

O H R N E T

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OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL, CHUKAT AND BALAK ARE READ TOGETHER ON JULY 15, 2000; 12 TAMMUZ 5760

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Chukat

TOO RICH AND TOO THIN

“This is the decree of the Torah” (19:2)

Who would ever have thought that Judaism, or at least its more arcane teachings, would have become hip amongst the *glitterati*? And yet it’s happened. Pop stars and other media darlings are all hot-footing it to be the latest adherents of Instant Kabbala.

While one may suspect that this gross trivializing of the deepest secrets of the cosmos is no more than another quick fix for an increasingly jaded generation, this “one-stop” spiritual shopping actually reveals a deep-seated longing.

Modern man displays a curious dichotomy: On the one hand he has rejected religion. On the other hand you find “Korrespondence Kabbala” — an enormous clamor for all kinds of spiritual exotica and esoteric wisdom.

Our Sages tell us that “the lover of money will not be satisfied by money.” To re-mint an old saying: “You can never be too rich or too thin.” Someone who has a million dollars doesn’t want another million. He already has that and it didn’t do the trick. What he wants is two million. Of course, the same goes for someone who has two million, four million, or a million million. A person is never satisfied with what he has. Most people die with not even half their desires fulfilled.

But there’s another saying by our Sages which is a little more difficult to

fathom. “The lover of Torah will not be satisfied by Torah.” It’s easy to understand why material craving leads to more material craving. The desire for possessions is really the desire to possess. The act of taking possession is the sweetness. The actual object of my desire itself ceases to give me the kick that I’m looking for once I own it.

But why should the lover of Torah never be satisfied with Torah?

In this week’s Torah reading, we learn about the *mitzvah* of the *para aduma* (red cow). The *para aduma* was the quintessential command whose function is hidden from the human mind. King Solomon, the wisest of people said: “I said I would be wise, but it [this commandment] is far from me.” (Proverbs 7:23)

The paradox of the *para aduma* is that while it purifies from the spiritual miasma that results from contact with death, it itself taints those who prepare it. That is, it purifies the impure and taints the pure. This paradox is beyond normal understanding.

The root of all knowledge is another seeming paradox: To know that there is a Knowledge beyond knowledge, beyond the hollow skull of man. We live in a world that has been tainted by the concept that what is beyond our mind’s grasp cannot exist. This is the basis of all atheism.

Those who reach for spirituality, albeit in a superficial way, reflect the axiom: “The one who loves Torah, will not be satisfied by Torah.” A person is never satisfied with his spiritual level.

He always wants to be closer to G-d. And the closer he becomes, the more he feels the distance that remains.

In the book of Job it says “Who can draw a pure thing out of an impure one? Is it not the One? (Job 14:4) Only He who is One can draw a pure generation out of an impure one.

However, the Torah does not yield her secrets to everyone. Someone who thinks that he can achieve a quick spiritual fix by a superficial embrace with mysticism will find, at best, disappointment. For G-d gave his most secret wishes in the form of a Divine kiss. And just like a kiss, it is bestowed only on those of the greatest intimacy.

Sources:

- Talmud Avoda Zara 35a, Tosfot *ibid.*
Rabbi E. E. Dessler

Balak

THE MOST UNKINDEST KINDNESS

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

There is a mystical concept that Hashem “gets angry” every day for a “*rega*,” a split second.

This “anger” is *midat hadin*, the Divine attribute of unyielding justice with which Hashem judges the world. Someone who has transgressed is most vulnerable at that time.

Bilaam’s talent was in discerning the exact moment each day of Hashem’s anger, and at that moment to utter a powerful curse. With a well-timed curse, Bilaam hoped to direct this Divine anger against the Jews.

Chukat

The laws of the *para aduma* — the red heifer — are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply which until then has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people. Hashem commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of Hashem's mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock produced water merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. *Bnei Yisrael* resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to *Eretz Yisrael*. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him 30 days. Sichon the Amorite attacks *Bnei Yisrael* when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

Balak

Balak, king of Moav, is in morbid fear of *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* (emissary from Hashem) blocks Bilaam's donkey's path. Unable to contain his frustration, Bilaam strikes the donkey each time it stops or tries to detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking Bilaam why he is hitting her.

The *malach* instructs Bilaam regarding 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, hoping that Bilaam will succeed in the 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. *Bnei Yisrael* begin sinning with the Moabite women, and worshipping the Moabite 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 Aharon, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This halts the plague, but not before 24,000 have died.

