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RIVKAH SAPPINGTON IN MEMORY OF **MOSHE
LAZAR BEN SHMUEL AND BATYA BAS MOSHE
YEHUDA HALEVI**

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PARSHAS BALAK EDITION – VOLUME 15, ISSUE 23 – TAMMUZ 16TH, 5875/JULY 12TH, 2025

TORAH QUESTION by RABBI MOSHE KLEIN: BALAK – BEING CAREFUL WITH KEEPING BOUNDARIES

This week's question: What is the idea behind the idol of Ba'al Peor? How does it make any sense to serve an idol through the act of defecation? We are talking about people who believed they were serving something Divine. Why would they choose such a disgusting and disrespectful act as a form of worship?

Answer: We see that the story of Ba'al Peor is fascinating (Chapter 25 in Bamidbar). The Jews were in Shittim and started to commit immorality with the daughters of Moav, and then the people were invited to sacrifice to the idols, of which they ate. Then, the Torah tells (ibid. 25:3) that the Jewish people worshipped Ba'al Peor, and then Hashem got angry. There is a specific anger for being attached to this idol (the wording used here is derived from the Hebrew word "harness"). There was a particular anger for this – what in the world were the people getting attached to?

To understand, let us quote two stories. The first story is quoted in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 64a): *"Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: An incident occurred involving a certain gentile woman who was very ill. She said: If that woman, referring to herself, recovers from her illness, she will go and worship every object of idol worship in the world. She recovered from her illness and subsequently worshipped every object of idol worship in the world. When she arrived at Peor, she asked the priests: How does one worship this idol? They said to her: 'One eats spinach, which causes diarrhea, and drinks beer, which also causes diarrhea, and defecates before it.' The woman said: 'Better for that woman (referring to herself) to return to her illness and not worship an idol in such a manner.'"*

We see how tempting this Ba'al Peor was for the Jews and what they had to do (they had to get to a state of diarrhea). This woman wanted to thank "the gods" but when she realized what this involved, she backed off. The Gemara (ibid.) continues: *"There was an incident involving a Jew named Sabbeta ben Alas, who rented out his donkey and his services to a certain gentile woman. He was driving his donkey behind her, and when she arrived at Peor, she said to him: 'Wait here until I go in and come out.' After she came out, he said to her: 'You also wait for me until I go in and come out.' She said to him: 'Aren't you Jewish? Why, then, are you worshipping idols?' He said to her: 'And what do you care?' He entered and defecated before the idol, and wiped himself with its nose, as he wanted to demean the idol as much as possible."*

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"To be frank, officer, my parents never set boundaries."

We are taught (Shabbos 105b) that, *"One who rips his clothing in anger, or who breaks his vessels in anger, or who scatters his money in anger, should be like an idol-worshipper in your eyes, as that is the craft of the Yetzer Hara (evil inclination). Today he tells him 'do this', and tomorrow he tells him 'do that', until he tells him to worship idols and he goes and worships idols."* When someone gets angry, they lose their *seichel* (common sense) and can stoop to the lowest depths. They can even worship idols, which is the antithesis of Yiddishkeit (Judaism).

What causes a person to lose themselves? Naturally, we are born in a state of feeling a certain authority over us (this is *Yiras Shomayim*). We serve Hashem, but sometimes a person may fall, as King Shlomo says (Mishlei 24:16) *"a righteous person will fall seven times but will then rise."* Yet, there is a certain level that we call *"shtoltz"* (in the lingo of Yeshivish people). There is a level that we must adhere to in order to survive like a proper person in this world.

