

# OHRNET

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EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS WEEK BALAK IS READ IN ISRAEL AND CHUKAT IS READ OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### How ABOUT You?

“Balak son of Tzipor saw...” (22:2)

Once, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky got into a taxi. The driver saw who his passenger was and said, “Rabbi, I want to tell you a story. When I got out of the army I went with a friend to India. We were deep in the jungle and we got separated from the group. We found ourselves in a dark, thick place. I turned around and saw an enormous python coiling himself around my friend and slowly strangling him. I ran back to him, but despite both our efforts the snake coiled himself tighter and tighter. My friend was turning blue. I could see there was nothing left to do and I said to him, “You better say “*Shma*.” He summoned all of his remaining strength and whispered faintly with his last breath “*Shma Yisrael, Hashem Elokenu, Hashem Echad!*” Instantly, the snake uncoiled himself, and slithered off into the undergrowth. Rabbi, I want to tell you that my friend came back to Eretz Yisrael and is now learning Torah all day and most of the night.”

Said Rabbi Kanievsky, “*U’mah itcha?*” — “And how about you?”

Said the driver, “No, the Rabbi doesn’t understand. It happened to him, not to me!”

In the closing verses the Torah says, “Never again has there arisen in Yisrael a prophet like Moshe...” (Deut. 34:10). Our Sages infer from this verse that although there never arose a prophet on the level of Moshe amongst the Jewish People, there was a prophet of comparable stature amongst the nations of the world. And that was Bilaam. (Sifri)

One could ask of Bilaam, “*U’mah itcha?*” If you had access to a level of prophecy second only to Moshe himself, how could you have stooped to evil?

There are two creatures of the air whose eyesight is unmatched: the eagle and the bat. In the daylight the eagle’s eyes are sharper and more penetrating than any other winged creature. By night, however, he is no match for the bat. The bat can “see” by emitting ultra-sonic signals and constructing a “radar picture” of the landscape ahead that no bird can match.

Bilaam’s sight was drawn from the powers of darkness and impurity, whereas Moshe derived the sight of prophecy from the light of *kedusha*, holiness and purity.

• Sources: *Sde Eliyahu of the Gra as heard from Rabbi Pesach Feldman*

## 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 prepara-

tions, 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.

## BAVA KAMA 44 - 50

*Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa said (rhetorically): “Something at which that righteous person toils, is it possible that his child should ‘stumble’ (i.e., die) as a result of?”*

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa stated this principle — an example of a “Divine trait” by which G-d metes out mercy or punishment in this world — in response to a specific event that was brought to his attention, as the *gemara* on our *daf* relates:

The daughter of a man named Nechuniya “the well digger” (who dug wells for the use of people who would come up to Jerusalem for the Festivals — Rashi) fell into a deep well, and there was fear for her life. People informed the great Torah scholar and righteous man Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa as to this dangerous situation. In the first hour (when it was still possible for her to be alive in the well — Rashi) he told the people, “Shalom”, i.e. she is alive and well. In the second hour he repeated his declaration. In the third hour (when it she could no longer have survived being in the well — Rashi) he said, “She has already come out of the well.”

When the people asked Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa if he knew all this because he was a prophet, he replied, “I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but this is what I ‘said’ (i.e. ‘know’): “Something at which that righteous person toils, is it possible that his child should ‘stumble’ (i.e., die) as a result of?”

Nevertheless, said Rabbi Acha regarding righteous Nechuniya the well digger, “His son died of thirst”. Rabbi Acha cited a verse (Tehillim 50:3) as the basis for the punishment in this case, which states in part: “...and around Him it storms furiously.” Rashi explains this to mean that “the righteous” — who “cleave and are around G-d” — are judged by a margin of transgression that is as narrow as a “strand of hair” (the word for “storm”, “*sa’ara*”, in the verse, is spelled with the letter “*sin*”, like the Hebrew word for “hair”, instead of the way storm is normally spelled, with a “*samech*”).

Tosaefot finds the death of the righteous well digger’s son by thirst difficult to understand, based on Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa’s principle that a matter in which a righteous person suffers will not be reason for his offspring to suffer, as he pronounced in the case of the well digger’s daughter. How could his son die in this manner, since the father toiled to dig water wells for the purpose of providing water to others so they should not be thirsty?

