

BROOKLYN TORAH GAZETTE

FOR PARSHAS CHUKAS-BALAK 5783

Volume 7, Issue 41 (Whole Number 348) 12 Tammuz 5783/ July 1, 2023

Printed L'illuy nishmas Nechama bas R' Noach, a"h

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Insights into the Custom Of Tikun Chatzos

By Daniel Keren



Rabbi Moshe Tuvia Lieff

One of the featured speakers at last month's Hakhel Memorial Day Yarchei Kallah Event in Flatbush at the Agudath Israel of Madison was Rabbi Moshe Tuvia Lieff, rav of the Agudas Yisroel Bais Binyomin on Avenue L and Nostrand Avenue. The title of his lecture was "A Hands-On Look at Our Times: Practical Halachos and Hashkafos."

He began by addressing the question of whether or not the minhag of reciting Tikun Chatzos is totally beyond us today? His immediate response was that it is

definitely in our ability to perform the practice of mourning the loss of our Beis Hamikdosh (Holy Temple in Jerusalem) at midnight. For the Arizal, the famous 16th Century Kabbala master taught that one is not obligated to recite everything in the section of the Siddur (prayerbook) for Tikun Chatzos

The real idea behind reciting Tikun Chatzos, Rabbi Lieff said is to be awake at that propitious time of the night. One could instead of reciting the long tracts of the formal text of Tikun Chatzos, read select perakim (chapters) of Tehillim (Psalms.) You don't have to spend the rest of the night studying [deep kabalistic aspects of the] Torah. It is all about utilizing just five minutes at midnight to connect to Hashem.

How to Accomplish a Major Spiritual Feat

Even if you don't understand the meaning of the words, if you recite Dovid Hamelech's (King David's) words of Tehillim, you have accomplished a major spiritual feat. There are many days such as Leil Rosh Hashanah and Leil Shabbos that one doesn't recite Tikun Chatzos.

The most important thing is to learn Torah. Don't get carried away with the technicalities of fulfilling the precept of "Zecher l'churban" (remembering and mourning the destruction of our holy Beis Hamikdosh/Temple in Jerusalem.) on the walls of your house.

Rabbi Lieff emphasized that we have to know that we live in Galus. Protest and marches against injustices in America have their place. But we have to be like Rabbi Yochanan who had respect for the goyim (the non-Jews.) He used to greet everyone cheerfully whether they were Jewish or not.

Recognizing that We Are Still Living in Galus

We have to live our lives anticipating the coming of Moshiach (our Redeemer from this galus/exile.) That includes breaking the dish at our chasanahs (weddings) which reminds us that despite all the legal constitutional rights we are entitled to, it all goes back to the fact that we must constantly remember that we are still living in galus.

The 2023 Flatbush Hakhel Memorial Day Hakhel Event concluded with an inspiring audio-visual shiur by Rabbi Eytan Feiner, rav of The White Shul in Far Rockaway on the topic of "Techiyas Hameisim [the Resurrection of the Dead] in Halacha and Machshava." Among the topics he examined were what will be the nature of our relationship with relatives?, what will we be 'wearing' after Techiyas Hameisim? And "At what Age will we appear?"

Reprinted from the June 22, 2023 edition of The Jewish Journal.

Utilizing a Jew's Innate Fear and Love of Hashem to Overcome the False Claims of Amalek & Bilaam

From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt"l



This week we read two Torah portions, Chukat and Balak. Balak, the king of Moab, hired Bilaam, a gentile prophet, to curse the Jewish people. Earlier in the Torah we read of another another nation who was also a sworn enemy of the Children of Israel, Amalek.

Mystical texts state that there is an inherent connection between Bilaam and Amalek. An illusion to this is seen when writing their names in Hebrew: when combining the first two letters of Bilaam (bet-lamed) with the first two letters of Amalek (ayin-mem), it spells Bilaam; and when combining the remaining two letters of Bilaam (ayin-mem) with the remaining two letters of Amalek (lamed-kof), it spells Amalek.

