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הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha
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פרשת בלק

Mishpachat Levy
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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת בלק

SHEMA YISROEL... VA'YAR BALAK BEN TZIPOR

We read *Parshas Balak* this week and we don't even realize that it is one of the most fundamental *parshiyos* in the entire Torah. And I'll prove it to you. Listen to these words from a *gemara* in *Brachos* (12b). It says there: בקשו לקבוע פרשת בלעם בקריאת שמע - The *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* wanted to make it obligatory to read the *parsha* of Bilam every day during *kriyas shema*. Just like you say the words that are our lifeblood, *Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*, they wanted you to also say the *parsha* of Bilam as well. Every day! During *kriyas shema*! That's how important it is! *Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad* and *Vayar Balak ben Tzipor*. The *yesodos ha'emunah*. It's remarkable. And it is difficult to comprehend

ומפני מאי לא קבעוה - "So why *didn't* they put it in?" The *Gemara* says because of *tircha d'tziburah* - it would have been too burdensome for the people to recite so much. It would take too much time. You have to go to work. It's long enough as it is to *daven* in the morning. And so even though a great benefit would be gained by saying it every day, still they waived that benefit because of *tircha d'tzibura*. Now you know how big of a "*mitzvah*"

it is when the chazan gets up at the *amud* and displays his cantorial talents and people have to suffer through that - as he's trolling his Caruso, his operas, during davening in order to "inspire" the people. To take up the time of the *tzibbur*? No, we don't permit such things.

We should listen to this carefully, because we're learning something here. We have here a *parsha* that is so important that it deserves to be said - not once a year like we do, but everyday! You know, it doesn't say that about the *bris bein ha'bsarim* or even about *ma'amad har sinai*. Only this, the words of a gentile from *Aram*, are from the *ikarei ha'emunah*, that we must wake up to and go to sleep with. בששכך ובקומך. And so when you say *Shema* every morning and every evening, right there along with the great principles of *Hashem Echad*, of *kabolas ol malchus shamayim* and *kabolas mitzvos* we would have begun to *lain* וירא בלק בן ציפור. Only that *Chazal* had *rachmanus* on us - it's too much time; we have to go to work, a man has to make some money too. You can't sit around on a bench in shul saying *shema* all day long!

However, this intention of the *chachomim* should be a hint for us that the *parsha* of Bilam is of utmost importance. So the question begs itself: What is so important about the words of Bilam? What is the secret that lies hidden in his his words?

ARE WE FAILURES?

And in order to understand what's doing here, we'll begin our subject as follows: Anyone who studies *chumash* hears, over and over again, that the *Am Yisroel* in the wilderness failed in many ways. The *pashtus* of the *pesukim* make that very clear. You read *chumash* with *rashi* and you hear it on every page.

The whole Torah wherever you look is full of criticisms of the *Am Yisroel*. The entire system of the Torah is *tochacha*, rebuke. Our great teacher, Moshe Rabeinu, calls us names all the time. He doesn't pat us on the back. עם נבל ולא חכם. - "You're a low nation, and without any wisdom." All we heard was criticism. We don't hear praises; maybe one or two places, but it's very brief. In

general , he is constantly belittling his people. And very sharply - constant chastisement with stinging bitter criticism for forty years. That was the lot of the עַם נֹבֵל in the *midbar*.

How can I alone bear the burden of your troublemaking and your conflict" (Dvarim 1:12). "Remember: Don't forget that you have angered Hashem your G-d from the day that you left Egypt" (Dvarim 9:7). "And behold; You have sinned against Hashem, your G-d" (Dvarim 9:16). "You were rebellious with Hashem," said Moshe to the people, "From the day that I knew you" (Dvarim 9:24). "I am well aware of your rebellious spirit and your stiff-necked stubbornness...and your constant rebellious behaviour against Hashem" (Dvarim 31:27).

CHILLUL SHABBOS IN THE MIDBAR

Yechezkel HaNavi said about them, אֵת שְׁבִתוֹתַי חָלְלוּ מְאֹד - They profaned my *Shabbosos* very much in the *midbar sinai*" (Yechezkel 20:13). "Very much," said *Yechezkel Hanavi*. They were antagonizing Hashem with *chillul Shabbos*! They had just received the gift of *Shabbos* - and they heard it from the mouth of Hakodosh Boruch Hu - and how do they treat it? They profaned it very much! And the leaders were guilty as well. Moshe and Aharon weren't spared the bite of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. אֲשֶׁר בִּי מַעֲלַתְּם בִּי לֹא הָאֵמַנְתֶּם - You rebelled against Me" (Devarim 32:51). לֹא הָאֵמַנְתֶּם בִּי - "You were both disloyal to Me" (Bamidbar 20:12). Moshe and Aharon were disloyal to Hakodosh Boruch Hu!