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General Editor:
Rabbi Moshe Newman
 Editorial & Web Advisor:
Rabbi Reuven Laufer
 Associate Editor:
Rabbi Reuven Subar
 Contributing Writers:
Weekly Daf, Love of the Land:
Rav Mendel Weinbach
Insights, Overview:
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Web Production: **Michael Treblow**

Produced and Designed by the Office of Communications
Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director

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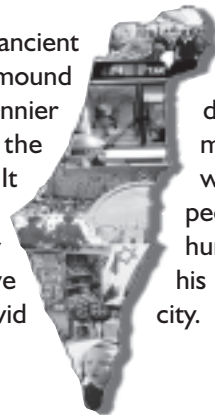
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LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

AVEILOH BET MA'ACHA

All that is left of this ancient city is a flat-topped mound just north of the Tannier Waterfall, not far from the northern town of Metulla. It was in this city that Sheva ben Bichri took refuge after the failure of his abortive rebellion against King David



(*Shmuel II 20*). When the city was threatened with destructions by David's commander-in-chief Yoav, a wise woman resident convinced the people to deliver the head of the hunted rebel into the hands of his pursuers and thus save the city.

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

continued from page one

Hashem foiled Bilaam's scheme by withholding *midat hadin* throughout those days; during that time, Hashem did not "sit in judgement."

This lack of "*din*" was not without repercussions, however; for the world balances delicately between *chesed* (kindness) and *din* (justice). When a few days passed without *midat din*, a disproportionate amount of Divine Kindness took its place.

Can there be too much kindness?

Bilaam realized that due to this influx of "excess kindness," the time was propitious to entice the Jewish People to sin through immorality, which is, in essence, unbridled "kindness." Accordingly, he advised Balak and Balak suc-

ceeded in luring *Bnei Yisrael* into degradation with the daughters of Moav.

DYING WISH

"Let my soul die the death of the righteous, and may my end be like his." (23:10)

Evil people want reward without effort. "Let my soul die the death of the righteous," said Bilaam. Bilaam longed to die like a righteous man...he just wasn't willing to live like one.

Sources:

The Most Unkindest Kindness - Avoda Zara 4a, Rashi 24:14 Rabbi Uziel Milevsky
Dying Wish - Chafetz Chaim

HAFTARAH

CHUKAT (IN ISRAEL): SHOFTIM 11:1 – 33

To the Amonite king's demand that Israel withdraw from the land east of the Jordan, Israel's new head, Yiftach, gives him a history lesson taken straight out of *Parshat Chukat*. Yiftach relates how the Jews had captured that land purely in self-defense against an unprovoked attack, and that it had been won from the Ammorites, not from the Amonites. Ignoring this, the Amonites attack; and — echoing the vow made by the Jews in their battle for that same land 300 years before — Yiftach vows to sacrifice whatever exits his house first to greet him on his victorious return. G-d gives him victory, and in a tragic twist Yiftach's daughter is the first to greet him upon his return.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Yiftach in his generation is like Shmuel in his generation," says the Talmud. This refers to our obligation to honor a leader of the Torah community even if he doesn't quite measure up to the leaders of old. Compared to Shmuel, Yiftach

had relatively small spiritual stature: Shmuel's greatness as prophet is likened to that of Moshe and Aharon; whereas regarding Yiftach the word "prophet" is never even used. Nevertheless, "Yiftach in his generation is like Shmuel in his generation." Dreaming about the great leaders of "the good old days" is no excuse to ignore the direction of our present-day Torah leaders.

BALAK (IN ISRAEL) AND CHUKAT-BALAK (OUTSIDE ISRAEL): MICHA 5:6 - 6:8

The Prophet Micha foresees "Yaakov's Remnant" — the Jews who survive the mass murders and decimation of exile — sprout and flourish at the end of days. Once vassals, the Jews grow into an independent people, relying on no man or nation for sustenance; once a sheep among lions, the Jews become like a lion who attacks its enemies with impunity. This stage is temporary, however; eventually, there will be no need for military might, horses, chariots, or fortresses, as peace will reign.

After this promising forecast, Micha

turns his eye to the past and present. Micha rebukes the Jews for their lax Torah-observance and reminds them of G-d's historical kindness: G-d freed them from Egypt and put three fabulous leaders, Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, at their head. And — drawing on the events described in *Parshat Balak* — Micha recalls G-d's special love and protection of the Jewish People against the nefarious plottings of Balak and Bilaam.

