



Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy



שמע קולנו

“יתגבר כארי לעמוד בבוקר לעבודת בוראו”

Parshas Chukas - Balak

פרשת חקת - בלק

A Tale Of Two Rebbes

Rabbi Mayer Schiller

I have long had a particular fondness for *Parshas Balak*.

On a personal note, it was the *parsha* of which I read the *maftir* and *haftorah* in the Spring Valley Jewish Community Center on June 27th of 1964, thus symbolically effecting my *bar mitzvah*. The actual Hebrew date was a few weeks earlier. The JCC, being a Conservative synagogue, was overflowing with Hebrew school students being trained for their *bar mitzvahs*, as were all such Temples in the 1960s. Accordingly, there were often three or four *bar mitzvahs* a week, requiring multiple *haftorah* readings, the result being that one's real date was often delayed due to "*haftorah* overcrowding." Today, the JCC building, long since sold, barely houses a small segment of the Hasidic Pupa girls' school. History seldom follows obvious paths.

So, from the abortive attempts of Bila'am and Balak to do harm to the Jewish people, to Pinchas' violent response to illicit acts and idolatry, and concluding with Michah's cry that we "do justice, love mercy and in quiet hidden ways be together with thy G-d" (13:8), this was a *parsha* that, for over half a century, captured my fancy.

This personal link was further strengthened when, in 1967, a series of events and accompanying *divrei Torah* laid a foundation for many fundamental individual and communal reflections. The week of *Parshas Mishpatim* 5767 (February 3, 1967), on Friday night, the Skvera Rebbe, R. Yaakov Yoseph Twersky (1960 – 1968) z'l suffered a stroke. Although he largely continued his daily regimen after that, he refrained from "saying *Torah*" after the *Tisch* on Friday night, as had been his custom. Responding to the requests of his family, he replied that whenever the next family *simcha* would occur,

he would return to "saying *Torah*."

Several months later, on June 5th, the Six Day war began, culminating, thankfully, in a thorough Israeli victory, with the capture of the Old City, the entire West Bank, Gaza, Sinai, and the Golan Heights. With almost total unanimity, world Jewry rejoiced in this victory. Perhaps the only dissent from this dreamlike happiness was sounded by the extreme Israeli left (Mapam and Rakach [today Hadash]), who saw the territorial acquisitions as a mixed blessing to be quickly shed (Mapam) or opposed a Jewish national state altogether (Rakach).

Yet, there was yet another dissenting note heard here in America.

Let it be noted that even the American Council for Judaism, the remnant of old school Reform Rabbis, who rejected their movement's 1937 Columbus Platform which endorsed, for the first time in Reform Jewish history, Zionism, became reconciled to the state of Israel after the Six Day War. Yes, their founder, Rabbi Elmer Berger (1908 - 1998) did then break with the ACJ to found AJAZ [American Jewish Alternative to Zionism, 1968 - 1988] but this is as far as our digression into the survivors of Classical Reform will go for the moment

The other dissenting voice emanated from 500 and 550 Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn, New York. Those addresses were of the home and the *shul* of the Satmar Rov, R. Yoel Teitelbaum (1887 - 1979). His position, stated clearly in many *seforim* and even at the height of the post Six Day War general euphoria, was that Zionism was a grave doctrinal error and a denial of exile and redemption as he understood them. It therefore followed for him that those who supported Zionism were either evil or brainwashed by evil, and, accordingly, all the wars waged in its name were needless bloodshed.

For our purposes, there is no need now to dwell on unpacking this belief system. We need only zero in on the Satmar Rov's frequent use of very strong language to condemn those he disagreed with. And, as a corollary of this, he had to state that the *derech* of the *Baal Shem Tov* has been "completely forgotten in our times." The reason for this was that "there are those who claim that the Baal Shem Tov advocated *limmud zechus* (seeking and teaching the merits) of the 'wicked Zionists'."

These two points were often a source of powerful disagreement between the Satmar Rov and those other *Chasidic Rebbes* who, firmly rooted in Chasidism, taught a) the eternity of the *Baal Shem's* teaching, in general, and b) a demand for a wide reaching *ahavas Yisroel* and *limmud zechus* for every Jew.

With this background in hand, we now arrive at *Parshas Balak* in New Square, July 14th, 1967, where the Skvera Rebbe, having now had a granddaughter, made good on his promise to his family and resumed his Friday night *Torah* presentations.

Balak was also the second week after the Satmar Rov concluded his four weeks of *Shaloshudes Torah*, which had begun in the immediate aftermath of the Six Day war, at which he denounced, in harsh terms, the Zionists and those who did not actively oppose them (at that time most of the *Chareidi* world) .

And so, that Friday night, the Skvera Rebbe began by saying, "Do I say anything of my own? Everything I say is from the earlier (*Chasidic*) Masters." He then proceeded to simply quote, in a voice of great emotion, a lengthy list of *Chasidic Torah* and tales which emphasized the need to love every Jew, and to seek to find the merits even of those far from *Torah*. He quoted many *Chasidic*

sources to indicate the requirement for a true *tzaddik* to do this, the need to link a sense of one's own humility with *limmud zechus* and, lastly, that this was the true path of the Baal Shem Tov.