The Claims of Amalek and Bilaam

Amalek's basic ability to confront the Jews was derived from his family relationship with them; Amalek was the descendant of Esau. "I too am the great-grandchild of Abraham and Isaac," Bilaam claimed. "I have the same right to voice my opinion in matters of Torah and holiness!"

The argument that was propounded by Bilaam was similar. Bilaam was a descendant of Laban, who insisted to Jacob that "the daughters are my daughters" - i.e., that the Matriarchs through whom the Jewish people would be established were

his kin. With these words Laban claimed the right to have a say in Jewish affairs. Bilaam, a member of the same family, continued his forefather's argument and demanded that his opinion be given weight when it came to Torah and mitzvot.

From this we learn an important lesson that is valid in every generation: If someone comes along and makes an assertion that is contrary to Torah, it doesn't matter if he is the grandchild of Abraham and Isaac, or if the Matriarchs of the Jewish people are on his family tree. We are forbidden to heed his word.

"We have none but our Father in heaven upon Whom to rely!" we must respond to his argument. As Jews, there is only one yardstick by which we measure all things: the Torah. Nothing else, not even the most prestigious lineage, may enter the equation. The holy Torah is our sole criterion.

Words Counter to the Torah Should Not Matter to Us

By definition, if a statement or directive is in accordance with the Torah it is good; if not, it doesn't matter who is saying it. If a Bilaam or an Amalek's words run counter to the Torah, they do not concern us in the least.

The best advice to a Jew who seeks to free himself from an Amalek or a Bilaam is yira (fear and awe) and ahava (love) of G-d, in that order. The Hebrew words themselves reveal this deep interconnection: combining the first two letters of yira (yud-resh) with the first two letters of ahava (alef-hei) spells yira; and combining the remaining two letters of yira (alef-hei) with the remaining two letters of ahava (bet-hei) spells ahava.

When a Jew possesses fear of G-d and love of G-d, there is nothing to be afraid of. Amalek and Bilaam will never succeed in defeating him.

Reprinted from the Parshat Chukat-Balak 5760/2000 edition of L'Chaim. Adapted from Volume 2 of Likutei Sichot.

Speak to the Children of Israel, that they bring to you a completely red cow on which there is no blemish, that has never borne a yoke (Num. 19:14)

Comments Rashi: "It should be perfect in redness; if there were two black hairs upon it, it would be disqualified." In the same way a red heifer is prevented from being "perfect" by the appearance of two black hairs, so too is a Jew's perfection disqualified by even the slightest "hairsbreadth" of dishonesty or deception, as it states, "You shall be perfect [whole] with the L-rd your G-d." (Chidushei HaRim)

Reprinted from the Parshat Chukat-Balak 5760/2000 edition of L'Chaim.

Rav Avigdor Miller On How Can One Overcome Depression



Now, it depends on a number of circumstances. First of all, what kind of person is asking that question – the age and health and social circumstances of the person – but if we had to give one general answer, there is no question that to be busy is the very best method to combat depression. There are also mental attitudes that one could learn, but they take time. There are medicines, but that needs a physician. But this is one thing that everybody agrees; that if the concerned party becomes busy and has no time to think, then that is the very best therapy.

Peculiar to the Human Race

Now there's a reason for this. The human being is built physically and mentally in peculiar ways, in ways that are peculiar to the human race. And one of the peculiarities of Mankind is that *atzlus* and *atzvus* go together; laziness and sadness go together.

You see that from the Gemara. And that's one reason the Gemara tells us, גדולה המלאכה – *Work is a great thing* (Nedarim 49b). And in one place the Gemara says, גדולה המלאכה שמחממת את בעליה, – *Work is great because it warms up the one who is working* (Gittin 67b).

It's a play on words – on the Mishna which says *mechabedes*, that work brings honor to a person, so this statement adds on that work is *mechamemes*. But it also is a great truism – work warms up a person. It mean that it gives enthusiasm to a person.

