

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### SAFE FROM A HOSTILE WORLD

*“For from its origins, I see it rock-like, and from the hills do I see it. Behold! It is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations.” (23:9)*

Two people went into the forest to chop down trees. The less bright of the two started to lop of branches one at a time – a long and tedious job that did not address the root of the objective. The other reasoned thus: “If we can find the roots of the tree and sever them, then with one fell swoop we take care not only the tree but all its branches too.”

Thus reasoned Bilaam in this week’s Torah portion: “Rather than curse each of the Tribes of Israel separately, I will attack their roots. If I can find an impurity in their origin, with one curse, I can damage the entire people.”

“For from its origins, I see it rock-like...” However, Bilaam saw that the Jewish People were the descendants of holy forefathers, “rocks”, and holy mothers, “hills.” Like their physical counterparts, the rocks and the hills that are the foundations of this world, so too are Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah the spiritual foundations of the world.

Bilaam realized that since the origin of the Jewish People was in holiness so their souls would always aspire to holiness. They might become misdirected and stray to the Far Eastern cult of asceticism or the Far Western cult of materialism, but they would never assimilate totally.

However “...it is a nation that will dwell in solitude

and not be reckoned among the nations.” As long as the Jewish People maintain their distinctive lifestyle and beliefs, they live in safety. When they try to assimilate, however, they will not be accepted by the other nations. The reaction will then be anti-Semitism. And the virulence of that anti-Semitism will be in direct proportion to the attempt to assimilate.

When the Jewish People “dwell alone,” when they do not intermarry, nor adopt the beliefs and cultural mores of their host culture, they will be protected by G-d.

The letters of the Hebrew alphabet contain many hidden secrets in the understanding of the Torah. We find a case in point in this very verse: The word *Hain!* meaning “Behold!” is ostensibly superfluous. *Hain* consists of two letters – *Heh* and *Nun*. The *gematria* of *Heh* is 5. The *gematria* of *Nun* is 50. What do 5 and 50 share in common?

In the mystical sources, the decimal numbers symbolize the completion of an entire stage or level. To make the decimal number of ten, you could take 1 and 9, or 2 and 8, or 3 and 7 or 4 and 6. However there is only one number which when added to itself will make 10. That number is 5. Similarly, the only number which added to itself will make the decimal number of 100 is 50 – *Hain*.

*Hain* symbolizes the Jewish People.

When the Jewish People find completion by connecting only with their own kind, they are safe from a hostile world.

Sources:

• *Midrash Rabba, Hemek Davar*

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## A PEOPLE WHICH DWELLS ALONE

A major topic of interest in the local media this past month has been what the future of El Al flights on Shabbat will be once the government no longer has a majority share in the airline. The arguments put forth for changing the national carrier's current policy of grounding its passenger planes on Shabbat are both economic and ideological.

The economic claim is based on some studies showing that El Al loses \$50 million a year by not flying on Shabbat. This is a highly questionable argument because the gains from flying on the day of rest would probably be offset by the boycotting of the airline by observant Jews in Israel and throughout the world.

But what is even more disturbing than this effort to manipulate economics is the argument that Israel must be a nation like all other nations and not surrender to its religious minority on the issue of Sabbath flights. It is to this anti-religious argument that the words of the heathen prophet Balak in this week's Torah portion are directed. He describes our people as "a nation which dwells alone" (*Bamidbar 23:9*).

It is the uniqueness which is the essence of our mission as a people and the entire basis for Eretz Yisrael being our homeland. Let us hope that the new bosses of El Al will have the sense to continue the government's policy of no flights on Shabbat as a guarantee for Israel forever.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### THE SURPRISE OF THE WIG

When the rabbis in Eretz Yisrael issued their ruling that wigs with hair from India were forbidden for use by married women because they were made from material offered as sacrifices for idol worship, the immediate reaction of countless women was to remove their wigs until the source of their hair could be verified and receive rabbinical sanction.

One such woman, a teacher in the fourth grade of a school in the State Religious (*Mamlachti Dati*) stream, appeared before her students one day wearing a snood in place of her customary wig. In response to the curious

inquiries of her pupils she explained that the prohibition had been issued by the rabbis and proceeded to elaborate on the importance of obeying such rabbinical rulings.

Upon hearing this, one pupil suddenly removed the wig she was wearing, exposing the baldness of her head which had hitherto been unknown to her classmates.

All the praises heaped by the rabbis upon the married women who bravely obeyed their directive pale beside the courage of this youngster to whom we all have to tip our hats.