So we see that Hakodosh Boruch Hu wasn't happy with us in the wilderness. There was terrible criticism of the seemingly lawless nation. עַד מָתַי מֵאֲנַתֶּם - "For how long will you refuse to obey My commandments" (Shemos 16:28). Constantly He criticized us. And it wasn't only words! Many were killed. A *mageifah* here. A *mageifah* there. So many died. By the *misonenim*. And at *Kivros Hata'avah* more died. And then the *nachash* came to kill more of them as well. Hashem was very angry at us!

And we say it every Friday night. Every Friday night we remind ourselves. And some people even sing it too אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה

דוד - "For forty years I quarreled with that generation" says Hashem. ואמר עם תועי לבב הם - "And I say that they are people whose minds have wandered away from Me, והם לא ידעו דרכי - And they did not know My ways" (Tehillim 95:10). You're singing it with a beautiful *niggun*, tra-la-la, They *didn't* know My ways. Just those few words of Dovid Hamelech are enough for us to get the picture of what was doing in the *midbar*.

A GOY ARGUES WITH HASHEM

And now, along comes Bilam the *goy*, and he's saying exactly the opposite of everything we're saying here. He's heaping praises and more praises upon the *Bnei Yisroel*. When we listen to Bilam it sounds like he's talking about a different nation altogether. He tells Balak ומה אזעום לא זעם השם - "How can I get angry at the Nation whom Hashem is not angry with" (Balak 23:8). Not angry with us?! What were we doing all forty years if not angering Hashem?! Wherever you look in the *chumash* Hashem is angry at us. ויחר אף השם - "And the anger of Hashem flared up." Hashem was angry at Yisroel constantly. And here Bilam comes and says, "No, Hashem is *not* angry."

Bilam looked at the *Am Yisroel* and said: לא הביט און ביעקב - "Hashem can see no sin in *Yaakov*, ולא ראה עמל בישראל, and He sees no wickedness among *Yisroel*" (Balak 23:21). No sin?! No wickedness?! Was the שתום העין really blind?! Over and over again we sinned; חטאתם להשם אלוקיכם - "You have sinned against Hashem" (Dvarim 9:16).

So what's going on here? Hakodosh Boruch Hu is telling us one thing, and then Bilam comes, *b'sheim Hashem*, and is telling us something else, something very different. And we wouldn't be wrong if we were confused. What's the real truth? Is it what Bilaam is telling us in our *parsha*, or is it what we understand from *kol hatorah kulah*?

THE CAMERA MAN CRITICISES THE KALLAH

And the answer is that it's all true. I'll give you a *mashal*. You're at a *chasuna*. And before the *chuppah* the camera man is

taking pictures of the *kallah*. And she is beautiful. Of course, she's beautiful - she's been preparing herself all day long for this moment. She's the most beautiful woman in the hall. And as he's about to take the picture he asks her to wipe away a tiny piece of dust that has lodged itself on her cheek. Now, are you going to tell me that the camera man thinks that there is a significant flaw in her appearance? Of course not. Certainly there's a flaw, but it's a flaw so minute that it takes an expert photographer to notice it. And it's only because he is such a professional, that he picks up on things that nobody else can see. Only because of that does it bother him. That's why he insists on correcting this small flaw. And that's why they hired him. Because they want the best results possible.

The camera man is interested in making the beautiful *kallah* look even more beautiful. And so, he won't let anything go. But, of course, the *kallah* is the most beautiful! And her friends who come tell her that! They tell her how beautiful she is. And the camera man agrees, because that is the real truth.

HASHEM CRITICISES HIS KALLAH

Now, everything that was said against the *dor hamidbar* was said in this sense. The great *tzadikim* were always bitterly criticized *as if* they had committed the worst of sins. Hakodosh Boruch Hu wasn't going to let anything go - even the smallest of sins.

The *Bnei Yisroel* are called the **אִחוּתֵי כְלָה**, the beloved bride of Hashem, in *Shir Hashirim*. Because we *are* the most beautiful *kallah* in the world. And the desire of Hakodosh Boruch Hu is to make us even more beautiful, more perfect. All the criticisms of Hashem, and of His *nevi'im* were soap to remove the smallest of stains. The accusations against Israel are actually a testimony to their excellence.

