there was. Who was he? Bilaam." [1]

Another midrashic source says that "There was nothing in the world that the Holy One blessed be He did not reveal to Balaam, who surpassed even Moses in the wisdom of sorcery." [2] At a technical level, Bilaam had all the skills.

Yet the ultimate verdict on Bilaam is negative. In chapter 25, we read of the ironic sequel to the episode of the curses/blessings. The Israelites, having been saved by God from the would-be curses of Moab and Midian, suffered a self-inflicted tragedy by allowing themselves to be enticed by the women of the land. G-d's anger burns against them. Several chapters later (31: 16) it emerges that it was Bilaam who devised this strategy: "They were the ones who followed Bilaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the Lord in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the Lord's people". Having failed to curse the Israelites, Bilaam eventually succeeded in doing them great harm.

So the picture that emerges from the Jewish sources is of a man with great gifts, a genuine prophet, a man whom the sages compared with Moses himself – yet at the same time a figure of flawed character that eventually led to his downfall and to his reputation as an evil-doer and one of those mentioned by the Mishnah as having been denied a share in the world to come. [3]

What was his flaw? There are many speculations, but one suggestion given in the Talmud infers the answer from his name. What is the meaning of

Bilaam? Answers the Talmud: it means, "a man without a people" (belo am). [4]

This is a fine insight. Bilaam is a man without loyalties. Balak sent for him saying: "Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me . . . For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed." Bilaam was a prophet for hire. He had supernatural powers. He could bless someone and that person would succeed. He could curse and that person would be blighted by misfortune. But there is no hint in any of the reports, biblical or otherwise, that Bilaam was a prophet in the moral sense: that he was concerned with justice, desert, the rights and wrongs of those whose lives he affected. Like a contract killer of a later age, Bilaam was a loner. His services could be bought. He had skills and used them to devastating effect. But he had no commitments, no loyalties, no rootedness in humanity. He was the man *belo am*, without a people. Moses was the opposite. God Himself says of him, "He is [supremely] loyal in all My house" (Numbers 12: 7). However disappointed he was with the Israelites, he never ceased to argue their cause before God. When his initial intervention on their behalf with pharaoh worsened their condition, he said to God, "O Lord, why do You mistreat Your people? Why did You send me?" (Exodus 5: 22).

When the Israelites made the golden calf and God threatened to destroy the people and begin again with Moses, he said, "Now, if You would, please forgive their sin. If not, then blot me out from the book that You have written" (Exodus 32: 32). When the people, demoralised by the report of the spies, wanted to return to Egypt and God's anger burned against them, he said, "With Your great love, forgive the sin of this nation, just as You have forgiven them from [the time they left] Egypt until now" (Numbers 14: 19). When God threatened punishment during the Korach rebellion, Moses prayed, "Will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?" (Numbers 16: 22). Even when his own sister Miriam spoke badly about him and was punished by leprosy, Moses prayed to God on her behalf, "Please God, heal her now" (Numbers 12: 13). Moses never ceased to pray for his people, however much they had sinned, however audacious the prayer, however much he was putting his own relationship with God at risk. Knowing their faults, he remained utterly loyal to them.

The Hebrew word *emunah* is usually translated as "faith," and that is what it came to mean in the Middle Ages. But in biblical Hebrew it is better translated as faithfulness, reliability, loyalty. It means not walking away from the other party when times are tough. It is a key covenantal virtue.

There are people with great gifts, intellectual and sometimes even spiritual, who nonetheless fail to achieve what they might have done. They lack the basic moral qualities of integrity, honesty, humility and above all loyalty. What they do, they do brilliantly. But often they do the wrong things. Conscious of their unusual endowments, they tend to look down on others. They give way to pride, arrogance and a belief that they can somehow get away with great crimes. Bilaam is the classic example, and the fact that he planned to entice the Israelites into sin even after he knew that God was on their side, is a measure of how the greatest can sometimes fall to become the lowest of the low.

