

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

BALAK
JULY 6-7, 2012 17 TAMUZ 5772

DEDICATIONS : In memory of Reuben ben Farha, my grandfather Reuben Bibi 23 Tammuz
Please pray for a Refuah Shelemah for Farha Bat Esther

Herman and Rebecca Ovadia in honor of their 45th anniversary!!
And in memory of Zelda Silverman.

Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach Schedule and Announcements
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Friday Night: Candles: 8:10PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 7:00 PM

Morning Service (Shaharith): 9:00AM –Please say Shemah at home by 8:21 AM

Kiddush this week is sponsored by Herman and Rebecca Ovadia in honor of their 45th anniversary!! Mazal tov and many many more!!! And also to commemorate the yahrzeit of Rebecca's grandmother, Zelda Silverman.

Please sponsor a Kiddush. You can email back, call IDA or go on to our website BenaiAsher.org. Dairy Kiddush starts at \$200, \$300 deluxe and \$400 with Bourikas. Meat Kiddush starts at \$350, \$450 for deluxe and \$600 for the works! Please dedicate one this summer in memory of a loved one, or in honor of a birthday, anniversary, or other occasion. We also need Seudah Shelishi sponsors at \$100 per week.

Pirkei Avot with Rabbi Aharon at 6:40 PM –
Childrens program at 6:40 with Rabbi Colish followed by Minha: 7:20 PM –
Seudah Shelishi and a Class 8:00 – with David – Can Moshe really be the source of Bilaam's power?
Evening Service (Arbith): 9:00 PM - Shabbat Ends: 9:10PM

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Sunday Morning, Halacha and Kosher kitchen cancelled this week
Daily 6:30 AM class – Shelah Hakadosh on the Perasha

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yanai – 8PM Monday night
Hebrew Reading Crash Course – 8-9 PM and continuing Monday Nights throughout the Summer. Beginner and intermediate levels welcome! We would like to pray Mincha and Arbit first on Monday nights. 8PM

Men's Halacha Class Tuesday Nights 8:30-10:30: Basar BeChalav – With Michael and David

Ladies Shabbat Class at the home of Tina Lemberger – each Shabbat at 5:30

Volley Ball with Daniel Wagner – Sunday mornings at the beach at 10AM All summer long.

Unveiling for Jeffrey Oberman – Sunday August 5th at 10AM

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This coming Sunday, July 8th, we will commemorate the Fast of the Seventeenth of Tamuz. (The fast

is moved from Shabbat Tamuz 17th to Sunday Tamuz 18th)

Why is the 17th of Tamuz a day of fasting?
Five tragedies happened to the Jewish people on the 17th of Tammuz:

1. In Biblical times, Moses descended from Mount Sinai and upon seeing the Jews worshipping the golden calf, he broke the first set of tablets that carried the Ten Commandments.

2. King Menashe, a Jewish King, and the worst sovereign of the Kingdom of Yehuda, placed on that day an idol in the Holy Sanctuary of the Temple, around the year 700 BCE.

3. In the time of the First Temple, on the 17th of Tamuz, 587 BCE, the Kohanim (priests) stopped offering the daily sacrifices due to the shortage of sheep during the siege of the city by the Babylonian army.

4. One year later, 586 BCE the walls of Yerushalaim were breached after many months of siege by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian forces. Three weeks after the breach of the wall, the Bet haMikdash was destroyed on the 9th of Ab.

5. Around the year 50 of the Common Era, Apostomus, a Roman captain, seized a Tora scroll and with abusive and mocking language, burned it in public.

Because of these five tragedies we fast and say special prayers that inspire us to mourn and to repent for our transgressions and those of our ancestors.

The fast begins at dawn

Editors Notes

On Sunday I had the distinct pleasure to sit on the dais with the roshei yeshiva, the teachers and principals of Pirchei Shoshanim and congratulate dozens of scholars who received Semicha in various areas of Jewish Law.

One of the most famous verses in the Torah comes from this week's portion. "Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakob" How goodly are your tents Jacob. The source of our strength has always been these tents. We see in this statement

the true intent of Bilaam was to attack these tents. The question is what are these tents?

The first explanation is that they represent the structure of the home, the family unit and the modesty that comes with it. We see that Bilaam's final advice after his curses fail in bringing women to seduce the nation is an attack against the home.

But there is a second thought. Many moons ago when we read Parshat Toldot we read about Jacob our forefather as, yosheb ohalim – the dweller of tents. These are the tents of the Bet Midrash, the tents of Torah study. Did you ever hear someone tell you, "I'm studying so hard or working so hard, it's killing me?" That's how we are to approach Torah study, with complete effort. Last week we read "Adam Ki Yamut BaOhel, A man who dies in the tent, which some expound on as our directive to study with everything we've got.

Bilaam realized that the protection for the Jewish people is their willingness to commit to study and support of Torah. When Jacob enters Isaac's tent for a blessing, Isaac declares that the voice is the voice of Jacob while the hands are the hands of Esav. The Rabbis saw this as a prophecy that only through the voice of Jacob, of dedicating ourselves to the study of Torah, of brains over brawn, can we overcome the threat of the hands of Esav. Today this threat is not simply in threats from enemies like Ahmadinejad, Y'S. It is even greater in Esav opening his arms to us and taking us in. How many Jews do we lose every day through intermarriage and assimilation?

