1st Seder Weekly Divrei Torah
A BAIS MEDRASH PROGRAM FOR MEN

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PARSHAS BALAK – NOW HEAR THIS

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan

When the officers of Balak came to Bilaam and requested that he curse Bnai Yisrael, he responded that he must first consult with Hashem. Hashem told Bilaam, "Do not go with them." Bilaam then told them, "Hashem refuses to let me go with you." Rashi explains that Bilaam understood that Hashem merely forbade him to go with these officers, but he would be permitted to go with more dignified officers.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz wonders how Bilaam could possibly have gotten the message so wrong. It was quite clear that Hashem did not want him to curse Bnai Yisrael. Rav Chaim explains that it is in consonance with the time-honored principle that a person hears what he wants to hear. Bilaam, who was so arrogant, so full of himself, was sure that Hashem had meant that it was beneath his dignity to go with such lowly officers. Thus, while Hashem had said, "Don't go with them," Bilaam heard, "Don't go with them."

Rav Chaim uses this concept to answer a question posed by Rav Akiva Eiger. The Gemara relates that Rav Elish had been taken captive and was sitting in prison with a man who understood the language of birds. When a bird came by chirping loudly, Rav Elish asked his cellmate what the bird had said. The fellow responded that the bird said, "Elish, flee; Elish, flee." The Aruch asserts that we can deduce from this Gemara that Rav Elish was familiar with the language of birds. Rav Akiva Eiger asks, "Doesn't the Gemara imply just the opposite – that Rav Elish did not know the language of birds and that is why he had to ask his cellmate?"

Rav Chaim suggests that indeed Rav Elish was fluent in the language of birds. However, since Rav Elish was very subjective regarding his plight in prison he did not want to trust himself to interpret the bird's words. Perhaps he was merely hearing what he wanted to hear. To verify his own interpretation, he checked with his cellmate.

Rav Ephraim Wachsman cites a Medrash which stresses the significance of not merely being able to hear, but to comprehend well what one is hearing: Hashem says to Bnai Yisrael, "If a person falls from the roof and injures his entire body, a doctor will come and bandage his head, his hands and feet until his whole body is one big bandage. I am not like that. There are 248 limbs in the body and the ear is but one of them. Even if the entire body is sullied with sin, but the ear is still capable of hearing, the entire body will live, as it says, 'Listen and your soul shall live!'" (Shemos Rabba 27,9) One who hears well, who discerns the real message can absorb enough enlightenment and inspiration to revive even the sickest of souls.

How often does a rabbi speak about the evils of loshon hara only to have a congregant tell him, "That was a great drasha, I wish so and so would have been present to hear it." Or when he speaks about the tools needed to preserve sholom bayis, he may have a member comment, "I have to tell this one over to my wife." The message flew right over their heads.

One of the most valuable keys to personal refinement and growth is the ability to learn from the Divrei Torah that we hear without our negative middos or specific agenda getting in the way. If we can accomplish that, if we can accurately comprehend the mussar that we hear, we can imbibe the elixir that provides our spiritual body with life and vitality.

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

Please contact R' Ungar (Ymungar@gmail.com) with questions or comment

QUESTION: A cold piece of raw chicken cutlet fell down on a stove top that is used for both meat and dairy which hasn't been cleaned recently. Do I have to throw out the chicken? By mistake I used a mug which is usually used for hot chicken soup, to drink some cold milk. After realizing my mistake, I washed it in my milchig sink with hot water. Is my mug treif?

ANSWER: The first question that a Rov will ask when presented with these types of questions is, was heat that is יד סולדת involved. In the first shailoh, the stove top was cold but dirty. Since both the cutlet and stove top were cold, there is no transfer of treif into the cutlet, and only some residue that perhaps is on the chicken can easily be washed off and then used. In the second shailoh, the mug which is fleishig was washed with "hot" water with milk inside. If indeed the water was hot then since the water is coming from a כלי ראשון and pouring directly into the mug, the mug would be treif and if it was a ceramic mug, it would have to be disposed of. However, after inquiring, the "hot" water wasn't so hot, since the one washing the mug just opened the faucet to rinse the cup and when the faucet is first opened the water is not yet hot enough to cause a transfer. The mug is fine.

