

בס"ד

ט"ז תמוז תש"פ

July 19th, 2019



Why does the opening *pasuk* of this week's parsha say "וירא בלק בן ציפור"¹ and not "וישמע בלק בן ציפור"? Seforno² explains that Balak saw that Bnei Yisrael won against Sichon and Og in an unconventional manner: they did not use a war trick or a special military scheme to become victorious. He knew that the only way to defeat the nation was to catch them making a mistake with one of their *middos*. Rav Mordechai Finkelman³ quotes a Medrash that Bnei Yisrael encountered the Midianite women because they were looking to buy their wives jewelry. Since they were told that these gifts were being sold in the tent, which happened to contain music, perfume, and immodestly dressed women, they immediately headed in that direction to purchase the presents. Balak took advantage of Bnei Yisrael's zeal to give honor to their wives, and used their enthusiasm of spousal honor as a gateway to make them cheat on their wives.

Is there a reason that there were specifically 24,000 casualties in Ba'al Pe'or incident? The *Rabbeinu Ephraim*⁴ is quoted as saying that that it is because in that incident, Bnei Yisrael served Avodah Zarah, the equivalent the whole Torah, which is comprised of 24 *sefarim*. It is interesting that there were twenty four thousand recorded fatalities in both the epidemic of Ba'al Pe'or as well as the epidemic that killed Rabbi Akiva's students.⁵ Perhaps there is a connection to be made here: the students of Rabbi Akiva died because they did not give enough respect to each other, and the men of Bnei Yisrael in the desert died because they had *too* much respect for others [their wives]. While the importance of *kavod habriyos* cannot possibly be understated (after all, *מר* says that it is pushes off a *לא תעשה* of a *דאורייתא* level,)⁶ one should nevertheless avoid trying to tip the scales with *too* much *kavod* (or any *middah* for that matter), lest something bad transpire as a result; as is true with most things in life, moderation is key. With the Three Weeks coming up, we should remember the importance of *bein adam l'chaveiro*, and continue to treat each other with a tremendous amount of respect so that we can preserve the incredible *אהבה* that Klal Yisrael is known for.

¹ במדבר כב: ב

² ספורנו במדבר כב: ב ד"ה וירא בלק

³ Rav Mordechai Finkelman is the Mashgiach of Yeshiva Ohr Hachaim in Kew Gardens Hills.

⁴ רבינו אפרים במדבר כה: ט

⁵ יבמות סב:

⁶ מגילה ב: