

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 12 Tammuz 5769. The Three Weeks begins this Wednesday night, the 17 Tammuz. The fast day of Shiv'ah Assar B'Tammuz is this Thursday.

TORAH DIALOGUE
(p. 652 Hz) (p. 898 S) (p. 584 Hi) (p. 838 AS)
CHUKAT-BALAK חקת-בלק

1. The law of the Red Heifer is a paradigm of a Chok, a mitzvah which defies our ability to explain it and rationalize it. The Midrash claims that the heifer is the mother of the calf, symbolizing the Sin of the Golden Calf, and that the ritual of the Red Heifer is likened to the fact that the mother must come and clean up after her offspring. In this fashion we see that the Jewish people are still in need of atonement for the Sin of the Golden Calf. This though is problematic in one fashion since God did punish the people at that time. He sent the plague against those who worshipped the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:38). Whoever did not sin did not die in that plague. Consequently why is there necessity for further atonement? We must derive from this that people who did not actually perform any ritual service to the Calf nevertheless still bear some of the guilt of that debacle. Perhaps those who stood by and did not object or take a hand to forcibly stop this sin are accessories to the crime and must earn atonement for their laid back posture of not intervening and stopping a disgraceful act of desecration of God's name. The application of this is quite profound in the fact that we are responsible for the performance of sins even though we are the ones who are not committing them. Maybe there is something to attempting to influence and stop other Jews from desecrating the Shabbat. Our non-involvement in their disobedience of Torah law is possibly judged in Heaven as sins of omission on our part. (RED)

2. The ritual of the Red Heifer is the vehicle through which people who became defiled and Tamei as a result of contact with a dead body can become purified. All of us at some time become defiled in this fashion; it is a natural occurrence in the routine activities of life. There is a distinction in law between a form of defilement manifesting itself from contact with a grave. The grave of a Jew has the ability to defile an individual, while the grave of a non-Jew does not have that same strength in creating impurity (Tamei B'ohel). The distinction between a Jew and a non-Jew manifests itself in many laws and yet we still recognize the sanctity of the Image of God that exists in all human beings, Jewish and non-Jewish. Nevertheless there is this distinction between Jews and non-Jews. I see a great distinction existing in our embrace of the mitzvah world. The Jew has an ability to sanctify himself in greater measure because of the abundance of mitzvot that exist at his fingertips. The non-Jew has an ability to increase his holiness by the observance of the minimum standard of the seven Noahide laws, and in addition he may opt for conversion to Judaism which is an option for all non-Jews. Tum'ah, impurity, is acquired when we negate the Image of God or expel it. This is accomplished at death when the Image of God, our Neshamah, our soul, abandons the body when it is summoned to return to the Almighty, its Creator. (RED)

3. When Miriam dies in the beginning of Chapter 20 the Jewish people find themselves immediately lacking water. From this association we surmise that the presence of water in the desert was in the merit of Miriam's greatness. Commentators on the Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 339) link this incident to the common custom recorded in the Shulchan Aruch: at the time when a person died in the neighborhood, the residents of the neighborhood would pour the water from their homes out into the street. The Shach writes that the reason for this custom was that this act of throwing the water out was a method to inform the people, passersby and all, that a tragedy has struck in the neighborhood and a person has died. In this fashion no Lashon Hara, or any speech was required to spread the word of a person's demise. We have accordingly adopted a slogan that it is never good to be the person to spread bad news. We always try to speak positively and avoid speaking negatively, even if it is not Lashon Hara per se. I do not know exactly when this custom was abandoned; I surmise that with the innovation of running water in people's homes there was no common practice of storing water in the house. Consequently there was no custom of throwing water out of the home and onto the street. Nevertheless it is important to let the word out and make sure people know when there is a death so that they can involve themselves in the various mitzvahs pertaining to this event. There is the Chevra Kadisha, the mitzvah of attending the funeral, taking care of the remains, plus furthermore there is a mitzvah to comfort the mourners and to deal with all the products and by-products of the person's death. (Maybe that is why God created email. It is a much more technological and efficient manner, replacing throwing the water out the window –RED.)

4. The incident of the hitting of the rock and obtaining water for the complaining people brought forth Moshe's downfall as the leader of the Jewish people. The punishment he received was being denied entry into the Promised Land. Yet the Torah is purposely vague in not specifically identifying Moshe's sin. The Abravanel lists ten sins that Moshe could have committed and would result in this punishment. The Shada"l (Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Luzatto) wrote that he refrained from being involved in this issue of trying to figure out what precisely was Moshe's sin. He was afraid that he would end up trying to be innovative and adding to the possible sins that Moshe committed. Truly I understand the Shada"l's perspective. If the Torah is specifically vague then maybe the Torah wanted it that way for whatever reasons. By involving ourselves in the enumeration and definition of Moshe's sin we end up making things worse and as in the Abravanel's case increasing the possible defining moment of Moshe's failure. What we end up doing is in some fashion Lashon Hara about Moshe Rabbeinu in the fact that we add to the nature of sin and all of this turns out to be reflecting badly upon one of the greatest people in world history, not just to the Master of Prophets in the Jewish tradition. (RED)

