



Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

# תורת אמן WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

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PLEASE NOTE: For the next few weeks, there will be different Parshiot read in Eretz Yisrael and Chutz L'Aretz (the Diaspora). To accommodate all of our members, we have included one article on each Parsha.

## Vigilance— Parshat Chukat

(this Parsha is read outside of Israel this week)

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Summarized by Channie Koplowitz Stein

After the death of Miriam, the Jews in the desert suddenly had no water. A miraculous well had provided them with water for 40 years in Miriam's merit. With the termination of the water supply, the people gathered against Moshe and Aaron, arguing with them for having taken them out of Egypt to the barren desert where they would die without water. Moshe and Aharon retreated to the *ohel moed*, the Tent of Meeting, and God's glory appeared to them and told them to gather the people, speak to the rock, and it would give forth water.

The Torah always records how faithfully Moshe carried out Hashem's command, "And Moshe did as God commanded him." This time, however, the text records three discrepancies between God's command and Moshe's execution. First, Moshe speaks harshly to Bnei Yisroel, calling them rebels. Then, he says, "Shall we bring forth water from this rock," instead of saying, "Shall God bring forth ..."; and finally, Moshe hits the rocks two times instead of speaking to it. While water did spew forth from the rock, Moshe was faulted for these breaches.

These appear to be minor infractions, yet, they had extensive ramifications, and for this, Moshe was denied entrance to the Land of Israel. Let us study what each of these differences implies and how they are interconnected.

Clearly, Moshe was outraged at the lack of gratitude of his nation, yet his reaction was not one that would foster improvement. If one hopes to improve the behavior of another, whether it is his child, his student, or his fellow citizen, the most effective method is to raise the self-image of the one he is reprimanding so that the current behavior is incongruous with his self-definition. Moshe's voice, on the other hand, was raised in anger, and instead of reminding them of their exalted position of God's chosen people, he called them rebels, or fools, a tone that would naturally put them on the defensive rather than foster receptivity to change.

It is in this context that the next two failures grow in significance. With their complaint, Bnei Yisroel had already demonstrated a breach of faith. Now Moshe came before them and, with the slightest slip of the tongue widened that breach. "Shall we draw forth water from this rock." While it is true that everyone understood Moshe to be the emissary of Hashem, Moshe's use of *we* instead of *God* left open to the listeners the possibility that somehow Moshe's speech had something to do with the miracle of the water. To compound this perception, Moshe then struck the rock two times, as if this was part of the formula. Hashem had wanted this to be an open miracle, perceived as exclusively the work of God. Moshe's actions subverted God's intent.

The Rebbe from Lublin interprets Rashi's explanation and says that it was Moshe's love for Bnei Yisroel that motivated him to hit the rock rather than merely speak to it. The rock would have obeyed God's command at the first syllable; why then was Bnei Yisroel so rebellious? Moshe looked for a way to lessen the faults of his people. By hitting the rock, and hitting it two times, one could perhaps reason that the rock did not obey the word, but rather obeyed the human action secondary to the command, the strike. Then perhaps the rock was no better than Bnei Yisroel, even though Bnei Yisroel should be better than an inanimate, unintelligent rock.

These slight changes, even if though they came from good intentions, bore tremendous consequences. A momentary lack of faith has a ripple effect on the cosmos, lowering the spiritual level of all existence.

We are in a constant state of war with our *yetzer hara* and evil. In a war, every bit of protection counts. If one removes one's armor, even for a moment, one leaves oneself vulnerable to mortal wounds. Our armor is our faith in Hakodosh Boruch Hu. We must be vigilant to keep this armor in excellent condition and to improve it whenever we can. Every mitzvah, every act of *chesed*, every prayer adds a layer of steel to this armor as it brings us closer to the goal of intimacy with Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

## Parshat Balak: Bringing Spirituality into the Mundane

(this Parsha is read in Eretz Yisrael this week)

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Parshat Balak tells the story of the evil prophet Bilam. Bilam was a study in contrasts. On the one hand, our Sages say that he was one of the greatest masters of sorcery and witchcraft. He had the power to bless and curse people. On the other hand, we find that he reached lofty levels of prophecy to the point that he merited to converse with Hashem.

Bilam recognized Hashem's all encompassing greatness and mastery over the world. Balak, too heard of the extraordinary miracles of the Exodus of Egypt and the Splitting of the Sea, and knew firsthand, Hashem's infinite powers. How were they able to entertain the thought that they could defy Hashem's will by utilizing impure sorcery and witchcraft? The Shem MiShm-

uel answers that Balak did not necessarily want to destroy the Jewish people. He only sought to prevent them from entering Eretz Yisrael. The Jewish people's mission is to bring spirituality into the physical world. Eretz Yisrael is the land where sanctity and physicality naturally meet. Therefore, it is there that the Jews will ultimately

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## אִמֶּךָ WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

### Parshat Balak: Bringing Spirituality into the Mundane- Continued

(this Parsha is read in Eretz Yisrael this week)

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

accomplish their destiny.