He said nothing explicitly about Satmar. But, never again did he present a similar catalog of sources on this subject. And, also never again did he reach the level of emotion in his *Torah* offerings.

The following are among the "*Torahs*" he said that evening:

Kedushas Levi (R. Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev [1740 - 1809])

"He observes no falsehood in *Yaakov* and saw no vexation in Israel, *Hashem* his G-d is with him and the shout of *Hashem* his G-d is with him" (*Bamidbar* 23:22). The Holy One, Blessed Be He, does not look upon the sins of *Yisroel* at all. And He does not wish that they should bring before Him the sins which the *Bnei Yisroel* perform. Rather, only when he (*Yaakov*) performs *mitzvos* and good deeds, then *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* will look towards him, rejoice in him, and attach Himself to them (*Klal Yisrael*). The *teruah* can also be translated as dividing; in that *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* divides the actions of men into two. However, He links Himself only to the *mitzvos*. He doesn't desire to look at sins and removes Himself from them. His only desire is to see our *mitzvos*.

Divrei Emes (Chozeh of Lublin, Reb Yaakov Yitzchak, [1745 - 1815])

"If one sees no evil and sin by others, it is because of his great *ahavas Hashem*. When a man has love of *Hashem* (because of his own humility, and sees all the good that he has received even though he is not deserving of receiving it), he will therefore inevitably love the Jewish people, since a person who loves the Father loves His children. And he will see no evil, since such love covers all

A Short Vort

Akiva Kra (21)

In this week's *parsha*, the Jews see Bila'am come and bless them. What the Jews didn't see, was everything that happened behind the scenes. This is the first time that the *Torah* tells us about a miracle that the Jews never knew about. They had no idea that many nations had gotten together to try and hire Bila'am to curse them and bring their demise.

So too, we should appreciate everything that is happening to us, because it could be worse. We might be annoyed that we're stuck in traffic, but maybe had we gotten somewhere quicker a speeding car would've crashed into us. If our phone died when we were on an important call, maybe the person on the other end was recording the call and would release out of context quotes to ruin our public image.

We will never know how many times *Hashem* has prevented something bad from happening to us, but we can always say thank you. All the Jews saw was a man with a donkey bless them. They had no idea what led up to that. If something ever seems bad, remember that we lack context for events in our lives, and things may have turned out way worse otherwise.

sin. This is particularly true when he knows his own faults, since then he will not be quick to see the faults of others. A man who lives humbly with G-d sees no evil."

Orach LeChaim (R. Avroham Chaim of Zlottshov [1750 - 1816])

"There are many opinions as to why Moshe was punished by the *mei merivah*. Rashi says it is because Moshe hit the stone and didn't speak to it. The Ramban says it is because he called the Jewish people "quarrelers." There is a *mesorah* from the *Baal Shem Tov* that all rebuke must be done in a spirit of love; only then it will be accepted. Since Moshe did not reprove the people in this fashion, but instead called them "*morim*" (rebels), they didn't listen. Therefore, he resorted to striking the rock. Would he have used love instead of anger, they would have repented, and the stone would have immediately yielded water."

Meor Aynaim (R Menachem Nachum of Tschernobil [1730 - 1787])

"*Chazal* tell us "*ein mazel liyisroel*" (lit. "there is no horoscope for *Yisroel*). This can be read in a different way: someone who considers himself to be "ayin" (humble, "nothing") can do any good *mazel* for the Jewish people."

There were many more such *verter* that Friday night, but let us conclude with the story the Rebbe told towards the end of his presentation:

It is said that R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev never came to the *hakafos* on *Simchas Torah* until he had figured that every Jew assembled in the *shul* was, in some way, more advanced than he was spiritually. One year, a well known evildoer was at the *hakafos*, and the *Rov* was very late in coming to *davening*. Finally, he arrived at the *hakafos*, after many hours of secluded pondering. He later told those closest to him that the merit he had discovered for that Jew was as follows: "I said to myself that, if I were to be as far removed from Jewishness as this fellow was, I probably would not come to *hakafos* in the first place! This was the *zechus* he had over me."

I always thought that the *Rebbe* might have been referencing those Jews who, although far from *Torah*, still sacrificed, in life and death, for the Jewish people and their people's link to the land. They, so to speak, "came to the *hakafos*."

In the early days of New Square, a group of non-*frum* Jews came to the *hakafos* on *Simchas Torah*. They had driven into the village. When asked

whether they should be given *aliyos*, the *Rebbe* replied, "When *Moshiach* will come, he will have to search the land to find these types of Jews, and this group has actually come to us! Of course, give them *aliyos*!"

Obviously, there is much to delve into regarding the *mitzvos* of *yishuv* and *kibbush ha'aretz* today, about the *halachic* status of *tinok shenishba* and the role of all of *klal Yisrael* in *yishuv haaretz*. All profound subjects. But for the present, I offer the foregoing as a brief chapter in *Chasidic* history and the teachings of the *Baal Shem Tov*.

G-d willing, next week we will probe some of these other questions from an *halachic* standpoint. Pinchas was the forerunner of zealotry. When is that meritorious? When, perhaps, is it wrong?

