

ל'חמ"ה

בלק בלק

In this week's *Parashah*, we read about Balak and Bil'am's attempts to curse the Jewish People. The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 12b) teaches that the Sages considered requiring the daily recitation of this *Parashah*, but they decided that that would be too burdensome. What did the Sages find so meaningful about this *Parashah*? The *Gemara* answers that it was the verse (23:24), "Behold! the people will arise like a lion cub and raise itself like a lion."

R' David Cohen *shlita* (*Rosh Yeshiva* of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim) explains: *Rashi* z"l interprets the quoted verse (based on *Midrash Tanchuma*), "When they arise in the morning, they show themselves to be as strong as a lioness and a lion, snatching *Mitzvot*--performing them immediately--clothing themselves in *Tzitzit*, reciting *Shema*, and donning *Tefilin*." [Until here from *Rashi*] Because this verse speaks of being diligent about accepting the yoke of Heaven in the morning--fighting off lethargy and arising like a lion to perform *Mitzvot*--our Sages considered enacting its recitation daily. After all, R' Cohen adds, overcoming one's nature in order to accept the yoke of Heaven is the essence of a Jew's task.

R' Cohen adds a technical question: Why did *Rashi* mention reciting *Shema* before donning *Tefilin*? We perform these *Mitzvot* in the opposite order; indeed, the *Gemara* (*Berachot* 14b) teaches that a man who recites *Shema* without wearing *Tefilin* is bearing false testimony, for *Shema* mentions the obligation to wear *Tefilin*! – **Continued in box inside** –

## Shabbat

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 119a) teaches: Two angels accompany a person home from *Shul* on Friday night--one a good angel and one a bad angel. When they come to his house and find the candles lit, the table set, and the beds made, the good angel says, "May it be *Hashem's* will that it be thus next week as well," and, against his will, the bad angel answers, "Amen." [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg z"l (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) writes: The song "*Shalom aleichem*" is based on this *Gemara*. But, he asks, why do angels accompany a person home specifically on *Shabbat*?

He answers: These "angels of peace" are sent by *Hashem* to bless the Jewish People, for *Hashem* "blesses His Nation with peace," as we say in the final blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*. *Hashem* always wishes to send blessings to the Jewish People, as we read (*Bemidbar* 24:1--in our *Parashah*), "It is good in G-d's eyes to bless *Yisrael*."

R' Mintzberg continues: All week long, *Birkat Kohanim* / the Priestly blessing (which is recited daily in *Eretz Yisrael*) serves as the vehicle for *Hashem* to bless His nation. In the *Bet Hamikdash*, *Birkat Kohanim* was recited at the conclusion of the daily *Avodah* / Temple service, and the *Kohanim*, who performed the *Avodah*, served as His messengers to transmit the blessing. (Today, *Shemoneh Esrei* takes the place of the *Avodah*, so *Birkat Kohanim* is appended to that prayer.)

On *Shabbat*, the entire day is devoted to *Avodah* / serving *Hashem*, and all of the Jewish People are like angels, who have no desire except serving *Hashem*. Therefore, on *Shabbat*, *Hashem* sends additional blessings, and He sends them through holy angels. On *Shabbat*, not only the *Kohanim*, *Hashem's* messengers on earth, bless *Yisrael*--*Hashem's* heavenly messengers, the angels, also bless *Yisrael*.

(*Ben Melech: Shabbat Kodesh* p. 546)

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Harav Yechiel Shruga Feivish ben Yitzchak Halevi Tarshish a"h

**"He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no perversity in Yisrael; Hashem his Elokim is with him, and Teru'at / the friendship of the King is within him." (23:21)**

R' Shlomo Yosef Zevin z"l (1888-1978; Russia and Israel; co-founder and editor of the *Encyclopedia Talmudit*) notes that the word "Teru'ah" has two connotations: "breaking" (see *Tehilim* 2:9) and "friendship." Both of these are tasks of a king: breaking his enemies and unifying the nation.

R' Zevin elaborates: The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 67a) states: "All of Yisrael are sons of kings." This refers to the fact that each of us is called upon to be a ruler over himself, as *Midrash Rabbah* teaches, "Tzaddikim control their hearts, while the wicked are controlled by their hearts." The Hebrew word for "king"--"Melech" (מֶלֶךְ)--may be viewed as an acronym for *Mo'ach* / brain, *Lev* / heart, and *Kaved* / liver. When man is a *Melech*, his *Mo'ach* rules over his *Lev* and his the other internal organs, symbolized by the *Kaved*.

