

Bringing the Farbrengen Home

BLIND IN ONE EYE

An Honest Look

By: Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

One of the earliest instances of anti-Semitism appears in this week's parsha, Balak. Known for his hatred of the Jewish people, the Moabite King Balak hires the gentile prophet Bilaam to curse the Jews.

Now Bilaam himself was not much less of an anti-Semite, and he didn't exactly demur at this employment opportunity. In the end, Bilaam's attempt to curse the Jews is foiled, and he ends up expressing beautiful blessings, including masked references to Mashiach and the final Redemption (see Rambam Hilchot Melachim ch.11).

Suddenly Bilam's donkey refuses to move. The donkey sees an angel blocking the path; Bilaam doesn't see it, and strikes his donkey, attempting to force the beast to continue moving.

"G-d opened the mouth of the donkey and she said to Bilaam, 'What have I done to you that you have struck me these three times?'" (Num.22:28).

Rashi explains, G-d was hinting that it was futile for Bilaam to attempt to destroy a people that observes the three annual pilgrimage holidays.

Yet what is so unique about our celebration of these three festivals that indicates that Bilaam will not be able to destroy us?



Certainly there are many other mitzvot that could be indicative of our enduring strength.

On a superficial level, this connection is related to the fact that in Hebrew, the word used for "times" (as in, "these three times") shares a root with the word for pilgrimage festival.

Everything in the Torah has multiple layers of interpretation. Here's another view:

The first Mishna in Chagigah discusses who is exempt from traveling to Jerusalem for the aforementioned pilgrimage festivals. For example, an elderly person, a sick person and a blind person are not required to make the journey.

The Talmud quotes the opinion of Rabbi Yochanan ben Dehavai, who says that one who is blind in one eye is also exempt.

He notes that the word "appear" is mentioned twice in the Biblical source, teaching that, "in the same manner that one comes to see, so he comes to be seen: Just as the usual way to see is with both one's eyes, so too the obligation to be seen [i.e., to appear in Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festivals] only applies to one who can see with both eyes" (Talmud, Chagiga 2a).

(continued on back)

Torah Q&A for Your Shabbos Table

Q: What tragedies happened on 17 Tammuz?

A: Five unfortunate things happened on 17 Tammuz:

1. In the first year of the Exodus from Egypt (2448) Moshe broke the *luchos* (tablets) upon descending from *Har Sinai* as the Jews were worshipping the golden calf.
2. The Babylonians broke the walls of Jerusalem leading up to the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash
3. During the Romans' siege on Jerusalem (3828) the Jewish people managed to sacrifice two lambs daily until the 17th of Tammuz when there were no lambs left to sacrifice. Jerusalem came completely under siege.
4. Apostomos (general of enemy army) publicly burned the Torah.
5. An idol was placed in the Bais Hamikdash.

Torah Questions?

You can submit any Q's that you would like to see in this column to Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer at rabbiquChabad.org

Recognizing the Divine

An Honest Look

continued from other side

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk explains that there is a deeper meaning to this requirement of vision in both eyes: *One eye represents our ability to see the greatness of G-d, while the second eye indicates our capacity to see our own lowliness.*

So seeing with two eyes means that we are able to look Above, striving ever higher, while at the same time not overlooking our own flaws.

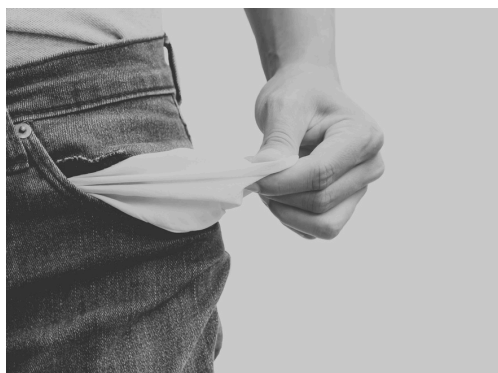
Now here's where it gets even more intriguing.

Rabbi Pinchas Menachem Alter, the 6th Gerrer Rebbe, points out that Bilaam was blind in one eye (Rashi to Num.23:3). So the very same person who could only see from one eye – that is, he only saw his own greatness – attempted to curse the people who see with both eyes, making the thrice annual pilgrimage. We are a people who look Above and below.

G-d was thus alluding to Bilaam, through his donkey, that he will never defeat the Jewish people. We are obligated to ascend to Jerusaelm to see and be seen, because we perceive the greatness of G-d and the lowliness of humankind.

Anti-Semitism is as old as the Jewish people. But we see with two eyes. We know how low we are, and how great we may become. ☯

(Based on Daf al HaDaf, Chagiga 2a, p.454)



Fast of 17 Tammuz Reminders

- The fast begins in Queens at 3:44am (Sunday). One is not to rinse one's mouth upon awakening (Shulchan Aruch 567:2). If very bothersome, one can rinse one's mouth with listerine.
- If one forgot it was a fast and accidentally said a blessing for food, one should say "*Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuso L'Olam Va'ed*" and not eat it (Nittei Gavriel, Bein HaMetzarim I 3:8). If you already put the food in your mouth, you should spit it out. Even if one accidentally ate or drank, one should nevertheless continue the fast (Mateh Efraim 602:23).
- During Shacharis we recite *Selichot*. *Avinu Malkeinu* is recited during Shacharis & Mincha.
- Children who are old enough to understand about the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash should eat simple foods (not treats etc.) (Kaf HaChaim 550:9; Nittei Gavriel ibid. p.68). ☯

HAYOM YOM

16 Tammuz

The Baal Shem Tov's Ahavat Yisrael (love of fellow Jew) was beyond imagination. The Maggid said: If only we could kiss a sefer-Torah with the same love that my Master kissed the children when he took them to cheder as a teacher's assistant!

Chassidic Story

Pocket Full of Blessings

(continued from last week)Students of the Maggid of Mezritch discuss the meaning of a miracle story about the Baal Shem Tov....

"To show us the Baal Shem Tov's power to perform miracles," the Maggid pronounced, "we have many stories. We do not need this specific story."

Another chassid spoke up: "But this was a double miracle: not only did the Baal Shem Tov make the money appear miraculously, but it was the exact amount—to the kopek."

Again the Maggid said that there are no lack of stories demonstrating amazing and doubly amazing miracles performed by the Baal Shem Tov.

A third chassid suggested: "That the Baal Shem Tov can make wondrous miracles occur—that is obvious. However, the Baal Shem Tov could have made all the money appear in his pocket, thus performing this important mitzvah by himself. Yet because of his tremendous love of his fellow, he wanted to share the mitzvah, and thus made money appear in the pockets of all those present. That, I think, is the message of the story."

"May I suggest," the Maggid said, "that this story is not about the Baal Shem Tov at all. I think that the story is truly about the greatness of his disciples. Even though Shabbat had just ended and none of them had any money with them, they nevertheless inserted their hands in their pockets, following the directive of their rebbe with complete faith and trust..." ☯

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8:15pm Mincha
Followed by Kabbalas Shabbos
8:45am Chassidus Shiur
10:00am Davening
5:00pm Tanya Shiur
7:55pm Mincha
9:16pm Maariv / Shabbos Ends