That's because Hakadosh Baruch Hu made it that man should be an achiever – he should desire to achieve. Now, his true achievements are in *ruchniyus*. The real achievements are the achievements of the spirit – *ma'asim tovim* and above all Torah, Torah and mitzvos.

However, when a person does something that looks like achieving, like bricklaying or sewing clothing, anything that's creative, then that person has a sensation of achieving. And even though he's not fulfilling the prime achievement of life – it's only a shadow or a substitute for achievement, but to an extent it stills the hunger, the craving of the soul. And therefore, people are happy when they're doing something – even when they're doing things that are in themselves almost valueless. And therefore, being busy is most important.

The Foolish Complaints

Now this person will complain, "But how can I do anything? I don't have the spirit to do anything." It's the same as saying, "I'm so weak, I don't feel like pulling myself out of the water when I'm drowning!"

Well, you'd better muster energy and you'd better start swimming with strong strokes or floating. Do something before you go down! And the same is when someone is too weak to do anything, the first thing is, do it, whatever it is. And that's going to take you out of the mental weakness.

There's no such thing as being happy when one is entirely unoccupied. No one could give you better advice, even if he charged you a hundred dollars an hour.

Reprinted from a recent email of Toras Avigdor based on Rabbi Miller's Tape #40 from his classic Thursday night lectures (October 1974)

And [Moses] said to them, "Hear now, you rebels, must we bring you forth water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10)

Calling the Jewish people "rebels" was considered a very grave sin for a person on Moses' spiritual level. For when Jews are in trouble, the proper thing to do is help rather than chastise them. (Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchev)

Reprinted from the Parshat Chukat-Balak 5760/2000 edition of L'Chaim.

Rabbi Berel Wein on Parshat Chukat 5783



The series of disasters that befell the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai, as recorded for us in the previous parshiot of the book of Bamidbar, reaches its climax in this week's parsha. Heaven decrees that neither Moshe nor Aharon or Miriam – the entire leadership team of the Jewish people – will be allowed to enter the Land of Israel.

The treatment of Moshe individually seems rather harsh to our limited human understanding of these matters, in light of his seemingly minor transgression of smiting the rock instead of speaking to it. Because of this problem, some of the commentators and scholars – Rambam and Abarbanel for example – claim that the punishment was for an accumulation of previous minor transgressions that culminated with Moshe's striking the rock – a straw that broke the camel's back type of scenario.

Most commentators however concentrate on attempting to explain the matter in light of the statement in the Torah itself, that Moshe's punishment was due to the sole incident of his striking the rock instead of following G-d's instruction to speak to it.

Be this matter as it is in all of its wondrous complexity and difficulty, the bottom line is that the Jewish people will not enjoy Moshe's presence and leadership when they embark on their task of nation building upon entering the Land of Israel. All of Jewish history, in fact all of world history, would have been different had Moshe led Israel into its promised land. But it was not to be.

I think that among the many lessons and nuances present in this Torah lesson there is one that bears great relevance to understanding the pattern of Jewish history itself. And that lesson is that a leader, no matter how great he is individually – even if he is Moshe who is able, so to speak, to relate to G-d directly and at will – is still only a product of his time and circumstances.

If Moshe's generation, the generation that left Egypt and stood at Sinai to receive the Torah is not going to enter the Land of Israel, then Moshe himself will also not enter it. The leader is bound to the fate and occurrences of his generation and times. A great leader of one time is not necessarily the great leader of another period.

The Talmud points this out in many different ways: "Yiftach is the great leader for his generation just as Shmuel was the great leader for his time." Individually speaking, the two may not be on the same plane and level of spiritual greatness, but Shmuel is not suited for leadership of Yiftach's generation just as Yiftach is not the right person to lead the generation of Shmuel.

Moshe is inextricably bound to his generation and cannot enter the Land of Israel. The rabbis also taught us: "The rule over the people of one time cannot impinge for even a hair's breadth over the rule over the people of the next generation." These ideas and axioms bound Moshe as well and they precluded him from entering the Land of Israel no matter his spiritual greatness and quality.

Shabat shalom.

