



Ohr Yerushalayim News

ד"ר תמוז תשפ"ד - בלק - 20th July 2024 - Volume 16 - Issue 54

News This Week

Chaim Aruchim

We wish Chaim Aruchim to the following who have Yahrtzeit this week:

- Sun, 15th Tammuz - Michael Wilks for his mother
- Mon, 16th Tammuz - Rov for his sister
- Tues, 17th Tammuz - Dean Kaye for his father

A Star Will Arise From Jacob

Rabbi J Rubinstein

There is a thought provoking essay by Rav Pam, involving the verse דרך כוכב מיעקב "A star will arise from Jacob", from this week's Parshah (Chap. 24 Verse 17). In his Sefer Atoroh Lamelech P. 134-136, he writes, when a father punishes his son for genuine educational reasons, he is immediately filled with the wish to be kind to his son, and make him happy; he only caused pain to the son because it was necessary, really he wants to bring him happiness. Similarly, when Hashem brings suffering on the Jewish people it is followed by a period which is particularly auspicious for Hashem to be merciful to his people. This is in keeping, he says, with the Verse "Just as a father will punish his son, so Hashem punishes you" (Devarim 8:5). Nonetheless we have to be worthy of that kindness coming to fruition.

Shortly after the destruction of the second Temple, somebody called Bar Kozba staged a rebellion against the Romans. Rabbi Akiva thought he was the Moshiach and the verse "A Kochav (star) will arise from Jacob" would be fulfilled through him. He is often referred to as Bar Kochva for that reason. But the rebellion ended in defeat and disaster. Was Rabbi Akiva completely wrong in thinking Bar Kochva was the Moshiach? Rav Pam explains it was a time in which the Moshiach could have come, but the people sinned, and it did not happen, as explained in Talmud Yerushalmi, Taanis.

Rav Pam cites numerous occasions in Jewish history following suffering, when the Moshiach might have come, but the Jewish people proved unworthy of it. Space does not allow me to discuss the examples. But I cannot resist quoting his presentation of a verse in Isaiah (21:11), אמר שומר אתא, שומר מה מלידה שומר מה מליד. "The prophet asks, "Guardian of Israel what of the night? (meaning, Hashem how long will it last?) Guardian of Israel what of the night?" The Guardian answers, "The morning will come, and night (for evil people); if you seek your request, repent and come" This means it is not, one long inevitable night. There have been times-particularly after suffering-when Hashem was ready to bring Moshiach but we did not rise to the occasion. If we really seek and wish the Moshiach to come, we should repent.

In another of his essays, Rav Pam writes, (This is my approximate translation of a paragraph on Page 141 of Sefer Atoroh Lamalech) "In our generation we find ourselves in such a low situation, a third of our nation was destroyed in the Holocaust, and now we are attacked by so many, can we not hope that Hashem's salvation is close" All this teaches us, we cannot know Hashem's plans, but we can hope this is an auspicious time for Moshiach to come, and try to rise to the occasion through repentance and prayer.

Fruits Of Passion

Rabbi Naftali Reich (Torah.org)

This week's Torah portion revolves around the saga of the evil prophet Bilam who was commissioned by Balak, king of Moav, to curse the nation of Israel. The Torah describes Bilam's repeated futile attempts to curse the Jews and the subsequent blessings that flowed involuntarily from his lips.

When Bilam initially asked permission from Hashem to accompany Balak's messengers, Hashem instructed him not to acquiesce. "Do not curse the people for they are blessed," Bilam was told. However, after Balak sent a second, more prestigious group of messengers, and Bilam again asked Hashem for permission to go, Hashem permitted him to travel to Balak, to carry out the king's dark mission.

Immediately afterwards, the Torah tells us that Hashem's wrath was directed at Bilam 'ki holech hu'; "for he was going [with the messengers]." The commentaries all ask the obvious question: If Bilam was given permission to go with the emissaries, why was Hashem angry at him for doing so? The commentaries explain that Hashem's wrath was directed at Bilam because he had flaunted Hashem's true intent, which was that Bilam should accompany the delegation and follow Hashem's instructions upon arrival. 'Kum lech itam'; you may accompany them," the posuk says. But instead of merely traveling with the delegation, Bilam joined them with great gusto, as the Torah hints with the words, 'vayelech im sarei Moav. He was impressed with the status of these ministers-senior officials of Moav-and embraced their mission.

Bilam relished the thought of being able to curse the Jewish people and was determined to take full advantage of the opportunity to topple them from their exalted state. In retaliation, Hashem sent an angel to block Bilam's way and to strike him. In a spectacular miracle, Bilam's donkey opened its mouth and reprimanded him, humiliating the arrogant Bilam.

The commentaries observe that if demonstrating passion and excitement to commit a sin provokes Hashem's fierce anger, applying this same passion and enthusiasm to the performance of mitzvos

Davening Times

Mincha & Kabbolas Shabbos	7.30pm
זמן שבת & Candle Lighting	7.43pm - 7.55pm
Shacharis	7.25am / 9.15am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.10am
Mincha	6.00pm / 9.27pm
Rov's Shiur	Following Mincha
Motzei Shabbos	10.32pm
Sun	7.15am / 8.20am / 9.30am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
שבעה עשר בתמוז	
Taanis Starts	1.50am
Shacharis	6.30am / 7.00am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	7.50pm
Taanis Ends	10.16pm
Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	7.45pm
Late Maariv	10.20pm

must surely elicit a dynamic response of an opposite nature—an outpouring of Divine favor and grace that cements our bond with Him. The strength of that connection is entirely dependent on the spirit and love that we invest into performance of His mitzvos.

