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EDITORIAL

The Man and the Donkey

"Bilam arose in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with *sarei Moav*."

Rashi says here that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* told Bilam, "Rasha! Avraham their forefather has preceded you, as it says 'Avraham arose early in the morning.'"

The Sochatchover Rebbe, the Shem MiShmuel, *zy"á*, wonders:

Ordinarily, when one event "cancels out" another, the two events must be comparable. In this case, what possible comparison can there be between Avraham Avinu personally saddling his donkey in order to heed Hashem's command to bring his beloved son to the *akeidah*, and a despicable evildoer like Bilam personally saddling *his* donkey to defy the will of Hashem and curse His beloved nation?

The *Midrash* tells us that Bilam argued that instead of only one nation — *Am Yisrael* — serving Hashem, all 70 nations should do so. In fact, this was a legitimate though premature claim; it will happen when Moshiach comes, as the *passuk* tells us (*Tzefaniah* 3:9), "For then I will change the

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nations [into speaking] a pure language, so they will all proclaim the Name of Hashem."

However, Bilam was not concerned with the honor of Hashem. His goal was to minimize the love Hashem has for His people, and so make it possible for him (Bilam) to curse them.

Bilam was an icon of evil, but he was not a fool. He was fully aware that the Omnipresent knows what is in the hearts of men, and cannot be manipulated. Therefore, at the time he presented this argument Bilam managed to consciously eradicate any inward thoughts or feelings that indicated that he meant anything but the honor of Hashem. While such a feat would be beyond most men, Bilam had enormous powers of spiritual impurity. He succeeded so well that it is possible that he even managed to convince himself that his intentions were pure and lofty, comparable to those of Avraham Avinu.

However, Hashem, who knows what lies hidden in the innermost chambers of the subconscious, saw through Bilam's attempt. Hashem told him that Avraham Avinu already "preceded" him with far more lofty and totally pure intentions.

The Shem MiShmuel states that this is a lesson for all of us. We are obligated to take the time every so often to scrutinize and analyze our good deeds. Even if on the surface it would seem that our intentions are

pure and holy, perhaps deep in our hearts there is some ulterior motive and selfish consideration.

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On that fateful journey, Hashem caused Bilam's donkey to see the Angel of Hashem standing before her three separate times; when she reacted to what she saw, Bilam struck her with his staff. Then Hashem "opened the mouth" of the donkey and she said to Bilam, "What have I done to you that you have struck me three times?"

One would have expected Bilam to be astounded at the turn of events. After all, a donkey had just spoken to a human!

Yet Bilam reacted as if nothing extraordinary had occurred. He responded — to the donkey! — by explaining why he hit her: "Because you mocked me!" He went on to vent his anger, "If there were a sword in my hand I would have killed you!"

It seems incomprehensible that Bilam was not impressed at the miraculous turn of events and did not take heed of the message from Heaven. Yet that is precisely what happened.

The Shem MiShmuel quotes his father, the Avnei Nezer, *zy"á*, as saying that the war with Amalek had to occur before *Mattan Torah*. If it had taken place after *Mattan Torah*, then the *kelipah* of Amalek would have ensured that the incredible revelations that took place on Har Sinai would not have their desired effect. The essence of Amalek is absolute falsehood, and it has the power to find "explanations" for everything. With seemingly rational but actually insidious and disingenuous logic, Amalek

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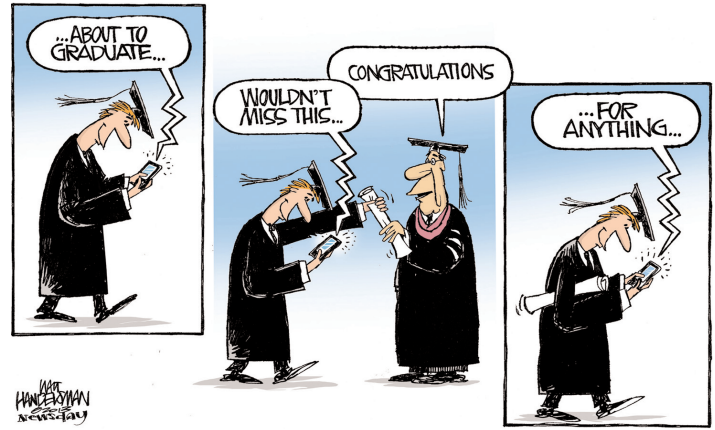
can prevent the human soul from reacting to spiritual manifestations.

The *Zohar* teaches us that there is a deep inter-relationship between Bilam and Amalek. To demonstrate this, take the first two letters of *Bilam* (*beis, lamed*) and the first two letters of *Amalek* (*ayin, mem*) and you get the name Bilam. Take the last two letters of *Bilam* (*ayin, mem*) and the last two of *Amalek* (*lamed, kof*), and you get the name Amalek.

Like Amalek, Bilam was so filled with falsehood that he did not react even when his donkey began to speak, and therefore failed to draw the necessary conclusions.

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May the *Ribbono shel Olam* help us to sense and properly react to the spirituality around us, and merit to serve Hashem with truth.



OPINION

Inter-Communal Animosity, the Chareidi Draft, and the Bread of Humiliation

BY BINYOMIN WOLF

The anger on both sides of the *chareidi* draft issue is palpable. The following observation risks sounding naïve by making a fundamental observation regarding a complicated issue: the *chareidi* and secular camps should theoretically get along splendidly. We have the perfect Yissachar-Zevulun relationship. The *chareidi* community in Eretz Yisrael provides the infinite merit of Torah learning to the entire Jewish people and provides the State with physical protection and security (*Bava Basra* 7b). On the other hand, the Israeli government grants exemptions from IDF service for yeshivah students, funds yeshivos and Bais Yaakov schools, and provides the *chareidi* community with a variety of other health and welfare benefits.

The easy answer is that secular people do not have any appreciation for the value of Torah and therefore view *chareidim* as "moochers" or "parasites" who should "share the burden." The problem is that this explanation of secular Jews' motivations oversimplifies the issue and conveniently places the blame and the burden of finding a solution squarely on the "other guy," our more secular brethren. It absolves us of the need for self-reflection as a community.

The Torah says (*Bamidbar* 18:21): "I have given all the tithes of the Jewish people to the tribe of Levi to possess *in exchange* for their service which they serve; the service of the Tent of Meeting" (emphasis added). Why is it necessary for the Torah to clarify that Shevet Levi received tithes *in exchange* for their service in the Mishkan? And why did the other tribes not view Shevet Levi as freeloaders and moochers?

Digressing for a moment, the Torah forbids one to eat from the first three years' fruit produced by a fruit tree (*orlah*). According to the Yerushalmi (*Orlah* 1:3), the Torah also forbids the consumption of the fruit of a non-*orlah* tree whose roots draw its sustenance from a nearby *orlah* tree. *Chazal* tell us that if the leaves of the non-*orlah* tree are facing toward the larger *orlah* tree, then it is not receiving any sustenance from the larger tree and it is permissible to eat the fruit of the non-*orlah* tree. If, however, the leaves of the non-*orlah* tree are turned away from the *orlah* tree, this indicates that it is receiving its sustenance from the *orlah* tree and it is forbidden to eat from it.

According to the *Gemara*, if the non-*orlah* tree obtains its livelihood from the larger tree, then it "feels" dependent,

embarrassed, and like a freeloader. It therefore turns away from it. The Yerushalmi concludes: "One who eats the bread of his friend is embarrassed to look at his face."

That may be why the Torah emphasizes that Shevet Levi receives the Jewish people's tithes "in exchange for" their service in the Mishkan. The Leviim recognized the value of their service in the *Beis Hamikdash* and saw how it offers untold benefits to the Jewish people. They therefore had no reason to be embarrassed when they accepted tithes from their neighbors from other *shevatim*.

Similarly, Torah study confers infinite merit and physical protection to those who study it and on the nation as a whole. Why then does our community "look away" from our secular brothers, despite the great benefit we offer them in exchange for the physical benefits they provide us?

Perhaps we hesitate to show gratitude for the government's support of Torah, attribute such support to some ulterior motives, and "turn away" from our secular brothers because we ourselves do not truly believe that the Torah studied by our community forms the basis for the financial prosperity and physical security of the nation.

It goes without saying that we know the infinite value of Torah *intellectually*, but most of us do not truly feel it in our gut. Because we do not truly recognize the true value of Torah to the nation, when we receive financial benefits from those who work, pay taxes and have served in the army, deep down, we worry that perhaps we really are freeloaders. This feeling arises from a deficiency in our own belief in the infinite value of our contribution to the nation. Perhaps the extreme rhetoric by some secular Israelis claiming that we do not "share the burden" is a projection of our own lack of belief in what we bring to the table.

Regardless of the outcome of the current political struggle, both sides of the issue will surely benefit when we, who consider ourselves the Torah camp, begin to truly internalize our belief in the Torah and when we, as a group, learn Torah with a sense of national, communal purpose and for the spiritual and physical benefit of the Jewish nation.

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