The difference, answers Tosefot, is that “in *that thing itself*, it is not fit for the child to suffer”. This answer may seem vague, but Tosaefot in Masechet Yevamot (121b, and as explained by the Ba’Ch there) writes that a well, which was what the righteous father toiled at, did not cause the death of the son. Rather, it was the lack of water. Therefore Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa’s principle did not apply for the son, unlike its applying for the daughter who would not die as a result of the well of water, the type of item that her father dug. It appears that Rashi on our *daf* agrees with this explanation since he carefully explains “the toil of her father” as “digging wells and cisterns for people travelling to Jerusalem for the Festivals”, and the son did not, in fact, die in a well.

However, another take on Rashi’s commentary is that the father dug holes in the ground which he hoped would be filled with rainwater afterwards, but he did not dig wells of water per se. This is the difference between his daughter and his son: Although his daughter could not die in a well (since he dug wells), his son could indeed die from a lack of water (since the father did not provide water for the wells). (Etz Yosef)

Another possible answer is that the principle that Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa taught is true only when the mitzvah is performed completely and perfectly “for the sake of Heaven.” The righteous father dug wells for the sake of the mitzvah of helping people fulfill the mitzvah to come up to Jerusalem for the Festivals, having sufficient water to drink along the way and arrive in good health. The father fulfilled the mitzvah exactly for the correct reason at the time of his daughter’s predicament, but he was lacking “by the breadth of a hair” in the perfection of this mitzvah at the time of his son’s fatal thirst.

One more answer I have heard is that when Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa stated that a matter in which a righteous person toils and suffers will not be reason for his child to die, it is not truly a “principle” describing G-d’s actions. Rather, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was telling the people the words that he prayed to G-d for the safety of Nechuniya’s daughter, a prayer that he was certain would be received by G-d, and the daughter would be alive and well. (Apparently, there was no such prayer in the case of the man’s son, for whatever reason.)

• *Bava Kama 50a*

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## 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 open eye," which means vision but implies blindness in the other eye.
20. 24:14 - Promiscuity.

Balak

## THE TALKING DONKEY

This Torah portion features the strange episode of the confrontation between the gentile prophet Bilaam and the *malach* (messenger) of G-d, which features a verbal exchange between Bilaam and his donkey. Abarbanel points out the obvious difficulties with this narrative. A speaking donkey is clearly a miracle, and G-d only performs miracles out of absolute necessity. If G-d's intention was to prevent Bilaam from cursing the Jewish nation He could have simply appeared to him in a dream or vision without invoking such a bizarre scenario with a talking animal that is capable of seeing a messenger of G-d who remains invisible to the prophet Bilaam.

Bilaam believed that G-d relates to the Jewish People in two different ways. He realized that G-d has a special relationship with the nation, a Divine Providence and intervention which prevail over the natural forces and influences of the physical universe. He believed, however, that they were also subject to these natural forces as well, and would manifest themselves through destructions and exiles that the nation would suffer. This is what he intended to convey to Balak. G-d, on the other hand, wanted to prevent Bilaam from saying anything other than the exact words that G-d wanted him to say. Giving the donkey the power of speech was a dramatic way of demonstrating to Bilaam that G-d alone grants the power of speech.

Abarbanel goes on to elucidate the nature of the relationship between natural forces and Divine Providence. Bilaam began his "career" as an astrologer and sorcerer, with knowledge of how events on earth were influenced by the stars. Once he became a prophet he understood that there was a concept of Divine Providence whereby G-d acted directly, and not through the influence of the stellar configurations. However, Bilaam was uncertain whether Divine Providence could prevail over the natural order or, vice-versa, if the natural order always remained in place. He understood the latter possibility from the fact that G-d had told him, "Do not curse this nation, for it is blessed." He took this to mean that by cursing them and bringing down the natural order to their detriment, he could overcome their special blessing from G-d. In his mind, G-d was instructing him not to curse them in order to prevent this from happening.

