

## פרשת חוקת

It is a paradox and the paradox is well-known.

It is quite usual to say, and it is correct, that the unique description given to the Mitzvah of פרה אדומה as חוקת התורה, *the statute of the Torah*<sup>1</sup> comes to underscore that paradox.

A *chok*-statute is a law for which we are unable to discern an explanation. The word *chok*-which is one of a number of terms that we have for laws, is aptly used for this inexplicable law.

חוק means 'engraved', a law that was 'written in stone' literally, as were all ancient edicts and decrees. But, just like the connotation of 'written in stone' means 'unchangeable', so is a *chok* unchangeable, that one might wish to change

---

<sup>1</sup> In fact, the phrase חוקת התורה, *the statute of the Torah*, is used once more in the Torah, in Parshas Mattos. We read there (B'midbar Perek 31/Posuk 21) regarding the *kashering* and immersion of utensils captured from the Midianites:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן אֶל אַנְשֵׁי הַצָּבָא הַבָּאִים לְמִלְחָמָה זֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה:  
Elazar the Kohen said to the soldiers who were coming to war, 'This is the statute of the Torah that Hashem commanded Moshe.'

Seforno writes there:

זאת חקת התורה. מה שאמר לכם משה שתתחטאו שלישי ושביעי הוא דין חקת התורה של פרה אדומה לטהר מטומאת מת:

*This is the statute of the Torah*-That which Moshe told you to purify yourselves on the third day and on the seventh day, that is the law of *Chukkas HaTorah* to purify yourselves from the impurity contracted from the dead.

Further on, we will bring the verses to which Seforno refers. His explanation of the verse here is that *Chukkas HaTorah* does not refer to the laws of *kashering* and immersion that he will teach at this moment.

Prior to teach about those laws, he reminds them, with a hint, regarding *Chukkas HaTorah* which teaches how people purify themselves after being in contact with the dead.

it because of our inability to understand it. But it is a *chok*. We cannot change it even though it is unfathomable. It is 'written in stone'.

We read in our Parshas Chukkas (B'midbar Perek 19/Posuk 2):

זאת חקת התורה אשר צוה ה' לאמר דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו אליה פרה אדמה  
תמימה אשר אין בה מום אשר לא עלה עליה על:

This is the statute of the Torah that Hashem commanded saying, 'Speak to B'nei Yisroel that they should take for you a pure red heifer that has no blemish on it and that no yoke was upon it.

It is fascinating to note, and we will attempt to consider this later, that the reason for having the Poroh Adumah is mentioned only after a number of verses that tell us of its specific function.

We read (P'sukim 11-13):

הנגע במת לכל נפש אדם וטמא שבעת ימים: הוא יתחטא בו ביום השלישי וביום  
השביעי יטהר ואם לא יתחטא ביום השלישי וביום השביעי לא יטהר: כל הנגע במת  
בנפש האדם אשר ימות ולא יתחטא את משכן ה' טמא ונקרתה הנפש ההוא  
מישראל כי מי נדה לא זרק עליו טמא יהיה עוד טמאתו בו :

One who touches the dead body of any person becomes impure for seven days. He shall purify himself with it [the water-ash mixture of the Poroh Adumah] on the third day and on the seventh day he will be purified; if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day he will not be purified. Anyone who touches the body of a person who dies and does not purify himself will have defiled the Mishkan of Hashem and the soul of that person shall be excised from Israel because the casting waters were not thrown upon him, he shall be impure; his impurity is still upon him.

The Torah teaches us here that contact with a dead body brings the highest level of impurity. This is what Rashi writes in his commentary to Posuk 22:

...המת אבי אבות הטומאה והנוגע בו אב הטומאה ומטמא אדם

The dead body is the highest level of impurity and one who touches it becomes the second highest level of impurity and can defile another person.

What is the paradox? We read (P'sukim 7-10):

וְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו הַכֹּהֵן וְרַחֵץ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְאַחַר יָבֵא אֶל הַמַּחֲנֶה וְטָמֵא הַכֹּהֵן עַד הָעֶרֶב:  
וְהִשְׂרִף אֹתָהּ יְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו בַּמַּיִם וְרַחֵץ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמֵא עַד הָעֶרֶב: וְאַסֹּף אִישׁ טְהוֹר  
אֶת אֶפֶר הַפָּרָה וְהַנִּיחַ מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה בְּמִקּוֹם טְהוֹר וְהִיתָה לְעֵדוּת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת לְמִי נִדָּה חֲטָאת הוּא: וְכַבֵּס הָאִסֹּף אֶת אֶפֶר הַפָּרָה אֶת בְּגָדָיו וְטָמֵא עַד  
הָעֶרֶב וְהִיתָה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּלְגֵר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם:

The Kohen who prepares the Poroh Aduma shall immerse his clothes and immerse himself in [mikveh] water and then he can return to the camp and the Kohen will be impure until nightfall. The one who burns it shall immerse his clothes in [mikveh] water and immerse himself in [mikveh] water and he is impure until the evening. A pure person will gather the ashes of the heifer and will place them outside the camp in a pure place and it shall be that which should be guarded by the congregation of B'nei Yisroel, casting waters, it is a sin-offering. The one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall immerse his clothes and he is impure until nightfall and it shall be an eternal statute for B'nei Yisroel and the convert who dwells with them in their midst.

There are a number of Kohanim and others<sup>2</sup> who are functioning in the preparation and the use of the Poroh Adumah. They all serve to prepare and utilize the ashes of the red heifer to bring purity to the individual who is impure and they themselves become impure. Those who serve to bring purity become contaminated!

This is what Chazal write in *Midrash Lekach Tov* to our Parshah regarding the Poroh Adumah:

---

<sup>2</sup> Not each and every act associated with the Poroh Adumah must be done by a Kohen. See Ramban at the beginning of our Parsha.

מטהרת את הטמאים ומטמא את הטהורים.

It purifies the defiled and defiles the pure.

That is the presenting paradox, written almost explicitly in the verses.

But, there is an additional paradox as well.

The laws of *tum'a* and *tahara*, purity and impurity are incumbent upon the Jew, not the non-Jew<sup>3</sup>.

The reason suggested for this distinction is the giving of Torah to Israel. Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch writes in Parshas Tazria that the reason for the ultimate impurity being from the dead is that impurity is distance from HaKodosh Boruch Hu.

G-d is purity. The closer one is to G-d the more he is able to experience purity. Ultimate distance from G-d is death because Man is connected to G-d through the *neshamah* that He bestowed upon him.

א...לקי נשמה שנתת בי טהורה היא...

My G-d, the soul that You have placed within me is pure...

At death, that soul abandons the body and the direct connection between Man and the Creator is rent asunder.

However, after the banishment from *Gan Eden*, when death was decreed upon mankind *בעטיה של הנחש*, because mankind accepted the counsel of the snake which is the *yetzer ha'ra'*, the permanence of connection between man and G-d that existed heretofore was weakened. Mankind became polluted.

---

<sup>3</sup> Whether or not a non-Jew can confer impurity of the dead is a separate question. Rambam writes in the first Perek of Hilchos Tum'as Hameis (Halachos 12-13):

אחד המת מישראל או מן העכו"ם מטמא במגע ובמשא... ואין העכו"ם מטמא באהל...  
A dead person, whether Jewish or non-Jewish brings impurity when he is touched or carried. A non-Jew does not bring the impurity of the dead in a covered-enclosure.

Such was the case until Mattan Torah. When the Torah was given the pollution of the serpent was nullified and the closeness to G-d was reinstated<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, it was the merit of accepting the Torah that brought Israel to the level of closeness that when there was distance, impurity became their lot.

And this is where the second unstated paradox is found.

One of the final Massechtos of *Shas* is Masseches Yodaim, 'Hands', and it deals with some specific laws of *tum'a*. As one could surmise, it deals mainly with laws of *netilas yo'daim*.

However, there is a case of *yo'daim* which may be unfamiliar to most. It is the last Mishnah in the Masseches (Perek 3/Mishnah 5) which reads:

ספר שנמחק ונשתייר בו פ"ה אותיות כפרשת ויהי בנסוע הארון מטמא את הידים  
מגילה שכתוב בה פ"ה אותיות כפרשת ויהי בנסוע הארון מטמא את הידים כל  
כתבי הקדש מטמאין את הידים

A Sefer Torah the letters of which are erased (faded) that still has a total of 85 [legible] letters, the number of letters in the section of *Va'yehi bin'so'a ho'o'ron* makes the hands of one who touches it impure. An individual scroll (*Chumash*) that has 85 legible letters, the number of letters in the section of *Va'yehi bin'so'a ho'o'ron* makes the hands of one who touches it impure. All books of the Tanach make the hands of the one who touches them impure.

