Points to Ponder

Balak - Master

(A short point from the **Chasam Sofer** who points out that Parshas Balak is the only Parsha whose whole entirety we know from Hashem. No member of Am Yisrael saw or could report on the interactions between Balak and Bilaam or between Bilaam and Hashem. The whole Parsha contains within it, proof of the divine origination of the Torah.)

**Parshas Balak** – The Gemara notes that Moshe wrote his sefer and Parshas Bilaam. Why is Parshas Bilaam singled out as distinct from the rest of the Torah? **Rav Schachter**  often quoted the Brisker Rav who notes that in regard to the prophesy of Moshe among Jews he was matchless. However, as far as Bilaam was concerned, he was on the level of Moshe. One cannot learn Halachos from other Neviim but one might learn that he can learn Halachos from Bilaam. That’s why the Torah tells us that when Bilaam delivered his Nevuah it did not have the status of Torah. Once Hashem repeated it to Moshe then it took on the status of Torah and we were able to derive Halachos from it.

**Balak (22:2)** – The commentaries are bothered as to why a Parsha in the Torah is named for a Rasha like Balak. **The Birkas Avraham** explains that since he offered 42 Korbanos to Hashem and fathered Rus so he merited the Parsha’s name. Others explain that it seems odd that the Avos do not get the name for their Parshiyos so why should Balak? Moreover, why shouldn’t the Parsha be called “Bilaam” if, after all, he is the main character? **Rav Dr. Benny Lau** explains that as far as Balak and Bilaam are concerned, only one is successful. Only Balak achieves his mission in the Parsha. Bilaam winds up failing and instead of serving as a leader to the nations, he becomes a mere vessel to be used (and abused) by them.

**וַיִּשְׁלַ֨ח מַלְאָכִ֜ים אֶל־בִּלְעָ֣ם בֶּן־בְּע֗וֹר  He sent angels to Bilaam (22:5)** – What type of person was Bilaam? Was he a Novi or a Rasha? How could he have been both? Moreover, the mishna in Pirkei Avos (5:19) describes the contrast between the talmidim of Avrohom Avinu and the talmidim of Bilam ha'rasha. Why doesn't the mishnah draw a contrast between Avrohom Avinu and Bilam himself**? Rav Schachter** would remind us often that some of the commentaries point out that when one would look at Bilam you could be fooled to believe that he himself is the same type of person as Avrohom Avinu. Because he was a novi he dressed the part, acted the part, and spoke the part. You could only tell the difference between the two when you look at their talmidim. The mishna (Pirkei Avos 4:20) warns us, *"al tistakel b'kankan eleh b'mah sh'yesh bo* - one should not judge a person merely based on externalities." The same is true for picking a Rebbe to follow. Don’t look at his dress. Check out those who learn from him. When one is deciding whom to follow as his rebbe, in fulfillment of the instructions in the mishna (Pirkei Avos 1:6), "*asei l'cho rav",* one must judge whether the rabbi in question is the right person in his inner core based on the rabbi's talmidim.

**Bilaam arose in the morning and he told the officers of Balak to return home since Hashem has refused him the opportunity to go with them (22:13) – Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh** notes that this shows us the further evil of Bilaam that he woke them up early in order for them to leave before breakfast so that he would not have to pay for the meal. **Rav Shraga Grossbard**  asks why we need to further see the evil of Bilaam. What was to be gained? **Rav Shraga Grossbard** answers that we see here that one considered to be a Rasha in relation to his connection Bein Adam Lamakom will also be considered a Rasha in his relationship Bein Adam L’Chaveiro. Values cannot exist fully without heavenly guidance.

**Don’t curse the nation for they are blessed (22:13) - Rashi** comments that Bilaam sought to bless the nation when he saw that Hashem wasn’t going to allow him to curse it. Hashem told him that his blessing was also not welcome – like the bee about whom we declare – not your honey nor your stinger. Why would Bilaam offer to bless the people? **Rav Moshe Wolfson**  suggests that Bilaam and Lavan are the same person (See Targum Yonasan). Rivka too, was an Akarah in order to prevent people saying that Lavan’s beracha brought her fertility. Bilaam figured that if he would bless the people, Hashem would hold off fulfilling the blessing in order to prevent its association with a Rasha like him. So in essence, even the blessing offer was a potential curse

**If Balak will give me a full house filled with gold and silver I still cannot violate the word of Hashem (22:18) – Rav Chaim Shmuellevitz**  points out that Bilaam represents the complex personality of good and evil mixed together. The fact is that most of us are a combination of good traits and talents with the desire to use them in a meaningful way and occasional desires and motivations that are less positive. Our job on this earth is to utilize our talents to observe the word of Hashem and at the same time to diminish the desire (or at least overcome it) to take our talents and use them for negative purposes.