Reprinted from the Parshat Chukat 5760/2000 edition of L'Chaim.

English Words with Surprising Jewish Origins

By Dr. Yvette Alt Miller



A fascinating list of words that you probably didn't know have Jewish linguistic origins.

When you kibbitz with your friends, does your babble ever lead to a big brouhaha?

Kibbitz, *babble*, and *brouhaha* are just some of the dozens of English words that come from Jewish languages such as Hebrew, Yiddish, and Aramaic. Here's a fascinating list of words that many of us use every day without knowing their distant Jewish linguistic origins.

Words About Talking

Given Jews' penchant for debate, it's no wonder a number of Jewish words related to speech made it into English.

Babble likely comes from a famous story in the book of Genesis recounting how people tried to build a tower – called the Tower of *Bavel* (Babel in English) – that would reach the very heavens to wage war against God. God thwarted their plans

and toppled the tower. Back on earth, people found that instead of speaking a common language as before, they all spoke different languages, which sounded like “babble” to others (Genesis 11:1-8).

Brouhaha sounds a bit like the Hebrew phrase *baruch haba*, which means “welcome” in Hebrew. Many linguists believe it was a dismissive word French people used to describe the sound of Jews speaking Hebrew. English speakers adopted this French word in the 1700s.

Kibbitz sounds a bit like the call of the European lapwing bird: *peewit*. Medieval German speakers called the bird *peewit*; from there, the name possibly evolved into *kibbitz* and moved into Yiddish, where it meant (at various times) to chatter, to visit, or to offer advice.

Shmooze has Hebrew origins. *Shmu'ot* means “rumors” in Hebrew. Yiddish speakers called idle chat *shmu'es*; from there, the word evolved into *shmuesn*, meaning to chat, and entered English as *shmooze*, meaning to have a nice, cozy conversation.

Being a Mensch: Words About Kindness and Doing the Right Thing

With Judaism’s emphasis on ethical behavior, it’s no wonder many English terms come from Jewish words.

Cherub – a sweet little innocent child in English – comes from the Hebrew word for sword, *cherev*. In the Torah, a Cherub (*cherev*) is a type of angel which guards the entrance to the Garden of Eden with a fiery sword, ensuring that people never return there (Genesis 3:24).

Jubilee comes from the Hebrew *yovel*, an occurrence once every 50 years when all debts were erased and indentured servants were freed (Leviticus 25:10-11). **Mensch** literally means “man” in Yiddish, just as it does in German, but the Jewish version of this word comes with a twist: reflecting the Jewish view that everyone is capable of being upright, honorable, and making a difference in the world. Calling someone a *mensch* means referring to them as a positive, good human being.

Ruthless refers to someone acting viciously, but it comes from the name of one of the heroines in the Bible, Ruth. A Moabite princess by birth, Ruth converted to Judaism and lived with her mother-in-law Naomi in Israel, where she displayed incredible kindness. Ruth’s great grandson was King David. “Ruth” became a byword for kindness; “ruthless” literally means having a lack of Ruth’s quality of empathy and giving.

Eat a Little: Jewish Words About Food and Drink

Cider comes from the Hebrew word for drink, *shaker*. It was translated into Greek as *sikera*, and migrated into Latin as *sicera*. In the Middle Ages, French

adopted the word as *cidre*, and it began to refer exclusively to strong drinks made from fermented fruit, particularly apples.

Lox migrated into English from Yiddish; Germanic speakers throughout central Europe refer to salmon as *lox*, *lachs*, or variations of the word and early Yiddish speakers adopted the term as well.

Words About Time and Measurement

The Torah instructs us to be scrupulously honest when it comes to our weights and measures (Leviticus 19:35-36). Here are a few English terms that are derived from Jewish words.

Iota comes from the Hebrew letter *Yud*, which is the smallest of the Hebrew letters. Iota was the Ancient Greek form of the *Yud*, and soon became synonymous with anything tiny.

Jot also derived from the Hebrew letter *Yud*, and was the Medieval Latin form of translating the letter. As with iota, jot soon became a way to refer to anything very small.