PLEASE DEW

"And Yaakov's Remnant among the many nations will be like dew from G-d...which looks to no one and waits for no man." (5:6)

Almost an entire Parsha, *Parshat Balak*, chronicles the spiteful attempts by Israel's bitter foes to obliterate the fledgling nation. During these attacks, the Jews are entirely passive — perhaps even unaware. They are protected by G-d alone.

So, at the end of days, will the Jews be like the dew which condenses miraculously upon the grass, independent of any human agency. Like the dew, the Jews will bring the nourishing waters of Torah to a thirsty world.

TEFFILIN AND THE SLAVE

A slave wearing *teffilin*? The issue of a slave putting on *teffilin* appears in a couple of places in the Babylonian Talmud aside from our own *gemara* which touches on it tangentially. A Torah student is required to perform all the services for his teacher that a slave performs for his master except for removing his shoes. Performing such a menial task, says Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, might give the onlooker the impression that the student is indeed a slave. Other sages qualify this ruling by stating that this fear is applicable only in a place where the student is not known to the public as a freeman or when the student is not wearing *teffilin*.

This implication that wearing *teffilin* is a sure sign that one is not a slave is based on the general rule that a slave is obligated only in those *mitzvot* which apply to women, and since women are exempt from *teffilin*, so is a slave. Tosefot raises the problem of an apparent conflict with an earlier *gemara* (*Ketubot 28b*) which states that a slave's wearing of *teffilin* in the presence of his master is *not* a sign that he has been freed. The resolution of the problem is that although a one-time wearing of *teffilin* is *not* an indication that a slave has been freed, it is certainly not normal for a slave to consistently put on *teffilin*.

This same concept of normalcy is applied by Tosefot elsewhere (*Mesechta Gittin 40a*) to explain why a slave on whom the master has placed *teffilin* is considered to have been freed. Why is this such an indication, ponders Tosefot. Can it be because the master would hesitate to put *teffilin* on a slave who is exempt from this *mitzvah*, since this would require him to make a blessing, which may be considered taking the name of Hashem in vain? Tosefot rejects this because it is his opinion, in contrast to that of Rambam, that women and slaves may make blessings on *mitzvot* such as *succah*, *lulav* and *shofar* from which they are exempt. His conclusion is that since it is not normal for a slave to wear *teffilin*, his master would not have put them on him unless he had earlier freed him.

Although a woman may perform any of the *mitzvot* from which she is exempt, and even make a blessing upon them according to Tosefot, the Rema (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 37:3*) rules that we must protest against an attempt by women to wear *teffilin*. The explanation for this given by the commentaries is that since they are not *obligated* in this *mitzvah*, it is unlikely that they will maintain the physical discipline required of anyone who wishes to be involved in so sacred an undertaking as wearing *teffilin*. There is a debate amongst the commentaries as to whether this restriction applies to slaves as well. Pri Megadim takes the position that we discourage slaves as well and adds another reason: Allowing a slave to consistently wear *teffilin* may lead to him being mistakenly taken for a freeman and permitted to marry a Jewish woman who is forbidden to marry a slave.

• *Ketubot 96a*

CIRCUMSTANCES LARGER THAN WORDS

A man sold his field because he needed cash to buy another field or merchandise. But the expected deal fell through because the seller backed out. Can he now back out of the sale which he made only for the purpose of acquiring cash which he mistakenly thought he would need?

This issue is discussed at length in our *gemara* and the conclusion is that he can back out and get his money back.

Tosefot points out, however, that this is true only if he made it clear at the time of the sale that he was selling for the purpose of purchasing a particular item. If he failed, however, to make his intention known, he has no subsequent claim that this was his intention, because "words kept in the heart are not considered words." This phrase is borrowed from another *gemara* (*Mesechta Kiddushin 49b*) about a man who sold his property because he intended to make *aliya* to *Eretz Yisrael*, but he made no mention of his intention at the time of the sale. When he changed his plans and wished to back out of the sale, the Sage Rava ruled that he could not do so because he had not revealed what he had in his heart.

