

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BALAK · FOR THE WEEK ENDING 12 TAMMUZ 5759 · JUNE 26, 1999 · VOL. 6 NO. 37
OUTSIDE ISRAEL CHUKAT / BALAK

PARSHA INSIGHTS

I WOULD IF I COULD BUT I CAN'T SO I WON'T

"Bilaam answered... 'If Balak will give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem, my G-d, to do anything small or great.'" (22:18)

Rashi tells us that this verse reveals Balak's lust for money. By talking about silver and gold, he reveals what's uppermost in his mind.

There's a problem here. Wasn't it King David himself who said *"Better to me is the Torah of Your mouth than thousands in gold and silver?"* Why isn't King David's comparison to silver and gold considered as revealing a mercenary streak. Similarly, in *Pirkei Avot* Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma said *"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."* That's quite a shopping list. Why doesn't this qualify as revealing a mercenary nature?

The difference is simple and fundamental. Bilaam said that he *"can't transgress the word of Hashem."* He didn't say he wouldn't — just he can't. Given the potential — sure, why not! King David and Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma, however, were saying that they *wouldn't* trade the Torah for all the money in the world — not that they couldn't.

SOLITAIRE

"Behold! It is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations." (23:9)

A man jumps off the top of the Empire State building. As he plunges downward at 33 ft/sec² someone sticks his head out of the 29th floor window and yells, "Are you okay?" Smiling, he shouts back: "So far, so good!"

The Jewish People are, in essence, an entity which exists in solitude. They are removed from the rest of society because they are essentially different from the other nations. Like oil and water. They cannot mix. And when they seem to mix, the eventual separation is violent and tragic in direct proportion to the desire to blend into the melting-pot. The Jews of Germany proclaimed their undying loyalty to a Germany that killed and tortured them. It was the ovens and the gas chambers which finally reminded us that Berlin was not Jerusalem.

America has proved a home of unparalleled acceptance for the Jewish People. That state has the merit of supporting enormous amounts of Torah scholarship. However, the rampant assimilation which is also a facet of American life should give us pause. We cannot afford to sit back and say "So far — so good."

In this week's Parsha we find a hint to the solitary nature of the Jewish People: *"Behold! It is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations."* The Hebrew word

in this sentence for "it is" is "hein." *Hein* consists of two letters: *heh* and *nun*. The *gematria* (numerical equivalent) of *heh* is five. Five is a unique number. It dwells alone. It has no partner other than itself: In the series of numbers from one to nine, all other numbers will combine with a different number to make ten: One and nine, two and eight, etc. However, five only combines with itself. It dwells alone and can only combine with itself to reach ten.

Similarly, the letter *nun*, is exactly halfway through the extended Hebrew alphabet of twenty-seven letters. *Nun* is letter 13. If you pair the first letter with the last, the second with the next to last, and so on, each letter will have a partner. Until you come to the 13th letter. The *heh* and the *nun* are like the Jewish People. A nation that dwells alone.

THE ARAB SECRET WEAPON

"He declaimed his parable and said 'Who will survive when He imposes these!'"

Hidden beneath the surface of this verse is a dark prophecy: Bilaam was prophesying that above all the seventy root languages in the world, G-d has only joined His name to two nations: The Jewish People — *Yisra-el* — and the Arab nations — *Yishma-el*. Continues Bilaam, woe will it be to he who lives in the "time of *Yishmael*."

continued on page three

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Balak, king of Moav, is in morbid fear of *Bnei Yisrael*. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilaam to curse them.

First, Hashem appears to Bilaam and forbids him to go. But because Bilaam is so insistent, Hashem appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a *malach* (emissary from Hashem) blocks Bilaam's donkey's path. Unable to contain his frustration, Bilaam strikes the donkey each time it stops or tries to detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking Bilaam why he is hitting her. The *malach* instructs Bilaam regarding what he is permitted to say and what he is forbidden to say

regarding the Jewish People. When Bilaam arrives, King Balak makes elaborate preparations, hoping that Bilaam will succeed in the curse. Three times Bilaam attempts to curse, and three times a blessing issues instead. Balak, seeing that Bilaam has failed, sends him home in disgrace. *Bnei Yisrael* begin sinning with the Moabite women, and worshipping the Moabite idols, and are punished with a plague.

One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a Midianite princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This halts the plague, but not before 24,000 have died.