That *geder* (fence) of not being in a state of *hefkeirus* – lack of feeling ownership – is what Ba'al Peor is. It's not about serving another god but serving the concept that there are no boundaries. →

TORAH QUESTION OF THE WEEK, CONCLUSION

Going to the bathroom is a private action. To publicly defecate and make it into idol-worship is showing there are no boundaries, and then any action is fair game. The Jewish nation is "tzniyus", which doesn't only mean modest in dress. Tzniyus – especially when it comes to women – isn't specifically about being covered up; rather, it's about not doing things in a provocative and boundary-breaking fashion. It's about holding oneself to a certain standard and guarding oneself from the attitude that anything goes. Contrary to popular belief, one who is tzniyus is not making oneself ugly and covering oneself in a burka. It's about holding oneself to a standard and not subjecting oneself to lawlessness that makes people around go off the rails.

Unfortunately, there is something similar to Ba'al Peor that we have today, albeit in a more sophisticated way. Some Jewish weddings start off in a proper way, with a Mechitzah dividing men and women in a way where no one is insulted. Then, comes the dancing, which also starts correctly with the two genders on their respective sides.

Everyone is in their proper places until the drinking starts. Suddenly, people lose their minds and stop thinking. Then, the dancing becomes mixed, and some people justify it because this breaking of boundaries, they claim, wasn't done intentionally. However, it was pre-planned because one was decisive in that one sought to lose their mind by drinking. One must be careful with these types of situations and never do something to lose the place where one is meant to be.

This week's question: Why is it that Pinchas, who acted with such zeal and even took a life, is specifically rewarded by Hashem with the blessing of peace? What's the connection between his violent act and the covenant of peace? (YOU MAY EMAIL RABBI KLEIN YOUR ANSWER AT DEPTHOFTORAH@GMAIL.COM)

SUGAR RUSH ON THE 613 MITZVOS BY R'ELI REIT **MITZVAH # 171 – MACHATZIS HASHEKEL**

In the time of the Beis Hamikdash, we are required to donate half of a shekel (ancient coin). The donation had to be made every year, and it was given to the Beis Hamikdash. The money was then used to purchase animals to be used as karbonos in the Beis Hamikdash. As the Pasuk (Shemos 30:12) says, "each man shall give a redemption for his soul to Hashem". This is only required of those who were counted in the desert, which were the men.

THE LEARNING IN THIS NEWSLETTER SHOULD BE A ZECHUS FOR THE SAFETY AND PROTECTION OF OUR FAMILY IN ERETZ YISRAEL AND A ZECHUS FOR A COMPLETE AND SPEEDY REFUAH OF LEEBA MIRIAM GEULAH BAS LEAH.

YESODE **HASHOLOM**

SHALOM BAYIS INSIGHTS FROM RASHI **BY RABBI YITZ GREENFIELD**

BALAK - MARRIAGE RUNS ON WILLPOWER

In this week's Parsha, Hashem allowed Bila'am to go with Balak's emissaries to curse Klal Yisroel. When Bila'am is on his way, Hashem, in His mercy, sends a malach to try to save Bila'am from the evil he is about to commit. Bila'am's donkey alerts him to the presence of Hashem's malach, but Bilam is unmoved. He is just as determined to curse Bnei Yisroel as before. The Malach Hashem tells Bila'am (Bamidbar 22:35): "Go with the men, but only the words that Hashem tells you, will you speak..."

Rashi wonders why Hashem allowed him to go and answers this question by quoting the idea (Makkos 10b): בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך בה מוליכין אותו - the way that a person desires to go, he is led. The fact that Bila'am wanted so badly to try to curse the Jewish people opened the path for him to go. The concept that nothing stands in the way of a person's will is a powerful concept. Have we given thought to exactly what is the way we want to go? In our marriages, it starts with our רצון - our will. If we give thought to sheleimus (perfection) and develop a strong desire to reach sheleimus with our spouse, we have achieved this first step.

Once we have the רצון, the will, we can figure out how to develop a deep and everlasting connection. What does this deep emotional connection look like on a daily basis? It starts with connecting when we first wake up in the morning by inquiring how our spouse slept and wishing them a good day. Throughout the day, we can set aside five to ten minutes of alone time with our spouse. During this quality time, we can talk about our dreams, our feelings, and our experiences (and NOT our to-do lists). We can set a reminder for ourselves to express meaningful appreciation to our spouses. We can check in with our spouse during the day just to let them know that we are thinking about them.