Although in both of these cases a verbal indication on the seller's part is sufficient grounds for subsequently nullifying the sale without the need for making a formal condition, this is not always so. Should a man sell his clothes in order to make *aliya*, even if he declares that this is his intention, he will not be able to subsequently nullify the sale when he changes his mind unless he had made a formal condition that the sale is totally dependent on his making *aliya*.

The reason for this difference is that — while it is normal for one to sell his property when making *aliya*, and his verbal declaration that this is the purpose of the sale is therefore an effective clarification of his true intention — it is not normal for one to sell his clothes in order to make *aliya*, and therefore nothing short of a formal condition can serve as grounds for nullification.

There are situations, concludes Tosefot, in which even a verbal clarification is not necessary, because the circumstances themselves are a clear indication. One example is found in an earlier *gemara* (*Ketubot 79a*) about a widow who wished to divest herself of property when entering a second marriage so that her new husband would not gain control of it. She wrote a document transferring ownership to her daughter from the first marriage. Her intention was obviously that should this new marriage end, the property would revert back to her. When this in fact happened, the daughter attempted to claim the property as hers. Rabbi Nachman, however, dismissed her claim because the circumstances so clearly indicated that the gift had been a conditional one.

• *Ketubot 97a*

HOW TO SPREAD TORAH STUDY

What is the ideal formula for spreading Torah study among Jews? The great sage Rabbi Chiya offers us this fascinating account of his own activities in this area:

“I made sure that Torah would not be forgotten by Jews. First I planted flax. I then used the flax to make nets with which I trapped deer. The meat of these animals I gave away to feed orphans and from their skins I made parchments. I then proceeded to a community where there was no one available to teach children Torah. On five parchments I wrote the five *Chumashim* of the Torah which I taught from and presented to five of the children. I also taught each of six children one of the six orders of the *mishna*. Then I instructed each one of them to teach the others what I had taught him until I would return to check on their progress. In this way I made sure that Torah would never be forgotten.”

Why was it necessary for Rabbi Chiya to make such elaborate preparations for the main task of teaching? Why couldn't he simply purchase written *Chumashim* and save all the time required for planting flax, fashioning nets, trapping animals and making parchment?

Maharsha explains that Rabbi Chiya understood that in order to succeed in his monumental undertaking to preserve Torah, he had to make sure that every single step was taken purely for the sake of Heaven, and that there was no earthly interest mixed into it. Should he buy an animal for its skin, there would be the interest of the seller to gain money from the sale. If the meat of that animal would not be utilized solely for the sacred purpose of feeding helpless orphans, there would again be some dilution of the purity of his actions.

Even after assuring that every step of his educational preparations was 100% pure, Rabbi Chiya did not see his task completed until he turned every one of his students into a teacher of others. The highest level of Torah development is reached only when one shares his learning with others, and this would be the guarantee that Torah study of the highest quality would go on forever.

Little wonder then that the greatest of teachers, Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi (Rebbie), said of these actions: “How great are the achievements of Chiya!”

• *Ketubot 103b*

THE SAGE WHO WOULDN'T PRAY

When Rabbi Yosef's disciples appealed to him to pray for relief from the famine from which they suffered, he thus explained why he could not do

so:

“The Prophet Elisha was so great a Torah sage and had so

many disciples that even when most of them took leave of him at the conclusion of their daily studies he was left with 2,200 who ate at his table. He nevertheless did not pray for relief from hunger in his time, so how can I dare to do so?”

Rabbi Yosef's humility as a reason for hesitating to pray for relief from famine is extremely difficult to understand. In *Mesechta Ta'anit* we learn of many sages who prayed for relief from the famines that threatened their communities, and it is doubtful that they were greater than Elisha or had more disciples than he did!

Maharsha distinguishes between two sorts of famine: When the famine was so intense that it posed a threat to life there was no hesitation upon the part of the sages to pray for relief. The famines in the days of Elisha and in the days of Rabbi Yosef were only a shortage of rain, which resulted in a difficulty in providing sufficient food for the disciples dependent on these masters, but posed no threat to life. Rabbi Yosef's reasoning was that if Elisha, who had so many more disciples to feed, failed to see such an emergency requiring a special appeal to Heaven, how could he with so many less to feed presume to do so?

• *Ketubot 105b*

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

Chukat

When Miriam died, the people didn't properly eulogize and mourn for her, because they didn't realize the extent of her greatness. So Hashem made the water cease when she died, showing the people that for 40 years in the desert, the water flowed in her merit.