HAFTARAH

The Prophet Micha foresees "Yaakov's Remnant" — the Jews who survive the mass murders and decimation of exile — sprout and flourish at the end of days. Once vassals, the Jews will grow into an independent people, relying on no man or nation for sustenance; once a sheep among lions, the Jews become like a lion who attacks its enemies with impunity. This stage is temporary,

however; eventually, there will be no need for military might, horses, chariots, or fortresses, as peace will reign in the land.

After this promising forecast, Micha turns his eye to the past and present. Micha rebukes the Jews for their lax Torah-observance and reminds them of G-d's historical kindness: G-d freed them from Egypt and put three fabulous leaders, Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, at their head. And — drawing on the events described in this week's Parsha — Micha recalls G-d's special love and protection of the Jewish People against the nefarious plottings of Balak and Bilaam.

MICHA 5:6 - 6:8

PLEASE DEW

"And Yaakov's Remnant among the many nations will be like dew from G-d...which looks to no one and waits for no man." (5:6)

Almost an entire Parsha, Parshat Balak, chronicles the spiteful attempts by Israel's bitter foes to obliterate the fledgling nation. During these attacks, the Jews are entirely passive — perhaps even unaware; they are protected by G-d alone.

So, at the end of days, will the Jews be like the dew which condenses miraculously upon the grass, independent of any human agency. Like the dew, the Jews will bring the nourishing waters of Torah to a thirsty world.

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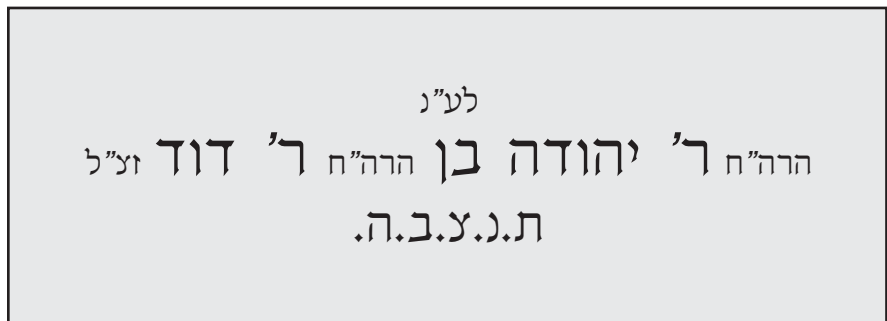
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I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

Bilaam and Balak were ingrates! They would not have been born if not for Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov: Bilaam's ancestor Betuel was born in the merit of Avraham binding Yitzchak on the altar, and Bilaam's ancestor Lavan had children in Yaakov's merit. Balak's Moabite ancestors descended from Lot after Avraham saved Lot's life.

• *Ba'al Haturim*



continued from page one

We are living in the time of Yishmael. We have seen a people thrust from the backwaters of history into its center stage. The abject poverty of these nations a mere hundred years ago has been transformed to fabulous wealth.

However, the source of Yishmael's power is not oil, nor their vast numbers nor their rhetoric. It is their secret weapon — the power of prayer. As their name implies: *Yishma-el* — “G-d will hear.”

Is there an Arab politician who finishes a speech without saying “with the help of Allah?” Is there a Moslem embarrassed to pull out a prayer mat and genuflect towards Mecca five times a day even in the most secular Western milieu? For every proud Moslem, I can find you at least one Jew who finds his religion “too Jewish.”

Millions of Moslems every year make the *Haj* — the pilgrimage to Mecca. The majority of Jews who come to Israel treat it as something between cultural nostalgia and a good beach holiday with guaranteed sun. There was a time when the entire Jewish People would make the thrice-yearly festival pilgrimage to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Now, the main highlight of a Jewish Pilgrim is likely to be a disco in Tel Aviv or wine-tasting in the Golan.

By what power does the Moslem

world control the Temple Mount? The El Aksa mosque has been sitting on the Temple Mount for nearly thirteen hundred years, while the sublime light of the Holy Temple only radiated from there for a mere eight hundred years. Isn't it ironic that in spite of the miraculous victories of the Six Day War, the Jewish People were not able to secure that holiest place on earth? What power allows Yishmael to hold that place? It is the power of prayer epitomized in his name.