We can offer to help our spouse and work together to help make our home run smoothly. We can try to take a walk with our spouse, weather permitting. We can make up a time when we head to sleep and try as best we can to honor that time. We can schedule date night weekly, and we can make an effort to refill our spouse's emotional battery daily with an action that is a unique need of theirs.

Just reading this might discourage us from trying, as it seems like too much effort. Keeping in mind the message of Rashi will help us realize that nothing can stand in the way of our will. If we want Shalom Bayis and we are willing to do the work, nothing can stop us. Shalom Bayis takes work and effort, but the dividends are worth the effort. May Hashem bless our efforts with success and shine the light of Shalom Bayis into our homes!

Rabbi Greenfield, MS MFT, is the author of the Torah Marriage Toolbox course. Create more Shalom Bayis in your home by visiting torahmarriage.com or by emailing rabbigreenfield@gmail.com

SPLENDID QUOTE OF THE WEEK **BY RABBI MENACHEM LOMNER**

"Even the most wicked know that our way is the correct way."

We know that Bila'am was wicked in all ways. He suggested the plot in Mitzrayim to enslave the Jews (although he was only following orders). He concocted the plot to ensnare the Jews to sin with the daughters of Moav. He lived a decadent life, but he also hoped that his "death should be the death of the righteous" (Bamidbar 23:10). Even though he gobbled up all the illegal enjoyments of this world he knew what was truly important and proper. We must appreciate that we can live the correct and important lifestyle and not have to long for it only when we are approaching death.

The story of Bila'am is quite strange. The representatives of Balak ask him to curse the Jewish people, to which he says, "I cannot do it unless Hashem let's me." Bila'am asks Hashem and Hashem tells him, "No – don't get involved at all." Bila'am apologizes to the reps, but they come back later and he tells them, "let me ask again." Bila'am asks and Hashem agrees. Wow – was Hashem worn down like a parent of nagging children? Then, Hashem is angry at Bila'am for going, to which the wicked prophet counters with, "But You told me I can go!"

Bila'am is on his way and Hashem sends the most-incompetent angel possible to kill him and Bila'am's donkey moves out of the way. The angel is stymied at every repeated attempt to kill Bila'am with his sword. Finally, the angel gets his sword ready, but the donkey sits down. Don't angels have wings and fly – couldn't the angel chase down this donkey? Then, Bila'am hits his donkey and the donkey starts speaking, asking Bila'am why he was hitting it. Not shocked at a talking animal, Bila'am responds, "because you're making fun of me." The angel then appears and ranks out Bila'am for animal abuse. Why is Hashem doing all this?

The answer is based on the Gemara (Makkos 10b) *"In the way that a person wants to go, he will be led."* Hashem will send you a message. Hashem will not strip you of your free will, and you have to understand that the choice will be yours even as He sends you signposts.



An opportunity will knock on your door (and it knocks on everyone's doors); the question is, will you open it? Hashem gave Bila'am opportunity after opportunity, many chances to figure out what's the right thing to do. However, Bila'am was bent on doing what he wanted. Hashem wasn't going to stop him, but He sent an angel of Rachamim (mercy) and not a destructive angel to inform him, "Don't you get it - this is not the Will of Hashem!" Bila'am thought he could get around the system and still get what he chose. He was wrong and it led to his demise.

Hashem will send us messages in our life, encouraging us to do what's right. We have the free will to heed the call or choose to ignore. Winston Churchill once quipped, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened." He similarly observed that, "Americans will always do the right thing, but only after they have exhausted all other options." Hashem will lead us into the right direction, but it is up to us whether to follow them or go on the road of self-destruction.



