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

PARSHAS CHUKAS-BALAK – HASHEM RUNS THE WORLD

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan

After the conclusion of the forty years of wandering in the Wilderness, Bnai Yisrael prepared to enter the land of Canaan. Traveling along the southeastern border of the Promised Land they passed by the countries of Moav and Ammon. Hashem commanded Moshe that Bnai Yisrael are forbidden to do battle with Moav and Ammon for their lands were granted as an inheritance to the descendants of Lot. Since these lands were off limits for Bnai Yisrael, they were forced to circle around them, proceeding northward toward the Emorite kingdom ruled by Sichon.

The Torah mentions that Sichon had previously waged war against Ammon and Moav and had captured a major portion of both countries. The Emorites were jubilant over their conquest. Their victory was celebrated by their poets: "Come to Cheshbon – let it be built and established as the city of Sichon… Woe to you Moav…their sovereignty over Cheshbon was lost" (Bamidbar 21: 27-30).

Rav Yaakov Galinsky takes note of the irony of this turn of events. While Sichon thought that he had conquered the lands of Ammon and Moav for himself, he had really taken possession of them on behalf of Bnai Yisrael. Since those territories no longer belonged to Ammon and Moav, they became eligible to be acquired by Bnai Yisrael. Therefore, when Bnai Yisrael fought Sichon and conquered his entire land, they also took possession of major cities of Ammon and Moav. Thus, the Gemara (Gittin 38a) states, "Ammon and Moav were purified by Sichon."

While Sichon and his people rejoiced over their acquisition of Moavite and Ammonite territory, Hashem had other plans. Sichon was merely a pawn in the transfer of these lands to Bnai Yisrael. There is a Yiddish expression: "A mench tracht un G-t lacht." A man thinks [about his plans] but Hashem laughs – because He runs the world.

Rav Galinsky cites the Gemara in Avodah Zara (40b). Rebbi Yehuda Hanasi suffered from a stomach ailment. Rebbi Yishmael told Rebbi Yehuda that his father had suffered from the same malady, and he was cured by drinking apple cider which had been aged for seventy years. A search for the precious cider was conducted, and they found a gentile who had 300 barrels of seventy year old apple cider. Now why did this family save these hundreds of barrels of apple cider for seventy years? Unbeknownst to them, they were really saving them for Rebbi Yehuda. Thus, Rebbi Yehuda declared, "Blessed is the Omnipresent Who entrusted His world to reliable caretakers!"

The Rambam, in his introduction to his commentary on Mishnayos, describes a theoretical situation in which a wealthy man built a magnificent palace which he did not ostensibly need. Yet this great mansion will have fulfilled its purpose when a very pious person comes many years later and finds shelter from the blazing sun in the shade of one of its walls. In Hashem's master plan there was no other purpose for its existence. He orchestrated its existence because He runs the world.

Megilas Esther is replete with such phenomena. Just one example demonstrates this point beyond any doubt. For whom did Haman build the gallows? For Mordechai? No, for himself and his ten sons. Who orchestrated that? The One Who runs the world.

When Columbus set sail westward toward "India" in 1492, the year of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, why did he discover America? To find new routes for commerce? To prove that the world wasn't flat? Not really. It was to prepare a land of refuge for millions of Jews fleeing persecution and tyranny all over the Eurasian continent and ultimately facilitate the proliferation of Torah across the entire United States.

Whether we are studying world history or discussing current events or evaluating events in our own lives, if we look closely enough, we will find this phenomenon over and over again, because it is Hashem Who runs the world!

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

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

QUESTION: Is it okay to use a stove top for both milchig and fleishig if it is clean?

ANSWER: One rule in בשר בחלב is: When two כלים touch and there is no liquid in between them, there is no transfer of בליעות/taste from one to the other. לכתחלה one should not let them touch, but if a pot of chicken soup touches a pot of milchig soup cooking right next to it, if it is dry in between nothing transfers and everything is okay. When putting a pot with meat on a grate that sits above a flame, nothing transfers from the pot to the grate since it is dry, and even if something spills over, the fire which is right there burns it up. This is why many allow one to use the same clean grate to cook both milchig and fleishig. An electric stovetop that has coils that turn red hot is also like a fire. However, a glass top doesn't have a fire, and even if it gets very hot, and one could argue that it does indeed burn anything that spills on it, it will only help for the area directly above where the fire is. On a glass top the pot often will touch areas off to the side where there's no fire, an area that could be treif from milchig and fleishig spills. A stovetop with a grate, the pot only touches the grate and is safe. So, if one has a glass top, one should designate sides for milchig and fleishig. See footnote.

עי' רמ"א יו"ד סימן צ"ב סעי' ח'. עי' אג"מ יו"ד"א סי' נ"ט. עי' ספר פסקים ותשובות סי' צ"ב אות כ"ט שכ' שכיריים זכוכית נעשה גם מחרס שא"א להגעילו וכ' שלכתחלה אין להשתמש חלב ובשר בחד מקום. אלא שכ' שיש נוהגים להשתמש לשניהם ויד על מי לסמוך בתנאי שהכיריים נקי.

THE CHASSIDISHE BAND

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Nachman, a Chassidish band leader, received a call from a man who said, "I'm making a wedding, and I'd love to ask you to play with your band at the wedding." Nachman accepted. They took down the information, the man put down a deposit, and Nachman was excited about the gig. The wedding day arrived.

Nachman and his five-piece band got set up. Slowly, the guests arrived, and the waiters began setting everything up. After all the preparations were finished, Nachman noticed that there was no mechitza at the dance floor. The wedding had already started, so Nachman went over to the baal simcha and said, "Sholom Aleichem. I'm just curious, where is the mechitza for the dancing?" The father said, "Oh, we don't do a mechitza. We're not planning to have one."