When Yitzchak offered himself as sacrifice at the site of the Holy Temple, he became the eternal source of the Jewish People's ability to give up their lives for G-d. In Hebrew, this ability is called *mesirut nefesh* — “giving over the soul.” However, one can be *moser nefesh* without dying. Every time a Jew turns to G-d in prayer, he is giving up his soul to G-d. When he sincerely asks G-d for his needs, he is being *moser* — handing over to G-d, his *nefesh* — his soul, his very existence. In effect he is saying, “G-d, my life is in Your hands.” This is the essence of prayer.

In Hebrew, prayer is called *avodah*, a word that shares the same root as *eved* (servant). When a servant asks for something, he doesn't base his petition on his own merits; rather he relies on his master's kindness. When we ask G-d for something, we completely humble our-

selves as servants before the King of Kings. This relationship is epitomized in our name “Yisrael,” which means “Yasher-Kel” — G-d is upright. We declare with our very name that we do not have a right to anything. G-d is upright; He will do what He deems best for us.

Yishmael's concept of prayer is very different. We can see this in his name. “G-d shall listen!” His idea of prayer is that he can tell G-d what to do, like a spoiled child demanding gifts from his father.

Yet, there is hope for the Jewish People. That hope does not lie in promises of princes, nor in pieces of paper. That hope doesn't lie in the might and sophistication of weaponry. The prayer of Yishmael thrives only when the prayer of the Jewish People is half-hearted. An El Aksa Mosque can exist only when the Temple Mount is in ruins. Yishmael steps into the vacuum created by the emptiness of our prayers. But if we give our very souls to G-d, if we admit that everything G-d does is upright though we may not always understand, then we will truly live up to our name, Yisrael.

Sources:
I Would If I Could But I Can't So I Won't - Ohr Yahel as heard from Rabbi Mordechai Perlman
Solitaire - Rabbi Menachem Nissel
The Arab Secret Weapon - Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, 30; Rabbeinu Bachya; Rabbi Menachem Nissel

LOVE OF THE LAND

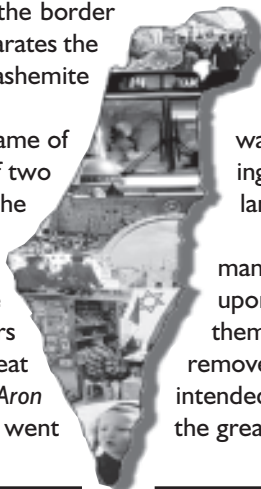
Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

NEHAR HAYARDEN (JORDAN RIVER)

Israel's major river, the Jordan once served as the border between two parts of *Eretz Israel*. Today it separates the Jewish state from its Arab neighbor, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

There are different accounts concerning the name of this famous river. One is that it is a contraction of two Hebrew words — *Yored Dan* — which refer to the Biblical city of Dan which is one of the river's main sources.

The miraculous crossing of the Jordan by the Children of Israel on the 10th of Nissan, 40 years after the Exodus from Egypt, is described in great detail in the Book of Yehoshua (3-4). The *Aron Hakodesh* (Holy Ark), carried by the *kohanim*, went



ahead of the people and entered the river at the command of Yehoshua. “As soon as the feet of the *kohanim* bearing the Ark of Hashem rested on the bed of the Jordan waters, the Jordan waters split, with the waters flowing down...forming a wall... and all of Israel crossed over on dry land.” (*Yehoshua 3:13-17*)

Following their miraculous crossing, the command came to remove twelve stones from the spot upon which the *kohanim* had stood and to replace them with twelve other stones. Both the stones removed and the ones which replaced them were intended to serve as reminders to future generations of the great miracle of the Jordan crossing.

THREE DIMENSIONS OF SANCTITY

Three categories of *muktzeh* connected with items designated as “mitzvah-items” are discussed in this section of *Mesechta Beitza*.

- The *schach* roofing used to cover a succah and the wood serving as its walls may not be used for any other purpose throughout the holiday of Succot. Even if a person made a condition before the holiday began that he should be allowed to use these materials for another purpose, he is still prohibited from doing so.
- The fruits and other items suspended from the *schach* as decorations are also forbidden to use for any other purpose throughout Succot because they are considered part of the *schach* and are sanctified for the purpose of the mitzvah. However, if he made a condition before the holiday began he may then make use of them.
- If one set aside a number of *etrogim* for use on Succot, a separate one for each day, he may consume on the morning the *etrog* used today for the mitzvah.

