

\* This week's speaker after davening in the Youth Minyan, will be Rafi Goodman.

\* There will be a shiur at Mark Franck's house (Gemorah Brachos) @ 3:55pm on Shabbos afternoon.

Katanga

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Caulfield  
Beth Hamedrash Weekly Newsletter

## D'var Torah

### “BILL V'S ABE”

by Rabbi Shraga Simmons

This week's Parsha describes the story of Bilaam - the greatest spiritual master of the non-Jewish world, hired to wage metaphysical warfare against the Jewish people. What distinguishes Bilaam from a man like Abraham who used his powers for the betterment of mankind? The Talmud identifies three key traits.

Someone who has a "good eye" will sincerely celebrate the success of others, while someone with an "evil eye" begrudges the success of others.

In Genesis 18:2, Abraham rushes to care for three nomadic strangers, as part of his constant striving to bring others closer to God. Contrast this with Bilaam, a hit-man hired to generate bad spiritual vibes against the Jews. Bilaam could have just as easily pursued victory by "blessing Moav;" instead he chooses the low road of cursing the Jews.

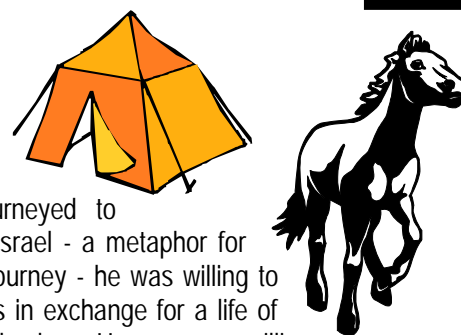
In practicality, it's a good idea to be careful about boasting of our own success - whether it be wealth or children or good fortune of any kind. Because the sad reality is that many people are jealous, and in order to feel better they will secretly wish for you to lose what you have. Which is not to say that we should be paranoid or reclusive. But it does make sense to be somewhat modest and discreet, and to be selective with whom we share personal information. Flaunting oneself simply invites the possibility of "evil eye."

The next trait that distinguishes Abraham from Bilaam is "humility versus arrogance."

As discussed in Parshat Bamidbar, the definition of "humility" is to know one's place in relation to others - particularly vis-a-vis God. Abraham personified humility because his mission in life was to teach that all power derives directly from God. Bilaam, meanwhile, went ahead and cursed the Jews, even though God clearly objected (Numbers 22:12). He saw God as a deity to be placated - or avoided altogether.

This relates to our own observance. When we encounter a mitzvah - whether it be giving charity, cleaning for Passover, or attending synagogue - do we view it as an obligation to be rid of, or as an opportunity to embrace?

The third trait is "contentedness versus greed."



When Abraham journeyed to the Land of Israel - a metaphor for his spiritual journey - he was willing to reject luxuries in exchange for a life of principles and values. He was even willing to be thrown into a fiery furnace, rather than forsake his moral integrity. Bilaam, on the other hand, was driven solely by the pursuit of riches. In fact, the Midrash even credits him with originating the concept of casinos and brothels. He was a free agent, a mercenary, a hired gun with no conscience. The very name Bilaam is a contraction of the words "Bi-lo Am," which means "without a nation." His loyalty was dictated by whoever offered the most money.

Practically, it is often difficult to discern someone's true intentions. Are they motivated to help mankind? Or are they self-serving and destructive? How do we discern?

The answer is found in our original source from Pirkei Avot, which distinguishes between the students of Abraham and the students of Bilaam. Why mention the "students?" Why not simply distinguish between Abraham and Bilaam themselves?

The answer is that the truest expression of a person's character is through the students they produce. That is why Judaism says that when choosing a rabbi, character is more important than scholarship. Maimonides, in his magnum opus "Mishneh Torah," expresses this by listing the laws of character behavior ("Hilchos Deyot") BEFORE the laws of Torah study. You can be talented and wise, but still end up like Bilaam - if you don't work to develop good character.

It is encouraging to note that in the final analysis, everything works out for the good. In Numbers 24:5, as Bilaam attempts to curse the Jews, what emerges is a beautiful blessing instead: "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places Israel." These are the first words that a Jew utters each morning when entering the synagogue to pray. For 3,000 years, Jews have used Bilaam's words to strengthen their commitment to God.

Perhaps this is the fulfillment of God's eternal promise to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you" (Genesis 12:3). May it always be so.