**אם לקרא לך באו האנשים קום לך אתם If the people came to call you then go but know that what I shall place in your mouth, that is what you shall say (22:20) – Rashi** says that Hashem was telling him that he would need to speak the word of Hashem exclusively even against his will. Still, we see his desire to proceed. What was he thinking? How did he think he would change Hashem’s mind? **Rav Bernard Weinberger**  points out that in each of the instances of prophesy, Bilaam recognizes 2 different aspects of the nation. At times he refers to them as Yisrael, the nation of Hashem who, when facing the other nations stands alone as part of Hashem’s army and also as Yaakov – which speaks to the aspect of Yaakov as the Jew among the nations. When the Jew is spread out among the nations, he is ripe for attack – like with Yaakov when living with Lavan. Bilaam thought that if he hinted to this aspect, he would be able to highlight the Jewish weakness. Here is where he failed. Hashem cares for the Jewish nation whether they are Yisrael as a nation living alone or even when they are Yaakov. Hashem turned the curse to a Beracha because he loves us.

**If the people are coming for your benefit then go with them (22:20)** - First Hashem tells Bilaam that he cannot go with Balak, now Hashem changes his mind. Rashi notes the change of position and comments that the issue seems to be one of whether Bilaam will make profit. Is Hashem really worried about Bilaam’s livelihood? **Rav Schwab**  explains that the difference was one of Lishma. When people are willing to do something altruistically, it is potent, but when the motivation is one of the almighty dollar, it loses its potency. This is what Hashem was telling Bilaam -- if you are going for your hatred, then you cannot go. However, once you are going for Kavod and money -- your words are meaningless.

**אִם־לִקְרֹ֤א לְךָ֙ בָּ֣אוּ הָֽאֲנָשִׁ֔ים ק֖וּם לֵ֣ךְ אִתָּ֑ם If the men came to call you (22:20)** - The Talmud (Makkos 10b) notes that it was not that Hashem changed his mind here. Rather, Hashem directs people in the direction that they wish to go. Why? **Rav Wolbe** explains that nothing stands in the way of his will. The utensils are always apparent. **Rav Boruch Mordechai Ezrachi** is amazed that a donkey and a malach speaking to him does not influence Bilaam of his errors.

**He dressed his donkey () - Rashi** explains that Bilaam’s getting up earlier was pre-empted by Avraham who did the same thing at the time of the Akaida. What is the connection? **Rav Moshe Feinstein**  explained that this Rasha tried to claim that he was better than the Jews who do not serve Hashem in the same way that they take care of their own needs. The answer preceded the question. Hashem told Bilaam that Avraham preceded him -- Avraham was ready to be embarrassed personally in order to promote Kavod Shomayim.

**Bilaam told the Donkey since you played with me… (22:29**) – How could it be that Bilaam experienced the miracle of a talking donkey and remained unmoved by it and spoke to it as if it were a regular occurrence? **Rav Chaim Kanievski**  explained that Bilaam wanted to woo the princes of Balak into thinking that this was indeed, a regular occurrence and that he was sought after by the world over – including the animals. Alas when he lost the argument to the donkey he demonstrated the exact opposite…

**וַיִּפְתַּ֥ח יְהֹוָ֖ה אֶת־פִּ֣י הָֽאָת֑וֹן  Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey (22:28)** – Why did Hashem open the mouth of the donkey (having created it Bein HaShmashos on the Friday of creation – why was it so important)? **Rav Gifter**  explained that the Torah is teaching us that people get so personally self absorbed that they distance themselves from Hashem. They think that they will ride through life on the material self-absorption (Chomer) throughout life. Hence Hashem created a mouth to the Chamor (donkey) right before Shabbos in order to reveal to a person just where reliance on chomer(materialism) really brings a person – not to Olam Haba – for it is not real but rather nowhere. So, prior to Shabbos which is a taste of Olam Haba, the Chamor (donkey) opens its mouth and speaks the truth.