5. On the final leg of their journey towards the Promised Land, Bnei Yisrael find themselves blocked by the territory of Edom, descendants of Esav. Although Moshe sends messengers to request safe passage to the territory, Edom refuses Moshe's appeal. Hashem did not permit the Jewish

people to contend with Edom, because as Hashem states later in the Torah (Devarim 2:4), He gave Mount Seir to Esav as a possession. Forbidden from attacking Edom, Bnei Yisrael needed to circumvent and travel in a circuitous route that would encumber their progress. Since they had plenty of time, this created no particular disadvantage to the people's travels. But it does bring out the difficulties that Bnei Yisrael would have in relating to the various nations with whom they shared ancestry. There is a difference in the Jewish relationship with Edom vis-à-vis the relationship with Amalek, who are also Esav's descendants. Moav and Ammon are Lot's descendents, and Hashem dictates very different relations that the Jewish people would have, not just within the context of the Biblical story, but later in Jewish history as well. Our relationship with our distant cousins is primarily dependent upon how they treated us from the times of the Biblical narrative. Amalek is a sworn enemy; Esav and Moav and Ammon receive certain benefits of being family. So being related, albeit in a distant fashion, is not the litmus test to our relationship with these nations. I guess the fact that we are distantly related to the Arab world would not be a consideration in the manifestation of our relationship with these people. (RED)

6. In the second Sidrah that we read today we are introduced to two other personalities, Balak and Bilaam. At first the Torah introduces Balak to us and does not indicate that he is the king of Moav. Only after several verses does the Torah make mention of this fact. Rav Chaim Soloveitchik (the Brisker Rav, grandfather of Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik) noted something interesting in this unique Torah introduction to Balak. Balak was not the king of Moav when he brought forth some of the problems that could possibly face the nation among whom he lived. With the death of Sichon and Og, Balak perpetuated the fear that the people should have regarding the oncoming imminent presence of Bnei Yisrael. The promotion of fear among the people was the method by which Balak was able to elevate himself within the society to the degree that the people's fear dominated the nation and proclaimed Balak king as a means of confronting their oncoming dangerous situation. Promoting fear among the people was the method by which Balak united the people and ultimately led them in confronting this dangerous situation. [Who in the modern period of history used the fear of the Jewish people to unite his national followers to confront the danger of the Jewish presence in their midst?]

7. Bilaam, the non-Jewish prophet, takes center stage in his attempt to fulfill Balak's request and curse the people, yet Hashem restricted that which came out of his mouth, and that which did are seen as words of truth and profound praise and recognition of the Jewish people. Bilaam states (23:9), "It is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations [of the world]." The miracle of the existence of the Jewish people is exactly that: that we still exist. Despite all the persecutions and isolation that we have been subjected to at the hands of the non-Jewish world we still exist. The Hitlerian "final solution" of the 20th century was a logical ramification and development of thousands of years of anti-Semitism. The persecution at the hands of the non-Jewish world, manifesting itself in the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Holocaust, only emphasize to us the

ultimate truth of Bilaam's prophecy that the Jewish people will exist, and will exist alone, and never be reckoned or accepted by the non-Jewish world. The presence of the Jewish people (and in fact the State of Israel) is always in jeopardy and under attack. It is under attack from without, from the non-Jewish world, and it is also under attack from within by Jews who cannot contemplate or accept the position or the definition of the Jewish people themselves. We have lived a precarious and yet unique life in world history, one that is miraculous by all means and understanding of the story of the history of mankind. (RED)

HAFTORAH

(p. 682 Hz) (p. 929 S) (p. 900 Hi) (p. 1189 AS)

MICAH **מיכה**

Jewish powerlessness is only a surface impression. On a deeper level, God's Firstborn People exert an imperceptible dew-like influence upon their hosts; this will eventually result in a powerful reshaping of the whole world toward justice, love, and God from Israel. First the Jews must see their own false economic and military security destroyed. Micah reminds us of Balak's scheme, which didn't work due to a basic flaw: God has no need of animal sacrifices, if the donor doesn't sacrifice – bring near to God – his own animal nature. Balak erred – he believed that God needed human gifts and was bribable by sacrifices, a reflection of his own values. Man created God in his own image; my true understanding of God can only match the level of my own inner Divine soul development. Balak's arrogant religious leader uses his knowledge of Divinity to hurt people or to sell blessings. Moshe, in contrast, is the most humble, the most other-oriented of all men, who teaches all how to walk modestly with our God. (Malbim.)

SHABBAT HALACHAH

It is permissible to feed animals on Shabbat only if they are normally fed by man (Orach Chaim 324:11, Mishnah Berura 29.) Not only are the owners of those animals permitted to feed them, but others are also allowed to do so (Shmirat Shabbat K'Hilchata 27:21.) Concerning animals which are generally able to find their own food, it is forbidden to feed them on Shabbat. It is for this reason that many Poskim forbid putting out food for birds on Shabbat Shira. The Aruch Hashulchan (324:2) is of the opinion that if one sees an animal that is hungry and unable to find food, even if it is normally not fed by humans, it is permissible to feed it because, "*His compassion extends to all of His creatures.*"