

BS"D

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON CHUKAS BALAK - 5762

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http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2001/parsha/rneu_chukas.html
TorahWeb [from last year]
RABBI YAAKOV NEUBERGER
CHUKAS: IT IS ALL IN THE ATTITUDE

The seeming extraneous phrase which opens the parsha of parah aduma, "This is the 'chok' of the Torah" has become the intimidating gatekeeper for all attempts to explain this and similar mitzvos which defy human understanding. That introductory phrase according to Rashi, is intended to discourage all attempts at apologia regarding the parsha of parah adumah, even in response to the teasing of other nationals. Thus Rashi's comment on the pasuk reads, "Because the Satan and the nations of the world aggravate us saying what is this mitzvah and what is its reason, therefore [the Torah] wrote in this parsha "chuka" [to say] it is my decree and you do not have permission to question it". Apparently this category of mitzvos observed despite our inability to see its meaning, serves to strengthen our absolute allegiance to carrying out Hashem's will.

That is why it is so surprising to find but twenty two pesukim later that Rashi quotes many an insight tucked away in the parah adumah requirements, and gleaned from the writings of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan. In this collection of short remarks, Rashi does not refrain from relating the parah adumah to the chet haegel and interpreting every detail from the involvement of Elazar Hakohen to the burning of the grasses, wood and red thread to the perfect redness of parah itself. Why did Rashi cast off the warning of the very first pasuk not to intellectually pursue or curiously peruse?

Reading the medrash quoted by Rashi carefully, one could fairly conclude that explaining the chukim of Torah is censured only when it finds its energy and encouragement from without. If we delve into the depths of a "chok" only due to the ridicule of others or even the "satan within us" - the anxiety that arises from expectations molded by contemporary culture and superficial spirituality - then indeed the intellectual journey discouraged from the outset. However if one is driven and assured by the belief in the unending depths of Hashem's word that study will allow one to catch sparks of insight and inspiration, then perusing the incomprehensible becomes a refreshed and reenacted personal "Na'aseh venishma".

This distinction unlocks a puzzling discussion that takes place between Rabbi Yochanan and his students after a non Jew questioned the master regarding the parah aduma. Articulating that which is in the hearts of many a serious student he said, "That which you do, burning a cow, grinding its ashes, processing them, sprinkling two three drops and proclaiming one who is tameh as tahor, looks like magic." The master curtly responded, "No. not magic, rather a "segulah" to chase away tumah." Thereupon the students asked their teacher, "The gentile - you blew him away - but what are you going to explain to us?" To which Rabbi Yochanan responded, "Hashem said, 'I decreed and you cannot violate my decrees'". Here too it may be said that had the students' curiosity had been piqued by the critical remarks of an outsider and thus were denied significant attention.

How different Rabbi Yochanan's response may have been had the students turned to him out of the unabating trust in the depths of every minutiae of Hashem's wisdom!

http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2001/parsha/rsch_balak.html
TorahWeb [from last year]
RABBI HERSCHEL SCHACHTER
MOSHIACH, MOSHIACH, MOSHIACH!!

The Rambam (towards the end of his commentary to Mishnayot Sanhedrin) lists what he considers to be the thirteen principles of our faith, the twelfth of which is to believe in the coming of Moshiach. This point is not unique to Lubavitch groups; it is part of the beliefs of all Jews. We believe that G-d did not forsake the world after the six days of creation. He continuously sees to it that history should unfold in the way He wants. "In the end of days" His kingdom will be accepted by all ma nkind, and the Melech HaMoshiach will represent Him.

This point of faith appears throughout the books of the prophets from the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu to the nevu'a (prophecy) of Malachi. One of the two places in the Chumash (Five Books of Moses) where the principle of Moshiach is spelled out is in Parshat Balak. The Torah records the prophecy of Bilam who speaks of King David as well as his descendent - the Melech HaMoshiach.

Towards the end of the Mishneh Torah, the Rambam dedicates two chapters to the topic of Moshiach. He writes that the exact details of the coming of Moshiach are very unclear, and are at present not that important. A tendency to dwell on these details will lead one to neither a greater love for G-d, nor a greater fear of G-d. The important point is that we believe in the principle of the coming of a human being, who will be a descendent of King David. In another essay the Rambam points out that the Moshiach will be highly intelligent, a tremendous prophet, and admired and respected by all. He will be an unknown figure until the time he is "revealed", and his debut will take place in Eretz Yisroel.

We all have an obligation to hope for the coming of Moshiach daily, and to do whatever we can to hasten his coming. But what can we possibly do? The matter is not under our control? The Rambam explains that what we can do is daven (pray) to Hashem who does have control. This is formally done in the weekday shmoneh esrei where there is a special bracha (es tsemach dovid etc.) through which we plead with G-d to hasten the coming of Moshiach.

In the days of the Talmud it was optional to recite the bracha of "es tsemach dovid" either as a separate bracha, or as part of the preceding bracha - "Veliyerushalayim ircha". Today the accepted practice is that these two themes are separated into two separate brachos. The reason it was originally considered acceptable to combine these two themes into one was that a complete rebuilding of Yerushalayim consisted of both a. rebuilding the Beis HaMikdash, and b. reestablishing the office of the government of Malchus Beis David there. The Rambam writes in the beginning of Hilchos Melachim that no other king (other than those of Beis David) may have their official palaces or official government offices in Yerushalayim. Yerushalayim is the official capital of Medinat Yisroel, especially reserved for the official government of that country. In fact, the generally accepted view in Shulchan Aruch is that the special rabbinic requirement to tear kriah upon seeing the old city of Yerushalayim in a state of destruction relates not so much to the fact that the city was the site of the Beis HaMikdash, but rather because it was the political capital of the Jewish medinah and the kriah represents symbolically our mourning over the loss of that medinah. Therefore, most have the practice not to tear kriah today when visiting the Old City, because it has become again the capital of the Jewish medinah.

There are those who argue that one can not establish a Jewish medinah in Eretz Yisroel before the coming of the moshiach. However, the Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh on this week's sedra offers a novel interpretation of the pasuk, "Darach Kochav MeYaakov, vekam shevet meYisroel". He explains it to mean that if Klal Yisroel will be worthy, we would witness the emergence of the Jewish government in Eretz Yisroel in miraculous and supernatural fashions, similar to a shooting star. But if we will not be zoche, then an inferior quality government will emerge in Eretz Yisroel, lacking the charm and the luster of the shooting star.

Even though we may be dissatisfied with the memshala (the individuals running the Israeli government), we are overjoyed and thankful to have a Jewish medinah in Eretz Yisroel.

From: RABBI RISKIN'S SHABBAT SHALOM LIST

[parsha@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: Thursday, June 20, 2002 8:13 AM

To: Shabbat_Shalom@ohrtorahstone.org.il Subject: Shabbat Shalom:

Parshiot Chukat-Balak by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Shabbat Shalom: Parshiot Chukat-Balak (Numbers 19:1-25:9) By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel - After a catalogue of the transgressions of the nation of Israel in the desert - the sin of the golden calf, the sin of the querulous complainers, (mitonenim), the sin of the scouts, the sin of the wicked attempters to conquer the land (ma'apilim), the sin of the rebels against Moses and Aaron - we come now to the saddest and most perplexing of transgressions: the sin of Moses himself.

As the Bible records the tragic happening, the Israelites once again find themselves in the desert without water and complain bitterly to Moses and Aaron: "Why did you bring th congregation of the Lord to this desert to die?" (Numbers 20:4). G-d instructs His leaders to "take the staff, gather the nation and speak to the rock in front of the (Israelites') eyes... You will then bring forth water from the rock and provide drink for the community and their cattle... . Moses lifts up his hand and strikes the rock with his staff twice; much water emerges, an he gives drink to the community and their cattle. The Lord then says to Moses and Aaron, 'Since you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me before the eyes of the children of Israel, you will not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them' " (Numbers 20: 8,9,11,12).

