

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

BALAK

Haftarah: Michah 5:6-6:8

JULY 8-9, 2017 14 TAMUZ 5777

The Fast of 17 Tamuz will be on Tuesday, July 11.

DEDICATION: Please pray for a refuah shelema for Elisheva bat Esther

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The Dog On The Chain

Every Jew is commanded to remember ten archetypical Biblical events. Not only are we commanded to remember them, but we must remember the loving-kindness that G-d showered upon us in each of these events and thank Him for it. The rabbis suggest we pronounce these each day and many siddurim list them at the end of the morning service.

The seventh item is to remember, "what advice Balak and Bilaam shared to do to our forefathers in order to know the righteousness of Hashem".

The story we read this week in brief tells of Bilaam, a descendant of Laban from Aram was internationally famous for the effectiveness of his blessings and curses. Balak who was the king of Moab was afraid of the invading Israelites. Understanding that the power of Moses and the Jewish people was through their mouths and prayer, he asked Bilaam to come and curse the people of Israel. Hashem told Bilaam, in a vision, that he should not go with Balak's emissaries; but after further urging from the messengers, Hashem allowed him to go.

Bilaam mounted his donkey and left with the messengers. An angel stood on the road with a drawn sword. The donkey saw the angel and swerved aside, refusing to continue, even when Bilaam hit her with his stick. The donkey, granted by Hashem the power to speak, complained to Bilaam against his ill treatment. What stands out is that Bilaam the prophet was blind to what his donkey could see.

Bilaam's eyes were then opened, and he saw the angel, who told him that he could proceed with the men, but he was allowed to say only what the angel told him to say.

Balak, the king of Moab, came out to meet Bilaam and reproached him for his reluctance to come. Bilaam answered that he could utter only the words that Hashem put in his mouth.

The next day, Balak went up with Bilaam to a high mountain from where they could see the camp of the people of Israel. Bilaam ordered that seven altars be built, and a bull and a ram were sacrificed on each of them.

Then came the moment when Balak expected Bilaam to curse Israel. To his great surprise, Bilaam uttered blessings for Israel, instead of curses. The same thing happened two more times: once on the top of Pisgah and the other on the peak of Peor.

Balak, angry and disappointed, told Bilaam to flee back to his own land. Bilaam's last words to Balak were a prophecy that Israel would one day triumph over Moab.

Bilaam, instead of returning to his country, stayed in the region and joined the Midianites. He suggested that the way to defeat Israel was to encourage the Israelites to be immoral and promiscuous. As a result 24,000 Israelites die and it would have been more had Pinchas not stopped it.

One would imagine the command to remember would be to recall the attempted curse and the foiling of that plot with curses becoming blessings. But in actuality if we look at the words of the prophet in this week's Haftara which form the basis of the misvah to remember, it is the advice we are to recall.

Remember the advice in order to recall the justice of Hashem. Act with justice, love kindness, and live modestly with the L-rd your G-d. Why the advice.

Rabbi David Sutton does a beautiful job giving an answer. He quotes the son of Rav Chaim Brisk who tells the following story as a mashal.

The citizens of a town hire a new teacher for the children. They caution him to be wary of a wild dog who resides at a certain junction. It is a powerful, dangerous and unpredictable dog held in place by strong steel chains.

The man likes animals and this peaks his curiosity. He goes to visit this junction, sees the dog secured with multiple chains. The dog appears to be docile. He decides to offer the dog a treat and repeats this day after day. Soon he is petting the dog and playing with it.

Weeks go by and the teacher approaches the owner questioning why it is necessary to lock up this sweet dog with so many chains. He pleads that the dog seems to be so nice. He begs for a chance to free the dog from it's chains and prove his theory. The people are not so brave and lock themselves in their homes. The owner warns him again, suggests he is crazy, but hands him the keys.

The teacher approaches the dog he has played with over the last few weeks. He feeds the dog adding some treats. He pets the dog and plays with the dog. And then he unlocks the dog, chain by chain. No sooner is the last chain unlocked when the dog goes from docile to vicious. The playful dog attacks his savior ferociously confronting the teacher and endangering his life. It is only the fact that the townspeople come out with canes and mallets and force the dog back into captivity which saves the teachers life.

We live in a world filled with ferocious enemies. Given the chance, they attack. We are being told to remember what happens when the dogs are let loose. At Shittim, 24,000 people die when the advice Bilaam shares with Balak becomes reality.