To one who is not aware of these laws, they sound totally unfathomable. We touch and hold *Sifrei Kodesh* all the time<sup>5</sup>. Do we not stretch out our hands to

---

<sup>4</sup> It is true that the sin of the *Eigel* lessened the purity of Israel but they did not revert to the status ante-Torah.

<sup>5</sup> In Masseches Shabbos (14 a) we read:

אמר רבי פרנך אמר רבי יוחנן: האוחז ספר תורה ערום - נקבר ערום. ערום סלקא דעתך? אלא  
אמר רבי זירא: ערום בלא מצות. בלא מצות סלקא דעתך? - אלא אימא: ערום בלא אותה מצוה:  
Rav Parnach said in the name of Rabi Yochanan: One who holds a Sefer Torah unclothed is buried unclothed. Could this mean that he is really buried unclothed because of this [misdeed]?

touch and kiss the Sefer Torah has it is removed from the Aron HaKodesh and returned there? If it would bring impurity, why do we seek to feel its closeness?

And, now, beyond the meaning of this individual Mishnah and the laws that it brings, let us ask the same question regarding *chukkas haTorah*. The Torah defines the laws of *Poroh Aduma* as *the Statute of the Torah*, as we read earlier

זאת חקת התורה אשר צוה ה' לאמר דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו אליך פרה אדמה  
תמימה אשר אין בה מום אשר לא עלה עליה על:

This is the statute of the Torah that Hashem commanded saying, 'Speak to B'nei Yisroel that they should take for you a pure red heifer that has no blemish on it and that no yoke was upon it.

---

Rav Zeira said, 'Rather unclothed of Mitzvos.' Could this mean that he has no Mitzvos whatsoever? Rather say, 'without that Mitzvah'.

Rashi writes:

ספר תורה ערום - אלא על ידי מטפחת.

*The Sefer Torah unclothed*-Rather one should touch it with a kerchief [but not directly.]

We read in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 147/1):

אסור לאחוז ספר תורה ערום בלא מטפחת. הגה: ויש אומרים דהוא הדין שאר כתבי קודש ולא  
נהגו כן, וטוב להחמיר אם לא נטל ידין; ובספר תורה, אפילו בכהאי גוונא אסור.

It is forbidden to hold an 'unclothed' Sefer Torah without a[n intervening] kerchief. Rama-Some say that this is the law regarding all scrolls of *Kisvei Kodesh*. But people do not follow that opinion. It is good to be strict [and not hold any *Kisvei Kodesh*] if one did not wash his hands. Regarding a Sefer Torah-even in such a manner [where one washed one's hands] it is forbidden.

Aruch HaShulchan writes here:

ומטעם זה אמרין...בשבת [י"ד:] ידיים שנגעו בספר תורה פוסלים את התרומה וגזרו על זה כדי  
שישמרו את עצמם מליגע בתורה בידי בלא מפה...

For this reason we say in Masseches Shabbos that hands that touched a Sefer Torah defile Teruma. Chazal made this decree so that people will guard themselves from touching a Torah with their hands without a cloth.

If it was Torah that brings about the ultimate closeness to G-d, allowing us this unique intimacy that is the extreme opposite of impurity, how could a Book of the Torah cause impurity?

And before we attempt to make order of these different and apparently contradictory factors we will view one additional issue.

In Masseches B'rachos there is a dispute regarding particular types of impurities that are caused by bodily emissions. The question there is whether *Ezra HaSofer* forbade the study of Torah for someone who has those emissions until immersion in a Mikveh.

The Gemara's (22 a) conclusion is found in the words of Rabi Yehuda ben B'seira:

תניא, רבי יהודה בן בתירא היה אומר: אין דברי תורה מקבלין טומאה. מעשה בתלמיד אחד שהיה מגמגם למעלה מרבי יהודה בן בתירא. אמר ליה: בני, פתח פיך ויאירו דבריך; שאין דברי תורה מקבלין טומאה שנאמר (ירמיהו כג/כט<sup>6</sup>) הלא כה דברי כאש נאם ה' מה אש אינו מקבל טומאה אף דברי תורה אינן מקבלין טומאה.

The B'raisa taught: Rabi Yehuda ben B'seira would say, 'Words of Torah cannot contract impurity.' An event occurred with a student who was near Rabi Yehuda ben B'seira and was stammering *divrei Torah* (because of this type of *tum'a* that could forbid Torah study). He said to him, 'My son, open your mouth and let your words bring light. Divrei Torah do not contract impurity as it says, 'Is not My word like fire?, said Hashem.'

Just like fire does not contract impurity so Divrei Torah do not contract impurity<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> The entire verse reads:

הלא כה דברי כאש נאם ה' וכפטיש יפצץ סלע:

Is not My word like fire? said Hashem; like a hammer shattering a rock.

<sup>7</sup> There is a dispute among the *rishonim* whether Rabi Yehuda ben B'seira holds that there was such an enactment by Ezra regarding learning Torah, and it was nullified, or whether there was never such an enactment whatsoever.

Are these contradictions? Can Torah be immune to impurity and yet one who is impure be forbidden to study it? Are these individual, specific items that are unrelated to each other? Are we able to take these pieces and arrange them so that together they will provide us with a picture far broader than we have had until now?

Let us go to Masseches Yodaim first. In Masseches Shabbos there is a lengthy discussion regarding the fact that there was an ancient *g'zeira* that books of Tanach bring *tum'a* to a person's hands. The Gemara (14 a) there explains:

וספר מאי טעמא גזרו ביה רבנן טומאה? אמר רב משרשיא: שבתחלה היו מצניעין את אוכלין דתרומה אצל ספר תורה, ואמרו: האי קדש והאי קדש. כיון דקחזו דקאתו לידי פסידא, גזרו ביה רבנן טומאה. והידים - מפני שהידים עסקניות הן. תנא: אף ידים הבאות מחמת ספר פוסלות את התרומה

What is the reason that Chazal decreed that a Book [of Tanach] defiles hands? Rav Mesharshia said: Originally people would store food that had the sanctity of Teruma<sup>8</sup> with a Sefer Torah [so that the sanctified food would not be mishandled]. They said, "This (the Sefer Torah) is holy and this (Teruma) is holy.' When the Chachamim saw that the Holy Books were being destroyed they de]creed them to be impure [so people wouldn't store their Teruma because then they would defile the Teruma when they would touch it] And hands [Why were they singled out for this decree? Because 'hands' are always active [always moving without prior intent and thus they are more likely to cause defilement]. The Braisa taught, 'Even [when only] hands become impure [because of the rabbinic impurity] of Holy Books, they disqualify the Teruma [from being eaten].

Rashi explains the destruction that came to these Sifrei Kodesh:

לידי פסידא - עכברים מצויין אצל אוכלין ומפסידים את הספר, אבל בחולין לא הוצרכו לגזור, דבלאו הכי נמי לא היו נותנין חול אצל קדש.

---

<sup>8</sup> Teruma is taken from agricultural products that grow in Eretz Yisroel and given to Kohanim. Kohanim and their family may eat Teruma if they and the Teruma are *tahor*.



*To destruction*-Mice were around food and they would [also] eat and destroy the Sefer. There was no need to make *this* decree regarding non-holy foods since they were never placed near Sifrei Kodesh.

That is, non-holy food did not need to be guarded against mishandling. Nonetheless, the practice of storing holy food near Sifrei Kodesh was wrong and in order to present that Chazal said that the Sifrei Kodesh imbue impurity. Therefore, no longer would people store holy food with Sifrei Kodesh.

Now we understand that there is no contradiction. As we learned, just like fire is always pure, so Divrei Torah and Books of Torah always remain pure. The impurity that was rabbinically imposed upon them was for their protection, not because they could contract impurity<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup> Although these Halachos are foreign to us in practice, they were seemingly most significant in the time of Chazal to such extent that when there was a discussion regarding certain Seforim whether or not they were to be included in the canon of *Kisvei Kodesh*, the indication of 'yes' or 'no' was whether or not they brought impurity.

See for example the continuation of the Mishnah in Masseches Yodaim that writes, in part:

שיר השירים וקהלת מטמאין את הידים ר' יהודה אומר שיר השירים מטמא את הידים וקהלת מחלוקת ר' יוסי אומר קהלת אינו מטמא את הידים ושיר השירים מחלוקת...

Shir HaShirim and Koheles defile hands. Rabi Yehuda says, 'Shir HaShirim defiles hands and regarding Koheles there is a dispute. Rabi Yosei says, 'Koheles does not defile hand and regarding Shir HaShirim there is a dispute.

That is, as late as the time of the later *Tanaim* there was a dispute regarding Koheles and Shir HaShirim (and Yechezkel in Masseches Shabbos) regarding their sanctity, and their inclusion in the canon (the Tanakh). Their sanctity was expressed in terms of the applicability of this decree of *tum'as yodaim*.

But, how are we to understand the fact that it was Torah that brought about the eligibility of *tum'a* for Israel when Torah itself is removed from any possible impurity?