Tumah and Kaparah: A Positive Light on a Negative Mitzvah

Aryeh Kolber (21)

The *Torah* is not a story book; it's not a bedtime story that we tell our children to help them fall asleep. Rather, it is a guidebook for life. Through reading these stories, we learn how to live. Not only do the stories themselves have significance, but their placement in relation to other stories is significant as well. In the beginning of this week's *parsha*, *Parshas Chukas*, the *Torah* deals with the laws of the *parah adumah*, the red heifer which was used to purify someone that had become impure due to either touching or being around a dead body, and then continues with the death of *Miriam*. Why is the story of the death of *Miriam* juxtaposed to the story of *parah adumah*?

Rashi (*Bamidbar* 20:1, d"h "*vatamas sham Miriam*") answers our question by quoting the *Gemara* (*Moed Katan* 28a) which explains that this connection teaches us that just like a *korban* atones for our sins, so too does the death of a *tzaddik* atone for our sins. What is the significance of the death of a *tzaddik*; why does it bring *kaparah*? Additionally, we know that the *parah adumah* wasn't a normal *korban*, in the sense that it made people *tahor* rather than atoning for their sins like a *chata'as* or *olah*. So why is the death of a *tzaddik*, which atones for sins, compared to the *parah adumah*, which makes people *tahor*? Rashi seems to be equating two different things!

After every death, there are mourners, and the most palpable emotion is one of loss. By a *tzaddik*, that emotion is felt by the entire community, or occasionally, by Jews across the world. A

death opens a void that is felt by all who are affected by it. In some cases, this void can be filled. One example of this is *yibum*, where a man needs to marry his late brother's wife if they didn't have children. The *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 51a) mentions that filling this void is called "filling the place of his forefathers", as we see when Rabbi Yishmael took over his father's, Rabbi Yosi's, place in leadership of the community, and Rabbi Yehudah *Hanasi* deferred to him. Rav Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz explains that Rabbi Yehudah deferred because a child can fill the void left behind by a parent. Obviously, everyone is special and unique, and their unique niche can never truly be filled, but to an extent, it is possible. The phrase "*bishvili nivra haolam*" ("The whole was created for *only* me") means that we each have our own purpose on Earth, and that purpose cannot be fulfilled by any other person. However, the void left behind by the loss of this person can still be filled somewhat. However, by a *tzaddik*, this is not the case. Their void can never be filled, even by a child who is filled with *yiras shamayim* and a vast knowledge of *Torah*. These *tzaddikim*, more of a phenomenon than just a righteous person, have a personality that is one-of-a-kind, and therefore leave behind a spiritual vacuum that can never be filled. Moshe and Miriam are definitely examples of this, since they didn't have children, but even Aharon, who had sons that took over the *kehuna*, left behind an unfillable gap in *Klal Yisroel*.

As we mentioned before, the death of a *tzaddik* is a *kaparah* for the sins of that generation. In addition to the *kaparah*, death also results in a bout of *tumah*. A very basic way of understanding *tumah* and *taharah* is that as an object gets closer to death, it also gets closer to *tumah*, and vice versa. This is easily seen in the different levels of *tumah*. A *niddah* or *ba'al ker*, two states which occur from a loss of potential life, are only *tamei* for about a week, but a person that touches a dead body, something that was completely alive, is *tamei* until he gets sprinkled with the *parah adumah* water. However, we know that a woman is *tamei* after childbirth, which is the epitome of life, the opposite of death. With that in mind, we can tweak our definition to say that *tumah* is the transition from life to death, or from "not-life" to life. This is a transition from a body having a *neschama* to the body not having a *neschama*. At this point, *tumah* and *kaparah* intersect. They are both changes from one extreme to the other, and they are influenced by the extreme change of life to death. When a person passes away, their *neschama* leaves them and leaves behind *tumah*. This road is a two way street, meaning that death also generates a purity in the form of *kaparah*. *Misas Beis Din* (death by

5 Minute Lomdus

Shimi Kaufman (21)

Q. The *Imrei Binah* (*Orach Chaim* 1) asks a question on the Mordechai, who quotes the *shita* of Rabbeinu Yonah (as quoted in *Beis Yosef Orach Chaim* 13) that if one does not have *tzitzis* on a four-cornered garment, he is allowed to wear said garment on *Shabbos*. This is because there is not technically a prohibition against wearing a four-cornered garment without *tzitzis*; rather, there is a positive commandment to have *tzitzis* onto any four-cornered garment which one wears. Since tying *tzitzis* on *Shabbos* would be in violation of the *melacha* of *kosher* (tying), he is unable to perform this *mitzvah*, as he is an *ones* (someone who cannot fulfil a *mitzvah* due to outside circumstances). Since an *ones* is *patur* from *mitzvos*, one is *patur* from having *tzitzis* on his garment on *Shabbos*. The Taz (*Orach Chaim* 14:5) goes a step further, and writes that even *dirabanan*, there is no requirement to have *tzitzis* on *Shabbos* (the *Magen Avraham* writes that there is a *dirabanan* prohibition, and this is what we follow in practice). The *Imrei Binah* asked that if there truly is no requirement to wear *tzitzis* on *Shabbos* at all, then how can one make the *bracha* of "*vitzivanu lihisatef bitzitzis*" (you commanded us to wrap ourselves in *tzitzis*) when donning their *tallis* on *Shabbos* morning? How can we say that *Hashem* commanded us to do something which there is no requirement to do?