The punishment which G-d metes out to Moses and Aaron is indubitably clear: they, too, will die in the desert, they will be denied their life-long goal of entering the Promised Land. But as to the nature of the sin which warranted such an extreme penalty, the Biblical text is much more ambiguous. Was it that Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock as G-d had commanded? Then why did G-d begin his instruction to Moses by telling him to take the staff in the first place? (Numbers 20:8). And does not the punishment seem to be rather severe for so minor an infraction? Would the miracle have been so much greater had the water emerged after Moses spoke to the rock rather than after Moses struck the rock? Do rocks ever give forth water, no matter what is done to them?

Before attempting to understand the nature of Moses' transgression, it is important to compare this Biblical account with Moses' own interpretation of the incident when he himself refers to it in his farewell address to the nation. Moses is reviewing the history of the Israelites in the desert, recounts the sin and punishment of the ten scouts and the generation swayed by their evil report, and then adds: "G-d then became angry also at me because of you, saying 'You too will not enter there (the Land of Israel)' " (Deuteronomy 1:37). Apparently Moses himself links his punishment to the sin of the scouts and blames the Israelites for his being barred entry to Israel; he doesn't mention his striking of the rock at all! How may we better understand the true reason for G-d's anger as well as the significance of the severity of His punishment?

Perhaps further illumination can come from continuing our comparison of the events as the Bible describes them with the events as later interpreted by Moses. Moses recounts the incident of the scouts, insisting that the initiative for dispatching the envoys emanated from the nation: "And you, all of you, drew near unto me, and you said, 'Let us send men before us, and let them dig out (va'yahperu) for us the land, bringing back to us the way: the road by means of our approach to it, and the cities we have to enter through' (Deuteronomy 1:21).

Yes, it was the people who made the suggestion of the scouts, but not as a commission of inquiry or even a committee of assessment; they merely wanted to ascertain the safest and most effective access roads, the best approach to the land they were about to conquer. It was Moses himself who broadened the instructions, who mandated the messengers to "scout out" (va'yaturu) the land and assess the military

capability of the inhabitants as well as the fortification of the cities (Numbers 13:17-24).

To be sure, Moses never expected that they would return with a negative report, that they would convince the Israelites that, given the bellicose strength of the inhabitants and the protective walls around the cities, attempt at conquest would be folly. After all, for Moses the Divine command - and promise - was more than sufficient. But herein lies the rub, the fatal flaw in Moses' leadership: he did not adequately assess the mood of his nation. He thought he could broaden the mandate to the envoys - after all, the more intelligence information the Israelites had going in, the easier it would be for them to properly prepare the conquest - but never expected the possibility that panic might set in and thwart the entire venture of entry into the Promised Land. He overestimated his people! They lost their courage and their will, and that entire generation was doomed to die in the desert. At that time, however, Moses is not yet punished; true the greatest of prophets misjudged, but it was because he trusted his people, he believed in Israel, too much. But a leader can not be condemned for overestimating his nation. However, now comes the follow-up test. The people are thirst fully complaining for water. Moses and Aaron fall on their faces in prayer before G-d. The Almighty tells Moses to take the staff - the symbol of leadership - and speak to the rock. G-d is about to perform a miracle - a miracle which is meant to teach the subsequent leaders a crucial lesson. The rock is an inanimate object, but it also symbolizes the Israelite nation, a stiff-necked people, hard and obstinate as a rock. "Speak to it", says G-d, with words of persuasion and love, and you will extract life-giving and Torah-true waters even from this stubborn nation. Moses misses the point. Instead of seeing a frightened, thirsty people in need of help, he sees a willful band of upstarts. "Listen now you rebels" (Deuteronomy 20:10), he shouts at them, striking out against the rock - nation, instead of loving them. (see Maimonides, introduction to Avot). This time in his assessment of the situation he under-estimates his people, refusing to recognize their objective suffering as well as their ability to repent under the proper loving guidance of speech and persuasion. Now G-d punishes him - divinely understanding that a shepherd who underestimates his flock, who loses proper love and appreciation for them cannot continue to lead them.

Shabbat Shalom.

A Present Day Israeli Post-Script

Soon after the initial Oslo accords, and while terror attacks were still raging, then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (May his soul rest in peace) armed the Palestine Police Force with automatic weapons. At a personal meeting with him, I questioned the wisdom of such an action.

He maintained that the Palestinian Authority would use the weapons against Hamas and Islamic Jihad. I raised the possibility - which unfortunately came to pass - of their joining hands with the terrorists and using the weapons against us. "We've got to take the risk," he said. "Our people are too tired for another war."

Tragically Mr. Rabin was wrong on the first issue; fortunately Mr. Rabin was also wrong on the second. Despite these most difficult and precarious times, the Israeli populace - and especially my people in Efrat - are standing courageous and resolute, proud to be fighting in our extension of the War of Independence, proud to be protecting Jews the world over, proud to be waging the battle of the just and the free against the primitivism of terrorist suicide bombers. Mr. Rabin, sadly underestimated his nation - and we are now paying a bitter price...

You can find Rabbi Riskin's parshiot on the web at:

<http://www.ohrtorahstone.org.il/parsha/index.htm>

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From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: Thursday, June 20, 2002 11:13 AM To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chukas "RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chukas -

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #379, The Jewish "Shabbos Goy".

The Link Between Para Adumah And The Death Of The Righteous
Immediately after discussing the use of Para Adumah [Red Heifer] ashes to purify a person who came into contact with the dead, the Torah tells us of the death of Miriam [Bamidbar 20:1]. The Talmud says [Moed Katan 28a] that the juxtaposition of these two parshios teaches that "Just as the Para Adumah atones, so too the death of a righteous person atones".

What common denominator between Para Adumah and the death of the righteous provides atonement for the world? We must note that the Gemarah, in making the comparison between the two, is not relating to the purification dimension (Tahara) of Para Adumah. Rather, the Gemarah is relating to the atonement (Kapara) that Para Adumah provides.

We must first examine the aspect of Para Adumah from which its atonement emerges. The Kapara of Para Adumah emerges from the fact that Para Adumah is a challenge to our faith (Emunah). Our Sages tell us that the Para Adumah was a cause for our being mocked by the gentiles. They used it to challenge our beliefs. They taunted us that it was a form of magic and witchcraft. How does it work? Why does it work? It is very strange. The whole set of laws associated with it are so paradoxical that it tests our very faith in the Divinity of the commandments. [The one upon whom the ashes are sprinkled is purified, but the one who sprinkles the ashes is rendered impure! This is so unfathomable that even the wisest of men, King Solomon, could not perceive its reasoning.]

Therefore, when the Jews observe the ritual of Para Adumah, they are in effect saying, "We trust G-d". It might not make any sense to us, but we are going to do it anyway. [N.B. Judaism does not demand belief without reason in the fundamentals, e.g. G-d and the Giving of the Torah -- on the contrary. But once a person accepts that G-d gave the Torah, it becomes incumbent upon the person to follow its Laws whether or not he or she understands each individual detail.] There are many things in life that do not add up and do not make any sense. We earn atonement as a result of the very fact that we are nonetheless prepared to follow G-d's teaching.

In this week's parsha, klal yisroel [the Congregation of Israel] had reached the end of the 40 years of sojourn in the wilderness. For the last 40 years they had the Well because of Miriam. As far as we know, Miriam only did one thing wrong in her life. She once spoke Lashon Hara [gossip] about her brother. She was immediately punished for that act.

Therefore, they could have wondered why Miriam had to die in the wilderness without being able to enter Eretz Yisroel. After all, she committed only one sin, and had already been punished for it. And yet... "And Miriam died there and she was buried there".

"But it's not fair!" Why wasn't she allowed to go into Eretz Yisroel? It does not make any sense. However, the death of the righteous atones. If a righteous person dies, we may ask ourselves why it happened. We wonder "this does not make any sense - he was such a good person!" However, ultimately, we accept the death of the righteous with the same simple faith with which we accept the laws of Para Adumah. We are prepared to continue our lives with the same dedication to G-d and His Torah, despite our unanswered questions as to why things are the way that they are. This is the source of atonement that comes from the death of the righteous.