I think that we can approach this question by citing an additional comment of Chazal on our Parsha.

Their words are focused on the first words of a verse (Posuk 14) that appears a little farther on. It reads:

זֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲדָם כִּי יָמוּת בְּאֹהֶל כָּל הַבָּא אֶל הָאֹהֶל וְכָל אֲשֶׁר בְּאֹהֶל יִטְמָא שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:

This is the Torah when a man dies in a tent- anyone who comes into the tent and all that is in the tent will be impure for seven days.

We read in Masseches B'rachos (63 b):

- אמר ריש לקיש: מנין שאין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה - שנאמר זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל.

Reish Lokish said, 'What is the source that Divrei Torah are enabled to exist only by one who causes himself to die for Torah? It is as it says, 'This is the Torah - when a man dies in a tent'.

Rashi explains:

זאת התורה - היכן מצויה - באדם שימות באהלי תורה.

*This is the Torah*-where is 'this' Torah found? In a person who will die in the 'tents of Torah'.

Netziv explains that which is unique in the verse that allows such an interpretation. He writes:

והנה מלשון המקרא היה ראוי לכתוב אדם מת כי יהיה באהל. ומה לי היכן הוא מת, מזה יצא דרש האגדה אדם כי ימות באהל אין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה

According to the way that the Torah 'should' have expressed itself, it would have been proper to write, 'when there is a dead person in the tent'. We do not care where he died [but rather that now the lifeless body is in the tent]. This [peculiarity of expression] is the source of the *aggadah* that 'when a person will die in a tent'- that the words of Torah only have continued existence with a person who causes himself to die over Torah.

We now understand the dynamics of what led to this interpretation. But what does this interpretation teach us? Most of the commentators relate this *drasha* to what Chazal write in Masseches Ovos.

We read there (Perek 6/Braisa 4):

כך היא דרכה של תורה פת במלח תאכל ומים במשורה תשתה ועל הארץ תישן וחיי צער תחיה ובתורה אתה עמל ואם אתה עושה כן (תהילים קכח/ב') אשריך וטוב לך אשריך בעולם הזה וטוב לך לעולם הבא...

This is the way of Torah- eat bread with salt and drink water in a measured manner, sleep on the earth and live a life of pain. You should toil in Torah and if you do so, you will be happy and it will be good for you. You will be happy in this world and it will be good for you in the world to come.

The Braisa bases its conclusion on the verse in Tehillim:

יְגִיעַ כַּפְיִךָ כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ וְטוֹב לְךָ:

When you eat the toil of your hands you will be happy and it will be good for you.

Certainly the *p'shat* of the verse refers to physical toil and benefitting from one's own actions and endeavors.

The interpretation of the Braisa refers, obviously, to Torah study. That is because Torah study is also termed as 'toil' and efforts. Thus, we read in Masseches Megillah (6 b):

ואמר רבי יצחק, אם יאמר לך אדם: יגעתו ולא מצאתי - אל תאמן, לא יגעתו ומצאתי - אל תאמן, יגעתו ומצאתי תאמין.

Rabi Yitzchak said, 'If a person will tell you, 'I toiled in Torah but did not find Torah', do not believe him. [If he says] 'I didn't toil and I found'-do not believe him. 'I toiled and found' – believe him.

In his commentary on Tehillim (ibid.) Malbim combines the *p'shat* with the *drash* and writes:

יגיע כפיך כי תאכל, אם יגיע כפיך יהיה רק בשיעור שתאכל, שלא תיגע להעשיר  
ולהרבות הון, רק כשיעור ההכרחי לעמידת החי למצוא אוכל, ולא יותר, אז אשריך  
וגם טוב לך

*When you eat the toil of your hands-* If the toil of your hand will be just the amount that you need to eat, not for the purpose of being rich and to have accumulated wealth, just the necessary amount that a living person needs, but not more, then 'you will be happy' and 'it will be good for you.'

That is, the verse is instructing a person how to have the 'happiness' of this world and the 'good' of the next: let the materialism of this world pale against its spirituality.

In fact, in the continuation of his words there, this is what Netziv writes in order to place this *aggadah* in the context of the flow of this section:

ומגיע זה הדרש לכאן דאפילו אדם המעלה הזה שאין רוחו המרחף על הגוף ראוי  
לטמא, והיינו המאמר הידוע צדיקים אינן מטמאין:

The reason why this interpretation is here is to teach us that even the highest level of a person, one whose spirit which hovers over his body is not fitting to be *tomei* and impure, and that is the well-known saying that the righteous do not bring impurity [at death].

That is, Netziv here raises the question why this wonderful statement of the ideal dedication to Torah is placed in our section. There are many explicit verses throughout the Torah that talk about the Mitzvah of learning Torah. In Shema', that central statement of Jewish belief, the emphasis on Torah study is part of its very essence.

We read there (D'vorim Perek 6/P'sukim 6-7):

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לְבָבְךָ: וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבִנְיָךְ וּדְבַרְתָּ בָּם  
בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ:

These words that I command you today should be on your hearts. You shall teach them to your children and speak about them, when you sit in your house and when you go on the way when you lie down and when you arise.

We are told that Torah is to be all-encompassing. It is to surround the entirety of one's existence. Would this not be an appropriate place to insert the Aggadah that is in our Parsha? Wouldn't that Aggadah be appropriately complement the other Aggadah that Rashi brings in connection with this verse:

אשר אנכי מצוך היום - לא יהיו בעיניך כדיוטגמא ישנה שאין אדם סופנה, אלא  
כחדשה שהכל רצין לקראתה.

*That I command you today*-The words of Torah that I command you should not be in your eyes like an outdated dogma to which people do not attribute importance. But it should be like a new law that all run towards it.

The Torah is given 'today', the verse emphasizes. Every day it is new and fresh. Wouldn't that statement be enhanced by the addition of our Aggadah and wouldn't our Aggadah be enhanced by this statement brought by Rashi?

Thus, Netziv answers this question that deals with the relationship between Torah and purity and refers, most briefly, to the question of whether the righteous bring impurity.

The reason why Netziv brought this idea with such brevity is that Ramban already raises it here.

We read the opening words of Ramban on our Parsha:

זאת חקת התורה - לפי שהשטן ואומות העולם מונין את ישראל לומר מה המצוה הזאת, לפיכך כתב בה חקה, גזירה היא מלפני ואין לך רשות להרהר אחריה, לשון רש"י מדברי רבותינו (יומא סז ב). וכבר כתבתי בענין שער המשתלח (ויקרא טז ח)

מה טעם לאומות שיהיו מונין אותנו בזאת יותר משאר הקרבנות שיכפרו ויש מהם שיטהרו...כי מפני היותה נעשית בחוץ יראה להם שהיא נזבחת לשעירים על פני השדה, והאמת שהיא להעביר רוח טומאה ושריפתה כריח ניחוח בחוץ. וטעם טומאת המת, בעטיו של נחש, כי הנפטרים בנשיקה לא יטמאו מן הדין, והוא שאמרו צדיקים אינן מטמאין.

*This is the statute of the Torah-* 'Because Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel saying, 'What is this Mitzvah?' Therefore the Torah writes 'Chukkah-statute'. [Hashem says], 'It is a decree from before Me and you have no permission to ruminate about it.' These are the words of Rashi and they are based on the words of our Rabbis in Masseches Yoma.

I have already written about the 'goat that goes to Azazel' [on Yom HaKippurim] that the reason that the nations of the world taunt us about it more than other Korbonos that bring atonement and purify...because its offering was outside the Beis HaMikdosh it would appear to the nations of the world that they were offering their korbonos to the demons in the field. But the truth is that it was to remove the atmosphere of impurity and its burning was a pleasant fragrance outside the Beis HaMikdosh.

The reason why there is impurity that stems from the dead is because it is due to the counsel of the snake. Those who die 'with a kiss' do not formally bring impurity and this is as it says that the righteous [dead] do not bring tum'a.

That is 'death with a kiss' is directly from the Ribbono Shel Olom, without the mediation of the Angel of Death. Only those who are completely pure merit such a death and this level of purity is free of any impurity whatsoever.

Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 263) writes similarly in our Parsha regarding the connection of Torah to death in our Parsha:

וראיתי רמז אל הטעם הזה שכתבתי בטומאת המת, שאמרו זכרונם לברכה כי הצדיקים גמורים אינם מטמאין, ולפי הדומה כי הכוונה לפי שגופם טהור ונקי ולא החטיא נפשם אבל סייע לזכותה, ועל כן תעלה נפשם בנשיקה, ועל גיוסם ישכון אור זרוע לעולם.