We must remember that Hashem keeps the dog on a chain, but if he let's the dog loose even for a moment, the dog wreaks incredible havoc. This is what we are commanded to remember.

We lived peacefully with our Arab neighbors in Syria for two thousand years, and then they attack. In Europe they lived for 900 years with their Lithuanian neighbors. They were friends, associates and business partners, but look what happens when Hashem lets them off the leash even for a moment.

If not for the Torah, we would have never known the story of Balak bringing Bilaam to curse the people. How many planned attacks are foiled without us even learning of them.

Rabbi Sutton reminds us of the words of the Hagadah. In every generation they stand up to destroy us and Hashem saves us from their hands. The Hagadah continues, "go and learn what Laban the Arami, (the ancestor of Bilaam) wanted to do to Jacob our father.

Don't we have better examples of enemies to pick from? We know that Jacob's father-in-law tried to swindle him. But do we really see in attempt a killing him? We see Jacob's brother Esav wants to kill him. Why not use Esav as the example? Why use Laban his father-in-law?

Rashi explains that Laban was ready to kill his son-in-law, his four daughters and twelve grandchildren but, "The G-d of your father came to me in a dream". We see that the plan is foiled even before it can even be acted upon.

It's a scary story. But we see it happening every day. How many of us are like the teacher? How many believe that the dog is kind and loving and will be a friendly neighbor? How many think that if we throw the dog a bone, build him a nicer dog house, give him a larger play area and remove his shackles, he will be loyal and caring?

But then how many times have we been killed when that dog was allowed to do it's bidding? There is a miracle in our survival. It is the miracle of Hashem holding back our enemies. There is the daily miracle of the enemies not being allowed to fulfill their desires.

We should be saying thank you Hashem for protecting me every day from the things that we see and from the things that we don't. And we do in our daily prayers, but we have to be reminded of what this really means.

Rabbi Sutton tells a story of the Chafetz Chaim who recalls as a child being with his friends who want to pull a prank on the milkman. After the milkman retires for the night, the mischievous boys in the midst of winter enter his barn. They fill his jugs with water hoping that the water will freeze during the frigid night. In the morning they return to witness the milkman imagining they will laugh as he goes about getting the ice out of each of his jugs. Instead the jugs are empty. Little did they know that the Chafetz Chaim returned during the night to empty the water and foil the plan. The boys wonder what happens and the milkman does not even realize he has been saved.

My friends, day in and day out it is we who are that milkman. We don't even realize we are watched over, cared for and protected on a daily basis.

Let us remember our protector, let us be thankful and let us merit to be protected always.

Shabbat Shalom,

**Yesh Atid MK Sends A Letter To Gedolei Torah
July 3, 2017 11:30 pm
(YWN – Israel Desk, Jerusalem)**

Yesh Atid MK Meir Cohen is known to many as the token Sephardi in the party headed by Yair Lapid, so it was not for nothing that he was considered one of Lapid's close associates.

On Sunday, MK Meir Cohen sent a polite letter, in which he addressed personally Gedolei Yisrael, HaGaon HaRav Aharon Yehuda Leib Shteinman Shlita and HaGaon HaRav Shalom Cohen Shlita, while there is doubt if the letter did reach the gedolim, it did reach the media.

He writes "To our sorrow and shame, we are still witness to the exclusion of Sephardim from registration to religious institutions belonging to the chareidi Ashkenazi stream. Despite the many promises made, we see that the phenomenon is not disappearing and in certain cases even intensified."

"I hereby appeal to you to act uncompromisingly to abolish the phenomenon that excludes Jews and Jewish children and bnei Torah and causes them sorrow and injustice, for the sake of the unity and love of Israel."

To Rav Shalom Cohen, the Knesset Member, adds the following paragraph: "Your Honor, you are the head of the largest Sephardic chareidi party in the world dedicated to glorifying glorious Sephardic Jewry, but we continue to witness the humiliation experienced by students, and their parents, only because of their origin."

Cohen ends his letter with "May HKBH give you bracha and longevity in good health and strength".

**Agudath Israel Statement On Recent Jewish
Federation Stances
July 4, 2017 12:15 pm
(YWN Headquarters – NYC)**

Leaders of the Jewish Federations of North America and local federations have spoken out loudly about their disappointment in the Israeli government's decision to suspend the Kotel resolution and about a contentious conversion bill that was recently put on hold.

A self-described Jewish state, of course, must maintain some Jewish standard, both with regard to its holy places and its definitions of personal status. The only reasonable standard in all such matters is that of the mutual Jewish past, the Jewish religious tradition, or halacha.

There are those, unfortunately, who agitate for different standards in Israel. That is their prerogative as individuals. But the historic role of Jewish federations has been to provide support and solace for disadvantaged or endangered Jews and to mobilize the community to come to Israel's aid when it is threatened. Taking sides in religious controversies anywhere, and certainly in Israel, egregiously breaches the boundaries of that role. It also entirely ignores the American Orthodox community, which harbors quite different sentiments. The most conservative estimates are that 10% of American Jewry is Orthodox. The Orthodox community, moreover, is poised to become a much more prominent sector of American Jewry. More than a quarter of all American Jews 17 years of age or younger are Orthodox. And even at present, the great majority of Jewishly engaged American Jews, those whose lives are infused with Judaism (and, not to mention, who are among the most strongly involved with Israel) are the Orthodox.

Any American Jew can, again, hold and promote a personal position on any issue, including the current ones in Israel. But federations are communal entities, not private ones. By proclaiming positions on religious controversies and ignoring the convictions of American Orthodox Jewry, federation leaders do grave damage to the very Jewish unity they profess as a goal.

**Rav Kook on the Perasha
Together with Shema**

In the parashah of Balak, we find prophetic verses of exquisite beauty and an inspiring story of God's vigilant watch over the Jewish people. But to truly appreciate this Torah portion, consider this remarkable teaching of the Sages.

The Talmud (Berachot 12b) relates that at one time the rabbis contemplated incorporating the parashah of Balak into the daily prayers, alongside the recitation of the Shema. This is truly astounding. What lesson is contained in the words of Balaam - a villainous prophet, steeped in blind hatred for the Jewish people — that could possibly compare to the Torah's most fundamental beliefs, as delineated in the Shema, the centerpiece of Jewish prayer?

Fortunately, the Talmud clues us in to what makes this parashah so special. Its unique message may be found in the following verse, comparing the Jewish people to a fearsome lion:

"[Israel] crouches; he lies like a lion and a lioness. Who dares rouse him?" (Num. 24:9)

Yes, it is a beautiful metaphor describing the timeless strength and vitality of the Jewish people. But does this verse justify reading the entire portion of Balak twice a day, together with the Shema?

The Missing Link: Clearly, the Sages saw an inner link between Balak and the Shema. In order to understand this connection, we must first analyze the principal themes of the Shema. The Sages taught (Berachot 13a) that the first passage of the Shema expresses God's unity and our acceptance of His rule; and that the theme of the second passage is our acceptance of the mitzvot.

However, these two axioms of Judaism — accepting God's reign and accepting His mitzvot — are missing a common link. What is it that combines them, leading to universal acceptance of God through the performance of mitzvot? The missing link is the Jewish people.

The lofty aspirations expressed in the Shema necessitate the existence of a nation who, throughout the generations, observes the mitzvot and introduces the concept of God's unity to the world. This is the mission of the Jewish people. In fact, they were created specifically for this purpose: "This people I created for Me, [so that] they will proclaim My praise" (Isaiah 43:21).

Now we can understand why the Sages wanted to add this particular verse to the recital of the Shema. Balaam poetically compared the Jewish people to a sleeping lion that none dare disturb. Everyone fears the formidable powers of this majestic creature, even when it sleeps. The latent power of the Jewish people is such that, even when 'sleeping' — even when they are exiled from their land and many of their unique national institutions (the Temple, Sanhedrin, kohanim, prophets, etc.) are dormant — nonetheless, their eternal nature is legendary. [1]

The survival of the Jewish people throughout the generations, despite all odds, and in violation of all laws of history, enables them to persist in their mission of proclaiming God's unity. Their indestructible nature is in itself a sanctification of God's Name.

Jewish Nationalism: If the significance of the parashah of Balak can be reduced to this single verse, then why not just add that verse to the daily prayers? Why add the entire section?

The Talmud explains that we may not add the verse by itself, since the Torah should not be broken up

arbitrarily. "Any section that Moses did not divide, we may not divide."

This explanation is difficult to understand. We find many individual verses incorporated in the liturgy. Why not this one?

