



TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshas Chukas-Balak

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A Taste of Torah Well-Placed Relationship

by Rabbi Aharon Wilen

The Talmud (Brachos 6b) says, “Anyone who sets a place for their prayers, the G-d of Avraham *Avinu* (our forefather Avraham) will be his help. Such a person should be eulogized as a pious student of Avraham.” The Talmud learns this idea from the story of the destruction of Sodom. Avraham, after praying unsuccessfully to save the people of Sodom, “arose early in the morning and returned to the place where he had stood before Hashem [in prayer].” (Bereishis 19:27) Here, teaches the Talmud, we find that Avraham returned to a previous place of prayer, and so someone who sets a place for prayer is a student of Avraham *Avinu*.

However, the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (5:22) teaches, “Those who have a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul are among the disciples of Avraham *Avinu*. Those who have an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul are among the disciples of the evil Bilam.” Setting a place for prayer is not mentioned among these traits.

Rabbi Yechiel Wolf of Beth Medrash Govoha explains as follows: Looking into this week’s Torah portion, we find Bilam, the Mishnah’s antithesis of Avraham *Avinu*. Bilam, looking for the place that would effectuate his curse upon the Jewish People, went to the Heights of Ba’al. Unable to pronounce his curse from there, he moved on to the Tzofim Field and after that to the top of Pe’or. His efforts ended with his submission to Hashem’s will that he bless the Jews instead.

This behavior is clearly the opposite

of Avraham (Genesis 19:27), who returned to the site of his previous prayer despite its initial failure. This incident gives us insight into the underlying theme of Bilam’s personality, in contrast to that of Avraham.

Bilam, as described by the Mishna, is arrogant and greedy. Understandably, Bilam’s relationship with Hashem was entirely self-serving and results-oriented. If I can’t get what I want over here, says Bilam, maybe I can get it over there, where the spiritual vibes are different. Hence, we find Bilam running around looking for a place where his curse would be allowed.

Avraham, on the other hand, exemplifies the humble spirit and meek soul. His relationship was altruistic, focused on building a relationship and on understanding Hashem’s will, rather than trying to bend it to his own. Avraham returned to the place of his prayer even after his plea on behalf of Sodom was turned down. The place of his prayer was the place where his understanding and acceptance of Hashem’s will deepened his relationship. Returning to that site demonstrated an interest in building a true relationship by continuing in a two-sided conversation. Thus, returning to one’s original place of prayer is an extension of Avraham’s other traits.

The Mabit (Rabbi Moshe ben Yosef di Trani; 1505-1585) in his work *Bais Elokim* (Ch. 4) adds another layer to this idea with a parable. Imagine a person who had the brief opportunity to shout a request to the king as the

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Stories for the Soul

Singing His Praises

During the first half of the 19th century, the Czarist government held meetings with a delegation of Jewish Torah leaders regarding different issues pertaining to the Jews under Russian rule. Rabbi Yitzchak of Volozhin (1780-1849), better known as Reb Itzele Volozhiner, was the leader of the delegation.

At one point, the education minister asked Reb Itzele to explain the verse in Psalms (117:1-2), “Praise Hashem, all of the nations, laud Him, all people, for His kindness has overwhelmed us.” Why would the other nations of the world praise Hashem for His kindness toward the Jewish People?

Reb Itzele replied that there were doubtless many plans and decrees plotted by the Russian government against its Jewish subjects. Yet many times, those nefarious schemes, despite the efforts invested in making them come to fruition, were thwarted. “Only you, the nations of the world, know of all the times that G-d impeded your plans against the Jewish People. Therefore, only you can praise Hashem for His kindness in protecting the Jewish People!”

In both Parshas Chukas and Parshas Balak, Hashem save the Jewish People from danger they were unaware of: First from an ambush by the Emorites, who hid in the mountains as the Jewish People passed between the cliffs, and a second time from the attempts of Balak to have Bilam curse the Jewish People.

Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit www.denverkollel.org, email rmh@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Parsha Quizzers

The six items below can be found in Rashi's commentary to this week's parsha. Can you figure out where they are? (Answers on bottom)

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| 1) Split in three | 4) Unite against a common enemy |
| 2) Lost rock | 5) A few days of calm |
| 3) Well informed | 6) Bedtime <i>shema</i> |

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Menashe ben Yisrael - Part XI

Spain had many territories in the New World, largely in Central and South America and the southern United States. Many Spanish Jews had fled to South America in the wake of the Spanish Expulsion. (Unfortunately, the Spanish Inquisition followed the Jews to the New World and forced the Jews there to hide their

religious practice yet again. In fact, the Inquisition was only formally abolished in the Americas in 1820; the last execution in Europe occurred in 1826.)

It is thus not surprising that Rabbi Menashe was ready to make the journey across the ocean to Brazil in order to secure a livelihood.

A Taste of Torah

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king's entourage passed by. Knowing that the king had heard his request, he made it his business to be in the exact same spot the next time the entourage passed. As the king rolled by, he noticed this subject of his whom he had encountered the day before and was reminded of his previous request.

In a similar way, when someone prays earnestly for something and subsequently returns to the place of his previous prayer, Hashem is reminded, so to speak, of the petitioner and his prayer, even without its being mentioned. This individual, by returning to the same spot, has created a relationship with the King of kings, and continues that relationship now. When Avraham returned to the place of his prayer, Hashem recalled his plea, as well. At the same time that Avraham returned

to that place, the angels were escorting Lot, his nephew, out of Sodom. It was the merit of Avraham's original prayer which was recalled at that very moment that saved Lot from destruction.

Bilam, on the other hand, teaches us not to run around searching for spirituality and connection to Hashem. Hashem is here, right where we seek Him. Whether or not we understand Hashem's will and whether or not we see the results we want, we need to realize that Hashem puts us exactly where He wants us to be. We do the best we can in our specific situation and don't try to run to "better" places where we think we will have greater success. Let us learn from Avraham, who returned to the place of his prayer even after his plea on behalf of Sodom was refused, and let us continue to perform Hashem's will.

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| 1) Split in three 19:9 s.v. <i>withni'tach</i> | 4) Unite against a common enemy 22:4 s.v. <i>el</i> |
| 2) Lost rock 20:10 s.v. <i>hamin</i> | 3) Well informed 21:16 s.v. <i>umisham</i> |
| 5) A few days of calm 23:8 s.v. <i>lo za'am ziknei</i> | 6) Bedtime <i>shema</i> 23:24 s.v. <i>lo yishkav</i> |

Parsha Quizzers - Answers