The noted educator, Rabbi Shmuel Dishon, conducts a highly successful outreach camp in Russia during the summer months. A few years ago, a Bosnian girl approached the camp directors and expressed her desire to embrace the Jewish religion. After being repeatedly rebuffed by the camp's administrative staff, she begged to be able to speak to the camp director, Rabbi Dishon. When Rabbi Dishon arrived from the United States, he invited her into his office and asked her why she would want to become Jewish. She outlined her spiritual aspirations and expressed her deep desire to share in the Jewish people's destiny. Rabbi Dishon tried to dissuade her. "You realize", he told her, "that if G-d forbid another despot like Hitler tried to destroy the Jews, you too would be targeted."

"That is a small price to pay for an eternal connection to the Divine," she replied. "But you could gain a passport to the world to come by upholding the seven Noachide laws," Rabbi Dishon responded.

"True, I could keep the Noachide laws but the sanctity and intimate connection with Hashem cannot be acquired through the Seven Noachide laws," the young woman said. "I am not interested in simply expanding my portfolio. I want to be truly one with Hashem."

Bilam recognized that the true source of the Jewish people's unique connection with Hashem was not simply their observance of His commandments but rather the love, devotion and zealotry with which they performed His mitzvos. It is the level of that commitment to devote one's life to carrying out His will with love that defines the quality and depth of our connection with our Creator in Heaven.

A Never Ending Story Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky (Torah.org)

With Divine intervention ensuring that Balak the King of Moav would be governed by Murphy's Law, everything that could go wrong for him went wrong.

Balak, the King of Moav saw that the Jewish nation was camped near his land and he became frightened. He employed the greatest sorcerer of the generation, Bilaam, to curse the Children of Israel, but alas, Hashem ensured that all potential curses were turned into blessings. In one of the early attempts to curse the Jews, Bilaam erected seven altars with sacrifices. He set out to accomplish his mission but he failed. Instead of cursing the Jews, Bilaam blessed them and longed for their eternal fortune.

"He declaimed his parable and said 'From Aram, Balak, king of Moab, led me, from the mountains of the east, 'Come curse Jacob for me, come bring anger upon Israel.' How can I curse? G-d has not cursed. How can I anger? G-d is not angry. For from its origins, I see it rock-like, and from hills do I see it. Behold! It is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations. Who has counted the dust of Jacob or numbered a quarter of Israel? May my soul die the death of the upright, and may my end be like his!" (Numbers 23:6-10)

Though I am no expert in sorcerer's spells or Bilaamic blessings, the juxtaposition is difficult to comprehend. Why did Bilaam suddenly ask to die the death of the upright after extolling the uniqueness of his adversaries, the Israelites? If he gave them blessings, why didn't he ask to live in the bounty of their goodness?

Last year my son was in fourth grade and had to do a report on President Abraham Lincoln. He did a fine job recounting his log-cabin childhood, his early career as an attorney, and his tumultuous presidency. He detailed the difficult period of the Civil War and Lincoln's bold stance in signing the Emancipation Proclamation.

I looked over his report and frankly, I was quite impressed — until I reached the last sentence. It read: "Abraham Lincoln died on Friday morning, April 15, 1865, and was buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery, outside Springfield, Illinois."

"Zvi," I exclaimed, "Abraham Lincoln died on Friday morning?" I rhetorically reiterated, stressing the passivity of the underreported,

yet most traumatic event. "Died?" I repeated. "He was shot to death! In fact, Lincoln was assassinated! In fact," I added, "he was the first President to be assassinated! How can you ignore that significant part of his life in your report?"

Zvi looked at me quizzically. "My report was on 'the Life of Abraham Lincoln. Who cares how he died? He died!" Bilaam understood that death, too, is an integral part of life. Our attitude toward death is part of our larger attitude toward life. And the way we leave this world is part of a greater outlook of how we aspire to live our lives.

A neighbor of mine was a former Yeshiva boy back in the early 1920's in one of America's first yeshivas. Time and circumstances eroded both his practice and belief. He had joined the army and rose to the rank of a General. He and his wife often ate in our sukkah and we became quite friendly. When he was diagnosed with a fatal illness, he asked me to perform his funeral service in the right time. I agreed only if he would be buried in accordance with the halacha. And though in his life he disregarded the daily practices of an observant Jew, in death, he forewent burial in his his army uniform and instead chose traditional tachrichim (shrouds) and a talis.

When one sees the ultimate spiritual eternity of the Jew, he realizes that death is just a portal to a greater world, Olam HaBah. Bilaam declared that we are a nation that dwells in solitude, and that our ways in life are not compatible with those nations who outnumber us. It is after he comprehended our eternity that he beseeched the Almighty with the haunting bequest, "May my soul die the death of the upright, and may my end be like his!" The Chofetz Chaim, however, added a very cogent caveat: In asking for the death of the righteous, Bilaam understood that there is more to the legacy of life than life itself. And so, Bilaam wanted to live his perverted life as a hedonistic heretic, yet he wanted to die the death of the righteous. "Truth be told," says the Chofetz Chaim, "our mission is not only to die the death of the upright, but to live the life of the upright as well." Because if you want to sleep the sleep, you first have to walk the walk

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