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THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

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“ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH...”

“How goodly are your tents O Yaakov!” (24:5)

What was so ‘goodly’ about the tents of Yaakov? Bilaam noted that not one of Israel’s tent entrances was aligned opposite the other. Every tent was angled so that its entrance looked out only onto the side of the tent of its neighbor. But was so special about that? True, it showed a discretion and a respect for privacy - but why, specifically, should it be this non-alignment of the tent-openings that caused Bilaam to proclaim the Jewish People deserving of the Divine Presence to dwell among them?

In fact, Bilaam’s whole intention was to find some universal flaw in the Jewish People which would allow him to bring them down - to curse them by accusing them of some endemic sin.

However, he could find no such common flaw. For, even though one Jew might stumble in one area, his neighbor would, as it were, step into the breach and excel in that same area, compensating for him.

And so on throughout the entire people. Bilaam could not find one ubiquitous vice that ran throughout the body politic of the Jewish People, try as he might.

That’s the hidden meaning of his words here “How goodly are your tents, Yaakov!” “None of your entrances (to sin) are aligned corresponding to the entrance of your neighbor. None of your sins are aligned opposite the sins of your neighbor. And so - I can’t get a ‘clear shot’ through to the middle! I can’t wound you by lobbing a shot clear into your midst - into your heart. For each one of you steps into the breach - the weakness of one is the strength of the other - leaving no opening to the sin which crouches at the door...”

• *Kehillas Yitzchak*

INSIGHTS

ANIMAL CRACKERS?

“What have I done that you have struck me these three times” (22:26)

Bilaam’s donkey was not asinine. When the donkey said “these three times,” he was alluding to the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succos.

The donkey was asking Bilaam how he could have imagined that he would uproot the Jewish People who make the three pilgrimage festivals. But what is so special about the three festivals that they are singled out as such a protective force for the Jewish People?

The Jewish People are above time. Since they can establish the day on which the month begins, they are essentially ‘partners in time’ with the Creator, and not totally subject to time’s constraints.

Bilaam, however, could only receive prophecy at night. His prophecy was time-dependent. Thus the donkey was reminding Bilaam that he was ‘yoked’ to time, and how could he possibly imagine that he would be able to dominate a people who were *above* time? That donkey was certainly not asinine.

• *Based on Admor Rav Dovid M’Kotzk in Iturei Torah*

YOU LOSE - I WIN

“So now - please come and curse this people for me, for it is too powerful for me.” (22:6)

When Balak ben Tzipor, the king of Moav was frightened of the Jews, he went to Bilaam and asked him, not to bless *him*, but to *curse* the Jews!

This is the way of the wicked - rather than seek a blessing for themselves, they would prefer a curse for someone else!

What does a Jew do when he finds himself in trouble? He goes to a big *tzaddik* and asks him to give him a *bracha*. He *davens* to the Creator of the world to save him.

• *The Chafetz Chaim*

THE MOMENT OF WRATH

“For I know that whomever...you curse is cursed.” (22:6)

There is a mystical concept that Hashem ‘gets angry’ every day (*Avodah Zarah 4a*). This ‘anger’ is the *Midas HaDin*, the Attribute of unyielding justice, with which Hashem judges sinners. Clearly, someone who has transgressed is most vulnerable at that time.

The ‘talent’ of Bilaam was that he was able to discern the exact time in each day when this attribute is active - when Hashem ‘gets angry.’ Thus, Bilaam wanted to direct the *Midas HaDin* against the Jewish People by cursing them and calling forth upon them Divine punishment.

However, Hashem foiled Bilaam’s scheme by ‘closing up’ the *Midas HaDin* and not sitting in judgment. But, necessarily, as there was no *Midas HaDin* during those days, the world received, in its place, the opposite *midah*, the *Midas HaChesed*, the attribute of kindness.

Bilaam realized that due to the influx of this ‘excess kindness,’ the time was propitious to get the Jewish People to sin through immorality, which is, in essence, unbridled ‘kindness.’ Thus he advised Balak accordingly (*Rashi 24:14*), and Balak was successful in luring Yisrael into degrading themselves with the daughters of Moav.