I saw a hint for this reason that I wrote regarding the impurity of death. The Chachamim of blessed memory said, 'Completely righteous individuals do not bring impurity at death' and the reason appears to be because their bodies are pure and clean and their bodies did not lead their souls to sin, rather they helped bring merit to their souls. Therefore, their souls ascend with a kiss and upon them there will be sown light forever.<sup>10</sup>

Ra"N writes in the eighth drasha of *Drashos HaRan*:

והרמב"ן ז"ל כתב בסוף סדר והיה עקב (דברים יא/כב), ויתכן באנשי זאת המעלה, שתהיה נפשם גם בחייהם צרורה בצרור החיים, כי הם בעצמם מעון לשכינה, כאשר רמזו בעל ספר הכוזרי (מאמר ג/א), עד כאן... ולפיכך בהמצא לחכמים והחסידיים בדורות, יהיה השפע שופע עליהם, ובאמצעותם אפשר שיהיה שופע על כל המוכנים מבני דורם...

ומפני זה אמרו רבותינו ז"ל (סוטה לד ב) שראוי להשתטח על קברי הצדיקים ולהתפלל שם, כי התפלה במקום ההוא תהיה רצויה יותר, להמצא שם גופות אשר חל עליהם כבר השפע האלהי.

Ramban writes at the end of Parshas Eikev , "It is possible that the souls of people on a very high level are intertwined in eternal life even while they are living [and not just at death]. The reason is that they themselves are an abode for the Shechinah as the author of Sefer HaKuzari has hinted in the beginning of Maamar III."

Therefore there is a Divine influence for the Wise Men and the Pious individual throughout the generations and through them that influence can

---

<sup>10</sup> This point is theoretical only. See for example Pe'as HaShulchan quoted by Rav Ovadia Yosef in Sh'ut Yechaveh Da'as IV/58:

גם הגאון רבי ישראל משקלוב בספר פאת השלחן (סימן ב/טז) כתב, שיש למנוע מנהג איזה כהנים שהולכים להשתטח על קברות הצדיקים בטענה שאין צדיקים מטמאים, וטעות הוא בידם  
Also the Gaon Rav Yisroel of Shklov in the Sefer Pe'as HaShulchan wrote, "One should refrain from the custom of some Kohanim who go to prostrate themselves on the graves of righteous with the claim that the righteous do not bring impurity [at death]. This is a mistake.

come upon all of their contemporaries who are prepared to receive it... That is why Chazal said, that it is appropriate to prostrate and pray at the graves of the righteous because prayer at that place is more accepted because of the presence of the bodies of those upon whom came the Divine influence.

Maharal to Masseches Shabbos (83 b) writes elaborates upon this idea and adds an aspect of how Torah which is not physical in its nature can exist within the human being who is physical in nature:

התורה שהיא שכלית איך אפשר שתעמוד באדם החמרי כי אלו שני דברים הם הפכים, ואין ראוי שיהיה השכל מתקיים אלא במי שממית עצמו על התורה, שמסלק גופו וגשמו בשביל התורה, ובשביל שהוא מסלק גופו בשביל התורה הרי אין נחשב לו גופו בשביל התורה, ובאדם זה התורה השכלית מתקיימת.

Torah is intellectual-how can it exist in man who is material? Are they not opposites? It is only fitting that the intellect be found in one who brings death upon himself in order to learn Torah. This person removes his body and his material existence for the sake of Torah. And since he removes his body for the sake of Torah, his body is not considered as existing because of Torah. In such a person, the intellectual Torah exists.

Even though this interpretation was called an *Aggadah*, Rambam brings it in Hilchos Talmud Torah (Perek 3/Halachah 12):

אין דברי תורה מתקיימין במי שמרפה עצמו עליהן, ולא באלו שלומדין מתוך עידון ומתוך אכילה ושתייה, אלא במי שממית עצמו עליהן ומצער גופו תמיד ולא יתן שינה לעיניו ולעפעפיו תנומה, אמרו חכמים דרך רמז זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל אין התורה מתקיימת אלא במי שממית עצמו באהלי החכמים...

Divrei Torah cannot exist with one who eases himself regarding them, nor with those who learn in an atmosphere of pampering and not in an atmosphere of eating and drinking. It exists only with someone who brings death to himself for them and perpetually causes pain to his body and does not give sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids. Our Chachamim said



as a *remez*-hint, 'This is the Torah-a person who dies in the tent. Torah only exists for one who brings himself death in the tents of the Chachamim.

The Word of G-d is like fire. On the one hand, fire is a substance and, on the other hand, we perceive it as being almost non-physical. The more that our physical self is inured against the presence of Torah within us, the more that our physicality overcomes our spirituality and the 'counsel of the snake' takes precedence.

That 'counsel of the snake' was realized when physicality overcame spirituality. We read (B'reishis Perek 3/Posuk 6):

וַיַּרְא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֵאֲכָל וְכִי תֵאֵוָה הוּא לְעֵינַיִם וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהִשְׁכִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיו וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ וַיֹּאכְלוּ:

The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and it was desirable to the eyes and the tree was pleasant for the intellect; she took from the fruit and she ate and she gave to her husband with her and he ate.

'Good' and 'desirable' were descriptions of the physical pleasures of consumption of the stomach and consumption of the eyes. That is what is written first. Then 'pleasant' is what is described for the non-physicality of the fruit, and that is written last.

In such an atmosphere the 'counsel of the snake' can assume reign and bring with it destruction that is death and impure.

The Midrash Aggadah to Parshas Emor (Perek 21), where we learn that Kohanim cannot defile themselves with the dead, writes:

שֶׁהַצַּדִּיקִים בְּמִיתָתָם הֵם חַיִּים [וְהַרְשָׁעִים בְּחַיֵּיהֶם נִקְרָאִים מֵתִים]

Tzaddikim, even in death, are called living [and the wicked, even when they are alive, are called dead].

It may be easier to think of death as a natural phenomenon but that the impurity that the dead bring as being completely inexplicable - *Chukkas HaTorah*. But that is not so.

The Poroh Aduma is *Chukkas HaTorah* because it is able to remove impurity, but some of that impurity then cleaves to the very people who attempt to remove it. That impurity comes from *Ma'aseh HaEigel* which continues to afflict Israel throughout the generations.

However, when there is no impurity, when the life that was lived comes to its end with the direct action of HaKodosh Boruch Hu, and not through intermediaries, there is no impurity. There is sanctity and *tahara*.

It is easy to assume that such sanctity and *tahara* come about through deprivation only. However, Rambam makes it clear. It is not deprivation for deprivation's sake. It is controlled limitation so that one does not live a pampered life.

For many, or most, it is necessary to knowingly limit one's physical circumstances to allow the spiritual to make itself known and not be suffocated by the physical. For those who are aware and exercise the necessary self-control, that awareness of the appropriate interplay and balance between physical and spiritual is sufficient in order to make sure that the material parts of our lives serve the higher aspects, the spiritual and intellectual.

Life can be eternal if we wish. And if we wish it begins right now.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock

## פרשת בלק

It is quite easy to raise our hands in defeat when we approach the study of this week's Parshas Bolok. The description of the events is seemingly relatively easy to follow. However, when we come to the prophecies of Bil'am we are challenged. Even the translation of some of the words is very difficult, not to mention the cryptic and concealed messages contained in his sayings.

However, we do not have to run from confronting our Parsha. We can first, at least, attempt to gain a perspective on how it is to be approached.

In fact, I would have thought that the interchange between Bolok and Bil'am could have concluded immediately after the first words the latter uttered in his first prophetic episode in our Parsha.

We read (B'midbar Perek 23/Posuk 8):

מָה אֶקְבֵּל לֹא קִבֵּה א... ל וּמָה אֶזְעַם לֹא זְעַם ה':

How can I curse someone that G-d did not curse? How can I be angry at someone who Hashem is not angry at?

Even if we do not understand each word in each verse, we do know that this is the theme that carries over the three events when Bil'am went to curse Israel. He cannot curse them.

The objective truth is said. What is there to add?

Why didn't Bolok catch on from the beginning?

Let us view a few P'sukim and see if we can perceive the picture that the Torah wishes to present to us.

Our Parsha begins as follows (Perek 22/Posuk 2):

וַיֵּרָא בִּלְקָם בֶּן צִפּוֹר אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֶמֹרִי:

Bolok ben Tzippor saw all that Israel did to the Emorites.

As the commentators point out, Bolok didn't actually 'see' what was done. But, as we find many times in the Torah 'seeing' is used to convey deep understanding.<sup>11</sup>

However, it is clear that Bolok was not only a king with geopolitical awareness. Rashi points out in our Parsha (Perek 23/Posuk 28):

קוסם היה בלוק

Bolok himself was a sorcerer<sup>12</sup>.

In fact, Rashi writes later on (Perek 23/Posuk 14):

בלעם לא היה קוסם כבלוק

Bil'am was less of a sorcerer than Bolok.

Bolok 'saw' but he didn't see.

Although he lacked true vision, the elders whom Bolok sent to invite Bil'am to curse Israel did not possess such a lacking.