These distinctions raise a couple of questions:

- Why does a condition help in the case of the *schach* decoration but not in regard to the *schach* itself?
- Why does the sanctity which attaches itself to the succah with the onset of Succot affect it for all the days of the holiday, whereas the sanctity attached to the *etrog* evaporates at the end of the day?

The sanctity which attaches itself to the succah at twilight of the first eve of the holiday affects it for the entire day. If he makes a condition, however, that he reserves the right to use the decorations at any point of this twilight period, this restrictive sanctity does not take effect. This is true, however, only in regard to the decorations which can be removed during that twilight period without violating the holiday. In regard to the succah itself, however, it is impossible to make such a condition since he is compelled to relinquish his right to remove the *schach* or the walls, as this would constitute a violation of the holiday.

(Note: For the condition regarding even the decorations to be valid, one must state that he does not relinquish his right of usage during *any* of the twilights of the days of Succot. Otherwise the sanctity which prohibits such usage will take effect at the next twilight and last throughout the holiday. The complexity of making such a condition prompted Rema in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 638:2 to note that it is customary not to invoke such condition, except regarding the decorations on the succah walls, which the *halacha* treats with greater leniency.)

Regarding the difference between succah sanctity extend-

ing to all the days of the holiday (even if he leaves his original succah for another one in the middle of the holiday) and the *etrog*, which may be eaten the next day if he has set aside another *etrog* for that day, the *gemara* offers a simple explanation: The mitzvah of *etrog* can be performed only during the day. The night therefore separates the days from one another and limits the of the *etrog* to that day. One is obligated to dwell in the succah at night as well as the day. Therefore, regarding succah dwelling, we view the entire holiday as one long day of unbroken sanctity.

• *Beitza* 30b

SIX SAD CASES

Three people, declare our Sages, have such difficult situations that it may be said of them that their life is not really a life.

- A person with no means of his own and looks to the table of another for his subsistence
 - A person dominated by one's spouse
 - A person whose body is dominated by suffering
- The *gemara* in *Mesechta Pesachim* (113b) lists three different categories of people whose life is not a life.
- A person who is extravagantly merciful
 - One who is overly excitable
 - One who is too sensitive

All three of these, explains Rashbam, face situations regularly which allow them no peace because of their overreaction, and therefore their life is not a life. But why, asks Tosefot in *Pesachim*, are these six types of sufferers separated into two categories of three each, rather than combined into one statement?

The explanation, Tosefot offers, is that the three mentioned in *Pesachim* are the result of a person's own character traits, while the ones mentioned in *Mesechta Beitza* are the result of circumstances beyond his control such as poverty, illness or a mismatched marriage.

• *Beitza* 32b

derech

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did Moav consult specifically with Midian regarding their strategy against the Jews?
2. What was Balak's status before becoming Moav's king?
3. What happens to a field where oxen graze?
4. Why did Hashem grant prophecy to the evil Bilaam?
5. Why did Balak think Bilaam's curse would work?
6. When did Bilaam receive his prophecies?
7. Hashem asked Bilaam, "Who are these men with you?" What did Bilaam deduce from this question?
8. How do we know Bilaam hated the Jews more than Balak did?
9. What is evidence of Bilaam's arrogance?
10. In what way was the *malach* that opposed Bilaam an angel of mercy?
11. Why did the *malach* kill Bilaam's donkey?
12. Bilaam compared his meeting with an angel to someone else's meeting with an angel. Who was the other person and what was the comparison?
13. Why did Bilaam tell Balak to build seven altars?
14. Who in Jewish history seemed fit for a curse, but got a blessing instead?
15. What tragedy befell the Jews at Rosh Hapisgah?
16. Why are the Jewish People compared to lions?
17. On Bilaam's third attempt to curse the Jews, he changed his strategy. What did he do differently?
18. What were Bilaam's three main characteristics?
19. What did Bilaam see that made him decide not to curse the Jews?
20. Bilaam told Balak that the Jews' G-d hates what?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 22:4 - Since Moshe grew up in Midian, the Moabites thought the Midianites might know wherein lay Moshe's power.
2. 22:4 - He was a prince of Midian.
3. 22:4 - It shows no sign of blessing.
4. 22:5 - So the other nations couldn't say, "If we had had prophets, we also would have become righteous."
5. 22:6 - Because Bilaam's curse had helped Sichon defeat Moav.
6. 22:8 - Only at night.
7. 22:9 - He mistakenly reasoned that Hashem isn't all-knowing.
8. 22:11 - Balak wanted only to drive the Jews from the land. Bilaam sought to exterminate them completely.
9. 22:13 - He implied that Hashem wouldn't let him go with the Moabite princes due to their lesser dignity.
10. 22:22 - It was mercifully trying to stop Bilaam from sinning and being destroyed.
11. 22:33 - So that people shouldn't see it and say, "Here's the donkey that silenced Bilaam." Hashem is concerned with human dignity.
12. 22:34 - Avraham. Bilaam said, "Hashem told me to go but later sent an angel to stop me. The same thing happened to Avraham: Hashem told Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak, but later canceled the command through an angel."
13. 23:4 - Corresponding to the seven altars built by the Avot. Bilaam said to Hashem, "The Jewish People's ancestors built seven altars, but I alone have built altars equal to all of them."
14. 23:8 - Yaakov, when Yitzchak blessed him.
15. 23:14 - Moshe died there.
16. 23:24 - They rise each morning and "strengthen" themselves to do *mitzvot*.
17. 24:1 - He began mentioning the Jewish People's sins, hoping thus to be able to curse them.
18. 24:2 - An evil eye, pride, and greed.
19. 24:2 - He saw each Tribe dwelling without intermingling. He saw the tents arranged so no one could see into his neighbor's tent.
20. 24:14 - Promiscuity.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

