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*In Israel: Balak is read this week and Pinchas next week
 *Outside of Israel: Chukat is read this week and Balak next week

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A Small Word with Two Meanings

“Even now it is said to Yaakov and Yisrael what G-d has wrought.” (23:23)

The Enabling Act on March 24, 1933, gave Hitler the freedom to act without parliamentary consent and even without constitutional limitations. Non-Nazi parties were formally outlawed on July 14, 1933, and the Reichstag abdicated its democratic responsibilities. The Chafetz Chaim died two months later on September 15, 1933. Maybe G-d took him away from this world then so that he would not see the terrible events that were about to take place, but his words on this week’s Torah portion are certainly prescient. I will present a loose translation of what he said.

The word “mah” in Hebrew can mean both “what” and “how.” “Mah” can equally be a question or an exclamation. It could signify a question, as in “What does G-d seek from you....?” (Micha 6:8). Or it could be an exclamation, as in “How great is the good that you have concealed for those who fear You!” (Tehillim 31:20)

The Jewish People have suffered more than any other in our long exile. And we protest and exclaim, “What has G-d wrought?” This is as if to say, “Why, G-d, have You hidden Your Face so from us that we have become prey to the cruel?”

“Even now it is said to Yaakov and Yisrael what G-d has wrought.” The “mah” in this world contains both meanings. In the future the world will ask why G-d vented His anger so fiercely on this nation. However, a day will come when G-d will comfort His people, and then all the world will say, “How great is that which G-d has done for Yaakov, for all the pain and suffering will be revealed as nothing but good to the Jewish People.” This is as the verse states: “O nations – sing the praises of His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants. He will bring retribution upon His foes and He will appease His Land and His people.” (Devarim 32:43)

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Balak: *Erchin* 23-29

Living and Giving in Moderation

Rabbi Illa said that in Usha (one of the Sanhedrin's locations while in exile) they decreed that one who wishes to give excessively should not give more than a fifth of his resources.

Rashi explains that this decree was based on the behavior of Yaakov Avinu. When he stated a promise to give of his wealth to the needy, he said the word for “a tenth” two times. This adds up to two tenths, or, in other words, a fifth. From here we can learn that even a generous person – as Yaakov most certainly was – should not give more than a fifth.

The *gemara* on our *daf* states that this teaching to limit giving to one fifth is the practical difference between the rulings of two Tanas who are quoted in our *mishna*. First we hear that Rabbi Eliezer says that a person may designate part but not all of his resources as *cherem* (a type of sanctified status), which is to be given to *kohanim*. He must leave for himself “a small amount,” explains Rashi. The Rashash suggests that Rashi means the amount needed for the person’s basic livelihood. Rabbi Eliezer derives this halacha banning total consecration from the Torah’s text, as explained in the *gemara*.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria follows Rabbi Eliezer with a different statement in the *mishna*. He says that if there is a ban against over-giving of one’s resources for a sanctified matter, all the more so there should exist a ban against over-giving for a non-sanctified matter.

It would seem from reading the *mishna* that there is no practical difference between the halachic rulings of Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria. Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria seems to be simply pointing out that the words of Rabbi Eliezer should apply also to non-sanctified matters, due to logical reasoning. However, this cannot be the case since the structure of the *mishna* indicates that Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria differ in halachic rulings. Therefore, the *gemara* asks, “What indeed is the practical difference between the rulings of these two Tanas?”

The answer given is that they differ in their rulings regarding Rabbi Illa’s statement about a ban by the Sanhedrin to

limit giving more than a fifth to the needy. Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria holds that indeed a statement about a ban was decreed to limit giving, as is seen in his logical extension of Rabbi Eliezer’s teaching to include also the non-sanctified (e.g., giving to the poor). Rabbi Eliezer does not hold of the ban against giving more than a fifth to the poor. He limits the Torah teaching to not allowing consecration of one’s entire resources, but does not apply the same limit to a non-consecrated purpose such as giving to charity.

The *gemara* goes on to relate an event which supports the opinion of Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria, that one should not give more than a fifth to charity. Rabbi Yeshavev wanted to give more than a fifth to the needy, but Rabbi Akiva told him that it was forbidden to do so. The statement of Rabbi Illa about the decree of the Sanhedrin in Usha is cited by Rabbi Akiva. The upshot of this story, which bans excessive giving, is consistent with the ruling of the Rambam who rules like Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria that one should limit his giving to a fifth.