In order to remove this mistaken notion from his mind, G-d used the situation with the *malach* and the talking donkey as a metaphorical lesson. The moving donkey represents the motion of the heavenly bodies. Bilaam, the rider of the donkey, represents the separate force that sets them in motion. The *malach* represents G-d's Divine Providence, as it says in Psalms "He will command his angels for you, to protect you in all your ways." When the donkey sees the *malach* he immediately turns away, to demonstrate that the natural order must give way to G-d's Divine Providence. Bilaam's attempt to force the donkey back onto its proper path demonstrates that the movements of the heavenly bodies and their influences below are the result of the constant direction of the forces that set them in their proper path. Sometimes there is a collision between the natural order and Divine Providence, such that each one prevents the other from expressing itself fully. In such a case, Divine Providence will always emerge victorious. This is illustrated by the passage of the donkey through a narrow lane between two fences. Bilaam, who represents the director of these heavenly movements, scrapes his foot against the fence when the donkey moves aside for the *malach*. Not only must the natural order yield to Divine Providence when they clash, but its influence will be "injured" — i.e., reduced — just as Bilaam's foot was injured, while the *malach* remains unscathed.

Additionally, there are situations where there is no room at all for both. Only one can be expressed. This is illustrated by the next incident in the narrative, where the passage is so narrow that the donkey cannot move aside at all. This was Bilaam's ultimate dilemma. What happens when they are in absolute and total opposition? In this case the natural order gives way totally to the Divine Providence, as is illustrated by the final act of the donkey — crouching down before the *malach*. It is at this point that G-d opens Bilaam's eyes to enable him to see the *malach*, and to understand the answer to his question. There are times when the Divine Providence supersedes the natural order, but there is never a time that the natural order can supersede Divine Providence. It is at this point that Bilaam is forced to admit that he has sinned by trying to curse the Jewish nation.

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## REWARDING BAD BEHAVIOR

From: Aaron

*Dear Rabbi,*

*One of my sons, he's 8, is really a source of tension at home. His behavior is totally unacceptable. And what's worse, no matter how I punish him, it doesn't help. He gets this rebellious spirit that won't break. My wife and I are very disturbed by this, and are losing hope. It's as if there's this power struggle going on and he's winning, as his siblings watch from the sidelines. What can we do to avoid things falling apart?*

Dear Aaron,

I understand your feelings of frustration and growing sense of helplessness, which is only exacerbated by the fact that it's being caused by an 8 year-old, your son, who you'd much rather love and be loved by than be at "war" with.

While I'm not a psychologist, and seeing a professional to help you all work through this to find the best solution might ultimately be what you need, I can try to offer some advice for starters to at least alleviate some of the tension, and which may provide a long-term solution as well.

Given the type of situation you describe, and the way you describe it, there are usually three major considerations that make reconciliation with the child so difficult and challenging: One: The feeling of "giving in", which seems to demonstrate weakness and undermine your parental authority. Two: "Rewarding" bad behavior, which might encourage more of it. Three: Setting a bad example and precedent for your other children.

Punishment should be exercised not to harm or humiliate, but to demonstrate, relative to the severity of the wrong doing, the ramifications of wrong, thereby educating the child to refrain from what he comes to recognize as unacceptable behavior. However, in your case, based on your own admission, the various forms of punishment that you have used not only have not helped, but they've even resulted in a spirit of rebellion and confrontation.

Without knowing more details about the family dynamics and the child involved, I can't know why that might be. But whatever the reasons are, the punishment approach

has not worked, and will probably only get worse.

At this point, you should battle rebellion with love, pride with patience and temper with tolerance. In fact, it's quite possible that it's not his intention to challenge your authority at all, but rather to challenge you to love him.

This can be done in a way that doesn't look like you're giving in, becoming weak or undermining your authority, but rather exercising your parental prerogative to choose a different option — that as parents you have the authority to decide upon another option that will be more beneficial for your child. Nor would this approach in your situation be viewed as encouraging bad behavior. This son cannot take punishment, which means punishing is encouraging bad behavior. Showing abundant love and understanding, particularly when things are less tense, is much more likely to defuse conflict. Finally, you can avoid the possibility of setting a bad precedent with your other children by continuing to reward their good behavior with love, which they certainly would rather earn by being good than bad.

One last point: This new approach should not be implemented all at once, all of a sudden, but gradually — ideally on the few occasions that he's not misbehaving, but eventually even if he is. And don't be concerned if it seems that you are thereby showing preferential treatment to this son over your other children, since it's likely that a lot of what's behind his behavior is his feeling, whether correct or not, that he's being treated differently than his siblings for the worse.