Pirchei Shoshanim is dedicated to making a difference in this world. Training Rabbis in the furthest

reaches of the globe and bringing Jewish study and observance to places so remote, we never heard of them.

Joining them for the last afternoon of their week long convention where tests were given and learning continued, it was heartwarming to see and talk with Jews from all over the Americas. I met an army chaplain who was stationed in Afghanistan. I heard from a naval chaplain and officer who was born in Israel and came to the convention with his family. We don't realize how many Jewish souls are in the US armed forces today and how few are the Jewish chaplains who can assist them. And when we find Jewish chaplains, most are from other denominations with little knowledge of halacha. Rabbi Fishel Todd who founded the Yeshiva has become a fixture in Washington and an advocate for Jewish chaplains around the world.

Even more amazing were the others who had dedicated themselves to the study of halacha. There were three young men from Argentina who spent two years learning Issur VeHeter received their Semicha. Another amazing man hailed, Richard Wallach, who came from northern Washington State, in a small town, "just a cow's patch from the Canadian border". There he thought the Jewish population was five, but he was still looking for the other four. He told us how with the support of his boss, a non-Jew, he was able to delve into halacha learning via the internet with the Rabbis and chevrutahs.

Another, Rabbi Shmuel Simenowitz, began the program while living in a wood heated cabin in rural Vermont. Today he is making a huge impact on the

Jewish world. He told me he spent a year in Long Beach when he was young and knew the Abittans.

There were guys from the community. Rabbi Victor Gindi of Hillel left before I got there, but I did get to see Jesse Shomer, Freddie Harari and Eddie Tebele. Some were receiving their second or third certificate of Semicha. Eddie Tebele who grew up in (I believe) Virginia and had a limited Jewish education told me how he hired a Rabbi when he first began five or six years ago and how much effort he was putting into understanding the Mefarshim inside. He is an example of someone putting in the energy and doing what others might have thought to be impossible.

Rabbi Dr David Wiseman tapped me on the shoulder and it was such a pleasure to see him receive Semicha as he is the son in law of our dear friends the Verobas of Atlantic Beach. Deena was a teacher at HAFTR and Murray is the Baal Koreh and gabai at the JCAB.

There is one other man I must tell you about, Rabbi Arthur Schlissel who Baruch Hashem at 84 had gone through almost all the sections of Shulchan Aruch that the Yeshiva offers and was receiving semicha in Ribbit (interest), who began his studies at 72. (Talk about Rabbi Akiva at 40). His wife who has been coming each year to the testing week and ceremony told how she finally was receiving a certificate herself, in a new course called "Shabbat Kitchen". Arthur spoke of his father who had made interest free loans a part of his life and said that when studying these laws, the memories of his father who was so careful to lend to whomever he could and never on interest came flooding back.

Rabbi Abittan, who studied Issur VeHeter with us twelve years ago based on Pirchei Shoshanim's notes talked to me about the need to have a study plan, a goal and also to be tested. Learning the material with the Rabbi was an experience we will never forget and when we finished Issur VeHeter we continued with other areas of Jewish Law using Pirchei Shoshanim courses and the Rabbi's unique way of explaining things. We never wanted to become Rabbis and even after being tested we rejected the title. But perhaps Daat Chachamim, the special wisdom G-d bestows on his wise ones, of Rabbi Abittan saw the need.

The program changed my life, and so many of those around me.

Today Rabbi Mansour is teaching Issur VeHeter to a large group. There are some studying in Yad Yosef and hopefully Rabbi Yedid will get a large program going soon in Shaare Zion. There are programs in Aventura, as well as in the Syrian communities of Brazil and Panama.

For those interested, Shema Yisrael's Revolutionary programs allows everyone to learn Halacha. It was designed from grounds up to support each of us in our personal journey into the depths of Judaism – it doesn't matter if we've been studying Torah since we were born or if we are making our first steps.

There are 2 levels to the project. Everyone is invited to join the first level regardless of their learning background. The program specifically allows those who have a limited background in Hebrew to participate in the true depth and breadth of the Torah. The project is written in English and Hebrew as well as certain programs which include a French, Spanish and Russian translation.

Some of these courses include, Learning Hebrew, The Shabbat Kitchen, Kosher Kitchen (which we have a number of woman learning in our synagogue), and the Roadmap to Prayer.

Those who are applying for the Semicha Program must adhere to very strict and detailed criteria. Some of the courses offered include, Issur V' Heter, Shabbos, Choshen Mishpat, Niddah, Orach Chayim, Shaatnez, Ribis, Aveilus, Eruvin, Pesach, Kiddushin, Mikvaot, Daled Minim.

There is also a 6 Month Business Ethics Course.

There comes a time to move past simply attending a weekly lecture. There comes a time, no matter how young or old, to put in real effort, an effort than can be measured and appreciated. For some this may be in depth study of Gemarah, for others it is Halacha which forces one to study a law with its source in the Torah and Talmud and then through the centuries from the Rishonim in the Tur and through the Bet Yosef to the Shulchan Arucha and the Rama. To the later commentaries all the way through the 19th and 20th centuries and up to today.