It appears that detaching this particular verse from the rest of Balaam's prophecy poses a special danger. By itself, the verse could be construed as extolling nationalism for its own sake. The unique strength of the Jewish people is not meant to serve the goals of self-centered nationalism, military conquest, or national aggrandizement. The eternal nature of Israel must be understood within the context of their unique mission: to promulgate God's Name in the world. Therefore we must take care not to separate this verse from the rest of the portion.

Appreciating the Message of Balak: In the end, the Sages did not add the parashah of Balak to the daily prayers. They felt that such a lengthy addition would be too great a burden for the people.

Reading this portion would be a burden, since its message is not applicable to every generation. Not every generation is able to appreciate the role that Israel's timeless vitality plays in achieving its spiritual goals. Yet the very fact that the Sages wanted to incorporate it in the prayers indicates that a time will come when this message will be accepted and internalized by the nation as a whole.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 67-68)

[1] Mark Twain wrote in 1898: "[The Jew] has made a marvelous fight in the world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished.

The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?" (Concerning The Jews, Harper's Magazine, March 1898).

Summary of the Perasha

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.

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"And from there he saw the edge of the people." (Bemidbar 22:41)

Bilam was a very unusual person. He was a real prophet, but at the same time he was willing to help destroy the Jewish People. He tried to curse the Israelites and failed. He also tried to harm them by the use of his eyes. His plan was to use his eyes to invoke Hashem's strict justice against the Jewish People. Even in this he didn't succeed. Having a bad eye towards others hurts them, but having a good eye can bless and help them.

Rabbi Raymond Beyda quoted Rabbi Yisrael of Salant zt"l. He used to say that Hashem gave a person two eyes, one with which to see another's good attributes and the other to view one's own shortcomings. Unfortunately, too many of us reverse his advice. We see our strengths and become conceited while we always see another's weaknesses.

We should always enjoy seeing other Jews and try to bring to mind feelings of love. A true story was told about a great Rabbi, the Machnovka Rebbe zt"l. He was imprisoned many years by the Communists. When he was freed, he returned to his Bet Midrash. Upon reaching his seat, he turned it around to face the people, even though Hasidic Rebbes generally face the Eastern wall of the shul. One of the Hasidim

asked the Rebbe why he wasn't facing the wall as he usually did.

"For so many years," responded the Rebbe, "I didn't see a Jew. Now that I have been freed, Baruch Hashem, I want to be able to look at Jews!" Rabbi Reuven Semah

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! Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

From My Point of View

Parents will testify that you can't make everyone happy. The home is as political as the halls of any government building. If one child merits a special reward, it is sure to arouse jealous complaints from his or her siblings. If Mom would like to treat the kids

to a special day of entertainment, you can be sure that what will excite Jacob will leave Ruthie with a long face. People just seem to see things from their own point of view.

When the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) went into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, he said a special prayer on behalf of the welfare of the community. In this once-a-year opportunity to approach Hashem on behalf of his brethren, the Kohen said, "And please do not fulfill the request of the travelers." Why not? Because travelers pray for the weather to be moderate and dry so that the roads are easy to pass and their trip is comfortable. However, these ideal travel conditions are not beneficial to the farmers who need sufficient rain for healthy crops to bring to market. The Kohen asks that the general good should supersede the good of the minority, those who are traveling.

It is not unusual to maneuver for your own best interests. If you do so, try and consider how your request will affect the general public or other members of your workplace, organization, or family. Look beyond your own interests and put yourself in other people's shoes. See things from their point of view. This will bring peace and harmony and yield a better outcome, in general, than that which might be brought about by the selfish interests of any individual member of the group. In the end, everyone will be better off. (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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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.

VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA

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Rabbi Wein RABBI MEIR ZLOTOWITZ ז"ל

I am saddened beyond words by the passing of my beloved friend of many decades, Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz. He was a person of great and many talents: a Torah scholar, a creative entrepreneur, a gifted graphic artist, a superlative fundraiser and above all a man of great vision and daring enterprise. ArtScroll and the Mesorah Heritage Foundation were his gifts to the Jewish people and to his everlasting eternity.

We cannot imagine the Jewish world today without his enormous contributions to the study and dissemination of Torah and Jewish thought. He opened and expanded the understanding of Talmud, prayer, the Bible, Mishna, and the other treasures of Judaism to the broad English-speaking public. His influence in Israel and the Hebrew speaking public was also of immense importance.

His uncanny ability to realize what the Jewish public needed to connect itself to the timeless treasures of Judaism created generations of stronger, more loyal and more knowledgeable Jews. It is no exaggeration to say that ArtScroll, in all of its projects and publications, is the recognized teacher of the Jewish people in our time.