• *Adapted from Kli Yakar*

Balak

Bilaam and Balak were ingrates! They would not have been born if not for Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov: Bilaam's ancestor Betuel was born in the merit of Avraham binding Yitzchak on the altar, and Bilaam's ancestor Lavan had children in Yaakov's merit. Balak's Moabite ancestors descended from Lot after Avraham saved Lot's life.

• *Ba'al Haturim*

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PARSHA Q&A?

Chukat

1. "Take a perfect *para aduma* (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" — *temima* — mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a *para aduma*?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *para aduma*; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the *mitzvah* of the *para aduma* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that *all* of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
7. Why is Miriam's death taught after the laws of *para aduma*?
8. During their journey in the *midbar*, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the *entire* congregation mourn Aharon's death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did Hashem punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon, rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Parshat Chukat's Questions!

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

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14,15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) He and his clothing contract *tumah*.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the golden calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were *all* fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam's.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to *speak* to it.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that even if one has adequate provisions he should purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - *Har Sinai* for receiving the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe's burial, and *Hor Hahar* for Aharon's burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon's merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, who was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about Hashem and about Moshe.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - Hashem's command, "Do not harass them" (*Devarim* 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

Lloyd Quinns from Leeds wrote:

Why was Aharon punished for the incident of the water from the rock? According to the text, it seems Aharon played no role there. If Moshe was punished for hitting the rock instead of speaking to it, what did Aharon do wrong?

Dear Lloyd Quinns,

According to the commentary of the Abarbanel, you're right:

Aharon was not being punished for the incident of the water from the rock; rather, he was denied entry into the Land of Israel because of his role in the Golden Calf. But because his intentions had been pure (he agreed to make the calf only in order to stall the people until Moshe's return, hoping thus to minimize their guilt) the Torah downplays the "golden calf" aspect of his punishment, and instead faults him here in the relatively minor sin of the incident of the water from the rock.

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!

PARSHA Q&A?

Balak

1. Why did Moav consult specifically with Midian regarding their strategy against the Jews?
2. What was Balak's status before becoming Moav's king?
3. What happens to a field where oxen graze?
4. Why did Hashem grant prophecy to the evil Bilaam?
5. Why did Balak think Bilaam's curse would work?
6. When did Bilaam receive his prophecies?
7. Hashem asked Bilaam, "Who are these men with you?" What did Bilaam deduce from this question?
8. How do we know Bilaam hated the Jews more than Balak did?
9. What is evidence of Bilaam's arrogance?
10. In what way was the *malach* that opposed Bilaam an angel of mercy?
11. Why did the *malach* kill Bilaam's donkey?
12. Bilaam compared his meeting with an angel to someone else's meeting with an angel. Who was the other person and what was the comparison?
13. Why did Bilaam tell Balak to build seven altars?
14. Who in Jewish history seemed fit for a curse, but got a blessing instead?
15. What tragedy befell the Jews at Rosh Hapisgah?
16. Why are the Jewish People compared to lions?
17. On Bilaam's third attempt to curse the Jews, he changed his strategy. What was different?
18. What were Bilaam's three main characteristics?
19. What did Bilaam see that made him decide not to curse the Jews?
20. Bilaam told Balak that the Jews' G-d hates what?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Parshat Balak's Questions!

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

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|--|--|--|
| 1. 22:4 - Since Moshe grew up in Midian, the Moabites thought the Midianites might know wherein lay Moshe's power. | wouldn't let him go with the Moabite princes due to their lesser dignity. | said to Hashem, "The Jewish People's ancestors built seven altars, but I alone have built altars equal to all of them." |
| 2. 22:4 - He was a prince of Midian. | 10. 22:22 - It mercifully tried to stop Bilaam from sinning and destroying himself. | 14. 23:8 - Yaakov, when Yitzchak blessed him. |
| 3. 22:4 - It shows no sign of blessing. | 11. 22:33 - So that people shouldn't see it and say, "Here's the donkey that silenced Bilaam." Hashem is concerned with human dignity. | 15. 23:14 - Moshe died there. |
| 4. 22:5 - So the other nations couldn't say, "If we had had prophets, we also would have become righteous." | 12. 22:34 - Avraham. Bilaam said, "Hashem told me to go but later sent an angel to stop me. The same thing happened to Avraham: Hashem told Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak, but later canceled the command through an angel." | 16. 23:24 - They rise each morning and "strengthen" themselves to do <i>mitzvot</i> . |
| 5. 22:6 - Because Bilaam's curse had helped Sichon defeat Moav. | 13. 23:4 - Corresponding to the seven altars built by the <i>Avot</i> . Bilaam | 17. 24:1 - He began mentioning the Jewish People's sins, hoping thus to be able to curse them. |
| 6. 22:8 - Only at night. | | 18. 24:2 - An evil eye, pride, and greed. |
| 7. 22:9 - He mistakenly reasoned that Hashem isn't all-knowing. | | 19. 24:2 - He saw each Tribe dwelling without intermingling. He saw the tents arranged so no one could see into his neighbor's tent. |
| 8. 22:11 - Balak wanted only to drive the Jews from the land. Bilaam sought to exterminate them completely. | | 20. 24:14 - Promiscuity. |
| 9. 22:13 - He implied that Hashem | | |