Moshe, the *oheiv Yisroel*, the lover of his people, sought to improve them by stern castigation. And for this special nation, this method was the most effective. And when he spoke the bitter

words of criticism, they loved him for it. I'm not saying it didn't hurt. Of course it hurt. It stung them to no end. But that's what they wanted to hear because they knew that the only path to greatness is awareness of one's own faults.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED ON THAT SHABBOS

“They profaned my *Shabbosos* very much, “ said *Yechezkel HaNavi*. Very much?! It's out of the question. You couldn't profane Shabbos in a small town in Lithuania eighty years ago! In a small town in Lithuania eighty years ago you couldn't carry anything outside of the *eiruv*. If a boy or girl walked outside the *eiruv* carrying something they'd be summoned to the Rav. And they'd be punished. Everybody kept everything. So you're telling me that when Moshe Rabeinu had full authority, with so many supervisors and judges over the people, that they were *Michallel Shabbos* very much?! It's ridiculous! It doesn't mean that they were *Michallel Shabbos* like on Kings Highway and Ocean Avenue on Shabbos afternoon. *Chas v'shalom!* The truth is that there was no *chillul Shabbos*. It happened only twice in forty years. A nation of at least three million, over forty years, and it happened only twice! There were two little incidents. **יצאו מן העם ללקוט** - Two people went out on Shabbos to gather *mann* - they didn't even do it, because there was no *mann* to gather. But they went out. And later there was the *mikosheish eitzim*. That's all. And that's called **שבתותי מאד**!! It's remarkable!

THE REBBI WHO POISONS HIS TALMIDIM

There never was a generation that kept Shabbos as conscientiously as the *dor hamidbar*. And yet, there was never a generation that was criticized for *chillul Shabbos* like the *dor hamidbar*! And these two go hand in hand. *Because* they were criticized so much, that's *why* they were the greatest *shomrei Shabbos* in our history. That has to sink into your heads. Because your *rebbe* in the *cheder* planted poison in your head. And I can't blame him. The whole *chumash* is full of bad things about our forefathers in the wilderness.

And that's what my *rebbeh* told us about that *possuk* in *kabolas Shabbos* that hits you in the gut. והם לא ידעו דרכי - "And they did not know My ways." And my *rebbeh* said it means "They *did* know My ways." But the reason they knew My ways, is *because* ארבעים שנה אקוט בדור, it's *because* I quarreled with them for forty years. For forty years I sent Moshe Rabeinu to bite at them and tell them that they don't know My ways. And that's why they knew My ways.

PERFECTION IN THE CHEDER

It's like a boy in *cheder*, and his *rebbe* says, "Do you know the *gemara*?" And he says, "Yes." And he *does* know it. He *chazered* it at home once or twice. But his *rebbe* says, "You *don't* know it." So the boy sits down in the corner and reviews it. And he sees that he had overlooked something. *Now*, the answer of *Abbaye* makes sense! *Now* he knows it. So he comes back and the *rebbe* says, "Do you know the *sugya* now?" And the boy says, "Yes." And the *rebbe* says, "You still *don't* know it." And the boy goes back and looks it over again, and he's thinking, "Everything seems to fit, it's understandable. Oh no, I overlooked this word. I *don't* know it yet!" And therefore by constant criticism he finally comes to perfection.

And that's what happened the *dor hamidbar*, and to a lesser extent to all of the generations of the *Am Yisroel*, even in our days. The criticism is what makes us great. The little details, the small spot on the *Kallah's* dress, is pointed out, and scrubbed away, and scrubbed again, until the *Kallah* is more beautiful than we thought possible.

OUR BEST FRIEND, BILAM THE DONKEY

And now we come back to our friend Bilam who praised us so greatly. Bilam hated us intensely. He tried his best to cause our downfall. But he couldn't help himself - what Hashem put in his mouth, he was forced to say. It was שכינה מדברת מתוך גרונו של בלעם. Just like the words that came out of his donkey's mouth was nothing but the *dvar Hashem*, a donkey has no *sechel* of his own

after all. So too, you must know that everything that came out of Bilam's mouth was the word of Hashem. Hashem is talking to us through Bilam's mouth. Bilam is our donkey and from his mouth comes forth a *nevuah* for us to let us know what Hashem is really thinking about the *Am Yisroel*.