Having studied under the Yeshiva and now teaching on their behalf, I can vouch for the experience. Pirchei Shoshanim's motto is that regardless of your experience and teachings, we can teach anyone about Torah and Halacha and can also help enlighten anyone on how to properly pray, keep a kosher kitchen, learn Hebrew, and much more. You can complete the Shulchan Aruch program at your own pace and according to your own schedule. The rabbis are always available to answer any questions that you may have. So if you want more information visit them on line at

ShulchanAruch.com or from the states call 800-747-2434. You'll be glad you did. It's a tremendous opportunity to become a "tent dweller", the one thing Bilaam hoped we wouldn't become. The one thing that acts as our protection and source of blessing.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

PS ... while on the subject of Halacha

In the past few years I have been getting more and more questions each week via email, text and phone. In fact I just hung up from someone asking about Pyrex and someone else asking about the three weeks. In speaking with a friend who publishes a widely read Jewish Newspaper he suggested that I list some of the questions as well as the answers explaining that if one guy asks, probably 100 wonder.

So let's tackle one that I received from a number of people asking about the week of Tisha BeAv this year considering that Tisha Be'Av falls on Shabbat and is delayed until Sunday and about the three weeks as well..

After the Shabbat that precedes Tisha BeAb through Tisha BeAb itself is the Week of Tisha BeAb known as Shavua SheChal Bo. If Tisha BeAb falls on a Sunday or on Shabbat – in which case the fast is pushed to Sunday - there is no halachic Week of. Maran, Rav Yosef Karo confirms this in the Shulchan Aruch that in this case there is no Shavua SheChal Bo. Yalkut Yosef 551:10 – concurs advising when Tisha BeAv is pushed to Sunday there is no Shavua SheChal Bo. This means that this year there is no weeks where hot showers, fresh clothes, laundering and shaving are forbidden. (But each of you

should check with your own rabbi). This applies to most Sephardim. Although some take the stringent view as does the Rama who notes that Ashkenazim are strict from Rosh Chodesh regarding laundry and haircuts from the 17th of Tamuz.

The custom in the last generation among the Syrian community has been to refrain from weddings during the three weeks. Now with weddings almost every night in June, I can see why three weeks might be an appealing break. At the same time we should realize that this is a created custom with little basis for Sephardim that I am aware of and the least we can remember this fact. One day our kids may decide to again have weddings in the end of Tammuz and we don't want them to think this is some sacred law with reason that forbids it. In Israel, Sephardim having weddings all through Tammuz.

Rosh Hodesh Ab is when the rabbis start giving us restrictions. And we will write about those B'H next week. Still we are told that this is a potentially dangerous period and so we are warned to be more cautious. We have delved into this during our classes in past years and probably in the newsletter. Additionally, it is a Sephardic custom to refrain from saying shehechyanu during these three weeks, which I guess means no new fruits or fancy new clothes. Although on Shabbat we can wear new suits, eat new fruits and recite shehechyanu.

PSS ... Rabbi Sacks has written an article in today's Jerusalem Post in response to the recent decision of a Cologne court in relation to Brit Milah.

The Jerusalem Post: The Europeans' skewed view of circumcision

In May 2007 a small group of religious leaders met, in the EU headquarters in Brussels, with the three most significant leaders of Europe: Angela Merkel, German Chancellor and at the time president of the European Council, Jose-Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission, and Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament.

The meeting was one of those semiformal occasions at which little is said, and a great deal of time taken in saying it. Concerned at the return of antisemitism to Europe within living memory of the Holocaust, I decided that the time had come to break protocol and speak plainly, even bluntly.

I gave the shortest speech of my life. Sitting directly opposite the three leaders I said this. "Jews and Europe go back a long way. The experience of Jews in Europe has added several words to the human vocabulary – words like expulsion, public disputation, forced conversion, inquisition, auto-da-fe, blood libel, ghetto and pogrom, without even mentioning the word Holocaust. That is the past. My concern is with the future. Today the Jews of Europe are asking whether there is a future for Jews in Europe, and that should concern you, the leaders of Europe."

It took less than a minute, and after it there was a shocked silence. We adjourned for lunch, and over it Angela Merkel asked, "What would you like me to do, Chief Rabbi?" I did not have an easy answer for her then. I do now. It is: reverse immediately the decision of the Cologne court that renders Jewish parents who give their son a brit milah, even if performed in hospital by a qualified doctor, liable to prosecution.

It is hard to think of a more appalling decision. Did the court know that circumcision is the most ancient ritual in the history of Judaism, dating back almost four thousand years to the days of Abraham? Did it know that Spinoza, not religious but together with John Locke the father of European liberalism, wrote that brit milah in and of itself had the power to sustain Jewish identity through the centuries?

Did it know that banning milah was the route chosen by two of the worst enemies the Jewish people ever had, the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV and the Roman emperor Hadrian, both of whom set out to extinguish not only Jews but also Judaism? Either the court knew these things or it did not. If it did not, then how was it competent to assess the claim of religious liberty? If it did, then there are judges in Germany quite willing to say to religious Jews, in effect, "If you don't like it, leave." Do judges in Cologne today really not know what happened the last time Germany went down that road?