INSIGHTS INTO THE RAMCHAL'S CLASSIC WORK, PATH OF THE UPRIGHT
CHAPTER 19, PART 33 – LOVING HASHEM WITH SIMCHA (TRUE JOY)

Summary: The Ramchal gave three approaches for showing Hashem love. The first one (that we covered over the last few weeks) is the concept of Dveikus, translated as full /total attachment to Him. Now, the Ramchal will speak about the second category.

He writes: "The second branch of loving Hashem is joy. It is a great, essential principle in serving Hashem. This is what David exhorted us saying: 'Serve G-d with joy, come before Him with song' (Tehillim 100:2), and 'the righteous will rejoice, they will exult before Hashem and delight with joy' (ibid. 68:4). And our sages said: 'the Divine Presence rests on a person only through his rejoicing in a Mitzvah' (Shabbos 30b). On the Pasuk 'Serve G-d with joy', the Midrash states (Shocher Tov, ibid. 100): 'Rabbi Abahu said: 'when you stand to pray, your heart should rejoice, for you are praying to the Almighty of whom there is none like Him.'" (Mesilas Yesharim, Ch. 19)

The joy which is so highly praised in the Torah is not the levity from earthly pastimes, but the Simcha of a Mitzvah. Only this merits the imminent Presence of Hashem. When **Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk** came as a young student to Rabbi Bunim of Pshische, the latter asked him, "Young man, where is G-d?" Rabbi Mendel said, "G-d is everywhere." Rabbi Bunim repeated the question to which Rabbi Mendel responded, "Hashem is wherever His presence is invited."

Hashem is indeed everywhere as Rabbi Mendel said, but to have the Divine Presence requires simchah. The Divine glory is not manifest where there is dejection. **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, ZT"l**, asks (in *Lights Along the Way*): Is it possible to generate joy? Isn't joy contingent upon various happenings in a person's life? Obviously, if one were to win a large sum of money, one would be happy. If one were to suffer a severe financial loss, one would be sad. If there is a birth or a wedding in the family, one rejoices. If, G-d forbid, there is illness or a death in the family, one is sad.

The emotions of happiness and sadness are thus dependent on what transpires in our lives, much of which is beyond our control. How, then, can there be a commandment, "You shall rejoice" (Devarim 16:15), as if there were a button one could push to turn on simchah?

Perhaps there is no button to push, but we are capable of having far greater mastery of our emotions than we think. We have mentioned two types of mental processes: (1) cognitive, or our knowledge of something, and (2) affective, or our feelings about something. Affect is largely dependent on cognition. We are happy when we win a huge prize because our cognition is that having money is good. A bit of sound, sober thinking can enable a person to realize that not everything that he has thought of as being good is indeed so.

If we rethink our values, then our cognition, our ideas of what is good, may change, and along with that our affects can change. The Ramchal began this work with the concept of what is man's purpose in the world, which, he states, is to do the Divine will, and thereby come close to Hashem. A true and sincere conviction of this will thus result in simchah.

Rabbi Twerski explains that the awareness that one is accomplishing something truly substantial is the zenith of joy. While there are both pleasant and unpleasant happenings in life, these need not impinge heavily on a person's affect. An intelligent, thinking person will realize that physically enjoyable pastimes are but fleeting and ephemeral and achieve nothing. It is the fulfillment of the Divine will which is man's purpose on earth, and when he is engaged in achieving this purpose, there is reason for simchah.

People who feel deprived cannot have simchah, but the person who has reached the state of *Chassidus* has already mastered *Prishus*, and since he has far fewer unmet needs, he can be happy. On the other hand, a person who feels he has many needs, some of which cannot be satisfied, will be deterred from Simchah by his constant state of dissatisfaction. One whose needs are few can be grateful for whatever he has, and there is no envy of others to interfere with his simchah. *More to come next week, B'Ezras Hashem.*

HEALTHY LIVING by MICHAEL SZPILZINGER **BALAK: TAKE IT WITH YOU**

The Mishna in Avos (5:19 or 21 depending on your version) outlines the three traits that embody the students of Avraham Avinu and their corresponding, opposite traits that embody the followers of Bila'am Harashah. Let's focus on the trait that is ascribed to the Nefesh. Bila'am and those similar to him have a *Nefesh Rechava* - an indulgent spirit as opposed to Avraham and those who emulate him, who have a more reserved spirit.