He took great risks but he accomplished great things. Together with his colleague, Rabbi Nosson Scherman, he created a genre of Torah literature, which has spawned many imitators but very few equals. Others will undoubtedly give him his due, with many articles and eulogies written about him. But I want to remember him as my personal friend, as a warm and caring human being who represented, in his persona and his actions, the finest ideals of Judaism as elucidated in the publications that he authored and produced.

Rabbi Zlotowitz was a keen observer of the traits and vagaries of human behavior. He was a realist in the finest sense of the word. He never gave in to cynicism and undue disappointment in the behavior and actions of others, even with those who did not share his vision and misunderstood his purpose.

His sense of humor was apparent to all who conversed with him. He was able to see the sometimes-ludicrous nature of human interaction, even in matters of scholarship and religious outlook. He was a very normal person who often found himself in very abnormal circumstances and situations.

One left a visit with him always in good spirits with a feeling of pleasantness and accomplishment. Even when he rejected an idea or project that was proposed to him he did so with grace and kindness and even encouragement. And he was a great friend to those who wished to befriend him. He was a source of comfort and cheer in difficult times, with constant strength and encouragement offered to those who were associated with him and with ArtScroll.

He was a rare person in today's fragmented Jewish world for he bridged many sections of it with his good humor, deep insight, and tolerant and optimistic nature. He was a very special person and as the Talmud records for us, there are only a few present in any generation.

I spoke to him barely a month ago and he was full of plans regarding an ArtScroll Shabbaton that he was planning to conduct this fall. He also spoke of books to be published and projects that were ruminating in

his fertile mind. I could not imagine that I would be writing this article only a few weeks later. But such is the uncertainty of human mortality and of God's will.

The entire Jewish people recognize the void that his absence leaves us with. But those of us who cherish him in his human capacity as a friend and a mentor are certainly deeply and personally affected by his untimely passing. There was so much left to be done, so much of the future to be realized that it is hard to imagine that somehow he will not be present to create and strengthen it. Naturally, his legacy will now be carried on by others, his family, colleagues and the great Mesorah Heritage Foundation that he created and led for decades. But to a great extent, he like all other human beings, especially those of note, are irreplaceable in their uniqueness.

The Jewish world is orphaned by his passing and I am saddened beyond words at the loss of such a good and loyal friend. May his memory be a blessing for his family, for his publishing house and most importantly, for all of Israel.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks A People That Dwells Alone

One of the most profound and influential comments ever made about Jewish destiny was made by the pagan prophet Bilaam in this week's sedra:

As I see them from the mountain tops,
Gaze on them from the heights,
Behold it is a people that dwells alone,
Not reckoned among the nations. (Num. 23:9)

To many – Jews and non-Jews, admirers and critics alike – that has seemed to epitomise the Jewish situation: a people that stands outside history and the normal laws governing the fate of nations. For Jews it was a source of pride. For non-Jews, it was all too often a source of resentment and hate. For centuries, Jews in Christian Europe were treated, in Max Weber's phrase, as a "pariah people." All agreed, though, that Jews were different. The question is: how and why? The biblical answer is surprising and profound.

It is not that Jews alone knew God. That is manifestly not the case. Bilaam – the very prophet who uttered these words – was not an Israelite. Nor were Abimelekh or Laban, to whom God appears in the book of Genesis. Abraham's contemporary, Malkizedek, king of Shalem (the city that later became Jerusalem) is described as a priest of the most high God. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was a Midianite high priest, yet the sedra that contains the

supreme moment of Jewish history – the revelation at Mount Sinai – bears his name. Even the Pharaoh who ruled Egypt in the days of Joseph said of him, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?"

God does not appear only to Jews, members of the covenantal nation. Nor does He answer only Jewish prayers. At the dedication of the Temple, King Solomon made the following request:

As for the foreigner who does not belong to Your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of Your name — for men will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm-when he comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from heaven, Your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of You, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears Your Name.

The sages continued this great tradition when they said that "the righteous of the nations of the world have a share in the world to come." Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, contains the names of more than 20,000 righteous gentiles who saved lives during the Holocaust years.