Sabbatical derived from the Hebrew word Shabbat (Sabbath in English), the seventh day each week when we recall God's rest on the seventh day of creation by ceasing to perform ordinary, weekday labor.

Words with More Negative Connotations Derived from Jewish Terms

Given how negatively antisemites have viewed Jews throughout the years, it's no wonder that quite a few Jewish terms have been given a sinister twist in English and other languages.

Bedlam was originally the nickname of England's first mental asylum. It was formally called the Bethlem Royal Hospital. Like many old hospitals, Bethlem began as a religious order; it was founded in the 13th century as a priory dedicated to St Mary of Bethlehem. And Bethlem was corrupted to bedlam.

Bethlehem, which literally means House (*bet*) of Bread (*lechem*) in Hebrew, is a town to Jerusalem's south. It is first mentioned in the Torah in Genesis 35:19 where Rachel is buried. Thousands upon thousands of people visit the Tomb of Rachel in Bethlehem today to pour out their heart in prayer.

Beelzebub is a Christian term for a malevolent being and comes from the Hebrew *ba'al* (lord) *zevuvim* (flies), the implication being that a "Lord of the Flies" would somehow be drawn to death and decay, which also attracts flies.

Cabal is an insulting term that's derived from the Hebrew word *Kabbalah*, which literally means "receiving" and refers to Jewish mysticism. Reflecting the widely-held, antisemitic (and false) belief that a secret group of Jews somehow controls the world, cabal refers to such a gathering. Surprisingly, the word was

popularized by Charles Dickens who used it as an acronym to help students remember the names of five government ministers in the 1600s in his book *A Child's History of England*.

Chutzpah is a Hebrew (and later also Yiddish) word that means impudence or gall. It also has a positive connotation of fearlessness and boldness, to stand up for what you believe and go against the flow.

Macabre likely comes from Medieval plays about the Maccabees, a group of Jewish fighters who resisted Greek rule in Israel a little over 2,000 years ago. Called *Chorea Maccabaeorum* - "dance of the Maccabees" - in Latin, the plays were often bloody and featured the martyrdom of Maccabee fighters. The plays' name evolved to *Danse Macabe* in French. In time, the name evolved to *Dance Macabre*, and the meaning to "dance of death".

Scapegoat originated in the Torah's description of Yom Kippur. In ancient times, the *Cohen Gadol* (the High Priest who served in the Temple in Jerusalem) would take two identical goats on Yom Kippur. One goat was sacrificed in the Temple and the other was sent into the wilderness south of Jerusalem to atone for the Jewish people's sins (Leviticus 16:5-18). "Scape" was an early English form of the word escape: the scapegoat was the goat which "escaped" being sacrificed. Today, it means one who is blamed for others' sins.

Reprinted from the June 20, 2023 posting on the aish.com website.

Therefore, it is said in the book of the wars of the L-rd (Num. 21:14)

The "book of the wars of the L-rd" refers to a specific volume recording all G-d's battles on behalf of those who fear Him. It is quite possible that the book dates back to our forefather Abraham, as many ancient manuscripts have been lost over the millennia: The Words and Testimony of Nathan; The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel; and King Solomon's Songs and Parables. (Ibn Ezra)

Lo, it is a people that shall live alone, and among the nations shall not be reckoned (Num. 23:9)

When the Jewish people are "alone," separate and distinguished from the gentiles, their existence is secure and they are respected by the nations. If, however, they begin to assimilate and copy their non-Jewish neighbors, they "shall not be reckoned" - they lose their importance and high esteem. (Divrei Eliezer)

Reprinted from the Parshat Chukat-Balak 5760/2000 edition of L'Chaim.

How to Avoid the Toxicity of Jealousy

By Katia Bolotin



Art by Yitzchok Schmukler

An acquaintance approached me in the checkout line and said, “I heard that you’re going to Israel. I’m so jealous!” I thought of retorting, “I saw that you’re expanding your new home. I’m so jealous.” I wondered if that would have made her uncomfortable. Instead, I chose to smile and say nothing. But our brief encounter left me feeling uneasy.

