



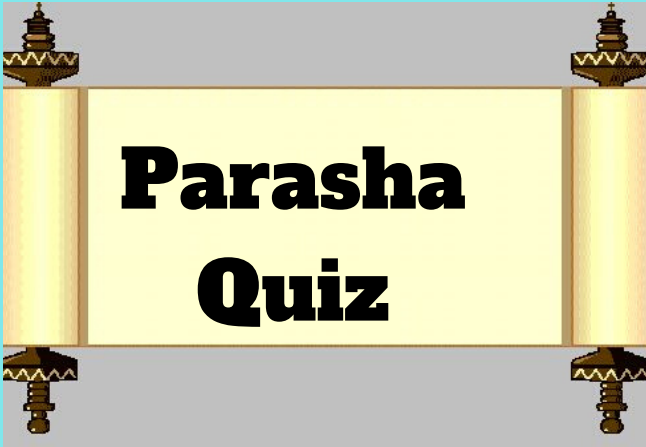
KMS Family Parasha

LEARN ABOUT THE PARASHA WITH THE KMS YOUTH DEPARTMENT

Compiled by Rabbi Aaron and Elisheva Levitt

Chukat-Balak - חֻקַּת/בְּלָק

7.4.20



Elementary:

- 1) What is a Parah Adumah and when is it used?
- 2) When the people complained of thirst what did Hashem tell Moshe to do? What did Moshe do? What was his punishment?
- 3) Who were Balak and Bilam and what did Balak hire Bilam to do?
- 4) What did Bilam's donkey say to him?
- 5) What famous line from Shacharit comes from the words of Bilam?

Middle/High School:

- 1) According to Rashi (19:22) why was the mitzvah of the Parah Adumah entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
- 2) According to Rashi (20:1) why is Miriam's death taught after the law of Parah Adumah?
- 3) According to Rashi (20:2) in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
- 4) According to Rashi (20:29) why did the entire congregation mourn Aharon's death?
- 5) According to Rashi (22:4) why did Moav consult specifically with Midyan regarding their strategy against the Jews?

What would you do?

Discussion starter for your Shabbat table..

If you had the opportunity to get a message across to a large group of people, what would your message be?

Did You Know?

TALMUDIC BURNINGS (Rabbi Ozer Alport - Aish.com)

Magen Avraham writes (Orach Chaim 580:9) that it is the custom of pious individuals to fast on the Erev Shabbos preceding Parshas Chukas in observance of a tragic event which occurred on that day. On this day in the year 1244, 24 cartloads of the Talmud and other holy books were publicly burned in France due to allegations of heretical and rebellious teachings contained therein.

Rabbi Hillel of Verona, a student of Rabbeinu Yonah, writes that his illustrious teacher noted that just 40 days prior to this episode, the Jews had publicly burned in that very spot a number of copies of the controversial philosophical writings of Maimonides. Rabbeinu Yonah saw in this tragedy Divine punishment being meted out for their actions, and he viewed it as a Heavenly message supporting the legitimacy of the teachings of Maimonides. The Jews of the time repented their actions and prayed for Divine forgiveness, thus ending the bitter controversy over the philosophical views of Maimonides.

Although fasts commemorating historical events are normally established on the calendar date on which they occurred - in this case 9 Tammuz - the rabbis of the time mystically inquired regarding the nature of the decree, and received the cryptic reply- "this is the decree of the Torah." This expression is taken from Onkelos' Aramaic translation of the second verse in Parshas Chukas (Numbers 19:2). They interpreted this message as alluding that the decree was connected to the day's proximity to the reading of Parshas Chukas, so they established the fast specifically on the Erev Shabbos preceding the reading of Parshas Chukas. Magen Avraham concludes by noting that in the terrible pogroms that occurred in the years Tach V'Tat (1648-9), two entire Jewish communities were brutally destroyed on the Erev Shabbos preceding Parshas Chukas.