A. This question only exists if we assume that the principle of *ones rachmana patrei* (*Hashem* forgives an *ones*) means that an *ones* is completely absolved of any *chiyuv* to perform the *mitzvah*. However, we can suggest that this rule only teaches that an *ones* does not receive any punishment for not doing the *mitzvah* in question. However, the *chiyuv* would still be in existence! For this reason, even the Taz would agree that we make the *bracha* of *lihisatef bitzitzis* on *Shabbos*.

-Source: *Mishmeres Chaim Chelek I*, "Tzitzis" 2

Jewish court) is a prime example of this. The reason for the death is to act as a *kaparah*, despite it making its surroundings *tamei*. Just like the greater the change from life to death something is, the more *tamei* it is, the more someone was living, the greater their impression on the world is. A *tzaddik* is living life to the fullest, so their death leaves a greater impression, also causing a greater *kaparah*.

One of the most well known *chukim* in the *Torah* is the *chok* of *parah adumah*. It's confusing to us on many levels. One difficult point is that a *tamei meis* must be purified with something that is itself *tamei*. The *parah adumah* mixture mainly consists of the

ashes of a dead cow. We would expect that to make someone *tahor*, they need to be sprinkled by a *tahor* substance, such as a *mikvah*. This difficulty is similar to the paradoxical nature of the death of a *tzaddik*. The death of anyone, especially a *tzaddik*, is tragic, but the death causes a positive event as well, a *kaparah*. The death is sad and causes a tremendous loss, but like the *tamei* ashes of *parah adumah*, it brings with it a bout of purity and holiness.

Miriam's death constituted a shift in reality. Her loss was unlike any other, and nobody could fill the gap she left behind. She, like the *parah adumah*, changed the world. She brought a *kaparah* and purity to the world, just as the *parah adumah* brought a *tahara* to the world. Even in her death, there was life and purity reborn. In the darkest times in our lives, we must remember that every cloud has a silver lining, and that everything negative brings something positive in the future.

The Logic Of The Law

Zack Steiner (17)

Yale Professor of Law Tom R. Tyler, in his book *Why Do People Obey the Law* (p. 31), states that people typically adhere to the law because they believe it to be legitimate and logical. If a law were to be illogical and illegitimate, studies show that people would be less inclined to comply with it. This idea makes sense to us; after all, rules are there for a reason, so if people understand that reason, they are more likely to listen to the rule. However, despite this, Judaism prescribes a different view on its law than the rest of the world.

This week's *parsha* introduces us to the laws of *tuma'as meis*, spiritual impurity which can be imparted to a person through contact with a corpse. One aspect of *tuma'as meis* is the law of *tuma'as ohel*, the ability to become impure merely by entering the same room as a dead body. The *halacha* is that only a Jewish body spiritually contaminates a person through *tuma'as ohel*; while a non-Jewish body does not (Rambam, *Hilchos Tuma'as Meis* 1:13). This seemingly makes no sense. If a dead body is *metamei*, what difference does it make if the body is that of a Jewish person or a non-Jewish person? Ostensibly, both would make a person *tamei*!

The *Ohr Hachaim* (*Bamidbar* 19:2 *d"h vizo chukas*) gives us a beautiful insight into why the *halacha* is this way, and in doing so, gives us a new understanding of the whole concept of *halacha*. He gives a *ma-shal* (parable): if a person were to fill one jar with honey and one with garbage, and put them both outside, it's clear that the one with honey would attract more insects. The same is true with a Jewish corpse and a non-Jewish corpse. A non-Jewish corpse is not filled

with anything—it did not have the opportunity to saturate itself with “honey [and] drippings of the comb” (*Tehillim* 19:11). The Jew, however, spent his whole life filling himself with *Torah* and *mitzvos*, the sweetest delights known to man. Therefore, the forces of impurity are more drawn to the Jewish body than to the non-Jewish body. Those forces want the sweetness of *avodas Hashem*, and it is exposure to those forces which renders a person impure.

This interpretation made me ask a very simple question: if the *kochos chitzonim* (evil forces), view the *Torah* and *mitzvos* as delicacies and delights, why don't I see them like that? Oftentimes, it's very easy to get caught up in the dos and don'ts of *halacha*, the yes and no's, the permitted and prohibited. We have to take the time to stop and smell the roses, to realize the tremendous opportunity we have for self-improvement and authentic joy in this world through observance of the *mitzvos*. In the words of the Ramchal (*Da'as Tevunos* 40) "doing *mitzvos* shines on a person the hidden light, until the point where a person perfects himself to the greatest extent possible, when he will shine with light of life." In the realm of *halacha*, to live is to act. The *Gemara* (*Brachos* 18a) tells us that the righteous, even when they are dead, are called living, for they incessantly sated themselves with the nectar of *avodas Hashem*, which is the true life. One is only fully alive if he is involved fully in the service of God. The *Torah* and *mitzvos* are not merely guidelines and prohibitions. Rather, they are 613 pieces of advice on how to perfect ourselves and bring ourselves closer to God (*Zohar*, *Shemos* 82:2). We have 613 opportunities, not 613 restraints.

