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CHUKAT AND BALAK OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Distressed by Relic-ing

“...if Balak will give me his houseful of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the Word of Hashem, my G-d, to do anything small or great.” (22:18)

“Relic-ing” means taking a pristine electric guitar and making it look like it’s been used on the road for fifteen years by some rock idol. The verb is to “relic.” Merriam Webster’s online dictionary lists it as a noun only, and not a verb, and I couldn’t find it anywhere online except in the context that I already had heard it.

The concept isn’t new. It always amazed me that the price of faded “stone washed” – and better still – torn Levis was far in excess of what a new pair would cost you. And further back still, “distressing” furniture to give the authentic patina of an antique heirloom has been going on for many years. (I wasn’t able to find out exactly how long.)

Now, apart from the obvious uses of “distressing” for counterfeiting and forgery, why would you want something to look used and half worn out, when you could have a spanking new version for a fraction of the price?

Advertising has long demonstrated that selling dreams sells soap. (The origin of the term “soap opera” comes from the days when soap companies sponsored radio dramas). When you buy a guitar relic-ed to look like Eric Clapton’s famous guitar, you’re not buying a guitar – you’re buying a dream. Buying dreams, however, is not merely a modern, Madison Avenue phenomenon.

“...if Balak will give me his houseful of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the Word of Hashem, my G-d, to do anything small or great.”

Throughout this week’s Torah portion, Bilaam repeatedly tells Balak that he cannot curse the Jewish People, for he who Hashem has blessed cannot be cursed by mortal man. Unperturbed by the facts, however, Balak lives out his own dream and invests Bilaam with a power that Bilaam himself tells Balak that he does not have. A dream is more powerful than a fact. A fact can be contradicted, but a dream can never be.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Shabbat 114-120

To Bless Or Not To Bless?

Rabbi Yossi said, “In all my days, I never went against the words of my friends. I know that I am not a kohen, but if they (my friends) would tell me to go up to *duchen* (for the *birkat kohanim* priestly blessing during the prayer service), I would go up to do so.”

The *birkat kohanim* Rabbi Yossi refers to is the mitzvah for the *kohanim* to say specific verses of blessing to the Jewish People. The Torah states that Hashem told Moshe to say to Aharon, “This is how you shall bless the Children of Israel, saying to them:

“May Hashem bless you and guard you.

May Hashem shine His countenance upon you and be gracious to you.

May Hashem turn His countenance toward you and grant you peace.” (Bamidbar 6:23-26)

Regarding Rabbi Yossi’s agreement to go up to *duchen* despite not being a *kohen*, Tosefot states the following: “The Ri (one of the famous *ba’alei Tosafot*) did not know what prohibition exists if a non-*kohen* goes up to *duchen*, if not for the matter of a ‘blessing in vain’ – since the Torah said for the *kohanim* to bless the Jewish People.” It seems at first glance that the Ri found it difficult to state what exact prohibition is transgressed by a non-*kohen* blessing the congregation with these three verses. And, it also seems that the only possible prohibition that might be involved is that of the non-*kohen* saying a blessing in vain.

However, the Tur and others ask what appears to be a very strong question on Tosefot. We know from elsewhere in *Shas* (Ketuvot 24a) that a non-*kohen* who “usurps” the priestly blessing transgresses a positive commandment of the Torah. The Torah states: “You will bless,” which is a mitzvah for the *kohanim* only. “You and not a non-*kohen*” is the way our Sages explain this prohibition. Therefore, it would appear that Rabbi Yossi would be transgressing a *mitzvat aseh* by going up to *duchen*. So, what in the world did the Ri mean in his “not knowing the prohibition”?

One approach to explain the words of Tosefot and the Ri’s apparent dilemma is to explain the scenario in a manner that is different than how we may have understood it at first glance. And, in doing so, the words of Tosefot and of the Ri will take on a new and different meaning, and will solve the “riddle” of the strong question asked by the Tur.

