



Published by **Mosdot Orot Chaim U'Moshe** in Israel

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MASKIL LÉDAVID

Weekly talk on the Parshah given by **Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlit**

The Counsel of Hashem Will Endure

“He sent messengers to Bilaam son of Beor to Petor, which is by the river of the land of the members of his people, to summon him, covered the surface of the earth and it sits opposite me” (Bamidbar 22:5)

Reading the pasuk, we may wonder: Why did Balak turn to Bilaam and point out the fact that Am Yisrael left Egypt? Wasn't this fact clear as day to all? When Hashem redeemed His nation from Egypt, after the miraculous plagues, His Name was known before the entire world. Likewise, when Hashem split the sea, all the nations became fearful of His Might.

Why then did Balak mention the fact that Am Yisrael left Egypt, when everyone was aware of this?

Furthermore, what is meant by the phrase that “it has covered the surface of the earth”? Am Yisrael was a small nation, as only one-fifth merited to leave Egypt.

The sefer Shema Yisrael quotes Rabbi Moshe MiDunnen, who explains Balak's actions. The words “Behold! a people has come out of Egypt” refer to the moral morass that was Egypt, known as “the abomination of the land” for its rampant immorality. In spite of Bnei Yisrael's sojourn in Egypt, “it has covered the surface of the earth.” The word עֵינַי (surface) can also mean eye. Bnei Yisrael covered their physical eyes from being affected by the defilement of Egypt.

Balak knew that where there is immorality, there is no Shechinah. The Angel of Destruction is given reign to do as he pleases. Balak tried to introduce sin to the Jewish nation by defiling their eyes with forbidden sights. But Bnei Yisrael were a people accustomed to protecting their eyes, since their days in Egypt. This very act of guarding their eyes from sights of

defilement allowed them to rise from the forty-nine levels of depravity to the forty-nine levels of purity.

Rabbi Shlomo MiRadomsk (Tiferet Shlomo, Balak) writes that a person's sanctity is dependent on guarding his eyes. The more one works on protecting his eyesight, the greater he ascends in Torah and yirah. The heart and the eyes are the agents of sin (Bamidbar Rabbah 10:2). We wear tzitzit in order to “not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray” (Bamidbar 15:39).

Subsequently, it is clear why Balak turned to Bilaam and did not rely on his own powers to harm Bnei Yisrael. This is because he knew that when Am Yisrael sojourned in Egypt, the land seeped in immorality, they guarded their eyes so that they should not stumble by seeing forbidden images, and this is why they merited redemption.

Balak knew that preserving the purity of their eyes would protect Am Yisrael in times of trouble. The commentaries explain that their purity of sight enabled them to be distinct from the Egyptians in their names, dress, and language (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 4:25; Pesikta Zutrati, Shemot 6:6). Bnei Yisrael preserved their level of tzeniut, did not defile their speech with inanities, and their names came from sources of sanctity, and therefore merited being redeemed from their slavery in Egypt.

Since Balak knew this secret, he began by revealing to Bilaam that Am Yisrael's abstention from matters of immorality granted them redemption from Egypt. He therefore suggested that he discover a cunning way to compel them to sin, thereby removing the Shechinah from their midst.

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Walking in their Ways

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagoon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

The Ultimate Scheme of Things

A man once came to me and said that he was a senior worker at a large American firm which employed thousands of workers. Its assets stood at tens of millions of dollars. But now the company was on the verge of bankruptcy. He was making every effort to come up with a brilliant plan which would put the company back on its feet. He explained his idea in great detail and asked my opinion on its chances of success.

The truth is that I didn't understand one word of his complicated project. The only thing I managed to comprehend was that there stood before me a very intelligent man.

Not for nothing had he climbed the corporate ladder and attained a senior position.

After he finished explaining his scheme, I asked him, "And what if your ideas don't succeed?"

He answered unhesitatingly, "Rabbi David, I have been working on these plans for the past month! They have to work!"

"B'ezrat Hashem, your plans will work. But let us imagine, for a moment, the unpleasant situation of them not working, and the entire company collapsing. What would happen then?"

The man thought for a few moments. Then he said, "Even if my plans don't work out, due to the problems of the company, I person-

ally can rest assured, knowing that I did my utmost to find a solution to the problems of the firm. Any lack of success will not be attributed to me, but to the company itself."

The man's words left me with much food for thought. We, too, must devise solutions for dealing with life's challenges. But if the solutions do not work out for whatever reason, we will know that we did our share. We will be able to arrive at the World to Come calmly. Our Sages state in Avot (2:16), "You are not required to complete the task."

A Jew must do his utmost to do the right thing. But he must know that ultimate success rests in Hashem's hands alone. Without His help, nothing can get done.