Balak, the king of the Moav, is in morbid fear of the *Bnei Yisrael*. He summons a renowned sorcerer named *Bilaam* to curse them. First, Hashem appears to *Bilaam* and forbids him to go. But because *Bilaam* is so insistent, Hashem appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a *malach* (angel, messenger from Hashem) blocks the path of *Bilaam*’s donkey. Unable to contain his frustration, *Bilaam* strikes the donkey each time it stops or wants to make a detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking *Bilaam* why he is hitting her. The *malach* instructs *Bilaam* what he is permitted to say, and what he is forbidden to say

regarding the Jewish People. When *Bilaam* arrives, King *Balak* makes elaborate preparations in the hope that *Bilaam* will succeed in the planned curse. Three times *Bilaam* attempts to curse, and three times a blessing issues instead. *Balak*, seeing that *Bilaam* has failed, sends him home in disgrace. The *Bnei Yisrael* begin sinning with the *Moavi* women, and worshipping the *Moavi* idols, and are punished with a plague. One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a *Midianite* princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. *Pinchas*, a grandson of Aaron, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This halts the plague, but not before 24,000 have died.

OVERVIEW



SING MY SOUL

Insights into the Shabbos Zemiros

מה ידיוות "HOW BELOVED..."

"Like being hedged in by roses.
In it son and daughter will rest."

A hedge of roses is the poetic description of the disciplines imposed by the Torah on Israel (*Shir Hashirim* 7:3). Such a hedge does not use its physical power to prevent one from penetrating it. Its ability to deter a potential trespasser is its beauty, which anyone with sensitivity will respect. No visible wall stands between the Jew and the violation of the Sabbath. But his love of the beauty and fragrance of the hedge of roses which is made up of the Torah and Rabbinical laws of Shabbos restrain him more effectively than any human policing.



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SECOND MATCH

Bill Bickel <bbickel@cris.com>

In Ask the Rabbi-Parshat Shlach you wrote about the custom that a child not attend the remarriage of a widowed parent. You wrote that attending the marriage of a surviving parent would be disrespectful to the deceased parent. There are obviously cases in which, because of the family dynamic, it would be particularly hurtful to the surviving parent — or to the surviving parent's spouse — for the child not to attend. Would this be an exception to the rule?

Leslie Z. Sokolow
<0003420021@mcimail.com>
wrote:

I'm very surprised at your answer about remarriage. I would think that a child has an equal obligation to honor the living parent as she would the deceased one. A child's absence could be construed as a public repudiation of the remarriage, which could greatly shame the living parent. How can this be condoned?

I think one should honor a dead parent many times a year but never at the expense of the living parent. I've always enjoyed your responsa so please explain your answer better so I can be at peace with your ruling.

Dear Bill Bickel, Leslie Z. Sokolow, and many others who wrote in on this subject:

True, the honor of the living parent supersedes the honor of the deceased one. So if the child's absence from his parent's remarriage causes a misunderstanding — e.g., the parent feels hurt or embarrassed — then certainly the child must attend.

But if the parent understands that the child is simply adhering to a time-honored custom, the parent won't feel hurt. He won't see the child's absence as repudiating the new marriage. On the contrary, he'll be proud that he raised a child who respects both parents, during their lifetime and beyond.

Ashira Hirsh
<Ashira.Hirsh@ccMail-Link.NMMC.Com>
wrote:

(Re: Attending a parent's remarriage) The next question that comes to mind is whether a child is allowed to go to the wedding of a divorced parent? I have learned much from

your responses and enjoy your writing style, a mix of seriousness and humor.

Dear Ashira Hirsh:

I asked Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch, *shlita*, who told me that the same would apply to attending the remarriage of a divorced parent. That is, the child shouldn't attend unless the parent getting married specifically desires that he do so.

Ask the Rabbi

MIXED VEGETABLES

Jeff Stier
<jstier@yu1.yu.edu> wrote:

As always, I enjoy your entertaining answers. I have a question that begs

for a wise response: I am an avid gardener and I am tempted to try what some call the potamo plant.

The potato and tomato are very similar plants. One main difference is that the 'fruits' of the potato grow below ground and the fruits of a tomato grow above ground. Agriculturists have combined the plants so that a plant produces both tomatoes on top and potatoes off the roots. I imagine I can eat the fruits — like you can eat a tangerine...But can I splice or plant them? I'm looking forward to your wise and witty answer — I'm 'rooting' for you!

Dear Jeff Stier,

In Israel it's forbidden to cross-breed vegetables. Outside Israel it's permitted.

This is based on the verse in the Torah which says "You shall not plant *your field* with mixed seed." The Sages teach that the words '*your field*' refer only to a field in Israel.

So if you live outside Israel, you're on 'solid ground' when you plant your *potamo*.

The *fruits* of a hybrid — even if bred contrary to *halacha* — may be eaten. Also, the seed produced is not considered a hybrid and may be planted even in Israel.