Who said that Rabbi Yossi would actually go up to *duchen* and say the blessings? Of course he would not, since in doing so he would be saying blessings in vain and also be transgressing a *mitzvat aseh*. Rather, the meaning of Rabbi Yossi’s willingness to honor the words of his friends “to go up to *duchen*” is, in fact, joining the *kohanim* where they stood, but without saying the blessings along with them. Is there any prohibition for a non-*kohen* to stand in the midst of the *kohanim*? Of course not!

In other words, Rabbi Yossi’s statement about “*duchen*” did not refer to the blessings of the *kohanim*, but rather to the elevated place where the *kohanim* would stand to bless the people. And now, based on this explanation of what Rabbi Yossi said he would do – and not do – we should be able to correctly understand the words of Tosefot and the Ri. “The Ri did not know what prohibition exists if a non-*kohen* goes up to *duchen*” does not refer to a non-*kohen* who is saying the blessings. The transgressions in that case are clear and known. Rather, Tosefot is saying that the Ri did not know why Rabbi Yossi needed to teach us that he would do as his friends requested, since there seems to be no prohibition for him to go up to the place of the *kohanim* to silently join them. (See the Maharsha in his Chiddushei Halachot to Shabbat 118b, which he refers to in his Chiddushei Aggadot there. Also see Aruch Hashulchan to Orach Chaim 128:6.)

Other answers are offered to explain why Rabbi Yossi would not be violating Torah Law in “going up to *duchen*” – even if he would say the three verses of blessings that the *kohanim* normally say. Perhaps most notable is the suggestion made by the Rema that there is a distinction in halacha between a non-*kohen* going up to join *kohanim* and saying the three verses of blessing – which would be permitted – and a non-*kohen* going up alone, which would be prohibited. Rabbi Yossi would be willing to join *kohanim* if his friends told him to do so, but would not go up to *duchen* if no *kohanim* were present. (See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 128:1 and Aruch Hashulchan 128:7 for a detailed explanation regarding this distinction.)

• *Shabbat 118b*

Q & A

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.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Anatomy of a Soul (Part 2 of 3)

In this 3-part mini-series we will discuss the five Hebrew words for the “soul.” In Part 1 we discussed the different etymologies of the words *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah*; in Part 2 we discuss here the functions of the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah*; and in Part 3 we will discuss the role of the *Chayah* and *Yechidah*, as well as their etymological basis. In doing so, we will better understand how these five words are not merely synonyms. Rather, each word carries its own unique meanings and implications.

Last week we began to explore the three Hebrew words *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah*. To summarize the findings of our discussion, we noted how these three words all refer to the “soul,” but a survey of their etymological bases shows that their primary meanings differ widely from one another. *Nefesh* is related to the concepts of “expansion” and “relaxation.” *Ruach* is related to the concepts of “air,” “wind,” and “smell.” And *Neshamah* is related to “breathing” and “abstraction.” In this installment we will concentrate on sharpening the differences between these three words by explaining how they focus on different aspects or components of the soul.

The Midrash (*Ber. Rabbah* 14:9) teaches that the soul has five names, each of which focuses on a different aspect. The word *Nefesh* refers to blood or bodily homeostasis as the lifeline of one’s physical existence (see Lev. 17:11, Deut. 12:23). *Ruach* refers to the wind-like property of the soul seamlessly flying up to the Heavens when one sleeps and descending back into one’s body as he awakens. Finally, the word *Neshamah* represents the sum total of an individual’s characteristics and personality – his personhood or unique individuality. The Midrash then continues to explain the last two terms, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*, which we will discuss next week. (Parenthetically, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky (1891-1986) said that a person’s *Neshamah* returns to the body in the morning only after he answers *Barchu* in the morning prayers.)

Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (1555-1631), known as the Maharsha, explains that these three elements represent three aspects of a person’s consciousness: the natural (*Nefesh*), the spiritual (*Ruach*), and the intellectual (*Neshamah*). The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) in *Yahel Ohr* similarly is quoted as saying that they correspond to the survival instinct (*Nefesh*), the emotional (*Ruach*), and the intellectual (*Neshamah*).

In a separate discussion, the Vilna Gaon writes that each of the three parts of the soul expresses itself both outwardly and inwardly. The *Neshamah* is manifest externally by way of a person’s facial countenance, and internally by a person’s age. The *Ruach* represents the drive for worldly, materialistic pursuits. This effort is manifest externally by a person going out and seeking profit, while it is present internally when a person schemes up plans for financial gain in his mind. Finally, the *Nefesh*, which directly powers life, is manifest externally by the physical desire for bodily pleasures, while it is also manifest internally by a metaphysical battery that charges a person and keeps him alive (which the Vilna Gaon identifies as one’s *Chayah*).

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (1749-1821) explains in *Nefesh HaChaim* (1:14) and *Ruach Chaim* (*Avot* 1:1) that these three aspects of the soul correspond to three different ways in which man’s will is manifest in the world. *Nefesh*

refers to man's *deeds*, which are the most physical and corporeal manifestations of his will (see Lev. 18:29, Num. 15:30). *Ruach* refers to man's *speech*, which is less physical than his actions but is still somewhat tangible (see II Sam. 23:2, Isa. 11:4). And *Neshamah* refers to man's *thoughts*, which are the most abstract manifestations of his will.

Ibn Ezra (in *Shittah Acheret* to Gen. 2:7), Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerona (1180-1263) and the Vilna Gaon both write that three essential organs in the body correspond to these three parts of the soul. They explain that the liver represents the *Nefesh's* desire for bodily pleasures, which Ibn Ezra specifically ties to the reproductive system. They also write that the heart represents the *Ruach's* desire for emotional pleasure (like wealth and honor), while the brain represents the *Neshamah's* yearning for religious/spiritual connection. (However, see Rashi to Ps. 25:1, 86:4, who writes that one's *Nefesh* is his "heart.")

Rabbeinu Yonah notes that the *Nefesh* and *Ruach* represent man's instinct for thriving and surviving in a physical or material way. He explains that these two aspects of the soul are not unique to mankind, but are also present in animals. However, the third aspect of man's soul – the *Neshamah*, or *Yechidah* – i.e. the intellectual dimension, is what sets man apart from the animal kingdom. Unlike Rabbeinu Yonah who understands that man actually has a *Nefesh* and *Ruach*, Radak (to Gen. 2:7) writes that the terms *Nefesh* and *Ruach* primarily apply to lower creatures and refer to man's *Neshamah* only in a borrowed sense.

When a man marries a woman, he undertakes the responsibility to provide her with three essentials: food, clothing, and conjugal intimacy (Ex. 21:11). Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575) writes that these three necessities correspond to the three parts of the soul that we have been discussing. Physical food corresponds to the *Nefesh*, which is the most physical aspect of one's soul and is sustained through material repast. Clothing corresponds to the *Ruach*, which is slightly less physical and can therefore be fueled only through sustenance that is more "abstract" (like the satisfaction of honor or wealth). Finally, conjugal intimacy corresponds to the *Neshamah*, which is the least physical part of the soul, energized by a totally transcendent Divine lifeline that is invisible to the eye – just like intimacy ought to be confined to the most private of settings, away from the prying eyes of others.

The Mishna (*Avot* 5:19) teaches that one who has a *Ruach Gavoha* ("high *Ruach*") and a *Nefesh Rachavah* ("wide *Nefesh*") is said to be a protégé of Balaam. As most commentators explain, *Ruach Gavoha* refers to somebody "haughty," and *Nefesh Rachavah* refers to one who is desirous and lustful. Indeed, Rashi (Ps. 27:12, Ecc. 6:7, and Iyov 6:11) ties the word *Nefesh* to one's desires, and Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* writes that because the *Nefesh* is the seat of desire, the Torah attributes man's sins to his *Nefesh* (Lev. 5:1, 5:15, 22:6).