The Haftarah



The haftarah of the week: "*The remnant of Yaakov*" (Michah 5:6)

The connection to the parashah: The haftarah discusses the kindness that Hashem dealt with His Nation in that He caused Bilaam to bless Am Yisrael. This is similar to the parashah, which relates how the two evil people, Balak the king of Moav, and Bilaam the rasha tried to curse Am Yisrael, but in the end they were blessed.



Guard Your Tongue

The Power of Speech

Hearing and Remaining Silent

One who is accustomed to remaining silent is spared many sins, such as flattering, scoffing, slandering, lying, and insulting. Because when a person insults and curses him, if he answers back, his fellow will respond by increasing his bombardment.

Our Sages said the following: I hear the slander and I keep silent. He said to him: Why? He said to him: If I would respond to the curses, I fear that I will hear other curses even worse than the previous ones.

Reasons for Jewish Customs



It is customary to sing during the Shabbat meal zemirot and piyutim.

The reason for this custom according to the Midrash on the pasuk, "Flee, my Beloved," is that when Bnei Yisrael eat and drink and bless and praise and glorify Hashem, He listens to their voices and is pleased.

Furthermore, Chazal say, "If three have eaten at the same table and have spoken words of Torah there, it is as if they have eaten from the table of Hashem." Since the common people are not learned in Torah, the custom to sing zemirot was initiated.



Words of Wisdom

Midrashim of Chazal on Parshat Hashavua

The Master of Speech

“Hashem put an utterance in Bilaam’s mouth, and said, ‘Go back to Balak, and thus shall you say’” (Bamidbar 23:5)

Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat in the name of Rabbi Chananya:

Why did Bilaam the rasha decide to curse Yisrael?? He believed that through him Yisrael would leave Egypt and through him the Torah would be given to Yisrael. Since he saw that Yisrael left Egypt through [the leadership of] Moshe and the Torah was given through Moshe, he immediately decided on the plan to curse Yisrael.

Regarding him, Shlomoh Hamelech says, “To man belongs the arrangements [of thoughts] in his heart, but from Hashem comes the tongue’s reply.” “To man belongs the arrangements [of thoughts] in his heart” applies to Bilaam the rasha, who arranged a series of curses to harm Bnei Yisrael. But Hashem shut his mouth and turned the curses into blessings, as it says “Hashem put an utterance in Bilaam’s mouth.”

Rabbi Yonatan said: A nail of iron was driven into his throat. When he wanted to bless – he was allowed. When he wanted to curse – he was not allowed. (Pitron Torah)

Strong Roots

“For from its origins, I see it rock-like, and from the hills do I see it” (Bamidbar 23:9)

This signifies the hatred of this rasha. From his [choice of] blessings, his intent became evident.

What can this be compared to? A person who comes to chop a tree. One who is not experienced – cuts the branches, each and every twig painstakingly. One who is experienced, searches for the roots and chops.

This is what the rasha said: Why should I curse each and every tribe? I will go straight to the root! He tried to touch them but he found them hard.

This is why it says “For from its origins.” This refers to the Patriarchs. “And from the hills” refers to our Mothers. (Midrash Tanchuma)

Mitzvot Connected to Dust

“Who has counted the dust of Yaakov or numbered a quarter of Israel?” (Bamidbar 23:10)

Let us examine how many mitzvot Yisrael do with dust.

Rabbi Meir said, the lowest people of Yisrael do not let a day pass without performing mitzvot.

Know! Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom said that even the most common Jew does not place a slice of bread in his mouth until he performs mitzvot.

How is this? When he goes to plow, he fulfills “You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.” When he goes to plant, he fulfills “You shall not plant your vineyard with a mixture.” When he goes to sow he fulfills leket, shichecha, and pe’ah. When he goes to thresh, he fulfills “You shall not muzzle an ox in its threshing.” When he creates a mound, he fulfilled the mitzvah of terumah and ma’aser rishon and ma’aser sheni. When he goes to bake it, he fulfills the mitzvah of challah.

Thus, he fulfills ten mitzvot.

Moreover, when he comes to eat, he stretches forth his two hands to wash them according to halachah. What is the reason? He stretches his hands before Hashem, and thus creates support in his defense. He says to Hashem, Ribboni! My ten fingers that are raised before you do not taste anything before fulfilling ten Commandments connected to dust. Therefore, Bila’am said: People who fulfill many mitzvot connected to dust, who can curse them? (Yalkut Shimoni)

Treasures

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik
Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita



Misplaced Trust

We might ask how it could be that Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf. They had waited patiently for forty days for Moshe’s return. Why, on the fortieth day, did their patience wear out? We still pay the price to this very day. One reason for fasting on the 17th of Tammuz is to atone for this sin, which occurred on that day. Sinning with the Golden Calf invested this day with powers of prosecution against Am Yisrael throughout all generations.