The recital of "Tziduk HaDin" [accepting upon ourselves the righteousness of G-d's Judgement], by saying "Hatzur Tummim Pu'u'lo -- The Rock, his actions are perfect", despite all our questions and latent doubts, is a tremendous atonement for us. And that is the linkage between the Red Heifer and the death of the righteous.

Taking Note of Even Small A Measure of Progress

Moshe Rabbeinu was denied entrance into the Land of Israel as a result of the incident that is known as the "Waters of Merivah". All of the Torah commentaries try to discover what Moshe did wrong. Rashi's

well-known interpretation is that Moshe hit the rock instead of speaking to it. The Rambam in his "Eight Chapters" explains that Moshe sinned when he publicly lost his temper and said "Listen here you rebels (shimu nah ha'morim), shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?" [Bamidbar 20:10]. It is as if Moshe lost his patience with his flock and addressed them in too sharp a manner.

We need to analyze the Rambam's explanation. Moshe Rabbeinu had a very legitimate reason to be angry. From a historical perspective, it certainly must have been frustrating. This was the second incident regarding this "Well". The same thing happened forty years earlier. Moshe Rabbeinu could justifiably say, "I have had it with these people! They have not come an iota closer to belief in G-d after forty years under my tutelage." Was it not understandable that Moshe needed to "let off a little steam" at them under such frustrating circumstances? And yet, the Rambam says that this was held against him. He should not have lost his patience.

In order to gain a better understanding of the Rambam's interpretation, it helps to note a subtle contrast between the two incidents in which the Children of Israel complained about lack of water.

Regarding the first incident in Parshas B'Shalach [Shmos 17:3], the complaint was phrased as follows: "The people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moshe and said 'Why is this that you have brought us up from Egypt to kill me and my children and my livestock through thirst?'"

Here in Parshas Chukas [Bamidbar 20:4] the complaint was "And why have you brought the congregation of Hashem to this wilderness to die there, we and our animals?" The texts are almost identical - except for one word. In Parshas B'Shalach the charge was that Moshe brought them into the wilderness to KILL them. In Chukas, they only charged that he brought them there to DIE. In other words, in Parshas B'Shalach they were charging Moshe with murder. Here they are only charging him with negligence -- they would die in the wilderness because they had no water. However, they did not complain that Moshe was trying to KILL them.

This is a subtle but very significant difference. This does represent "progress" on their part. If forty years earlier they accused their leader of being a murderer and now they were somewhat more respectful in how they talked to him, that is a step forward. According to the Rambam, Moshe was punished for failing to take note of this subtle, miniscule difference. Moshe should have appreciated that difference. He should not have spoken down to them as "rebellious ones".

There is a great lesson here. These are tremendous words of encouragement for anyone who is in the teaching profession -- or anyone who is in the 'parenting business'. Sometimes we may tell something to our child at age 10 and then need to repeat it to them when they are 15. They appear to be at the exact same level that they were at five years ago. We can give instructions to students at the beginning of the year and we do not necessarily notice progress. At the end of the school year, the students will still sometimes act incorrectly without constant correcting. However, this is a misperception on our part. We sometimes need to be on the lookout for such a small thing as the way something is articulated, and even for the body language of the way something is said. Even a subtle change in attitude can be called progress. That is a level of progress that should be appreciated, not summarily dismissed.

This is difficult. It is frustrating. We want to see major progress. We want to see overnight dramatic change. But it does not always happen like that. Progress comes in incremental steps. This is something that Moshe Rabbeinu had to recognize and his failure to recognize it by losing his temper with the words "Shimu nah ha'Morim" is perhaps the reason that -- for all his greatness -- he was held accountable.

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Parashas Chukas

EXCERPT FROM PIRKEI TORAH,

BY RABBI MORDECHAI GIFTER

This is the teaching regarding a man who will die in a tent: anything that enters the tent and anything that is in the tent shall be impure for seven days (Numbers 18:14).

We often convince ourselves of our ability to remain unaffected by negative influences, thinking that we can avoid their effects should we come into contact with them. However, we must awake up to the reality that we are convincing ourselves of a fallacy. Our posuk shows that all it takes is a contaminated atmosphere — devoid of any living influences — to affect man. One can have the strongest intention of remaining unaffected, but if he sets foot into the tent he becomes impure. He need not enter for more than a second to be affected and becomes impure for seven days.

Not only must we take steps to distance ourselves from people of negative influence, but even from negative environments, because even if we try not to be affected, we are indeed affected — and thus infected — by them.

From: ohr@ohr.edu Sent: Thursday, June 13, 2002 4:19 PM To: weekly@ohr.edu Subject: Torah Weekly - Chukat / Balak
* TORAH WEEKLY * Highlights of the Weekly Torah Portion Parshat Chukat-Balak For the weeks of 5 Tammuz / June 14 & 15 (Chukat) and 12 Tammuz / June 21 & 22 (Balak) - in Israel and 12 Tammuz / June 21 & 22, 2002 (Chukat-Balak) - outside Israel
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Chukat:

ROCK SOLID

".and speak to the rock." (19:8)

Nothing is as anonymous as a rock.

I suppose to a rock, each rock must be as individual as we are to each other. Rocks may even consider the fact that humans think that all rocks look the same to be mere racial stereotyping. I don't know. But to me they all look the same.

When G-d told Moshe to speak to the rock, He was referring to a certain specific rock. G-d had created this rock specifically to be used for the miraculous production of water. It was this same rock that was revealed to Hagar when her son Yishmael was dying of thirst. It was this same rock that accompanied the Jewish People on their wanderings in the desert for forty years and finally was finally hidden with Miriam's death.

After G-d commanded Moshe to speak to the rock, Moshe couldn't see it. What should Moshe have done at that point? Moshe should have gone and spoken to each and every rock. One after one. Until he found it.

The service of G-d demands patience from us. The spiritual path is not a rocket trip. A rocket plummets faster than it rises. All genuine growth is incremental.

It's first this rock.

Then this rock.

Then this rock.

We may have to spend hours speaking to rock after rock. And get nothing but silence as the answer. Until we finally find the rock from which flows the waters of spirituality.

Moshe knew that he could bring forth water from another rock by hitting it. He had already done this before. However, G-d wanted him to speak to the rock. We are certainly in no position to judge Moshe, but the the Torah teaches this event for a lesson. When the people

agitated and pressured him, instead of continuing his search for the rock to the extent expected of Moshe by G-d, the rock which would yield water through speech, he took the staff and hit another rock. We are taught here to serve G-d in patience and calmness.

Balak:

ASININE TALK

"And Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey..." (22:28) What does it mean when a donkey starts to speak?

The essential difference between Man and the animals is the power of speech. Man is called "The Speaker." This is the quality that epitomizes his elevation above animals. The power of speech is given to Man to elevate the physical world, to inject spirituality into the physical.

Describing the creation of Man, the Torah says that Hashem "blew into his nose a spirit of life." Targum Onkelos translates this phrase as "He blew into his nose a speaking spirit."

In Hebrew the word for "thing" - "davar" - is connected to the same root as "dibur" - "word." Speech is the interface between the world of things - the physical world - and the spiritual world.

When a person degrades the power of speech by using it to curse and to denigrate, then he becomes no more than a talking donkey. But if he uses his power of speech to add spirituality to the world, he fulfills his true purpose, he epitomizes the speaking spirit. He elevates both himself and the world with him.

SWEETER THAN HONEY?

"Do not go with them; do not curse this people, for they are blessed." (22:12)

"Hashem said to Bilaam 'You shall not curse the people.' Bilaam said to Hashem 'If so, I will bless them.' Hashem said 'They do not need your blessing, for they are blessed.' "

As the proverb says: "We tell the bee 'Neither your honey, nor your sting.' " (Rashi)

Which non-kosher animal produces kosher food?

The bee. Although the bee is a non-kosher animal, honey is itself kosher. The reason that honey is kosher is because honey doesn't actually come from the bee's body. Rather, bees manufacture honey from the pollen that they gather. However, the bee's poisonous sting does come from the bee's body itself. (Yoreh Deah 81)

Bilaam was like the bee. All of his "honey" - his sweet blessings and prophecies about the Jewish People - did not come from him. In no way were they part of his nature. Rather, they were gathered from an outside source. Bilaam's venomous curses and foul plots, however, emanated from his true poisonous essence.