So Bilam said, "Hashem sees nothing bad in the *Am Yisroel*." And he spoke at length about it. Because Hashem *doesn't* see any wrong at all. "I see nothing wrong in My Nation." Human beings sometimes make errors; but My people, לא הביט און ביעקב. Certainly people do wrong things, people make mistakes. On each person we say אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא. Certainly! But Hashem looks at the nation and He sees no wrong in *Yaakov*. לא ראה עמל בישראל. He sees no injustice in *Yisroel*.

Like the *kallah's* friends who tell her how beautiful she really is, so too Bilam tells us only the truth. He came for one purpose, and for one purpose only. To say the *emes!* Hashem sees *no* sin in the *Am Yisroel*. He sees *no* wickedness among His people! And that's no contradiction *at all* to the biting criticism that fills the Torah, which comes to perfect the perfect Nation.

MISUNDERSTANDING PSHAT IN THE TORAH

This will take a long time to explain because in cheder you learned differently. But when you grow older, you have to understand the truth of the Torah. And that is that the *Am Yisroel* is the greatest and purest nation, much more than any nation in the world!

Many people have been misled, even *talmidei chachomim*. I remember once I was saying a *drasha* in shul and I mentioned that the *Dor Hamidbar* was beloved by Hashem. I said that they are called *yedidim* and *ahuvim*. And this one man, a *talmid chochom*, finally lost patience with me. He was so angry with me when I said that. "It's against the *pesukim* what you're saying" he told me. "They didn't know My ways." He showed me the *possuk* in the *siddur*.

And how can you blame people for being misled? All the *seforim* in the Torah criticize the *Am Yisroel*. Terribly! Yishaya, and Yirmiya, and Yechezkel, are all criticizing. And it makes an impression. But it's such a *sheker*! It's a big misunderstanding. And even a man as great as Rabbi Akiva made that error. The Gemara says that (Sanhedrin 110b) שבקיה רבי עקיבא לחסידותיה - He forsook his piety when he spoke about the *Dor Hamidbar*. And he made this mistake because the *pashtus* of the *pesukim* are on his side. But the *maskanah* of the *gemara* is: אספו לי חסידיי - Gather in to Me, My devoted ones, the *dor hamidbar*. They were Hashem's *chassidim*.

And so, if we were *chassidim* and *yedidim* and *ahuvim*, then what is all the criticism?

The *nevi'im* were cleaning us! A little speck on your face?! Wash it off! Every little speck is a tragedy. And so Hashem says, "Oy, *gevalt*. *Gevalt*, *gevalt*, look at that little speck on you!" And He makes a big fuss out of it. But when we read it today, we are so impressed with the "*Gevalt*, *gevalt*" that we think that they were wicked people *chas v'shalom*.

LEARNING TO THINK ALONG WITH BILAM

And therefore it becomes a big problem, a great confusion. We have to fight back against all these wrong ideas that make us look down at our nation. So Hakodosh Boruch Hu did something. He sent us Bilam. He sent a *goy*. A *goy* is the one least liable to say anything good about us. From a *goy* you'd expect nothing but *kitrug*, accusations, blame. But when Bilam opened his mouth, and the words of Hakodosh Boruch Hu came out, He had nothing to say except praises of the *Am Yisroel*. So now you know that's the *emes*! If we'll listen to Bilam's words, we'll become *ovdei Hashem*. We'll learn to think like Hashem thinks.

V'NAHAPOCH HU!

It states in the *navi*, "My nation, remember the kindness that I did with you, when Bilam was called to curse you, ויהפוך השם אלוקיך את הקללה לברכה - Hashem your G-d overturned the

curse into a blessing." Hashem was *mihapeich* the curses of Bilam into *brachos*. The question is what's the big *chesed* over here? They're not supposed to be cursed. Why *should* they be cursed?

Now pay attention to the answer. Bilam *could* have spoken like Moshe Rabeinu. He could have said words that would have been very bitter. He could have said **עם נבל ולא חכם** - "You're a very low nation. You made an *eigel*." **ארבעים שנה אקוט בדור עם תועי**. **לבב הם והם לא ידעו דרכי**. "For forty years you fought with Hashem and you didn't know His ways." And it would have been all true. Moshe Rabeinu said it. So couldn't Bilam also say it? And that's what Balak wanted to hear. He paid good money for that.