The case – like the banning of shechitah by the Dutch parliament, now thankfully reversed – illustrates the deep difficulty Jews are facing in Europe today. Both cases initially had nothing to do with Jews. They were directed predominantly against Muslims, whose population vastly outnumbers that of Jews in almost every country in Europe. They are part of the backlash against the misguided policy, adopted by most European countries in the 1970s, known as multiculturalism. This was meant to promote tolerance. Its effect was precisely the opposite. It encouraged segregation of ethnic minorities, not integration, and instead of getting people to ignore

differences it made an issue of them at every stage.

The Muslim communities of Europe have been in the frontline of both the policy and its discontents. The result has been that in Germany the court, and in Holland Parliament, have sought to ban a Muslim practice, while the Jewish community has suffered collateral damage in both places.

That is part of the problem but not all of it. I have argued for some years that an assault on Jewish life always needs justification by the highest source of authority in the culture at any given age. Throughout the Middle Ages the highest authority in Europe was the Church. Hence antisemitism took the form of Christian anti-Judaism.

In the post-enlightenment Europe of the nineteenth century the highest authority was no longer the Church. Instead it was science. Thus was born racial antisemitism, based on two disciplines regarded as science in their day: the "scientific study of race" and the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer and Ernst Haeckel. Today we know that both of these were pseudo-sciences, but in their day they were endorsed by some of the leading figures of the age.

Since Hiroshima and the Holocaust, science no longer holds its pristine place as the highest moral authority. Instead that role is taken by human rights. It follows that any assault on Jewish life – on Jews or Judaism or the Jewish state – must be cast in the language of human rights. Hence the by-now routine accusation that Israel has committed the five cardinal sins against human rights: racism, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, attempted genocide and crimes

against humanity. This is not because the people making these accusations seriously believe them – some do, some don't. It is because this is the only form in which an assault on Jews can be stated today.

That is what the court in Cologne has done. It has declared that circumcision is an assault on the rights of the child since it is performed without his consent. It ignored the fact that if this is true, teaching children to speak German, sending them to school and vaccinating them against illness are all assaults against the rights of the child since they are done without consent. The court's judgement was tendentious, foolish and has set a dangerous precedent.

In historical context, however, it is far worse. By ruling that religious Jews performing their most ancient sacred ritual are abusing the rights of the child, a German court has just invented a new form of Blood Libel perfectly designed for the twenty-first century. Chancellor Merkel, the answer to your question, "What would you like me to do?" is simple. Ensure that this ruling is overturned, for the sake of religious freedom and the moral reputation of Germany.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: Parshas Balak begins with King Balak's offer to Bilam the Prophet to curse the Jewish people and G-d's refusal to allow him to accept.

2nd Aliya: Balak sent a second negotiating team and Bilam was given permission to go. However, G-d stipulated that Bilam could only speak the word of G-d.

3rd Aliya: Along the way the incident with the talking donkey

occurred, emphasizing G-d's instructions to that Bilam only deliver the word of G-d.

4th Aliya: Bilam attempted his first curse and was unable to do so. Instead, the words he spoke were a blessing for the Jewish people.

5th Aliya: Bilam made his second attempt at cursing the Jews and was again unable to do so. Instead, he issued his second blessing.

6th & 7th Aliya: Bilam attempted his final curse but again blessed the Jews. As he left in disgrace, Bilam told the assembled coalition of kings of their eventual destruction by the Jews. As a parting shot against the Jews, he advised them to seduce the Jewish men with Midianite women and bring G-d's wrath down upon the nation. The Parsha concludes with the incident of Baal-Peor and Pinchas's heroism.

Michah 5:6 - 6:8 - This week's Haftorah is from Micha. Micha prophesied around the year 3200 during the reigns of Achaz and Chikiah. The prophecy in this selection relates to the period prior to the war of Gog and Magog and the coming of Mashiach.

The nations of the world will have assembled against Israel, and the Jews will know that their salvation can only come from G-d. G-d's power will be revealed to everyone and a time of peace and tranquility will envelop humanity. Armies and defenses will no longer be necessary to protect the Jews and the nation's war machinery will be disassembled.

Micha was then commanded to chastise his generation for violating G-d's will, despite all the goodness He had bestowed upon them.

In the final verses of the Haftorah, the prophet tells the nation that true atonement can only be attained through change and action. The ceremonious aspects of devotion, such as sacrifice and prayer, will not accomplish forgiveness. Justice, loving kindness, modesty, humility, and active change are the services that G-d desires.

The connection to our Parsha is the mention of Balak and Billam as examples of G-d's caring and protection for the Jewish people. The story of Parshas Balak involved G-d protecting us from our enemies even when we were totally unaware of their insidious conspiracies and intentions. Prior to the coming of Mashiach, the Jews will realize that their safety is dependent upon G-d and G-d alone, just as the Jews in the desert were totally dependent upon G-d's continuous protection and intervention

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

Rabbi Reuven Semah

"I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing opposite me on the road." (Bemidbar 22:34)

Our perashah contains the famous story of Bilam's donkey that spoke. Three separate times Hashem caused the donkey of Bilam to see the angel of Hashem. All three times the donkey saw the sword-wielding angel, got frightened, and tried her best to avoid the angel. All three times Bilam beat his donkey because he didn't see the angel. Finally Hashem "opened the mouth" of the donkey and she confronted him over what had just transpired. After an amazing dialogue with his donkey, Bilam at last merited to see the angel for himself. The angel rebuked Bilam, "Why have

you beaten your donkey these three times?"