By taking this approach in your specific situation, you are actually in good company. Rabbi Moshe Cordavero, in *Tomer Devora*, which analyses in depth the 13 Attributes of Divine Mercy, writes regarding the trait "He doesn't maintain His anger forever" (Ch. 1, attribute 5) that while G-d punishes transgression, when that punishment does not have the desired corrective result, and the sinner continues to do wrong, G-d Himself gradually reduces punishment despite continued rebellion and sin, with the hope that if punishment doesn't serve as a deterrent, love will.

## HOW TO STAND IN PRAYER

**W**hen praying the *Shemoneh Esrei* one needs to bend his head slightly so that his eyes are pointed downward in order to see the ground. One should also have in mind that he is standing in the *Beit Hamikdash*, with his heart directed towards Heaven. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 95:2*)

The source for bending one's head towards the ground is a verse in which G-d tells Shlomo Hamelech, "My eyes and heart shall be there (the *Beit Hamikdash*) all the days (*Yevamot 105b*)." Since G-d's eyes are towards the *Beit Hamikdash*, we must place our eyes to there as well. Accordingly, one looks down towards the ground in the direction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, the direction which we face when we pray.

The idea of standing in the *Beit Hamikdash* should fill one with a feeling of awe and trepidation, as Yaakov said when he awoke from his prophetic dream, "How awesome is this place; it is none other than the abode of G-d, and this is the gate of the Heavens!"

In preparation for prayer one should have in mind the mortality of man when looking down towards the ground. In contrast, while directing his heart towards Heaven he should consider the immortality of the soul, which our Sages says was carved out from under G-d's "throne of

glory". With the above in mind, one will place his focus on praying for what will help him fulfill his true purpose, and not follow his heart that can lead him to ask for the wrong things.

The *poskim* (authorities in Jewish Law) discuss an apparent contradiction with an earlier ruling that requires a *Beit Kneset* (Synagogue) to have windows. According the Rashi one is meant to look out of these windows towards the sky in order to strengthen his prayers. The Bach explains that one is to look out the windows before beginning the *Shemoneh Esrei*, but not during. Others explain that if one becomes distracted during the *Shemoneh Esrei* he may look up to help him concentrate, but the rest of the time he should be looking towards the ground. (*Mishneh Berurah 90:8*; see also *Beit Yosef* in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak Abuhav)

The custom of the Arizal was to pray the *Shemoneh Esrei* with his eyes closed. On this point the Chida explains that a person should do what will be best for his concentration. One who prays better with his eyes closed should do so, and someone who will concentrate better using a *Siddur* should do so. According to all opinions it is certainly inappropriate to look around at what is going on while praying the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### THE LOCATION OF THE TOMB OF THE PROPHET YONAH

**T**he Prophet Yonah is familiar to us, perhaps mostly because the entire Book of Yonah is read at the Mincha service on Yom Kippur. Where he is buried is a matter of dispute, with sites as varied as Zippori, Kfar Kanah, Hebron, Halhul, Kfar Azza, Tiberias, Ashdod and Mosul in Iraq mentioned as possibilities.



Rabbi Chayim ben Attar, author of the *Ohr Hachayim* commentary on Chumash, is reported to have said that when he lived in Peki'in he visited the tomb of Yonah in Kfar Mash'had. This village lies between the Beit Rimon junction and Nazareth, and an Arab mosque marks the assumed location of the prophet's tomb.

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## RABBI SHALOM GARFINKEL

**Age: 43 - San Rafael, Marin County, California - Stanford University, BA in History, 1996  
Center Program, Main Beit Midrash, Ohr LaGolah: 1996-2004**

For one growing up as a Reform Jew in the ultra-liberal, secular San Francisco, California of the 80's and 90's, adherence to Torah and *mitzvot* was as foreign as a trip to the planet Neptune. Shalom's father was the General Manager of the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, the most luxurious hotel in the city. The family lacked nothing in material terms. After public primary school, Shalom enrolled in one of the most elite private preparatory high schools in the West. After graduation he was accepted to Stanford University and entered in 1991.

Shalom had intended to become a doctor, and took courses in the Sciences as well as the Humanities. But there was something more that he wanted out of life. "I would ask my professors: What is life all about? I understood that it couldn't be that life was excelling in a chosen profession, discovering the thing that no one else had, winning a Nobel Prize. But, those were the answers I was given. It occurred to me that the professors had never really thought about why we were put on earth?"