This is the Jewish view on the law. We do not view the *Torah* as restrictions which we are to follow because they make sense. Rather, we do the *mitzvos* because they are the opportunities which *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* provided us to experience authentic joy in this world. This is why we don't need to know reasons for the *halachos*; if *Hashem* told us to do it, it must be to our spiritual benefit. We do not question the ashes of a red cow any more than we do the most technical financial cases. If we work on ourselves to see the *mitzvos* in this light, we will be *zoche* to an authentic *avodas Hashem* done for the right reasons!

The Importance of Inspiration

Donny Book (22)

This week's *parsha* is packed. Miriam dies, Moshe and Aharon sin with the rock and are told they will be unable to enter *Eretz Yisroel*, and then Aharon dies as well. While this is all happening, we are introduced to the *parah adumah*, the red cow whose ashes are used to purify a *tamei* person. This *mitzvah* is a *chok*, a *mitzvah* with no sound moral reasoning besides the fact that *Hashem* said that it's something that we

have to do. While the story starting with the death of Miriam and ending with the death of Aharon can largely be chalked up to cause and effect, the idea of *parah adumah* doesn't really fit into the picture. So what exactly is going here?

The breakdown of the story is that Miriam died, causing the miraculous well of water that the people received in the desert in her *zechus* to dry up. *Hashem* then commands Moshe and Aharon to speak to the rock and convince it to bring forth water. There was confusion at the scene, and instead of speaking to it, Moshe hit the rock, which still caused the water to begin flowing.. Despite the fact that the sin seems to be that Moshe and Aharon didn't listen to *Hashem*, the *pesukim* actually seem to suggest something entirely different. The *possuk* records *Hashem's* rebuke of Moshe and Aharon: "because you did not trust Me enough to sanctify Me before Bnei Yisroel, you shall not lead this people into the land I have given them." Rav Moshe Krieger suggests that in order to understand the error, we first have to understand what Moshe was expected to say to the rock. He quotes the *Yalkut Shimoni*, which says that Moshe was supposed to teach the rock a single piece of *Torah*. Rav Yechiel Michel Feinstein explains that there is in fact a very strong connection between teaching *Torah* to the masses and bringing forth water. *Chovos Halevavos* writes that the entire natural world exists only to serve the *Torah*, just as a slave exists to serve his master. By teaching *Torah* to the nation in the presence of the rock, he explains, the power of the entire nation's learning would have been enough to convince the rock to help quench the thirst of those learning the *Torah*. The *Netziv*, however, says that *Hashem's* command to talk to the rock was actually meant to tell Moshe to lead the nation in prayer. Prayer also has the ability to direct the power of the natural world. Moshe's punishment was for the failure of teaching either of these lessons.

Rashi defines a *chok* as a decree of the King that has no logic. To an onlooker the purification process looks very strange and ritualistic. Why have something like this? Rav Moshe Krieger explains that in order to truly connect to *Hashem*, we must understand that we will never truly grasp the loftiness of *mitzvos*. *Mitzvos* are deeper than we can fathom, and we cannot make our fulfillment of them contingent on our superficial understanding. Instead, we must strive to fulfill the will of *Hashem* simply because it is His will. While inspirational ideas can and should be used to bolster our *avodah*, a lack of these emotions does not invalidate the service.

The *Gemara (Bava Basra 121a)* teaches that when the giant Sichon went to conquer Moav, he made a grave error that we are often prone to as well. He took over thinking that he was building his kingdom,

but he was merely a stepping stone for *Bnei Yisroel* to take both lands away from him at once. Moshe thought he was leading the people through the desert to take them into the land, but that turned out not to be his fate. Similarly, we may work to achieve things that turn out to be illusions in the end. The way we avoid this is through *cheshbon hanefesh*, self introspection. The *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* states that when we do *cheshbon hanefesh*, we should compare the reward of a *mitzvah* with what we will be losing when we perform it, and the enjoyment of a sin against its impending consequences. If, as we stated, it is not possible to know the weight of *mitzvos* or *aveiros*, then how can one make such a calculation? The Slonimer Rebbe explains that while we may not be able to make an exact *cheshbon*, we at least know that no matter how much enjoyment we may derive from a particular sin, that pleasure is only limited to this world. *Mitzvos* create an eternal and infinite bond between us and *Hashem*. The Ramchal writes in *Mesilas Yesharim* that it is very difficult to strive toward perfection without *cheshbon hanefesh*. If we do not give thought to our issues and challenges we can certainly never address them. It is the greatest defense against the Yetzer Hara, and allows us to focus and plan to reach our goals.

Torah and *Tefilah* are great vehicles for introspection. It is when we relate to something that is greater than us that we take a good hard look in the mirror to see what we can fix. *Hashem* not only wants us to improve ourselves, but help other people by proving to be role models. This is how the *parah adumah* relates to our story. Where Moshe failed was in recognizing that, despite the message of the *parah adumah* that we needn't understand the *mitzvos* we do, there is still tremendous value in inspiration and *cheshbon*. Moshe assumed that hitting the rock rather than using the opportunity to inspire the people would be just as effective. For this reason, *Hashem* rebuked Moshe for not sanctifying His name through words of inspiration and encouragement. We must remember that we are also meant to feel inspired by the *mitzvos* we do, and to use that inspiration to affect others as well.

White Cow, Black Cow, Spotted Cow... Red Cow?

