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ON PARSHAS CHUKAS BALAK - 5756

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PART I - CHUKAS

owner-mj-ravtorah@shamash.org Josh Rapps
<jr@sco.COM>mj-ravtorah@shamash.org
Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZTL on Parshas Chukas

The Rav was always intrigued by certain figures in Tanach. The ones who were hated because they were ahead of their times. Especially Moshe who was the greatest of all men. However he was also the most tragic of men. Chukas describes the full extent of the paradoxical tragedy of his life. The portion of Chukas should have been appended to either Terumah, Ki Tisa, Tzav or Shemini. According to tradition, the Parshas Parah was given at the same time as the Torah tells us about Moshe and Aaron initiating the service in the Mishkan, when the Parshas Meluim was revealed. We could also imagine that it would be inserted into Tazria Metzora which deals with the laws of Tumah and the Parsha of Parah deals with Tumas Mes. Parshas Parah would have completed the institution of Tumah. The Torah instead inserted the Parshas Parah between Korach and the death of Miriam and the arrival of B'nei Yisrael in Midbar Tzin. We must understand why Parshas Parah was inserted in Chukas.

The Rav raised several questions. The first had to do with the order of shelach korach and chukas. What is in common between these parshios? Also, where is the continuity between first part of chukas that deals with Parshas Parah and Midbar Tzin, death of Miriam, the May Meriva and the desire to pass through Edom on their way to the Promised Land? According to Chazal, Chukah means a mysterious or enigmatic law. They detected in the word Chok an inherent incomprehensibility by man. The enemies of Israel always ask why we keep them. Chazal have never tried to rationalize it (although Rashi quotes Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan who tried to give it an interpretation). Chazal have said that we must accept Chukah, without requesting explanation or motivation. Chazal regard that chukah requires and asks that we suspend our judgement. Sometimes man has to use his ability to reason, the greatest gift given to him by Hashem. In certain situations it must be suspended and man must obey the letter of the law.

However, even though we can't ask for motivation or reason in Chukah, we may still inquire into the interpretation of the law. There is a difference between explanation and interpretation. Some disciplines deal with interpretation while others deal with explanation. Explanation answers the question of why or how. Physics doesn't ask "why" which is metaphysical question. It asks "how" does it function. By establishing dependence of phenomena in terms of mathematical equations the answer of "how" is given. There are other areas that we don't explain at all rather we interpret the event. Not "how" or "why" rather "what" is it. The answer is descriptive, (e.g. botany). The first question is what. You go to other disciplines to explain the how.

With Chukim and Mishpatim we don't ask "why". Often it is foolish to ask "why" even in mitzvos that we consider meaningful. Usually motive lies outside my reach. The ultimate answer of why is because the will of Hashem is that it be done. Realization of the will of Hashem is the greatest ultimate goal. However we can ask "what is Parah Adumah to me", not why did Hashem ordain the law. What is the spiritual message of Parshas Parah that I can assimilate to my world view and world outlook? Ramban and Rambam emphasized time and again that Avodah Shblev includes more than Tefila. It tells man how to live and worship Hashem. Avoda Shblev must be present in every act, religious and moral. The Rambam gives as an example of Avoda Shblev in Chagiga on the verse Oveyd Elokim Vlo Avado. Oveyd Elokim is a separate quality that even a Tzaddik might not have. The example given is one who learns 100 times versus learning 101 times. For instance, if I enter a Sukkah because of the rain I am still fulfilling the mitzvah. The Ramban asks would such a person be called a Oveyd Elokim? The Ramban says no, to be called Oveyd Elokim there must be an expression of love to Hashem and enjoyment in fulfilling the Mitzvah. Misnagdim also can enjoy a Mitzvah. Chassidus added Avodas Elokim not only to discharge the Mitzvah but to rejoice and enjoy the Mitzvah. Avodas Elokim is unattainable if the Chok does not deliver a message to us. If there is no idea generated by the chok how can I rejoice in the mitzvah. The logos must be involved in the action or Mitzvah so that we understand it in order for us to enjoy the Mitzvah and rejoice in it. To involve the logos, it must understand the mitzvah. Not "why", sometimes not "how", but always "what".

We have a duty to interpret chukim. It is forbidden to ask why Hashem ordered us to act in such an unintelligible way. However I can ask what does the mitzvah mean to me. I must be able to make the mitzvah an integral part of my religious experience. The Ramban says regarding Shiluach Hakan that I can't say that the Torah is concerned with the feeling of the mother bird. I can't ask why the Mitzvah was ordered but I can ask how I can assimilate the mitzvah in my total religious and moral outlook and I awareness. I am obligated to raise this question.

We look at Parah Adumah through the "what" question not "why". Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan did not attempt to explain the "why" of Parah Adumah, rather the what of the mitzvah. According to him, it was an atonement for the golden calf. How am I to experience the Parah Adumah? When I say Shema, I experience the closeness to Hashem. But what am I supposed to experience when we hear Parshas Parah? What is the central mitf of Parah Adumah? What is so peculiar about the Parsha and what does the uniqueness of the mitzvah consist of? Why do we consider Parah Adumah special? There are other mitzvas that appear non-rational as well, e.g. Shatnes and Sair Hamishtaleach. Yet, Chazal consider Parah Adumah representative of all Chukim as the chok par excellence. We will do well to abandon the popular approach to the Parsha, of looking at the ceremonial aspects of the parsha, the aspect of purifying the unclean and unpurifying the clean. Even though there is a prohibition of Shecutay Chutz we were still ordered to bring certain Korbanos outside. The mixing of the ashes with the water is peculiar. These are intriguing questions, however the singularity of Parah Adumah lies elsewhere. We should ignore the Parshas Parah and the laws of burning and mixing with spring water. After that we have a topic of Adam Ki Yamus B'ohel. Nothing of Mes was mentioned in Tazria Metzora. In Emor and Naso we have a hint of Tumas Mes. Yet we could not derive that there is a concept of Tumas Mes from these [laces, as perhaps it is prohibited but it does not defile. The first time we hear that Tumas Mes defiles is in Parah Adumah. Tumas Mes differs from all other kinds of Tumah. Something about Mes is different. The Torah never says Adam Ki Ytameh Bsheret.

However the Torah uses solemn terminology of Zos Hatorah Adam Ki Yamus Bohel. What is this solemnity? Because Tumas Meas has a singular, strange aspect from all other kinds of Tumah. For example, a kohen can touch a sheretz but not a Mes. Same with Nazir. (The Rav said that he spoke with a scholar in Chachmas Yisrael who said that a parchment was found that says that a kohen is forbidden to be Metamy Lsheretz. The Rav asked if he, the scholar, accepted it as true, and the scholar replied yes, that it must be true. The Rav said that in the days that the parchment was written there was no shortage of ignorance either, similar to the ignorance of Torah that is evident these days as well. The Rav said that whoever wrote that parchment was ignorant as well.)

Already we see the uniqueness of Tumas Mes. The method of cleansing the unclean person from Tumah is different. In all other Tumos, immersion in a Mikveh is the method for removing the Tumah. Tumas Mes is different. It requires Tevila and sprinkling of May Chatos twice (days 3,7) otherwise the person is enjoined from entering the Mikdash. Why did the Torah single out Tumas Mes and why is immersion in a Mikvah not sufficient to cleanse the person like all others Tumos? What lies at the root of Tumas Mes that makes it so unique? We are impressed by the onus placed on the person to guarantee that he has sprinkling on days 3,7. Why is the Torah so emphatic here that we not take the sprinkling lightly and that we not equate Tumas Mes with other kinds of Tumah. Why is the sprinkling central?

We must understand "what" is the message the Parah Adumah is telling us. In the peculiar method of sprinkling we find the uniqueness of man as a great yet tragic man. Why should man, the greatest of creatures in the universe exist in distress and his life be a tragic one? In addition to the physical difference in process between Tevila and sprinkling May Chatos, there is a semantic difference. Tevila and Hazaya are distinct experiences from a religious perspective. For example, conversion requires Tevila, there is an experience associated with it. There is also an experience associated with sprinkling, because the Torah emphasizes that we should not short change the sprinkling. The difference is that Tevila is accomplished by the Tamay himself while Hazaya is done by someone else. Tevila requires that the Tamay himself must immerse himself and bow his head and knees to immerse. No one else cleanses him, just himself. He emerges from Mikveh, Tahor because of his own effort. Had he been lazy or refused to immerse he can never attain holiness. Halachically it is an act performed by the Tamay. Al Pi Din, the act of Tevila is reflexive in nature. Man defiles himself, man must clean himself alone. No one else can pronounce him Tahor if he himself does not do it. Human capability to accomplish change in status, human initiative and ability to raise self to new heights is through Tevila. It is the symbol of free will. If one wants to stay tamay never immerse in mikveh. Want to be Tahor, immerse. It is up to the individual

With regards to Hazaya the situation is reversed. The Tamay can't sprinkle May Chatos on himself simply because he is a Tamay. Only a Tahor, someone else, can sprinkle it on him. This is the antithesis of Tevila. The human who defiled himself can't free himself from the state of uncleanness. Someone else, who has the ability to restore purity for others and help them (not all are capable), must sprinkle the May Chatos on the Tamay. This is quite different from all other types of Tumah. Nowadays we can purify ourselves from all other Tumos. But the Tumas Mikdash, which prevents us from entering Har Habayis, requires not only the Parah Adumah but a Tahor that can sprinkle us. For this we have to wait till Moshiach arrives. Without Parah Adumah being sprinkled on him, man can't escape the Tumah that holds man in its clutches and won't let him go. Chazal have equated Tumah with Teshuva. Mikveh, the aspect of Tevila, is associated with Teshuva. The symbol of Hazayas Mayim was put in by Yechezkel. Sin requires both immersion in a Mikveh and sprinkling as well. Chet is equated with Tumas Mes which requires both Mikveh and sprinkling for Teshuva. With Teshuva, the initiative to repent starts with the sinner. If he is to vain to amend his ways and style of life Hashem will not help him. The initiative belongs to man, the final Kapparrah to Hashem. Tumas Mes is such a distinct Tumah and so difficult to remove because of the uniqueness of the experience man is confronted with when he comes in contact with a Mes. Other Tumos that are experienced e.g. Sheretz and Neveila, typically precipitate a negative aesthetic experience. It's abominable or obnoxious. The experience is derived from the fact that the Tuma is associated with disease and with the

phenomenon and ugliness of a dead organism exposed to the elements and in the process of decomposition and disintegration. A Sheretz in this status is filth, squalor and causes unpleasant emotions to arise. All other Tumos can be subsumed experientially under such unpleasantness (e.g. Leprosy).

Tumas Mes constitutes a separate category beyond the experience associated with the status of the decomposing body. We experience something additional when we contact a dead human versus a dead animal. Death as far as the animal kingdom is concerned is not viewed by man as a catastrophe. It indicates the termination of functionality of the organism. However, a dead man indicates the end of a spiritual personality, no matter what he might have done while alive. While alive, man has an existential dimension that is self aware and self conscious, driven by vision and hope, one that grieves and despairs but lives in retrospection and anticipation and plans and builds and destroys worlds. Human death means destruction of a world. It is the most tragic human experience. Man who comes in contact with a dead person becomes aware of his own timed existence. He knows that while he lives he is committed to the service of Hashem. Chazal were worried about death because it would interfere with their great joy in engaging in Torah and Mitzvos. In the animal world, the death of an organism is not tragic because there is no individualistic existence among the beasts. The class will survive therefore the loss of the individual is not so tragic. The individual leads a representative existence for the class. The human has his own right to exist not only as a representative of others but on his own behalf. He leads an autonomous existence. The existential experience is to be found in the individual not in the class. That is why death in the individual is absurd and existentially abominable. The Rav related the story of the Rumanian dictator Causcescu who visited Sadat before the Yom Kippur War and advised him not to start a war with Israel. Sadat showed him a copy of Maariv that had a front page picture of a young boy in uniform who was killed and was being mourned by the nation. Sadat said that such a people can't live through an extended war of attrition when each dead individual is important and precious. The Rav noted that if there was a plebiscite on the separation agreement (NOTE: this was the proposed separation discussed after the Yom Kippur war, not the Peres-PLO agreements) it would pass even though the Israeli people knew that the agreement was not worth the paper it was written on. Because they will do anything to save a Jewish life, a world.

The spiritual death that is unique to man is the most frightening to man. Tumas Mes is a result of trauma, not ugliness, that shows that death defeats everyone eventually. That's why Tumas Mes is a Tumah per se. It represents the situation that makes man's life tragic and one that he can't save himself from. It is the absurd and tragic destiny of man. To clean oneself through the same process used for cleaning from Tumas Sheretz is non-sensical. It requires an additional form of cleansing besides Tevila, which was not abandoned. We require the sprinkling of the third and seventh day. The final cleanser is Hashem in the eschatological age when all nature will be cleansed of death then man will be free of this Tumah. Until that time comes, even though we can't defeat death now, at least partially we must fight it. We must do tevila. We have to do anything possible to extend life. Judaism believes that in the course of time man will succeed in taming the death monstrosity and limit its power. That's why tevila is in place. However Judaism was not naive to believe in human scientific capability to defeat death and make man immortal. Longevity can be achieved, but not immortality. Death will plague man until Hashem saves man from the curse of death for all time. How can man redeem himself from the fright and defilement of death? Through tevila, organized scientific effort to extend life. But death requires another component of Hazaya, that of placing our trust in Hashem that the age will come when Hashem will sprinkle the purifying water on man to complete the cleansing and erase death and the associated tuma forever. Zos Chukas Hatorah refers to death, the great, unintelligible mystery that no one can grasp. The greatest mystery is the fact of Adam Ki Yamus Bohel. Those that are in the tent at the time of death or who enter the tent are shocked and frightened by the experience. It is Hashem that cleanses ultimately the person from this tragic experience. Between the end of Parshas Korach and the portion of Bnay Yisrael entering Midbar Tzin and the death of Miryam lies a gap of 38 years. Korach's rebellion happened by the second year in the desert. The death of Miryam happened in the fortieth year after the death of all the people sentenced to die in the desert because of the sin of the Meraglim. It is strange

that the Torah discusses at length what happened the first 2 years in the desert. We don't know what happened during those intervening 38 years. What did Moshe do during those long and dreary years? That period was enigmatic and frightening.

We find a clue as to what happened in those 38 years from the bridge between the last words of Korach to the beginning of Parshas Parah. When Moshe reviews the travels of Bnay Yisrael after the Meraglim, in Parshas Devarim, he says that they spent 38 years circling Mount Sayir. He adds that Hashem confused them over those years. The 38 years were a period of Hester Panim. The people returned to Hashem, Vatashuvu Vativku Lifnei Hashem. This is an example of how in a time of Hester Panim the Tefila of the people is still rejected. The Rambam explains circular movement as without gain or achievement. The Rambam explains the circular movement of the heavenly bodies as their attempt to come close to Hashem yet they always fail and they start over again. So to the people in the desert. Bnay Yisrael tried to approach the mountain of Sayir but could not. Moshe added that the divine hand eliminated the previous generation as quickly as possible. It was a time of Hester Panim when no prayer was accepted and no heavenly communication reached man. Not even Moshe communicated with Hashem. It was like a long dark and dreary night.

The Gemara tells us that each year the whole congregation would dig graves for themselves on Tisha Bav and lie down in them that night. In the morning the call went out for those that were alive to arise from among the dead. The whole congregation died each Tisha Bav and some regained life the next day. They died 38 times in the desert. Life was no different from death. It was a life without hope and anticipation. Each one knew that they would end up eventually in one of those graves. People can never understand the will of Hashem in times of Hester Panim. They were confused and without communication with Hashem. It did not matter if they survived this year. Eventually they would die. They spent 38 years in a state dedicated to death and annihilation and separated from Hashem. The greatest of men, Moshe, had to wait for the redemption and sprinkling of the purification waters on Bnay Yisrael from Hashem to indicate that the period of death had ended. That is why the Torah says that when they came to Midbar Tzin they were all alive, that the period of darkness without hope had ended. The Torah talks about Chalah and Terumos and Maasros in Shelach and Korach, after they had been sentenced to wander in the desert, in order to tell the people that eventually they will come to Eretz Yisrael. The Torah tells the people that eventually there will be the sprinkling of the water on the people by Hashem after the period of Hester Panim. Now the dialogue with Moshe and the people must be suspended for 38 years until the generation of the Meraglim will die out. The episode at Midbar Tzin happened 38 years after the Parshas Parah was given.

After this we come to the end of Moshe and Aaron as well. The Parsha of Misa Moshe is the most tragic. He was chosen to redeem the people, he loved them so much and received the Torah that spoke about the Mitzvos that were to be done in Eretz Yisrael. He wanted so much to see the land on his own. Yet Hashem forbade him to even pray about being permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael, something we don't find anywhere else. The death of Moshe is the most irrational of all. Death in general, and particular the death of Moshe is the most enigmatic of all. No matter the reason for Moshe's death, the fact is that Moshe died for the sin of the people. As it says in Devarim that Hashem was angry with Moshe for the sake of the people both at the Meraglim and May Meriva, as it says Beglalchem. In what regard were the people responsible for the death of Moshe? If Hashem got angry at Moshe, why should they be responsible for it? If Moshe's sin was hitting the rock instead of talking to it, this should have been overlooked for the great Moshe. The same question applies to the other reasons given for the denial of Moshe to enter Eretz Yisrael.

There was one major tragedy that marks the denial of Moshe to enter the land. It is the tragedy of the Rebbe who is to great to be understood by the people of his generation and his contemporaries. Even though there were individuals who received the Torah from Moshe and relected and carried on his teachings, like Joshua and Eliezer, Moshe was the teacher par excellence of the entire generation that he delivered from bondage and carried throughout the desert. Why wasn't the entire congregation acting as the disciples of Moshe? Why only Joshua Eliezer and Pinchas? If they had

Moshe as a teacher, why didn't they resist the temptations of the prostitutes of Moav. At the time of the golden calf, Moshe argued that they were still under the slave mentality and they needed time to outgrow that mentality. Moshe had a strong argument and it was accepted. The people of the exodus generation were not his disciples, they were the people who left Egypt and had not been trained yet by Moshe. He did not raise them as their teacher and parent yet.

However when they got to May Meriva and Shitim the generation of people that were alive at that time were the disciples of Moshe. When they complained to Moshe at May Meriva as to why he had taken them out of Egypt, Moshe was taken aback that the generation that he had trained over all those long years in the desert would use the same argument used by their ancestors of the previous generation who had not had the benefit of Moshe's tutelage throughout the long sojourn in the desert. Moshe realized that if he could not implant in them faith then he failed. They were no different than their parents who were liberated slaves 40 years ago in Refidim. That is why in the episode of Shitim and the prostitutes of Moav Moshe cried where he never cried before at the previous transgressions of the golden calf, even that of the Meraglim. Now he realized that he failed.

However Moshe did not fail. Rather he was at too high a level for the people to understand and appreciate him. That is why Moshe said that he was punished because of the people. Had they understood and appreciated his teachings of 40 years he would have been admitted to the promised land. For a recently freed slave no water is a rebellious event that can be rationalized and defended. However the people who were his disciples did not give in to their teacher and were unwilling to be his students and remained with the same rebellious attitude as their parents. Then the teacher, even though he did not sin, is punished for the deficiency of the people. Just like the teacher who must accompany his student into exile because his transgression is traced back to the teacher, so to Moshe was punished in place of the generation. That is why he said that it was because of them that he was denied entry, even though it was their fault and not his.

Of course the failure of Moshe to enter the land changed Jewish History because had he entered Eretz Yisrael, the people never would have been exiled. Moshe would have been anointed as Melech Hamoshiach. Jewish History would have found its fulfillment and realization immediately on entry. Moshe will always be the greatest of all men, greater than the Melech Hamoshiach, with regards to prophecy. Moshe the chosen of all men should have been chosen as Moshiach. If he was qualified, why was he not ordained by Hashem as the Moshiach? No one else will ever be as qualified as Moshe. The Messianic era would have commenced immediately and the land would have been endowed with Kedusha that the legions of Babylon never could have destroyed, as opposed to the Kedusha of Joshua which was temporary. It was not Moshe's fault. He was ready to be the Moshiach. However the Messianic era depends on the people being ready as well. If Moshe's message had an impact on the people and if they treated him with respect due the Rebbe from his students, he would have been crowned Moshiach and they would have been the generation of Moshiach, a great merit in its own right. Instead his students behaved like the freed slaves of the previous generation. The messianic era was postponed for a long time. Moshe had to die without entering the land and Joshua was charged with bringing the people to Eretz Yisrael. Only when the people are ready to fully commit themselves to his teachings and Moshe will be accepted as teacher by entire Umah Yisraelis, when all will be willing to be his disciples, will the hour of redemption arrive. In the meantime, because of the May Meriva the people were assigned a new job of conquering the land with Joshua. The opportunity of Moshe leading us into the land as Moshiach was lost and won't be regained for a long time. Jewish History became more complex and tragic. The Adam Ki Yamus Bohel referred to in Chukas was the greatest of all men, Moshe. We suffer the consequences in that the era of Moshiach was delayed. The sequence of events of Chukas was the arrival in Midbar Tzin, followed by the death of Miryam the prophetess. The one who had faith and hope in her brother that she helped saved, died. Next we have the events at May Meriva with the edict that Moshe and Aaron would not enter the land. We might have expected that the death of Aaron would be the next event mentioned. Instead it is the refusal of Melech Edom to allow Bnay Yisrael to pass through his land and the turning away of the people. Why was this story mentioned here? It would

have fit in nicely with the frame of reference of the battles with Sichon and Og. Also when Sichon and Og refused their request and went to battle, Moshe conquered them. However with Edom the people simply circled Edom and were left to contemplate their situation and failure. Edom was a weaker king relative to Sichon and Og who were mighty. Why were they enjoined from battling Edom at that time?

Because at that time no Jew, not even Moshe was allowed to set foot in the land of Edom. Instead they had to circle the land for many years. The only time that a Jew will be able to tread on the land of Edom will be when the Moshiach will rise up to the Mount Sayir and judge them as mentioned in the Midrash when Yaakov told Esau that he will visit him. Edom, the ancestor of Amalek, is the symbol of hostility displayed by the nations of the world towards Jacob. Edom is the mysterious person who makes the life of the Jew difficult. Once Moshe lost the majestic crown of Moshiach, Edom land became inviolate. Edom will exist as long as the Moshiach has not arrived. Once Hashem told Moshe that he would not bring them into the land and be the Moshiach, Edom was provided with security. Moshe lost the battle to bring the people through Edom. Moshe sent messengers to Edom and he realized that Edom would refuse and that Bnai Yisrael would have to back away. Because the age of Moshiach and judgement of Edom was postponed for many years to come. Moshe lost the crown and the people lost the opportunity to enter as the generation of Moshiach.

That is why the Torah narrates the story of Edom right after the May Meriva. Moshe lost the crown, we lost the opportunity to be the generation of Moshiach as indicated by our inability to conquer Edom and this is the connection to Parshas Parah and Chukas Hatorah.

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Ohr Somayach <ohr@jer1.co.il> * TORAH WEEKLY * Parshas Chukas

Summary: The laws of the Parah Adumah -- the red heifer -- are detailed. These laws of ritual purification are to be used when someone has come into contact with death. After the nation "wanders" for nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam passes away and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply which until then has been provided for them miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aaron and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. Hashem commands them to gather the nation at Merivah, and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth from it. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of Hashem's power over the world which would have resulted if the rock had produced water as a result of him only speaking to it. Therefore, Hashem tells Moshe and Aaron that they will not bring the people into the Land. The Bnei Yisrael resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Eisav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mt. Hor, Aaron passes from this world and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aaron was beloved by all the people, and they observe a national mourning period of 30 days. The Bnei Yisrael battle Sichon the Amorite, who fights against them rather than allow them to pass through his land. As a result, Bnei Yisrael conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

Commentaries

A Wing and a Prayer "This is the decree (chok) of the Torah..." (19:2) The mitzvah of the Parah Adumah (red heifer) is the quintessential 'chok' or decree which defies human understanding. The world is like a 747. No pilot would dream of getting behind the control column of a 747 until he knows how to fly his craft in all kinds of weather and under all conditions. He has to know how to take off, to land, to trim the ailerons. He has to know what every button and switch in front of him can and cannot do. He has to be a professional. The lives of 500 hundred people are hanging on his judgment and experience. In much the same way, every Jew is a 'pilot'. We have to

know how to fly the 747 of life. Every halacha is like a switch in that 747 cockpit. And only with the Torah's help can we navigate life's airways without nose-diving into the sea. We can never understand the depth of a mitzvah, for a mitzvah is an expression of the Will of the Creator and transcends the knowledge of His creations. But we know that the mitzvos are the control panel to the spiritual world. We can never know how a mitzvah works, but this mustn't interfere with our precision and care in doing them. No pilot knows why his plane flies through the sky. But he has to know how to fly the plane. The fact that he cannot explain why the air passing under his wings should cause the plane to fly, in no way detracts from his concentration as he sits on top of two tons of metal hurtling down the runway at over 100 mph. At that moment he's not in the slightest bit concerned that he doesn't understand how flight works. He knows that unless he performs flawlessly, this flight will certainly not work! (Heard from Rabbi Simcha Wasserman zt"l)

SOUL FOOD Similarly, if someone asked us why we eat, we would answer that we must eat in order to live. If we were questioned further as to why we eat bread and not stones, we would answer that stones don't contain the necessary nutrients to sustain life, but why humans need these nutrients, and why we can't extract them from stones -- that we would not be able to explain, for that only Hashem knows. Even though we eat to stay alive, Hashem created the world in such a way that our food also has a pleasing taste and aroma. But that taste should never be confused with our reason for eating. Mitzvos are spiritual food for the neshama. Why or how a particular mitzvah sustains our soul, we cannot know, anymore than we know why a particular protein sustains our body. Hashem wanted the mitzvos to be palatable to us, so he infused them with taste -- ideas and lessons -- that we can understand. However, we should never confuse the taste of a mitzvah with its real reason, as we should never eat merely to satisfy our taste buds. (Rabbi Z. Leff in Outlooks and Insights)

WRITTEN IN STONE "This is the decree (chok) of the Torah..." (19:2)

There are two kinds of letters. Letters which are written, and letters which are engraved. The difference is that letters which are written are ultimately separate from what they are written on. They are not one with the paper or the parchment. The letters are of ink and they adhere to the paper, and only then are they one. However, when letters are engraved, the letters themselves are from the same medium as that on which they are written. There is no distinction between what is written and on what it is written. The letters are not something external, separate entities, rather they emanate from the stone itself. The Torah was given in the form of engraved tablets to teach us that we should relate to it not as separate from ourselves, rather the Jewish People and the Torah are indivisible and identical. "Yisrael, the Torah and the Holy One, Blessed is He, are One." The words of the Torah are engraved in the fabric of our heart, not merely embroidered there. They must penetrate to the deepest and innermost chambers of our identity, they must go through and through us - just like the tablets of the Torah which could be read from both sides. The word in Hebrew for 'engraving' is from the same root as the word for a decree that surpasses human understanding - chok. Our attitude to the entire Torah should be the same as to a chok. Even though we don't understand the chok, we still do it because it is the Will of our Father in Heaven. With this same attitude we should do all the mitzvos, even those that we think we understand -- for no other reason than the fact that they are engraved on the tablets of our hearts as decrees of the King of kings. (Adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin)

Haftorah: Shoftim 11:1-33: The Historian An essential component of wisdom is the knowledge that man's failure to comprehend truth does not make it untrue. Just as in the sedra this week, Man is left uncomprehending the law of the Parah Adumah -- the workings of the spiritual world -- so too are the workings of history mysterious to all except He who writes history. Thus, the Haftorah depicts the 'unhistorical' rise of Yiftah to the position of chief despite his lowly beginning in life.

Sing, My Soul! Insights into the Zemiroh sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.
Yom Shabbos Kadosh Hu - The Sabbath Day is Holy... Its laws were commanded to us in Marah

This reference to the statement by our Sages (Sanhedrin 56b) that the laws of Shabbos were commanded to Israel when they camped at Marah before reaching Sinai raises the obvious question: Why did Hashem give us Shabbos before giving us the rest of the Torah? In order to be worthy of receiving the Torah, suggests Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, Jews had to sanctify their souls. Shabbos has the ability to lift a Jew's soul to the greatest heights and therefore served as an introduction to the receiving of the entire Torah at Sinai.

Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair General Editor:
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"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frاند on Parshas Chukas-Balak -

We Must Understand: Not Everything Can be Understood

In this week's parsha we learn of the mitzvah of the Parah Adumah [Red Heifer]. Rash"i quotes the Chaza"l that this mitzvah is known as the quintessential "chok".

This mitzvah is, in fact, a tremendous paradox. The Parah Adumah was used to be me'taher people who were Tameh Meis. People who have the impurity of Tameh Meis have no way of achieving purity other than by means of the Parah Adumah. Yet, on the other hand, any person who had anything to do with the preparing or the carrying or the sprinkling of the Parah Adumah became ritually impure, himself. The paradox of the Parah Adumah, thus, is that it makes those who are impure, pure and those who are pure, impure. Our Rabbis tell us that the verse in Koheles [7:23] "All this I tried to understand with my wisdom; I said I will figure it out, but it is still distant from me" refers to Solomon stating that he understood the entire Torah, except for the chapter of Parah Adumah which remained elusive -- despite all his inquiry.

The Medrash further states that G-d told Moshe, "To you I will explain the paradox of Parah Adumah, but to every other human being I will always hide its mystery." However the Medrash does say that in the Messianic Era, G-d will finally explain to us the mystery of Parah Adumah.

We see from over here that G-d made a deliberate and conscious effort to keep the mystery of Parah Adumah hidden from us. Shlomo [Solomon] with his wisdom, should have been able to understand Parah Adumah. But G-d said, "I've got to keep this a secret. There is a reason. I will tell it to Klal Yisroel in the distant future. But for now, no one can understand Parah Adumah."

Why? Does G-d want to prove that he is smarter than us? Is this a game where G-d dangles something in front of us, teasing us with our inability to figure it out?

The Be'er Yosef offers a powerful insight. The reason G-d hid the understanding of Parah Adumah from us, is to teach us a vital lesson. The lesson is that there are things in life that are inexplicable. We must learn the lesson that things will happen in life that we will never be able to understand. We will come across things that will be terrible paradoxes, things that have apparently no rhyme and no reason.

What is this area of paradox that parallels Parah Adumah? It is the area of Tzadik v'ra lo and Rasha v'Tov lo. Just as Parah Adumah is a paradox that makes absolutely no sense, so too, there exists a paradox in life that we meet time and time and time again.

Logic would dictate just the reverse: A person is righteous, he is a noble Jew and unfortunately he suffers. Another person is wicked, he does everything that is forbidden and he is wealthy and prospers and has honor. Does this make sense? It's a paradox!

However, for some reason, that is the way that G-d made His world. We will have to deal with that issue and problem. So, G-d educated us in paradoxes. What is that education? Parah Adumah.

This is a tremendous education. Today, we think of Parah Adumah as an obscure mitzvah. We learn about it in the Chumash. We don't really know what it is talking about. There is a tractate in the Talmud called "Parah".

Yet, there are few people who study it.

However, during the time of the Temple, the laws of Parah Adumah were extremely relevant. They were as relevant to the Jews then, as much as the laws of Aveilus (mourning) are relevant to us. If we will live, and not (G-d forbid) die before our parents, we will all have to deal with the laws of mourning. They are universal.

Unfortunately, the laws of Aveilus touch all of us. They have relevance every day of the year -- from the solemnity of a Yom Kippur to the exuberance of a Purim. Even Jews who have no connection to anything else, have a connection to the laws of Aveilus.

That was the reality of the laws of Parah Adumah in the time of the Temple. Invariably, one came into contact with dead people; one went to funerals; one became tameh. Then what? One could not eat Kodshim Kalim; one could not eat Ma'aser; one could not go to certain places in Jerusalem until one became Tahor.

Therefore, Parah Adumah was certainly something that happened many times a year and was often a daily occurrence. Every single time, a Jew would be faced with the same paradox. He walks in tameh and walks out tahor while the Kohen would walk in tahor and walk out tameh. It does not seem to make sense, but at least the Jew would be exposed to and get accustomed to a paradox.

The Jew would learn that there are some things in this world that don't seem to make sense. That is why G-d hid the reason for Parah Adumah from us and it is also why in the future He will explain Parah Adumah to us.

The Talmud in Tractate Pessachim [50a] quotes the verse "In that Day G-d will be One and His Name will be One" [Zecharia 14:9] and asks, "In this world, G-d's Name is not One?" The Gemara answers that in this world we make the blessing "...dayan ha'emes [the True Judge]" on bad news and the blessing "ha'tov v'ham'ey'tiv [the Good and the Doer of Good]" on good news. However, in the Future World we will make "ha'tov v'ham'ey'tiv" on everything.

Rash"i explains that in the future there will be no bad news because then we will understand that even the bad is good. In the future, the paradox of "Tzadik v'ra lo" will no longer exist. Therefore, in the future we will be able to hear the reason for Parah Adumah, because by then we will have learned our lesson.

There is a fascinating Shibolei HaLeket which the Magen Avraham cites in Chapter 580. He writes "concerning the tragedy which happened, because of our multitude of sins, in our day 5004 (1244 c.e.) in which 24 containers of Sifrei Torah, Neviim, Medrashim, Gemaras were publicly burnt..." When did this occur? "...on Friday of the week in which the Torah portion was 'This is the Chok of the Torah...' (Chukas)".