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (1749-1821) clarifies in *Nefesh HaChaim* (1:15) that none of the words we are discussing refers to any perceivable, physical phenomena. Although the word *Neshamah* cognates with the word *neshimah* ("breathing"), it does not refer to man's breathing in the sense of his respiratory system. Instead, it refers to G-d "blowing" – so to speak – into man a spiritual life-force that keeps him alive.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin compares G-d powering man by His "breath" to a glassblower. Just as the glassblower exhales into a blowpipe, so too does Hashem begin this chain reaction that leads to life by "blowing" life into man – this first step is called *Neshamah* and is, so to speak, the closest to G-d. In the next stage, the air that the glassblower breathes out enters the blowpipe, which is like a pipe or conduit. This resembles the *Ruach*, which serves to bridge the *Neshamah* and the *Nefesh*. Finally, the glassblower's spurts of air reach their final destination in the molten glass that it shapes, resembling the *Nefesh*. In light of this parable, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin explains that because the *Nefesh* is the last stop for this influx of Divine "air," the verb cognates of *Nefesh* also refer to "resting" and "stopping."

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

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BLESSING SIX: BEING JEWISH — THE VERY HEIGHT OF FASHION

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who clothes the naked.”

The sixth blessing thanks G-d for having given us clothing. Its straightforward understanding is reminding us that, as human beings we have a higher spiritual calling than animals. G-d gives animals the entire physical wherewithal that they need to be able to exist in their natural habitats. They do not require clothing, as the essence of an animal is solely its physicality. Therefore, they do not need anything other than the “fur coats” (or whatever else each animal requires) that were given to them by G-d. Humans, on the other hand, are comprised of both a physical dimension – the body – and a spiritual dimension – the soul.

The Torah relates that when Adam and Eve were created, they were not given clothing by G-d. Our Sages teach that there was no need for clothes because the essence of Adam and Eve was their souls and not their bodies. Their spiritual beings defined who they were, and, in effect, their bodies served as the clothing to their souls. In their reality the body was the physical, less significant part of the person. Therefore, prior to their sinning, when they looked at each other they did not see an unclothed body. Rather, they saw a soul that was incased in a body.

One of the fateful consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin was that the pure and clearly discernable spirituality that shone from within them retreated to an inner, less accessible place. It withdrew to a place that was no longer obvious, as it had once been. With their sin, their whole perspective of the world changed. Adam and Eve, who had been deeply spiritual creations, became intensely physical ones instead. And when they now looked at each other, it was in a completely different way than before. They no longer saw a soul covered by

a body. Rather, they saw just the body. A body that was exposed and vulnerable. Due to their sin, the body had now moved to the fore of their consciousness, and by doing so had become their essence. The body had become something that was intensely intimate and that necessitated its being shielded from others. Thus, the first thing that G-d gave Adam and Eve after they sinned was clothing. Clothing that would both protect them from the elements and also protect their very being from being exposed to others.

Our blessing is thanking G-d for returning our dignity to us. By clothing us, G-d is declaring that we are not on the same spiritual level as the animals. We are human beings, who have been created in His image. We are human beings who have been placed here in this world to elevate ourselves, and, by doing so, to reveal even more holiness. Hence, we thank G-d for having lifted us out of the more animalistic aspect of who we are.

But there is another connotation which serves as the next step on our “Stairway to Heaven.” The previous blessing gave thanks to G-d for having given us the ability to see the incredible potential that exists in our lives. The capacity to perform the commandments. But it is not enough just to *be aware* of them. We must *live* them as well. It is as if, until this blessing, we are “bare” of that spiritual dimension. Bare of observing the commandments. But now, as we begin to fulfill them, we are clothing ourselves in the most luxurious and magnificent fabric of all.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

The Secret of Israel's Strength: Sexual Sanctity

Balak is intent on cursing the people. When he fails once, he tries and tries again. Each time, Balak arranged for a change in the vantage point to view Israel, and each time his efforts were foiled. Ultimately, he is forced to recognize that the people cannot be cursed, for they are a blessed nation. But from his attempts – specifically from the location of his attempts – we learn the great strengths of Israel which safeguard its blessings.