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From: listmaster [listmaster@shemayisrael.com] Sent: Thursday, June 13, 2002 4:28 PM To: Peninim Parsha Subject: Peninim on the Torah by RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM

PARSHAS CHUKAS The princes dug the well, the nobles of the people excavated, with a scepter, with their poles. And from the wilderness they went to Matanah; and from Matanah to Nachaliel, and from Nachaliel to Bamos; and from Bamos to Hagai. (21:18,19,20) Matanah and Nachaliel have other meanings: Matanah is a gift, and Nachaliel is defined as an inheritance from Hashem. How are these meanings related to the pasuk? In the Talmud Nedarim 55a, Chazal say that Matanah and Nachaliel refer to the manner in which we receive the Torah from Hashem. If a person asserts himself in a selfless and dedicated manner, the Torah is given to him as a gift. Once the Torah is his, it is a nachal-Keil, an inheritance from Hashem. At that point, the individual is elevated to a distinguished position, described by the word Bamos, greatness. If, however, at any time the person becomes arrogant, he is immediately lowered, which is represented by the word Hagai, a term used for a valley. Chazal describe the Torah as belonging to a person both as a gift and as an inheritance. In fact, these are two distinct levels of relationship to the

Torah. The more significant level is that of an inheritance. When one assumes a piece of property that has been previously owned and passed down to him by his forebears, he views it as part of a legacy. He sees himself as carrying on a family tradition. Hence, he acts in a manner which he perceives will expedite his families best interests. Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, explains that this concept motivated Bnos Tzafchad to express their concern regarding inheriting their father's portion in Eretz Yisrael. They claimed "Lamah yigra shem Avinu?" "Why should the name of our father be lost from the family because he had no sons? Let us have an inheritance among the land of our father's brothers." They were not merely asking for rights to a piece of property. They sought their heritage. They fought to assure their father's spiritual destiny. The ownership of a parcel of land in Eretz Yisrael guaranteed the survival of the heritage transmitted by their ancestors. Moshe Rabbeinu responded to their request. He understood the sincerity with which they spoke. Thus, the Torah writes, "Moshe advanced Mishpatam, their just claim, before Hashem." Their argument was legitimate and sincere, its goals lofty and noble. Rav Rogov posits that this should be our attitude concerning the study of Torah. It should be a matter of heritage to us. It should elicit a sense of belonging, a feeling of pride in being connected with the Torah. Studying a Mishnah should not be an abstract experience. One should picture the Revelation: Hashem giving the Torah to Moshe, who in turn transmits it to Yehoshua and the Zekeinim, Elders - all the way down to him! He should feel a sense pride at his association with scores of generations of men and women who dedicated themselves to living the Torah way of life. It will also cause him to measure his words and avoid repeating any interpretations of Torah or halachah which might not be authentic or might lack spiritual integrity. We might add that those who have denied the Divine source of Torah also sever their relationship with their heritage. Our People is a nation only by its connection to Torah. In other words, they have torn asunder their bond with the Jewish People, because the "twine" that holds us together is our nachalah, heritage of Torah. When one studies Torah with a sense of heritage, he transports himself to Har Sinai and becomes a part of that awesome experience. For one who studies Torah in this manner, every moment is precious, every word is invaluable. Striving to understand the Mesorah, tradition, of Torah - as it was transmitted to us at Har Sinai to Moshe and from Moshe to Yehoshua - elevates one's study to a spiritual plateau unattainable in any other way.

From: listmaster [listmaster@shemayisrael.com] Sent: Thursday, June 20, 2002 5:21 AM To: Peninim Parsha Subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
PARSHAS BALAK
 Balak ben Tzipor saw all that Yisrael had done to the Emori. (22:2) There are two types of individuals - the first can see; he has a clear outlook and can read the Heavenly map with its designated "road signs" which cover his entire life. He has one problem, however: execution. He is incapable of successfully executing what he sees, because he does not quite understand what he sees. Another type of person is perceptive and able to execute fully what he sees. He, regrettably, has one shortcoming: he does not see. One sees, but does not understand. Thus, he is incapable of following his map. The other is capable, but sightless. Both of these people look at Heavenly signs and are unable to act upon their destiny. Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, submits that this is the source of the downfall of two people: Korach and Balak. Korach saw, but failed to see the message clearly. He saw an illustrious lineage, Shmuel ha'Navi was to descend from him. He erred in his insight. Instead of following the signs to glory, he was mistaken and ended in infamy. Balak was another individual who saw. Indeed, he saw very well, with a clear perspective. Yet, he had a problem when it came to definition. He could not interpret what he saw and assimilate it into his thought process. He could not understand the message. Hence, what could have elevated him spiritually, instead brought about his downfall. It is necessary to have both qualities: the ability to see and the ability to understand the message and act upon it. One person saw and understood his destiny -

Yisro. He saw and "heard" the message. Unless there is a reason, one does not see a message that has been communicated by Hashem. Yisro understood the message and immediately acted upon it. This is the difference between "Balak saw" and "Yisro heard." Balak had acute vision; he saw with clarity, not overlooking a thing. It remained, however, nothing more than a vision, because he could not interpret its message. Yisro saw and heard. He understood that he must act. His destiny depended upon it. One who understands what he sees becomes the "eyes" for others. Yisro was asked to be Klal Yisrael's "eyes." Interestingly, while some are able to be the eyes for others, there are some who cannot even see for themselves.

From: elaine@jewishdestiny.com Sent: Wednesday, June 19, 2002 7:34 PM

Subject: RABBI WEIN'S WEEKLY COLUMNS

Parsha Archive June 21 2002 CHUKAT- BALAK CHUKAT Being able to enter into the Land of Israel and dwell there permanently is not an easy achievement. It is not easy today to integrate one's self into modern-day Israel, even if somehow one accomplishes "making aliyah." There is obviously a wealth of factors that are factored into one's decision and actions regarding moving to Israel. But the Torah teaches us that coming to Israel is dependent upon heavenly approval as well.

There have been many great, brave, pious, stoutly determined Jews who have attempted to arrive in the Land of Israel and failed in that attempt. In the past centuries, some of the greatest leaders of the Jewish people, such as Rabbi Elijah of Vilna (the Gaon of Vilna), Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaCohen Kagan of Radin (the Chofetz Chaim) and Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv) among others, attempted to leave their Eastern European exile and move to the Land of Israel and failed to realize their goal. Heaven seemingly always intervened to deny them the realization of this life-long, fiercely held dream. Heaven always has its own inscrutable calculations and has the last word on the matter. This is certainly obvious from the narrative that appears in the Torah reading of Chukat.

Moshe is denied entry into the Land of Israel by G-d. His striking the rock at Meriva instead of speaking to it as G-d had instructed him is the proximate cause for his punishment of being excluded from leading the People into the Land of Israel. How this apparently severe punishment fits the transgression of Moshe, is the subject of much discussion among the commentators to the Torah. But, however we will resolve this matter of crime and punishment, transgressions and retribution, the basic fact of the Torah remains - Moshe was prevented by Heaven from realizing his goal of entering the Land of Israel. And Moshe's tragic disappointment led to dramatic consequences for all of Jewish and world history.

Midrash teaches us that if Moshe, instead of Yehoshua, had led the people of Israel into the Land of Israel, the Jewish people would never have been exiled from the Holy Land. Another, more deadly and dreaded heavenly punishment would have then been devised to punish Israel for its sins. And, according to this line of interpretation, this fact was also taken into consideration in the heavenly decision to bar Moshe from entering the Land of Israel. Thus, it is not only the merits of Moshe that decided the issue but other variables, unconnected to his direct behavior, also played a role in the sad result. Probably the same type of insight and logic can be applied to the failures of other great Jews to achieve their dream of returning personally to Zion and Jerusalem. Heaven, from its eternal point of vantage, intervened to thwart their hopes, but perhaps that was somehow for the benefit of the people and Land of Israel in the long run.