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

Balak, king of Moav, is in morbid fear of *Bnei Yisrael*. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilaam to curse them. First, G-d speaks to Bilaam and forbids him to go. But, because Bilaam is so insistent, G-d appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a *malach* (emissary from G-d) 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 blessings issue 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 they 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.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

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. Why did G-d grant prophecy to the evil Bilaam?
4. Why did Balak think Bilaam's curse would work?
5. When did Bilaam receive his prophecies?
6. G-d asked Bilaam, "Who are these men with you?" What did Bilaam deduce from this question?
7. How do we know Bilaam hated the Jews more than Balak did?
8. What is evidence of Bilaam's arrogance?
9. In what way was the *malach* that opposed Bilaam an angel of mercy?
10. How did Bilaam die?
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. Bilaam told Balak to build seven altars. Why specifically seven?
14. Who in Jewish history seemed fit for a curse, but got a blessing instead?
15. Why are the Jewish People compared to lions?
16. On Bilaam's third attempt to curse the Jews, he changed his strategy. What was different?
17. What were Bilaam's three main characteristics?
18. What did Bilaam see that made him decide not to curse the Jews?
19. What phrase in Bilaam's self-description can be translated in two opposite ways, both of which come out meaning the same thing?
20. Bilaam told Balak that the Jews' G-d hates what?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

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

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

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

### THE GOOD LAND

Both in the Torah and in our *birkat hamazon* blessings after a meal, Eretz Yisrael is referred to as "the good land".

In a literal sense this is a reference to the material qualities of the Land, just as the other titles of



"desirable" and "expansive" mentioned in our blessing after meals pay tribute to those qualities. But "good" is far more encompassing than those other titles and certainly includes the spiritual advantages which Eretz Yisrael offers its inhabitants.

## TOO TOUGH FOR WARMTH

There is often an interesting background to a passage from Tanach which the Talmud cites as support for a halachic ruling. A case in point is the ruling of the Yeshiva of Rabbi Yishmael concerning the mitzvah of giving the *kohen* a share of the wool a Jew shears from his sheep.

Although the Torah passage (*Devarim 18:4*) containing this command does not distinguish between the quality of one sort of wool and another, the above-mentioned Sages ruled that wool which is uniquely tough in its texture does not have to be shared with the *kohen*. Such wool, they explain, does not properly warm the body when transformed into clothes and therefore does not come under the heading of “the shearing of your sheep” mentioned in the above-mentioned Torah passage.

As proof that only wool which warms its wearer is considered “shearing”, a passage in *Iyov* is cited which is part of a long protestation by this suffering *tzaddik* regarding his righteousness. In describing how much he has always cared for the needy, he mentions how he provided for the poor, the widow and the orphan. His generosity also extended to providing clothes for one who could not afford any, and he rhetorically asks, “Did not his loins bless me for warming them with the clothes made from the shearing of my sheep?” (*Iyov 31:20*).

The linking of “sheep shearing” with “warming” in the statement of *Iyov* serves as proof that the ability to provide warmth for the wearer determines what the Torah refers to as the shearing of sheep. Unusually tough wool fails to provide such warmth and therefore is exempt from the obligation to share it with the *kohen*.

• *Bechorot 17a*

## HEAVENLY BLUEPRINTS

The *chut hasikra* – red-colored stripe – ran around the middle of the altar in the *Beit Hamikdash*. The blood of certain sacrifices was applied right above this stripe while the blood of others right below.

A question is raised by our Sages as to whether it is possible to be perfectly exact in measurements made by man. An effort is made to prove that this is possible for otherwise there would be a problem in regard to this stripe separating the upper and lower halves of the altar. If it is impossible to be perfectly exact how could the

builders of the altar be absolutely certain that the blood intended for application above the dividing line was not actually below half the altar or that the blood intended for application below the line was not actually being applied above the real middle?

This proof is rejected because there was an explicit Divine command to create that stripe so that whatever the altar architects would paint as a dividing line would determine what is properly above and below. In connection with this Divine command, a passage is cited from the instructions which King David gave to his son Shlomo for building the *Beit Hamikdash* and creating all of its vessels.

“All of this is written,” he told the son who had been designated by G-d to build the *Beit Hamikdash*, “from the Hand of G-d which came to give me understanding of all that had to be done in regard to the building” (*Divrei Hayamim I 28:19*).

This passage is quoted in other parts of the Talmud as a provision that nothing could be added or subtracted from the exact blueprints given to David through the Prophet Shmuel. In his commentary *Malbim* sees in this passage two components. “From the Hand of G-d”, he explains, refers to the prophecy which David received from Shmuel regarding the construction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, while the “understanding” refers to what David received through Divine inspiration (*ruach hakodesh*) regarding the sacred secrets and significances behind them.