Some people may claim that “I’m jealous” is just an expression, like “Get out of here!” or “Break a leg!” Of course, these aren’t meant to be taken literally. But certain expressions are concerning, and “I’m so jealous” is one of them.

No, I’m not overthinking this. I’m just aware of the insidious effects of jealousy. It can morph into an uncontrollable monster. Our sages cautioned us, “Jealousy, desire and pursuit of honor remove a person from the world.”¹

The Consequences of Jealousy

The consequences of these destructive character traits are highlighted in this week’s Torah reading. Korach was a scheming rabble-rouser. Jealousy and

impudence led him to rebel against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Although Korach possessed social status and wealth, he was dissatisfied.

Feelings of jealousy are normal, but if those feelings are allowed to evolve, beware! Excessive jealousy is self-sabotaging and hijacks a person's clarity and perception. Like any other negative trait, it's meant to be harnessed and transformed into a positive one.

Our Talmudic Sages encourage us to admire and emulate others' virtuous, positive behaviors: "Jealousy among Torah scholars increases wisdom," they write.² The desire to refine one's abilities, knowledge, and character is positive and productive. In contrast, destructive jealousy emanates from a lack of self-worth, thinking that someone else's success will decrease your own.

The Torah provides us tools with which to cultivate a realistic, healthy, sense of who we are. The first and the last of the 10 commandments—"I am the L-rd your G-d," and, "You shall not covet"—connect to form a fundamental teaching. G-d grants each of us resources with which to achieve our specific life's purpose. Saying to yourself, "I deserve this just as much, or even more than, someone else," or thinking, "Why don't I have what s/he has?" is implying that G-d's agenda is flawed. Thoughts such as these essentially express the haughtiness and entitlement that led to Korach's downfall. Focus, instead, on what's in your toolbox and use your resources well.

A doctor wouldn't covet a repairman's screwdriver, nor would the repairman covet the doctor's stethoscope. Neither would be able to do his job with the other's tools. Similarly, our material possessions and circumstances are needed to best play our earthly roles in the script of life that we are given.

Whatever we have, or lack, is necessary for our particular role. It's not the part we play that matters; what matters is how well we play the part. Jealousy distracts a person from accomplishing what s/he has been placed in the world to achieve.

How to Be Like the Wise Person

The Talmud teaches us: "Who is wise? One who sees what will be born [from his actions]."³ Our thoughts and actions influence our direction. Harboring jealousy produces negative ramifications, and is harmful to our health and well-being.

Strive to be like the wise person. Wise people are mindful of their triggers. We can emulate them by being aware of our own red flags. They're meant to alert us: "Beware, you're approaching a jealousy zone. Change direction, immediately!"

How can we avoid falling into the clutches of jealousy? Recognize that thoughts lead to actions. Wisely and proactively choose what thoughts you allow to occupy your mind. Evict distorted ideas that can mislead you. Eliminate the phrase "I'm so jealous" from your vocabulary. It may be just an expression, but it's certainly not a positive one worth repeating. Spoken words amplify our inner feelings. Rather

than focus on what's lacking in your life, be more aware of what you have and can be grateful for.

We can never fully know another person's situation in life; only G-d knows the entire story. That's another reason why it's pointless to be jealous of anyone. Let's learn from the mistakes of Korach and his followers. Aspire to overcome your feelings of jealousy and not act upon them. But if you ever find yourself feeling envious of someone who has overcome their jealousy, then just admire and emulate him instead.

Making It Relevant

Every time you have the natural urge to feel jealous, switch your focus to things for which you are grateful.

In cases of loss, focus on what remains.

Recognize that you could lose what you have. Appreciate the life you're living.

FOOTNOTES

1. Avot 4:28.
2. Bava Batra 21a.
3. Tamid 32a.

Reprinted from the Parshat Korach 5783 website of Chabad.Org



Mizrach art from Dec. 12, 2022 Judaica auction of Kedem Auction #43.