Stanford, while having a Jewish student population of approximately 10%, had no observant undergraduate students, and only a handful of observant graduate students. Shalom had nothing to do with the Jewish students, and opted to join a non-Jewish fraternity.

The summer after his freshman year, he went on a trip to Israel to study Hebrew language at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. One particular experience on that trip made a lasting impression. He observed his first full Shabbat. The effects weren't immediate, but they proved to be profound.

After his second year at Stanford he received an internship at the Clinton White House in Washington, DC. He worked for the Office of Public Liaison doing Public Relations. He loved it. During that summer he also met other young people who were both "frum and cool" — a combination that had never occurred to him as a possibility. It was in DC that he experienced his first Tisha B'Av. "I was told it was a fast day, but I didn't know why. My friend told me to come to Shul after work not wearing leather shoes. I thought he was crazy when I saw him sitting on the floor, until I saw Senator Joe Lieberman on the floor next to him! Then I realized that this couldn't be that crazy!"

His father had been pressing him to decide on his professional life-path, but Shalom couldn't decide. At this point he felt that

he needed to learn more about his heritage. He left Stanford for two years and delved into the study of Judaism in Israel. He spent a year at Pardes and another at Yeshivat HaKibbutz HaDati. Then he returned to Stanford in 1995, graduating the following year.

Shortly before graduation a recruiter for the Center Program at Ohr Somayach, Rabbi Moshe Efras, visited Stanford. The program he described sounded perfect to Shalom — an opportunity to gain the "tools" to be able to learn Torah independently.

Shalom spent two years in the Center Program and was enthralled by the rabbis and their classes. In particular, Rabbis Epstein and Mandel inspired him. He also volunteered for the "job" of bringing breakfast to Rav Bulman, the *mashgiach ruchani* of Ohr Somayach, and spent hours with him, drinking in his wisdom and *haskafa* while Rav Bulman ate his breakfast. He continued learning in the Beit Midrash program, and then completed the Ohr LaGolah Program and received *semicha*. In total, Shalom spent six years at Ohr

Somayach. After his initial two years in the Center Program, Shalom married Suri, who was a *madricha* in her third year at Darchei Binah seminary in Jerusalem.

In 2004, Shalom entered the world of *kiruv*. He took a job with JAM at UCLA, doing campus outreach there. After three years at UCLA, another Ohr Somayach graduate named Rabbi Zev Kahn, who had just gotten funding for another *kiruv* rabbi for his Chicago based JET (Jewish Educational Team), asked Shalom to join him as the Outreach Director. Shalom is still the Outreach Director at JET, and is running programs for young professionals. The programs attract between 500-600 people a year. This summer Shalom brought four young professional men to Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem to learn for a few weeks. Three of them changed their return flights and have decided to stay for additional weeks of Torah study.

His family has grown both physically and spiritually in Chicago. *Baruch Hashem and bli ayin hara*, Shalom and his wife have seven children — six girls and a boy, ranging in ages from 17 to 4.

His opinion of Ohr Somayach: "It takes the best and brightest, and trains them to become '*bonei Torah*' who can share that message with others. Ohr Somayach is the standard-bearer of what it means to live a Torah life."

Shalom has found the answer to what life is all about.



## THE PARSHA DUAL DICHOTOMY 5776

## PART ONE

I'm sure everyone knows that this week's *parsha* outside of Israel is Chukat. Yet, this *parsha* was actually read in *Eretz Yisrael* last week, meaning that the weekly *parsha* right now is not the same one in *Chutz La'aretz* as it is in *Eretz Yisrael*.

This *parsha* "split" occurs whenever the last day of a Yom Tov falls on Shabbat. In *Chutz La'aretz*, where a second day of Yom Tov is observed, there is a "special" public Torah reading for the Yom Tov, whereas in *Eretz Yisrael* the Torah reading for the next scheduled *parsha* is read. This puts *Eretz Yisrael* a *parsha* ahead until the rest of the world "catches up", by an upcoming potential double-*parsha*, while each *parsha* would be read separately in *Eretz Yisrael*.