First Balak led Bilaam up to *Bamot Ba'al*, the place of the general Canaanite deity, the supreme “force of nature,” who holds sway over material prosperity. In choosing this place, Balak posed the question: *Where does this nation stand in relation to the favor of Divine material wealth? Perhaps I can stunt their growth from this direction.* But Bilaam's response indicates that Israel's strength is not its earthly element: *Who would count the earthly element of Yaakov? Who would count the births among Israel as one would count the animal young?* The fortune of other nations may depend on their number of bodies, but not so Israel. It is not their earthly element that determines their significance, and it is not their material conditions which lead to their success.

Then, Balak led Bilaam to peek at *Sdeh Tzofim*, the “Field of Seers and Watchmen,” the place symbolic of intellectual prowess. Here, Balak's second hypothesis is tested: *Perhaps this nation's strength derives from the intellectual elite in its midst – individuals who can look into the future and with its insight and magic divinations predict and shape events? Perhaps I can exploit their weak spot in this regard.* But the response is that *no divination is needed in Yaakov, nor magic in Israel.* These are only for the helpless who have no other resort. When Israel is in distress, it turns to G-d, and receives the clear word and direction of G-d.

It was thus clear to Balak that Israel is vulnerable neither from the standpoint of material prosperity nor from the standpoint of spiritual, intellectual might. But a nation may be blessed with an abundance of both and still meet its ruin if it shamefully surrenders to sensualism. This could render a people unworthy and incapable of receiving and preserving G-d's blessing.

Thus, the next location is *Baal Peor*, the place of deified shamefulness. This cult directs man to openly display his animal side before the false gods. Here Balak poses the question to Bilaam: *What is the attitude of this people toward modesty and sexual morality? Perhaps here I will find their weakness.* The response is an ode to the modesty of the Jewish People: *How good are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places O Israel!* That nation who encamps by paternal descent, because every child knows who is father is. How “good”! How very in accord with moral sanctity are these people! Their power of victory depends precisely on this moral aspect of family and sexual life.

While the blessing remains with them as long as they remain true to this moral sanctity, as soon as there is a breach – with the daughters of Midian at this very place, Baal Peor – Israel is vulnerable to defeat and destruction.

- Source: Commentary, Bamidbar 23:9 – 24:9

SEASONS - THEN AND NOW

by Rabbi Chaviv Danesh

Harmony of a Nation - Overcoming baseless hatred (Part 1)

The Gemara says that in every generation that the Beit Hamikdash is not rebuilt, it is as if it was destroyed in that generation (Yerushalmi, Yoma 1:1). This is because if we would do sincere *teshuva* for the sins that caused the Beit Hamikdash to be destroyed, then we would merit seeing it rebuilt. The fact that the Beit Hamikdash is not yet rebuilt is therefore testimony to the fact that we are continuing in the wrong ways that led to its destruction. In fact, the commentaries explain that the purpose of a fast day is to contemplate and repent for our sins and our ancestors' sins that were, and continue to be, the cause of tragedies (Rambam, Hilchot Taanit 5:1). Based on this, it is incumbent on us to understand, and thus fix, the actions that led to the Beit Hamikdash's destruction, and which continue to prevent it from being rebuilt.

Chazal tell us that the first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins: idolatry, illicit relations, and murder. The second Beit Hamikdash, though, was destroyed because of *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred). Since the first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of idolatry, illicit relations, and murder, and the second was destroyed because of baseless hatred, the Gemara concludes that baseless hatred is akin to the three cardinal sins (Yoma 9b). Let us try to understand the sin of baseless hatred and then analyze ways of fixing it.

In One's Heart

One important fact about the prohibition of baseless hatred is that one can transgress this commandment by just bearing hatred in one's heart, even without outwardly expressing it (Rambam Hilchot De'ot 6:5, Ramban on Vayikra 19:17). Nevertheless Chazal give us an "action-based parameter" that helps us determine if the level of dislike has reached the point of hatred, which is prohibited. Chazal tell us that if out of hatred one decides to purposely not talk to his fellow for three days, it is a sign that he has reached the level of hatred which is prohibited (see Sanhedrin 27b, Ahavat Yisrael, chapter 2).