The Yahrtzeit of that terrible burning was the Erev Shabbos of Parshas Chukas. The Shibolei HaLeket states (brought by the Magen Avraham) that some individuals have the custom to fast on Friday of Parshas Chukas as an atonement and a memorial to that terrible tragedy. The Shibolei HaLeket asks, why was the calendar date of this tragedy not preserved? How many days into Tammuz did it occur? Normally, Fast Days are associated with the calendar -- the 17th of Tammuz, the 9th of Av, the 3rd of Tishrei, etc. We've never heard of a Fast Day pegged to a day of the week!

The Shibolei HaLeket says they asked in dream and were told that the Fast Day commemorating this event had to be pegged to the Erev Shabbos of Parshas Chukas. This tragic event is connected to reading of Parshas Chukas.

This tragic event, the paradox of Sifrei Torah being burnt, which makes no sense, whatsoever, has nothing to do with a date. It has to do with Parshas Chukas.

The lesson is that there are things which we will never understand -- Sifrei Torah being burnt... or Jews being burnt ... or Tzadikim suffering. That is why this Fast Day is pegged to Parshas Chukas.

Sources and Personalities Shibolei HaLeket -- Halachic compendium by R. Tzidkiyah HaRofei of Rome (c. 1230-c.1300) Magen Avrohom -- R. Avraham Gombiner (1634-1682) of Kalisch, Poland; name of his basic commentary on Shulchan Aruch --Orach Chaim.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington twerskyd@scn.org
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YESHIVAT HAR ETZION VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH PROJECT(VBM)
PARASHAT CHUKAT
SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A

"It is not in the Heavens"
Summarized by Hillel Meizels

"R. Acha in the name of R. Yosi bar Chanina said: When Moshe went up (to receive the Torah) he heard God's voice dealing with the parasha of para aduma (the red heifer) and stating halakha in the name of the one who said it: 'R. Eliezer says ...a cow has to be in its second year (to be fit for use as a para aduma).' ...Moshe said to God: 'May it be Your will that he be one of my descendants.' God said to him: 'Upon your life, he IS of your descendants, as it is written: "And the name of THE ONE is Eliezer" - and the name of that special one is Eliezer.'" (Midrash Tanchuma, Chukat, 24)

Our human concept of "oneness," completeness, wholeness, is not the same as God's. A human can have conflicting emotions, can change his opinions from one day to the next and can act hypocritically. God, however, is completely unified. His different attributes are in total harmony and all contribute to His oneness.

By referring to R. Eliezer, a human, as THE ONE, God was saying that R. Eliezer was the human being closest to the state of Godly oneness, and therefore, God took pleasure in quoting the halakhot in his name. What makes this strange is that this is the same R. Eliezer who was placed under a cherem (ban) by the rest of the sages in the famous case of the "tanur shel Achnai" (Bava Metzi'a 59b). This was an oven made of separate tiles, connected with sand-cement. R. Eliezer held that if an impure substance was placed in it, the whole oven remained pure, while the sages held it became impure. R. Eliezer brought many miraculous signs to show that he was correct, but the sages stood firm in their decision. R. Eliezer then called on heaven to prove that he was right. A bat kol (heavenly voice) called out: "What are you doing to R. Eliezer, for the halakha is like him in every place?" R. Yehoshua stood up and said: "It is written: 'It [the Torah] is not in the heavens (Devarim 30).' What does this mean? That the Torah was already given on Har Sinai and [now] we do not pay attention to a bat kol [to decide halakhic issues]." R. Natan later asked Eliyahu what God's reaction was at the time. Eliyahu replied: "God smiled and said: 'My sons have defeated me, My sons have defeated me.'"

The sages proceeded to reverse all R. Eliezer's decisions in which he proclaimed something pure, and they burnt those objects (as they were now impure). They then got together and put R. Eliezer under a ban. The gemara continues to describe how upset R. Eliezer was and the upheavals that took place in the world due to his anguish. When Rabban Gamliel's ship was then threatened by a storm, he called out to God that he had banned R. Eliezer in order to maintain God's honor, i.e. so that there should not be many arguments within Yisrael.

This incident only serves to highlight R. Eliezer's standing in the eyes of God and it seems very strange that a man so great should be put in cherem by the rest of the sages. To understand this better, we first have to understand one of the laws of tum'a (impurity).

Any vessel which comes into contact with something tameh (impure) is rendered tameh as well. However, if the vessel is slightly broken or cracked or made from different pieces, it can not be rendered impure. It is only fit to become tameh if it is complete, whole.

Now we can apply this to the tanur shel Achnai which was made of tiles connected by sand-cement. When R. Eliezer came to determine the status of the oven, he looked at it from heaven's viewpoint of completeness and wholeness. From that lofty perspective the oven was not at all whole. Therefore, it could not become tameh and R. Eliezer pronounced it tahor (pure). However, from that perspective, nothing in this physical world is ever really complete. The sages realized this and therefore judged the oven

from a realistic, worldly perspective. From this point of view, the oven was whole and therefore tameh. The sages understood that we can't live our lives in this world, which is bound by physical limits, according to the high standards of heaven. True, we have to draw from the spiritual, the Godly, and strive towards it, but the halakhic norms of our lives must be established by the practical, physical limitation of the world we live in. We cannot establish halakhic reality in this world based on Heaven's high standards.

Now we can understand why the sages denounced R. Eliezer and all his halakhot, because these were not judged by the criteria of the human beings for whom they were aimed, but rather by heaven's standards. But halakha is meant for human beings and not angels. We can also understand how R. Eliezer was able to call forth all those miraculous signs: by heaven's standards, he was correct and so he received God's support, to the point of having a bat kol support his position.

One question remains. Surely God was the one who established that halakha must be judged in accordance with the requirements of this physical world; He was the one who said: 'It is not in the heavens.' So why did the bat kol defend R. Eliezer?

The answer is simple enough. Although by heaven's standards R. Eliezer was right, God obviously knows that we are living in this physical, limited world and are bound by it. By sending out a bat kol he was testing the sages to see if they would stand by their principles, even to the point of God himself seemingly going against them. If they could withstand this, they could withstand any type of adversity, and would always continue to determine halakha appropriately.

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PARSHAT CHUKAT (new version) ml@etzion.org.il (Menachem Leibtag)
yhe-parsha@jer1.co.il (Chumash shiur focusing on theme and structure by Menachem Leibtag)

Note: Last week I sent out last year's shiur. This week, I had time to re-write the shiur, but not to edit it, so please excuse its final form. It's soon shabbat, so I am sending the rough draft.

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PARSHAT CHUKAT

Why is Moshe punished at the incident of "Mei Meriva"? Because he:

- * spoke HARSHLY, instead of GENTLY;
- * HIT the rock, instead of SPEAKING to it;
- * hit the rock TWICE, instead of only ONCE? These are only a few of the numerous opinions raised by the commentators.

In this week's shiur, we first analyze the parsha to show WHY there are so many opinions. Afterward, we discuss the possibility that Moshe may not have sinned at all!

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Everyone assumes that Moshe sinned at Mei Meriva for a very simple reason - because he is punished immediately afterward:

"And God told Moshe... BECAUSE you did not trust Me enough to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you shall not lead this people into the land that I have given them.." (20:12)

Obviously, Moshe would not be punished if he did nothing wrong. However, the Torah only informs us WHY he is punished, i.e. "because he did not enough faith to sanctify God's name"; it does not specify WHAT he did that was so terrible.

To determine precisely Moshe did that provoked God's anger, the commentators scrutinize the psukim which describe this event in search of some fault in Moshe's behavior.

THE FOUR CLASSIC "SHITOT"

In the "rishonim" (the classic commentaries) we find four different approaches explaining WHAT Moshe did wrong (see Ramban 20:1):

- 1) RASHI (following the Midrash)-

Because Moshe HIT the rock, instead of speaking to it;

2) IBN EZRA -

Because he hit the rock TWICE, instead of once;

3) RAMBAM -

Because Moshe 'lost his temper' and spoke harshly;

4) RAMBAN / in the name of Rabeinu Chananel -

Because Moshe said: "can WE get water from this rock?",
instead of: "can GOD get water from this rock?".

Even though each "shita" (opinion) is different, they are all based on the assumption Moshe is punished because he did not properly fulfill God's instructions of how to bring forth water from the rock. A very straightforward analysis can show the reason for this four-way "machloket" (argument).

FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

Determining WHAT Moshe did wrong should be quite simple. We must compare the pasuk which describes what God INSTRUCTED Moshe to do (20:7-8), and COMPARE it to the psukim which describe he actually did (20:9-12). [While doing so, we will find the reason for each of these four opinions.]

God's instructions to Moshe appear to be very definite and precise:
"And God spoke to Moshe saying: TAKE the staff, and GATHER the congregation together, you and Aharon your brother, and SPEAK to the rock before their eyes that it should give water, and TAKE OUT for them water from the rock, and GIVE DRINK to the people and their animals."

Carefully note the five verbs in God's commandment, which correspond to five actions which Moshe must take:

- (1) TAKE the staff;
- (2) GATHER the congregation;
- (3) SPEAK to the rock;
- (4) TAKE OUT for them water from the rock;
- (5) GIVE DRINK to the people.

Now, to determine Moshe's sin, we must compare this command to the corresponding stages of its fulfillment.

STAGE ONE -

GOD: "TAKE the staff";

MOSHE: "And Moshe TOOK the staff from BEFORE THE LORD, AS GOD HAD COMMANDED HIM..." (20:9)

Nothing seems to be wrong here, after all the pasuk says: "as God commanded him". [Later in the shiur we shall return to this pasuk.]

STAGE TWO

GOD: GATHER the "eydah" (people), you and Aharon...

MOSHE: And Moshe and Aharon GATHERED the "kahal" (congregation) people together in front of the rock... (20:10)

Here again, nothing appears to have been done wrong. [There is slight discrepancy between "kahal" and "eydah", but these two words may simply be synonymous - See Further Iyun.]

STAGE THREE

GOD: SPEAK to the rock that it should give water...

MOSHE: And he [Moshe] said to them: Listen here you rebellious people, is it possible that WE can take water from this rock?" (20:10)

Here we find a major discrepancy. Instead of speaking to the ROCK, Moshe speaks to the PEOPLE. [It seems as though Moshe understood 'speak TO the rock' as 'speak ABOUT the rock'.] In any case, this specific rebuke of the people seems to have been added on Moshe's own initiative. Both Rambam and Ramban take issue with this rebuke:

RAMBAM takes issue with the TONE of Moshe's rebuke: "Listen you rebels..." reflects an unnecessary anger which caused a "chillul Hashem" (a desecration of God's Name). [See Rambam in "shmoneh prakim" or Ramban on 20:7)]

RAMBAN takes issue with the CONTENT of this remark: "Is it possible that WE can take out water from this rock?" - From this question, the people could conclude that MOSHE and AHARON are causing the water to come out; NOT GOD.

STAGE FOUR

GOD: TAKE OUT for them water from the rock...

MOSHE: And Moshe lifted his hand and smote the rock with his

staff two times, then much water came out..." (20:11)

RASHI understands that God intended for Moshe to 'take out' the water by 'talking' to the rock. Therefore, according to his "shita", in this pasuk we find Moshe's sin, for God commanded him to TALK to the rock, and instead he HIT it.

[Ramban and Rambam argue that possibly nothing is wrong in Moshe's hitting the rock. After all, it is also a miracle if Moshe hits the rock, just as he hit the rock at Chorev forty years earlier.]

IBN EZRA refutes all of the above reasons. He focuses on the word "pa'amayim" (=two times) in this pasuk, claiming that Moshe transgressed because he hit the rock TWICE instead of only once.

STAGE FIVE

GOD: Give drink to the people and their animals.

MOSHE: ... and the people and their animals drank. (20:11)

This final stage is obviously fine.

In summary, we have shown that a careful analysis of the variations in Moshe's fulfillment of God's command can explain the reason for this variety of opinion. So, which of the four "shitot" is 'correct'?

DID MOSHE DO ANYTHING 'WRONG' ?

Not only does this comparison explain why there are so many opinions, it also suggests that Moshe may have done nothing wrong at all! As we shall now demonstrate, almost every action that Moshe performs can easily be understood. [See the commentaries of Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Abarbanel on this topic; each of them present very convincing arguments why all of the other opinions are wrong.]

In order to prove that Moshe may have not sinned at all when hitting the rock, we must look a bit more carefully at the first stage:

"And Moshe took the staff LIFNEI HASHEM (from before God), AS GOD HAD COMMANDED HIM..." (20:9)

Why does the pasuk need to inform us "as God had commanded him"? Is it not obvious?

This phrase, to our surprise, may actually be referring to a much earlier commandment. Note, that there is another important phrase in this pasuk. Moshe took the staff "m'lifnei Hashem" - from BEFORE GOD. What does this mean? Is God standing next to Moshe, guarding his staff? WHOSE STAFF IS IT?

Which staff did Moshe take?

It is commonly assumed that Moshe takes his own staff, i.e. the very same staff which brought the plagues, split the sea, and brought forth water from the rock at Chorev, etc.

However, this assumption is incorrect! It cannot be Moshe's own staff, for the pasuk states explicitly: "the staff which is 'lifnei Hashem'". Usually, "lifnei Hashem" refers to in front of the "aron ha'eydut" (the ark containing the tablets) located in the "kodesh ha'kodeshim" (the holiest domain of the Mishkan /see Shmot 29:11,42;30:8; etc.). Why would Moshe leave his staff in the "kodesh k'doshim"? [It is obviously not to be used as his personal closet!]

Surely, Moshe's staff is not kept "lifnei Hashem", however, AHARON's special staff is!

Recall that after Korach's rebellion, God commands Moshe to conduct a test between the staffs of each of the tribal leaders (see 17:16-24). Once it is established that the staff of Aharon is chosen, God commands Moshe:

"... return the STAFF OF AHARON - 'lifnei ha'eydut" - [in front of the 'tablets of testimony', i.e. the 'aron'] for safe keeping, in order that it be a SIGN FOR ANY REBELLIOUS GROUP ["ot l'bnei meri"]- so that they will stop complaining and not die..." (17:25-26)

In this respect, Moshe acts flawlessly. He takes the staff of Aharon which is kept "lifnei Hashem" - for its very purpose is for situations of rebellion such as these, the complaints of the people at Mei Meriva (see 20:2-5)! [Note the textual parallels between the complaints at Mei Meriva (20:3-5) and the complaints raised at Korach's rebellion (17:16:13-14)! One could even suggest that "ka'asher tzivahu" in 20:9 may imply: as God commanded him - in PARSHAT KORACH!]

This understanding, that Moshe is commanded to take Aharon's special "mateh" (staff) that is kept in the kodesh k'doshim, explains every stage in Moshe ensuing behavior! Recall that the purpose of this mateh is to be an "ot

l'bnei meri" - a sign for a rebellious group. Therefore, it must be God's intention that Moshe hold up this staff and rebuke the people. Now, stage three makes perfect sense: Moshe must speak to the people; NOT to the rock. His choice of words: "shimu na ha'MORIM" [listen you rebellious people] relates perfectly to the purpose of the match: an "ot l'bnei MERI"!

Moshe's continuing statement: "Can we take water from this rock" also makes perfect sense. Because the match is "mateh Aharon", he MUST rebuke the people, therefore: "speak TO the rock" must mean: "speak ABOUT the rock" and "v'natan meimev" means that he should challenge them to believe if it is possible that the rock could give water!

This interpretation also explains beautifully why Moshe HITS the rock. Once Moshe understands that "speak TO the rock" means "speak ABOUT the rock", then God's next instruction: "v'hotzeita" [you shall TAKE OUT water] must imply that Moshe himself must cause the water to come out. How? Exactly as he did forty years earlier by the rock in Chorev, using his own mateh (not Aharon's / read 20:11 carefully - "matey'hu") to HIT the rock.

The only minor detail remaining without a clear explanation is 'striking the rock twice'. Could it be however, that hitting the rock twice instead of once made the miracle any less impressive? Furthermore, God did not tell Moshe to hit the rock ONCE or TWICE! He just commanded him to 'take out water'. Should Moshe not have leeway to hit the rock as he feels proper. Who says that at Chorev the rock was only hit once? Even if this action was incorrect, could this slight 'transgression' warrant such a severe punishment?

Thus, we have shown that once we establish that God instructed Moshe to take "mateh Aharon", every action taken by Moshe was quite logical, and surely did not constitute a deliberate transgression of God's will. Why then is Moshe punished. Where in Moshe's behavior is there any lack of sanctification of God's name? Furthermore, what did Aharon do wrong? Why is he punished?

PUNISHMENT OR DEMOTION

To understand what Moshe and Aharon did wrong, we must re-examine the nature of their punishment:

"And God told Moshe... BECAUSE you did not trust Me enough to sanctify Me... therefore YOU SHALL NOT LEAD THIS PEOPLE INTO THE LAND..." (20:12)

Moshe and Aharon are not being punished as INDIVIDUALS, rather as NATIONAL LEADERS. God is not telling them that: Because you committed a specific sin, you are now being punished and you cannot ENTER the Promised Land. Their punishment is not on the personal level; nor is their sin on a personal level.

God informs Moshe and Aharon that he has decided that they are no longer capable of fulfilling the task of LEADING Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Canaan. They are being 'demoted'! Why?

It would only be logical to assume that if they are being punished as national leaders, their behavior as national leaders at Mei Meriva must have been faulty.

Actually, this is exactly what the pasuk says:

"...BECAUSE you did not trust Me enough TO SANCTIFY ME in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael..." (20:12)

As national leaders, Moshe and Aharon are expected to be capable of creating a "kiddush Hashem" (sanctifying God's Name) in situations of rebellion against God. At Mei Meriva, it seems as though they were unable to do so.

If we look carefully at the OPENING events which take place at Mei Meriva, it becomes quite clear what went wrong:

"And there was not water for the people, and they gathered against Moshe and Aharon. They argued with Moshe saying: It would had been better had we died with our brethren 'lifnei Hashem'... Why did you bring us to this desert to die?...

Why did you take us out of Egypt to bring us to this terrible place?... there are no fruits here and there is no water to drink." (20:3-5)

Moshe and Aharon's immediate reaction is rather pathetic:

"And Moshe and Aharon came to the entrance of the Ohel Moed [in fear] from the congregation, and they fell on their faces..." (20:6)

Forty years earlier at Rfidim a similar incident took place with almost the

identical complaint (see Shmot 17:1-7). In that confrontation, Moshe immediately answered the people:

"mah trivun iy'madi, mah t'nasun et Hashem" (17:2)

[Why are you arguing with me, why are you TESTING God?]

When they continue to complain, Moshe cries out to God, begging for a solution (17:4). There too, God's answer was to take his 'mateh', gather the elders, and hit the rock, etc. It is important to note the concluding pasuk of that incident:

"That place was named 'Masa & M'riva' as they had tested God saying: 'ha'yesh Hashem b'kirbeinu, iym ayin" - Is God in our midst or not? (17:7)

Bnei Yisrael's complaint for water at Rfidim did not reflect the nation's lack of belief in God's existence, rather their lack of faith in His Providence ('hashagacha'). In other words, they were testing (or doubting) His ability to care for their needs. This firm belief in God's Providence is an essential element in becoming God's special nation. [See Dvarim 6:17 and its context! see also Bamidbar 14:22-23!]

Forty years later, at "Mei Mriva", Moshe and Aharon's behavior appears much more passive. Instead of confronting these almost identical complaints, they immediately 'run away' to the Ohel Moed and 'fall on their faces' (20:6).

Was this the proper reaction? Should they not have assured the people that God will indeed take care of their needs. Should they not have challenged the statement that it "would have been better had they remained in Egypt"? Could one not suggest that already at this point in the narrative they have failed as national leaders. They did not sanctify God's name when the opportunity arose. Their behavior, in the eyes of the people, may have caused a serious doubt in God's ability to help His Nation.

"In the eyes of Bnei Yisrael" Moshe and Aharon were not steadfast in their faith - "yaan lo ha'emantem bi" (20:12). [Note the use of the word "emunah" in the war against Amalek, when Moshe must keep his hands upright (Shmot 17:12).

When Bnei Yisrael will enter and begin their conquest of the Land of Israel, rebellious situations such as these are likely to take place numerous times. Bnei Yisrael require leadership which can deal with such mundane complaints. God decides that Moshe and Aharon are no longer capable of leading this new generation. Not because they did anything 'wrong', because they are not able to lead them at their level.

At Mei Meriva, once again Bnei Yisrael are 'testing' God. Moshe and Aharon are expected to respond in a manner which will create a "kiddush Hashem", but they are unable.

Tragically so, as individuals Moshe and Aharon do absolutely nothing wrong. They did not disobey God's commandment, they faithfully performed every detail as they best understood. However, as national leaders they failed. They failed to create a "kiddush Hashem" out of this perilous predicament. When all is said and done, their behavior during this entire episode did not appear to improve the people's relationship with God. [For example, later in the Parsha, a similar situation arises at "B'ey'rah" (21:16-18). There Moshe gathered the people together, God provided water, and the people responded with a song of praise! This shows that given the proper circumstances, such a situation can result in a "kiddush Hashem". Moshe may have learned his lesson, however, by then it is already too late for God to change His decision.]

REASONS OR INDICATORS

One could suggest that all the various opinions explaining Moshe's sin, and view them not as REASONS for his punishment, rather as INDICATORS of his faltering leadership: their harsh tone, their quick anger, their lack of patience hitting the rock twice instead of once, their running away to the Ohel Moed, and possibly their inability to understand correctly Hashem's command or deliver His message. All these opinions point to the same general problem of leadership. Their punishment, therefore, is not only appropriate, but also inevitable.

This problem of leadership has already surfaced in Parshat Bhaalotcha when the nation complained for food (the 'mitavim' / see previous shiur, and the 'nevuah' there of Eldad & Meidad). In fact it could almost be considered a theme in Sefer Bamidbar. >From the time Bnei Yisrael leave Har Sinai, every event which Chumash records reflects this pattern of faltering leadership: *

At "Kivrot ha'taaveh" Moshe himself claims that he can

longer lead the people (11:11-15). * Later, even Miriam, Moshe's own sister, complains about his leadership (12:1-3). * When the "mraglim" return, Moshe and Aharon fall on their

faces (14:5); Kaleb and Yehoshua take leadership positions. * In the rebellion of Korach (chapter 16), again Moshe and Aharon's leadership is challenged, again they fall on their faces (16:4,22).

[This approach also explains why later in Sefer Dvarim, Moshe claims that it was because of "Chet Ha'Mraglim" that he could not enter the land (Dvarim 1:37). This is not a contradiction to Sefer Bamidbar, it is a recurring theme.

As we have explained, surely as individuals, Moshe and Aharon are tzadikim, they do nothing 'wrong'. However, as leaders, they fail. Leadership must provide not only solutions but also guidance. At Mei Meriva, possibly a personal example of patience, stamina, confidence, and calm rebuke may have able to create the necessary "kiddush Hashem"; but this did not happen.

This leadership crisis is not a question of good or bad behavior, rather a problem of compatibility. In the fortieth year, not only is there a generation gap, there was also a gap in spiritual level. The events of "Mei Mriva" exhibit a recurring theme in Sefer Bamidbar - the lack of compatibility between Moshe Rabeinu and Bnei Yisrael. To meet the challenges of taking this nation into the Promised Land, new leadership is necessary. Not because Moshe and Aharon did anything 'wrong', rather because Am Yisrael were not worthy of them.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

NCYI Divrei Torah - Chukat

Guest Rabbi: Rabbi Heshy Blumstein Young Israel of Redwood, New York
Imagine you are on a difficult mission. Your job (should you decide to accept) is to transport dangerous and difficult criminals. As you depart, your superior tells you, "Take your stick. You are going to need it. Use it". You did. Your next mission is to transport less dangerous criminals. You are warned, "Don't use violence. But just in case, take your stick". It is obvious that you are being told not to use force unless absolutely necessary. Moshe Rabbeinu was told in perek 17, pasuk 6, "Behold, I will stand before thee thereupon the rock in Horeb and now thou shalt smite the rock and there shall come out of it water that the people may drink. And Moses did so." In perek 20, pasuk 8 Moshe Rabbeinu was told, "Take the rod and assemble the congregation thou and Aaron thy brother and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes that is given forth its water". Moshe tried to speak to the rock but according to Rashi's interpretation Moshe did not recognize the rock for the rock had gone away and dwelt among the other rocks. He spoke to the wrong rock. Therefore, he said perhaps it is necessary to smite the rock as on the former occasion. Feeling perhaps that the rock deserved to be hit for not listening to the commandment of HaShem, Moshe hit the rock. What exactly was Moshe's sin? What did he do to deserve to lose the merit of entering into the land of Israel?

There are many opinions given by the commentaries. I will briefly review them. A: Chazal tell us that the sin that Moshe performed was that he belittled the Jewish Nation by calling them rebellious.

B: Ramban tells us that the sin was the anger that Moshe channeled at the Jewish Nation. G-d does not get angry at His children when they ask for water and food in the proper manner. Why did Moshe?

C: Ramban feels the fact that Moshe left out the name of G-d when he said, "Bring forth for you water"- he should have said, "G-d will bring forth for you water", just like he had said by the Mon: "This is the bread that G-d gave for you to eat".

D: The sin was that he hit the rock twice. Others feel the sin was that Moshe did not say shira (a song of praise) after the rock gave forth water.

E: The Abarbanel explains- HaShem commanded Moshe and Aaron to talk to the stone. When they subsequently hit the stone, HaShem punished them for their previous sins. Aaron- because of his involvement with the Golden Calf. Even though he is not directly blamed for this terrible sin, he indirectly

caused the death of many members of Klal Yisrael. Moshe received punishment for sending the spies without HaShem's approval. It was Moshe who told the spies to see if the land was weak or strong, and to report back to Klal Yisrael. Even though Moshe's intentions were good, he caused evil words to be said about the Land of Israel. These sins were revisited and caused these two great spiritual giants to pass away in the desert and not to enter the Holy Land.

F: The most common known answer is the Midrash which Rashi teaches us. Moshe was commanded to talk to the stone and not to hit the stone. For if they would have spoken to the rock, it would have given forth water which would have sanctified the name of HaShem. Klal Yisrael would have said, "If a rock which is an inanimate object- unable to speak or hear- obey's G-d's wishes, certainly we should adhere to G-d's wishes". And now the question- Moshe tried- he spoke to the rock but it would not listen. HaShem told him to take his rod. Isn't it quite obvious that he should use it?!

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky, ZT"L, in his sefer, Emet L'Yaakov, gives us his insightful response. Moshe's sin was unique to Moshe since he was the Mesorah (tradition) of the Torah to the Jewish Nation. Every word that came from Moshe was the word of G-d. Moshe had to transmit these words exactly as told and, therefore, his actions had to be exactly as he was told from G-d. By hitting the rock he altered his mission only an iota; yet that was enough to put the mesorah in danger. For this he had to be punished to prove that in all other missions, it was done exactly as told. The Bnei Yissachar tells us, similarly, that Moshe's relationship with G-d was a unique relationship where G-d's words actually come out of Moshe's throat.

Such a relationship does not leave room for self innovation.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch, of Blessed Memory, when discussing the death of Nadav and Avihu, gives us a similar message. There is no place for "innovation" when dealing with the service of G-d. Only that which has been transmitted via Mesorah is to be included in the service of G-d. Simply put, just because an idea of how one is supposed to serve G-d is appropriate in one's mind, does not make it necessarily correct. Our job as parents and as Rabbis is to transmit the Torah and its values exactly the way we were taught by our teachers. When a question arises dealing with contemporary issues we must ask ourselves- how would our teachers have answered this question? How would Moshe Rabbeinu given our technology, answer this question? That's the Torah true Mesorah. As great as our teachers are, the leaders of the past generations were exponentially greater, increasing in greatness as the years date backwards to Sinai. We don't encourage change, we encourage tradition.

A well known story is told about the great Gaon, Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky. On a trip to Israel a well-known "enlightened" individual was seated near the Rosh Yeshiva. Impressed by the honor given to Rav Yaakov by his grandchildren (they came to check on him many times throughout the trip), this man exclaimed, "Why do your grandchildren treat you with such respect while my grandchildren treat me like an old man- a has been"? Rav Yaakov responded, "You believe that the Darwin theory of evolution has validity. You believe that our ancestors were apes; the older the individual, the closer he is to the beginning of man- or to the ape. We believe that our ancestors were the Holiest of Holies, therefore the older the individual, the closer he is to the source of Holiness and the greater he is. Our grandchildren respect our traditions because they know it was transmitted from father to son from Sinai". Let us merit to be the link in the chain, our children a further link, in a chain that spans from Sinai till today.

This Dvar Torah was written in memory of my dear grandparents, Yitzchok and Elka Glogower, who transmitted this beautiful Mesorah to their grandchildren. They will be remembered forever.

Torah Studies-Chukas

B"H
Torah Studies
Adaptation of Likutei Sichos
by
Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks

Chukat begins with an account of the Red Heifer, a strange practice whose object was the purification of those who had become contaminated through contact with the dead.

The heifer was burned, and its ashes, mixed with water, sprinkled on those who had become defiled. But the paradox was that though it purified them, it made impure all those who were involved in its preparation. Thus it is called, in the Sidra's second verse, a chukah ("ordinance") - a technical term meaning, "law for which no reason can be given."

Rashi gives this explanation for the word, but his comment has some unusual features which the Sicha first points out, and then explains, showing that it is intelligible only if we distinguish two different kinds of chukah.

RASHI'S COMMENT ANALYZED

The Sidra begins: "And the L-rd spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: This is the ordinance (chukat) of the Torah which the L-rd has commanded...."

Rashi interprets the phrase, "this is the ordinance of the Torah" thus:

"Because Satan and the nations of the world provoke Israel, saying, 'what is the meaning of this commandment to you and what is its reason?,' therefore it is described as an 'ordinance' it is a decree about which you have no right to speculate."

But there are difficulties here:

(i) From the words of Rashi - "therefore it is described as an 'ordinance' " - it is apparent that he intended not to explain the meaning of the word "ordinance" itself - which he has already done previously on many occasions. (And even though he has not done so previously in the book of Bamidbar, it is not as if he suspected that readers of his commentary would have forgotten his earlier explanation, because the word "ordinance" occurs earlier in Bamidbar and passes without comment from Rashi.)

Rather, Rashi wants to explain the fact that it appears to be superfluous, since the phrase "this is the law" would have been sufficient.

And if this is so, since the reader already knows the meaning of "ordinance," a brief explanation would have served. Why then does Rashi add, at length, the comments about Satan and the nations of the world, which he has already made several times previously?

(ii) Also, there are several differences between Rashi's answer here, and in earlier places, which require understanding.

In earlier comments the agent provocateur is the "evil inclination"; here it is "Satan."

In these earlier places, he is represented as "raising objections" or "caviling"; Here, as "provoking."

And in one earlier comment, one is said to be forbidden to "exempt oneself" from the ordinances; here one is forbidden to "speculate about them."

(iii) If our earlier reasoning is correct, Rashi's comment applies only to the seeming superfluity of the word "ordinance." Why then should it bear the heading "this is the ordinance of the law," as if Rashi intended to explain the whole phrase?

Within Reason and Beyond

The explanation is as follows:

The wording of the phrase, "this is the ordinance of the law" suggests that the law of the Red Heifer is the only ordinance in the Torah. But surely there are other ordinances (mentioned as such by Rashi), like the prohibition of eating the meat of pig or wearing clothes made of a mixture of wool and linen.

Therefore, we are forced to say that there is a special class of ordinance, of which the Red Heifer is the only example; that is, that there are two kinds of ordinance:

(i) those which could in principle be understood by human intelligence, but details of which are beyond comprehension;
(ii) those which are entirely beyond the scope of human understanding. The phrase "this is the ordinance of the law" is thus intended to indicate that the law of the Red Heifer is alone in belonging to the second category. Therefore when Rashi brings examples (in Vayikra) of ordinances, he mentions the prohibitions of the meat of the pig and of clothes made of wool and linen mixture, and the waters of purification, but he does not include the Red Heifer, since that belongs to an entirely separate category.

The "waters of purification" (water mingled with the ashes of the Red Heifer) is something whose principle can be understood rationally.

For, just as purification through immersion in a Mikvah is a notion which Rashi never classifies as an "ordinance," because it is quite reasonable that waters of the Mikvah have the power to cleanse spiritually; similarly, the "waters of purification" can have equal effect. Their only peculiarity lies in the detail that only a few drops of it suffice to purify, whereas the Mikvah requires total immersion.

Hence the waters belong to the first class of ordinances - decrees which are partially intelligible. But the laws of the Red Heifer itself are entirely beyond understanding.

It cannot be construed simply as a kind of burnt offering, since:

- (i) no part of the Red Heifer was offered up at the altar;
- (ii) all the actions involving the Red Heifer were to be done "outside the three camps"; whereas all the offerings were made specifically within them;
- (iii) the Red Heifer is not even analogous to the goat of Azazel which, (besides its preliminaries being conducted within the camp,) was something for which a partial explanation was given ("and the goat shall bear forth on it their iniquities unto a desolate land").

And it has the following exceptional features that the goat of Azazel did not:

- (i) it was to be carried out by the Deputy High Priest;
- (ii) its blood was to be sprinkled seven times towards the front of the Ohel Moed;
- (iii) it was called a "sin offering" to show that it was similar to holy things.

In short, the Red Heifer does not belong to the first category of ordinance for it cannot be even partially understood.

G-d and Man

In the light of this, we can understand why Rashi uses expressions here ("Satan" as opposed to "evil inclination": "Provokes" in place of "raising objections"; and "forbidden to speculate" instead of "forbidden to exempt oneself from them") which do not occur in his other explanations of the word "ordinance."

It is clear that G-d's intellect surpasses man's, so that if we are told by G-d that a given commandment cannot be humanly understood, there is no ground on which the evil inclination can argue from its unintelligibility to its non-Divine origin. For, why should finite man be able to comprehend infinite G-d?

But when a commandment is partially open to human understanding, the evil inclination and the nations of the world do have (albeit fallacious) grounds for "arguing" or "raising objections" that it is not Divine: For how could G-d command something which on the one hand was accessible to human reason and on the other hand was inaccessible to it? They would therefore argue that they are not Divine, and not binding on the Jew.

But since the Red Heifer is entirely inaccessible to reason, it cannot be "refuted" by the evil inclination or the nations of the world. All they can do is to "provoke" the Jew by saying "what meaning has this commandment for you, and what is its reason?" Admittedly you have to obey the word of G-d, but in doing so you are doing something which to the human mind is completely meaningless and irrational.

Thus Rashi uses the word "Satan" instead of the "evil inclination" - for the skeptical voice seeks here only to trouble a Jew at the moment of acting, not to dissuade him from it at all.

And thus he does not say, "it is forbidden to 'exempt yourself' from the command" (for a case cannot be made out for exemption); but, that "it is

forbidden 'to speculate' about its rationale," and instead perform it with joy as if one understood it completely.

The reason is (as Rashi continues), that the Red Heifer is a "decree" of G-d: That is, that G-d Himself is telling us not to be perturbed by the absence of a rationale, and to do it simply because G-d so decrees.

This is the only way that it can be properly fulfilled.

We can now understand why Rashi cites the whole phrase "this is the ordinance of the law" as his heading: For it is this phrase which makes it clear that this ordinance is different from all others; and this is what underlines the nuances of Rashi's explanation.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. VIII, pp. 123-7.)

PART II - BALAK

Torah Weekly - Balak Ohr Somayach <ohr@jer1.co.il> * TORAH WEEKLY *

Summary Balak, the king of the Moav, is in morbid fear of the Bnei Yisrael. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilaam to curse them. First, Hashem appears to Bilaam and forbids him to go. But because Bilaam is so insistent, Hashem appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a malach (angel, messenger from Hashem) blocks the path of Bilaam's donkey. Unable to contain his frustration, Bilaam strikes the donkey each time it stops or wants to make a detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking Bilaam why he is hitting her. The malach instructs Bilaam what he is permitted to say, and what he is forbidden to say regarding the Jewish People. When Bilaam arrives, King Balak makes elaborate preparations in the hope that Bilaam will succeed in the planned curse. Three times Bilaam attempts to curse, and three times a blessing issues instead. Balak, seeing that Bilaam has failed, sends him home in disgrace. The Bnei Yisrael begin sinning with the Moavi women, and worshipping the Moavi idols, and are punished with a plague. One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a Midianite princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aaron, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This halts the plague, but not before 24,000 have died.

Commentaries

"ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH..." "How goodly are your tents O Yaakov!" (24:5) What was so 'goodly' about the tents of Yaakov? Bilaam noted that not one of Israel's tent entrances was aligned opposite the other. Every tent was angled so that its entrance looked out only onto the side of the tent of its neighbor. But was so special about that? True, it showed a discretion and a respect for privacy - but why, specifically, should it be this non-alignment of the tent-openings that caused Bilaam to proclaim the Jewish People deserving of the Divine Presence to dwell among them? In fact, Bilaam's whole intention was to find some universal flaw in the Jewish People which would allow him to bring them down - to curse them by accusing them of some endemic sin. However, he could find no such common flaw. For, even though one Jew might stumble in one area, his neighbor would, as it were, step into the breach and excel in that same area, compensating for him. And so on throughout the entire people. Bilaam could not find one ubiquitous vice that ran throughout the body politic of the Jewish People, try as he might. That's the hidden meaning of his words here "How goodly are your tents, Yaakov!" "None of your entrances (to sin) are aligned corresponding to the entrance of your neighbor. None of your sins are aligned opposite the sins of your neighbor. And so - I can't get a 'clear shot' through to the middle! I can't wound you by lobbing a shot clear into your midst - into your heart. For each one of you steps into the breach - the weakness of one is the strength of the other - leaving no opening to the sin which crouches at the door..." (Kehillas Yitzhak) ANIMAL CRACKERS? "What have I done that you have struck me these three times" (22:26) Bilaam's donkey was not asinine. When the donkey said "these three times", he was alluding to the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succos. The

donkey was asking Bilaam how he could have imagined that he would uproot the Jewish People who make the three pilgrimage festivals. But what is so special about the three festivals that they are singled out as such a protective force for the Jewish People? The Jewish People are above time. Since they can establish the day on which the month begins, they are essentially 'partners in time' with the Creator, and not totally subject to time's constraints. Bilaam, however, could only receive prophecy at night. His prophecy was time-dependent. Thus the donkey was reminding Bilaam that he was 'yoked' to time, and how could he possibly imagine that he would be able to dominate a people who were above time? That donkey was certainly not asinine. (Based on Admo'r R. Dovid M'Kotzke in Iturei Torah)

THE MOMENT OF WRATH "For I know that whomever...you curse is cursed" (22:6) There is a mystical concept that Hashem 'gets angry' every day (Avodah Zarah 4a). This 'anger' is the Midas HaDin, the Attribute of unyielding justice, with which Hashem judges sinners. Clearly, someone who has transgressed is most vulnerable at that time. The 'talent' of Bilaam was that he was able to discern the exact time in each day when this attribute is active - when Hashem 'gets angry.' Thus, Bilaam wanted to direct the Midas HaDin against the Jewish People by cursing them and calling forth upon them Divine punishment. However, Hashem foiled Bilaam's scheme by 'closing up' the Midas HaDin and not sitting in judgment. But, necessarily, as there was no Midas HaDin during those days, the world received, in its place, the opposite midah, the Midas HaChesed, the attribute of kindness. Bilaam realized that due to the influx of this 'excess kindness,' the time was propitious to get the Jewish People to sin through immorality, which is, in essence, unbridled 'kindness.' Thus he advised Balak accordingly, (Rashi 24:14) and Balak was successful in luring Yisrael into degrading themselves with the daughters of Moav. YOU LOSE - I WIN "So now - please come and curse this people for me, for it is too powerful for me." (22:6) When Balak ben Tzipor, the king of Moav was frightened of the Jews, he went to Bilaam and asked him, not to bless him, but to curse the Jews! This is the way of the wicked - rather than seek a blessing for themselves, they would prefer a curse for someone else! What does a Jew do when he finds himself in trouble? He goes to a big tzaddik and asks him to give him a bracha. He davens to the Creator of the world to save him. (The Chafetz Chaim)

Haftarah: Michah 5:6-6:8 WALKING HUMBLY "O Man, what is good and what does Hashem seek from you, only to do justice and love kindness, and walk humbly with your G-d". (6:8) "to walk humbly with your G-d" - this refers to the mitzvos of providing for a bride and escorting the dead - (Rashi) To perceive the true essence of a person, one must see him both in moments of transcendent joy - providing for a bride - and abject sorrow - escorting the dead. For in these moments of extremity, the inner qualities are revealed in stark relief. Only then can it be seen whether he can be said "to walk humbly with your G-d." (Kochav M'Yaakov)

Sing, My Soul! Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations. Mah Yedidus - "How Beloved..." Like being hedged in by roses, in it son and daughter will rest kashoshanim sugah, bo yanuchu ben uvav A hedge of roses is the poetic description of the disciplines imposed by the Torah on Israel (Shir Hashirim 7:3). Such a hedge does not use its physical power to prevent one from penetrating it. Its ability to deter a potential trespasser is its beauty, which anyone with sensitivity will respect. No visible wall stands between the Jew and the violation of the Sabbath. But his love of the beauty and fragrance of the hedge of roses which is made up of the Torah and Rabbinical laws of Shabbos restrain him more effectively than any human policing. Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman Production Design: Lev Seltzer (C) 1996 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

"rmk@yoss.org (Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky) drasha@torah.org" PARSHAS CHUKAS -- BALAK --- LISTEN TO THE MOCKING BIRD When you are hit in the face, it is hard to help but notice. Unless, of course, you wear your ego as a face-guard. This week, the gentile prophet Bilaam, a man whom our sages say had prophetic vision equal to if not greater than Moshe, is hired by the Nation of

Moav to curse the Jewish Nation.

At first he is reluctant. Upon hearing the tremendous reward of storehouses filled with gold and silver, however, he acquiesces and sets out on his dastardly mission. Then a miracle occurs. An angel, who is seen only by Billam's donkey, blocks the path. His ordinarily faithful she-donkey tries to squeeze by the Angel and inadvertently presses Bilaam's foot against the wall. During this time, Bilaam, unaware of the metaphysical circumstances that brought about the shift in his donkey's behavior, is incensed. He strikes the animal three times. Another miracle occurs! The donkey begins to talk. He carries on a brief conversation with his Master.

"Why did you hit me three times?" asks the donkey

"Because you mocked me! If only there were a sword in my hand I would kill you!" replies Bilaam.

The donkey continues to plead her case. "Am I not your faithful donkey that you have ridden on all your life? Have I been accustomed to do this type of thing to you?"

Bilaam replies meekly in the negative. Hashem opens his eyes and he finally realizes that an Angel blocked the way.

The human aspect of the incident is perhaps more astonishing than the miracle itself. How is it possible that the great seer who hears his donkey speak begins to threaten it with death? Doesn't he realize that a supernatural event is occurring?

Second, why would he threaten to kill the animal? By doing so he would never get to his destination. Wasn't that a totally irrational threat?

The episode reminds me of an old yarn by the writer Leo Rosten.

Irving, a wealthy man, walked into a pet shop and inquired about a pet for his lonely grandmother. "I have the perfect gift," exclaimed the proprietor. "It's a myna bird that talks Yiddish. It can say up to fifty different phrases! It will keep you grandmother company and cheer her when she is lonely."

A week after the gift arrived, Irving, called his grandmother.

"Bubbie, How did you like the bird?"

"Delicious, Irving. I had the butcher fillet it."

"But, Bubbie, that bird spoke Yiddish!" Irving shrieked in horror.

"So why didn't it say something?"

Billam was experiencing the event of a lifetime. He had an angel directly in his path, and his donkey was actually speaking to him. But he did not notice. He had his eye focused on one thing. His heart was set on cursing the Jew's and collecting a handsome fee.

Miracles were occurring all around him but he lost all rational control. He did not notice. He was only interested in his honor. He would have slaughtered his donkey on the spot.

Often, events occur that should jar us into rethinking our current situations. But our minds are set, our hearts are pre-determined, and our conclusions are foregone. A talking donkey or even a bird for that matter could not get us to stop and think.

The world around us is filled with miraculous events, some, perhaps, greater than a talking donkey. All we have to do is listen.

Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller in Memory of Yoel Nosson Ben Reb Chaim HaLevi O"H Joseph Heller of blessed memory -- Niftar 9 Tamuz Mordechai Kamenetzky - Yeshiva of South Shore rmk@yoss.org <http://www.yoss.org> Drasha, Copyright (c) 1996 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc. Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Mesivta at Mesivta Ateres Yaakov, the High School Division of Yeshiva of South Shore, <http://www.yoss.org/> Project Genesis, the Jewish Learning Network 3600 Crondall Lane, Ste. 106 Owings Mills, MD 21117 (410) 654-1799

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH PROJECT(VBM)

PARASHAT BALAK
SICHA OF HARAV LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Summarized by Aviad Hacohen

"How Good Are Your Tents, Yaakov..."

"How good are your tents, Yaakov; your dwelling places, Israel. Like

winding brooks, like gardens by the riverside, like tents which God has planted, like cedars by the waterside..." (Bamidbar 24:5-6).

The gemara, in massekhet Berakhot (12b), teaches that "originally they wanted to institute parashat Balak as part of Keri'at Shema, and why did they not do so? Because of the inconvenience to the community [that would result from such a lengthy recitation]. And what is so special about parashat Balak that it was considered worthy of being included in Keri'at Shema? The fact that it contains the words, 'He crouched, he lay down like a lion (ari), and like a great lion (lavi) - who shall rouse him?'" A different version in the Mekhilta maintains that the key words of the blessing, making it worthy of inclusion in Keri'at Shema, are "The nation shall rise up like a great lion (lavi) and lift itself like a young lion (ari)."

Bilam's words depict the tranquillity of the Israelite encampment: brooks, tents, gardens by the riverside. Imagine the scene: against the background of the barren desert, the peaceful and pastoral encampment of Bnei Yisrael - orderly rows of tents, trees and gardens, lawns and peaceful streams. The midrash teaches, "How good are your tents, Yaakov" - that the entrance to one tent was never facing the entrance to another." Even in this idyllic setting, modesty is being maintained.

As Bilam continues speaking, we witness a sudden and radical change of atmosphere: After all the water has dripped slowly out of the bucket (24:4), quietly and peacefully, there suddenly appears a powerful torrent, a crashing waterfall, and the storm grows ever more fierce: "He shall consume the nations, his enemies; and shall break their bones, and pierce them with his arrows." There is no peace here; instead there is unceasing war and turmoil.

Does this not contradict our previous scene? It is as if the fifth and sixth symphonies of Beethoven are being featured together here, with no acknowledgment of the tremendous contrast between the peace and tranquillity which characterizes the one, and the storm and turmoil depicted by the other.

One verse in particular stands out in its radical imagery: "The nation shall rise up like a great lion... he shall not lie down until he has eaten the prey and drunk the blood of the slain." Here the lust for the flesh of the enemy and the thirst for their blood reach new heights.

Rashi, to our amazement, ignores the harsh tone altogether and explains all the imagery on a completely different level: "When they arise from their sleep in the morning, they are strong like a lion and like a young lion to "pounce" on the mitzvot, to wear the tallit, to recite the Shema and to don their tefillin. At night as they lie down to sleep they "devour" and destroy any harmful thing that comes to attack them - how? By reciting the Shema while upon their beds, and surrendering their souls to God, and God strikes down their enemies."

Rashi "ignores" the literal meaning of the text. Instead of their drinking blood and devouring prey, Rashi depicts Israel eagerly donning tefillin, "conquering" their tzitzit, "devouring" Keri'at Shema with awe and fear.

At the foundation of this wondrous combination - of war and the sword on one hand and observance of the mitzvot on the other - lies the strength of the Israelite camp. A military encampment, which by its very nature usually tramples any hint of shame, has become a holy camp where no tent entrance faces any other.

There is a dual heroism here: the lion which devours, and the lion which lies down; i.e. knowing when to fight and when to overcome the temptation posed by the power to kill.

The nations of the world cannot grasp such a combination. Tumult and war in the midst of gardens and tents by the waterside? On the other hand, they find it equally difficult to understand the presence of modesty within a military camp.

The exclamation of surprise is born of this wonder in the eyes of the gentile prophet: "How good are your tents, Yaakov" - tents wherein both aspects of heroism form a creative and fruitful combination. (Originally delivered on Shabbat Parashat Balak 5744. Translated by Kaeren Fish.) Copyright (c) 1996 Yeshivat Har Etzion. All rights reserved.

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH PROJECT

(VBM)

PARSHAT HASHAVUA

PARSHAT BALAK

by Menachem Leibtag

In memory of samuel goldsmith, shmuel ben aryeh hakohen, upon the yahrzeit on the 7th of tamuz. In honor of the anniversary of the marriage of our son taniwallach to miriam taragin - tamuz 11, 5754. By kathy and paul wallach.

Mazel tov to: howie and marcy oster on birth of a baby girl david odes ('88) upon his engagement to jo corre Hillel novestys ('83) upon his engagement to neima greenberg

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (5:22) cites Bilam as the archetype "rasha" (a wicked person). Similarly, in various Midrashim, Chazal consistently judge Bilam in a negative light. At first glance, this criticism seems unfair, for in Parshat Balak, Bilam seems to do nothing 'wrong' at all. In fact, throughout the entire Parsha, Bilam does exactly as God commands. [Note that almost every "aliya" concludes with Bilam's declaration that he will not waiver from whatever God says.

In this week's shiur, we show how studying the Parsha in its fuller context helps us appreciate Chazal's judgment.

INTRODUCTION

The story of Bilam and Balak is the first of many events that take place at Arvat Moav (22:1), Bnei Yisrael's final campsite before crossing the Jordan. To better understand Bilam's true character, it is important to recognize his involvement in subsequent events which are recorded later in Sefer Bamidbar.

Immediately after the story of Bilam (chapters 22->24), we find the story of Bnei Yisrael's sin with "bnot Moav" (the daughters of Moav and Midyan/ chapter 25). Although the Torah does not specify who or what instigated this sin, the juxtaposition of these two stories suggests a connection (see Rashi & Ramban 25:1).

In Parshat Matot, when the Torah details the ensuing war against the Midyanites (chapter 31 /note 25:17 and 31:1-2), we find more definite proof of Bilam's direct involvement in the sin of "bnot Moav".

There, we are informed that Bilam is killed together with five other 'kings of Midyan' in that battle (31:8). Furthermore, Bilam is mentioned in Moshe's censure of the military officers for taking female captives:

"And Moshe became angry at the military officers... saying: Were they not the very ones who - b'DVAR BILAM - at the BIDDING OF BILAM, induced the Bnei Yisrael to sin against God in the matter of Peor!" (31:14-16)

[In Sanhedrin 106a, the Gemara deduces from this pasuk that "Dvar Bilam" refers to Bilam's advice to use the daughters of Moav and Midyan to lure Bnei Yisrael towards the idol worship of "Baal Peor".]

From this statement by Moshe, we see that Bilam's involvement in this scheme was 'common knowledge'. [Moshe's statement takes for granted that the military officers are aware of "DVAR BILAM", in other words, everyone knows that he was the instigator.] Bilam was so involved that this entire incident is associated with his name!

When Bnei Yisrael attacked Midyan, Bilam did not just 'happen to be there'. It is more likely that he was orchestrating the entire scheme.

What can we learn from Bilam's involvement? Did he simply offer some last minute advice to Balak once he realized that 'cursing' didn't accomplish Balak's goal?

A closer reading of several psukim, together with a little geographical background, will help us understand Bilam's true motivation.

BILAM'S HOME-TOWN

Bilam lived in Mesopotamia, a VERY FAR DISTANCE away from Moav!

"And Balak sent messengers to Bilam ben Be'or to city of Ptor which is by THE RIVER ... to call him" (32:5)

In Chumash THE RIVER ("ha'nhar") refers to the Euphrates ("n'har prat"), the main river flowing through Mesopotamia.

This assumption can be confirmed by Sefer Dvarim, in a short reference to Moav and the story of Bilam:

"... and because they hired Bilam ben Be'or from Ptor ARAM

NAHARAIM" [Aram - (located between) the two great rivers (the Euphrates and Tigris)] (23:5)

Furthermore, Bilam's opening blessing states specifically that he came from Aram, from the East (modern day Syria/Iraq):

"from ARAM, Balak has brought me... from mountains in the EAST [har'rey KEDEM]" (23:7).

Why is it so important that we know that Bilam came from Mesopotamia, a location so far away?

THE RETURN OF BILAM

At the end of Parshat Balak, after blessing Bnei Yisrael instead of cursing them, Chumash informs us that Bilam returns HOME, i.e. to ARAM (see 24:25). Nevertheless, only a short time later, when Bnei Yisrael are fighting Midyan (as recorded in Parshat Matot), Bilam is back in the 'neighborhood', together with the five kings of Midyan (31:8). Thus, we can conclude that after Bilam returned home, he CAME BACK to Moav - a SECOND time!

Upon his return home, Bilam recognized that his first mission was a 'failure'. Now he returns, embarking on another journey of several hundred miles, not to curse Bnei Yisrael, rather to ADVISE Moav and Midyan on an alternate method to bring about their demise.

Bilam, the 'PROPHET' went home - Bilam the 'CONSULTANT' returns!

What motivated Bilam's lengthy trek back to Moav? Why is he so interested in causing Bnei Yisrael to sin?

BILAM - THE RASHA

Bilam's return proves that his true intention was to curse Bnei Yisrael, yet as a prophet, he could not do so, for 'he can only say that which God commands him'. He is faithful to God as a prophet, but not as a person. Overcome by his desire to cause Bnei Yisrael harm, he employs his prophetic understanding to devise an alternate plan - to create a situation where God Himself will curse them.

As reflected in his blessing of Bnei Yisrael, Bilam came to the realization of the special relationship between God and His Nation. He could not curse them, for it is God's will that Bnei Yisrael fulfill their Divine purpose (see 33:8). On the other hand, Bilam also realized that should Bnei Yisrael themselves fail in their obedience to God, He Himself would punish them. In other words - this special nation could not be cursed without a cause. Bilam's conclusion is shrewd: to CAUSE Bnei Yisrael to be cursed - by causing them to sin. Bilam finds a potential 'loophole' for their demise.

This may be why Chazal consider Bilam a "rasha" (a wicked person). Bilam is utilizing his prophetic understanding, the special trait which God gave him, to further his own desires rather than to follow God's will.

BETWEEN AVRAHAM AND BILAM

In the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (5:22), not only is Bilam called a "rasha", he is also contrasted with Avraham Avinu:

"Whoever has the following three traits is among the 'talmidim' (disciples) of AVRAHAM AVINU; and whoever has three other traits is among the 'talmidim' of BILAM 'ha'rasha':

BILAM	AVRAHAM
evil eye	good eye
arrogant spirit	humble spirit
greedy soul	meek soul ...

Both Avraham and Bilam are men of renowned spiritual stature. Bilam exploited this quality for his own personal pride and gain, while Avraham Avinu utilized this quality towards the perfection of mankind. A "rasha" according to Chazal is one who harnesses his God-given traits and abilities towards an unworthy purpose. A disciple of Avraham Avinu is one who harnesses these qualities for a Divine purpose.

In Chumash, we find several textual parallels between Bilam and Avraham Avinu which support this comparison. We will note two examples:

(A) BRACHA & KLALAH

AVRAHAM: "and I will BLESS those whom you bless, and those who CURSE you shall be cursed, and through you ALL NATIONS on earth SHALL BE BLESSED" (Br. 12:3)

BILAM: "for it is known, that he whom you BLESS shall be blessed, and he whom you CURSE shall be cursed." (22:5)

(B) ARAM NAHARAIM

The homeland of both Avraham and Bilam is in Aram Naharaim,

the center of ancient civilization:

AVRAHAM: see Breishit 24:4 & 24:10, and Br.11:27-31

BILAM: see Bamidbar 23:7 & Dvarim 23:5

These parallels point to this thematic contrast between Bilam and Avraham Avinu. As Bnei Yisrael, the chosen offspring of Avraham Avinu, are about to enter the Land which God promised him, in order to become a 'blessing for all nations' (Br. 12:3), they meet a final challenge. Just as God's prophecy concerning Avraham is about to become a reality, Bilam - the prophet with the ability to bless and curse - together with Moav (the descendants of Lot) and Midyan (the descendants of Yishmael) make a last minute attempt to thwart the fruition of this destiny.

PROFESSIONAL BIAS

One could suggest that this confrontation may be representative of a more fundamental conflict. Unlike Moav, whose fear was motivated by a practical threat upon their national security (22:3-4), Bilam's fear of Am Yisrael may have been more ideological.

The existence of Am Yisrael posed a threat to Bilam himself! Bilam, as echoed in his three blessings, perceived the Divine purpose of Am Yisrael: a Nation destined to bring the message of God to mankind. This novel concept of a Nation of God threatened to upset the spiritual 'status quo' of ancient civilization. Up until this time, Divine messages to mankind were forwarded by inspired individuals, such as Bilam himself. The concept that this purpose could now be fulfilled by a nation, instead of by an individual, could be considered a 'professional threat' to Bilam and the society which he represents.

On a certain level, this confrontation between Bilam and Am Yisrael continues till this very day. Is it possible for a nation, a political entity, to deliver a Divine message to all mankind? Bilam and his 'disciples' endeavor to undermine this goal; Am Yisrael must strive to achieve it.

shabbat shalom menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Note the commentary of the Abarbanel where he explains that Bilam is a descendant of Lavan. 1. Does this support the basic points made in the shiur. 2. What parallels exist between Bilam and Lavan? 3. Did Lavan ever receive "n'vuah"? Did Hashem ever speak to him? If so, what was the content? Is it parallel to Bilam? 4. Could the struggle between Lavan and Yaakov also be considered of a spiritual nature?

B. Bilam was almost successful. Bnei Yisrael's sin with "Bnot Moav and Midyan" led to some 24 thousand casualties. The plague was stopped due to the zealous act of Pinchas (25:6-9). His act returned Bnei Yisrael to their covenantal partner. In reward, Pinchas receives the covenant of the 'kehuna' (25:10-13). 1. In what way does his reward reflect his deed? 2. What are the responsibilities of the 'kohanim' in addition to working in the Mikdash? 3. How does this relate to the ultimate fulfillment of our national destiny?

C. An additional textual parallel exists between Avraham and Bilam: Travelling in the morning with two servants etc.: Avraham - V'yashkeim Avraham ba'boker, V'YACHAVOSH et chamoro va'yikach et SHTEI NA'ARAV ITO .. (Br. 22:3) Bilam - "V'yakom Bilam ba'boker, V'YACHAVOSH et atono...

U'SHNEI NA'ARAV imo" (Bamid. 22:22-23) 1. Could this parallel be the source of the Midrash Chazal describing the 'satan' who challenges Avraham Avinu on his journey with Yitzhak to the Akeidah? If so, explain why.

D. Who wrote "Sefer Bilam"?

Parshat Balak seems to be an integral part of Chumash, however the Gemara in Baba Batra 14b makes a very strange statement. "Moshe katav sifro (chumash -his book), parshat bilam, and sefer Iyov (Job)." It is understandable that we need to know that Moshe wrote Sefer Iyov, but why would there be any 'haava aminah' they he didn't write Parshat Bilam?

Rashi (in Baba Batra) explains that every other parsha in Chumash is connected in some way to Moshe - either 'tzorcho', 'torato' (mitzvot), or seder maasav (narrative). Rashi explains that everywhere else in Chumash Moshe is in some way directly involved. In parshat Bilam, no one including Moshe should have known about the entire incident between Bilam and Balak.

The obvious question then arises, who wrote the story of Bilam that appears in Chumash? If not Moshe, what other navi was there, who could have? This question is answered by Rabeinu Gershom (al atar) that the possibly exists that this parsha was written by Bilam himself! Since he was navi! His brachot and conversations are quoted directly!

In order that we do not come to that conclusion, the Gemara must tell us that Moshe wrote down this entire Parsha directly from Hashem, and did not receive them via Bilam.

How does this relate to the machloket regarding : "Torah -megilah nitnah", or "sefer chatum nitnah" ?

E. One could also ask how Bnei Yisrael aware of Bilam's involvement in the sin of "bnot Moav". Why was "Dvar Bilam" common knowledge among Bnei Yisrael? Who told them that it was Bilam's idea?

The answer could be quite simple. Most probably the daughters of Midyan (who sinned with Bnei Yisrael) had informed their 'patrons' as to who had sent them. [The 'word' got around.]

F. "Ma Tovv Ohalecha Yaakov"

From the time that Bnei Yisrael leave Har Sinai, Sefer Bamidbar has few positive events to record. They nation appears to be going from one sin to the next (mitonim, mitavim, nraglim, korach, mei m'riva etc.). With all the complaining, internal strife etc., it is difficult to find anything positive.

It 'davka' takes an outsider, like Bilam, looking from a distance at Am Yisrael, to perceive the greatness of this nation despite all of its problems. When Bilam recognizes that an entire nation is following Hashem through the desert, he proclaims:

"Ma tovu ohalecha yaakov..."

This is an important insight for today also. Sometimes we become over disillusioned with ourselves, as we see so much disagreement, lack of unity, lack of commitment etc. We become so involved with the details that we sometimes are unable to take a step out and look at the whole picture, to see our achievements. With all the problems in Israel today, there continue to be great achievements in all walks of Jewish life. It is important to periodically take a step back and assess the good as well as the bad. It gives us the motivation to continue to achieve. "Ma tovu ohalecha yaakov" - a nice attitude to start off the day!

Parashat Balak 5756 - "Bil'am's blessings"

The Weekly Internet

P A R A S H A - P A G E

by Mordecai Kornfeld

of Har Nof, Jerusalem

(kornfeld@jer1.co.il)

edited by Yakov Blinder

This week's issue is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Mirel bas Reb Yakov Mordechai, who was killed by the Germans along with most of her family.

[Bil'am raised his voice and proclaimed.] "Hashem did not behold any iniquity in Yaakov nor see any wrongdoing in Israel. Their God Hashem is with them, and the shofar-blast of the king is among them." (Bamidbar 23:21, translated according to Ibn Ezra; see Rashi for alternate interpretation)

Hashem your God refused to listen to Bil'am's curse. Instead, He reversed the curse into a blessing, because He loved you. (Devarim 23:6)

Bil'am wanted to say, "Kallem" [= "eradicate them"] . However, Hashem reversed this into the word "Melech" [= "king"], as it says

"The shofar-blast of the king is among them."

(Tosafot to Avodah Zarah 4b s.v. Regga)

Tosafot interprets Hashem's "reversal" of Bil'am's curse into a blessing, in a very literal manner. Bil'am wanted to pray for Israel's eradication using the word "Kallem," which is spelled with the letters Kaf, Lamed, Mem. However, Hashem reversed these letters in Bil'am's mouth into Mem, Lamed, Kaf, which spells Melech ("king"). Hashem thus forced Bil'am to utter the blessing, "The shofar-blast of the *king* is among them."

To which king was Bil'am referring? What is the meaning of this blessing, and how was it fulfilled? Perhaps the simplest explanation can be offered by referring to a Mishnah in Shabbat (111a), "Rebbi Shimon says: All of the Children of Israel are considered to be like the sons of kings." (Rebbi Shimon's statement has halachic ramifications, see Mishnah Shabbat ibid.) What Bil'am meant, then, is that *every Jew* is to be considered of royal lineage, and is therefore expected to conduct himself with the self-respect of a "king."

According to this explanation, however, it would have been more fitting for Bil'am to have spoken of "the shofar-blast of *kings*" (plural). Furthermore, according to this interpretation, it was not actually a blessing (as Tosafot calls it) that Bil'am was uttering, but rather the statement of a pre-existing fact -- a flattering fact perhaps, but only a fact.

Let us therefore examine a different line of approach to the meaning of this blessing, through which we shall also gain further insight into what is meant by the "reversal" of Bil'am's curse into the word "king."

II

The Gemara tells us:

A person should always engage himself in the study and fulfillment of the words of the Torah, even if his motives are insincere (e.g. for the sake of personal grandeur, etc. - Tosafot.). If someone practices these acts, even though it is with ulterior motives, he will eventually practice them through a sincere motivation.

The value of even the insincere service of Hashem is demonstrated by the fact that as a result of the 42 sacrifices Balak offered to Hashem, he merited to have Ruth among his descendants. [Rashi: the import of this statement is that *King David*, Ruth's great-grandson, descended from Balak.] As Rebbi Yosef ben Chanina said: Ruth (the Moabite proselyte) was a descendant of Eglon (the Moabite king of Shoftim, Chap. 3), who was a descendant of Balak (the Moabite king who hired Bil'am to curse the Jews).

(Gemara Horayot, 10b)

We know that Hashem always deals with mankind through a correlation of "Middah Keneged Middah" -- the reward or punishment He metes out for one's deed always corresponds in some way to the deed itself. What, then, is the connection between Balak's 42 sacrifices and his reward of being the forebear of the greatest king of Israel?

Rashi, in his comments to Sotah 47a (s.v. Zacha) offers a very simple explanation. David planned (and his son Solomon executed) the building of the Beit HaMikdash in Jerusalem -- the place where Hashem chose to have sacrifices brought before Him. Thus the sacrifices of Balak led to the institution of a place of worship where sacrifices would be offered on a regular basis.

III

We may add that even the number of Balak's sacrifices (42), of which the Gemara makes special mention, is accounted for in Balak's reward. Balak's 42 sacrifices were actually offered at three different locations and at different times, each occasion involving *14* sacrifices. (See Bamidbar 23:1, 23:14, 23:29.) Fourteen is the numerical value of the name David (4+6+4)! The years of David's life may be divided into three periods: 1) Before he was anointed as king; 2) the seven years that he ruled only over the tribe of Yehudah, from Hebron; and 3) the 33 years that he ruled over the united kingdom of Israel, from Jerusalem. Perhaps the three sets of sacrifices (14 in each set) offered by Balak corresponded to the three stages in the development of King David.

We may add yet another dimension to this analysis. We read in the book of Shmuel (I 13:1) that King Shaul, who ruled over Israel for two years before David took over, sinned against Hashem in the first year of his reign (following Rashi's interpretation of that verse). According to Seder Olam (Chap. 13), it was at that point that the prophet Shmuel went to anoint David as king of Israel (see I Shmuel, Chap. 16). According to this, David was anointed as king for two years before he "officially" ascended to the throne at Hebron. If we add these two years to the total length of King David's reign, we will see that David was anointed as king of Israel for a total of exactly 42 years! We can now discern a close parallel between Balak's acts (his sacrifice of 42 animals) and his reward (having his descendant anointed as king over Israel for 42 years).

IV

In either case, the Gemara proves from Balak and his sacrifices that performing a Mitzvah out of insincere motivation can bring positive results. In what sense were Balak's offerings brought with "insincere motives?" The fact is that Balak did not offer these 42 animals out of a heartfelt desire to serve Hashem. He did so only because Bil'am had suggested that this course of action might persuade Hashem to betray his covenant with the Jewish people and enable Balak to thereby overcome his sworn enemy.

In fact, however, the exact opposite was effected. Instead of causing the downfall of Balak's enemy, in the long run these sacrifices led Balak's descendant David to conquer all of *his* adversaries. (See the beginning of II Shmuel for a description of King David's successful military campaigns.) In fact, David secured a major victory over the nation of Moav, Balak's own people (II Shmuel 8:2)!

This, then, gives us a fuller appreciation of the "reversal" of Bil'am's curse into a blessing. The very sacrifices which Bil'am had advised Balak to bring in the hope that they would lead to Moav's victory over Israel (represented by the word "Kalleim"), achieved the exact opposite result. They led to Israel's defeat of their own enemies -- Moav among them -- led by triumphant King (= "Melech") David.

We can now understand the deeper meaning of the blessing "the shofar-blast of the *king* is among them." The "king" that Bil'am blessed Israel with was King David, who embodied the concept of kingship over Israel. (Only King David's descendants were fit to be kings of Israel, see II Melachim 8:19; Yirmiyahu 33:17; Yechezkel 37:25). Even the future Messiah who will eventually rule over Israel will be a descendant of King David's -- may he come speedily, in our lifetimes!!

B"H

Torah Studies

Adaptation of Likutei Sichos

by

Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of Great Britain

Based on the teachings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson on the weekly Torah Portion

Chukas-Balak

BALAK

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.

THE ZEALOUSNESS OF PINCHAS

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

On this verse the Talmud (cited in Rash'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. 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," 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 Talmud 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.

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 side 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, 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 clear 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" 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, 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.

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); 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.

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."

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")

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). And, as Pinchas had not until that time been a priest, 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, for from it a child may be born, with perhaps greater powers than his father. 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" for it alone transgresses the boundary which G-d has set between Jews and all other peoples (a boundary also compared in the Midrash 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. 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, "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"), 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.

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.

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. 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.)

"Bircas Hatorah <bircas@jer1.co.il>
Selected, translated and arranged by Rabbi Dov Rabinowitz

Balak

The gemora (Makkos 10b) quotes Rabba bar Rav Hunna in the name of Rav Hunna, and some say Rav Hunna in the name of Rabbi Elazar: "From the Torah, from the Nevi'im and from the Kesuvim (we learn that) in the way which a person wishes to go, they make him go. From the Torah, as it is written 'You shall not go with them' (22,12), and it is written 'Arise and go with them' (22,20). From the Nevi'im as it is written 'I am HaShem your G-d who teaches you to help (you and) leads you in the way which you will go' (Yeshayahu 48,17). From the Kesuvim as it is written 'If (it is) to scoffers, He will scoff, and to the humble, He will give grace.' (Mishlei 3,34)" This concept is cited briefly by Rash"i (22,35).

The Maharsh"a notes that it does not say that HaKadosh Boruch Hu makes him go, but (rather) that 'they' make him go. This (can be understood) in the light of what (the Maharsh"a) has written in a number of places, that every thought, speech and action which a person does, creates for him a malach (angel); according to the the circumstances, it will be good or evil. Thus it says 'in the way which a person wishes to go,' for HaKadosh Boruch Hu gives (every) person the possibility (to do as he wishes), as 'Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven' (Berochos 33b). However, those malachim which were created from his desires and thoughts, make him go according to his desire and his inclination.

The gemora brings a support from the Torah; (first) it is written "You shall not go with them." HaKadosh Boruch Hu told him this. (Later) it is written "Arise and go with them." His evil desires and intentions to accompany them caused HaKadosh Boruch Hu to send him a malach in accordance with his desires and intentions, who told him "Arise and go with them." (Next), the gemora brings the possuk 'I am HaShem your G-d who teaches you to help . . .' for all the mitsvos of HaKadosh Boruch Hu only teach us to help us and to do good for us, but 'leads you' is (through the agency of) a malach, and you (first) direct him in which way you wish to go according to

While on his way to Moav to meet Balak, Bilam encountered an angel. The Angel stood in his path with a drawn sword, and from the Torah's narrative it appears that had Bilam actually "bumped into" the Angel, it would have put Bilam to death. Bilam did not see the angel, but his donkey did, and in order to avoid the angel the donkey veered off the path. The angel blocked bilam's path three times. The first time was in the open, and the donkey walked around it. The next time there were walls on either side of the path, and there was only room to pass the angel on one side. Even so, because of the narrow space Bilam's leg was pushed into the wall as they passed. The third time there was no room to pass the angel, and the donkey stopped and refused to go on. It was when Bilam started beating the donkey that Hashem "opened the mouth of the donkey", and the donkey pleaded his case to Bilam, eventually leading to the Malach revealing himself to Bilam and telling him of Hashem's displeasure.

Rashi hints to a midrash that interprets the three times the angel stands in Balam's way as correlating to the three Avot, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. The first time there was room on both sides of the angel. If Bilam wanted to curse the descendents of Avraham Avinu he had two options, the descendents of Yishmael, and the descendents of K'tura (the wife Avraham took after Sara died). The second time there was room to pass on only one

your inclinations and desires. Then it brings the possuk 'If (it is) to scoffers, He will scoff' which denotes that if it is to scoffers, He will assign him a scoffer, a malach who (acts) according to your scoffing . . .

"And HaShem opened (literally revealed) Bilam's eyes" (22,31) The Ramba"n explains that we learn from this possuk that Bilam was not a navi (prophet), for had he been a navi, how could it be that he would need to have his eyes opened to see the malach (angel)? For the Torah (only) says this regarding someone who has not reached the level of nevuah, like (we find with) the subordinate of Elisha (Melachim 2, 6,17) and Hagar the Mitsris (Bereishis, 21,19); it does not use this (phrase) about nevi'im. And the possuk calls him "Bilam ben Be'or the sorcerer" (Yehoshua 13,22) (kosaim - one who uses evil forces to acquire supernatural abilities DR). And when he said "as HaShem will speak to me" (22,8), he was (merely) calling his knowledge of the future through his sorcery 'the speech of HaShem.'

However, HaShem appeared to him that night for the glory of Yisroel. After this, he was (even) raised to the level of 'giluy eineim' - 'opened eyes' when he saw the malach and spoke to him. And he finally rose to the level of 'machaze Shakai' - 'the vision of the D-ivine presence' (24,4). All this (occurred only) for the sake of Yisroel and for their glory. After he returned to his land, he was (merely) a sorcerer, for this is what the Torah calls him (when it relates) his death "and they killed Bilam ben Be'or the sorcerer with a sword" (Yehoshua 13,22); it would be unthinkable that they would harm a navi of HaShem.

The Midrash Bamidbar Sinai Rabba (20,19) says "Bilam drew (himself) close to 'Ruach HaKodesh' - 'the spirit of holiness' (the lowest level of nevuah DR)" and when he associated with Balak, the Ruach HaKodesh withdrew from him, "and he reverted to be a sorcerer as he was originally. This is why he yelled 'I used to be elevated, and Balak plunged me down.'"

Parashat Balak
Dear alumni and friends,

I hope you enjoy this week's d'var Torah. If you have any questions or comments please feel free to send them to me. Please address any messages to shaalvim@jer1.co.il (there is no apostrophe in shaalvim). Shabbat Shalom.

Sincerely, Aaron Weiss

Parashat Balak: Understanding the Jews -by Aaron Weiss (A chumash Bamidbar is helpful but not essential for this d'var Torah.)

side. If Bilam wanted to curse the descendents of Yitzchak Avinu he only one option, the descendents of Eisav. The third time the was no way to pass the angel. If Bilam wanted to curse the descendents of Ya'akov Avinu no options, because all of the sons of Ya'akov were righteous.

The Chizkuni writes in Rashi's name that the three times the angel blocked Bilam's path allude to the three Avot, but he then goes on to explain the allusion differently than the midrash. When Bilam first came to curse B'nei Yisrael, the merit of Avraham Avinu was not enough to save them, and the path in front of Bilam was open on either side, corresponding to the descendents of Yishmael and the descendents of K'tura. When Bilam continued on his path to curse B'nei Yisrael, the merit of Yitzchak Avinu was not enough to save them, and the path in front of Bilam was open on one side, corresponding to the descendents of Eisav. When Bilam again continued on his path to curse B'nei Yisrael, the merit of Ya'akov Avinu was enough to save them because all of the sons of Ya'akov were righteous.

The difference between these two interpretations is subtle. According to the midrash, from the very beginning Bilam's path to B'nei Yisrael was effectively blocked. The path that lead to B'nei Yisrael was inviolate, and Bilam could only curse those descendents that were not righteous. According to this interpretation, the reason B'nei Yisrael could not be cursed was

because they themselves were righteous.

According to the interpretation of the Chizkuni, Bilam managed to continue on his path to curse B'nei Yisrael by bypassing the resistance put up by the merit of Avraham and Yitzchak. Their merit could not defend B'nei Yisrael because neither Avraham or Yitzchak could claim that a nation was worthy of protection by virtue of their descendents. Only the merit of Ya'akov protected B'nei Yisrael from Bilam's curse because Ya'akov's descendents were all righteous. According to this interpretation the merit of B'nei Yisrael was not enough to save them, they also needed the "Zchut Avot" of Ya'acov, but this "Zchut Avot" itself was dependent on their own merit. They were not saved because they were righteous, but to be saved they could be nothing but righteous. In other words, B'nei Yisrael are righteous by destiny.

The interpretation of the midrash allows for the possibility that B'nei Yisrael could sin. The interpretation of the Chizkuni indicates that B'nei Yisrael are somehow disassociated from sin. Both of these seemingly contradictory ideas are represented in the story of B'nei Yisrael's encounter with Bilam. The prophecies of Bilam all point to B'nei Yisrael's inviolability. For example: "A people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. [Bamidbar 23:9]" "He has not seen iniquity in Ya'akov, nor has he seen perverseness in Yisrael. [Bamidbar 23:21]"

However, unable to curse B'nei Yisrael, Bilam succeeded in harming them by advising the Moavites to send women to seduce them and lead them to idolatry. As a result twenty four thousand Jews died in a plague. If it were not for Pinchas stopping the plague with his zealous action, many more Jews would have died. Interestingly, Bilam was able to see that sin could lead to their downfall even though he himself was the one who prophesied their inviolability.

These two facets of Am Yisrael are hard to reconcile intellectually, but they need to be recognized on a practical level. When Bilam did so he was able to precipitate a disaster for the Jewish People. If we do so, we can take the first steps toward true Ahavat Yisrael, and so doing bring the geula shleima.

Shabbat shalom.

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dmgreen@skynet.net (David Green)dvartorah@torah.org"

Parshas Chukas Balak

begins with the words "This is the decree of the Torah." The Torah goes on to explain the procedure of preparing the red heifer for use in purifying those who have become ritually disqualified. Such people must be sprinkled with water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer before they may bring sacrifices, or even step foot on the temple mount. This commandment is cited as the classic "chok", or commandment for which no reason is given.

Our generation is a very scientific, pragmatic generation which questions everything from rules of etiquette, to belief in G-d. We generally refuse to do that which we don't comprehend a reason for. Why would the timeless Torah expect us to do things we cannot understand? What can we gain from such an observance?

Once a rabbi asked his faithful and loyal right-hand man to do something for him. The man flatly refused. Upon hearing his refusal the rabbi stated "you never listen to me." Insulted, the man replied "What do you mean? This is the first time I have ever refused to do what you've asked of me." "Yes, this is true," replied the rabbi. "But this is also the first time you have ever disagreed with me." In essence, he was only doing what he thought was right, and not really deferring to the rabbi in any one of the previous incidents.

Doing something "because I said so" is an acknowledgement that Someone knows more than I do. G-d gives us a selection of commandments about which he does not share any reasoning. He expects us to recognize our own limitations of understanding the big picture, and submit our will to His. This is a level of humility. This is not considered blindly following, but rather it is a conscious choice made by the intelligent thinker who knows that he doesn't know everything. Just as a child who lacks experience (hopefully) accepts the council of his (hopefully) wiser parents, so too, the adult understands that no matter how brilliant, his experiences are limited. He must defer to the judgement of One Whose experience and breath of knowledge are unlimited. Good Shabbos!
Rabbi Dovid Green <dmgreen@skynet.net> <dmgreen@michiana.org>
Moderator, Dvar Torah Project Genesis

Friday, June 28, 1996

SHABBAT SHALOM: One-eyed antisemites

By RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

"Behold there is a people come out from Egypt. Behold they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me. Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people." (Num. 22: 5-6)

GIVEN the long history of the Jewish people, it's understandable that reactions to us have taken various forms.

There are times when the hatred seems to be based on fact, even if that "fact" is really a big lie. This is the antisemitism of Pharaoh, who claimed the Jews were more powerful than the Egyptians; this is the antisemitism of those Christians who shriek that the Jews killed God; and this is the antisemitism of the Nazis, who taught that Jews are vermin, an inferior race.

But there are times when the hatred is particularly sophisticated. The rulers recognize the brilliant history of the Jew, and are happy to engage his services as lawyer, business manager, orchestra conductor or medical professor, and yet despite all this they hate us - a hatred based upon grudging admiration bordering on fear.

Balaam, the powerful gentile prophet in this week's portion of Balak, was probably the first antisemite to recognize the greatness of the Jews but still end up hating us.

He who came to scoff and revile could not but remain to praise and compliment. So impressed is Balaam by the sight of the Jewish encampment that he declares, virtually against his will: "How goodly are your tents O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel!" (Num. 24:5-6)

At least 29 verses, nearly a third of the entire portion, extol the Jewish people and their enviable guarantee of Godly protection.

But if this reversal from curses to blessings, from the threat of destruction to a prophecy of ultimate victory, is all so perfect, why doesn't Balaam believe his own words? Why doesn't he become a Jew, thereby guaranteeing himself a place of honor as the first convert after Sinai?

If we want to understand why so many of his antisemitic descendants did not join us, we find a hint in the following verse: "The saying of Balaam, son of Be'or. The saying of the man satum ha'ayin [usually translated "whose eye is opened"]

Since this formula is repeated in verse 15 (when Balaam responds to Balak's anger with another blessing), it seems that the expression "whose eye is opened" may be an opening into the character of Balak.

The words satum ha'ayin are difficult Hebrew. According to Onkelos, the words indicate someone who can see well. However, the usual meaning of satum (with a samech) is "closed," and since in the Talmud we often call one who is blind "full of light," here the seer of "closed eye" may well mean that he sees deeply and profoundly. Hence the phrase may mean either "closed of

eye" - blind but insightful - or open-eyed.

Rashi merges both possibilities. Citing a mishna in Avoda Zara (69b,) in which the root satum is used in the context of boring out a hole in a wine barrel, Rashi describes our verse as a reference to an eye that has been extracted from the socket, hence open-yet-shut, or blind. Yet further on, Rashi agrees with Onkelos's translation that Balaam indeed could see well, was open-eyed.

Both ideas can be harmonized on the basis of a Talmudic text which stresses that Balaam's eye is spoken of in the singular, suggesting that he was blind in one eye, but could see very well with the other.

These interpretations didn't make sense to me until I heard the founder of Yeshivat Shalavim, Rav Meir Shlesinger, explain the consequences from a scientific point of view. A medical fact: Blindness in one eye causes vision to lack depth. Without depth perception, one is unable to perceive the relationship between objects.

If we look at Balaam's words, we notice that two main qualities characterize his prophecy. When he opens the passage with the beautiful and reverential, "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob..." he concentrates on a vision of domestic bliss. This garden of Eden perfumes the world, for our Sages tell us that Balaam is referring to the arrangement of tents so that the windows of one dwelling could not see into the windows of another - a field of modesty despite the crowded conditions, a human social structure that the entire world would look upon with admiration.

But Balaam's domestic vision is followed by a vision of power: "A scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite through the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of Seth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also, even his enemies shall be a possession..." (24:17-18)

Balaam perceived our domestic bliss as a result of our commitment to laws of modesty and family ritual purity, and he also foresaw our future success in battle; since his vision lacked depth, however, he failed to recognize the relationship between these two realities. He did not perceive that our military success was dependent upon our faith, morality and ethics.

With one eye he saw from the beginning to the end of time, but his other eye was blind, and so he was blinded to the true weapon in Israel's arsenal - our commitment to divine law.

The worst antisemites in history have acknowledged our greatness, but their one-dimensional vision has hobbled them: Catholic Christianity cannot fathom the link between family life and sanctity, and Islam cannot understand why our commitment to monotheism does not lead to conquest by the sword. Our greatest enemies are not those who attack us openly, but those who speak wonderfully while hating us in their hearts.

Shabbat Shalom

Of Sticks, Stones, and Words That Can Harm

By Steve Sommer (ssommer@jcpenny.com)

Our parsha relates the episode of Mei Merivah, the third of a series of accounts which finds an ever querulous Bnei Yisrael, carping and kvetching about their dire thirst. The incipient grumblings came just after kriyat Yam Suf, at Mara, so dubbed because Bnei Yisrael bellyached that the water was bitter.

The Sifre denotes mayim as a metaphor for Torah; with cisterns as disciples, and springs as scholars. Similarly, the Mechilta interprets the incident at Mara as an allegory explaining that there Moshe Rabbenu's flock failed to find words of Torah which are likened to water. Because, elaborates the Mechilta, Bnei Yisrael had been without words of Torah for three consecutive days, they became rebellious. Therefore the Zekanim and Neviim instituted the reading of the Torah on Shabat along with the second and fifth

days of the week - so that three days not elapse without Torah - to prevent a similar recurrence.

Shortly thereafter - even after being lavished with the selav and the mon - as the fledgling nation wended its way to the encampment of Rephidim, they strove again with Moshe, grouching that there was no water at all. Here, however, the murmuring is elevated to a higher plaintive pitch as evidenced by the people's onerous striving and demanding of Moshe - caught as it were between a rock and a "hard-necked" people - such that he is driven to seek refuge with Hashem lest they stone him.

Such a leveling of cavil characterizes the circumstances in our parsha. Significantly the perek begins with the demise of Miriam. Now according to Pirkei Avot one of the ten things created bein hashmashot erev Shabat of Creation, was Miriam's well. And the Gemara in Taanit declares that for the full forty years in the Midbar, Bnei Yisrael enjoyed the waters of the well courtesy of Miriam's merit.

As does the Sefas Emes, the Alshich distinguishes the mayim as symbolizing Torah sh'beal peh, with Torah sh'bichtav represented by the mon. The Alshich further notes that the Torah introduces the parsha both spatially as well as temporally, identifying the coming of Bnei Yisrael to "Midbar Tzin bachodesh harishon vayashev haam bekadesh" (Num. 20:1) in order to emphasize that it was neither the natural habitat nor the time of year which caused the dearth of water. For, the first month of the year, continues the Alshich, being just after the end of winter, should have bestowed moisture aplenty remaining from the rainy season. Thus the waters ceased with the departing of Miriam, and adds the Alshich, owing to the negligence of the congregation to properly mourn and honor her. It is with this sentiment that I would like to dedicate the following drops of Torah to the zechut of my mother, Hendel bat Yosef Elchanan Halevee, z"l.

The significance of the incident at Merivah can be gauged by the magnitude of the punishment, wherein Moshe and Aharon forfeited the privilege of escorting Bnei Yisrael into the promised land. However, even here the text is ambiguous, obscure, and even contradictory. Thrice in Sefer Devarim, Moshe casts the blame upon Bnei Yisrael, "biglalchem," "lemahnchem," and "al divraychem" for his loss. Of a piece with this is what Dovid expressed in Tehillim "vayahktzeefu al mei merivah vayeyrah lemoshe ba'avuram" (Ps. 106:32). Yet conversely, as we recite when we usher in Shabat, Tehillim also attributes the 'arbaim shana akut bedor' to the 'al takshu levaychem kemereevah, keyom masah bamidbar!' (Ps. 95:8)

The rishonim duly devote copious attention to the elliptic episode. Rashi, Rashbam and Malbim maintain that the sin was in striking the rock in lieu of speaking to it. The Ramban disagrees, challenging Rashi's rationale, pointing out that Hashem directed Moshe to take the rod, evidently an implement with ample experience for the purpose of smiting. Moreover, avers the Ramban, it is no less of a miracle to draw water from a rock by hitting it, than by addressing it.

Ohr Hachaim introduces the idea that Moshe smote a rock different from the one selected by the people. The Ramban and Ibn Ezra submit that Moshe was punished at Merivah for becoming incensed; Ibn Ezra stressing that Moshe suffered from a momentary lapse of concentration due to his upbraiding of Bnei Yisrael with the words shimu nah hamorim (Num. 20:10), to the extent that he even struck the rock an extra gratuitous blow.

Again the Ramban differs posing several rebuttals. To begin with, he notes that Hashem explicitly and unequivocally declared 'yaan lo heehmantem bee' (Num. 20:12) their shortcoming manifest as lack of faith, which has absolutely nothing to do with irascibility. Additionally, answers the Ramban, if ire was the offense, then why wasn't Moshe commensurately censured when he petulantly raged at the 'pikudey hechayil' (Num. 31:14) who returned with the spoil of Midian. And why was Aharon - as characterized by Hillel in Avot as "ohev shalom verodayf shalom" - whose dander was never

up, included in the punishment. Hence, the Ramban credits the view of the 10th century Rabi Chananel that the iniquity committed by Moshe was in associating himself and Aharon with the miracle in an ostensibly self-aggrandizing manner by saying 'hamin haselah hazeh notzee lachem mayim' (Num. 20:10).

The Abarbanel diverges dramatically from all of the above claiming that it was not because of Mei Merivah that Aharon and Moshe were barred from entering the land, but rather for their respective roles in the incidents of 'chet haegel' and the 'meraglim.' Yosef Albo poses that the faults resided in the fact that Moshe and Aharon did not take the initiative immediately as soon as Bnei Yisrael was bereft of water, but instead ran somewhat sheepishly to Ohel Moed seeking guidance.

Rabbenu Bechaya underscores that Hashem bid Moshe: "vehotzaytah lahem mayim" (Num. 20:8) precisely because it is the language of the miraculous, and outside the realm of nature, as in asher hotzayteecha mey'Ur Kasdim (Gen. 15:7); or, asher hotzayteecha mey'erez Mitzrayim (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). And so, asserts Rabbenu Bechaya, that by rashly hitting the rock twice, Moshe - as it were, with one stone - at once, diminished the impact of the miracle, obviating the grandeur of the moment, and thereby deprived Bnei Yisrael of the opportunity to sanctify Hashem.

(Albo, as Rabbi Alan Schwartz reminds, holds as one of his quintessential ikarim that the Torah follows the doctrine of midah keneged midah. In this vein I would propose that if we examine the requital we might decipher a clue to the transgression. And so, patently what characterizes the sentence of Moshe and Aharon is the fact that they are prevented from obtaining that which they most resolutely yearned to realize and achieve. They are chastened by Hashem's refusal to grant their most fervent and zealous passion. Thus, we might conjecture that their offense was in failing to assiduously follow the divine bidding of Hashem.)

Kli Yakar weighs in with an engaging thought. He notes that of all of Bnei Yisrael's sundry grievances the term 'vayarev' appears only twice; here in our text, and back in Shmot where the congruent complaint first reared itself. He attributes the distinction of 'vayarev' in the two vignettes of strife pertaining to water, as related to the medrash in Bereshit Rabah which justifies the absence of the cachet 'kee tov' from the refrain of the second day of creation. There the medrash explains that with 'vayehee mavdil ben mayim lamayim' (Gen. 1:7) - 'machloket' was cast into the world. And Kli Yakar goes on then to cite as proof the 'riv' between the shepherds of Yitzchak with those of Gerar which too was over the waters of the wells. (Notwithstanding the pejorative connotation, I would stir this Kli Yakar with the Kabbalistic notion of the Alshich, that mayim represents Torah sh'bal peh; its divisions in the Mishneh and Gemara serving as filters - machloket being the medium - for distilling the words of Hashem.)

Now proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis have veritable field days with variant versions, their congruities and disparities. Consequently I'd like to concentrate on the two vignettes depicting Moshe drawing water from a rock. Actually, already in the 12th century the Bechor Shor, advanced the existence of duplicative narratives, not just in our text but for the episodes of the mon and the selav, as well.

Perhaps the most compelling piece of tautological evidence appears in the Torah's play of Jewish Geography. Our parsha declares "Hamah mey Mereevah asher ravu Benei Yisrael et Hashem" (Num. 20:13) echoing the aetiology of the first incident in sefer Shmot wherein the nomenclature was already established: "vayikra shem hamakom Masah uMereevah, al riv Benei Yisrael v'al nasotam et Hashem" (Ex. 17:7).

The dissimilarities, however, provide several interesting homilies. For instance, Bamidbar Rabah distinguishes the complaint in our parsha wherein the reaction of Moshe incurs Hashem's severe sentence due to a difference unique to this occurrence. Focusing on the words "lehakdeeshaynee l'aynay

benei Yisrael" (Num. 20:12) the Medrash infers that all the previous incidents transpired in private, away from the purview of the people, while this one took place in public, conspicuously right before their eyes. Hence it could not be overlooked, and perforce an example had to be made.

Nachshoni cites an interesting remark regarding the tefillah for geshem offered by Tosefes Berachah, which recognizes another distinction. The supplication describes the one "drawn in the basket from the bulrushes of the water...at the time the treasured people thirsted for water he struck the rock and issued water." If, in fact, the smiting of the rock was sinful, it would be rather impolitic, when propitiating for rain, for the paytan to mention it along with the roster of virtues. Hence, Nachshoni offers his brother-in-law's suggestion that the paytan might be referring to the first case of smiting in Shemot; however, he adds, the term used by the Torah there is 'tzur' whereas the paytan employs the term 'selah' as it appears in our parsha. Incidentally, Art Scroll, in glossing the line in the tefillah for geshem, appears to have made the same mistake, citing Exodus 17:6 as the source of 'al haseleh hach.'

Years ago I heard Rabbi Shlomo Riskin apply a modern homiletic reading. As such he emphasized that the lesson of the latter incident is precisely in the fact that the directions deviated from those of the former. Moshe's mistake, then, was in presumptuously striking the rock just as he had been instructed previously, thus peremptorily taking Hashem's command for granted and responding automatically by rote.

I would like to close with an original somewhat literary observation. Rabbi Alan Schwartz refers to Nechama Leibowitz's term "meelat hamncheh;" what Buber and Rosensweig before her dubbed "Leitwörter," key words which reverberate throughout a text. A salient example from the two segments we have just compared might be the word "vayarev" followed by "mah tareevun," "masah umereevah al riv" along with "bechorev" for assonance in Shmot; and again "vayarev" and "mei mereevah asher ravu benei Yisrael," with the alliterative echoing of "mayim rabim," in our parsha.

I would like to point out three additional leitwörter which I have mentioned several times over the past few minutes; and that I believe adumbrate the gamut of Moshe's life, resonating especially loudly in our text. The first one, mayim, is fairly obvious. Concealed and then discovered on the water floating in an ark reminiscent of a renowned flood, Moshe's very name is derived "kee min hamayim m'sheeteehu" (Ex. 2:10). Moreover, it provides a rich imagery which flows abundantly through the Aggadah.

For instance, two reasons are tendered for the edict to cast all the newborn male children into the Nile. According to the Gemara in Sotah, on "hava nitchachma lo" (Ex. 1:10), the Mitzrim were familiar both with Hashem's 'modus operandi' of remunerating in kind, meedah keneged meedah; as well as the promise never to revisit the world with another mabul. So too, Shmot Rabbah embellishes that Paroah's astrologers - who augured the birth of Israel's savior - also foresaw that this same redeemer would meet his fate by water; which of course the Medrash reveals are the waters divined by Moshe in our parsha.

Furthermore, Shmot Rabbah qualifies that Aharon wielded the first plague so that Moshe would not smite the very waters that earlier had protected him. And the Zohar recognizes that the malach Hashem appeared to Moshe "b'lahbat esh meetoch hahs'neh" (Ex. 3:2) "because one who is drawn out of water - has no fear of fire." Ironically this prophet, who nevertheless is credited with the miraculous turning of the "mayim asher bayehor" (Ex. 7:21) to blood, and leads his people through the sundered sea "vehmayim lahem chomah" (Ex. 14:29), does so against the backdrop of a parched and arid wilderness; which brings us to the second leitwörter.

I would submit that just as Bereshit Bara is a paronomasia, so too is vayidahbair Hashem el Moshe bemidbar Sinai (Num. 1:1). Thus, the Tanchuma emends al tiqrey bamidbar, eleh bamidabair; suggesting that the

letters of the word midbar - the perfect purlieu for receiving the Torah - appropriately contain the word, "dvar" Hashem . Similarly, the title of the final book of the Torah, Devarim, is a particularly apt one. I would venture to say that veritably four-fifths of the Torah, everything from Sefer Shmot on reads less like a mee amar el mee and more like a mee deebair el mee. "Eleh hadevarim asher deebair Moshe" (Deut. 1:1) reiterates Hashem's endowment of the would-be laconic Moshe, with the power of speech, the divine logos.

The old joke goes that, were it not for the fact that Moshe stammered we would have had so many more than just ten commandments. However, "commandments" is a misnomer, for indeed they are aseret hadevarim (Ex. 34:28) delivered moreover with indeed supreme irony by the one who demurred, protesting that lo eesh devarim anochi (Ex. 4:10). Moshe who pronounced Hashem's words over and again to Paroah; who conversed with Hashem "panim el panim (Ex. 33:11);" and who indeed was taciturn in the aftermath of "vaht'dahbair Miriam v'Aharon" (Num. 12:1). Moshe, who suffered the "deebah" of the Meraglim, and because of the chronic murmurings of the people Hashem hitahnaf bee al divreychem (Deut. 4:21). Moshe, who transmitted to Bnei Yisrael kol divrei haTorah; nevertheless, was reprimanded by Hashem al tosaif dabair eylahy ohd badavar hazeh (Deut. 3:26).

Finally, beshem omro, the last leitworter, I owe to a friend of mine Jerry Belitsky; and it functions almost on the scale of a genetic character trait. We are privy to very little of the early life of Moshe, save for a few sparse details among them the fact that he was the progeny of a man and woman both members of the house of Levy. Levy, who Yaakov had blessed in concert with his other son; their rubric: Shimon v'Levy achim, klay chamas mechorotayhem (Gen. 49:5). We know what havoc these two wrought upon Shechem, and how Yosef incarcerated - as my friend Arthur Feinerman slyly observes (by melding several Midrashim) his father-in-law - Shimon, putatively as collateral, while, in fact, it is in order to isolate the two instigators of violence.

Sefer Shmot fast-forwards to find Moshe next, full grown and stepping out to observe the afflictions of his brethren. Nechama Leibowitz sorts out three scenarios. In the first episode Moshe rescues a Jew from a Mitzri; in the second he intervenes between two arguing Jews; and in the third he intercedes on behalf of the daughters of Midian. Leibowitz points out that the three cases represent three paradigmatic possibilities; first between Jew and non-Jew; second between two Jews; and third between two non-Jews; and Moshe did not shrink from responding to each.

However, what is most characteristic about all three, beyond the attribute of leadership, is the physical action. The key verb which seems to invest this son of Levy in his rite of passage is "to strike;" vayar eesh mitzree makeh eesh ivree (Ex. 2:11) vayach et hamitzree (Ex. 2:12). Even the assonance in the text is appropriate: vayeefen koh vahchoh (Ex. 2:12). And this propensity for "striking" becomes his hallmark in the ensuing incident when he insinuates himself between the two striving Jews with "lamah takeh rayecha?" (Ex. 2:14)

We already alluded to "vayach et hamayim asher baye'or" (Ex. 7:21), to these let us add "vayach et afahr ha'aretz" (Ex. 8:13); "vayach habarad," (Ex. 9:25) in fact a total of ten celebrated "makot" dispatched. And, after chet haegel, in keeping with the ostensible predilection of his tribe, Moshe vents by breaking the luchot and enlisting his shevet Levy to exact a ferociously violent retribution upon 3,000 sinners. Moreover, these themes are picked up at the end of our parsha when Israel is portrayed as seeking and being denied passage - notwithstanding their voluntary pledge to abstain from the wells of Sichon Melech Ha'Emoree, compelled then to "vayahkayhu" (Num. 21:24). And following this they engage Og Melech HaBashan, "vayaku" (Num. 21:35); both events accruing to Moshe's credit in Sefer Devarim with "acharay hakoto et Sichon...v'et Og."

Incidentally my friend Victor Falleck reinforced the motif of mayim with an additional touch of irony, namely that what separated Moshe from his most ardent longing were the waters of the river Jordan. Moreover, Victor also reminded of Moshe's blood-relation similarly exalted for his action. Listen to the lashon of the Torah lauding this member of Moshe's gene-pool, his very own grand-nephew Pinchas: "veshem ish Yisrael hahmukeh hukah et haMidyanit...veshem ha'easha hamukah...vayidabayr Hashem el Moshe leh'mor, tzaror et haMidianim veheekeetem otam...al devar Kazbee bat nasee Midian achotam hamukah" (Num. 35:14-18).

I mention these seminal motifs because ultimately they converge in our parsha when Moshe errs, instead of "vedeebartaym el haselah" (Num. 20:8), "vayach et haselah bematayhu pa'amayim, vayaytzu mayim" (Num. 20:11)! Implicit are several more ironies. I hesitate to use the Aristotelian term "tragic flaw;" however, it would seem that the one who hath protested so much "lo eesh devarim anochi" (Ex. 4:10) was right. Moshe, "aral sefatayim," who was succored by the "water," and whose imprimatur was "smiting," by dint of these, sustained an overwhelming, even inscrutable, reckoning.

Finally, it is not for nothing that the Torah recounts two versions of Moshe yielding water from a rock. In fact, I would suggest that the two are a study in contrasts, set as they are chronologically in a chiasmatic pattern: the first instance coming shortly after yitziat Mitzraim; our parallel episode capping the forty years of peregrinating in the Midbar. Hence, it not only informs of Moshe's character, but epitomizes the mandate and destiny that is the nation's. On the strength of my notion, Victor Falleck added, that it would seem as if the ten makot, ineluctably, were transformed into the ten devarim. Perhaps then, for the former generation - pre-Sinai - hitting the rock was an appropriate act; for the latter - post-revelation, and on the cusp of entering the promised land - the physical violence is superseded by that of the reified "word," so that the paragon parallel segue of naaseh veneshma can be fulfilled. GOOD SHABASS