But Hakodosh Boruch Hu said, "No, I'm not going to let you say that. I'm not going to put those words in your mouth! I'm going to turn My *hanhaga* upside down. You're going to say the opposite of what My *nevi'im* have been telling the *Am Yisroel*. **ויהפוך** - I'm going to turn everything upside down and you're going to tell them just the opposite. From *you*, they're going to hear *the truth!*

And that was the *neis!* It was a big *neis!* Moshe Rabeinu can tell us how bad we are because he didn't mean it! He only wanted to benefit us. But if you, Bilam, would say it, you'd mean it as a *k'lalah*. Oh no, I won't let you say it." And therefore, from Bilam's mouth came out only *brachos*. **ויהפוך** - Hashem turned His way of dealing with His people upside down. He changed His *hanhagah*, and only the pure truth came out of Bilam's mouth, *brachos* instead of *klalos*.

We must look at the *Am Yisroel* through *Bilam's* eyes, *not* through the eyes of Moshe Rabeinu. *Not* through the eyes of Yeshaya and Yirmiyah and all the *mochichim*. We have to listen to their words, absolutely. But to look at the *Am Yisroel*, we should look at them only through the eyes of Bilam, *because that's the truth*. The greatness of the *Am Yisroel* is what Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants us to know.

WE ARE BEING FOOLED

And now you know why they wanted to put the *parsha* of Bilam into *kriyas shema*. We are being fooled by all the criticism and bitter words of Hashem and His *nevi'im*. You know, the *kallah* when she hears again and again about the black speck on her cheek, the small stain on her dress, so she might make a mistake. She might feel that *she's* the one in the room who is most filthy. And it's the same with us - we learn constantly about the criticisms and we start to think that the *bnei yisroel* were not so good. And therefore, *Chazal* wanted us to repeat *Parshas Bilam* every day, in order study the importance, the greatness, the holiness, the beauty and the virtues of the *Am Yisroel*.

And **Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants us to spend time thinking about that.** Because no matter what we'll say, no matter how how much we review it, it will never be sufficient to exhaust the subject of the greatness of the *Am Yisroel*.

BILAM IS OUR MODEL

And that's *our* job in this world. Despite whatever we might know about the *frummeh*, the slight failings of the *Am Yisroel*, we still know that the truth is what Bilam said. לא הביט און ביעקב ולא ראה עמל בישראל. And we must constantly fill our minds with a barrage of *emes*, a barrage of the true greatness of the *Klal Yisroel*. We take Bilam as our model and ויהפוך, we have to turn the *klalos* into *brachos* constantly. We have to be very careful to see only good just like Bilam.

But how do we do that? How are we supposed to see our own greatness in the midst of all the criticisms? Awareness of our greatness leads us to demand perfection of ourselves and of our neighbors. We view ourselves through the magnifying glass of the Torah and we therefore criticize ourselves and are embarrassed by our people's flaws. We are not satisfied with mediocrity and familiarity breeds contempt. If you stand among the nations of the world like an ordinary human being, and you see the *Bnei Yisroel* so you see them as human beings.

Let's say, here's a *kollel* family. And there's another person standing in the street, a Jew, a frum Jew, and he sees the *kollel* family. To him it seems like they're human beings. Just like he is. The children are boisterous, a little wild. The mother is busy cooking and cleaning. And life goes on in their house like any other house. And therein lies the great error of not appreciating the *Am Yisroel*.

And therefore, we must follow the model of Bilam who taught us how to achieve this goal. And he explains: **כי מראש צורים** - **אראנו** - "I see the *Am Yisroel* from the top of mountains." It means that I look at them from an elevated position. You can see better when you're standing on a mountain. When you're down below, close by, sometimes it's too close, and you don't see the truth. "Everybody else sees them and criticizes them," said Bilam, "but I see them from a viewpoint higher than anybody else. And I see the real truth, that Hakodosh Boruch Hu sees them as the best people in the world. Nobody can even remotely resemble them."

And so, when you look at that *kollel* family, you'll have to get off the ground. To understand the greatness of *any* frum home, you are going to have to get off of the ground and view them with a nobility of mind. If you go through life without thinking, then you'll never appreciate the *Am Yisroel*. It's only when you take a step back, and you see the *Am Yisroel* with the clear sighted view that Bilam had, that's how you'll appreciate our greatness.