The angel's question is difficult to understand. Since Bilam did not know about the angel, why was he being reprimanded for his handling of his donkey? Furthermore, Bilam's answer to the angel is also puzzling. "I have sinned for I did not know that you were standing on the road before me. Now if it displeases you, I will return." To the contrary, the fact that he didn't know about the angel was a reason for it not being a sin!

The answer is that Bilam should have gotten the message. Granted, Hashem gave him permission to accompany the Moabites. But Hashem had only given him permission to reveal what the future will bring. He had not received permission to curse the Israelites, which is what he wanted to do. Bilam should have realized that his donkey's behavior was a message that Hashem was displeased. This failure to connect the dots and draw the right conclusion was his sin.

All of us are constantly receiving messages. When we set out to do something and find obstacles in our way, they are there for a reason. We must stop and think. Are my plans in line with the will of Hashem? If you can comfortably answer yes, then the obstacles are simply proof that your plan is very important in heaven. It is so important that the evil inclination is doing all it can to stop it. But, if you can't answer yes, then these obstacles may very well be a message that this is not what you should be doing. Sometimes it's not so black and white and guidance is needed.

Listen to the messages. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

When we read in the perashah about the talking donkey we can't help but wonder why this miracle had to occur, and to none other than to Bil'am, the prophet of the nations. Indeed, this was one of the phenomenon created at the end of the six days of creation, which makes it even more amazing why such a great event was necessary, and to Bil'am of all people.

The Rabbis tell us that the lesson here is very simple and yet very important. Bil'am, the greatest prophet of all the nations, was intending to curse the Jewish people. He wanted to use his G-d given gift of speech to do harm to our nation. Hashem wanted to show him that the gift of speech is divine and should be used properly. Even a donkey could speak if Hashem wills it so, and therefore Bil'am should not be arrogant about his ability to bless or curse because it is only from G-d that a person can say anything.

We have to appreciate our ability to speak and communicate. We should understand that it was given to us to be able to pray and bless Hashem and bring benefit to ourselves and to our fellow man. Yet when we abuse the power of speech by speaking evil about others or cursing other people, we are misusing one of the greatest gifts to mankind.

One great Rabbi once said that we should have been created with two mouths, one to pray to Hashem and the other to use for everyday talk. Then he reconsidered and said that if we would use both our mouths the wrong way, imagine how terrible it would be. We hear of small children using foul language that they pick up from the street (or from the home!) Could this be

why our prayers are not being answered the way we would like them to be, since our mouths are being used to hurt rather than to help? Imagine the benefit to everyone if words of praise, compliments, constructive criticism, consolation and encouragement would be the bulk of what came out of our mouths? After we say something good to others, let's try to pray to Hashem and see what happens. We will be pleasantly surprised! Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

The Three Regalim and the Sin of the Calf

Parashat Balak tells the story of Bilam, a non-Jewish prophet who tried to place a curse upon Beneh Yisrael. As he made his way to Moab, whose king had summoned him for this mission, an angel blocked his path three times. Bilam could not see the angel, but each time, the donkey, which did see the angel, veered off the path or crouched in place, unable to move forward. And in response, each time, Bilam violently beat the donkey. Finally, God made a miracle enabling the donkey to speak, and the donkey asked Bilam why he beat it three times (22:28). The phrase used by the donkey for "three times" is "Shalosh Regalim" – the same term used in reference to the three pilgrimage festivals when the Jewish people assembled in Jerusalem – Pesah, Shabuot and Succot. The Sages teach that the donkey was informing Bilam that he has no hope of placing a curse upon Beneh Yisrael because they observe the three Regalim. The merit of this Misva protected them from Bilam's scheme, and no curse could possibly have any effect upon them.

Later in the Parasha (24:1), we read that Bilam attempted to win

God's approval for his plan by "facing the desert." The Targum on this verse explains this to mean that Bilam invoked the sin of the golden calf. This was an especially grievous sin, and Bilam thus figured that by reminding God of this incident, he would earn God's consent to curse Beneh Yisrael. As we know, of course, his plan was foiled. Apparently, the merit of the three Regalim protected Beneh Yisrael from the consequences of the golden calf. Although they committed the grave sin of the calf, Bilam was unable to curse them because of the merit of the three pilgrimage festivals.

Why did this Misva in particular – the observance of the three Regalim – protect Beneh Yisrael from the consequences of the sin of the calf?

After the sin of the calf, when God announced His plans to eradicate Beneh Yisrael, Moshe interceded on their behalf, pleading with God to remember His covenant with the patriarchs – Abraham, Yishak and Yaakob. He told God that if Beneh Yisrael deserved execution by fire, He should remember the merit of Abraham, who was thrown by Nimrod into a fiery furnace. And if the people deserved death by the sword, He should remember the merit of Yishak, who was nearly sacrificed upon the altar. Finally, Moshe prayed that if Beneh Yisrael were deserving of exile, then God should remember Yaakob, who was driven from Eretz Yisrael. It is thus in the merit of three patriarchs that Beneh Yisrael earn forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf.