Bilaam Versus Abraham - by Rabbi Shraga Simmons (Aish.com)

"Whoever has three particular traits is counted among the students of Abraham, and whoever has three other traits is among the students of Bilaam. He who has a good eye, humility and contentedness is a student of Abraham, while he who has an evil eye, arrogance and greed is a student of Bilaam." (Talmud, Pirkei Avot 5:22)

In this week's Parsha, the Jewish people pass through the territory of Moav. Balak, the King of Moav, wants to wage war against the Jews, but realizes that attacking them physically is of no avail. Jewish survival is governed by spiritual laws, and thus the only method to defeat them is with spiritual powers. So King Balak hires the greatest spiritual master of the non-Jewish world, a man named Bilaam, to wage metaphysical warfare against the Jewish people. Who was Bilaam? And what distinguishes him from a man like Abraham who used his powers for the betterment of mankind? The Talmud identifies three key traits, we'll examine them one by one.

Someone who has a "good eye" will sincerely celebrate the success of others, while someone with an "evil eye" begrudges the success of others. In Genesis 18:2, Abraham rushes to care for three nomadic strangers, as part of his constant striving to bring others closer to God. Contrast this with Bilaam, a hit-man hired to generate bad spiritual vibes against the Jews. Bilaam could have just as easily pursued victory by "blessing Moav," instead he chooses the low road of cursing the Jews. You can discover whether people have a good eye or an evil eye by seeing their reaction to another's good news. For example, if you drive up in your shiny new car, will others dance around with a chorus of "Mazel Tov?" Or will they sneer, simmer, and curtly blurt "That's nice"??...

The next trait that distinguishes Abraham from Bilaam is "humility versus arrogance." As we discussed in Parshat Bamidbar, the definition of "humility" is to know one's place in relation to others – particularly vis-a-vis God. Abraham personified humility because his mission in life was to teach that all power derives directly from God. Bilaam, meanwhile, went ahead and cursed the Jews, even though God clearly objected (Numbers 22:12). He saw God as a deity to be placated – or avoided altogether. This relates to our own observance. When we encounter a mitzvah – whether it be giving charity, cleaning for Passover, or attending synagogue – do we view it as an obligation to be rid of, or as an opportunity to embrace?

The third trait is "contentedness versus greed." When Abraham journeyed to the Land of Israel – a metaphor for his spiritual journey – he was willing to reject luxuries in exchange for a life of principles and values. He was even willing to be thrown into a fiery furnace, rather than forsake his moral integrity. Bilaam, on the other hand, was driven solely by the pursuit of riches.... He was a free agent, a mercenary, a hired gun with no conscience. The very name Bilaam is a contraction of the words "Bi-lo Am," which means "without a nation." His loyalty was dictated by whoever offered the most money.

Practically, it is often difficult to discern someone's true intentions. Are they motivated to help mankind? Or are they self-serving and destructive? How do we discern? The answer is found in our original source from Pirkei Avot, which distinguishes between the students of Abraham and the students of Bilaam. Why mention the "students?" Why not simply "distinguish between Abraham and Bilaam themselves? The answer is that the truest expression of a person's character is through the students they produce. That is why Judaism says that when choosing a rabbi, character is more important than scholarship. Maimonides, in his magnum opus "Mishneh Torah," expresses this by listing the laws of character behavior ("Hilchos Deyot") BEFORE the laws of Torah study. You can be talented and wise, but still end up like Bilaam – if you don't work to develop good character.

There is yet one more example of the difference between Abraham and Bilaam. The Torah reports that each of them "arose early in the morning and saddled his donkey." (Abraham in Genesis 22:3, and Bilaam in Numbers 22:21). In Hebrew, the word for "saddled" (yach'vosh) is closely related to the verb "to conquer." And the word for "donkey" (chamor) matches the word for "physicality" (chomer.) The interpretation is as follows: When Abraham "saddled his donkey," he conquered his physical drives in service of God. Thus when Abraham went to receive prophecy at Mount Moriah, he leaves the donkey behind (Genesis 22:5) – as if to say "I am free from the grip of desire." Contrast this with Bilaam, who arose early in order to scheme the downfall of others in his pursuit of wealth and glory. In Bilaam's case it is the donkey itself who gets the prophecy (Numbers 22:25) – proving itself on a higher level than Bilaam himself! No wonder God predicts Bilaam's demise with the words: "Their forefather Abraham has already preceded you." (Talmud, Sanhedrin 102b).