When you look down now, **מראש צורים**, from the mountains, and you see the *Am Yisroel*, the *ovdei Hashem*, through the eyes of Bilam, which is really through the eyes of Hashem, then there is no comparison between a Jewish home and the homes of the *umos ha'olam*. When you view them with a clear sighted view, you'll be amazed at what you see. You'll see a nation that has no equal, by far, among all the peoples of the world. The best nations of today and of antiquity never even came close to the **המון בית ישראל**, to the ordinary Jew.

And Bilam said: מה טובו אהליך יעקב - How beautiful are your tents Yaakov, משכנותיך ישראל - your dwellings, O' Yisroel. Bilam is speaking here about the private home of a *Yisroel*. Now, of course some say that it includes the *Mishkan*, the *batei mikdash* - the first *beis hamikdash*, the second *beis hamikdash* - the shuls and *batei midrashim* but אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו. It's good, but it's not the *pshat*. There's no question that the Bilam here is talking about the Jewish home. Bilam is speaking about the homes where the Jewish mothers and fathers raise up their children. The Jewish home is beautiful. It's unique in the world. And Bilam, with his prophetic eyes saw that.

And he saw that the home of a simple Jew was going to actually be a *beis hamikdash*. It's a place of the greatest idealism. And no house in the world will ever compare to the Jewish home. Everything that comes in has to pass supervision - is it kosher? And the mother is supervising like a *kohen gadol*. The whole *avodas Hashem* in the kitchen is done perfectly with הדרת קודש. There are *milchedig* dishes, and *fleishigidig* dishes, and *pareveh* dishes. Nothing in the world can equal such a service. There's no mixing! The mother gets nervous if she even thinks that you might have mixed the spoon in the wrong place. Everything is done according to prescribed form. The meat is slaughtered according to special rules, and the blood is removed with salting. The milk has come from certain sources, and all the food in the house is certified with kosher labels. You can't bring any type of food into a Jewish home. It's not easy, but it's always done.

Shabbos is observed in that home. And they pray to Hashem all day long in that house. The children are taught to thank Hashem before putting any piece of food in their mouths. *Mezuzos* on every doorway to proclaim to the world, "We belong to Hashem." *Taharas hamishpacha*, *tzniyus*, decency, morality fill the Jewish home. And you hear *brachos* in that home all day long - a different blessing for every item that you're eating. How beautiful is the Jewish home!

And outside on the street it's the same holiness. Beautiful Jewish boys, decent and frum. Beautiful Jewish girls - you see Jewish girls in the street, long dresses and long sleeves, even in the summer heat. The gentiles are walking down the street wearing the same amount of clothing that a horse wears. A woman goes out on Kings Highway and she's dressed up in a pocketbook! But our girls are covered. They don't expose their bodies. And they're decent girls. They're well behaved; they don't shout in the street. It's a pleasure to see their loyalty to the Torah. You can be sure that they won't eat just anything, even if they're hungry. They're careful what they eat, where they go, what they wear. The Jewish children are being brought up with chastity and *taharah*.

Here's a Jewish boy riding past me every day on his bike. It's such a pleasure to see him - I look out for him every day. A big *yarmulkeh* on his head, a crown of glory, to signify that he's a servant of Hashem. And his *tzitzis* are flying behind him in the wind. And he's riding on his bike through a gentile street - he's not ashamed. He doesn't even think about it. He's a Jew! He wouldn't change it for anything in the world.

And if he's hungry for a piece of candy, does he buy any candy? No; he looks, does it have a *hechsher* on it? What kind of *hechsher*? It depends. Sometimes the hechsher is not good enough and he'll deny himself the fun of eating candy. Even though nobody is around! That's a holy nation! Who else does such things?! Nobody. They're *kodesh kodoshim*. That little Jewish boy, when Shabbos comes, he's not riding on his bike anymore. No, he walks. And he doesn't carry. He checks his pockets before he goes out in the street, that little Jewish boy. He's *kodesh kodoshim*.

You have to try to find the very best that you can see in your people. Think about their greatness. And the truth is that as much as you'll look and as much as you'll find, it's not the truth. They're better than you think they are. They're *much* better than you think they are. If you only knew how much self-sacrifice there isour! How much money is given away for charity! So many give

a tenth of their income to *tzedaka*. You know what that means? A tenth?! People are working hard to make a living! And they're giving *ma'aser*. These people are *tzadikim gemurim*. They're living according to the *Shulchan Aruch*. They call up and ask questions about small details of procedure. Everything is done according to *halacha*.