Nachman said, "No mechitza? What do you mean? You hired a frum band." The father replied, "Yes, we love Chassidish music, but we're not Orthodox, and we're not planning to have a mechitza." Nachman said, "I'm sorry, but I can't play if there's no mechitza. The father became very tense and said, "I am a lawyer, and if you quit on me now and humiliate me, I'm going to sue you for every last cent you have." Nachman did not know what to do. He did not want to be sued, but he also did not want to play at a wedding without a mechitza. He felt very unsure. The rabbi, the mesader kiddushin, saw the disagreement and came over. He said, "What seems to be the problem?" Nachman explained, "I was supposed to play, but there is no mechitza, and I'm not playing without one. The father said he is going to sue me." The rabbi said, "Okay, here's what we're going to do. The baal simcha is not going to sue you, and you are going to play. But how are you going to be paid? Instead of being paid with money, you will be paid by their agreeing to have a mechitza. In other words, there will be a mechitza, but it won't cost them anything."

Nachman felt he had no choice. He did not want to be sued, so he agreed. They "paid" him by putting up the mechitza. Once it was in place, Nachman and his band played their hearts out. It was a gorgeous, inspiring wedding. Everyone left with tremendous simcha, on a real high.

Nachman did not hear from them again for a while. About a year later, Nachman received another call. It was an unfamiliar voice, and the person said, "I'm making a pidyon haben. Could you and your band please play at the pidyon haben for our child?" Nachman said, "Of course." But this time, he had learned his lesson. He asked, "Will there be a mechitza?" The man said, "Of course! It's a frum pidyon haben." So Nachman came with his band and set up. And lo and behold, the proud father and mother of the baby were the very same couple whose wedding he had played at a year earlier. Now, they were completely religious. It turned out that because of the wedding, because the band had played with a mechitza, and the experience had been so inspiring, the couple had been set on a path of growth. Over the past year, they had become completely frum. Nachman had made such a Kiddush Hashem. Nachman was very excited to hear the story. He also met the grandfather, the man who had originally hired him for the wedding. After the pidyon haben, the baby's father, the former chassan, paid Nachman for his services. Nachman then went over to the grandfather and said, "You know, I'm so happy to hear this story, and I'm happy everything turned out so well. The truth is, last year, when I agreed to play for nothing, I didn't really mean it. I only did it because I was forced, since you were going to sue me. But now that it seems you are no longer in a litigious mood, I would be very grateful if you could please pay me for my services at the wedding. I would be grateful if either of you would pay." The son turned red and said, "I'm sorry, but I didn't hire you, and I really can't afford another fee." The father said, "I'm sorry, but I'm not going to pay you. To be honest, I didn't actually benefit. I didn't enjoy having you play with that mechitza. Maybe other people benefited and enjoyed it, and perhaps they should pay you. But I personally did not benefit." Nachman still felt that he should be paid, since he had only agreed to play for free because he was under pressure. So the question is: After the fact, does Nachman have the right to ask for payment from the son or from the father? Does the son have a responsibility to pay Nachman for his services? Does the father have a responsibility to pay him? Should we say that although they agreed under duress, they nevertheless agreed, and now it is too late, Nachman has no right to claim payment for the wedding? What do you think? See Chashukei Chemed, Nedarim page 518.

Regarding last week's question about playing soccer on Shabbos, Rabbi Zilberstein (Veharev Na Volume Two, Shelach) answered that since a talis katan is not an obligation, but a mitzvah kiyumis (Since we do not normally wear four-cornered garments, we are not technically obligated to wear a talis katan.), he should not wear his talis katan in this case as it will cause a zilzul of Shabbos, a disrespect for Shabbos, giving the impression that this is a permissible activity on Shabbos.

THE OLOMEINU SUBSCRIPTION

Yeshivas Toras Chaim, and Torah pioneer of the Five Towns in New York, encountered a Jewish father and his young son at a local post office.

The fellow had just moved to the neighborhood, and Rav Binyamin asked the man where his son went to school. "Well, he hasn't started school yet, but next year I'll be enrolling him in public school," said the man. "Public school?" asked Rav Binyamin. "Why don't you send him to our yeshivah? This way, he will receive a quality Jewish education." The man responded that he wasn't religious and was not interested in having his child receive a religious education. Rav Binyamin described how much the young boy would benefit from attending Yeshivah of South Shore, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. Seeing that he was getting nowhere, Rav Binyamin asked the man for his address and then wished him a good day.

Years later, the man met Rav Binyamin. He had become shomer Shabbos, primarily because of his son, whom he had indeed enrolled in a local day school. Rav Binyamin had lost touch with him, but the fellow embraced him and thanked him for being the reason that he had decided to send his son to a Jewish day school. At the shivah for Rav Binyamin, he told the family the secret: "Not long after my encounter with Rabbi Kamenetzky at the post office, a publication called Olomeinu began arriving at our home each month. I looked through it and was impressed by the ethics and morals conveyed on each page, beautiful Jewish ideals being taught to Jewish children. I realized that these were principles that I wanted my son to learn, and the only way he'd learn them is if he attended a yeshivah. Your father did not give up on us! He bought our family a subscription to this great magazine, and today, my entire family is shomer Shabbos."

Rav Binyamin had seemingly been unsuccessful in his overtures at the post office, but he cared too much to just let it go. The least he could do was get the man's address, so that he could pay for a subscription to Olomeinu, hoping it would expose the family to Torah values. It was that gesture that ultimately succeeded in influencing the family to provide their children with the Jewish education they deserved. And today, decades later, their grandchildren care proud talmidim of Yeshivah of South Shore.

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