Thanks for letting me 'field' your question, which 'stems' from a 'growing' concern in *halacha*. 'Till' next time...

By the way, what do you call a dog that grows out of the ground?

A Collieflower.

Sources:

- *Leviticus* 19:19
- *Tractate Kiddushin* 39a
- *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 297:1
- *Talmud Yerushalmi, Kilayim* 1:4
- *Rambam Hilchot Kilayim* 1:7

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked: Which ONE verse (NOT different verses with the same words) is read publicly from the Torah most frequently?

• riddle submitted by Raphael N. Levi

Answer: Numbers 21:3. This verse is part of the monthly *Rosh Chodesh* Torah reading. In most communities it is read *twice* during the *Rosh Chodesh* reading; hence, it is the most frequent publicly-read verse. (According to another custom, *three* other verses are repeated. Numbers 21:3 is nevertheless the most oft read verse, taking all communities into account.)

• *Shulchan Aruch Oruch Chaim* 423:2, *Mishna Berurah* 3, *Siddur Tefillat Kol Peh* p. 416

WHEN THE HEIR DOESN'T CARE

The Kohen Gadol daily brought “*minchas chavisin*,” an *issaron* amount of meal which he provided from his own resources and divided into two equal parts, offering half in the morning on the altar and half in the afternoon.

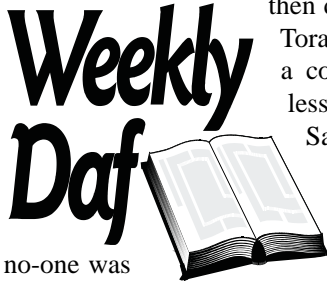
If he passed away and no-one was yet appointed to succeed him, Rabbi Shimon rules that the community must provide the meal for the *minchas chavisin* and a full *issaron* must be offered both in the morning and in the afternoon.

During the era of the Second *Beis Hamikdash* there were many Kohanim Gedolim who were not fit for the position they gained through political power. As a result they died within the first year of their service. This created a situation in which the Sanctuary treasury was depleted each year by having to provide funds for the *minchas chavisin* in the interim period till another Kohen Gadol was appointed. The Sages therefore decreed that the responsibility for providing this would be

placed upon the heirs of the deceased Kohen Gadol.

This decree was in effect until it became apparent that the heirs were becoming negligent in fulfilling their obligation. It was then decided to reinstate the original, Torah ordained system of making it a communal responsibility, regardless of the strains it placed on the Sanctuary budget.

• *Menachos 51b*



Insights, explanations and comments for the seven pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle.

HEROES AND ZEROES

“*Rabbi Ezra, grandson of Rabbi Avtulas, who was in the tenth generation from Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, who was the tenth generation from Ezra, is at the door!*”

This was the grand introduction made to Rabbi Preida concerning his visitor.

“What is all this fuss about his genealogy?” asked Rabbi Preida. “If he is a Torah scholar without a glorious genealogy that is fine. If he is a Torah scholar and is the scion of a great family as well it is even better. But if he has only genealogy but not Torah then to blazes with him!”

Only after he was assured that the visitor was indeed a Torah scholar did he invite him in and enter into a long discussion of Torah subjects with him.

This attitude of Rabbi Preida provides a perspective on how the Sages viewed the value of what we call “*yichuss*” — genealogy. *Yichuss* has been compared to a bunch of zeroes. If you put a number in front of those zeroes it becomes multiplied by hundreds, thousands and millions. But if no number is placed before them they add up to nothing.

In similar fashion the greatness of ancestors can multiply the achievements of their scion. But if he achieves nothing on his own and relies only on his *yichuss* he adds up to nothing.

• *Menachos 53a*

1. Which two traditional enemies joined forces to combat the Jewish People?
2. Since Bilaam was such an evil person why did Hashem grant him prophesy?
3. On what basis did Balak think that Bilaam’s curse would be effective?
4. Why didn’t the elders of Midian remain overnight with Bilaam?
5. When did Bilaam receive his prophecies?
6. Hashem opened his conversation with Bilaam by asking, “Who are these men with you?” What did Bilaam deduce from this question?
7. How do we know that Bilaam hated the Jewish People more than Balak?
8. What is evidence of Bilaam’s arrogance?
9. What is evidence of Bilaam’s greed?
10. In his conversation with his donkey, how did Bilaam shame him-

self in front of the princes?