עי' יו"ד סימן פ"ז סעי' צ"א סעי' א'

Question regarding tasting food on a Fast day from *EMAILIM BATORAH* on back page

THE PARATROOPER

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

With gratitude to Hashem, my family and I have returned home. Thank you to all of you who were so welcoming and helpful while we were away and when we returned. The Baltimore community is truly so special.

This week's parsha talks about the war that Bnei Yisrael waged against their enemies, the Midyanim. Let me share with you another true story about Eretz Yisrael and modern-day Jewish soldiers.

Matan was a paratrooper in the IDF. One day, during a practice jump, he leapt from a plane as usual. But as he descended, a strong wind suddenly caught him and blew him far off course—away from the designated landing zone.

To his shock, the wind pushed him toward an area near the army base where by-standers often gathered to watch the paratroopers. Despite his efforts to steer away, Matan crash-landed into a young toddler, an adult woman, and a parked car, injuring the two people and damaging the vehicle.

Later, Matan began to wonder: according to halacha, is he obligated to pay for the damage? On the one hand, this was clearly an accident. The wind carried him off course—it was beyond his control. But on the other hand, there's a Torah principle: adam mu'ad l'olam—a person is always responsible for the harm they cause, even unintentionally. But what about the bystanders? They had voluntarily come to a place near a military landing zone. Even if the risk was tiny, they chose to stand where accidents could conceivably happen. Did that mean they accepted the risk? What do you think? Is Matan required to pay for the damage caused by this parachuting accident? See Chashukei Chemed, Bava Kama, page 217.

Regarding last week's question about Mark Zuckerberg and Sam Altman, The Minchas Yitzchak (5, 77) writes that always poaching another person's employees is an "Avlah Gedolah, a great injustice". In the words of another prominent posek, "A blanket hetter to poach employees, could destabilize many businesses, and would enable those with deeper pockets to strangle their competition by soliciting away their critical staff."

HE WOULD DASH AROUND THE SHUL, FISTS FULL OF CANDY, SEARCHING FOR THE SAD LITTLE FACES

We know that there is a custom to throw candies at a chassan during his aufruf. When Rav Shimshon Pincus celebrated his sons' aufrufs, he always came prepared. He would buy a large stash of candy and hide it under his seat in shul. After everyone had thrown their candies at the chassan, and once the excitement had died down, Rav Shimshon would spring into action.

Amidst showers of berachos and mazal tov wishes, he would dash around the shul, fists full of candy, searching for the sad little faces who hadn't managed to catch any sweets. With a smile, he would drop candy into their outstretched hands—turning tears into smiles.

(From The Life of Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus, Published By Feldheim. Reprinted with permission from Table Talk.)

Tasting food on a Fast day (from EMAILIM BATORAH):

Rochel wasn't sure if she added enough pepper to the soup. She asked her Rav if she may taste the soup on 17th Tamuz. The Rav answered that she may take a spoonful and taste it and then spit it out. Leah asked the same question from the same Rav. She wasn't sure if she added enough salt to the soup. The Rav answered that she may not taste the soup even if she spits it out.

3 Answers:

1) ***Rochel is a Sephardia. The Rav told her to follow the Psak of the בית יוסף, who allows tasting food (& spitting out) on a תענית except for on Tisha B'Av & Yom Kippur. Leah is an Ashkenazia who must follow the רמ"א who forbids tasting food on every תענית***
2) ***The מ"ב תקס"ז סק"ו quotes the חיי אדם "when cooking for a סעודת מצוה one may taste the food on a תענית" (may not swallow). Rochel cooked a סעודת מצוה.***
3) ***The (ברכי יוסף תקס"ח) brings a מחלוקת If someone mistakenly made a ברכה (on food) on a תענית. According to the נחפה בכסף, he should eat less than a כזית. Others argue and hold to say בשכמל"ו after making the ברכה.***

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HAVE A GOOD SHABBOS!