On this day, the walls of Yerushalayim were broken, a breach which led to the churban Beit Hamikdash. This indicates that the 17th of Tammuz is considered a day of retribution for Am Yisrael because they sinned with the Golden Calf on that day. The Torah is compared to a wall, because the Torah is a rampart shielding our nation from all harm. A breach in this wall, indicating neglect of Torah, invites the Destroyer to enter. The path to total destruction is short. The word חומה (wall) is similar to the word חמה (wrath). How deep was Hashem’s anger toward Bnei Yisrael for abandoning the Torah. He had no choice but to destroy the House of His Shechinah.

The root of the churban lay in the sin of the Golden Calf. This was the beginning of the end. How did Bnei Yisrael descend to the level of sinning in this way, in a sin whose far-reaching consequences are felt by us in every generation? Could we even imagine a person who was brought up in the lap of Torah and mitzvot deciding to enter a church and bow before an idol? Just as this thought is impossible to entertain, it is difficult to us to understand how Bnei Yisrael could come to erect an idol and worship it.

Often, a person wants to test his level of endurance. Many people flirt with fate by placing themselves in peril. They want to see how much torment they can tolerate. People have met their deaths after pulling the rope a little too much. But they find it intriguing to do dangerous things

in order to test how much agony they can bear. This is borne out by many dangerous sports in which people engage. There are those who dive into very deep waters, jump to great heights, walk tightropes, or do free falling. These are just examples of the lengths people will go to for the thrill of checking their stamina. Onlookers are perplexed. How could a person take his life into his own hands in order to break another record? They are literally daring death. What motivates them to act so recklessly?

Every person has an inner voice whispering, “I’ll survive.” True, many have attempted to climb to the top of Mount Everest and didn’t live to tell the tale, but one feels that his senses are keen, and he will overcome all danger.

When Bnei Yisrael awaited Moshe’s return during the forty days that he was in Shamayim, they examined themselves to see if they were prepared to live without a leader and the Torah to guide them. They ceased anticipating his descent with the luchot. Removing their thoughts from Moshe Rabbeinu and the Torah led them to fashion the Golden Calf.

A person must know his own strengths, as well as his weaknesses. He should never test the waters of his endurance by diving into a situation that is too deep for him. Who knows if he will emerge safely from the nisayon? Every day, in Birchot Hashachar, we ask Hashem, “Do not bring me to nisayon.” Hashem never places a person in a situation that he cannot withstand. A person himself must ensure that he does not place himself in such a nisayon.

Current Events

The Fourth Fast - 17th of Tammuz



This year the fast on the 17th of Tammuz falls on Shabbat. Therefore, the fast is postponed until Sunday, the 18th of Tammuz. In the Sephardic and Eastern communities, it is customary to announce the fast on Shabbat.

Chazal relate that five dreadful events occurred on the 17th of Tammuz:

The first Tablets were broken. The daily [continual] burnt-offering ceased. The city's wall was breached. Apostimos the wicked burned the Torah. An idol was erected in the Temple.

The Tablets were Broken

On the seventh of Sivan, after the giving of the Torah, Moshe returned to ascend Mount Sinai (it was still prohibited for the nation to approach the mountain, as they were warned prior to Matan Torah). Moshe went to learn straight from Hashem all the rules and details and laws of the Torah, and to receive the Tablets of Testimony.

When Moshe went up to Heaven, he told Am Yisrael: At the end of forty days, at the commencement of the sixth hour (of the day), I will come and bring you the Torah. They thought that the day that he ascended counted as the first day. However, Moshe had told them it would be forty full days, and a full day begins at the sunset preceding it. Thus, the day that he ascended did not count as the first day because it was not a full day beginning at the sunset prior to it. As we know, Moshe ascended on the seventh of Sivan, and accordingly the fortieth full day came out on the 17th of Tammuz.

On the 16th of Tammuz the Satan came and confused the world with images of blackness and muddle, images of cloudiness, fog and turmoil, saying, certainly Moshe died, since the sixth hour of the morning already passed and he did not return.

The Satan said to them: Moshe, your leader, where is he? They said to him: He ascended to Heaven. He said to them: The sixth (hour) has passed! – But they paid no heed to him – Died! – and they did not pay attention to him. He showed them an image of his coffin. They ran to Ahron hysterically in confusion and said to him: Make us a G-d!

The next day, Moshe came down from the mountain. When Hashem gave Moshe the Tablets, the Tablets carried themselves. However, when Moshe descended and approached the Camp and saw the Golden Calf, the letters floated out of the parchment and the Tablets became unbearably heavy in Moshe's hands. Immediately – "Moshe's anger flared up," and he threw them from his hands.

