



TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Parshas Balak

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A Taste of Torah Put the Fear of G-d in You

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Speak with a therapist or psychologist about the most common maladies he treats, and I suspect that anxiety and fear will be in the top five, if not at the very top. No, I haven't done a formal study on this, but from advertisements I've encountered, articles I've read and conversations I've had, the prevalence of too much fear and anxiety in society becomes clear.

Having had no formal in mental health, I will leave advice on dealing with these issues to those trained in this field. Instead, I want to focus on the importance of fear and anxiety. Yes, you heard me right, I am advocating that we actually need these emotions. It's pretty simple, really – self-preservation requires some degree of fear and anxiety to ensure a person reacts to potentially dangerous or destructive situations. What prompts a person to jump out of the way of an oncoming car? Fear. What pushes a person to look for a job so he has money to pay the bills and put food on the table? Anxiety. You get the idea. This article is not meant to be a layman's analysis of our emotions, so why am I sharing all of these observations? Because the importance of fear comes up in this week's parsha.

After Bilam fails spectacularly to carry out his nefarious plan to curse the Jewish people, he tries another approach. Bilam tells King Balak, who had hired him to get rid of the Jewish People through his power of imprecation, "The G-d of this nation despises immorality." Bilam tells Balak that if the Jews fall prey to immoral behavior, they will be promptly punished by Hashem. Balak has the Moabite and Midianite women engage the Jewish men, and they succumb to their seductions, leading to their agreement to worship their idols,

as well. A plague breaks out among the Jewish Nation, and all seems lost. It is only the heroic intervention of Pinchas, as he slays the Shimonite prince Zimri and the Midianite princess Kozbi as they engage in immoral behavior, that shocks the men into realizing how low they have sunk, stopping their spiritual slide and, by extension, the plague.

It appears that this entire debacle was coincidental and could have happened at any time; Bilam was simply aware of what would enrage Hashem and exploited that to try and take out the Jewish Nation in one fell swoop.

However, Rabbi Gedalia Schorr (1910-1979) explains that this abrupt moral failing occurred specifically in the wake of Bilam's curse-turned-blessing. He notes that the Talmud teaches (Brachos 7a) that Hashem becomes angry at a very specific moment each day, and Bilam, great prophet that he was, knew when that moment was and sought to utter his malediction at that moment, when it was guaranteed to be effective. However, Hashem turned the tables on Bilam and simply did not get angry for those days when Bilam attempted to curse the Jewish People.

What is the purpose of this moment of Divine wrath? wonders Rabbi Schorr. Anger, when used and administered properly, serves to strike fear into the hearts of those experiencing it; a person who displays anger shows he means business, and his wishes are not to be taken lightly or flippantly ignored. Hashem's moment of anger, says Rabb Schorr, is meant to instill in Creation a fear of G-d and the attendant feeling that one must abide by His laws and commandments. Essentially, it is this moment of wrath that helps us humans stay in line and not succumb

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Stories for the Soul

You Never Know

A man once came to Rabbi Aryeh Rodin, Rabbi of Congregation Ohev Shalom of Dallas, to make a contribution to his synagogue. The fellow, who was Jewish but not religious, spoke with Rabbi Rodin, and then gave him a donation for \$2,000. Rabbi Rodin was quite surprised at the man's generosity, and asked him why he had chosen to give such a large sum to a synagogue he had just encountered for the first time.

The man explained that he had just returned from Jerusalem. While there, he visited the Western Wall, and he saw a man praying with great intensity. The donor explained that he was very moved by this person's prayer, and he resolved that he would make a contribution to the institution where that man would feel most comfortable praying. Upon returning to Dallas, he asked some people where a man with sidelocks, a long black coat and broad black hat would pray were he to visit Dallas – and Rabbi Rodin's synagogue was the address he was given.

Rabbi Rodin and the man became friends. They studied Torah together, and the fellow and his family began attending services at the synagogue. The man, who was quite wealthy, also became a major donor to the synagogue, enabling Jewish outreach programs and, eventually, helping the institution construct a magnificent new building, which they desperately needed.