11. Why was Bilaam’s donkey slain by the *Malach*?
12. Why did Bilaam tell Balak to build seven altars?
13. In which ways does the Jewish nation “not reckon itself among the nations”?
14. Why did Balak tell Bilaam to curse the Jewish People from Rosh Hapigah?
15. What tragedy befell the Jewish People at Rosh Hapigah?
16. Why are the Jewish People compared to ‘lions’?
17. On Bilaam’s third attempt to curse the Jewish People he changed his strategy. What did he do differently?
18. What were Bilaam’s three primary characteristics?
19. What did Bilaam see that made him decide not to curse the Jewish People?
20. In verse 24:19, Bilaam stated that a king, “shall rule and destroy the remnant of the city.” Who is the king and which city?



I Didn't Know That!

Bilaam struck his donkey rather than curse it because he intended to curse the Jewish People that day, and only one curse can be effective on any given day.

• *Ba'al Haturim*

Bonus Question ?

Bilaam’s ability to curse was based on his knowledge of the precise ‘*rega*’ (moment) each day of Hashem’s ‘anger.’ How long is a ‘*rega*’? What curse against the Jewish People could Bilaam have uttered during that time?

Answers on back page

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers to this Week's Questions!

- 22:4 - Midian and Moav.
- 22:5 - So that the Gentile world could not say "If we also had prophets, we would also return to be good."
- 22:6 - He knew that Bilaam had helped Sichon to defeat Moav.
- 22:7 - They set for themselves a sign that if Bilaam didn't come right away, he would not be of help to them.
- 22:8 - Only at night.
- 22:9 - That Hashem isn't omniscient.
- 22:11 - Balak wanted to drive the Jewish People from the land. Bilaam sought to exterminate them.
- 22:13 - He suggested to the princes of Moav that Hashem wouldn't permit him to go with them due to their lesser dignity.
- 22:18 - He told the princes that Balak should give him all of his gold, since otherwise Balak would need to hire many armies.
- 22:29 - He told his donkey, "Were there a

sword in my hand, I would slay you." He was hired to destroy an entire nation through his power of speech, yet for a donkey he needed a sword!

- 22:33 - So that people should not point to it and say, "This is the donkey that silenced Bilaam." Hashem is concerned for the dig-



nity of mankind.

- 23:4 - Corresponding to the seven altars built by the Avos. Bilaam said to Hashem, "The ancestors of the Jewish People built seven altars, but I alone have built a number equal to all of them."
- 23:9 - They will not be exterminated like

other nations. When they rejoice, no other nation rejoices with them. When other nations prosper, the Jewish People can share in their prosperity without having it effect their life in the World-to-Come.

- 23:14 - Balak foresaw trouble for the Jewish People at that site.
- 23:14 - Moshe died there.
- 23:24 - They arise in the morning, and 'strengthen' themselves to perform *mitzvos*.
- 24:1 - He realized that enchantments wouldn't convince Hashem to allow him to curse the Jewish People. He hoped that by calling attention to their sins, he would be permitted to curse them.
- 24:2 - An evil eye, pride, and greed.
- 24:2 - He saw each Tribe dwelling without intermingling. He saw the tents arranged so that no one could see into his neighbor's tent.
- 24:19 - The king is the *Mashiach* and the city is Rome.

Recommended Reading List

RAMBAN

- 22:5 Balak's Rise to Power
- 22:20 Bilaam's Mission
- 22:23 The Donkey
- 23:16 Bilaam's Prophecy
- 24:20 Amalek

SFORNO

- 22:2 What Balak Saw
- 22:6 Bilaam's Power
- 23:22 Jewish Conquest

Bonus Answer!

A 'rega' is the fraction of a second required to say the word 'rega'. In that time, Bilaam could utter the word 'kalem' (destroy them). Alternatively, Bilaam needed only to begin his curse during the 'rega' of Divine anger, and then he could continue even afterwards.

• *Brachos 7a, Tosafos*

HAFTORAH: Micha 5:6-6:8

WALKING HUMBLY

"O Man, what is good and what does Hashem seek from you, only to do justice and love kindness, and walk humbly with your G-d." (6:8)

"walk humbly with your G-d" - this refers to the mitzvos of providing for a bride and escorting the dead - • Rashi

To perceive the true essence of a person, one must see him both in moments of transcendent joy - providing

for a bride - and abject sorrow - escorting the dead. For in these moments of extremity, the inner qualities are revealed in stark relief. Only then can it be seen whether he can be said "to walk humbly with your G-d."

• *Kochav M'Yaakov*

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