How would YOU answer this question?

The Torah says: "G-d was angry that Bilaam went" to curse the Jews. Why was G-d angry? G-d had given Bilaam permission to go? I know what Rashi says: That Bilaam knew G-d didn't want him to go, yet he went anyway with great desire, but the

text doesn't seem to say anything about Bilaam going with great desire. How does Rashi see this?

Answer:

It doesn't say G-d was angry at Bilaam "because he went" but rather "because he was a *goer*." (Not "*ki halach*" but rather "*ki holeich*".) The

difference is subtle but significant: For Bilaam, going to curse the Jews wasn't a mere action he tried to do; rather, it was an action that defined his essence. At that moment, Bilaam was a "Goer," a "Jew-cursing." When a person expresses his essence, he acts with desire.

• Based on Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!

FROM MARS TO JERUSALEM

Jim Silver from Chicago, IL
<silverjamese@yahoo.com>
wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Assuming Mars is ever colonized and Jews live on Mars, will they need to pray UP to face Jerusalem? This question is based on the fact that the orbit of Mars is outside the Earth's orbit of the Sun.*

Dear Jim Silver,

You've certainly asked your question to the right Rabbi: When I was in school, I took up space!

Even on Mars you wouldn't face upwards to pray because one should pray with his head slightly bowed and his eyes downward. Also, facing up towards earth might look like you were praying to a star. A Jewish no-no.

Of course, there may be other valid halachic views on this issue; therefore, when you get to Mars, ask the local Orthodox Rabbi.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 95:2
- Mishna Berura 426:13

BOSNIA CONVERSION

Shoshana Randolph-Friedly from Ft. Huachuca, AZ
<sdrandolph@hotmail.com>
wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
I recently married a non-Jew who wishes to convert under Orthodox auspices. Unfortunately, at the moment we are both serving in the US Army, and are deployed in Bosnia. Is there a Rabbi out there who would be willing to correspond with my new husband and to help him learn while he is gone so that when he returns to the US he'll be that farther along in*

his learning process towards conversion? Any ideas you can contribute would be gratefully appreciated.

Dear Shoshana Randolph-Friedly,

Shalom. Please send me the name and contact information of the Rabbi or Rabbinic body supervising the conversion back in the US. This will help me get a good picture of the situation and then I may be able to suggest a Rabbi with whom he can correspond.

Ohr Somayach's "Ask the Rabbi" service <info@ohr.org.il> is available for all questions; we try to respond to each person within 48 hours. And our web site has tons of material for seekers on all levels. <http://www.ohrnet.org>

WRITE ON MOSES

Jeremy Harris from UK
<JHarris@clifton-college.avon.sch.uk>
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

The chances of Moses being able to write when he was given the Torah are very limited. Historical evidence suggests that Moses would not have known how to write and the only form of writing was in Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Dear Jeremy Harris,

I suggest you read some archaeological studies of the era; you will find that writing was quite well known and common. For example, see:

- Leah Bronner, *Biblical Personalities and Archaeology*, Keter Publishing, Jerusalem p. 52
- K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and the Old Testament*, 1970, pp. 136ff
- E. Neilson, *Oral Tradition*, 1954, p. 24

I also suggest you check out the literature (especially the *Biblical Archaeology Review*) on the discoveries of Nuzi, Mari, Amarna, Ras Shamra etc. that clearly show overwhelming evidence of the existence, use and non-specialist use of writing in the time of Moses and even preceding him.