Rabbi Rodin comments that the Jew who was observed praying on that day hasn't the slightest inkling what he

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Kollel Happenings

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION LIVE & LEARN LEARNING PROGRAM AT THE WEST DENVER KOLLEL TORAH CENTER

The Live & Learn Learning Program for seniors is held Tuesdays at the West Denver Kollel Torah Center. Coffee and pastries at 10:30 am, two classes of 45 minutes each from 10:40-12:15 (including 5 minute break between classes), and lunch (including take-home option) at 12:15. For more info, email info@denverkollel.org.

SPRING-SUMMER AVOS UBANIM CONTINUES THIS SHABBOS

The Kollel's spring-summer Avos Ubanim program continues this Shabbos afternoon at the Kollel Torah Centers in West Denver and Southeast Denver. Learning begins one hour before mincha, followed by nosh and prizes. Program ends 15 minutes before mincha in Southeast Denver, at mincha in West Denver. For sponsorships and more info, email info@denverkollel.org.

LEARN 2 LEARN GESHMAK WITH RABBI YOSSI EPHRATHI

You may have limited experience learning Talmud. You may think that you don't enjoy serious Talmud study, that it's just not for you. But you haven't tried Learn 2 Learn Geshmak. A Gemara program crafted to give you the satisfaction and joy of learning, Learn 2 Learn Geshmak is taught by Kollel Scholar Rabbi Yossi Ephrathi. Contact info@denverkollel.org for further details.

Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: Why would a person's sensitivity to being dirty halachically require hand washing?

Answer: The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 181:10) writes that some do not have the custom to wash *mayim acharonim* in contemporary times, as the two primary reasons for doing so – the removal of dangerous Sodomite salt

from one's hands and cleaning one's hands after eating – are not relevant today. However, the Shulchan Aruch continues that one who is sensitive and particular to clean his hands after eating is obligated to wash *mayim acharonim*.

This week's question: How is it possible for one to eat bread yet not need to first wash his hands?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Meir Shapiro - Part LV

Rabbi Shapiro had named Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin as the beneficiary of his large life insurance policy, leaving the yeshiva a substantial sum after the

debts were paid off. Thus, ironically, what he had struggled to accomplish in life he achieved through his passing.

A Taste of Torah

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to temptation.

Because this fear of Hashem was absent from the world as Hashem prevented Bilam from capitalizing on that moment of Divine anger, it was far more difficult for the Jewish People to withstand the enticements of the Moabite and Midianite women. Bilam, being aware of this reality, advised Balak to take full advantage of this weakness.

It was the intervention of Pinchas, as he executed Zimri and Kozbi for their degenerate act, that reinstilled this fear in the Jewish People. This point is made abundantly clear in the precise wording of Rashi at the start of next week's parsha. Hashem tells Moshe that Pinchas "zealously avenged My vengeance among them, (Pinchas 25:11)" and Rashi

comments, "...when he expressed the anger that I should have expressed." The very anger that Hashem did not impart into Creation, leading to the terrible events that felled so many, was instead expressed by Pinchas, saving the Jewish Nation, as Hashem concludes, "so I did not consume the Bnai Yisrael in My vengeance."

Fear, anxiety, and anger, while often viewed as negative traits, have their place and can be used positively; they need to be managed and channeled. We can worry and fret about things we have little or no control over, like pandemics, inflation, and wars. Or, we can utilize this natural emotion to exert control over ourselves and use it to become better people. The choice is ours.

Stories for the Soul

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accomplished. After he passes from this world, he will come before the Heavenly Court, where he will be informed of the many merits he has due to the Torah studied and mitzvos performed in Dallas because of his actions. This fellow will likely respond, "What's Dallas?!"

Our Sages tell us that Balak's sacrifices to G-d, insincere as they were, had a positive effect: the famed convert Ruth descended from him in the merit of those sacrifices. We can never know what far-reaching effect even seemingly insignificant actions will have.

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