

The Shul

at the Lubavitch Center

6701 Old Pimlico Road
Baltimore, MD 21209

www.chabadshul.org



July 20, 2024

Balak

14 Tammuz, 5784

It Pays to Be Thorough

You're expecting some guests.

You clean the bathroom, straighten out the books on the bookshelf, dust the furniture, and hide all the bits and pieces in your junk drawer and clutter closet. Everything looks fine from the outside.

And then, like a bolt of lightning, it hits you. How could you have forgotten that among the guests will be your grandmother, a neat-nut if you ever saw one? Just doing the outside, surface stuff won't be enough.

So you start cleaning a little more seriously. You clean out the fridge, straighten up your bedroom (you were just planning on closing the door), and scrub the bathtub. Then run to get some of Grandma's provisions: decaffeinated tea, bran flakes, and prunes.

Starting this Tuesday, we enter the period known as the "Three Weeks." It is a three-week mourning period for the destruction of Jerusalem and the two Holy Temples. It is also an opportunity to focus on and propel ourselves forward to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Third Holy Temple.

"Next year in Jerusalem" "I believe with perfect faith..." smashing a glass under the chupa... At different moments in our lives, consciously or unconsciously, we have prayed for the Redemption.

Throughout our lives, the mitzvot we have done have helped to hasten the Redemption - the ultimate purpose for the creation of the world. Our mitzvot - those between ourselves and G-d and those between ourselves and our fellowmen - have been effecting spiritual changes in the world which will eventually lead to the spiritual and physical perfection of the world in the Messianic Era.

What does all of this have to do with guests and cleaning?

In our regular day-to-day lives, we straighten a little, take the garbage out, load up the dishwasher, do the laundry. We listen to a friend's tale of woe, give a coin to a street person, visit a sick friend, drive the kids to Hebrew school.

At special times, when "guests" are coming, we clean a little more vigorously and straighten a bit more enthusiastically. We go to a seder, light a Chanuka menorah, hear the sounding of the shofar.

Then, there's now. Not just any guest is coming, a very close relative will be arriving soon. And special measures need to be taken. We know we need to clean the insides - the insides of our fridge and the inside of the tub. We go beyond the closed doors of our bedrooms and closets and straighten those up, too.

A special guest will be arriving soon, a close relative to every one of us - Moshiach. It should hit us like a bolt of lightning: We have to do more than we've done in the past. We have to clean up the insides and behind the closed doors. We have to do more mitzvot, go to classes, read about Moshiach and the Redemption. We have to go out of our way to have in our house the "necessities" that this special guest would like to see there: mezuzot on our doors, Jewish books, a tzedaka box in a place of importance. And we have to try to live like the Redemption is already here by being kinder, more considerate, less competitive, more truthful.

(from <http://www.lchaimweekly.org/>)

Imaginary Fears

Several years ago, one of the writers for Torah.org reached out to me in a hurry. He had made a mistake and wanted to stop the distribution of the email he had just sent.

What was his mistake? He had identified the weekly reading as "Parshas Bila'am."

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Misnaming this particular parsha was what we might call a “scholar’s error:” The reading is named after the Moabite King Balak, but the story centers around Bila’am, the evil prophet hired by King Balak to curse the Jews. Balak is something of a minor figure in the parsha that carries his name; it is primarily about Bila’am!

But, of course, without the actions of Balak, the whole story of Bila’am would not have happened.

I heard the following from Rabbi Meilich Biderman, a well-known inspiring speaker. He asks, did you notice that Balak is in a panic about the Jews coming from Egypt, that he is terrified of them? He says the Jews “will eat up everything around us like the ox eats up the vegetables in the field” [22:4]. He expects the Jews to come through, ruin the fields, and eat the crops. That is what caused Balak to send messengers to Bila’am to hire him to deliver curses, and the entire parsha comes as a result of this fear.

Balak’s fear was entirely, unquestionably, 100% baseless. Hashem had specifically told the Jews “Do not bother Moav and do not provoke war with them, for I will not give to you from their land as an inheritance...” [Deut 2:9]. So Balak was afraid for no reason. And because he acted on his irrational fears, he brought destruction upon himself and his people.

What do we learn from this? The Torah, Rav Biderman said, is eternal, and there’s a lesson in here for us today. I should introduce what he says by explaining that our Sages teach that everything G-d does is good, in ways we do not understand, and specifically good for us. Nothing comes to a person unless G-d wants it to be so, and He only wants the best for us.

So, he says, we shouldn’t be living in fear! We must remember that Hashem runs the world and there’s nothing to be afraid of. Obviously, we should behave in a way that is prudent and reasonable, but not second guess ourselves, regret bad investments, or be afraid of every distant possibility. Balak’s unfounded fears led to the entire story!

For those interested, it’s not really possible to retract or stop a bulk email once sent. So every subscriber did receive a class entitled “Parshas Bila’am” that day. Yet the teacher had nothing to be afraid of—few noticed, and none, to my knowledge, lost any respect for him. It was, after all, a wise man’s error!

It is interesting that Rabbi Biderman is often described as a Mashpia, which translates as “influencer.” In today’s culture, an “influencer” is a teenager or twenty something with many social media followers, who convinces them to buy the brands that he or she is being paid to promote. Think about the difference between one “influencer” and the other. We can all be influenced, it’s just a matter of which influencers we listen to!

(by Rabbi Yaakov menken from Project Genesis at www.torah.org)

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DAVENING AND SHIURIM SCHEDULE

<p>Friday, 7/19 — 13 Tammuz Shacharit —7:00 a.m. Minchah / Ma’ariv — 7:00 p.m.</p> <p>Shabbat, 7/20 — 14 Tammuz Shacharit — 9:00 a.m. Sof Z’man Kriat Shema — 9:32 a.m. Minchah — 8:00 p.m. Shiur — after Minchah Ma’ariv — 9:16 p.m.</p> <p>Sunday, 7/21 — 15 Tammuz Shacharit — 8:00 a.m. Minchah / Maariv — 8:10 p.m.</p> <p>Monday, 7/22 — 16 Tammuz Shacharit — 6:50 a.m. Minchah / Ma’ariv — 8:10 p.m.</p>	<p>Tuesday — Fast of 17 Tammuz, 7/23 — 17 Tammuz Fast Begins — 4:16 a.m. Shacharit — 6:35 a.m. Minchah / Ma’ariv — 7:55 p.m. Fast Ends — 8:58 p.m.</p> <p>Wednesday, 7/24 — 18 Tammuz Shacharit — 7:00 a.m. Minchah / Ma’ariv — 8:10 p.m.</p> <p>Thursday, 7/25 — 19 Tammuz Shacharit — 6:50 a.m. Minchah / Ma’ariv — 8:10 p.m.</p> <p>Friday, 7/26 — 20 Tammuz Shacharit —7:00 a.m. Candles — 8:05 p.m. Minchah / Ma’ariv — 7:00 p.m.</p>
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