Nor is it that God's covenant with the children of Israel means that they are more righteous than others. Malachi, last of the prophets, has striking words to say on the subject:

From where the sun rises to where it sets, My name is honoured among the nations, and everywhere incense and pure oblation are offered to My name, for My name is honoured among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. But you profane it . . . (Malachi 1:11-12)

Nor did any of the major strands in Jewish thought ever see Jewish chosen-ness as a privilege. It was, and is, a responsibility. The key verse here is the famous prophecy of Amos:

You alone have I singled out
Of all the families of the earth –
That is why I will call you to account
For all your iniquities. (Amos 3:2)

Where then did Jewish singularity lie? The clue lies in the precise wording of Bilaam's blessing: "Behold it is a people that dwells alone." For it was as a people that God chose the descendants of Abraham; as a people that He made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai; as a people that He rescued them from Egypt,

gave them laws, and entered into their history. "You will be to Me," He said at Sinai, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Judaism is the only religion to place God at the centre of its self-definition as a nation. Jews are the only nation whose very identity is defined in religious terms.

There were many nations in the ancient world who had national gods. There were other religions – Judaism's two daughter faiths, Christianity and Islam – that believed in a universal God and a universal religion. Only Judaism believed, and still believes, in a universal God accessible to all, yet peculiarly manifest in the way of life, fate and destiny of a single and singular people:

You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen . . . You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, that I am God. (Isaiah 43:10-12). Israel, in its history and laws, would be God's witness. It would testify to something larger than itself. So it proved to be. The historian Barbara Tuchman wrote:

The history of the Jews is . . . intensely peculiar in the fact of having given the Western world its concept of origins and monotheism, its ethical traditions, and the founder of its prevailing religion, yet suffering dispersion, statelessness and ceaseless persecution, and finally in our times nearly successful genocide, dramatically followed by fulfilment of the never-relinquished dream of return to their homeland. Viewing this strange and singular history one cannot escape the impression that it must contain some special significance for the history of mankind, that in some way, whether one believes in divine purpose or inscrutable circumstance, the Jews have been singled out to carry the tale of human fate.

Why, if God is the God of the universe, accessible to every human being, should He choose one nation to bear witness to His presence in the human arena? This is a profound question. There is no short answer. But at least part of the answer, I believe, is this. God is wholly Other. Therefore He chose a people who would be humanity's 'other'. That is what Jews were – outsiders, different, distinctive, a people who swam against the tide and challenged the idols of the age. Judaism is the counter-voice in the conversation of mankind.

During two thousand years of dispersion, Jews were the only people who, as a group, refused to assimilate to the dominant culture or convert to the dominant faith. They suffered as a result – but what they taught was not for themselves alone. They showed that a nation does not need to be powerful or

large to win God's favour. They showed that a nation can lose everything else – land, power, rights, a home – and yet still not lose hope. They showed that God is not necessarily on the side of great empires or big battalions. They showed that a nation can be hated, persecuted, reviled, and yet still be loved by God. They showed that to every law of history there is an exception and what the majority believes at any given moment is not necessarily true. Judaism is God's question-mark against the conventional wisdom of the age.

It is neither an easy nor a comfortable fate to be "a people that dwells alone", but it is a challenging and inspirational one

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL
QUESTION: Is it important to save money for retirement or your children?

ANSWER: It's permissible to do, however! To save for your children, it depends. If you save without sacrificing the purpose of your life, that's alright; but people who give away the time that they should devote for their own betterment, they give that to their children, then it's a hundred percent waste. Because your child, when he comes into the world, he brings along an allowance that he takes with him from heaven, everybody is born with an allowance. My parents didn't set me up in business, didn't leave me any money: Baruch Hashem I never had to borrow any money all my life.

If you won't save up for your children, you'll take off your evenings to study Torah, you'll dotzedoka, you'll give money to charity; don't try to leave wealth for your children. Of course, if you want to leave them Torah wealth and it costs money to send them to Yeshivas, it costs money to keep even your married children in Kollel, that's yours! Whatever you do for them is for you, that's an investment on your own. But even that, suppose you're capable of sitting in the Kollel but your son would like you to keep on slaving to keep him in the Kollel? So you tell him, if you wish you can do it for me, I'll let you slave and support me in the Kollel.

Why not? A father has the right to be in the Kollel, sometimes the father has a better head than the son has. The Gemara says, hulilmodubnolilmodhukodem, it's a question who should learn he or his son, he's first. So you don't give away your soul for your children. But – if you can do it without any big sacrifices of your time, to leave a little bit for them, nothing wrong.