If a woman buys a chicken, and she spends ten dollars, let's say, on a meat order. And then she finds something that's a question. She goes to the Rav and he says it's *treifeh* and she throws it away. She doesn't argue. She doesn't try to deceive the Rav. Even a butcher who buys a big *beheimah*, a half of a steer, and he finds something wrong with it, he asks the Rav to *pasken* the *shailah*, and the Rav says it's *treifeh*, a regular decent butcher is willing to lose hundreds of dollars. It's a Jewish nation of idealists. And therefore we have to appreciate them. And Hakodosh Boruch Hu loves them even more than we ever will be able to do.

What is it that the *Am Yisroel* is excited about?! They're excited about Hakodosh Boruch Hu. They're excited about *mitzvoos*. That's their lives. Their whole lives are based on *shmiras hatorah*. You know how much money it costs to send a child to *cheder*? It's a load of money! A tremendous amount of money. And the girls also. People are spending a tremendous amount on tuition, to bring up their children *b'derech hatorah*. We're trying very hard, petitioning the government to give us vouchers, for the government to recognize us, to give us a rebates on income tax. The Reform Jews are fighting against that, they don't want that. Because once we have the opportunity to get rebates on our school expenses, then maybe more and more Jews will send their children to *yeshivos*. The reformers are afraid of that, they're fighting hard against that. But, no matter what happens, our nation is paying anyhow. Even though the IRS doesn't care how much the people spend; you can't deduct that. And so, the *Am Hashem* is spending tremendous sums on *schar limud*. And that's a great demonstration that the *Am Yisroel* is an *am kadosh*. No question about it!

The *bnei yisroel* are *michabev es hamitzvos*, they love mitzvos very much. If we look at the *Am Yisroel* the way we're supposed to be looking at them, then our attitude in general will be very different. We begin to appreciate that this is a nation that is keeping the *mitzvos Hashem*. And they're doing it in *pratei peratim*. The Torah says *לא תבשל גדי בחלב אמו* - "You can't cook milk and meat together." You can't *cook* them together. So if you have a piece of cold meat, cooked meat, cold salami and you smear some butter on it, so according to the Torah there's nothing wrong. Butter on salami or cream cheese on salami, why not? According to the Torah, nothing wrong! But would the *Am Yisroel* do that? *Chas v'shalom!* Not only do they not cook it together, but they don't even eat it together cold. From the oldest to the youngest, we are a nation who are dedicated to Hashem and His Torah.

I always tell you the same story; it's a great story to tell. There was a little boy who ate a *fleishigah* meal. And he wants some ice cream. Nobody is home; he's all alone. But he looks at the clock. He can't eat the ice cream yet. He's a little boy. An eight year old boy. And he's waiting for the clock to turn to the sixth hour and then he'll eat the ice cream. A little boy! That's what the *Am Yisroel* is bringing up! It's an *am kadosh!* You have to appreciate the *Am Yisroel*.

We're *mechuyev* to understand that the *Am Yisroel* are thirsty for *avodas Hashem*. All our lives we should live with the clear awareness that the *Am Yisroel* is a holy nation. Men and women, complete segregation. No dancing together like by the *umos ha'olam*. No games, no entertainment; when people come together it's for *avodas Hashem*. *Tzniyus*, loyalty to Hashem, *bein adam la'chaveiro*, *shmiras ha'lashon*, *chesed*, doing kindness to others. *Derech Eretz*. We're accustomed to all these things so we don't feel the greatness of our lives. But Bilam looked through the walls of the tents and saw how the *Am Yisroel* lived. He saw our perfection and he said that we're a nation that is *kodesh l'Hashem* forever and ever.

And it's not enough to view the *Am Yisroel* properly. We also have the function of praising the *Am Yisroel*, praising the frum Jews. It's a *chiyuv* on us. You have to learn how to say *sh'vachim* on the frum Jews. You have to learn that *chiyuv* because that's what Hashem expects of you. That's why He sent Bilam, to be a model for us. If the *goy* Bilaam said it in the name of Hashem, *in order that we should recognize the truth*, then our job is to praise the *Am Yisroel* always.

THE KGB PROPAGANDISTS

You know that up until recently, when the Communists were still in charge in Russia, so the Russians worked very hard to influence American public opinion. They had thousands of agents in the United States, people all over the country, who had one job only. They wandered around, they made their way into newspaper offices, into the offices of politicians, they put themselves everywhere, and whenever they had a chance they said something. You wouldn't know they were agents. You didn't know they were propagandists. But at every opportunity they spoke, they got in a few words; to praise communism, to speak against President Reagan, to knock the American government, to talk against nuclear arms. They were infiltrating society everywhere; private life, public life, the newspapers, business. Thousands and thousands of agents. And they had one purpose - to praise what the Kremlin wanted them praise. To work on behalf of the Communist government and praise everything that they did.