We read early on in our Parsha (Perek 22/Posuk 7):

וַיֵּלְכוּ זִקְנֵי מוֹאָב וְזִקְנֵי מִדְיָן וַיְקַסְמִים בְּיָדָם וַיָּבֵאוּ אֶל בְּלָעָם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו דְּבַרֵי בָלֶק:

---

<sup>11</sup> See for example (B'reishis Perek 11/Posuk 5):

וַיֵּרַד ה' לִרְאוֹת אֶת הָעִיר וְאֶת הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם:

Hashem descended to see the city and the tower that people built.

Rashi writes:

וירד ה' לראות - לא הוצרך לכך, אלא בא ללמד לדיינים שלא ירשעו הנדון עד שיראו ויבינו. במדרש רבי תנחומא:

*Hashem went down to see* - This was unnecessary to write (because Hashem is omniscient). Rather it comes to teach judges that they should not adjudge a person as guilty until they see and understand. This is in Midrash Rabi Tanchuma.

<sup>12</sup> *Midrash Aggadah* here writes that Bolok was a

A great sorcerer.

קוסם גדול

The elders of Moav and the elders of Midian went and they had sorcery tools in their hand and they came to Bil'am and they spoke the words of Bolok to him.

What were the 'sorcery tools' that they were holding? In one of his explanations, Rashi writes there:

וקסמים בידם -...קסם זה נטלו בידם זקני מדין, אמרו אם יבא עמנו בפעם הזאת יש בו ממש, ואם ידחנו אין בו תועלת, לפיכך כשאמר להם (כב/ח<sup>13</sup>) לינו פה הלילה, אמרו אין בו תקוה, הניחוהו והלכו להם, שנאמר וישבו שרי מואב עם בלעם, אבל זקני מדין הלכו להם:

*Sorcery tools in their hand*-This piece of sorcery-perception was what the elders of Midian took in their hand: They said, 'If he will come with us this time, then that indicates that he has substantive powers. If he will delay us, that indicates that he will not be beneficial.

Therefore, when Bil'am said to them 'sleep here tonight', they said, 'there is no hope from him'; they left him and went on their way. For it says, 'The officers of Moav stayed with Bil'am.' However, the Midianite elders went on their way.

The **וקסמים** in this second explanation are 'omens', signs that indicate success or failure. The omens here indicated failure.

Immediately, it became apparent to at least some that Bil'am would be of no service.

Certainly the famous incident with Bil'am and his she-donkey should have given pause to the most fervent believer that he was not as good as his reputation. And yet, Bolok received Bil'am royally. Instead of having Bil'am come first to Bolok and pay his respects, as would be expected, we read (Posuk 36):

---

<sup>13</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם לִינוּ פֹה הַלַּיְלָה וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי אֶתְכֶם דְּבַר כְּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלַי וְיִשְׁבוּ שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב עִם בְּלָעָם:  
Bil'am said to them, 'Sleep here tonight and I will respond a word to you when G-d speaks to me; the officers of Moav stayed with Bil'am.

וַיִּשְׁמַע בִּלְקָם כִּי בָא בִלְעָם וַיֵּצֵא לִקְרָאתוֹ אֶל עִיר מוֹאָב אֲשֶׁר עַל גְּבוּל אַרְנוֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּקִצֵּה הַגְּבוּל:

Bolok heard that Bil'am came and he went out to meet him to the Moav City that was on the border of *Arnon*, at the edge of the border.

And at this point, Bil'am returns with his initial prophecy and the verse that we saw above.

מָה אֶקְבֵּל לֹא קִבְּהָ א... ל וּמָה אֶזְעַם לֹא זָעַם ה':

How can I curse someone that G-d did not curse? How can I be angry at someone who Hashem is not angry at?

Let us see what this verse says beyond its translation.

Rashi writes:

מָה אֶקְבֵּל לֹא קִבְּהָ א... ל- כִּשְׁהִיוּ רֵאוּיִם לְהִתְקַלֵּל לֹא נִתְקַלְלוּ, כִּשְׁהִזְכִּיר אֲבִיהֶם אֶת עוֹנָם, כִּי בִאִפְסֵי הַרְגוֹ אִישׁ. לֹא קִלְל אֱלֹהִים אִפְסֵי, שְׁנֵאמַר (בְּרֵאשִׁית מִט/ז<sup>14</sup>) אֲרוּר אִפְסֵי. כִּשְׁנִכְנַס אֲבִיהֶם בְּמַרְמָה אֲצִל אֲבִיו הִיָּה רֵאוּי לְהִתְקַלֵּל, מָה נֹאמַר שֵׁם (שֵׁם כִּז/לג<sup>15</sup>) גַּם בְּרוּךְ יִהְיֶה. בְּמִבְרָכִים נֹאמַר (דְּבָרִים כִּז/יב<sup>16</sup>) אֱלֹהִים יַעֲמְדוּ לְבָרֵךְ אֶת

---

<sup>14</sup> The entire verse reads:

אֲרוּר אִפְסֵי כִי עַז וְעִבְרָתָם כִּי קִשְׁתָּהּ אֲחִלְקֶם בְּיַעֲקֹב וְאִפְיָצִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:  
Cursed is their anger because it is brazen and their wrath because it is harsh;  
I will divide them in Yaakov and I will scatter them in Israel.

<sup>15</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיִּתְרַד יִצְחָק חֲרָדָה גְּדֹלָה עַד מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר מִי אֶפּוֹא הוּא הַצֵּד צִיד וַיָּבֵא לִי וְאָכַל מִכָּל בְּטָרָם תְּבוֹא וְאֶבְרַכְהוּ גַם בְּרוּךְ יִהְיֶה:  
Yitzchak trembled very greatly and he said, 'Who then was he who captured the hunt and brought it to me and I ate from it all before you came and I blessed him? He shall also be blessed.

<sup>16</sup> The entire verse reads:

אֵלֶּה יַעֲמְדוּ לְבָרֵךְ אֶת הָעָם עַל הַר גְּרִזִּים בְּעִבְרָכֶם אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן שְׁמַעוֹן וְלֵוִי וַיְהוּדָה וַיִּשְׁשָׁר וַיֹּסֵף וּבִנְיָמִן:  
These shall stand to bless the people on Mt. Grizim when you cross the Jordan: Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Yissochar, Yosef and Binyamin.

העם. במקללים לא נאמר ואלה יעמדו לקלל את העם, אלא (שם יג<sup>17</sup>) על הקללה,  
לא רצה להזכיר עליהם שם קללה:

*How can I curse someone that G-d did not curse*-when they deserved to be cursed, they were not cursed. When their father Yaakov mentions the sin of Shimon and Levi 'that with their anger they killed a man', he only cursed their anger [but not them] as it is says, 'their anger is cursed'.

When their father Yaakov came to his father Yitzchak in deceit, he deserved to be cursed. What does it say there? 'Despite this<sup>18</sup>, he should be blessed'.

When the blessings and curses were given on *Har Gerizim and Har Eival* it says, 'These [tribes] shall stand to bless the people. Regarding those who said the curses it does not say 'these shall stand to curse the people'. Rather it says [these will stand] 'regarding the curse'. G-d did not want to mention a curse upon them.

Gur Aryeh here helps to better understand the depth of Rashi's commentary:

פירוש, כי "לא קבה" הוא לשון עבר, כמו "לא זעם ה'", ואם כן על כרחך פירוש שהיו ראויים לקללה, דאם לא כן, למה היה הקדוש ברוך הוא מקלל אותם - אם לא היו ראויים לכך, אלא שהיו ראויים לקללה, ואפילו הכי לא קלל הקדוש ברוך הוא אותם. ואם לא היה לשון עבר, הוי למכתב 'מה אקוב לא יקוב אל', ואם כן על כרחך אנו צריכין לפרש כמו שאמרנו:

The explanation is that 'He [Hashem] did not curse' is in the past tense, just like the second clause, 'G-d was not angry'. Since that is its explanation, you are forced to say that it implies that Israel deserved to be cursed. Were it not so, what reason would there be for G-d to curse them?

---

<sup>17</sup> The entire verse reads:

וְאֵלֶּה יַעֲמִדוּ עַל הַקְּלָלָה בְּהַר עֵיבַל רְאוּבֵן גָּד וְאַשֶׁר וְזְבוּלֹן דָּן וְנַפְתָּלִי:  
These will stand by the curse on Mt. Eival: Reuven, Gad, Asher, Zevulun, Dan and Naftali.

<sup>18</sup> This is how Targum Yonasan renders the word גּוֹיִן in this particular context.

Rather, they deserved to be cursed and even so, HaKodosh Boruch Hu did not curse them.

[The proof is] that were it not past tense, the Posuk should have written 'what will I curse, G-d *will* not curse'. [Since it is not written that way] we need to say that the explanation is as we said.

The point that Gur Aryeh makes in this commentary is that Bil'am is saying that to curse Israel is impossible. There is no possibility to curse Israel, because G-d Himself did not curse them in the past, even when they deserved it.

