1st Seder Weekly Divrei Torah

A BAIS MEDRASH PROGRAM FOR MEN

FIRST SEDER BAIS MEDRASH established in 2012 by Rabbi Uri Greenspan, provides a unique learning program for men with diverse schedules, ages, and backgrounds. Since its inception, the daily learning programs of Gemara, Mishnayos, Tanach, Halacha, and Jewish ethics, have provided hundreds of First Seder participants with a rich, challenging, and authentic Bais Medrash experience. The wide range of subjects and the varying levels of difficulty allow for the participants to choose which learning track best fits their individual needs, enabling them to truly take their learning to the next level.

DAILY SCHEDULE:
9-11:30am: Gemara in-depth and B'Chavrusa
9:10am-1pm: Classroom Learning

Monday 9-9:45pm: Dirshu Mishna Berura Shiur
Tuesday *8:45-9:45pm:* Daf HaShovua Gemara Shiur

TO JOIN: Contact Rabbi Uri Greenspan at 732.407.3178
Office@FirstSeder.org, Lower Merion Synagogue

PARSHAS BALAK – AMAZING

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan

"Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey and it said to Bilam, 'What have I done to you that you struck me these three times?' And Bilam said to the donkey, 'Because you mocked me. If there were a sword in my hand I would have killed you'" (Bamidbar 22:28-29).

Now if it were your donkey or mine that opened its mouth and started talking, we would be dumbfounded. "This can't be! Donkeys don't talk!" However, Bilam is unfazed. On the contrary, he begins to argue with his donkey. Rav Shimon Schwab explains that as a person degrades himself by succumbing to more and more temptations, he becomes inured – desensitized. No taboo daunts him. As it says in Yeshaya (6:10), "Their hearts are fattened, their ears hardened, and their eyes are sealed." (This indeed is the phenomenon that Rav Huna described: "Once a person commits a sin and repeats it, it becomes to him as if it is permissible.")

Although the talking donkey should have shaken Bilam to the core, he remained undeterred. Rav Schwab asserts that since Bilam incessantly pursued self-gratification to the nth degree, descending into the most immoral behavior – nothing shocking daunting him, he was punished by losing any sense of astonishment. Perhaps it was *middah keneged middah*. Since he deadened his sense of awe, Hashem took away his capacity to be stunned and deterred.

We have witnessed this phenomenon today before our very eyes. How is it possible that the level of violence and *pritzus* in our society and in the media has descended to such an unfathomable state? As people pursue all kinds of excesses they lose their sense of astonishment or thrill, so it takes more and more to shock or excite them. This can continue, G-d forbid, ad infinitum.

Rav Schwab asserts that tragically we too have lost a great deal of this kind of sensitivity, as manifest in the Mitzvos that we do by rote without any passion or fervor. When we hear a loud clap of thunder we may be shaken and recite with fervor *shekocho ugevuraso malei olam* – the beracha extolling Hashem's great powers. Yet we say *shehakol nihiyeh bidvaro* - "that everything came into existence by His word" – without any sense of amazement at how truly remarkable all forms of food and nourishment are – even plain H2O. Indeed our entire relationship of *ahavah* and *yirah* – love and awe of Hashem – is based on our capacity to be amazed by the greatness of Hashem and the wonders of creation. See Rambam Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah (2:2).

We must try to resuscitate our sensitivity. Perhaps we can develop a deeper amazement and awe at every aspect of this wonderous world that Hashem created by focusing more intensely on our Tefillos and berachos. Thereby we too will declare as Dovid Hamelech did (Tehillim 8:4), "When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, what is man that You remember him… You made him slightly less than angels and crowned him with a glorious soul…Hashem our Master how mighty is Your Name throughout the Earth!"

You can bring a zechus refua shelaima for Sandy Bruck - Shalom ben Tila Leah - by signing up for a weekly erev Shabbos contribution at https://pay.banquest.com/lightuptheworld and by joining the 2-3 minute daily shiur on the writings of the Chofetz Chaim.

THE HANDYMAN'S LADDER

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

In this week's Parsha we learn about the importance of showing hakaras hatov, gratitude. We find that the angel rebuked Bilam for hitting his donkey. The Sefer Chasidim (668) writes that one should not hit their donkey and certainly one has an obligation to relate in a pleasant way to people who benefit him. This leads us to the following true story.

Aron was a handyman. He owned a van where he kept all of his tools. He also had a ladder tied to a roof rack on the top of the van. One day Aron had a hard day of work. He wanted to get home quickly, so he attached the ladder to the top of the roof, but he didn't take the time to tie it securely. As he parked in front of his home, he thought about the loose ladder and told himself that he would secure the ladder later.

Aron went to his Daf Yomi shiur at night, came home and fell asleep. As you might have guessed, he forgot about the loose ladder. At about 2:00 in the morning there was a knock at his door. It was his neighbor Levi. "My wife is going into labor and our car is now at the mechanic, can we please borrow your van to rush to the hospital?" Levi asked excitedly. Without hesitation, Aron tossed Levi the keys. "Of course. And everything should go with mazel, and beshaa tova", Aron called out with a smile. Levi and his wife took the keys to Aron's van and drove the van as fast as they could to reach the hospital.

Suddenly, a car in front of them stopped short, because of a red light. Levi hit the breaks hard. Suddenly a large projectile shot off from the roof of the van. As Levi watched in horror a large metal object flew into the rear window of the car in front of them. Levi jumped out to make sure everyone was ok. The driver of the car was shocked but unhurt. The car however was a different story. Levi knew his cars and he recognized that the car was an expensive one. It was a new model of the Mercedes Maybach S 580. After assessing the scene Levi understood what happened. The ladder on the roof of the van was not secured properly. Levi was driving very quickly, and when he stopped short the ladder shot out and smashed into the Mercedes in front of him. He understood that the damage was going to be very expensive. Levi quickly gave the driver ahead of him his insurance information and told him that his wife was in labor. The man was very considerate and understanding and Levi was able to continue to the hospital. Thankfully a healthy child was born shortly after.

After the dust settled, Levi thought about his accident. He was very grateful to Aron for lending him his van but was frustrated about the fact that he was never told about the loose ladder.

Levi wondered who was responsible to pay for the damage according to the Torah. On one hand, he was the driver and he was driving very fast. Perhaps it was his responsibility. But on the other hand, the van had a loose ladder on top, and Aron, the owner of the van, never told him that it was insecure. Perhaps it was Aron's responsibility. And finally, perhaps both Aron and Levi could argue that the accident was out of their hands and that both of them were exempt from paying the damage and the owner of the Mercedes should swallow the loss.

What do you think? See Upiryo Matok Bereishis Page 284

Regarding last week's question about selling the apartment to the people who might have contributed to his wife's death, Rav Zilberstein answered as follows. Normally one would have to overcome their anger and sell the apartment. But in a case that beis din feels that the neighbors might have been negligent in contributing to her death, beis din can say that the husband should not sell it. This is in order not to reward people for their sin of carelessness. This is based on the principle of Hefker Beis din hefker.

WE HAVE TO MAKE A SEUDAH! I HAVE FOUND STERNEVITCH

The Brisker Rav would travel to Switzerland periodically for some needed rest. One year, news of the Brisker Rav's arrival in Switzerland spread quickly, and many came to him, some to ask his advice, others just to spend time in his presence. One of the Brisker Rav's visitors, a local Jew, came and asked the Brisker Rav a question. After giving his answer, The Brisker Rav asked him his name. "Sternevitch," the man responded. "Sternevitch?" asked The Brisker Rav. His face changed completely, "Did you live in such-and-such a town before the war?" No, the man said. "Perhaps," The Brisker Rav continued, "one of your relatives lived there?" "Yes," he answered. "I had a cousin with the same name, and he lived in that town."

The Brisker Rav's then face lit up, and he quickly called his host, R. Wolf Rosengarten. "R. Wolf, we have to make a seudah! I have found Sternevitch!"

Seeing the perplexed expressions on the faces of those present, The Brisker Rav explained: Toward the end of 5699 (1939), when the war began, we were stranded in Krenitze, the resort town where I would go every year for a vacation at the end of the summer. The war front was approaching, and everyone was escaping from the area. As we began our flight, I realized I didn't have enough money to continue the journey, and my son suggested that we stop in a local village and ask members of the local Jewish community for a loan. I, on the other hand, thought there was no need for this. I was sure Hashem would send us help where we were and there was no need to make extra efforts. Before the train that was to take us away from the danger zone would arrive, the money would be there! "And indeed, through Divine intervention, a Jew came up to us, and when he heard about our predicament, he lent us the money we needed. We asked his name, and he told us, 'Sternevitch, from such-and-such place.' I told him that as soon as we arrived home, we would send him the money with someone." At that point no one knew the scope of the war and the extent of the destruction that was about to descend upon Europe. The Brisker Rav assumed that after some time he would return to his home in Brisk and from there he would be able to send the payment to this good-hearted person. Of course, this was not to be: The Brisker Rav never returned to Brisk.

"From the day I arrived in Eretz Yisrael until today, fifteen years have passed, and I've had no rest over this debt," The Brisker Rav continued. "Every time a guest comes to my house from anywhere in the world, I ask him if he knows a family by the name of Sternevitch. I've even attempted to locate a list of the survivors of that town and where they settled after the war, but all my efforts proved futile. "And so, I continued my search, the matter being extremely distressing to me. I lost much sleep thinking about the loan: how will I face the Beis Din in Heaven after I die with an unpaid debt on my ledger?

But now, finally, I have found a relative of that Jew who took care of me in my time of trouble, and after all the distress I've experienced, the opportunity has finally come to fulfill the mitzvah of paying off this debt that has worried me so — how can I not be ecstatic?"

The astonished guest related to the Brisker Rav that his uncle and entire family had been killed in the Holocaust. He was the last living Sternevitch. The Rav calculated the sum of the old loan and paid the debt in full.

From The Brisker Rav Volume Three, By R' Shimon Yosef Meller, Published by Feldheim. Reprinted With Permission From Table Talk.

Mishnayos Shiur

The daily Mishnayos shiur is currently learning Taharos. You can join us Monday through Thursday from 9:20 to 9:55 AM

Kli Yakar Chabura

The Kli Yakar Chabura will meet Shabbos afternoon at 5:15 PM in Rabbi Greenspan's home, 113 Grassmere Road, Bala Cynwyd.

Dirshu Mishna Berura Shiur

Have you joined the Dirshu Mishna Berura shiur??? Start today!

1st Seder

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NOW IN OUR 10TH YEAR!

To sponsor the 1st Seder Weekly, please contact office@firstseder.org. For more information or to register for First Seder, contact Rabbi Uri Greenspan at RabbiGreenspan@FirstSeder.org or 732-407-3178.

Good Shabbos!