



The Greater Washington Community Kollel

SHABBOS DELIGHTS

TORAH MINUTE

IN MEMORY OF RABBI KALMAN WINTER ZT"l

Tent Intent

Presented by Rabbi Hillel Shaps, Kollel Scholar and Director of Special Projects

"How good are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Israel." (24:5)

In Parshas Balak, Bilaam is hired by Balak and the nation of Moav to curse the Jewish people. Instead of curses, however, G-d places beautiful blessings on Bilaam's lips. Famous among his many blessings is "*Ma Tovu Ohalecha Yaakov* – How good are your tents, O Yaakov..." The Talmud (Bava Basra 60a) cites Rav Yochanan that when Bilaam "raised his eyes and saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes," (24:2) he saw how their tents were arranged in a way that allowed privacy to each family. The commentaries (Rashbam on Bava Basra, Rashi on our verse) understand that it was in response to this observation that he subsequently declared, "How good are your tents, O Yaakov!"

This interpretation, though, is seemingly contradicted by a different statement of Rav Yochanan. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 105b) cites the following from Rav Yochanan: "Based on the blessings of that wicked one (Bilaam) one can derive what was in his heart. He desired that they should have no *Batei Knessios* or *Batei Midrashos* (Houses of Prayer or Houses of Study). [This is derived from his blessing] "How good are your tents, O Yaakov!" While the first approach seems to interpret the "tents" as a reference to the individual private tents of the Jewish people, this second interpretation implies that the "tents" are public *Batei Knessios* and *Batei Midrashos*. What kind of "tents" was Bilaam in fact referring to?

Perhaps we can suggest the following resolution. Bilaam understood that the strength of the Jewish people lies in their level of spirituality and connection to G-d. If he could undermine their ability to do *mitzvos* and have a relationship with G-d, it would leave them vulnerable. Bilaam, however, mistakenly assumed that Judaism was like other religions whose religious activities are primarily restricted to their temples or churches, while the home is generally divested of any religious practice or sanctity. He, therefore, cursed the Jews that their *Batei Knessios* and *Batei Midrashos* – the buildings from which they could achieve spiritual elevation should be obsolete.

But Bilaam was wrong. In Judaism, the home is also a place of spiritual development, purity and holiness! There is a mezuzah on the door of the home to remind us of G-d's presence and protection. *Mitzvos* are performed in the home and blessings and prayers are recited there. Jewish children receive some of their most essential Jewish education in the home and things that are contradictory to purity and holiness are not brought into the home. The Jewish home is actually a beacon of spirituality and holiness and makes its own spiritual mark on the world.

"Based on the blessings of that wicked one, one can derive what was in his heart." Bilaam indeed only intended to curse the "tents" of worship and study based on his mistaken belief that those were the only centers of spirituality. The output, however, was a blessing that included all of our centers of spirituality – that our homes should be places of purity and holiness and that there should be many *Batei Knessios* and *Batei Midrashos* where we could gather together for prayer and Torah study. May we all merit to dwell in such beautiful "tents!"

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TABLE TALK

Point to Ponder

The words of the one who hears the sayings of G-d, who sees the visions of Sha-dai, while fallen... (24:4)

When Hashem appeared to Bilaam, he did not have the ability to stand on his feet, so he fell on his face... (Rashi)

Never again has there risen in Israel a prophet liken Moshe (Vzos Haberacha 34:10).

In Klal Yisrael there has not been a prophet like Moshe, but amongst the non-Jews there has been, namely Bilaam (Sifrei, Vzos Habrocho 39).

From Rashi it seems that Bilaam's prophecy was not as great as Moshe's being that Moshe did not fall on his face when Hashem spoke to him, and yet Bilaam did. How to we reconcile Rashi with the Sifrei?

Parsha Riddle

What other Parsha name is attributed to a section of Parshas Chukas?

Please see next week's issue for the answer.

Last week's riddle:

How did the words of Kabbalas Shabbos cause the death of two people in two different instances?

Answer: In Kabbalas Shabbos we say "Moshe and Aaron were among His priests, and Shmuel among those who invoke His name." 1) Korach – when he saw he would have a descendant (Shmuel) who is equated with Moshe and Aaron, decided he could argue with them, thereby leading to his death. 2) Shmuel – when he saw he was equated with Moshe and Aaron, he claimed that his appointee to king, Shaul, cannot be removed from his position during his lifetime. Therefore, Hashem made Shmuel die young in order to be able to have Shaul die (Taanis 5b).

HATORAH V'HAMITZVAH

HALACHA INSIGHTS FROM THE PARSHA

In *parashas Chukas* (20:14-21), the Torah relates: Moshe sent emissaries from Kadesh to the king of Edom. ... And Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through me ..." ... Then Edom went out against him with a massive throng and a strong hand. So Edom refused to permit Israel to pass through his border, and Israel turned away from near him.

The *Meshech Chochmah* notes that although the Jews sent emissaries to "the king of Edom," the subsequent references to Edom are all simply to "Edom." He explains this in light of the Talmudic observation that Edom does not have a hereditary monarchy: "Behold, I made you small among the nations" (*Ovadiah* 1:2), is a reference to the fact that the Romans do not place on the throne as king the son of the king (*Avodah Zarah* 10a).

While this is apparently an allusion to the Roman Republic, before its transformation into the Roman Empire in which the imperial succession was generally hereditary, the verse in *Ovadiah* references the Biblical nation of Edom, and the *Meshech Chochmah* apparently assumes that this lack of a hereditary monarchy was the case as far back as the nation of Edom in the time of the Pentateuch, hundreds of years before the Roman Republic. The *Meshech Chochmah* associates the lack of a hereditary monarchy with democracy – "when the monarchy is not hereditary, the will of the people has primacy" – and he explains that this is why the Torah repeatedly refers to "Edom," i.e., the people of Edom, represented by a "parliament" (!), rather than its monarch.

The implication of the *Meshech Chochmah's* approach seems to be that democracy is an inferior form of government (since the verse in *Ovadiah*, as understood by the Talmud, is disparaging Edom / Rome for its form of government). This is in line with the mainstream perspective of our tradition that we are commanded to appoint a (hereditary) monarch. There are, however, some alternative perspectives as well, such as that of the *Ha'amek Davar* (*Devarim* 20:14) who argues that a careful reading of the commandment to appoint a monarch indicates that on the contrary, the Torah does not unequivocally mandate a monarchical system of government, but rather leaves it up to the people to decide whether they desire a monarchy or a democracy.

PRESENTED BY

RABBI YITZHAK GROSSMAN, ROSH CHABURAH

KIDS KORNER

Who Am I?

#1 WHO AM I?

1. The Sukkah is for us.
2. The attack came upon our departure.
3. We were for Aharon.
4. We were then for Moshe.

#2 WHO AM I?

1. My father did not fly.
2. I ruled a nation I did not belong to.
3. I am not a block.
4. I feared B'nei Yisrael.

Last Week's Answers

#1 Created during Bein Hashmashos (twilight)

(Entangled Ram, Wooden staff with flowers waiting to bloom, Mouth of the donkey, Mouth of the ground)

#2 Korach (My lineage was not fully delineated, My lineage caused my downfall, Don't confuse me with Rabbi Akiva, I was not ice.)

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