Thoughts for the week:

"There is none so wise as the experienced." (Akeidah, Sh: 14)

"Bitterness is a pill that we swallow and hope that it will kill the enemy."

"We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark. The real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light." (Plato)

"Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself." (Eleanor Roosevelt)

"The difference between a genius and a lunatic is that the genius has proof." (D. Bouchard)

Suggestions or comments regarding our website or newsletter? Email us - we would love to hear from you.

Other Developments

\* Last week the Shul celebrated the affruf (and subsequent marriage) of Jack & Sharona Zacks. Following the merged davening in the main minyan, the shule was treated to a wonderful kiddush.

\* Ezra May spoke last week at Shalosh Seudos explaining why the Torah, when introducing the Mitzvah of Para Adumah, uses the expression 'Zos Chukas HaTorah'. Ezra offered various possible explanations for the Para Adumah, the quintessential paradox, and then highlighted that in reality all Torah and Mitzvos are Chukim - without definitive rationale - and should be treated accordingly. Yasher Koach.

MAZAL TOV!

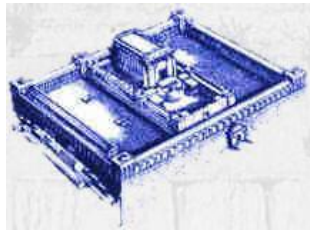
A A very hearty Mazal Tov to Jack and Sharona Zacks on the occasion of their wedding this past week.

A Katanga would like to wish the happy couple, their parents and extended families much naches and simchas in the future.

17th of Tammuz

by Rabbi Moshe Lazarus

The 17th of Tammuz (Sunday, 8th July) is a fast day commemorating the fall of Jerusalem, prior to the destruction of the Holy Temple. This also marks the beginning of a 3-week national period of mourning, leading up to Tisha B'Av.



Five great catastrophes occurred in Jewish history on the 17th of Tammuz:

- 1. Moses broke the tablets at Mount Sinai in response to the sin of the Golden Calf.
2. The daily offerings in the First Temple were suspended during the siege of Jerusalem, after the Kohanim could no longer obtain animals.
3. Jerusalem's walls were breached, prior to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.
4. Prior to the Great Revolt, the Roman general Apostamos burned a Torah scroll - setting a precedent for the horrifying burning of Jewish books throughout the centuries.
5. An idolatrous image was placed in the Sanctuary of the Holy Temple - a brazen act of blasphemy and desecration.

Announcements

- This Sunday (8th July) is the 17th of Tammuz. The fast begins at 5:51am on Sunday morning and ends at 5:43pm Sunday evening.

- The Three Weeks begin on Sunday with the 17 of Tammuz. See laws pertaining to this period above.

Parsha Overview - Balak

Balak, king of Moav, is in morbid fear of Bnei Yisrael. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilaam to curse them. First, Hashem appears to Bilaam and forbids him to go. But because Bilaam is so insistent, Hashem appears to him a second time and permits him to go. En route, an angel blocks Bilaam's donkey's path and instructs him regarding what he is permitted and forbidden to say. Bilaam attempts three times to curse, and three times a blessing issues instead. Bnei Yisrael begin sinning with the Moabite women and idols - and are punished with a plague. One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a Midianite princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This halts the plague, but not before 24,000 have died.

The Three Weeks

During the 3 weeks, various aspects of mourning are observed by the entire nation. We minimize joy and celebration. And, since the attribute of Divine judgement ("din") is acutely felt, we avoid potentially dangerous or risky endeavours.



Aspects of mourning observed during the Three Weeks:

- 1. No weddings are held. (However, engagement ceremonies are permissible.)
2. We do not listen to music.
3. We avoid all public celebrations - especially those which involve singing, dancing and musical accompaniment.
4. We avoid pleasure trips or other unusually entertaining activities.
5. No haircuts or shaving. (Fingernails may be clipped up until the week in which Tisha B'Av falls.)
6. We do not say the blessing "She-hechianu" on new food or clothes except on Shabbos.

- Katanga's weekly squash competition will not be held this Sunday (8th July) due to it being the 17th of Tammuz (fast day).

- Minyanim times for this coming week are: Mornings: 6:40am and 7am. Mincha at 4:45pm followed by a shiur and Ma'ariv.

See us on the web at; http://come.to/katanga

Shabbat Shalom & Gut Shabbos to all!

"The Editors"