Those who are loyal to other people find that other people are loyal to them. Those who are disloyal are eventually distrusted and lose whatever authority they might once have had. Leadership without loyalty is not leadership. Skills alone cannot substitute for the moral qualities that make people follow those who demonstrate them. We follow those we trust, because they have acted so as to earn our trust. That was what made Moses the great leader. Bilaam might have been but never was. Always be loyal to the people you lead.

[1] Sifre Devarim, 357. [2] Tanna devei Eliyahu Rabbah 28; see also Bamidbar Rabbah 14: 20; Berakhot 7a; Avodah Zarah 4a. [3] Mishnah Sanhedrin 10: 2.

[4] Sanhedrin 105a

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Bishul Akum Problems in the Home, part II

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Last week, we began a discussion of bishul akum problems that can happen in the comfort of one's home. We now continue our discussion...

Commuter crisis

Mrs. Goldman* is stuck in a typical commuter predicament. The traffic is not moving, and it is well past the time that she should be putting up supper. She calls the non-Jewish babysitter, Jenny, to apologize for the delay and asks her to find something in the freezer to warm and serve the kids. Jenny finds some blintzes, places them on ceramic cookware and pops them into the toaster oven. That evening, when Rabbi Goldman returns from Kollel, Mrs. Goldman tells him about her frustrating commute home. Rabbi Goldman realizes that they may now have a kashrus concern in their house. As I explained last week, Jenny's warming the blintzes created a bishul akum problem. Frozen blintzes are inedible at the time the company freezes them. When you remove these products from your freezer and heat them, you are cooking them, whether you realize it or not. Therefore, when Jenny warmed these foods, she not only cooked them, but she also made them into prohibited bishul akum, thus rendering the foods and the equipment non-kosher, although she meant no harm.

Even in the comforts of your own home?

When Mrs. Goldman's mother heard about the calamity that had befallen her grandchildren, in that they ate non-kosher bishul akum food, she reacted with surprise: "But does bishul akum apply in your own house?" Indeed, she is not the first to raise this issue.

Does the prohibition of bishul akum exist when the food is cooked in a Jewish house? Since neither of the reasons for the prohibition, the risk of social interaction or the kashrus concerns, exists when the food is prepared in a Jewish house by a hired hand, perhaps the prohibition does not exist either. Indeed, one of the early Baalei Tosafos, Rav Avraham ben Harav David, contended that no bishul akum prohibition exists when food is prepared in a Jewish house.

However, Rabbeinu Tam disputed this conclusion, contending that in the vast literature Chazal provided concerning the prohibition of bishul akum, they made no such distinction. Furthermore, Rabbeinu Tam contends that the reasons for bishul akum apply even in a Jewish house (Tosafos, Avodah Zarah 38a s.v. Ela). The Shulchan Aruch rules according to Rabbeinu Tam (Yoreh Deah 213:1), although some authorities rule that, even according to Rabbeinu Tam, the prohibition of bishul akum does not apply to long-term hired household servants (Issur VaHeter, quoted by Taz, Yoreh Deah 113:3). This approach is not accepted by most later authorities (Chachmas Odom 66:7).

Three times and you're safe!

There is a lenience regarding kashering from bishul akum that does not apply to most halachos. Ordinarily, if an earthenware or ceramic vessel absorbs non-kosher taste, there is no way to kasher the equipment, and it has been rendered permanently non-kosher. In such a case, your beautiful ceramic may be used henceforth as a planter or for some other decorative purpose, but not for food production.

However, Chazal were lenient when the essence of a prohibition is rabbinic in origin, as is the case with bishul akum. They permitted kashering even normally non-kasherable earthenware by boiling the vessel three times (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 113:16). Thus, Mrs. Goldman may kasher her favorite ceramic bowl by boiling it three times, and it can then be returned to kosher use.

Microwaved blintzes

Would the same prohibition apply if Jenny had heated the blintzes in the microwave oven instead?

Why should it make any difference?

Indeed, one of our generation's greatest halachic authorities, Rav Vozner of Bnei Beraq, rules that no difference exists between having a gentile cook food in a microwave oven or by any other means: it is prohibited as bishul akum.