Man proposes but G-d disposes. Yet man must always continue to propose and attempt. If Heaven decrees otherwise, that in no way frees us from our responsibilities to struggle to achieve the dream of the Jewish ages - Zion and Jerusalem rebuilt, secure, faithful and strong, and teeming with Jews. It is therefore mysterious, if not downright disappointing, that millions of Jews have not attempted to avail themselves of the opportunity to pursue their dream of entering the Land of Israel in a more meaningful, concrete, practical fashion. Every

day when I walk in the streets of Jerusalem, I remind myself that I am doing what the great Moshe was forbidden from doing - living in the Land of Israel. Why G-d has allowed me, and millions of my fellow-Jews to enjoy what Moshe could not, is beyond me. But I thank Him daily for so doing.

BALAK

This past century, the bloodiest in all of human history, should have lain to rest two of the most cherished theories about mankind postulated by the Enlightenment and Secular Humanism. One was the idea that all moral questions, all issues of right and wrong, good and evil, were subject to being correctly decided on the basis of man's reason alone, without the necessity (better put, without the interference) of divine revelation or organized religion. Man, and man alone, would be the final and autonomous arbiter of morality. This idea brought with it, as a necessary corollary, the firm belief that man left to his own reasoning devices would invariably choose to do what is right, what promotes life and fairness and the common good.

This second idea of man's innate choice of goodness was aided and abetted by an arrogant belief that an educated person was more likely to do good than an illiterate one - that a Ph.D. graduate would be less likely to kill, harm, maim and destroy than a poor, hardscrabble, backwards farmer. But none of these theories have proven true. Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Milosevic and the entire slew of other murderers of the 20th century have all given the lie to these fantasies about human morality and rectitude. One-third of all of the commandants of the Nazi death camps held either a Ph.D. or M.D. degree. Man, left to his own reason, will not choose right. Reason, by itself, is death and destruction, oppressive theories and murderous social engineering. No faith and no belief have led us to the brink of the social abyss of self-destruction.

Our society hungers for a return to self, to a system of eternal values, to a disciplined life-style and to the true liberty of faith, which will free us from the ills of mindless conformity.

Balak and Bilaam, the two main characters in the Torah reading of this week are powerful, respected, intelligent people. Bilaam even possesses the gift of divine intuition and prophecy. But they are base, evil and immoral people. They are so convinced of their own powers, of their own ability to reason correctly, that they are convinced that they can hoodwink G-d and destroy the Jewish people, all without consequence to themselves. They exhibit all of the immoral traits of the dark side of human behavior - greed, corruption, jealousy, foul speech and causeless hatred. But their worst trait is arrogance - they know better, they are better, they deserve better. And the People of Israel, and through it, the G-d of Israel and His divine Torah, apparently stands in their way. So, denying G-d and destroying the People of Israel will somehow improve the world. We have seen the genocidal plan of Balak and Bilaam take on the flesh of reality in this past century as well. We now know how dangerous such people are.

But many, and especially, inexplicably many Jews, are loath to relinquish the good old theories of the Enlightenment. And that is a truly sad and dangerous error. Jewry needs a healthy dose of realism and should forsake many of the utopian, naive and dangerous beliefs and theories that have characterized our journey in the modern world over the past two centuries. We should never forget that Balak and Bilaam are unfortunately real. But so is our faith and tradition. Shabat Shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

MessageFrom: Kerem B'Yavneh Online [feedback@kby.org] Sent: Saturday, June 15, 2002 5:05 AM
PARSHAT CHUKAT THE EXILE IN EGYPT AND ERETZ YISRAEL
ROSH HAYESHIVA RAV MORDECHAI GREENBERG SHLITA
When Bnei Yisrael wanted to traverse Edom on their way to Israel, Moshe sent emissaries to the king of Edom saying, "So said your brother Israel: You know all the hardship that has befallen us. Our forefathers descended to Egypt ... and the Egyptians did evil to us." (Bamidbar 20:14-15)

There are two questions he:

1.. Why did Moshe feel it necessary to relate the troubles of the past to the king of Edom? 2.. "Your brother Israel. Why did Moshe mention brotherhood here?" (Rashi) Chazal answer in Midrash Tanchuma as follows:

"You know all the hardship that has befallen us." [Moshe] said to [the king of Edom]: You know that when G-d said to Avraham, "Know with certainty that your descendants shall be aliens in a land not their own, and they will enslave them and they will oppress them" (Bereishit 15:13) -- we were enslaved and you were free ... This is comparable to two brothers, against whose grandfather a debt-document was presented. One of them paid it. Some time later, he began to ask something of his brother. He said to him, "You know that the debt that I paid was upon both of us, and I was the one who paid it. Therefore, do not deny the request that I ask."

Hashem said to Avraham: "To your descendents I will give this Land." (15:18) However, it is not clear who the descendents of Avraham are -- Yitzchak or Yishmael? Yaakov or Esav? And while it is possible to exclude Yishmael, since he is the son of the maid, Esav is different, as Malachi states: "Was not Esav the brother of Yaakov -- the word of Hashem -- yet I loved Yaakov." (Malachi 1:2) Why was Esav excluded and the promise fulfilled only with Yaakov?

This is because in the brit bein habetarim (covenant of the pieces), it says (Bereishit 15:13-18):

Your descendants shall be aliens in a land not their own, and they will serve them, and they will oppress them, four hundred years ... The fourth generation shall return here ... On that day Hashem made a covenant with Avram saying, "To your descendants I have given this land."

Thus, it is clear that the same descendants who will be aliens, and will descend to Egypt -- they are the very same descendants to whom the Land will be given.

Regarding Esav it says: "Esav took his wives, his sons, his daughters ... and went to a land because of his brother Yaakov." (Bereishit 36:6) Rashi cites a Midrash:

"Because of his brother Yaakov." Because of the debt of the decree, "Your descendants shall be aliens," which was placed on the descendents of Yitzchak. [Esav] said, "I will leave here, and I will share neither in the gift, that this land is given to him, nor in the payment of the debt."

Therefore, it says in the end of Parshat Vayishlach: "These are the chiefs of Edom by their settlements, in the land of their possession -- he is Esav, father of Edom" (36:43), and immediately afterwards it says: "Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning" (37:1), and the story of the descent to Egypt begins. The account of the exile was fulfilled only through Yaakov, whereas Esav settled in his possessed land.

This is why Esav is mentioned in the Passover Haggadah: "To Esav I gave Mount Seir to inherit, and Yaakov and his sons went down to Egypt." (Yehoshua 24:4) Esav went complacently to his inheritance, while the decree of exile was fulfilled through Yaakov. Thus, they were the ones through whom the promise, "To your descendants I have given this land," was fulfilled.

This is why Moshe mentioned to the king of Edom, "So said your brother Israel." As Rashi explains, since we are brothers we should have both paid the debt, and therefore, "Let us pass through your land" -- you cannot contest the inheritance of Israel, just as you did not pay the debt.

Only the refinery of the suffering, subjugation, and the troubles of the exile, award rights to the Land of Israel, as Chazal teach: "G-d gave three good gifts to Israel, and all were given to them only through suffering: Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and the world to come."

With this we can understand Rashi's opening comment on the Torah in explaining the narrative of Bereishit. Rashi cites from the Midrash that it would have been proper to begin the Torah with, "This month shall be for you the beginning of the months" (Shemot 12:2), the first mitzvah given to Am Yisrael. However, the Torah begins with the story of Creation because of, "The strength of His deeds he declared to His people, to give them the heritage of the nations." (Tehillim 111:6) If the nations of the world will say to Israel, "You are robbers, for you stole

the Land," we will say to them, "G-d created the world; He took Eretz Yisrael from them and gave it to us."

This interpretation does not explain, though, what is the purpose of all the stories from Parshat Lech Lecha, in which Eretz Yisrael is promised, and on? Rather, all the narrative until, "This month shall be for you," comes to teach how Yishmael and Esav were separated from the descendants of Avraham. Only through Yaakov was the decree of brit bein habetarim fulfilled, and only through him was the promise of the Land fulfilled.