Rabbenu Bachye adds to these comments. In the words of Bil'am there is more implied than the fact that Israel was not cursed by G-d. Embedded within these sentiments that Bil'am spoke was the unceasing love of G-d for Israel. He writes:

מָה אֶקְבֵּל לֹא קִבֵּה א...ל-אף כשהיו ראויין לקללה במעשה העגל לא זז מלחבבן, לא פסקו ענני כבוד והמן והבאר, וכן כתוב בעזרא: (נחמיה ט/יח - כ) "אף כי עשו להם עגל מסכה ויאמרו זה אלהיך אשר העליך מארץ מצרים ויעשו נאצות גדולות, ואתה ברחמיך הרבים לא עזבתם במדבר את עמוד הענן לא סר מעליהם ביוםם להנחותם בהדרך ואת עמוד האש בלילה להאיר להם ואת הדרך אשר ילכו בה, ורוחך הטובה נתת להשכילם ומנך לא מנעת מפיהם ומים נתת להם לצמאם".

*How can I curse someone that G-d did not curse* -Even when they deserved to be cursed in the event of the *Eigel*, G-d's love did not veer from them: Clouds of Glory, the Manna and the Well did not cease. And so it is written in Ezra:

Even when they made for themselves a molten calf and they said, 'This is your god Israel that took you up from the Land of Egypt', and they made terribly hateful behaviors, You Hashem with your abundant mercy did not forsake them in the wilderness-the Clouds of Glory did not turn from them in the day to lead them on the path and the Pillar of Fire at night to give them light on the path upon which they were to go. Your good spirit You gave to make them wise and Your manna You did not withhold from their mouths and you gave them water for their thirst.



And, if this would not be enough, the saga continues confirming that which was perceived already-the mission of Bil'am was impossible; it would not succeed.

Thus we continue to read (Perek 23/Posuk 11) the inevitable conclusion that Bolok drew after hearing the first prophecy:

וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְקָם אֶל בְּלָעָם מָה עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לָקַבְתָּ אֵיבֵי לְקַחְתִּיךָ וְהִנֵּה בִּרְכַּתְךָ בְּרָחָ:

Bolok said to Bil'am, 'What did you do to me? I took you to curse my enemies and behold you surely blessed them.

Bolok defies understanding. If we didn't see it happening we would not have believed that it could have occurred. We wonder why Bolok didn't see what was happening- but he didn't. That is implied in the opening statement that Bil'am makes as he begins his second prophecy. He says (Posuk 18):

וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר קוּם בִּלְקָם וּשְׁמַע הָאֲזִינָה עֲדֵי בְנוֹ צִפּוֹר:

He took up his parable and he said, 'Arise Bolok and hear; listen to me you son of Tzippor.

Why did Bil'am address Bolok in such a way? Why did he tell him to arise? It is the king's prerogative to be seated<sup>19</sup>! Rashi explains:

קוּם בִּלְקָם - כִּי־וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ שֶׁרָאָהוּ מִצְחָק בּוֹ, נִתְכוּוֹן לְצַעֲרוֹ עֲמוּד עַל רִגְלֵיךָ, אֵינְךָ רֹשֵׁי לִישָׁב וְאֵנִי שֹׁלֵחַ אֵלֶיךָ בְּשִׁלְיחוֹתַי שֶׁל מִקּוּם:

*Arise Bolok*- When Bil'am saw that Bolok was mocking him, Bil'am intended to cause Bolok discomfort [so he said] 'Stand on your feet, you are not allowed to sit while I am being sent to you on a mission of G-d.

---

<sup>19</sup> Although this is not a proof, but it is certainly an indication of such when we learn( Masseches Yoma 25 a):

אֵין יוֹשִׁיבָה בְּעִזְרָה אֲלָא לְמַלְכֵי בֵּית דּוֹד בִּלְבָד

The only ones allowed to sit in the Azarah area of the Beis HaMikdosh were kings of the Judean dynasty.

Thus, at least some kings are allowed to sit where sitting by any other individual is not permitted.

Were this not to be Torah, I think I would consider the unfolding events to be a comedy, a comedy of buffoons. I am reminded of the 'Emperor's New Clothes' where the foolishness is entirely evident but most people refuse to believe it.

But, such is not the case.

Furthermore, we must continue to ponder why Bil'am was chosen to be the vehicle to transmit these unique blessings to Israel. If such was to be transmitted to Israel there were certainly other means. Yaakov Ovinu bestowed blessings upon Israel as did Moshe Rabbenu. The Torah gives its blessings prior to the *tocheicha*-rebukes in Parshos Bechukosai and Ki Sovo.

We must conclude, therefore, that if Bil'am was the medium through which these blessings were given there must have been a purpose that required that he be the communicator.

What was that purpose?

I think that at least part of the answer can be found in Masseches Sanhedrin (105 b) where the Gemara brings a verse from the Haftarah of Parshas Bolok.

The Gemara begins with an analysis of another part of Bil'am's prophecies. We read in our Parsha (Perek 24/Posuk 16):

נָאֵם שִׁמְעֵ אִמְרֵי אֱלֹהִים... לְיָדַע דַּעַת עֲלִיּוֹן מִחֲזֵה שֵׁשׁ... יִחַזְּקֵה נִפְלֵ וּגְלוּי עֵינָיו:

This is what he who hears the words of G-d and he who knows the mind of the Supreme Being says. He sees the vision of the Almighty; he falls but his eyes are opened.

The Gemara proceeds to analyze the meaning of this statement of grandiosity in light of the event with Bil'am's donkey. It writes:

וידע דעת עליון, השתא דעת בהמתו לא הוה ידע, דעת עליון הוה ידע?...אלא מאי וידע דעת עליון - שהיה יודע לכוון אותה שעה שהקדוש ברוך הוא כועס בה, היינו דקאמר להו נביא לישראל (מיכה ו/ה) עמי זכר - נא מה יעץ בלק מלך מואב ומה ענה אתו בלעם בן בעור מן השטים עד הגלגל למען דעת צדקות ה', מאי למען דעת צדקות ה' - אמר להן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל: דעו נא כמה צדקות עשיתי עמכם

שלא כעסתי כל אותן הימים בימי בלעם הרשע, שאילמלא כעסתי כל אותן הימים -  
לא נשתייר משונאיהן של ישראל שריד ופליט. היינו דקאמר ליה בלעם לבלק. מה  
אקב לא קבה א...ל

*He who knows the mind of the Supreme Being*-If he didn't know the mind of his animal, he would know the mind of the Supreme Being?

Rather, [he meant] that he knew how to find the precise moment that G-d gets angry [and curse Israel at that moment].

That is what the prophet meant when he said to Israel: 'My people, remember please the counsel that Bolok King of Moav gave and what Bil'am ben B'or answered him from the *Shittim* to the *Gilgal* in order to know the righteous acts of G-d.'

What were the 'righteous acts of G-d' that Israel was to know?

Hashem said to Israel [in this verse]: Know, please, how many acts of righteousness I Hashem have done with you in that I was not angry with you at all during all of the days that the wicked Bil'am [was threatening you]. Were I to have been angry, no enemy of Israel<sup>20</sup> would have survived at all.' That is what Bil'am said to Bolok: *How can I curse someone that G-d did not curse.*

That is, in a certain fashion, Bil'am was privy to the times when G-d was angry with Israel. Since he was privy to those times, he would have uttered his curse at those moments so that they would find a place within G-d's anger to be effective against Israel. Hashem's righteousness was that He refrained from anger for that entire period of time in which Bil'am was attempting to harm Israel.

When I read these words that the Novi Micha uttered centuries following the event in the Chumash, I understand that one can contemplate that which happened generations earlier. But what about the contemporary people? How can they know what is occurring?

---

<sup>20</sup> This is a euphemism. It is really referring to Israel.

If we return to the early verse of our focus and see it again in a certain context we may have an insight.

מה אֶקְבֹּל לֹא קִבְּהָ א... ל וּמָה אֶזְעַם לֹא זָעַם ה':

How can I curse someone that G-d did not curse? How can I be angry at someone who Hashem is not angry at?

Imagine, Israel is sitting far below and the most crucial events of the moment that are related to them are taking place far beyond their perception. Plots and plans are being discussed, their destruction is being plotted and they are going about their everyday business. What expectations do we have from Israel?

I think that one of the messages of this entire Parsha is the solution to the above question.

Where did Bolok and Bil'am first meet? We read earlier:

וַיִּשְׁמַע בִּלְקָם כִּי בָא בִלְעָם וַיֵּצֵא לְקִרְאָתוֹ אֶל עִיר מוֹאָב אֲשֶׁר עַל גְּבוּל אֲרָנָן אֲשֶׁר בְּקִצֵּה הַגְּבוּל:

Bolok heard that Bil'am came and he went out to meet him to the Moav City that was on the border of *Arnon*, at the edge of the border.