For general verification and evidence

of the historical truth of the Torah, see *Permission to Receive by Lawrence Keleman, Living Up to the Truth by Dovid Gottlieb* (downloadable from our website for free, at www.ohr.org.il). Also see our article on the web entitled "*Historical Verification of the Torah.*" <http://www.ohrnet.org/ask/ask158.htm#Q1>

GRAVE ISSUE

Name@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Regarding the daughter whose parents asked to be cremated [Ask the Rabbi #239 Shlach (in Israel) / Beha'alotcha (outside Israel)] — isn't there a halacha (Jewish law) to not listen when your parents ask you to do a sin? That is, honoring parents does not surmount other Torah laws. So wouldn't she be obliged to not fulfill her parents' request in this case?

Dear Name@Withheld,

You are correct: A child should not obey a parent's request to transgress the Torah. If it be in her power, she should see that the cremation not be done, even if this is against her parent's will.

This reminds me of a story, that I find frightening, one which illustrates the frightening evil to which a human can sink and, at the same time, the wisdom of our Sages: Not far from Luban, Russia, there lived a Jew who was a traitor to his people; he spent his life harassing the Jewish community by slandering them to the Russian authorities at every opportunity. At the end of his life, as he lay on his death bed, he summoned the Jewish burial society. "Bury me face down," he said. Then he died.

His most odd request was brought to the great Rabbi Moshe Feinstein. Rabbi Feinstein ruled that, despite the requirement to fulfill a dead person's final wishes, he must nevertheless be buried face-up in accordance with Jewish Law.

A few days after the funeral, the

Russian authorities rode into town and summoned the Jewish burial society demanding that the recently buried body be dug up. Mystified, the Jews went out to the cemetery and began digging under the watchful eye of the Russians. When the body was unearthed and became visible, the Russians said, "Enough. Bury him again." Now the Jews couldn't contain themselves: "Please explain why you wanted to dig him up?" they asked.

"This man," the Russians explained, "was our friend. He was forever loyal to us. He told us that the Jews hate him so much for being our friend that they are going to bury him face down!"

I LOVE SPAM[®]

Philipp <philipp_666@hotmail.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Do you ever feel the need or the urge to eat pork?

Dear Philipp,

No, not really. But by the same token, I've never had a real urge for whale, camel, elephant, crow, or any unkosher meat. (Though I have eaten my hat on a number of occasions.)

I must admit, I'm personally repulsed by the thought of eating pork, although this may not be a "kosher" attitude! Our Sages teach us a fascinating idea: Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says, "Don't say 'I don't want to eat meat with milk...rather say 'I want to, but what can I do, G-d has decreed that I must not.'" So, it's OK — even desirable, perhaps — for a Jew to have the urge to eat pork, but nevertheless to refrain due to G-d's decree.

The famous Torah giant Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky was the head of the Torah Voda'ath Talumdic Academy in Brooklyn, New York. Near the academy was a non-kosher pizza shop. Walking past the pizza shop one day with his students, Rabbi Kaminetsky stopped, took a deep whiff and said "Ah! It smells so delicious!"

Sources:

- Torat Kohanim Parshat Kedoshim

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Cremation (Ohrnet Shlach):

I also am a ba'alas teshuva. My mother was niftar [passed away] on 8 Elul. She was a concentration camp survivor who had frequently stated that she wished to be cremated. She had also maintained a membership in the Workmen's Circle which happens to include a cemetery plot. After her passing, I had a kosher burial for her. I reasoned as follows: My mother had been meshuga (crazed) due to her camp experiences and even if firmly resolved regarding cremation, she was not making the choice with true sanity. My mother never renounced the cemetery plot associated with her membership, allowing me to believe that at least in part of her mind she was not truly committed to cremation. And after her death I felt I was committed to doing what was halachic with her body, that her soul in olam haba (the next world) would approve, now that it was no longer in the suffering state she had had during life.