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

"The Torah says: 'G-d was angry that Bilaam went' to curse the Jews. Why was G-d angry? G-d had given Bilaam permission to go? I know what Rashi says: That Bilaam knew G-d didn't want him to go, yet he went anyway with great desire, but the text doesn't seem to say anything about Bilaam going with great desire. How does Rashi see this?"

Answer: It doesn't say G-d was angry at Bilaam "because

he went" but rather "because he was a *goer*." (Not "*ki halach*" but rather "*ki holeich*".) The difference is subtle and significant: For Bilaam, going to curse the Jews wasn't a mere action among actions; rather, it was an action that *defined* him. At that moment, Bilaam was a "goer," a "Jew-cursor." When a person expresses his essence, he acts with desire.

• Based on Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!

JEWES IN JULY

From: Name@Withheld

Dear Rabbi,

I know that there are blessings to say in honor of certain non-religious things, such as meeting a great secular scholar or seeing the king of a non-Jewish state. With this in mind, I was wondering if there is a Jewish way to celebrate the American Independence Day on the 4th of July.

Dear Name@Withheld,

Being from England, I am not quite sure why you want to celebrate a day that commemorates the end of English rule...to each his own! ☺

Having said that, there is no doubt that the Jews in America have much to be thankful for. America today is a place of calm where it is possible for the Jewish community to live in peace and to continue their Jewish life unhindered.

On the other hand, our Sages point out that tranquility is not always positive. In America, along with the tremendous growth in Jewish life and institutions of Jewish education, there has been in many communities the most terrible “relaxation” of Judaism to the point that millions of Jews are so relaxed about their heritage that they are almost comatose.

So, how should a Jew in the United States approach the 4th of July? I think it would be very appropriate to take a little time for introspection, to think about how a Jew should use the freedom which was unavailable to so many of our ancestors. And, after having begun the day in the correct way (praying and studying Torah), it would quite acceptable to celebrate in the traditional fashion — fly the flag, go on a picnic with family and friends...

And remember: Fireworks are dangerous; be careful!

• Thanks to Rabbi Eliya Green for preparation of this answer.

TZIM-TZUM

**From: Dr. Auriel ibn Michell in El Paso, Texas
<rcombs01@elp.rr.com>**

Dear Rabbi,

I am curious about the concept of tzimtzum in the creation of the physical/spiritual universe. If G-d can constrict Himself to make room for creation, why can He not also use the same concept to become a man, a rock, or an angel?

Dear Dr. Auriel ibn Michell,

Your question is based on understanding tzimtzum to mean constricting, that G-d drew inward and made room for the universe. Unfortunately this is a common misconception.

Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner, in his book *Nefesh Hachayim*, specifically states that this is not the meaning in our context of tzimtzum; rather it means “hiding.” He cites examples where the word tzimtzum means hidden and hiding.

The idea is that from G-d’s vantage point, nothing exists besides G-d, and nothing can exist, because He must will it into existence. So in essence everything is just a manifestation of G-d. I imagine it as if the characters in your dreams would perceive themselves as real. Tzimtzum is a hiding of G-d that enables a creation that “feels” as if it has an independent existence.

The *Nefesh Hachayim* states that we cannot, and should not, try to delve into understanding the nature of tzimtzum, or G-d before tzimtzum.

This is an example of how studying books of *kabbala* can cause harm. Kabbala is easily misunderstood, which can lead to believing in a corporeal G-d. It can bring a person to not performing mitzvot if he understands that we do not really exist and the whole Torah is just a hiding of the “real” reality. Or it can be taken to the other extreme, that if G-d is equal everywhere, as in before Tzimtzum, then there can be no difference between holy and unholy things and places, because all existence is really G-d himself. This can lead people to incorrect behavior, as Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner bemoans in his work.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

CHUKAT

RAMBAN

20:1 The Whole Congregation
21:9 The Serpent
21:21 Imperative for Peace
21:34 Fear of Og

OHR HACHAIM

20:8 The Sin of Moshe

SFORNO

19:2 Para Aduma
20:26 Aharon’s Special Shroud

BALAK

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

YIDDLE RIDDLE

WHO KNOWS 21?

In the song at the end of the Pesach Seder we describe the significance of the numbers from one to 13 as they relate to Jewish life and thought: "Three are the fathers, Four are the Mothers... 12 are the Tribes of Israel..." What about the next 13 numbers? And after those? What significance do they have in Jewish tradition? This week, we challenge you: "Who knows 21?" Write to info@ohr.org.il

Reader responses to previous numbers:

Lag Baomer is the 18th of Iyar. People often give charity in multiples of "18," as 18 is *gematria* of *Chai* (life). And finally, on the 18th of Av, 18 years ago, I came to Israel from Argentina. I made "aliya!"

• R.J. <RaffiAs@shaam.gov.il>

18 is the number of times G-d's name is mentioned in *shema* (*Berachot 28b*).

• Chezkie Mark, Staten Island, NY <mark@ateret.org>

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Jewish Rule at the Kotel (Ohrnet Behaalotcha):

Recently, a reader commented that photos of the 1967 liberation of the Kotel (Western Wall) showed no *mechitza* (partition). You responded that we can't make inferences regarding Jewish practice based on that period, because "for approximately the last 1900 years, up until 1967, the Kotel was not under Jewish rule."

Even though it wasn't "under Jewish rule," there were times when we were allowed to act as rulers, notably when Julian the Apostate gave permission to rebuild the Temple in 363. And literary sources point to Jewish religious practices including prayer, Tisha B'Av customs and reciting of special *piyutim* (prayer poems) both on the Temple Mount and at various surrounding locations. Other locations along the Western Wall, the Southern Wall and the Eastern Wall served as prayer sites too.

More to the point, even if there were no *mechitzot* in those pictures, as everyone can see the men and the women prayed separately.

• Yisrael Medad <yisraelm@israelwire.com>

Just What She Needed:

Hello. I would like to say that your web page is just what I need in learning more about what I didn't know growing up! I was raised Jewish and Protestant and didn't learn much about either religion. I have started to learn for the past couple of years and I must say that I wish I knew about this web page years ago! Sincerely, Adina

• Amy Coleman
<adinac@student.umass.edu>

Re: Simcha's Torah Stories:

Yes, school is out, and again *today & yasharkoach* (Thank You!) for the great help you gave to me to give your "Simcha Torah Stories" to my kindergarten class. What a way to bring such lovely Torah ideas to those *pitskelach* kids, I cannot thank you enough! May Hashem give you health, you did bring happiness and WOW!!! They really always waited for your stories, but of course I did too. Shalom and see you again in September with the help of Hashem.

• Blineder@aol.com

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

The following story I heard from Rabbi Abraham Lipsker of Coney Island, New York. It illustrates that there is almost always a positive way to look at people.

TO TELL THE TRUTH

Two friends left the synagogue after prayers one Shabbat with words of praise for the members of their congregation! What holy, upright people we have in our congregation. Soon they passed an outdoor cafe, and recognized a member of the congregation, eating a sandwich! Such a pious man, eating in a cafe on Shabbat? He must have forgotten the day! "We better warn him!" the first exclaimed. But

when he spoke to the seated man, he only replied, "I know that today is Shabbat," and went on eating. Then the other noticed it was a cheeseburger, and thought, "He can't realize what he's doing, such an honorable, religious man!" And so he warned him the food was not kosher. But the man replied, "I know," and went on eating. "Perhaps there is a life-threatening reason which compels you to eat right here and now?" they asked. "No," he said, calmly continuing his meal. Nothing they could say would stop him, so they turned, and walked away.

"What a wonderful, holy congregation we have!" said the one. "Yes," the other replied, "Nobody in our congregation is ever capable of telling a lie!"

• Phillip Danzig NY, NY <PIDanzig@aol.com>