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From: Yated USA [yated-usa@ttec.com] Sent: Thursday, June 20, 2002 5:11 PM To: Yated Subscribers Subject: Yated USA, 06-20-2002
Parsha Perspectives: Parshas Balak - Opening Salvo
BY RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Yidden walk into shul each morning, open their siddurim, and begin to daven. They begin with a tefillah entitled "Ma Tovu-"How beautiful are your tents, Yaakov; your dwellings, Yisrael." These words may sound beautiful and eloquent, but their source seems quite repulsive. After all they come from Bilaam! When, Balak, the king of Moav, hires the world's greatest sorcerer, Bilaam, renowned for his cursing and spell casting abilities to curse the Yidden, Bilaam attempts to cast some very insidious spells upon the Jews. But with the help of Hashem, all that left his mouth were words of praise and blessing. The words "Ma Tovu-How beautiful are your tents" emanated from Bilaam in one of his futile rants. But if there are so many other beautiful songs and psalms, authors and composers, which chazal could have chosen to open the daily service, why did they choose the curse that was transformed to a bracha, as Bilaam observed the Jewish encampment? Obviously there is a lesson that we must learn-first thing in the morning-every day. Let's analyze what happened. Bilaam, accompanied by his employer, set out to get a good vantage point to view and curse Klal Yisrael. They were thinking about the horrid character of these people as they aroused their spirits for the curse of all time. And then they look. What they saw startled them. The Tents of Israel were strategically placed to conform to the highest standards of morality. Not one tent opening faced another. These tents epitomized modesty, chastity, and self-esteem. Bilaam, a very spiritual being, was dumbfounded. His curse had nothing to grab on to. Pure evil can never latch on to pure holiness. Bilaam couldn't berate the Jews. The only spiritual verbiage that he could utter, were words of praise for the very nation he set out to destroy. The sight (and of course the Ribbono Shel Olam's intervention) left him not a detractor, but rather a praiser of Israel.

The following story, I heard while I was learning in Lakewood and later saw printed in a book. The names have been changed, and the events slightly modified. John Lawson was a disabled, decorated Vietnam veteran. The war, however, left him shell-shocked, in need of psychological rehabilitation. He was distraught and searching. As part of his fully compensated rehabilitation, he was sent to a V.A. hospital in Central Jersey. Somehow he found his way to the Lakewood Yeshiva, where he was befriended by the talmidim. John, a Mormon, felt warmth and direction. He ultimately began to love the tenets of Judaism, became Jewish, and began to study Torah-day and night. The army, which was funding his rehabilitation, felt this was too much. Any occupation would be considered by the Veterans Administration as suitable for full disability pay, but learning-in a Yeshiva-was unacceptable! He argued that until he finished his studies, and received semicha, he would not be able to function in society. His case was presented to a military panel. Upon hearing his case, one of the judges, a former naval officer, got up and announced. "I know exactly what this man wants-and I'm going to let him have it!" All eyes focused on the former navy commander. "During the Korean War, we were at sea off the China coast for three straight months. My crew was stir crazy. I'm embarrassed to say the things they talked about and did while waiting out those months in the China Sea. When we docked in Japan, the crew was even wilder. All except for two men. They were observant Jews. Every day, during the entire stay aboard the vessel they would sit in serious discussion over a big tome they called the Talmud. They were calm, clear, and directed.. One day I asked one of them what they were doing. He answered, 'Officer, I'm studying the Talmud. By the time this war is over, we're going to be Talmid Kockems.' [He meant Talmid Chacham, but was unable to pronounce the guttural "ch".] I was really impressed by those

fellows. If John here wants to finish his studies and become a Talmid Kockem, I say we ought to continue funding that education!" Every day as we enter the shul, we open our siddurim and say special words. "How beautiful are your tents, Yaakov." We remind ourselves that, as we leave the shul, all eyes are upon us. What we say, and what we do are observed. We are not only on this earth to see-we are here to be seen. The day begins with a vivid testimony that our actions in this world can influence the way our people, and our Torah, are perceived. We can transform the curses of our detractors, and have them sing the praises of Yaakov's tents and the Talmid Kockems who dwell in them. Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Associate Dean of Yeshiva South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parable series.

From: Yated USA [yated-usa@ttec.com] Sent: Thursday, June 20, 2002 5:11 PM To: Yated Subscribers Subject: Yated USA, 06-20-2002

CONCEPTS AND CONCEPTS
BY RAV NOCHUM EISENSTEIN, Lakewood, NJ

Tamos nafshi mos yesharim u'sehi acharisi kamohu, "I should die like the straight ones (avos) and my ending should be like them" (Bamidbar 23:10). Bilaam's statement, revealed his innermost emotions and his lifelong ambition, to die like a Jew and to merit entrance to Olam Habah. On one hand, his aspiration is not surprising. After all, he was a navi and certainly had great comprehension of the real values in life. On the other hand, why should he merit such honors? What did he do to deserve them? Did he endure the pains of a Jew? Did he serve Hashem? The Mishna (Avos 5:19) draws a parallel between Bilaam and Avraham Avinu: "Whoever has the following three traits is among the disciples of Avraham Avinu, and whoever has three other traits is among the disciplines of Bilaam Harasha: Those with an ayin tova (good eye), ruach nemucha (a humble spirit), and a nefesh sh'fala (satisfied soul) are among the disciples of Avraham Avinu. Those who have an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul are among the disciples of Bilaam. How are the disciples of Avraham Avinu different than the disciples of Bilaam Harasha? Avraham Avinu's disciples enjoy this world and inherit the world to come. But the disciples of Bilaam Harasha inherit Gehinom and descend to the depths of degradation." The Mishna suggests that from a pure academic standpoint Avraham and Bilaam stood on equal footing. None was greater than the other. This is not so astounding, really, because in the intellectual arena all knowledge is equal. One plus one equals two regardless of the society to which you belong. E=mc² whether you are American, British, French, Japanese, or any other nationality. Thus, Avraham Avinu and Bilaam stood equally in terms of their intellects and knowledge. So what differentiated them? Character traits. Avraham Avinu was a kindly, considerate person who took interest in others. He did not live just for himself. The Mishna describes Avraham as having an "ayin tova," that is, he looked favorably at others. He neither scorned nor ridiculed them. He did not talk lashon harah about them, but, rather, always attempted to help them. He pleaded with Hashem to save Sodom. He devised a system to bring people closer to Hashem. By coming closer to Hashem, a person lives eternally. This is the meaning of ayin tova. Bilaam, on the other hand, was selfish, motivated by greed, and had no problem with trying to destroy an entire nation with his curses. Ruach nemucha (a humble spirit) and nefesh sh'fala (satisfied spirit) go hand in hand with ayin tova. Because Avraham had an ayin tova, he was not jealous of others; he was satisfied with his own lot and wanted that others should be similarly situated. He was not self-centered, he was not arrogant, and did he did not attempt to control the world. Rather, he looked to serve Hashem and encouraged others to do so. Each one of these traits feeds on, and complements, the others. This formed his personality and earned him the right and privilege to become the father of Klal Yisrael. A few weeks ago, in parshas Naso, the Torah described the laws of a nazir: "Ish ki yafli," "When a person utters a vow" (Bamidbar 6:2) literally means, "When a person does something wondrous." In a well-known comment, the Ibn Ezra focuses on this terminology, which denotes wonderment or something extraordinary. He explains that a person who accepts to conduct himself as a nazir is something out of the ordinary and is amazing. As he observes, most people follow their materialistic inclinations. To find, therefore, a person who is strong enough to curtail and control them is quite an unusual phenomenon. I recently had a different insight in the Ibn Ezra's statement. The life of Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky zt"l presents many lessons about honesty. We hear and read them and marvel at his unusual