This explains the power of the Regalim to protect Beneh Yisrael from Bilam's curse. The three pilgrimage festivals correspond to the three patriarchs. Pesah corresponds to Abraham, who

hosted the three angels in his tent on Pesah. On Shabuot, when we received the Torah at Mount Sinai, a Shofar was sounded, and this Shofar was the horn of the ram that Abraham offered in place of Yishak, thus establishing a connection between Shabuot and Yishak. And Yaakob built "Succot" when he returned to Eretz Yisrael from exile, and the holiday of Succot thus corresponds with Yaakob. As such, Beneh Yisrael's observance of these three holidays has the capacity to invoke the merit of our patriarchs, and this is what protects us from the effects of the sin of the golden calf.

There is also another point of connection between the golden calf and the three Regalim. The Torah relates that when the calf was made, Beneh Yisrael arose in the morning to worship the golden image. Moshe came down from Mount Sinai at midday, at which point he threw down the stone tablets and punished the worshippers. It turns out, then, that the sin of the golden calf lasted for six hours – from daybreak until noon. There is a well-known Halachic principle in the laws of Kashrut known as "Bittul Be'shishim," which means that if a food mixes with another food, it is considered "nullified" if the ratio is at least 60:1. Meaning, if a bit of milk falls into a meat dish, the dish nevertheless remains kosher if the milk comprises 1/60th or less of the mixture, since in that proportion its taste cannot be discerned. Therefore, we can negate the six hours of the golden calf by properly observing the three pilgrimage festivals. Pesah and Succot are each celebrated for seven days, and Shabuot is celebrated for one day. (Outside Israel, an extra day is added to the holidays, but essentially Pesah and Succot are seven days and Shabuot is one day.)

Altogether, then, the three Regalim comprise 15 days. With some elementary arithmetic, we can calculate that 15 days amounts to 60 times the period of six hours. (Six hours is $\frac{1}{4}$ of a 24-hour period, and $15 \times 4 = 60$.) Thus, we "nullify" the six hours of the golden calf by celebrating the holidays. The special sanctity of these three Yamim Tobim allow us to utilize the principle of "Bittul" to negate the "taste" of the golden calf, and in this way our celebration of the Regalim protects us from the effects of that grievous sin.

Rabbi Wein Bilaam's Killing Kindness

The Torah records for us in this week's parsha the appearance of an old enemy in a new guise. According to Midrash, which reflects traditional rabbinic thinking on the subject matter being discussed, Bilaam had advised Pharaoh decades earlier to exterminate the Jewish people. Pharaoh, for various reasons and circumstances beyond his control, was unable to finish the job though vast numbers of Jews were consumed in his slave house and crocodile infested rivers.

Now Bilaam returns to the scene, this time as an ostensible agent of Balak but in reality as an independent agent of his own hatred of the Jews, determined to enforce his own nefarious plans to destroy the Jewish people. He is prevented from so doing by God's restraint placed upon him. Nevertheless thousands of Jews will die because of his advice and behavior.

Bilaam is the first Human Rights Organization of history. He speaks beautifully. Some of the finest Hebrew poetry spills from his tongue and mind. He has many complimentary things to say

about Israel but as the rabbis put it: "From his words of blessing one can easily deduce what curses he really meant to utter against the Jewish people."

One need merely look behind the sanctimonious facade that defines Bilaam in order to glimpse the enemy that leers with hatred against the Jewish people, its Torah and its faith. Bilaam is the father of all hypocrisy and pious sounding criticism leveled against the Jewish people throughout the ages and currently against its lonely embattled great little state. Bilaam states, "How goodly are your tents, Jacob" and yet he compares us to a raging lion and a destroyer of other nations. Subtly, his compliments and blessings are clearly his curses.

In the last century much of the world attempted and abetted the murder of millions of Jews. Again, for various reasons the "Final Solution" to the "Jewish Problem" was not completed. So, like Bilaam, much of the world has withdrawn from outright advocacy of the genocidal destruction of Jews and has resorted to "blessing" the Jewish people and the State of Israel with pious NGO's, human rights organizations, UN commissions – all of which are dedicated to saving Israel from itself.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, there are many Jews overwhelmingly ignorant of their own faith and traditions, naïve in believing the façade of Bilaam as being genuine, that have joined the chorus of Bilaam's hypocrisy and hatred.

Jews love Bilaam, his words, his lofty ideas, and his flattery. They find it hard to believe the worst about him and therefore the Jewish people and the State of Israel continually suffer grievous injury from his subtle attempts to

harm and destroy. Bilaam builds altars to God and proclaims his righteousness and presents his credentials as prophet, wise man and noble human being.

He not only knows what is best for Israel, if they would only listen to his counsel and wisdom, but boasts that he knows the details of God's will as well. He possesses eternal truths and no facts or realities should be allowed to contradict his set ideas. He will kill us with kindness, with Rose Garden ceremonies and Nobel Prizes. But kill us he will, if he only can. So once again the Lord will have to stop him, as He undoubtedly will.

**Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky -
Parsha Parables
You say Tomato, I say Cash!
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Bilaam refused to curse the Jews. At least that is what he told the officers of Balak, who came laden with gold and silver and offers of prestige and power, if Bilaam were to acquiesce and cast an evil spell upon the B'nai Yisrael camped near the nation of Moav. But Bilaam's refusal was not due to altruism. If it were up to him, he would gladly have seized the opportunity.

The elders of Moav came to Bilaam and said to him, "So said Balak, son of Tzippor, 'Do not refrain from going to me. For I shall honor you greatly, and everything that you say to me I shall do; so go now and curse this people for me.'

"Bilaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, 'If Balak will give me his houseful of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem, . . . to do anything small or great' (Bamidbar 22:16-18).

Rashi quotes the Tanchuma, which comments on Bilaam's refusal. This shows us that he was greedy and coveted other

people's money. He said, "He ought to give me all his silver and gold, since he has to hire many armies, and even then, it is questionable whether he will be victorious or not, whereas I will certainly succeed.

While learning the Pirkei Avos this summer, I was quite struck in seeing a similar expression used by none other than the holy Tana, Rabbi Yose ben Kisma. He tells a story: "Once I was walking on the road, when a certain man met me. He greeted me and I returned his greeting. He said to me, 'Rabbi, from what place are you?' I said to him, 'I am from a great city of scholars and sages.' He said to me, 'Rabbi, would you be willing to live with us in our place? I would give you thousands upon thousands of golden dinars, precious stones and pearls.' I replied, 'Even if you were to give me all the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls in the world, I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah'" (Avos 6:9). What is the difference between Bilaam and Rav Yose? They both decline offers of gold and silver, yet Rav Yose is praised for his high-minded outlook, while Bilaam is condemned for being greedy.

The Story: Recently a normally subdued professional displayed a violent streak. They sent him to a psychiatrist who performed a Rorschach test on him showing him random blotches of ink and asking him to identify them.

To the first one he exclaimed, "Why it's a fellow choking another man!" To the next he recoiled. "Why it's one man stabbing another!" The third picture he described as one man violently shooting another man. And so on. Each picture evoked a more violent description.

The Message: If you look at the two offers and the responses you will notice a stark difference. The fellow who met Rabbi Yosi offered him "thousands upon thousands of golden dinars, precious stones and pearls". The rabbi responds directly to that offer, "even if you were to give me all the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls in the world, I will dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah".

The story with Balak and Billam was quite different. King Balak offered Bilam honor, even great honor. But Billam does not respond to that offer. Balak says honor. Bilaam wants cash! He hears money. He hears all the money in the world! That offer was not on the table. But in the Rorschach test of greed, you can show someone a blot of honor and all he will see is the other fellow's cash!

**Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United
Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth
Not Reckoned Among the
Nations**

The year is 1933. Two Jews are sitting in a Viennese coffee house, reading the news. One is reading the local Jewish paper, the other the notoriously antisemitic publication Der Stürmer. "How can you possibly read that revolting rubbish?" says the first. The second smiles. "What does your paper say? Let me tell you. The Jews are assimilating. The Jews are arguing. The Jews are disappearing. Now let me tell you what my paper says. The Jews control the banks. The Jews control the media. The Jews control Austria. The Jews control the world. My friend, if you want good news about the Jews, always read the antisemites."

An old and bitter joke. Yet it has a point and a history and it begins with this week's parsha. Some of the most beautiful things ever said about the Jewish people were said by Bilaam: "Who can count the dust of Jacob ... May my final end be like theirs! ... How beautiful are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel! ... I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel."

Bilaam was no friend of the Jews. Having failed to curse them, he eventually devised a plan that worked. He suggested that Moabite women seduce Israelite men and then invite them to take part in their idolatrous worship. 24,000 people died in the subsequent plague that struck the people (Num. 25, 31: 16). Bilaam is numbered by the rabbis as one of only four commoners denied a share in the world to come (Sanhedrin 90a).

Why then did God choose that Israel be blessed blessings by Bilaam? Surely there is a principle Megalgelim zekhut al yedei zakkai: "Good things come about through good people" (Tosefta Yoma 4: 12). Why did this good thing come about through a bad man? The answer lies in the principle stated in Proverbs (27: 2): "Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips." Tanakh is perhaps the least self-congratulatory national literature in history. Jews chose to record for history their faults, not their virtues. Hence it was important that their praise come from an outsider, and one not known to like them. Moses rebuked the people. Bilaam, the outsider, praised them.

That said, however, what is the meaning of one of the most famous descriptions ever given of

the people Israel: "It is a nation dwelling alone, not reckoned among the nations." (Num. 23: 9)? I have argued (in Future Tense) against the interpretation that has become popular in modern times, namely that it is Israel's destiny to be isolated, friendless, hated, abandoned and alone, as if anti-semitism were somehow written into the script of history. It isn't. None of the prophets said so. To the contrary, they believed that the nations of the world would eventually recognise Israel's God and come to worship Him in the Temple in Jerusalem. Zechariah (8: 23) foresees a day when "ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'" There is nothing fated, predestined, about antisemitism.

What then do Bilaam's words mean? Ibn Ezra says they mean that unlike all other nations, Jews, even when a minority in a non-Jewish culture, will not assimilate. Ramban says that their culture and creed will remain pure, not a cosmopolitan mix of multiple traditions and nationalities. Netziv gives the sharp interpretation, clearly directed against the Jews of his time, that "If Jews live distinctive and apart from others they will dwell safely, but if they seek to emulate 'the nations' they 'will not be reckoned' as anything special at all."

