

“[God] does not look at the sins of Jacob ...” (Numbers 23:21) .

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Dvar Torah for Parshat Balak

Some of us might find this verse somewhat troubling. Does it mean that Hashem (God) doesn't judge us for what we do? Does it mean that He doesn't see what we do? Does it mean that it's ... OK to do those things the yetzer hara (evil urge) whispers in my ear?

No, no and no. Rosh HaShanah is called Yom HaDin (Judgement Day); "He Who forms the eye, will He not see?" (Psalms 94:9); and our verse does call them "sins" so they are still forbidden. So, what does the verse mean?

Rebbe Nachman teaches us that Hashem's way is to focus on the good that Jews do. If there are things that are not good about them, He turns a blind eye to those things. "All the more so, a person is forbidden to look at another in a negative light, to seek and find specifically what is wrong about [the other's] worship. On the contrary. One is obligated to focus only on the positive."

This is important throughout the year, but is especially

important now, as we approach the period of Bein HaMitzarim (literally, between the straits, aka, The Three Weeks). This is the period of the year in which we mourn our exile, which began with the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash (Temple). The climax of The Three Weeks is the anniversary of the Temple's destruction, 9 Av. (This year, 5771/2011, The Three Weeks begin Tuesday, 17 Tammuz [19 July] and conclude at the end of Tuesday afternoon, 9 Av [9 August]). The Talmud tells us that the reason for the destruction of the Temple—and our prolonged exile—is sinat chinam (baseless hatred).

It seems like a rather formidable task: rid ourselves of the tendency to look at people unfavorably. How do we do it? The Rebbe gives one suggestion in the first part of the lesson: Celebrate Shabbat! Enjoy it! Dress up! Make Kiddush on a wine you enjoy. Eat nicer meals than you do during the week. I'm sure you have no objection to this suggestion. But you're probably a little curious: what's the connection?

Hashgachah (Divine providence). Rebbe Nachman writes that when a person behaves right, God takes care of him/her with a personalized, tailor-made hashgachah. What would happen, he asks, if a person misbehaved? If he were to be treated with tailor-made hashgachah then, he would have a difficult, unpleasant existence. What does Hashem do to allow us to enjoy some good in life? He lets our life run naturally. That way, in the natural order of things and in the natural course of events, good things can happen to us.

Shabbat is holiness itself. All holiness demands appropriate celebration and joy. When we observe Shabbat by refraining from the 39 types of melakhah (loosely defined as "work") and their offshoots, we remove the distractions that keep us from appreciating Hashem's presence in life. The food, drink and other pleasures that we enjoy are meant to enhance our true joy, which is the recognition and feeling of God's care and concern for us—His hashgachah.

When we celebrate Shabbat, our appreciation for Hashem's "not looking at the sins of Jacob," we internalize to some degree the same perspective, so that we, too, do "look at the sins of Jacob," of our fellow Jews. For just as you understand God's involvement, care and concern in your own life, you understand His involvement, care and concern in the other person's life. You begin to understand that just as out of His love for you He overlooks your errors, mistakes and defiance—your sins—He also overlooks the errors, mistakes and defiance—the sins—of your fellow Jews. All the more so should you!

May we merit to see the good in others. Amen!

Based on Likutey Moharan II, Lesson #17

agutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

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