

ALLAH AKBAR/ GOD IS GREAT

By Ozer Bergman

“Balaam said to Balak, ‘I have come to you now. Can I say anything? Whatever word God puts in my mouth, that I will say’” (Numbers 22:38).

It cannot be put into writing how much Rebbe Nachman emphasized God’s greatness. He stated that it is beyond all measure. So many magnificent and spectacular things take place in the world—so much so, that people truly know nothing at all (*Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom* #3).

Balak, king of the cowardly Moabites, in order to destroy the Jews, sent a delegation to enlist the aid of Balaam, the well-known prophet of doom (Numbers 23:3, 5). What did we know? We were sitting in our goodly tents (ibid., 24:5) minding our own business, oblivious to the international negotiations and political machinations taking place in a royal palace far away. And right now, as we live our humdrum, private lives sitting in our contemporary goodly “tents,” more negotiations and machinations are taking place somewhere with the aim of changing our lives, not necessarily for the better.

In fact, many magnificent and spectacular things are taking place right within us, this very moment: our eyes working in tandem so we can read, our breathing and the locomotion of happy neurons as they leap gaily from one synapse to the next. Even those of us who have learned about these wonders are not conscious of them. Yet, unbeknownst to us, God coordinates them—and a whole lot of other stuff—so that we continue to live and the world continues to go ‘round.

The upside of being aware of our colossal ignorance is the opportunity to exercise our humility muscles. Instead of strutting around as know-it-alls, reacting angrily, smugly or despairingly to information and people who interrupt our plans, we can meet bad news and challenging situations with the awareness that as certain as we were that our thinking was right, the thinking of the Great Coordinator is more right, and will

result in a better outcome than the one we had envisioned and planned.

Our ignorance and its resulting humility can help us in another way. One of the big deterrents we face in striving to be bigger Jews is frustration at our lack of progress. After all our effort, the report card shows a failing grade. Despite resisting temptation a hundred times, the hundred and first temptation is our downfall and undoing. We don’t just feel like failures; we’re *sure* we’re failures.

That’s exactly when I remind myself, “You imbecile! Don’t you remember what Rebbe Nachman said? ‘I don’t know anything—at all.’”

Because in deed, Rebbe Nachman often said that he knew nothing at all. But his not-knowing wasn’t an ignorant not-knowing like mine. His not-knowing was born from knowing very, very much. Anybody familiar with life sees the Rebbe’s knowledge of the psyche. Anybody with a minimal familiarity with Torah can recognize the breadth, depth and subtlety of the Rebbe’s genius. Anybody who has been touched by the Divine feels it emanating from Rebbe Nachman’s works. So, when he didn’t know, he really didn’t-know.

Failure to appreciate the Divine wisdom in biology, physics, social dynamics, etc., won’t prevent their operation. But ignorance and misunderstanding of the dynamics of the *neshamah* (soul) and the spiritual world can have, God forbid, a detrimental or even devastating effect on one’s eternity. Thinking that God runs out of compassion after you’ve sinned (i.e., failed) for the billionth time, or repeated despicable, harmful and loathsome crimes (i.e., failed horribly) on innumerable occasions, prevents one from attempting *teshuvah* (return to God).

What Rebbe Nachman knew/didn’t-know most was that God’s mercy and kindness are unfathomable. As long as a person—*any* person—is alive, God waits for his *teshuvah*, his return to God and his own divinity. Now that you know, don’t keep Him waiting.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

—Based on *Sichot HaRan*
(*Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom*) #3

SIDEPATH

If only we were joyous, we would not taste the bitterness of suffering, and the full measure of life’s problems could not weigh us down. This is neither fanciful nor unrealistic. It’s simply that we know that sometimes we can do nothing about our situation except pray. Rather than wallow in sorrow, we can rise above it and make the best of it. Things will eventually work out. Thus, Rebbe Nachman teaches: Joy opens the heart (*The Aleph-Bet Book, Joy A:2*).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

22:5 He sent messengers to Balaam

Spiritual Power Is Expressed Through The Mouth

When the Moabites saw that the Israelites had been victorious against Sichon and Og in a miraculous fashion, they said, “Their leader grew up in Midian,” and went to ask the Midianites what Moses’ main characteristic was. The Midianites told them, “His power is in his mouth [i.e., the power of prayer]”—whereupon the Moabites set out to defeat the Jews with a man (Balaam) whose power also lay in his mouth [i.e., to pronounce curses] (Rashi on Numbers 22:4).

Moses is the personification of the *da’at* of holiness, whereas Balaam is the personification of the *da’at* of impurity. In either case, the revelation of *da’at* is through the mouth, as it is written, “Night following night expresses *da’at*” (Psalms 19:3). However, when a wicked person speaks and expels air from his mouth, he produces the poisonous air of immorality, and whoever hears his words and breathes in, takes this air into his body (LM I, 43).