Also during the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash, the [wall of the] city was breached in Tammuz, on the ninth day of the month. However, because one cannot burden the people excessively, we do not institute two consecutive fast-days. Therefore, the fast was set on the 17th of Tammuz, since the destruction of the second Temple was harder for us.

The Daily [lit. Continual] Burnt-Offering Ceased

During the destruction of the First Temple, the following occurred. On the ninth of Tammuz, the wall surrounding Yerushalayim was breached and the enemies charged through the city and caused destruction. However, the enemies could not enter the Temple, because the Kohanim barricaded themselves within and continued performing the services until the seventh of Av. But the supply of sheep for the daily sacrifice was lacking from the thirteenth of Tammuz, since they always kept a four day supply of sheep that were checked for flaws and ready for sacrifice. From the thirteenth of Tammuz and onward they bribed the enemies who made a siege on them: They lowered silver and gold, and they sent up sheep for them. This is what they did until the 17th of Tammuz.

The [wall of the] City was Breached

This event took place during the destruction of the Second Temple when the wall surrounding Yerushalayim was breached on the 17th of Tammuz as Titus and his army invaded the city. Whereas the destruction of the First Temple in the times of Tzidkiyahu Hamelech it says (Yirmeyahu 52): In the fourth month, on the ninth of the month, the famine in the city became critical; there was no food for the people of the land. The city was breached, and all the men of war fled and left the city during the night," etc.

In Yerushalmi it says that also during the destruction of the First Temple the city was breached on the 17th of Tammuz, but because of the terrible suffering at the time, they were confused about the date, and they thought that it was the ninth of Tammuz.

And even though Hashem knew the date, and the navi knew it as well, He recorded through the navi Yirmeyahu that it occurred on the ninth of the month as the nation believed, in order to demonstrate that, so to say, Hashem is with them in their suffering, and so to say, even His calculations got distorted, which is something which we cannot dare utter with our mouths or allow our ears to hear.

Apostimos Burned the Torah

This event which is mentioned in the Mishnah, its description is not recorded in the earliest sources. Yerushalmi only mentions: Where did the burning take place? Rav Acha says: passage of Lud; and Rabbanan say: by the passage of Terlosa.

The later commentators speculate that this event refers to the period of the Roman commissioner Cumanus. It took place approximately sixteen years before the Great Revolt against the Romans. At that time the commissioner's troops provoked the Jews and their service in the Temple, causing large disturbances that subsequently quieted down. Regarding that period, Josephus relates the following:

"After this calamity (when ten thousand people were killed on the Temple Mount because of the uproar caused by the Romans) a new uproar began because of highway robbers, since on the main road next to Beit Horon, bandits attacked the convoy of Stephen, a servant of the Caesar, and robbed him. Cumanus sent members of his army to the nearby villages where the robbery took place, and commanded the arrest of the villagers and to have them brought to him, since he accused them of not chasing after the highway robbers to catch them. One of the soldiers took the sacred Torah scroll in the village and tore it up and burned it. All over the Jews were frenzied, as if the entire country before them was consumed by fire. Immediately upon hearing what happened, people fueled by their zealotry over the holy scroll, rushed like arrows flying from a sling to Caesarea to see Cumanus, so he should not delay the punishment of the man who always cursed at G-d and His Torah. The Commissioner realized that the storm would not subside until he would calm their spirits. Therefore, he ordered the soldier hung on the gallows in the midst of the throngs demonstrating against him. Thereafter, the Jews returned to their homes.

According to this account, the event took place on the 17th of Tammuz, several years prior to the destruction of the Second Temple. The name Stephen was confused with Apostimos, and such mix-ups are quite common.

An Idol was Erected in the Temple

There are those who claim that also this was performed by Apostimos the wicked on the fateful day of the 17th of Tammuz. And there are those who claim that it is referring to the idol that Menashe Hamelech erected in the Temple, which was on the very day of the 17th of Tammuz as well.

Days of Peace and Truth

In the future, so the prophet Zechariah prophesied following the destruction of the First Temple, all the fasts; Tisha B'Av, the 17th of Tammuz, Tenth of Tevet, and the Fast of Gedaliah, will become days of joy and happiness. And this is what the prophet Zechariah says: "Thus says Hashem, Master of Legions: The fast of the fourth [month], the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth will be to the House of Yehudah for joy and for gladness and for happy festivals. [Only] love truth and peace!" (Zechariah 8:19)

Nevertheless, we should know that the sages stated that not everyone will merit to live until the End of Days and to see Yerushalayim in its glory. What must we do to merit to get to these glorious days? One must grieve over the destruction of the Temple and feel the pain of the holy Shechinah, who is wailing because she is in exile, as it says (Ta'anit 30b): Whoever mourns over Yerushalayim merits and sees in her joy, and whoever does not mourn over Yerushalayim will not witness her joy.