• Rukhl <Eissenstat@aol.com>

Re: Espousing Religion (Ohrnet Shlach):

I feel compelled to write to the woman from DC who plans to start a family with her currently non-observant husband. I am, unfortunately, in a similar predicament...only that I became observant after we had children. I only wish that I had the foresight to question this potential problem before we started a family! Each relationship is so very different making it difficult to advise without knowing the couple personally. Your suggestions make sense, to tread carefully as the wife moves forward in observance, but sometimes it's easier said than done! As you mentioned, a woman can "set the tone" of the household thereby enabling her to raise the children traditionally Jewish. But this doesn't take into account the potentially lonely existence one

feels when your spouse is basically traveling down a different road in life. Many aspects of Judaism involve the entire family and when the husband isn't there or is there only grudgingly, it can begin to take its toll, even on one's own *Yiddishkeit*, *chas v'sholom*. Even if the husband is tolerant of her "religious activities," both sides will undoubtedly harbor feelings of "why me?" resentment. I'm not even mentioning the issues which arise when you're raising boys and the difficulties of not only not having a husband who will serve as a *frum*, observant male role model, but who can have a negative impact Jewishly (*chas v'sholom*). I caution this woman to REALLY think this through — not only by trying to define her own life's goals but attempting to foresee the possible actions and reactions her husband can have to this new lifestyle which he never chose to embrace.

• Name@Withheld

Re: Q&A:

Many young and old teens, including myself, are in the middle of studying for finals. Is it possible to add to your website a *chumash* and *navi* (*Five Books and Prophets*) question sheet and answer for all weekly Torah Portions? Also is it possible to use words more understandable for us young readers of your site. Thank you.

• Name@Withheld from Miami Beach, Florida

Dear Name@Withheld,

Thanks for your confidence that we can help you get good grades! We do have PARSHA Q&A on our site with 20 questions and answers on every weekly Torah portion. We don't have *navi* or *haftara* questions yet. Good idea! (although you will probably graduate before we actually get around to it!) Regarding your suggestion that we use more understandable words, I agree. As I always say: Eschew obfuscuity! Salutations!

THE MAD PROFESSOR

My father was in Manhattan a while ago and met a man who said he was a professor from Israel giving a seminar in his field that day. My father, a warm, generous man, engaged this professor in conversation for quite a while. The poor professor mentioned that his wallet had just been stolen. “What will you do in Manhattan without funds?” my father asked, and offered him a large sum to cover food and transportation. They exchanged addresses and phone numbers and the man promised to send my father the money.

All this was relayed to me because I live here in Jerusalem and my father wanted me to look him up. “He’s a very interesting person; you should definitely get in touch.” Well, the phone number Dad gave me for that neighborhood I knew wasn’t correct. Sure enough, it didn’t work. No problem, I thought. I’ll just look it up in the directory. The professor was indeed listed, but on another street. His answering machine said that he and his wife were “abroad.”

The monpassed and my father asked occasionally if I’d reached the professor. Finally one night, I called and left a message on the machine and received a call back within an

hour! “I want to make sure I have the right person,” I began. “Is this Professor S. who was recently in America?” “Yes,” he said. “My father asked me to call; he so enjoyed meeting you in Manhattan!” “Manhattan? No, we were in Florida and Detroit.”

“Are you sure you weren’t in Manhattan? My father said he met you there on your way to give a lecture!” “No, I am sorry, we were only in New York to catch a flight back to Israel.”

There was a pause. Then, I heard the professor’s wife talking excitedly in the background. Suddenly he asked me: “Tell me, did this man ask your father for money?” “Well, sort of...he said he’d been robbed and my father gave him \$100!” The professor began telling me that a few years ago they received calls from New York concerning sums of money he apparently had “borrowed.” He explained that all the details of who he was and his position could be read in the university “Who’s Who” and that any clever scoundrel could impersonate him. “I am very sorry about this,” he said. “Please tell your father that when he visits, I would be happy to introduce him to the *real* professor!”

• A Devoted Reader

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Who didn’t eat or drink for upwards of 60 years? **Answer next week...**

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

22:5 Balak’s Rise to Power
 22:20 Bilaam’s Mission
 22:23 The Donkey
 23:16 Bilaam’s Prophecy
 24:20 Amalek

SFORNO

22:2 What Balak Saw
 22:6 Bilaam’s Power
 23:22 Jewish Conquest

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 goodliteratureandinformationonthousandsofJewish
 andcontemporarytopicsvisitourwebsite.org

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