There is, however, another possibility, hinted at by another antisemite, G. K. Chesterton (that Chesterton was an antisemite is not my judgment but that of the poet W. H. Auden).[1] Chesterton famously wrote of America that it was "a nation with the soul of a church" and "the only nation in the world founded on a creed." That is precisely what made Israel different – and America's political

culture, as historian Perry Miller and sociologist Robert Bellah pointed out, is deeply rooted in the idea of biblical Israel and the concept of covenant. Ancient Israel was indeed founded on a creed, and was, as a result, a nation with the soul of a religion.

All other nations, ancient and modern, have arisen out of historical contingencies. A group of people live in a land, develop a shared culture, form a society, and thus become a nation. Jews, certainly from the Babylonian exile onward, had none of the conventional attributes of a nation. They did not live in the same land. Some lived in Israel, others in Babylon, yet others in Egypt. Later they would be scattered throughout the world. They did not share a language of everyday speech. Rashi spoke French, Maimonides Arabic. There were many Jewish vernaculars, versions of Yiddish, Ladino and other regional Jewish dialects. They did not live under the same political dispensation. They did not share the same cultural environment. Nor did they experience the same fate. When the Jews of Spain were enjoying their golden age, the Jews of Northern Europe were being massacred in the Crusades. When the Jews of Spain were being persecuted and expelled, the Jews of Poland were enjoying a rare summer of tolerance. Yet they saw themselves and were seen by others as one nation: the world's first, and for long the world's only, global people.

What then made them a nation? This was the question R. Saadia Gaon asked in the tenth century, to which he gave the famous answer: "Our nation is only a nation in virtue of its laws (torot)." They were the people defined by the Torah, a nation under the sovereignty of God. Having received, uniquely, their laws

before they even entered their land, they remained bound by those selfsame laws even when they lost the land. Of no other nation has this ever been true.

Uniquely then, in Judaism religion and nationhood coincide. There are nations with many religions: multicultural Britain is one among many. There are religions governing many nations: Christianity and Islam are obvious examples. Only in the case of Judaism is there a one-to-one correlation between religion and nationhood. Without Judaism there would be nothing (except antisemitism) to connect Jews across the world. And without the Jewish nation Judaism would cease to be what it has always been, the faith of a people bound by a bond of collective responsibility to one another and to God. Bilaam was right. The Jewish people really are unique.

Nothing therefore could be more mistaken than to define Jewishness as a mere ethnicity. If ethnicity is a form of culture, then Jews are not one ethnicity but many. In Israel, Jews are a walking lexicon of almost every ethnicity under the sun. If ethnicity is another word for race, then conversion to Judaism would be impossible (you cannot convert to become Caucasian; you cannot change your race at will).

What makes Jews "a nation dwelling alone, not reckoned among the nations," is that their nationhood is not a matter of geography, politics or ethnicity. It is a matter of religious vocation as God's covenant partners, summoned to be a living example of a nation among the nations made distinctive by its faith and way of life. Lose that and we lose the one thing that was and remains the source of our singular contribution to the heritage of humankind. When we forget this,

sadly, God arranges for people like Bilaam and Chesterton to remind us otherwise. We should not need such reminding.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z"TL

"Let me die the death of the righteous and let my afterward be like his" (23:10)

Here Bileam envies the reward of the Afterlife which is promised to Israel, and he expresses the wish that he could be worthy to share their lot. It is noteworthy that this open declaration of the reward of the Afterlife was made by a non-Israelite prophet. Although the Afterlife is hinted elsewhere, yet no Israelite prophet spoke openly on this matter; and it was left to Bileam to proclaim publicly the reason why Hashem numbers Israel.

The Rambam says "sadeekim yoshvim", the sadeekim sit forever in Olam Haba. They never get tired of it. Every minute the simha in Olam Haba gets bigger and bigger. And "their crowns are on their heads." What are those crowns? The Rambam says they are the da'at Hashem, the understanding of true knowledge that you gain in this world. You have to know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the Bore' (Creator); He is the Mehav'e', the One who brings everything into existence. The whole world was made bidvar Hashem, with His word, and not only did He make it, He maintains it all the time.

All of these things are part of the crown of true understanding/da'at. The love of Hashem, going in His ways, and other things that make the crown on your head. The Rambam explained that in Olam Haba the sadeekim have pleasure in proportion to the kind of crown

they have acquired in this life. The reward in Olam Haba is measured by how much knowledge of Hashem you gain (de'ah). Misvot are very good, but if you want to get more reward, do Misvot with De'ah, and De'ah is something you have to work on.

That is why Talmud Torah is so important. You have to learn Hashkafa (Torah outlook) and Emunah and all the topics dealt with in the Hovot Halevavot (Duties of the Mind), in order to recognize Hashem's Hessed and Wisdom in the world. "Gudlo v'tubo male' olam", His kindness and greatness and wisdom fill the world (Shabbat prayers).

Adapted from "Journey Into Greatness" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT'L

"Rabbi Miller Speaks Vol. 1"

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