22:30 Have I ever been accustomed to do this kind of thing to you?

Guarding The Covenant Protects The Traveler On The Road

[*HahaSKeiN hiSKaNti* (ההסן הסכנת), have I ever been accustomed] is similar to *SaKaNaH*

(סכנה, danger).] Our Sages derive from this term that Balaam had relations with his donkey (*Sanhedrin* 105b).

All roads are considered dangerous (*Yerushalmi, Berakhot* 4:4).

There is danger on the roads for one who does not protect himself from immorality. Travel requires guarding the covenant (LM I, 31:4).

23:9 It is a nation that dwells alone

Private Time With God

It is a nation that is on its own: it practices *hitbodedut*, a secluded, private prayer before God (LH I, p. 145a).

23:14 He took him to the field of lookouts

The Tzaddik Oversees Each Soul

Sedeih tzofim (field of lookouts) may also be translated as “field of seers.”

Jewish souls can be compared to grasses growing in a field of Torah. The Master of the Field—the tzaddik—oversees them, looking into each soul and seeing where rectification is needed.

When these souls serve God, the eyes of the Master of the Field shine and he can see further into them—examining each one’s speech to see where it is lacking perfection—and bring them to their ultimate goal (LM I, 65:2).

23:20 It is a blessing that I have taken, and such a blessing I cannot reverse

We Must Create Vessels In Which To Receive God’s Light

The word “blessing” appears twice in this verse. In the first instance, it is pronounced *BaReiKh*, and in the second instance, it is pronounced *BeiReiKh*. The first vowel in *BaReiKh* is a *kametz*, while the first vowel in *BeiReiKh* is a *tzeirei*.

Kametz literally means “closed” or “sealed,” and *tZEiRei* (צירי) alludes to *le-hitZtaYeiR* (להצטיר, to take shape).

God’s light descends to us in an undifferentiated and unformed—i.e., sealed—fashion. It is up to man to create a vessel with which to receive that light. If a person’s vessel is faulty, then although the light comes to him, he cannot shape it into

blessing (LM I, 36:6). Thus, “It is a blessing that I have taken”—it is up to each individual to perfect his vessels so that he may take God’s blessing.

23:21 He does not look at wrongdoing in Jacob

We Should Look Only At The Good In Others

God always looks for the good in the Jews and ignores what is not good. How much more should we refrain from looking negatively at others, or search out their shortcomings! (LM II, 17:3).

23:23 Even now it is said in Jacob and Israel: “What has God done?”

In The Future, Jews Will Be Closer To God Than The Angels

In the Future, when the angels will see the Jews inside the parameter that is closest to God, they will ask the Jews, “What has God done?” Because they withstood the test of this world, Jews will be closer to God than the angels, who were never tested. The Jews will then merit to the inside parameter, the Keter. Thus, the angels are called *seraphim* (burned ones), because they are consumed with their attainments without possessing any necessary vessels in which to contain their enthusiasm. But the Jews, by performing the *mitzvot*, create those vessels (LH I, p. 203a).

24:17 A star will step forth out of Jacob and a tribe will arise from Israel

Prayer Can Bring About Miracles

There is not a blade of grass below that does not have a star and an angel Above, which strike it and tell it, “Grow!” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 10:7).

Kam (will arise) may also be translated as “stand.” This refers to prayer, since the name for the most important Jewish prayer is the *Amidah* (Standing Prayer) (*Berakhot* 6b).

When a “tribe of Israel” stands up to pray, it thereby arouses a star, and the star steps forward and strikes things to make them grow, as the Midrash explains. All is dependent on prayer, because prayer alone reaches to God, Who creates and governs everything. Through prayer, it is possible to prevail upon God to act on our behalf—i.e., to perform miracles for us (LM I, 9:2).

KITZUR L”M WEEKLY

14 — To Draw Peace (continued)

7. A person must guard himself against all the things about which people generally pride themselves. There are three such things: wisdom, power and wealth, as it is written, “Let not the wise man take pride in his wisdom, the mighty man in his power, or the rich man in his wealth” (Jeremiah 9:22). In other words, it is necessary to break the pride that a person takes in all of these things, and be humble and lowly about them all.

8. To the degree that one breaks his own pride, so does he merit Torah. Then, through the Torah, he merits to draw close to God those who are distant, and in turn, God’s honor is magnified and elevated and he raises honor up to its root. In this way, this person merits holy awe, which leads him to attain domestic peace or “peace in his bones” (as in Psalms 38:4). Domestic peace enables him to pray, and he thereby merits overall peace, which is peace in all the worlds.



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