As the Rambam states: A person who spends his money for *mitzvot* should not spend more than a fifth, and should conduct himself as our Prophets advised (in Tehillim 112:5): “[Good is the man] who is gracious and lends (which is a *mitzvah*), who conducts his matters with good judgment.” (*Hilchot Erachim and Charamim* 8:13)

The Rambam elsewhere writes: A Torah scholar should manage his financial matters with good judgment. He should eat, drink and provide for his family in accordance with his funds and success without overtaxing himself... Our Sages have also taught us: One should always eat less than suits his income, dress as befits his income, and provide for his wife and children (reasonably) beyond what is appropriate for his income. (*Hilchot De’ot* 5:10)

- *Erchin* 28a

Questions

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?

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

Answers

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.

ASK!

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Food Fight

Question:

I would like your point of view about this "anecdote." It's Friday, early in the afternoon, a son talks to his mother over the phone, telling her he won't be able to come for Shabbat dinner, and asks her if he can come to pick up one challah (bread) for his Shabbat at home with his wife and baby. The mother had baked two challahs, and the son only asks for one. She replies: "No, because I need two challahs in order to say the blessing (according to the rules)." So she won't give her son one because of this, and of course the son has no challahs at all for his Shabbat.

So: Was she right? Wouldn't it have been better in this situation to skip the "Do it by the book" approach, and to show her love to the son by giving him one challah?

Thank you very much for your reply.

The OhrRabbi answers:

It's a mitzvah on Shabbat to say the blessing over *two* whole loaves of bread. Many use braided challah loaves, but any whole loaves (kosher, of course) will do. In our home we sometimes use matzah. (Did you ever see braided matzah?)

Now, assuming the son had other food, it wasn't a question of his going hungry. Rather, he wanted the mitzvah of enjoying a proper Shabbat meal, and to say the blessing over one whole challah loaf, at least.

Should the mother give away her mitzvah of having *two* whole loaves in order that the son would be able to have the mitzvah of having at least one whole loaf?

Strictly speaking, one doesn't have to give up one's own mitzvah in order to allow the other person to do a mitzvah. But bringing peace and harmony among people, especially among family members, is a very great mitzvah, so there's a strong case to be made for sharing the challahs.

But are there any other relevant details? For example, is this the first time the son canceled out on his mother at the last minute? Does she get the feeling that he takes advantage of her goodness and love? Without hearing, first-hand, both sides of the story, it's difficult to give a definitive answer to your question.

Relationships flourish when each person focuses on his obligations to the other person. But when each person focuses on the other person's obligations to him, relationships falter.

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.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Are You Really “With Me”?

The most common word in the Bible, by far, is *et*, which appears roughly 12,000 times! In general, the word *et* cannot be translated into English, because it usually serves a grammatical function rather than a lexical one. *Et* is used to mark the object of an action, thus clarifying the difference between the subject and predicate. Rabbi Nachman Marcuson likens the word *et* to an arrow which points the reader to the object of a verb. Thus, *et* functions more like punctuation than as a word that has meaning.

However, there are some instances in which *et* actually does have its own meaning. As Ibn Janach and Radak explain, *et* can sometimes mean “to” (e.g., Lev. 13:49, Num. 13:17), “from” (e.g., Gen. 44:4, Num. 35:26), “next to” (e.g., Gen. 40:4, 44:24), “instead of” (e.g., Lev. 22:17, II Sam. 12:6), “on top of” (e.g., I King 9:25), and “with.”

This article focuses on the word *et* when it means “with.” A suffix is commonly added to the word *et* to show “with” whom we are talking, such that *itto* means “with him,” *itti* means “with me,” and *ittah* means “with her.” However, those familiar with Hebrew know that the word *im* (AYIN-MEM) also means “with.” *Im* can also have suffixes appended to it to create words like *imo* (“with him”), *imi* (“with me”), and *imah* (“with her”). In fact, Rashi (to Gen. 37:18) writes that *itto* means *imo*.

These parallels between *et* and *im* lead us to the obvious question: What is the difference between the word *et* (when it means “with”) and the word *im*? Why does the Bible sometimes use one and sometimes the other?

Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer of Vilna (1720-1797), better known as the Gra or the Vilna Gaon, addresses this issue in the context of the story of Balaam. When Balaam first asked G-d for permission to go with Balak’s men to curse the Jews, G-d answered, “Do not go with them (*imahem*), do not curse the nation because they are blessed” (Num. 22:12). However, when Balaam asked G-d a second time for permission to go, He replied, “Get up and go with them (*itam*)” (Num. 22:20). The Torah subsequently reports that Balaam went “with” (*im*) Balak’s men, and G-d was angered (Num. 22:21-22). The Vilna Gaon asks: If G-d first told Balaam not to go with Balak’s men, then why did He seemingly “change His mind” and later allow him to go with them? Moreover, if He allowed Balaam to go with Balak’s men, then why did He get angry?

The Vilna Gaon bases his answer on the difference between the implications of *et* and *im*. The word *im*, he explains, means “with” in the fullest sense of the word. It implies the joining of two completely equal and cooperative bodies. While *et* also means “with,” it does not connote equality and congruence between the two who are “with” each other.

Accordingly, the Vilna Gaon explains that when Balaam first asked G-d if he may go with Balak’s entourage, G-d barred him from going “with” them using an *im*-related word, because G-d did not want Balaam to join Balak’s efforts to curse the Jewish People. After Balaam further pressed the issue, G-d said that he would allow Balaam to go “with” Balak’s men using an *et*-related word, to imply that while He would let Balaam physically go with Balak’s men, he was not to unite with them in completely joining their efforts to help them achieve their goal of cursing the Jews. Ultimately, when reporting that Balaam went “with” Balak’s men, the Torah uses an *im*-conjunction to indicate that Balaam was “with” them in the fullest sense. In doing so, Balaam had thus violated G-d’s directive, causing Him to become angry.

The Vilna Gaon and the Malbim both derive the implications of *et* in the sense of “with” from *et*’s more common grammatical function of indicating an object. As an example, let’s take the simple clause *achalta et halechem*, “you ate [et →>] bread.” There is an actor (“you”), and an object being acted upon (“the bread”), and the two are not equal (the person is eating the bread). Likewise, the word *et* in the sense of “with” denotes an unequal relationship where one is dominant and active, and the other is passive.

When the Torah says that Lot came “with” Avraham to the Holy Land, it uses the word *itto/et* (Gen. 12:4). But when the Torah says that Lot and Avraham parted ways and Lot was no longer “with” Avraham, it uses the word *imo/im* (Gen. 13:14). The Malbim accounts for this change in wording by explaining that while at first Lot deferentially followed Avraham’s lead, he later asserted his independence and tried to show that he was an equal player.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) in *Cheshek Shlomo* and Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) in *HaKsav VeHaKabbalah* take the opposite approach. They explain that *et* denotes a stronger and more equal “with” than *im* does. As Rabbi Pappenheim writes, the word *im* means “with” in a circumstantial way – they just happened to be “with” each other - while *et* denotes “with” in a more

deliberate and absolute way. As we shall see below, Rabbi Mecklenburg uses this approach in several different contexts (although, curiously, in his commentary to the story of Balaam, his approach actually mirrors the Vilna Gaon's).

For example, he uses this approach to explain why the Torah initially says that Lot came “with” Avraham to the Holy Land using an *et*-word, but later (after assorted differences of opinion with Avraham) says that Lot left and was no longer “with” Avraham using an *im*-word. Based on the above, Rabbi Mecklenburg explains that this word switch serves as the basis for the *Zohar*'s (Genesis 78b) contention that Lot originally attached himself to Avraham in order to learn from him (and become “equal” to him), but was ultimately unable to reach that goal.

Similarly, Eliezer arrived at Betuel's house with a whole entourage of men and camels to find a spouse for Yitzchak. Betuel brought water for washing Eliezer's feet and the feet of the men who were *itto*, “with him” (Gen. 24:32). However, later in the episode, when describing the banquet Rivka's family held before sending her off to marry Yitzchak, the Torah says that Eliezer and the men who were *imo* (“with him”) ate and drank (Gen. 24:54). To account for this switch from an *et*-word to an *im*-word, Rabbi Mecklenburg postulates that it reflects Rivka's family's attitude towards Eliezer and the men who came with him. Initially, Betuel had not realized that Eliezer was the main person charged with the bride-finding mission. He thought that Eliezer and all the

men with him were equally important. For this reason, the Torah first uses the word *itto* to describe the relationship between Eliezer and the other men who came with him. However, after Eliezer took charge and explained the situation it became clear that he was the leader of the group. Therefore, when describing his relationship to them in a subsequent passage, it says *imo*.