This year, the 8th day of Pesach fell out on Shabbat. On that Shabbat/Yom Tov everyone in *Chutz La'aretz* read the Yom Tov reading of "Aser Te'Asser" from *Parshat Re'eh*, whereas in *Eretz Yisrael*, *Parshat Shemini*, the next *parsha* in the cycle was read, since Pesach had already ended for them.

Although this happens every now and then, this year *Chutz La'aretz* will not catch up to *Eretz Yisrael* until *Parshiot Matot-Masei* — around Rosh Chodesh Av — over three months later! In *Eretz Yisrael*, *Matot* and *Masei* will be read separately on consecutive weeks, while in *Chutz La'aretz* they will be combined and read on a single Shabbat. The last time a split of this magnitude occurred was twenty-one years ago in 1995. The next time scheduled is in 3 years, in 2019, so we can all be prepared in advance.

There are seven potential double *parshiyot*. These seven are:

- *Vayakheil/Pekudei*, the last two *parshiyot* of Sefer Shemot
- *Tazria/Metzora*, in Sefer Vayikra
- *Acharei Mot/Kedoshim*, in Sefer Vayikra
- *Behar/Bechukotai*, the last two *parshiyot* of Sefer Vayikra
- *Chukat/Balak*, in Sefer Bamidbar
- *Matot/Masei*, the last two *parshiyot* of Sefer Bamidbar
- And *Netzavim/Vayeileich*, towards the end of Sefer Devarim

Many people want to know why didn't we catch up this

year right away by *Acharei Mot/Kedoshim* or *Behar/Bechukotai*? Or even *Chukat/Balak*? Why should three separate double *parshiyot* be passed over, with the world only catching up on the fourth possibility, months later? In other words, why do we wait so long for the whole world to be realigned?

Moreover, this causes all sorts of halachic issues for travelers to and from Israel during this time period, such as: Which *parsha* should they be reading? If/how can they catch up? Although technically-speaking, since *kriat haTorah* (public Torah reading) is a "*chovat hatzibur*", a communal obligation, and one is not actually mandated to "catch-up", but is rather fulfilling his obligation with whichever *parsha* is publicly, correctly being read, nevertheless, commonly, special *minyanim* are set up expressly for this purpose. Many *Yeshivot* double-up the *parsha* when most of the students return from *Chutz La'aretz* in order to catch them up. In fact, a number of *shuls* in *Eretz Yisrael*, such as the renowned Zichron Moshe "Minyan Factory", offer a solution by hosting weekly "catch-up *minyanim*", featuring the Torah reading of each previous week's Israeli *parsha*, which is the "*Chutznik's*" current one, until the calendars remerge. But those flying back to *Chutz La'aretz* would presumably not have such a "safety-net" to fall back on.

Although some cite alternate *minhagim* (customs), nevertheless it is important to note that nowadays this long *parsha* split is indeed *Minhag Yisrael*, as codified by the *Knesses Hagedolah*, *Magen Avraham*, and *Mishnah Berurah*. We should also realize that back then travel to and from *Eretz Yisrael* was far less of an issue, since undertaking the trip would take several months, and missing one *parsha* would be the least of one's worries. But to properly understand the "whys" of this fascinating dual dichotomy, one must first gain an understanding of the *parsha* rules and setup. In fact, this is not a new question, as several early Torah authorities, including the *Mahari"t* (Rabbi Yosef Tirani), addressed this exact issue almost 500 years ago.

*To be continued...*

## LISTEN UP!

“Listen O heavens, and I will speak, and the earth shall hear the words of my mouth...” (Deut. 32:1). These are the opening words of a poetic song uttered by Moshe shortly before his demise. In this passage the word for “listen” is *ha’azinu*, while the word for “hear” is *tishma*. A form of the latter word is more famously used in the formula “Hear (*Shema*) O Israel, Hashem our G-d — Hashem is one” (Deut. 6:4). While some Tosafists actually write that the two words are used interchangeably for poetic effect, most commentators reject the concept of synonyms in the Holy Language, and must therefore explain the words thusly. So, what is the difference between the word *shema* and *ha’azinu*? Furthermore, while Moshe uses *ha’azinu* for the heavens and *shema* for the earth, the prophet Yishaya uses the exact opposite formulation: “Hear O heavens, and listen O earth, for G-d has spoken” (Isa. 1:2). In this context, Yishaya uses *ha’azinu* for the earth, and *shema* for the heavens. Why does Yishaya deviate from the norm already established by Moshe?