We have to realize that *we* have to do the same. That's *our* job in this world. But *l'havdil*, instead of being agents of disinformation, we are the *sh'luchim* of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, the agents of the truth. And that's what Rabeinu Yonah teaches us in his *Sha'arei Teshuva*. If you look in the *sha'ar shlishi, siman kuf ches*, you'll see that he says every person has to be a *sh'liach ne'eman* for his Creator. We're Hashem's agents and our job therefore is to spend our lives in talking in *shevach* of *avodas Hashem* and in

shevach of the *ovdei Hashem*. It's our job to praise the *ovdei Hashem*. That's our job!

And who are the *ovdei Hashem*? That's the *frummeh*! The mothers and fathers who are raising children *b'derech hatorah*. The boys and girls who at such a young age are already busy day and night with *avodas Hashem*; *davening*, learning, making *brachos*. It's the regular families, those are the *ovdei Hashem* that the *Sha'arei Teshuva* is talking about.

You have to be proud of the places of *avodas Hashem*, proud of the *yeshivos*, proud of the *kollelim*, proud of the *Beis Yaakovs* and the *batei kneisiyos*. Let's say you go to a certain *frum shtiebel*, and you see many *frum Jews*, *kein yirbu*, so when you come back home, make sure to speak in praise of what you saw to your family, to your friends. "I'm *nispa'el*," you'll say. "It's so wonderful there. Their behavior, their *avodas Hashem*, the *hispailus* in the *davening*, their devotion. It's such a wonderful place." Speak to the sky about it!

Wherever you go, *Rabeinu Yonah* says, rehearse beforehand, to utilize the opportunity. Let's say you're going to be at a *chasuna*. You have to go, it's a cousin. And you're going to spend time talking. You'll be sitting there at the table and everybody is wasting their words, talking about nothing. So you prepare beforehand some good propaganda, some good words to say about the *frummeh*. Think beforehand. Every time you sit down for a meal with your family is a remarkable opportunity. You can speak about the greatness of the *Am Yisroel* in so many different ways.

That's what the *Sha'arei Teshuva* says: כאשר יתיצב בתוך העם - וידבר עם חבריו - "When you're standing among the people, יתבונן - בינה וידקדק וישגיח בכל מוצא שפתי - to speak words of praise about His servants and those who fear Him." You can't just show up at the

chasuna or the Shabbos table and hope that the right things come to your mouth. You have to prepare beforehand.

And *Rabeinu Yonah* says that if you do this then יזכה בזה בהגיון לבו ומבטא שפתיו בלא יגיעה ופעל כפים זכות גדולה עד לשמים כי זה מעיקרי יצירת האדם - by doing this, by merely preparing your thoughts and using your words for the cause of Hashem, then without any effort and work of your hand, you will acquire merits without end, *because this is one of the most important purposes of the creation of man.*"

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"שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך"



Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:

What would you tell a Yeshiva bochur who's afraid to learn because his friends will make fun of him?

A:

I don't know what that means. In the *yeshiva*, everybody learns, no? If not, you're in the wrong place or you have the wrong friends. And outside the *yeshiva*, you're still a Yeshiva Man; what else should you do besides learn? The fact that they'll make fun of you, that's great! You know how great is the reward for doing a *mitzvah* and having people mock you?!

Let's say you're at home and you have a big sister, or a brother-in-law who ridicules you when you are busy learning. Ahh! You're a lucky fellow! So what should you do? Take out the biggest *gemara* you can find – even though all you want to say is a little piece of *chumash* – take out the biggest *gemara*, hide the *chumash* behind the *gemara*, and burn her eyes out with the big *gemara*. And say it in a loud voice, להכעיס. Demonstrate that you're proud. And you have reason to be proud. You're studying the words of Hashem. You're thinking Hashem's thoughts. Of course you should be proud. Because your sister is a fool or your brother-in-law is a fool, therefore you're going to yield?! Not at all! You're a success!

And the more you are ridiculed, the more you are opposed, the bigger is your reward. The more there are scoffers who belittle you, the greater will be your reward.

TAPE #504

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