As we mentioned last week, money and possessions don't have an exchange rate in Olam Haba. A person can be so consumed by physical pleasures and the quest for fame, amassing more and more capital to be used for furthering these ends. However, what happens in the end? What does their fame and fortune do for them in an eternal world where they have no value? The only thing left for this unfortunate soul to receive is "an inheritance of Gehinnom and a descent into *"Be'er Shachas"*.

On the other hand, those who emulate Avraham don't necessarily have to avoid wealth and status. Avraham recognized that his fame and fortune were from Hashem and that they were tools that he was meant to use to bring people under the *Kanfei HaShechina*. This meant even making choices that would limit his wealth (refusing to take from the King of Sodom) and being ready to do things that would challenge his esteem (circumcising himself, *Akeidas Yitzchak*). When one lives a life where the physical world is connected to the spiritual realm, he is able to amass eternal capital. *"He eats in this world and inherits Olam Haba"*.

We have so many opportunities to eat in a way that banks our eternal credits. By eating, we are referring to not only the specific act of eating, but also more expansively to the experiences that we have in life that are enjoyable or bring us glory. Yet, we must recognize that if the eating is merely consumption, we will be left with very little after we are done. Be like Avraham Avinu and take it with you!

SHORT STORY OF THE WEEK BY YONI SHWARTZ

An elderly woman from Europe once approached the grandchildren of **Rav Avraham Shag**, ZT"L, asking to be taken to his kever on Har HaZeisim. Puzzled, the grandchildren asked her how she knew their grandfather. She responded with the following story: Many years ago, your grandfather was learning as usual, very immersed in his sefer, and somebody stopped by asking if he could leave a rather large sum of money with him to watch for a couple of days. The Rav said, "Yes." However, since he was so immersed in his learning, he buried the envelope in one of his drawers and must have forgotten where he put it.


A few days later, the man returned asking for the money. Rav Shag looked and looked, but to no avail. Having lost the money, he felt awful and told the man to come back in a few days. Wondering what could've happened to it, he realized that nobody else had access to the room except for the maid who came in to clean. He thought that the culprit was most likely her. "But..." he thought, "how can I accuse a fellow Jew? No, I cannot do it!" Rav Shag then decided that he was going to take a loan and repay it little by little so the man could receive his money back on time. Since it was an enormous sum, he spent multiple years repaying it.

To his surprise, during Pesach cleaning, years after it was repaid, he was going through his drawer and found the long-lost envelope. Right away, he reached for the phone and called up the former maid. He told her, "I want to apologize to you. I thought negatively about you. I thought you took the envelope," he said. She responded, "Please, Rav... you went out of your way to borrow a lot of money and spent years stretching yourself financially to repay it just not to cause me shame. You don't need my forgiveness."

"No! No!" he said, "I shouldn't have blamed you in my mind; it could've destroyed your entire career had I said something about it." She responded, "Ok, I'll forgive you. But...on one condition. I'm an older woman already and have not yet merited to have children. If you bless me to have a child, I'll forgive you." Happily, the Rav blessed her, and they both parted ways. The old woman then looked her grandchildren in their eyes and said, "I am that child."

Comment: In this week's parsha, Parshas Balak, we learn about how the wicked Bila'am tried to curse the Bnei Yisrael. Try though he may, he was unsuccessful. When he saw how fellow Jews are respectful and kind to one another, all he could do was utter a blessing. "How good are your tents, Yaakov, your dwellings, O Israel" (Bamidbar 24:5). Indeed, when we are kind to one another, respect others' boundaries, and share what is ours (whether our possessions, time, or money), this blessing manifest itself in our own dwellings.

don't let 'em rule your life



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