The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 7a) teaches that there is one instant each day when *Hashem* gets angry at *Bnei Yisrael*, and Bil'am was planning to capitalize on his ability to identify that instant in order to curse *Bnei Yisrael*. The *Tosafot* ask: What could Bil'am have said in such a short time? They answer: He could have said the word "*Kahlem*" / "destroy them." R' Zevin explains: The word "*Kahlem*" (כָּלֵם) has the same letters as "*Melech*," but in reverse order. Bil'am hoped to turn us from people whose intellects control our physical beings to people whose *Kaved* and *Lev* come before their *Mo'ach*.

R' Zevin concludes: Our verse says, "The *Teru'ah* of the King is within him." Within every Jew is the power to break the obstacles that stand in the way of his spiritual advancement. And, within every Jew is the power to unify the Jewish People. (L'Torah U'l'mo'adim)

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He explains: The *Mitzvah* of *Kri'at Shema* as we observe it today is found in *Devarim* (6:6 & 11:19). Those verses had not yet been taught in Bil'am's time. Only the *Mitzvah* to recite the first verse ("*Shema Yisrael*") was given earlier--at the Giving of the Torah, according to R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and Eretz Yisrael) and other early commentaries. The first verse of *Shema* does not mention *Tefilin*; therefore, reciting it while not wearing *Tefilin* is not false testimony and it was permitted in Bil'am's time. (And, because one should hurry to accept the yoke of Heaven, it was preferable not to wait since needing to don *Tefilin* was not a concern.) (Lekach David vol.3)

**"Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey and it said to Bil'am, 'What have I done to you that you struck me these Shalosh regalim / three times?'" (22:28)**

*Rashi* z"l writes: By putting these words in the donkey's mouth, *Hashem* hinted to Bil'am, "Do you think you can uproot a nation that celebrates *Shalosh Regalim* / three pilgrimage festivals annually?" [Until here from *Rashi*]

Why was the *Mitzvah* of *Shalosh Regalim* singled out from among the many merits that the Jewish People possess?

R' Pinchas Shapiro z"l (1726-1791; Korets, Ukraine; a leading disciple of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*) explains: *Targum Onkelos* (to *Bemidbar* 24:1) writes that once Bil'am realized that he would not be able to curse *Bnei Yisrael*, he tried to harm them by "reminding" *Hashem* of the Golden Calf. For how long did *Bnei Yisrael* worship the Golden Calf? For six hours, R' Pinchas writes, i.e., from sunrise until Moshe's return at noon.

R' Pinchas continues: There is a *Halachic* concept known as *Bitul b'shishim* / nullification in sixty. (In very specific circumstances, a prohibited substance that gets mixed into sixty times its volume of a permitted substance may be permitted. The classic illustration of this concept refers to a drop of milk that falls into a large pot of chicken soup, but please consult a rabbi before applying this principle in practice.) The *Shalosh Regalim*--*Pesach*, *Shavu'ot*, and *Sukkot*--have 15 days between them, which equals 360 hours, or sixty times the number of hours that *Bnei Yisrael* served the Golden Calf. *Hashem* said to Bil'am: You want to anger me by reminding me of the Golden Calf?! It is nullified in the service that *Bnei Yisrael* perform on the *Shalosh Regalim*! (Divrei Pinchas)

We learn in *Pirkei Avot* (5:8) that ten things were created at twilight, when the Six Days of Creation were ending and the first *Shabbat* was beginning. One of those ten things was the "mouth of the donkey," referring to the ability of Bil'am's donkey to speak.

R' Shlomo Halevi z"l (1532-1600; Macedonia) explains: The weekdays represent work, while *Shabbat* represents rest, which is what one does when he finishes his work. Because these items were finished but not finished--they were created, but their purpose would not be known until later--they were created at the moment of transition from the workweek to *Shabbat*, at a time which *Halachically* is neither one nor the other.

R' Shlomo adds: *Hashem* created these items, like the donkey's mouth and the hole that swallowed Korach because he wants to remind mankind that all things can change their nature--including people! (Lev Avot)