The *poskim* also mention that if one wants, or takes pleasure in, the suffering or failure of his fellow, then it is also a sign that he has reached the forbidden level of hatred (Rema, Yoreh Deah 335:2, Orchot Tzadikim in *shaar sinah*, Torah Lishma 71). It is important to point out that even if one does not want – or take pleasure in – the suffering of his fellow, but at the same time does not want his fellow to succeed, even though it is not considered a transgression of hatred, it is still considered not fulfilling the mitzvah of "loving one's fellow like yourself" according to some opinions (see Ramban on Vayikra 19:18).

Why Is It So Bad?

With all of the above, we need to understand why *sinat chinam* is considered so grave, and why the Gemara equates it with the three cardinal sins. This is especially so because *sinat chinam* is a sin that one can commit even without doing an action, and it applies even when there is a relatively low level of hatred. Furthermore, the halacha states that one has to give up his life rather than transgress the three cardinal sins, but that this does not apply to *sinat chinam*. How then can the Gemara equate this seemingly minor transgression with the three cardinal sins? (See Shaarei Teshuva 3:202 with regards to *lashon hara*.)

The commentaries offer a few explanations for the severity of this sin:

1. Unlike the three cardinal sins, this sin of *sinat chinam* is "available" all the time and can be committed constantly, at every moment. Furthermore, since the hatred is in one's heart, at times it can continue on and on, because his fellow is not even aware of it to ask forgiveness, justify his actions or point out a misunderstanding which caused the hatred. As a result, people can sometimes go on hating for days, months and even years! Because of all this, unlike the three cardinal sins, *sinat chinam* can create a quantitative mountain of transgressions (see Shaarei Teshuva 3:203

with regards to *lashon hara*, Shaarei Kedusha part II *shaar* 4, Ahavat Yisrael, chapter 2).

2. Additionally, unlike the three cardinal sins, there is no real deterrent for this prohibition, because while, generally, people are embarrassed to sin due to simple peer pressure and fear other people's judgments, for *sinat chinam* there is no such deterrent because it is in the heart.

3. Unlike the three cardinal sins, which are viewed by even those who commit them as crude acts, *sinat chinam* is not looked at as being bad, since, after all, it's only a feeling in the heart. In fact, often the hater even considers himself righteous for keeping his hatred in his heart and not acting on it! Because of this, unlike the three cardinal sins, people don't feel the need to do *teshuva* for the sin of *sinat chinam*, thereby adding to its

severity (see Shaarei Teshuva 3:202, 205 with regards to *lashon hara*).

4. Furthermore, *sinat chinam* may lead to other serious transgressions, like causing fights, hurting through words or actions, embarrassing others in public, *lashon hara*, *rechilus*, *motzi shem ra*, revenge, bearing a grudge, causing damage to another, and, in extreme cases, even murder (see Rashi on Devarim 19:11, Shaarei Teshuva 3:39, Ahavat Yisrael, chapter 2).

Now that we know the severity of *sinat chinam*, we see how important it is to study this mitzvah in depth. In future issues we will iy"H address what baseless hatred is, since, after all, people usually have a reason for hating someone, and we will also iy"H go over ways of overcoming hatred, doing *teshuva* for it and preventing it from happening in the future.

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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 about 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 are issued 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 act halts the plague, but not before 24,000 people have died.

The hanhala, staff and students of Ohr Somayach, and especially the Ohrnet team, would like to take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Rosalie Moriah for over thirty years of dedication. We wish her a happy, healthy and meaningful retirement.

OHR LAGOLAH PRESENTS

FROM SIEGE & DESTRUCTION TO REBUILDING: OUTREACH AS INREACH

KIRUV SEMINAR

17TH OF TAMMUZ / JULY 9TH

ISRAEL: 10AM, 2PM, 6PM, 10PM

NY: 7AM, 11AM, 3PM, 7PM



Rav Nota
Schiller



Rav Yitzchak
Breitowitz



Rabbi Dovid
Gottlieb



Rav Zev
Leff



Rav Aharon
Feldman



Rav Yisroel
Reisman



Rav Lipa
Geldwerth



Rabbi Yitzchak
Greenblatt



Mr Harry
Rothenberg



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