Now, if this was the place where Bil'am was to offer his curses, I understand why the Torah tells us of the location of their first meeting. But such was not the case. The curses were to be offered somewhere else. Thus we read (Perek 22/Posuk 39):

וַיֵּלֶךְ בִּלְעָם עִם בִּלְקָם וַיָּבֹאוּ קִרְיַת חֲצוֹז:

Bil'am went with Bolok and they came to the City of Chutzos.

Why then are we told about their initial meeting place?

If we test our memory, we will quickly be reminded that *Arnon* figured prominently in last-week's Parshas Chukkas.

What did we read? The verse, discussing Israel's travels, reads (Perek 21/Posuk 13):

מִשָּׁם נָסְעוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ יַמְעַבְרַת אַרְנוֹן אֲשֶׁר בַּמִּדְבָּר הַיָּצֵא מִגְּבֹל הָאֱמֹרִי כִּי אַרְנוֹן גְּבוּל מוֹאָב  
בֵּין מוֹאָב וּבֵין הָאֱמֹרִי:

From there they traveled and they encamped opposite *Arnon* that was in the wilderness that extended from the Emorite border because Arnon is the border of Moav between Moav and the Emorites.

Now, if all I had was this verse, I might have thought that we are being apprised of their location to know why Moav saw them as a threat. They were on their border!

However, the following verses reveal that far more happened than was visible to the eye of Israel. We read the next Posuk (14):

עַל כֵּן יֹאמַר בְּסֵפֶר מִלְחַמַת ה' אֶת וְהַב בְּסוּפָה וְאֶת הַנְּחָלִים אַרְנוֹן:

Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of G-d, 'that which He gave us at the Red Sea and the <sup>21</sup>rivers of Arnon.

Rashi explains the meaning of this cryptic verse and the similar ones that follow:

על כן - על חניה זו ונסים שנעשו בה...כשמספרים נסים שנעשו לאבותינו יספרו את  
והב וגו':

*Therefore*-Regarding this encampment and the miracles that were done in it. When Israel will tell of the miracles that were done to our ancestors they will tell of that which was done at the Red Sea [and that which was done at Arnon].

את והב...כלומר את אשר יהב להם הרבה נסים בים סוף:

---

<sup>21</sup> *Nachal* can mean a river or a valley. Here, it means both as will become apparent.

*That He gave*-This means to say that G-d gave them many miracles at the Red Sea.

ואת הנחלים ארנון - כשם שמספרים בני ים סוף, כך יש לספר בני נחלי ארנון,  
שאף כאן נעשו נסים גדולים. ומה הם הנסים:

*And the rivers of Arnon*-Just like they will tell of the miracles of the Red Sea so they should tell of the miracles of the Rivers of Arnon. Here, too, great miracles were done. What were the miracles?

...שנשפך שם דם אמוריים שהיו נחבאים שם, לפי שהיו ההרים גבוהים והנחל עמוק וקצר וההרים סמוכים זה לזה, אדם עומד על ההר מזה ומדבר עם חבירו בהר מזה, והדרך עובר תוך הנחל. אמרו אמוריים כשיכנסו ישראל לתוך הנחל לעבור, נצא מן המערות בהרים שלמעלה מהם ונהרגם בחצים ואבני בליסטראות. והיו אותן הנקעים בהר של צד מואב ובהר של צד אמוריים היו כנגד אותן נקעים כמין קרנות ושדים בולטין לחוץ, כיון שבאו ישראל לעבור נזדעזע ההר של ארץ ישראל...לצד הר של מואב ונכנסו אותן השדים לתוך אותן נקעים והרגום...

The blood of the Emorites who were hiding there spilled into the rivers<sup>22</sup>. The mountains were very tall and steep and the valley<sup>23</sup> was deep and narrow. The mountains were very near to each other. A person could stand on one mountain and talk to someone else on the other mountain. The passageway [was not over the mountains, but] through the valley between the mountains.

The Emorites said, 'When Israel will enter the valley to pass through, we will go out from the caves and crevices in the mountains above them and we will kill them with arrows and propelled stones.

On one mountain there were crevices and on the facing side of the other mountain there were protrusions extending outwardly. When Israel entered the valley, the mountain on the Eretz Yisroel side moved towards

---

<sup>22</sup> That is, the valley became a channel for the river of blood as Rashi explains.

<sup>23</sup> It is clear that here the translation of *nachal* is 'valley'.

the side of the mountain of Moav and the protrusions entered into the crevices and killed the Emorites who were waiting to ambush Israel.

...אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא מי מודיע לבני הנסים הללו...לאחר שעברו חזרו ההרים  
למקומם והבאר ירדה לתוך הנחל והעלתה משם דם ההרוגים וזרועות ואיברים  
ומליכתן סביב המחנה וישראל ראו ואמרו שירה:

Hashem said, 'Who will inform My children about these miracles? After Israel passed through the valley, the mountains returned to their place and the well descended into the valley and brought up from there the blood, the limbs and the organs of the killed Emorites, and made them circle the Camp of Israel and Israel saw and they said *Shira* [just like the *Shira* that was said at the Red Sea.]

If we consider what occurred at this event, an event that happened immediately before the episode of our Parsha we will have a new insight into what was expected of Israel and what is expected of us.

At *Arnon*, there was hostile activity planned against Israel. It was an ambush that was plotted meticulously and should have been successful. We can be certain that the brief description that Rashi brings and that we find in the Midrashim is not exhaustive.

Undoubtedly, Emorites recruited many troops, supplied them with the necessary armaments and battle tools and stationed those troops strategically above the narrow passageway that Israel was about to enter. There were certainly generals and commanders who waited for the appropriate signals to begin their attack in which they hoped to maximize the number of casualties and inflict a punishing blow to Israel so that Israel would retrace its steps and no longer be a threat to the Emorites and the Moabites.

Except that they left out one factor-Yad Hashem. They ignored the history of Israel which was so well-known to all<sup>24</sup>. And, of course, that was *the* factor that could allow success or assure defeat.

And they were defeated resoundingly.

But, all of this took place far from the awareness and cognition of Israel. It seems certain that even Moshe Rabbenu Olov Hashalom was unaware of this terrible threat. Were Moshe Rabbenu to have been aware of the threat he would have taken some preventative measures, whether militarily or through prayer. But since he did not take those measures we see that G-d chose to keep even Moshe Rabbenu, *Av HaNevi'im* in the dark.

---

<sup>24</sup> Forty years after the splitting of the Red Sea, the wonderment of that miracle was just as fresh to non-Jews as were the more recent events.

We read the words of Rachav to the spies that Yehoshua sent to Yericho (Yehoshua Perek 2/P'sukim 9-10):

וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל הָאֲנָשִׁים יְדַעְתִּי כִּי נָתַן ה' לָכֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְכִי נִפְלָה אִימַתְכֶם עָלַי וְכִי נִמְגַּו כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵיכֶם: כִּי שָׁמַעְנוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר הוֹבִישׁ ה' אֶת מִי יָם סוּף מִפְּנֵיכֶם בְּצִאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם לְשֵׁנֵי מַלְכֵי הָאֲמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן לְסִיחֹן וְלַעֹג אֲשֶׁר הִחְרַמְתֶּם אוֹתָם:

She said to the men, "I know that Hashem has given you the land and that your fear has fallen upon us and that all the inhabitants of the land dissolve before you. Because we have heard how Hashem dried up the Red Sea before you when you went out of Egypt and that which He did to the two Emorite kings that are on the other side of the Jordan River, to Sichon and to Og, that you vanquished them.

And, centuries later, as we read in the Haftorah of Parshas Chukkas, the memories were as fresh as ever. The Novi (Shoftim Perek 11/Posuk 13) tells us the response of the king of Amon to Yiftach HaGiladi:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן אֶל מַלְאָכָי יִפְתָּח כִּי לָקַח יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת אֶרְצִי בְּעֵלוֹתוֹ מִמִּצְרַיִם מֵאֲרֹנוֹן וְעַד הַיַּבֵּק וְעַד הַיַּרְדֵּן וְעַתָּה הִשְׁיבָה אֶתְהֶן בְּשָׁלוֹם:

The King of B'nei Amon said to the messengers of Yiftach, 'Because Israel took my land when it went up from Egypt, from *Arnon* to the *Yabbok* and to the Jordan River; now, return them to me.



Thus, there was a deathly threat and Israel was saved, not knowing of the threat and not knowing of their salvation.

The Ribbono Shel Olom decided that, after the fact, Israel should know of their salvation and thus the life-giving well brought the tidings of another life-saving event.

Why did G-d want them to know that they were saved? He was surely able to let them know of the threat in real-time and the salvation in real-time<sup>25</sup>, but He didn't.

I think that the reason may have been that there was to have been a lesson for Israel:

G-d is always protecting Israel. Never take anything for granted and do not assume that if things go well that it is because 'that is the way it is'.