Dori Goldberg (23)

The Ramban famously points out that a *korban* is meant to stand in the place of the person who is bringing the *korban*. This comment from the Ramban highlights that a person who is giving a *korban* is meant to feel as though they are meant to be on the altar of *Hashem* themselves. It also highlights that the situation of the *korban* can be compared to the situation of the person. The Abarbanel takes this a step further in his discussion of the *parah adumah* in this week's *parsha*. He notes that in contrast to the *par*

hachata'as of the *kohen* on *Yom Kippur*, which is brought in the *Beis Hamikdash*, the *parah adumah* is *shechted* outside of the *machaneh*. The Arbarbanel explains that this is meant to represent the *tameh* people being purified by the *parah adumah*, who are unable to enter the camp until they complete the purification process. Like the Ramban, the Arbarbanel is establishing a parallel between the individual who is giving the *korban*, and the *korban* itself.

This could be one way of understanding the idea that *parah adumah* is a *chok*. *Parah adumah* is a *chok* because it is *mitameh* the *tehorim* and *mitaher* the *timeim*. Hashem created this *korban* at the antithesis of the normal *korban* of the *Beis Hamikdash*, one that allows space for *tumah* in order to be *mitaher* it, and drags the *tahor* outside of the *machaneh*. The message of the Arbarbanel is striking. While the *Beis Hamikdash* is exclusively for people who are *tahor*, the *Torah* allows for the *parah adumah* to be offered outside of the *Beis Hamikdash*, to teach us that *Hashem* is still with us, and there is still room to become *tahor* again,. The *parah adumah* serves as a parallel for the *tamei* person -- even when we find ourselves outside the *machaneh* of *Hashem*, we can always find a way back.

"I'm Saving Orthodoxy!"

Shimi Kaufman (21)

The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 22b) tells us that when King Yanai was on his deathbed, he told his wife not to fear from the *Perushim* (people who hated Yanai for murdering *talmidei chachomim*), since they were righteous, nor from the non-*Perushim* (ie. the *Tzedokim*), since they loved King Yannai. Rather, Yannai told his wife to beware of those hypocrites who appear to be *Perushim*, but are not truly sincere. These people, said King Yannai, are "*oseh ma'aseh kizimri ubikesh scharo kipinchas*" - they do the actions of Zimri, and expect the reward of Pinchas.

This phrase is a reference to this week's *parsha*, which concludes with the story of Zimri and Pinchas. Zimri was the *nasi* of *Shevet Shimon* who sinned openly with a Midyanite woman by the name of Kuzbi. *Chazal* tell us that the members of *Shevet Shimon* brought Kuzbi before Moshe *Rabbeinu* to ask if she was permitted to marry. Moshe responded that she was not, which prompted the members of the tribe to ask how Moshe himself could have married his own wife, Tzipporah, who was originally from Midyan as well. Moshe did not respond, but rather began to cry. Only Pinchas, grandson of Aharon *Hakohen*, recalled that the *halacha* in this case is that a zealot may arise and kill the sinners (see *Sanhedrin* 73a). Moshe told Pinchas that because he had remembered the *halacha*, he should be the one to carry it out, and so he did, cutting down Zimri and Kuzbi in one strike.

In light of the details of the story, Yannai's warning seems to be odd. Zimri was clearly the sinner in this case. Who could be foolish enough to do something as wicked as Zimri and expect the same reward as Pinchas?

Moshe's stunned response to the people's claim is seemingly irrational. Firstly, Moshe's marriage was not at all comparable to this case, since Tzipporah had converted before marrying Moshe. But even if the cases had been comparable, the argument of *Shevet Shimon* still would not have been legitimate, as the main reason why the people were being punished for sinning with the Midyanite women was because the women caused them to bow to the *avodah zarah* of *Ba'al Peor*. The argument that Moshe and Zimri are at all similar is ridiculous. Why, then, was Moshe's response to cry? Why did Moshe not refute the clearly shaky claims being lobbied against him?

Rav Eli Baruch Shulman *shlit"a*, one of the RIETS *Roshei Yeshiva*, explained what King Yannai was referring to by clarifying exactly what Zimri was preaching. Zimri came to Moshe *Rabbeinu* with the following line of logic: "You yourself, Moshe, took a Midyanite woman for a wife. Even if your case was slightly different, as your wife converted, this case is still not so far off from your situation. In any case, this is surely not as wicked of a sin as *avodah zarah!* Moshe, by standing your ground and forbidding Jews to marry these women, you are causing more and more Jews to leave the fold entirely and worship the Midyanite idols! It would be much better to allow this relatively small sin, rather than turn so many Jews away from *Yiddishkeit*." The fault in Zimri's logic is clear: it assumes that the Jew's sin with the Midyanites is inevitable, and that the main focus of the leaders should be damage control above all else. Zimri took it as a given that the Jews were going to sin with the Midyanites, and thought that through his actions he would be the one to save the Jews from a far worse fate. He truly believed that through his sin, he would be known as the savior of religious Judaism.

Zimri's claim effectively invalidated anything Moshe could say from that point on. If Moshe tried to explain that something was *assur*, he would simply be accused of pushing Jews away by being too strict. Nothing he could say, no reasoning that he could give, would be able to overcome this fallacy. Zimri had so corrupted the *Zeitgeist* of *Klal Yisroel* that Moshe could not even explain the dictates of *halacha*. There was nothing left for him to do but weep.