In this vein, Rabbi Mecklenburg also accounts for a similar word switch concerning Yaakov's burial. The Torah reports that Yosef led the funeral procession from Egypt to the Land of Canaan, “And all the servants of Pharaoh – the elders of his house – and the elders of the Land of Egypt ascended (to Canaan) with him (i.e. with Yosef)” (Gen. 50:7). The Hebrew term for “with him” used in this passage is *itto*. Several verses later the Torah says, “And also chariots and horse riders ascended (to Canaan) with him (Yosef)” (Gen. 50:9). This time, the Hebrew word used for “with him” is *imo*. Why does the Torah switch words? Rabbi Mecklenburg answers that the elders of Pharaoh's house and the Egyptian statesmen joined the funeral procession as equals or near-equals to Yosef. For this reason their relationship to him is indicated with the word *itto*, which implies equality. On the other hand, when mentioning that chariots and cavalry that also joined the procession, the word *imo* is used because they were much lower ranking than Yosef.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

A Minyan in Hebron

There were very few Jews in Hebron several centuries ago, and the only way they were able to have a minyan for Shabbat and Holiday services was through the arrival of some Jews from the surrounding villages. One year those Jews decided to go to Jerusalem for Yom Kippur, and the Hebron community was left with only nine men, with no tenth man in sight to complete the minyan for services.

As they wept over the likelihood of Yom Kippur without a minyan, an aged stranger appeared. He refused their offer of a pre-fast meal saying that he had already eaten one during his

travel. After a very special day of prayer, one of the community leaders invited the mysterious stranger to his home to break the fast. When they reached the house, however, the guest suddenly disappeared. After a futile search the disappointed host had a somewhat restless sleep during which the stranger appeared to him in a dream. He identified himself as the Patriarch Avraham, who saw how pained they were and joined them for one day as the tenth man in the city where he lived and was buried.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch
by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Poison of Pe'or: Glorifying Shamefulness

The sin of Pe'or recounted at the end of this week's *parsha* is a devastating end to the people's forty years sojourn in the wilderness. Whereas the sin of the golden calf claimed the life of 3,000, the sin of Pe'or claimed the lives of a staggering 24,000.

The sin of Pe'or comes on the heels of Bilaam's attempt to curse the people. But after all his valiant attempts, he concedes that his mouth has no power unless endowed so by G-d. Neither the sword of mighty kings like Sichon and Og, nor the curse from a foe from without has the power to harm Israel. Only Israel itself can bring misfortune upon itself by forsaking G-d and His Torah.

The "nation" (*am*) begins to forsake the faithfulness to moral duty and to give themselves up to the daughters of Moav. Whenever the term "*am*" is used, it is a derogatory term, contrasted with the use of "*Yisrael*" which denotes the Jewish People in its honorable and elevated state. After provoking them to sin, the daughters then invite them to their sacrificial feasts, and finally induce them to prostrate themselves before the Pe'or deities.

There were various *be'alim* – deified powers. The *baal tzafan* was the midnight god of the desert; the *baal ma'on*, the god of dwelling places; the *baal zevuv*, the god of decay, to whom they would turn in times of illness. And there was also the *baal p'eor*, a god of shamelessness. The worship of this god – by defecation – was to give brazen prominence to the most bestial aspects of human life. In the cult of Pe'or, licentiousness was not considered a sin, but an act of surrender and homage to the power of the gods. In the words of Hoshea the prophet, *they came to Baal Pe'or and dedicated themselves to shamefulness.*

The poison of Pe'or is illustrative of the type of Darwinism that has infected modern society. When man's descent to the level of beast is glorified, and man's Divinely-given nobility is stripped from him, man regards himself as merely a higher species of animal. Negating the shamefulness of Pe'or restores the fundamental conditions of man – his moral freedom and ensuing nobility.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 25:1-3

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