The Shem MiShmuel writes that if the Jewish nation live up to their calling and work to elevate physicality to spirituality, all the other gentile nations will be positively influenced to do the same. Bilaam and Balak desperately wanted to avoid this. They feared that they would be forced to give up their narcissistic, hedonistic lifestyles. Therefore, Bilaam plotted to use his sorcery to keep the Jews stranded in the desert. Let them continue their purely spiritual monastic lifestyles. Living in the land of Israel would require elevating physicality to spirituality and the Jews would surely fail, they claimed.

Hashem rejected their evil notions and foiled their plans. A Jew's *raison d'être* is to elevate his physical self through the medium of Torah and mitzvot. Each of the 613 commandments correspond to one of the 613 parts of the body. Hashem's will is for us to sanctify our being through the spiritual aspects of the mitzvot.

When Bilaam fell to his knees and begged forgiveness after sighting the angel with his sword drawn, the donkey said, "*Ki Hikaishi Sholosh*

*Regalim*"-For you hit me three times. Rashi states that this hints to the *shalosh regalim*-the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot where the Jews were required to ascend to Jerusalem and bring sacrifices to Hashem. Why were these mitzvot particularly singled out? The Shem MiShmuel answers that Bilaam had 3 bad character traits, *ayin raah*-a bad eye, *ruach govoah*-a wide spirit, and a *nefesh revachah*-a wide spirit. These correspond to *kinah*, *taavah*, and *kovod*, jealousy, passion, and honor, which in turn correspond to the three cardinal sins. Jealousy leads to murder, passion to adultery, and honor to idol worship. The three avot and the three festivals counteract these three vices. Pesach corresponds to Avraham and the battle against idol worship. The Jews displayed extraordinary *mesirat nefesh* by sacrificing the lamb-the symbol of idoltry, in ancient Egypt. Avraham fought idoltry and introduced monotheism into the world. Shavuot is Yitzchok and the power to subdue passion and adultery. Torah is the only weapon that can restrict and restrain ones uncontrollable urges. Sukkot symbolizes the ability to battle against jealousy. It's the festival of *emunah*-were one trusts that Hashem will fulfill all of ones needs. *Kinah* is the complete antithesis of

trust. Therefore Sukkot is the festival of Yaakov, the quintessential baal bitachon. Bilaam's blessings reveal each festival's theme. Pesach corresponds to "*Am l'vadod yishkon*"-A nation that dwells alone. This symbolizes the closeness between Hashem and the Jewish people engendered on this festival. Shavuot teaches us Hashem's unique love for us, expressed in the giving of the Torah. Sukkot is "*Ma Tovo Ohelecha Yaakov*"-How good is your tent Jacob. This corresponds to the booths that we are enjoined to dwell in for 7 days. In the fourth blessing, Bilaam speaks of the coming of Moshiach which symbolizes Atzeret-the 8th day of Sukkot.

Throughout our long bitter exile, the Jewish peoples' enemies have used Bilam's age-old ploy to attempt to hurt the Jews with words. Their battle is really aimed at Hashem who does not allow the Jews to stand alone. Hashem protects us, He is our shadow, firmly standing on our right side, hovering over us, eternally watchful and on guard to protect us from all evil.

### Rebbetzin's Perspective Part 13:

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller's Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

#### Question:

My 19 year old son who used to be a top bachur in yeshiva has now has dropped most vestiges of yiddishkeit and spends most of his time smoking marijuana and watching movies. I have gone to many people for advice but so far have not seen any changes for the better only for the worse. I spend most of my waking hours worrying and thinking about him. It's hard for me to find happiness in my life because I care so much. Children can give a parents a lot of nachat but the pain of seeing them fall is very great. How can I lift myself above the situation and not allow it to pull me down?

#### Answer:

You are going through one of the most painful and difficult *nisyonot* that a person can face. Worrying about your child's fate in this world and the next world is harder than suffering through illness or poverty. Practically every mistake you ever made raising him seems huge, insurmountable,

and impossible to rectify. However, you need to realize that our Avot struggled with similar challenges. Avraham had to contend with Yishmael. The child that exhibited such evil behavior, that he was forced to expel him from his home. True, he repented in the end, but he was certainly not the child Avraham dreamed of. Yitzchak had to struggle with Esav, the wicked son that fooled him for so many years. How did they deal with their challenges? I would say the key was something Avraham said to Hashem-"*Lu yichyeh Yishmael l'fanecha*-If only Yishmael would live before You. Avraham prayed that Yishmael should attain *yirat* Hashem-fear of Heaven, and to some degree his prayers were answered as Yishmael did repent. Take the energy that you are now putting into blaming yourself, your son, his school, or his father and put it all into prayer. The Baal haTanya gives an *eitzah* that if a person is worried about something he should allow himself to feel the pain up to a certain time limit, let us say from 11am to 11:30am and then he must go

right back into living the moment. One should ask, "What is Hashem telling me now and what should I be doing at this moment?" Some people may worry that if they permit themselves to switch focus they are somehow surrendering to despair. That is not true. Today you need to respond to today. Tomorrow may be a completely different day with a new set of challenges. Turn to Hashem for help. King David says in Tehillim, "*V'nattata simcha b'libi*". Ask Hashem to create joy in your heart. Appreciate all the goodness He did give you-your other children who provide you *nachas*, your devoted spouse, and your loving friends. Create a reality within yourself that is big enough and good enough so that when the long awaited day comes and your son returns, you will be ready to welcome him, ennobled and fortified by the *nisayon*.