However, I have read opinions from other rabbonim who dispute this conclusion. I will explain some of their reasons.

Smoking

The Talmud Yerushalmi discusses whether there is a prohibition of bishul akum when food is cooked by smoking. One should be aware that there are several different methods of preparing food that are all called "smoking," but for our purposes we are discussing food that is cooked by heating it in hot smoke. (Some types of sausage, including frankfurters, are often cooked this way.)

Why should smoking be different from any other type of cooking?

Most cooking is performed either in a liquid, usually water, or through baking or roasting, which are through direct heat without any liquid medium. Frying is also prohibited because of bishul akum, since oil is, likewise, considered to be a liquid medium as in regular cooking (Aruch HaShulchan 113:24). Smoking involves cooking food without direct heat in a non-liquid medium, which is qualitatively different. The question is whether this distinction in the cooking method is significant enough that Chazal did not include it in their prohibition of bishul akum.

The Shulchan Aruch rules that food smoked by a gentile is not prohibited because of bishul akum (Yoreh Deah 113:13). Thus, he concludes that where the method of food preparation differs significantly from what Chazal prohibited, the prohibition does not exist, even though the reasons for the prohibition of bishul akum apply just as well.

Steaming

Some foods are cooked in steam rather than in water. If cooked this way by a gentile, are they prohibited as bishul akum? This is a very common case, since much commercial production, including canned vegetables and tuna, for example, are cooked in steam. In addition, many oriental foods include rice, which is commonly steamed. This question became germane in the 19th century, when factories began cooking food through steam. Similar to smoking, here food is cooked in steam, which, although closer to water, is also not direct heat and not a method of cooking that existed in the days of Chazal. Does the halachic lenience that applies to smoking apply equally to steaming? This issue was debated by the authorities of the time. An early responsum debates whether cane sugar is prohibited because of bishul akum, since the ground sugar cane was cooked in steam.

(Others authorities permitted cane sugar for a variety of other reasons [Aruch HaShulchan 113:23].)

Some authorities permitted steaming just as smoking is permitted, and others permitted for a different reason, contending that gentile steaming is permitted since it is a totally new production method that did not exist in the days of Chazal and was therefore not include in the prohibition. We find that some later authorities relied on this heter, but only in combination with other reasons to permit the food (Shu't Minchas Yitzchak). On the other hand, other authorities contended that the heter of smoking cannot be extended to something cooked in vaporized water (Darkei Teshuvah 113:16). I leave it to the individual to discuss with his rav whether he permits the use of food cooked by a non-Jew with a microwave oven.

Thus, some rabbonim would have permitted Jenny to cook the blintzes or the fish sticks in the microwave, whereas others would contend that this alternative form of cooking does not change the situation. I leave it to our readers to ask their own posek for a decision on the matter.

Seminary sous-chef

At this point, I would like to address Rabbi Black's* shaylah, mentioned last week, whether he needs to kasher his seminary's kitchen. The question was that they had discovered that the mother of their cook is not Jewish, and therefore the cook herself is not Jewish. The question is whether the seminary needs now to kasher its entire kitchen. There are two possible reasons to permit the seminary's kitchen without kashering, both of which also apply to the Goldmans' ovens and pots. The household in which the food was cooked is Jewish, so that according to Rabbi Avraham ben Rabbi David, the food is not bishul akum. In addition, there are Rishonim who contend that although Chazal prohibited bishul akum, they did not prohibit utensils that cooked bishul akum. Both of these positions are rejected as the final position in Shulchan Aruch, but perhaps based on the two together one could avoid kashering. Since there are authorities who might permit the utensils under these circumstances, one should ask a shaylah from one's halachic authority whether one needs to kasher the equipment.

Conclusion

The Gemara teaches that the rabbinic laws are dearer to Hashem than the Torah laws. In this context, we can explain the vast halachic literature devoted to understanding this particular prohibition, created by Chazal to protect the Jewish people from major sins.

**Although all the stories here are true, the names have been changed for privacy.*