• *Bechorot 17b*

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## THE TRUE SOUL MATE

From: Name Withheld

Dear Rabbi,

*I have a question. I have been shomer Shabbat (Sabbath observant) for 6 years, keep kosher, taharat haMishpacha (family purity), and every day I pray, recite tehillim (Psalms) and study Torah. I'm 40 years old, have two teenage children, a good husband, and until 2 months ago this was enough. But I met a young man, who could be my son, and there is a special feeling I get, not physical attraction — it's like being complete, or at home. When I see him, there is like a special energy I gain. And then when we talk, this is over — there is no distress, only peace. It is no secret that my husband and I are not soul mates; we've talked about it. Now, I feel I have met my soul mate. Could I be wrong?*

*This distresses me very much because, as you can see, I'm on a spiritual journey to G-d, and these feelings are not helping a lot. But I don't know what to do with these feelings. He has a girlfriend, so I know his attraction to me isn't physical either. He just comes to talk with me a lot and I think I have to see this person sometimes in order to help him. If not, why would G-d place him in my life like that? Since this happened, I've lost some of my overweight, and seem to be more inspired to do my job well. On the other hand, the strong feelings I'm developing scare me. What should I do? Thank you.*

Dear Name Withheld,

I am so sorry to read your letter. Your uncertainty and anguish are plainly apparent and I sympathize with your predicament.

However, you must realize that it is quite common that after many years of marriage, one may lose perspective on why one married whom he did. Surely if you search deep in your memory and past, you will recall the wonderful attributes which made you feel so good about your husband before and after you married. Share these memories with your husband, and together, rekindle the love of your youth and enrich it with the depth of your mature years.

And even if now you feel that your husband wouldn't be your first choice, you must appreciate that there will always be exceptional individuals who are "better" than one's spouse. (By the same token, there will always be those better than us as

well.) But that doesn't mean that they are better for us, or that we deserve them, or that is right to abandon a marriage and children in search of the expectation for "better". After all, the initial excitement is fleeting, which is usually the reason why people eventually feel dissatisfied. Why should this "choice" be any different?

Having said that, I want to suggest that perhaps you have a misconception about what a soul mate really is. In Jewish tradition there is a concept of a "first soul mate" (*zivug rishon*), a "second soul mate" (*zivug sheini*) and a third one, etc. The Sages teach that if a person merits finding their "first soul mate", the relationship will need little effort to provide contentment. The further away a person's soul mate is from the magical #1, the harder the couple will have to work to achieve fulfillment and happiness.

The Sages teach that the only couple in the Torah who married as "first soul mates" was Jacob and Rachel. This teaches us that it is extremely unlikely that we will find our "first soul mates". However, this does not mean that we should not look for the best or not marry. It just alerts us to the fact that in married life it is essential that we take into account the fact that our partners have different personalities than ours, and that we must always strive to make our marriages work by being loving, giving, sensitive and considerate.

This means that your relationship with your husband is one that contains all the ingredients for a wholesome, nourishing and mutually rewarding marriage — if you will only allow it to. Seeing this person and talking to him undermines your ability to make your marriage work. If you think, for whatever reason, that your relationship will not become physical, you are either being naive or deceiving yourself; both possibilities are very dangerous and that's something to be scared about. And while you say that you need to see him sometimes in order to help him, I think if you really delve into yourself, you'll find that what you really feel is that it's *you* who needs *him*.

The fact that you have made this young man part of your life does not mean it's good for you, or from G-d. One of the great commentators on the Talmud (Rif, Berachot 16a) writes that we should beseech G-d to grant us only those desires that are really beneficial for us. If we truly ask G-d for something, He grants us our wish. Life is not a soap opera (and if you're watching them, stop)! Rather, use the wisdom of the Torah to find inspiration in your marriage and as an incentive to improve who you are, what you do and how you look. May you be blessed that you and your husband grow in Torah, happiness and love, and that your children be a constant source of Jewish pride and joy to you both.

## After the Return

BY RABBI MORDECHAI BECHER AND RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN  
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## LET HIM FINISH HIS TALK!

**Question:** I recently attended a Bar Mitzvah celebration for the son of a friend. When the boy was invited to deliver his traditional *drasha* speech, his classmates repeatedly interrupted him with song after a couple of sentences. This seemed rather strange to me. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** The custom of interrupting a Bar Mitzvah boy and a *chatan* when they begin to speak is based on the consideration that they may not succeed in effectively completing their talks. Such consideration was shown in regard to the declaration which a Jew was required to make when bringing *bikkurim* first fruits to the *Beit Hamikdash*. In order to avoid embarrassing someone incapable of making this declaration, our Sages instituted a practice of the *kohen* making this declaration for everyone, even those who could make it themselves. The same reasoning moved them to abandon the old practice of everyone called up to

the Torah in the synagogue reading his portion by himself and to have a *ba'al koreh* read for everyone.

An even more touching example of such consideration is the custom of the *berachot* at the *chupa* being said by others rather than the *chatan*, to whom they really belong, in order to avoid embarrassing a groom incapable of saying them.

Although there is a “method in the madness” of interrupting the youngster, it should nevertheless be borne in mind that he has spent countless hours in preparing this talk and may be very anxious to deliver it. The safest compromise is to judge the reaction of the youngster after the initial ceremonial interruption. If he is indeed looking for a way out, he will sit down in relief. But if he insists on continuing, the greatest consideration which can be shown for him, and respect for his words of Torah, is to let him finish his presentation – and to pay attention!

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