The only person who could respond to such a claim was someone like Pinchas. At this point in time, Pinchas was not a *kohen* (Rashi explains that he was born after Aharon and his sons were anointed, so he was not considered a *kohen*). Pinchas was a regular *ba'al habayis*, merely another member of the people.

That was who needed to refute the claims of Zimri. The opposition could not stem from the leadership of the nation, since anything they would say would be misconstrued and held against them. They would be slandered as “backwards-thinking”, and “living in the past”. It needed to be a person from among the people, an ordinary Jew, who would stand up and declare that Zimri’s position was wrong. Pinchas ensured the survival of Judaism throughout the generations by establishing himself as a model for zealots through the centuries, men from the people who stood for the integrity of the Eternal Law.

Zimri thought that through his actions, he would ensure the long-term survival of Judaism. But in the end, it was Pinchas whom *Hashem* credited with saving the people from spiritual destruction.

Unfortunately, we still have people today who act like Zimri while believing that they will be a savior of Judaism, a Pinchas. The legacy of Pinchas beckons us to take on the mantle of the *kana'im*, the zealots who fight for the unchanging validity of the *halacha* as the binding word of *Hashem*. We must carry on this fight.

Donkey Business

Josef Flamenbaum (21)

Parshas Balak contains the famous attempts of Bila’am to curse *Bnei Yisroel*, despite all the obstacles in his way. One of these obstacles is a physical one, as an angel blocks the road three times, causing his donkey to get scared and refuse to move. Bila’am, who was unable to see the angel, merely thought that his donkey was being difficult, and so he beat it in an attempt to get it to move. After the third time that Bila’am hit his donkey, the donkey miraculously began to speak, asking Bila’am “*mah asisi licha ki hikisani zeh shalosh regalim?*” - what have I done to you that you should hit me these three times? Rashi quotes the *Medrash Tanchuma* to explain that this rebuke was actually far more thoughtful than a simple complaint regarding animal cruelty. The *Medrash* points out that the unusual phrasing of *regalim* (times) is actually a subtle jab at the very purpose of Bila’am’s mission. The donkey was asking how Bila’am dared to harm a people who celebrated the *shalosh regalim*, the three holidays of *Pesach*, *Shavuos*, and *Sukkos*. This deeper explanation of this incident seems to line up with what we would expect: after all, surely such a big miracle would not have been performed and recorded in the *Torah* for future generations if the donkey was not going to say something profound. Indeed, the *mishnah* in *Avos* (5:6) counts the creation of the mouth of the donkey as one of the special items created by *Hashem* right before the first *Shabbos* in history. So, what is the special message the donkey had? What is the message that was so important that it was given special status in

creation itself? And how does this message for Bila’am apply to us?

Many point out that the short-term purpose of the rebuke was to be another obstacle to try to dissuade Bila’am from continuing on his journey. To that end, the *Kli Yakar* interprets it as a message: Bila’am was arrogant, as he possessed a great ability for speaking *nevuah* (prophecy). However here it was demonstrated that *Hashem* also gives mere donkeys abilities related to speech. While this explains why the miracle was necessary, it does not explain the specific reference to the *Shalosh Regalim*. After all, while the *Shalosh Regalim* certainly are quite holy, what separates them from all the other mitzvos *Am Yisroel* did such that they were specifically listed as a reason for them not to be attacked by Bila’am’s curses?

Although the *Meforshim* give many different types of answers to this question, there seems to be a general theme throughout them. The *Shalosh Regalim* symbolize the fundamental uniqueness of *Klal Yisroel*. One example is the great *achdus* that is seen on those days. On each of the *Shalosh Regalim*, all the divisions and differences throughout the land were dissolved as everyone descended upon the same *Beis Hamikdash* to offer the same *korbanos* and daven in the same *Azarah*. The *Gemara* famously quotes that during these times, it was never said that it was too crowded in *Yerushalayim*. Everyone was at peace with one another as they went to celebrate the holiday. The Brisker Rav also points out that the model of unity is highlighted in the “*Misheberach*” prayer recited on the *Shalosh Regalim*. Thus, the donkey hinted to Bila’am that he could never hope to harm or divide a nation with such potential for unity.

Another answer is mentioned by the *Shem Mishmuel*: The *Maharal* writes that the *Shalosh Regalim* were given to *Klal Yisroel* in the *zechus* of the three *Avos*, who each (in some way) worked to rectify one of the three cardinal sins of *avodah zara*, *gilui arayos* (forbidden relations), and *shefichas damim* (murder). The *mishnah* in *Avos* (5:22) lists the three traits which each lead to those three sin. Jealousy leads to murder, arrogance leads to self-worship and thereby *avodah zara*, and the never-ending quest for pleasure leads to *gilui arayos*. The *Mishna* says that these three traits are the *middos* of Bila’am! The message is now quite clear: the donkey was rebuking Bila’am for attempting to destroy the nation who celebrated the *Shalosh Regalim*, which represented the *Avos*, who worked to counteract Bila’am’s fundamentally evil traits. That rectification was in the very genes of *Klal Yisroel*, so how could Bila’am ever hope to destroy them? We must choose the path of the *Avos* over that of Bila’am, and if we do so, enemies will never be able to destroy us.