Israel was greatly endangered and they didn't know it. They would not have been able to defend themselves against such a deadly attack if it would have occurred.

It was Yad Hashem that prevented its occurrence.

With that lesson having been taught, what should we have expected from Israel? Should we not have expected Israel to be more aware when the seductive practices of their enemies began?

We read at the end of our Parsha (Perek 25/P'sukim 1-3):

וַיָּשָׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשֹׁטִים וַיַּחַל הָעָם לְזָנוֹת אֶל בָּנוֹת מוֹאָב: וַתִּקְרְאוּן לָעָם לְזָבָחַי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן  
וַיֹּאכַל הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶן: וַיִּצְמַד יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבַעַל פְּעֹר וַיַּחַר אֶף ה' בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

Israel dwelled in *Shittim* and the people began to behave promiscuously with the daughters of Moav. The daughters of Moav invited the people to

---

<sup>25</sup> It would seem that Israel was unaware of the movement of the mountains or that they did not directly see the result of the movement or hear the cries of the stricken Emorites.

the offerings of their gods and the people ate and prostrated before their gods. Israel became attached to *Ba'al P'or* and Hashem's anger was ignited against Israel.

It was not only the promiscuity and idolatry that brought about G-d's anger. It was, as well, ignoring the Guiding Hand of G-d that they had so recently seen. That explains the unusual expression that we read in the instructions given regarding the punishment of the sinners. The Torah writes there (Posuk 4):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה קַח אֶת כָּל רִאשֵׁי הָעָם וְהוֹקֵעַ אוֹתָם לְהַ' נֶגֶד הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וַיֵּשֶׁב חֲרוֹן  
אָף ה' מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל:

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Take the heads of the people [as judges-Rashi] and hang [the sinners-Rashi] before Hashem in the sun and G-d's anger will recede from Israel.

What is the meaning of 'in the sun'?

Rashi writes:

נגד השמש - לעין כל. ומדרש אגדה השמש מודיע את החוטאים, הענן נקפל  
מכנגדו והחמה זורחת עליו:

*Before the sun*-Visible to all. The *Midrash Aggadah* says-'The sun would make known who the sinners were. The Divine cloud would fold itself up [from above the sinner] and the sun would shine on him [pointing out his guilt].

The *p'shat* cannot be that the people were tried and found guilty by this Divine indication. There were trials as the Halachah dictates; that is why Moshe was told to appoint judges to deal with the cases<sup>26</sup>.

---

<sup>26</sup> Or Hachaim HaKodosh explains that there was judicial justice and Divine justice. Where judicial justice could be applied, that is when there were proper witnesses and warning providing the necessary evidence for the courts, the judges appointed by Moshe Rabbenu adjudicated properly.

The idea is, though, that their behavior was guilty because they had the sun-like clarity of the events of *Arnon* to make them beware of such untoward behavior. There should not have been surprises. G-d taught them that He 'works behind the scene'. They should have been aware of His Presence and not have sinned.

This, I believe is the message of Parshas Bolok to us. This is why we see the events unfolding as they do and the behavior of Bolok and Bil'am and their legions being so absurd as it seems to be in retrospect.

Bolok thought that he 'saw', but we saw that he was blind. He thought that he was a leader of the event but he was led, no less than Bil'am. He and Bil'am became puppets in the Hand of G-d when they thought that they would

---

However perpetrators against whom court-acceptable testimony was not available were punished by Heaven.

We find a precedent for this explanation of Or Hachaim in the events surrounding Eigel HaZahav.

We read in Parshas Ki Sisa (Sh'mos Perek 32/P'sukim 26-28):

וַיַּעֲמֵד מֹשֶׁה בַּשַּׁעַר הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לָהּ אֵלֵי וַיֵּאֲסֹפוּ אֵלָיו כָּל בְּנֵי לֵוִי: וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁימוּ אִישׁ חֶרְבּוֹ עַל יָרְכוֹ עִבְרוּ וְשׁוּבוּ מִשַּׁעַר לְשַׁעַר בַּמַּחֲנֶה וְהָרְגוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו וְאִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ אֶת קָרְבוֹ: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי לֵוִי כְדַבַּר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפֹּל מִן הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כִּשְׁלֹשָׁת אֲלָפֵי אִישׁ:

Moshe stood at the gate of the camp and said, 'Whoever is for Hashem, to me; all of the Levites gathered to him. Moshe said to them, 'So said Hashem the G-d of Israel, 'Each man should place his sword on his thigh and to throughout the camp, from one gate to the other and each man should kill his brother and his neighbor and his relative [who sinned]. The Levites did as Moshe spoke and there fell from the people that day about 3,000 men.

However, we read just a few verses later (Posuk 35):

וַיִּגַּף ה' אֶת הָעָם עַל אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ אֶת הָעֵגֶל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אַהֲרֹן:

Hashem put a plague upon the people that made the *calf* that Aharon made.

Certainly, the question begs to be asked: if all those who worshipped the calf were killed, upon whom was the plague visited?

Rashi writes:

ויגף ה' את העם - מיתה בידי שמים, לעדים בלא התראה:

*Hashem put a plague upon the people*-Death from heaven for those against whom there were witnesses but no warning.

manipulate Him Yisborach. And that is why Bil'am was empowered to give the blessings. He was empowered to give the blessings to show that his intentions and actions were meaningless when he thought that he would defeat the Ribbono Shel Olom.

The perspective was fixed at *Arnon*. G-d is there. Shlomo HaMelech taught us in Sefer Mishlei (Perek 19/Posuk 21):

רבות מחשבות בלב איש ועצת ה' היא תקום:

There are many thoughts in the heart of a person; but it is the counsel of Hashem which will stand.

*Davka*, the blessings were given by Bil'am to show that blessings come from G-d alone and He alone will choose the vehicle by which they are delivered. With the overview that the Torah gives us of his absurd behavior, his extraordinary failure to attend to the reality surrounding him, we know that the words that he utters were not his own. As the angel of Hashem told Bil'am (Perek 22/Posuk 35):

ויאמר מלאך ה' אל בלעם לך עם האנשים ואפס את הדבר אשר אדבר אליך אתו  
תדבר וילך בלעם עם שרי בלק:

The angel of Hashem said to Bil'am, 'Go with the men; but the word that I will speak to you-that is what you will speak; Bil'am went with the officers of Bolok.

If we were studying literature and the 'story' of Bolok and Bil'am was a short story it surely would have been called a 'farce'. It is silly. But, of course, so was the emperor who had no clothes.

The donkey saw, but not the prophet.

What is the message of Parshas Bolok us? I think that it is no different than it was for Israel three millennia ago.

Just a week ago Medinat Yisrael and the Jewish People marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Entebbe Rescue. Most of the readers here were born long

after the event. But I remember it clearly. It was a 'mission impossible'. It had no chance of success.

Some 9 years before Entebbe there was the Six Day War. It was 144 hours of terrible suspense that was preceded by weeks of anguish and fear of what would be. And yet, Israel defeated its enemies against all odds; it was humanly impossible.

I remember the Six Day War well, too. I remember it far more intensely than Entebbe that was finished before we even knew that it happened.

Can we speak about the evident miracles of the Six Day War and of Entebbe and then immediately forget that there is a Divine Guiding Hand?

Perhaps it would seem farcical to suggest such a possibility. But we know that such is the fact so often.

We can be enthralled with Divine salvation and then ignore His Existence the next minute.

That is the message of Parshas Bolok.

If we mock the foolishness of the king, his prophet and their cohorts, let us remove ourselves from being objects of the very same ridicule that we level against others.

We can fulfill the dictate of the Novi Michah who, after exhorting us to remember the events of our Parsha, concludes with a prescription, as we read (ibid. Perek 6/ Posuk 8):

הַגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם מֵה טוֹב וּמֵה ה' דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ כִּי אִם עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהִצַּנֵּעַ  
לְקַת עִם אַ...לִיקִיר:

Man, G-d has told you what is good and what Hashem seeks from you-only to do justice, to love kindness and going modestly with your G-d.

הצנע לכת

Going modestly.

הצנע means to be hidden. If one goes 'hidden' *with* G-d that means that he mutes his prominence so that the prominence of G-d which may not always be visible is allowed to come to the fore and to present itself.

G-d keeps Himself hidden almost all the time. We are able to remove the veil if we stand to His side and not block His visibility. That is the antidote to our misdeeds at the end of our Parsha and our misdeeds throughout history and in our own lives.

If we allow G-d to become visible in our lives then we can hope to merit Divine protection so that regarding us, too, our enemies can say:

מָה אֶקְבֵּל לֹא קִבֵּה א... ל וּמָה אֶזְעַם לֹא זְעַם ה':

How can I curse someone that G-d did not curse? How can I be angry at someone who Hashem is not angry at?

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock