

# THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel

Parshas Balak

July 19, 2019

## A Taste of Torah

### Raise A Dust

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Sometimes, you have get your hands dirty, and mitzvah performance is no exception. During the course of his curses-turned-blessings, Bilam wonders, "Who has counted the dust of Yaakov?" (Balak 23:10) Rashi, in one explanation of this strange statement, explains that the many mitzvos performed by the Jewish people with dust and the like are incalculable. Jews are enjoined, continues Rashi, not to plow the earth with two different types of animals, not to plant *kilayim* (different species together), to create and use the ashes of the *Parah Adumah* (Red Heifer), to use dirt in the process of testing the *sotah* (woman suspected of adultery), and so on. For the same price, Bilam could have mentioned the numerous mitzvos done with clothing, such as *shatnez*, the priestly garments, and the like. Or he could have discussed the many mitzvos performed with the plant and animal kingdom. But, strangely, Bilam chose to focus on dust and ashes. The Shem Mishmuel (Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain; 1855-1926) notes that when Balak initially summoned Bilam to curse the Jewish People, he exclaimed, "Behold, they have covered the surface of the earth!" (Balak 22:5) The Shem Mishmuel explains that this odd-sounding expression of fear reflects the underlying concern of Balak and the Moabites. Until this point in time, the Jewish Nation had lived a miraculous existence in the desert, not really part of this world. Now, though, they stood on the cusp of entering the Land of Canaan, and they would begin living

as part of the natural world again. Except for one thing. Rather than leaving their spiritual existence behind in the desert, the Jewish People would connect the natural world to that otherworldly existence. And the world would never be the same. Until this point, the nations of the world were happy to allow those who wanted to live in different plane of spirituality do so, while they could do as they pleased down on earth. But here, the dawn of a new world order was on the horizon, where even those on earth would need to connect to a higher spiritual reality. Such an existence was terrifying to the Moabites, and they were determined to prevent it from occurring. Balak therefore asked Bilam to ensure that the Jewish People would never make that leap. Stay in the desert and eat manna and worship G-d? No problem. Live as part of the regular, physical, world while simultaneously making that world holy and spiritual? No way. And this was expressed quite succinctly by Balak, "They have covered the surface of the earth!" The very earth - the lower, natural world - is going to be covered by this nation, as they descend from their heavenly existence to connect Heaven and Earth. When Bilam failed to utter the curses he so longed to invoke, the words he tried to say were turned from negative to positive. Thus, his attempt at disconnecting the Jewish People from the lower, physical world - the dust of the earth - turned into a statement of wonder at their ability to do just that - "Who has counted the dust of Yaakov?" - through the many mitzvos

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## Stories for the Soul

### Keep An Eye on the Apartment

A young man had a daily study session with Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (1910-1995). One day, the young man informed Rabbi Auerbach that he wouldn't be able to make it to their session the next morning because he and his wife had to check out an apartment down the street that they were seriously considering purchasing.

To the young man's surprise, Rabbi Auerbach asked if he, too, could come along to visit the apartment. Though he thought it quite odd that such a great man would want to see an apartment with him, the fellow couldn't refuse the offer.

Sure enough, the next morning Rabbi Auerbach arrived at the apartment. The young man, his wife, the real estate agent, and the great Torah sage toured the small apartment; Rabbi Auerbach remained silent the entire time.

After leaving the apartment, the still-surprised man walked Rabbi Auerbach back to his yeshiva, waiting to hear why he had wanted to come along. Finally, not able to contain his curiosity any longer he said, "Rebbi, it was an honor to have you join us this morning, but why?"

Rabbi Auerbach gave his legendary smile and said, "Since you are considering making your life and bringing up your children in that little apartment, I wanted to participate by injecting a little *ayin tov* (good eye, created by looking at things positively) into your future

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## Kollel Happenings

### SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention bachurim in Denver over the summer! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Denver Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursdays. Night seder begins at 8 pm, with ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the sederim. For further details, info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org).

### LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest. For more information, contact [rmh@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org).

### SFAS EMES: A PIERCING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

It is one of the most widely-studied works of our time. Sfias Emes gives us a glimpse into the infinite depths of Torah and Jewish thought. Kollel Scholar Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky is an expert in this great work, and a master in bringing its timeless lessons into daily life. Join Rabbi Karnowsky on Thursdays, 8:15-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St.

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** Generally, a *bracha* (blessing) is recited prior to the performance of a mitzvah. Sometimes, a *bracha* is recited after the performance of the mitzvah. Where do we find the recital of a *bracha* after a mitzva in addition to the *bracha* beforehand?

**A:** 1) One called to the Torah 2) Megillas Esther 3) Hallel 4) The Gemara (Nidda 51b) tells us of a custom to recite *lishmor chukav*, to keep His decrees, before removing tefillin, but the halacha does not follow this custom. According to Rabeinu Tam (quoted by Tosafos *ibid.*), this custom was specifically when removing tefillin prior to a time when wearing

tefillin would be prohibited; thus, it is a fulfillment of Hashem's command to remove them then. Interestingly, the Elya Rabba (Orach Chaim 25:25) advocates removing the tefillin on Rosh Chodesh while reciting the words *shenishmor chukecha*, that we may keep Your decrees (a line in the *Uva Letzion* prayer recited before *mussaf* on Rosh Chodesh), as it mirrors the abovementioned custom.

**This week's question:** The Shulchan Aruch rules (based on a Gemara) that one wearing tefillin may not remove them in the presence of his teacher. What other halacha is derived from this?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email [ryz@denverkollel.org](mailto:ryz@denverkollel.org).

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders Rabbi Eliezer Silver Part XI

Feeling that much greater opportunities for building Torah-true Judaism existed in Cincinnati, Rabbi Silver accepted the offer. The Agudas Harabanim held its convention in Cincinnati that year in honor of the city's new chief rabbi.

Cincinnati was a much larger community than Springfield; in fact, it was the largest Jewish community outside of the East Coast Jewish communities. Cincinnati was also the home of the Hebrew Union College, the central institution of the Reform movement.

## A Taste of Torah

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the Jewish People perform with that lowest part of the natural world, dust and ashes. True, there are many mitzvos done with other parts of the physical world, but nothing expresses making the lowly holy more than taking the lowest part of the physical

world, the very dust upon which we walk, and using it to serve G-d. G-d does not want us to sit on a mountaintop meditating. On the contrary, we must live normal lives, as part of this world, and sanctify even the most mundane elements of our lives.

## Stories for the Soul

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life and dwelling."

Our Sages teach us that Bilam was the master of *ayin hara*, evil eye, always perceiving things negatively and

infusing them with evil, while our forefather Avraham excelled in an *ayin tova*, looking at things in a positive way and creating goodness around him.