achievements in this area. In reality, our marvel is rather a reflection of how far we have strayed from even recognizing what emes (truth) is. Rav Yaakov once accompanied someone on a trip to Baltimore. His companion noticed that Rav Yaakov seemed tired and inquired. Rav Yaakov replied that his neighbor is a baker who returns home early in the morning. Because R. Yaakov's alarm clock would certainly have interrupted his neighbor's sleep, R. Yaakov stayed up all night to be sure to be on time for the trip. Everyone marvels at this story, especially because R. Yaakov's neighbor the baker was not Jewish. This, too, reflects how far we are from feeling for another person. To someone like Rav Yaakov, such behavior was not extraordinary; it was automatic and axiomatic. If you care about other people, as Rav Yaakov did, this is how you act. The amazing part of the story is not that he stayed up all night, but, rather, that he had perfected this sterling character trait of having such a degree of concern for another human being. My mother a"n once related an incident of a din Torah involving one of her great grandparents. He had purchased a product, but when he put the money down on the counter the storekeeper told him that he had made a mistake, that the price was a lesser amount of money. The purchaser insisted that the amount was correct and that he would not take the item for a penny less. The seller countered by saying that because he had offered it for less, he would not take a penny more. This was the essence of the din torah. The story is marvelous. The part that amazes me is that they had such standards; who today would even consider asserting such a position let alone going to court over it?! "Whatever you can get away with" is today's motto. Before Rav Aharon Kotler, the Lakewood Rosh Yeshiva, zt"l, came to America there were many people committed to learning Torah and fulfilling mitzvos. But the concept of being a Ben Torah, dedicating your life, in America, to Torah, was unheard of and far from anyone's imagination. Rav Aharon fought, not to upgrade the learning of Torah, but to raise the level of concepts of American Jewry. The supremacy of Torah was the theme to which he geared Jews. Torah is not just another mitzvah like tefilin or tzitzis or sukkah. Torah is the very oxygen of Klal Yisrael. Without Torah, there is no Klal Yisrael. This was the message for which he was moser nefesh (dedicated his life) to instill in us. At a wedding, Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l approached Rebbetzin Steif a"n to wish her mazal tov. She naturally stood up as he approached, whereupon he politely told her that it was unnecessary. She replied, "What do you mean? When my husband would speak to you on the phone he would stand out of respect." What a concept of honor and respect! The degradation of human dignity brought about by the use of cell phones is beyond imagination. Most people do not fathom the deterioration caused by its use and haven't the slightest inkling as to what is wrong with it. The rudeness and insensitivity brought about by this little device is untold. I recently gave someone a ride. After putting on his seat belt he pulled out his cell phone and ignoring me, began talking non-stop, without concern for basic human dignity and civility. [Refer: Yated Vayislach 2001] Bilaam had no problem with this. He fully comprehended the merit and value of tznius (modesty), appreciated a refined person, respected nobility, and felt for human dignity. He understood Torah values and concepts. He chose, however, not to live with them. He nevertheless assumed that he was a candidate for olam habah far greater than those people who have no concept of a higher way of life and do not and cannot appreciate the true flavor of olam habah. His contention, however, was erroneous. To enter olam habah, one has to have not only an appreciation of ruchnius (spirituality) and Torah values, but one must live with them. It is insufficient to be "a Jew at heart;" a cardiac Jew; you have to practice it. Olam habah is reserved for those who stand courageously on the battlefield to curtail their instincts, who aspire to raise their concepts to conform to Torah values, and who work conscientiously on achieving this lofty goal.

Al tiftach peh l'Satan- One should be careful with his words lest he invoke the Satan. "V'ata lecha nah arah li es ha'am hazeh. -So now, please come and curse this people for me." (22:6) In Tochachos Mussar, the Shla"n HaKadosh writes that a person should be extremely careful with his words since, through his speech, he can inadvertently bring evil upon himself. When Balak asked Bilam to curse the Jewish people, he said, "arah li-curse for me." However, these words can also mean "curse me." Obviously, Balak did not intend to curse himself, but this, in fact, is what happened. Bilam's attempt to curse the Jewish people failed and, instead, he told Balak what the Jewish people would do to his nation at the end of days... This lesson is also stated in the gemara. Reish Lakish said, "One should never open his mouth for the Satan." In other words, a person

should not utter anything that might invite the Satan to strike. R' Yosef explains that the source for this halacha is the pesukim at the beginning of Yeshaya (1: 9 and 10) where the Jewish people said, "We were nearly (destroyed) like Sodom," and the Navi replies, "Hear the word of HaShem, O chiefs of Sodom..." (Brachos 19A) The power of speech, in terms of its ability to invoke evil, might also be the reason for Dasan and Aviram's unnatural death. The day after Moshe "struck down" the Egyptian man (who struck the Hebrew man) and concealed him in the sand, Moshe saw two Hebrew men fighting. The gemara tells us that these men were Dasan and Aviram. Moshe said to the wicked one who was about to strike his fellow, "Why would you strike your fellow?" to which the wicked one replied, "Do you propose to murder me as you murdered the Egyptian?" (Shmos 2:14) These words indeed came to pass when, like the Egyptian, Dasan and Aviram were swallowed up in the ground at the word of Moshe Rabbeinu. Speech is an extremely powerful tool and must be used appropriately. The gemara in meseches Megilla (15A) tells us "not to take lightly the blessing, or curse, of an ordinary Jew." This is because, through his expression, an ordinary Jew has the power to bring good or evil upon his fellow. We must take a lesson from here that we should try our very best to speak positively and wish our friends well so that our words will benefit everyone. R' Yochanan said, "How do we know that a covenant can be implemented with words? From the pasuk "Avraham said to his young men, 'Stay here by yourselves with the donkey, while I and the lad will go yonder; we will worship and we will return to you.' " Avraham had intended to sacrifice Yitzchak at the top of the mountain, yet he told the young men "we (plural) will return." The result was that Avraham unwittingly saved his son's life. His words actually came to pass. Regardless of the state in which a person may find himself, he should never speak pessimistically as this could, G-d forbid, be the cause of his downfall. Even if a person is on his deathbed or "a sharp sword rests on his neck" he should never give up hope for HaShem's mercy. Rather, he should be optimistic and speak in positive terms so that his words may bring about his salvation rather than the reverse. (Pele Yoetz) In his sefer Zera Chaim, R' Yaakov Chaim Sofer, shlita, writes about the life and practices of R' Shaul Broch, zt"l, who never spoke negatively. "He would never say that a person was sick, but rather, he was unwell. Even when reciting the special mi sheberach for sick people, he did not follow the usual text "May He heal the sick one, so and so... but simply said, "may He heal so and so..." R' Shaul felt that merely saying that a person is sick could have a negative impact on the patient. On one occasion, a guest in R' Shaul's shul, who was unaware of the rabbi's practice, recited the customary text of the mi sheberach and elicited sharp criticism from R' Shaul. "Why do you take the liberty of referring to a Jewish person as "sick?" he asked. "Don't you know that the prosecuting angels in heaven seize every opportunity and every word uttered by a Jewish man to use to his disadvantage?" Even while praying for a person's welfare, we must be extremely careful with our choice of words, lest they have the opposite effect. The Munkatcher Rebbe, zt"l, also omitted the words "the sick one" in the mi sheberach for the unwell. He explained his practice with the gemara in meseches Shabbos, which states the following: "A person should always pray that he not become ill, for, once he does, it will be necessary for him to redeem himself with merit." (32A) The rebbe explained that as long as a person is healthy, he need not prove why he deserves to remain that way, but once he becomes ill, he will have to explain to the heavenly court why he deserves to enjoy good health. Therefore, one should never refer to another person as "sick," since doing so, in effect, means conceding to his current state. If one is branded as being sick, the person doing so must help the latter prove his merit before the heavenly court. While it is our practice today to follow the customary text of the prayer, the sensitivity of these great gedolim in terms of the power of speech demonstrates the amount of caution we must exercise in order not to harm another Jew. In the same way that we should not take the blessings and curses of others lightly, we must understand that our own blessings and, G-d forbid, curses also carry much weight. Let us try to make a habit of speaking positively and wishing others well so that we may experience only good fortune together with our fellow Jews. The Chofetz Chaim was once at a reception where he sat beside R' Naftoli, zt"l, a rebbe in the Radin yeshivah. The Chofetz Chaim expressed his dismay at the sad fact that the average Jew of his generation lacked proper faith in HaKadosh Boruch Hu. "Why do you seem surprised?" R' Naftoli asked the Chofetz Chaim. "When the Jewish people were in exile in Mizrayim, they were still close enough in time to remember the holy patriarchs and lived with the knowledge that the Jewish people would not be in Mizrayim for longer than four hundred years. Still, the slavery in Mizrayim hardened

their hearts and the nation stooped to the forty-ninth level of tumah. It is not surprising, then, that we, who are so far removed from our forefathers, and who have no clue as to how long we will be in this long and trying exile, have lost some of our faith..." The Chofetz Chaim nodded in acknowledgement. "You have spoken well. You are a good proponent for this generation, and may your words rise before HaShem's honorable throne." In Radin it was told that R' Naftoli passed away shortly after relating this story. Some of the kabbalists in Radin suggested that R' Naftoli's death was the result of the words uttered by the big tzaddik. He had suggested that R' Naftoli would be a good proponent before HaShem's throne.... (see Moed Koton 18A and Gittin 56A regarding the humility of R' Zecharia)