Gedolim Glimpse: Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz

Meir Morell ('22)

Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz (1906–1993) was born in Minsk, in what was then Imperial Russia. He attended *cheder* together with Avraham Rosenstein, a linguist and lexicographer who eventually compiled the Even-Shoshan dictionary, where they learned Hebrew and Hebrew grammar from Avraham's father, who was the teacher. In 1919, his family moved to Grodno, where he was a main talmid of Rabbi Shimon Shkop in Yeshivas Shaar Hatorah. He later learned in the Mir *yeshiva* until 1932, receiving *semichah* and becoming well known as an outstanding *talmid chacham*. In 1933, he married Tzipporah Chava Yoselowitz, the daughter of the renowned rabbi of Suvalk, Rabbi Yosef Yoselowitz. Upon the death of his father-in-law in 1935, Rabbi Lifshitz became chief rabbi, where he developed a reputation as a warm and involved Rav, concerned with all Jews. He remained in Suvalk until the Nazis captured the city in 1940.

In 1941, Rabbi Lifshitz reached America along with his wife and daughter, and was appointed a *rosh yeshiva* of Beis Medrash Litorah in Chicago. Rabbi Lifshitz was soon accorded immense stature among his fellow rabbis, his students, and the rest of the Chicago community. His reputation as an outstanding *rosh yeshiva* spread throughout America, and he received offers for several positions. He accepted the invitation of Rabbi Samuel Belkin, and in 1944, was appointed as a *rosh yeshiva* in RIETS. He taught *Torah* there for almost 50 years to thousands of students, many of whom came to be distinctively known as "Reb Dovid's students." His efforts on behalf of the community were numerous. He served as a member in the Agudas HaRabbonim of America and Canada for many years. During the final 17 years of his life, he served as president of Ezras Torah, a *tzedakah* organization which helps *talmidei chachomim* with financial difficulties. His *shiurim* on hashkafa and *mussar* were compiled and published by his students in the *sefer "Tehillah L'Dovid"*. His *shiurim* on *Gemara* were also published as "*Shiurei Rav Dovid Lifshitz*". He died in New York City in 1993.

Parsha Puzzles

Submit your answers to shemakoleinu@yuhsb.org along with your name and cell phone number to be entered into a raffle at the end of the summer!

(Hint: Use the commentaries in the Mekraos Gedolos Chumashim, along with the Toldos Aharon on the side to find relevant Gemaras and Midrashim)

1. What gifts were given to *Bnei Yisrael* in the desert through the merits of Aharon, Moshe, and Miriam? When are each of their *yahrzeit* dates?
2. What stone structure did the donkey press Bilaam's leg against?
3. What reward did Balak receive for offering 42 sacrifices to Hashem?

Parsha Summaries

Chukas -- *Parshas Chukas* begins with the halachos of the *parah adumah*, the red cow used to purify someone who had become *tamei* through contact with a dead body. The *parsha* then records the death of Miriam, the sister of Moshe and Aharon. Due to Miriam's death, the miraculous well which had followed *Bnei Yisroel* through the desert in her merit dried up, causing the people to complain to Moshe and Aharon about their thirst. *Hashem* instructs Moshe to speak to the rock in order to cause it to flow, but Moshe hits it with his stick again. Though this sin was relatively minor, this slight deviation was a grave sin for a *tzaddik* like Moshe, causing him and Aharon to lose the merit to enter *Eretz Yisroel* with the rest of the nation. The people request to cross through Edom's land, but Edom refuses. Aharon *Hakohen* dies, and is succeeded by his son Elazar. However, Aharon's death caused the *ananei hakavod*, the protective clouds which surrounded *Bnei Yisroel* in Aharon's merit, to disappear. The people complained, and *Hashem* sent poisonous snakes to attack them as punishment. In order to stop the snakes, Moshe was instructed to create a copper snake on a mount, which miraculously healed the snake bites. The people then travelled to the domain of the giants Sichon and Og, whom Moshe defeated in battle.

Balak -- Balak, king of Midyan, sends a delegation to Bila'am, a non-Jewish prophet, with a request that he curse the Jewish people. Bila'am gets a *nevuah* from *Hashem* that he should not do this, so he refuses. Balak sends another delegation, and *Hashem* grants Bila'am permission to go, but reminds him that he will only be able to speak that which *Hashem* wants him to speak. On his way to curse *Bnei Yisroel*, Bila'am's donkey speaks to him, again reminding him that he will be unable to say anything *Hashem* does not want him to say. Bila'am tries to curse the Jews three times, but each time his curses come out as blessings. (In fact, one of Bila'am's blessings was *Mah Tov*, which we say every day before *davening*.) Bila'am leaves in disgrace, but not before telling Balak that he should attempt to destroy the Jews by causing them to sin. Balak sends Midyanite women to seduce *Bnei Yisroel*, and it works. The *nasi* of *Shevet Shimon*, Zimri, takes a woman named Kuzbi and shows in public that he is going to be *mezaneh* with her. Upon seeing this, Pinchas, Aharon's grandson, becomes enraged on behalf of *Hashem's* honor, and murders Kuzbi and Zimri, in accordance with the *halacha*.

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