The Midrash (Sifri to Parshat Ha’azinu) explains that these two terms reflect two types of listening. One type of listening refers to hearing something from afar, while the other type of listening refers to hearing something nearby. When one listens to something from a distance he must be especially attentive to the sound in order to properly concentrate, hear what should be heard, and focus on its meaning. According to the Midrash, *shema* refers to listening from a distance, while *ha’azinu* refers to listening from close-range. (Other commentators, such as Chizkuni, Abarbanel, and Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, disagree with the Midrash and actually define the terms in the opposite way, and explain the difference between Moshe and Yishaya accordingly.)

Based on this, the Midrash explains that Moshe was closer to the heavens, so he used *ha’azinu* to refer to the heavens listening to him, while he was farther from the earth, so he used *shema* when referring to the earth listening to him. Conversely, Yishaya was closer to the earth, so he used *ha’azinu* for the earth, and only used *shema* for the heavens.

However, this explanation begs the question: Since both Moshe and Yishaya were prophets of G-d, then why is Moshe considered “closer to the heavens” and Yishaya considered “closer to the earth”? The commentators offer

several ways of differentiating between Moshe and Yishaya in this context. The first answer argues that because Moshe pronounced his epic song in the days before his death, he was considered “closer to the heavens” simply because his death was approaching and he already had “one foot” in the heavens; whereas the passage from Yishaya was at the start of his prophetic career, well before his death.

The second answer explains that although Moshe and Yishaya were two of the most important prophets, the importance of Moshe infinitely exceeds that of Yishaya. Moshe was the “father of all prophets”, and attained a level of clarity in his prophecy unrivaled by any other prophet. As G-d Himself said of Moshe, “Mouth to mouth I speak to him, in a clear vision, and not in riddles...” (Num. 12:8). While Yishaya’s prophecies served to uphold the Torah, only Moshe’s prophecies *became* the Torah itself. For this reason Moshe’s elevated spiritual existence rendered him closer to the heavens than to the earth. In contrast, Yishaya, for all that he continuously rebuked the Jewish People to keep the Torah, remained closer to the earth like an ordinary human being. Similarly, a third answer suggests that since Moshe was accustomed to ascending to the heavens, as he ascended Mount Sinai multiple times for long stretches, he is considered “closer to the heavens” than anyone else.

Other sources point to another distinction between the words *ha’azinu* and *shema*. The word *ha’azinu* is derived from the Hebrew word *ozen*, which means ear. As such, the verb of listening expressed by the word *ha’azinu* refers simply to the physiological function of the ear: hearing sound waves and relaying them to the brain. On the other hand, explains the Malbim, the word *shema* does not refer simply to the physical act of listening; rather it also denotes a certain degree of intellectual or emotional understanding of that which is being heard.

Rokeach explains that the word *shema* refers to hearkening in response to another’s call, while *ha’azinu* simply refers to any type of listening. However, these explanations fail to account for the change in phraseology between the introduction of Moshe’s song and Yishaya’s opening prophecy. Elsewhere, Rokeach writes that *shema* refers to listening to something which was stated explicitly, while *ha’azinu* refers to listening and inferring to something only said implicitly.

# KIRUV SEMINAR

FOR BNEI TORAH

## צום הרביעי תשע"ו

**Fast of Tammuz, Sunday Afternoon July 24, 2016**

at Yeshiva Ohr Somayach - Tanenbaum College

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, Maalot Daphna, Jerusalem

1:00 pm - Rav Nota Schiller, Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Somayach

1:45 pm - Mincha

2:30 pm - Rav Moshe Shapiro (עברית)

3:15 pm - Rav Yitzchok Breitowitz, Rav, Kehillas Ohr Somayach

3:55 pm - Rav Nissan Kaplan, Yeshivas Mir Yerushalayim

4:40 pm - Rav Moshe Lazerus

5:20 pm - Rabbi Dr. Dovid Gottlieb

6:00 pm - Rabbi Tzvi Wainstein

6:30 pm - Rabbi Dovid Kaplan

7:10 pm - Rav Zev Leff

7:50 pm - Rabbi Richard Jacobs

8:05 pm - Ma'ariv (Followed by Refreshments)

Registration 10 NIS - Doors open at 12:30 pm