The mitzvah of chastisement. "Kach es kol roshei ha'am v'hoka osam laShem neged hashemesh.-Take all the leaders of the people. Hang them before HaShem facing the sun..." (25:4) The Midrash Tanchuma explains that Moshe was to hang "the leaders of the people" since they failed to admonish the nation. They were to be hanged in the sun, explains the Sforno, so that everyone would see their punishment. This was midda k'neged midda: the people witnessed the hanging but were unable to protest, which atoned for the leaders' failure to protest to the immoral behavior of their followers and chastise them accordingly. The gemara quotes three opinions as to how far one should go to reproach another Jew. Rav says that one is commanded to admonish his fellow "until the person is ready to hit him." Shmuel says "until he wishes to curse him," and, according to R' Yochanan, one should stop as soon as the person gets angry. (Erchin 16B) However, our sages emphasize that just as it is a mitzvah to guide another with words that will be heard, it is also a mitzvah not to speak words that will not be heard. R' Abba asserts that a person has a positive obligation to remain silent in instances where his rebuke will certainly not be accepted. As it is written (Mishle 9:8), "Do not rebuke the scoffer lest he hate you." (Yevamos 65B) The reason one should not rebuke the scoffer, explains the gemara in meseches Shabbos (55A), is because "it is preferable that he sin unknowingly rather than intentionally." Our obligation is to try to help others improve their performance of mitzvos, but if reprimanding someone will make things worse it is preferable that we remain silent. Nevertheless, if there remains even a very small chance that our words will prompt the transgressor to change, then we must take the chance. (A question raised by the acronym is whether the need to rebuke someone until he "hits" or "curses" are guidelines in terms of how long one must continue to reprimand another Jew or guidelines as to what type of person is considered someone who is not prepared to listen.) Finally, a hint regarding the importance of guiding others in their service of HaKadosh Boruch Hu can be found on the opening pasuk of our parsha. "This is the decree of the Torah, which HaShem has commanded, saying..." (19:1) The Torah's decree is that we should "say"-that we are to speak out against wrongdoing. We are to guide others with our words rather than turn an eye from their transgressions lest we be guilty of their sins. (Chasam Sofer) Rabbi Yehudah Tzodko related the following story during one of his lectures in the yeshiva. At a certain point in time when shabbos desecration became rampant in the holy city of Yerushalayim, the local rabbis called upon all religious Jews to gather for a mass demonstration to condemn the terrible desecration of Hashem's name. After a license for the demonstration was procured and the specific guidelines met, tens of thousands of Jews, sincerely disturbed by what was taking place in their city, gathered together to express their distress at the status quo, and, above all, to spread awareness of the sanctity of the holy shabbos. However, much to the demonstrators' surprise, as soon as the public gathered the police arrived and, for some unknown reason, burst into the crowds and began dispersing them. Using megaphones, they called upon all the participants to leave the area and, while some obeyed the orders, others resisted. It wasn't long before things got messy and the police were using their clubs to chase people away. "But I continued standing in my place," R' Yehudah told his students, "because the rabbis in the city had instructed us to carry out this demonstration. At that time a police officer approached me and said, 'Go home! This demonstration is illegal!' " "I cannot do that; the rabbis have commanded me to demonstrate," I replied. But he persisted. "Rabbi, do you want me to hit you?" "Go ahead," I replied. "Rabbi, why are you making things difficult for me? Why are you going to make me hit you?" Rabbi Tzodkoh explained to the police officer that a Jewish person's obligation to admonish his brothers continues until the person is ready to hit or curse the admonisher, but the policeman just became more frustrated. "Please, I really don't want to hurt you. Please do

me a favor and go home," the officer pleaded. "If you are unwilling to hit me then I have not yet fulfilled my obligation..." The police officer took a step closer to R' Yehuda. "Give me your hand," he said, and he gave R' Yehudah a pat on his hand. "Okay, that's enough, now go." R' Yehuda nodded in acknowledgement and began to pull his hand away, but the police officer held on tightly and kissed R' Yehuda's hand. Then he held Rabbi Tzodko's hand and escorted him beyond the reach of the police and the remaining demonstrators. "So you see," said R' Yehuda to his students, "as long as there is a chance that you can make a difference in a person you must continue to try..." (V'Zos LiYehuda)

One who has slighted his friend must beg his forgiveness. "Vayomru chatanu ki dibarnu BaShem vavach hispallel el Hashem v'yoser me'aleinu es hanachash.-They said (to Moshe), "We have sinned, for we have spoken against Hashem and against you. Pray to Hashem that he remove the serpent from us." (21:7) Bnei Yisroel realized that they had spoken inappropriately and begged Moshe's forgiveness. They also asked Moshe to pray to HaKadosh Boruch Hu on their behalf and plead that He remove the serpents from among them. Indeed, the pasuk goes on to say that Moshe prayed for them and that the serpents were duly removed. This teaches us the power of tshuva (repentance), says the Midrash. "As soon as they said, 'We have sinned,' Moshe prayed to HaShem and He listened." (Midrash Rabba) One of the greatest obstacles that stand in the way of a slanderer who wishes to repent is the need to beg his friend's forgiveness. Rabbeinu Yona writes that this is an extremely difficult task for a number of reasons. First, one who is accustomed to speaking loshon horah cannot even remember all the times he has spoken negatively about other people. Over time he has harmed so many individuals with his evil words that he will not even remember whom he must ask for forgiveness. Second, the people he has slandered might not know of the slander, and now, when he wishes to beg forgiveness from those whom he does recall smearing, it will be terribly embarrassing as he will have to inform them of what he did to them. (Sha'arei Tshuva 3:207) Based on Rabbeinu Yona's words, the Chofetz Chaim rules that in order for the victim of loshon horah to be able to grant full forgiveness, he must know exactly what was said about him. As difficult as it may be for both parties, this is the only way for the repentant to find atonement for his sin. Obviously, the repentant will also have to beg forgiveness for having caused the victim even more pain by informing him of what he did in his effort to seek atonement for his sin. (Hilchos Shemiras HaLashon 4:12)

One Yom Kippur, prior to the Ne'ilah service, a young man asked the Steipler Gaon what time he expected Ne'ilah to conclude, but the Steipler motioned to the man that he did not know. Immediately after davening, the Steipler called for the young man and begged his forgiveness for not having answered his question more respectfully. "When you came over to me I did not answer you properly because I had already begun Ashrei. However, as soon as you left, I realized that what I did was wrong, since it is permissible to interrupt a recitation of Ashrei in order to accord proper respect to another human being. You see, even on Yom Kippur prior to Ne'ilah it is so easy to stumble. Please forgive me for my insolence," said the Steipler. The Steipler would not rest until the man said "I forgive you." Then he gave the man a copy of one of his seforim as an expression of his sincere apology. (Toldos Ya'akov)

This week's column is dedicated l'iluy nishmas HaRav Pinchas Hirschprung, zt"l Chief rabbi of Montreal.

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