**וַיִּפְתַּ֥ח ה אֶת־פִּ֣י הָֽאָת֑וֹן Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey (22:28)** – On other occasions we have noted the commentaries that are amazed by Bilaam’s obstinance in not noticing that he was speaking to a donkey. Those commentaries castigated Bilaam’s lack of self awareness. **Rav Gifter**  looks at the issue differently. He too, notes the contradiction between the miraculous (the opening of the donkey’s mouth) and the expected. But even someone with the lofty spiritual levels like Bilaam allows himself to allow contradictions to exist in the same person at the same time. If it is true for him it is certainly true for us and makes us responsible not to allow ourselves to be content with such contradictions.

**ויפתח ה' את פי האתון Hashem opened the mouth of the Donkey (22:28) – Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz**  points out that the mouth of the donkey was one of those things created in the final moments before Shabbos of creation. Why was it so important to Hashem that he needed to create this mouth for a private conversation between Bilaam and the donkey? Rav Chaim answers that Hashem created the mouth of the donkey to demonstrate how far one can go in order to keep someone else from doing an Avaira. Still, Bilaam was such a Rasha, he could not see the change in nature and take a lesson from it that could have prevented him from Avaira.

**And Hashem opened the mouth of the Donkey (22:28)-** What was the point of the opening of the donkey’s mouth? What effect did it have**? Rav Yaakov Abuchatzeira**  suggested that Bilaam’s sorcery power came from the donkey but he thought that the power of Kedusha of Moshe also came from a foreign source. Here is where the donkey corrected him – you used ulterior means to achieve your sorcery, she told him. Moshe did not. Bilaam cannot get the message and sees it as a taunt and accuses the donkey of making a joke out of him.

**And Hashem opened the donkey’s mouth (22:28**) – The Mishna includes that donkey’s mouth among those things that were created Erev Shabbos. (The **Ibn Ezra** entertains the debate as to whether the donkey actually spoke.) Why would Hashem create a mouth for a donkey to speak to Bilaam and why would he report the story to us? What difference does it make? **Rav Yonasan Sacks**  offered a thought based on the comments of the **Haggadas Chachmei Yirushalayim** who explain the reason why the goyim praise Hashem Kee Gavar **Aleinu** Chasdo – is that there are things that we do not know – but they do – that we are saved from. The awareness of Hashgachas Hashem on the occasions that we merit to see it is reason to know that it is there even when we don’t.

**וַיְגַ֣ל ה֘ אֶת־עֵינֵ֣י בִלְעָם֒ Hashem opened Bilaam’s eyes (22:31)** - The Torah uses the term ויגל ה’ את עיני בלעם to describe how Bilam was able to see the malach standing in front of the donkey. What does “Hashem opened his eyes” mean? **Rav Menachem Penner**  suggests that we find this idea when Hagar is thrown out of the house by Sarah and is looking for water. The Torah says ויפקח אלקים את עיניה ותרא באר מים. We also find it regarding Elisha. When Elisha was with his na’ar, the na’ar was concerned that they were surrounded by the enemy and Elisha reassured him that they were protected. Elisha then davened that the na’ar should see the protection and the pasuk says ויפקח ה’ את עיני הנער וירא והנה ההר מלא סוסים ורכב אש סביבת אלישע. In both of these situations, their eyes were able to see something that was already there. Here too, the malach was already there, but Bilam didn’t see it. It wasn’t until Hashem opened his eyes that he was able to see the malach who is always there to protect the Jewish people.

**חָטָ֔אתִי כִּ֚י לֹ֣א יָדַ֔עְתִּי כִּ֥י אַתָּ֛ה נִצָּ֥ב לִקְרָאתִ֖י בַּדָּ֑רֶךְ I sinned because I didn’t know you were standing in front of me (22:34)** - If he didn’t see the Malach so in what way did he sin? The Shelah explains that ignorance is not always an excuse. When one should have known, s/he cannot declare ignorance. **Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski**  added that when there are matters that no special knowledge is required, not using common knowledge thought is punishable. The concept of Ol Malchus Shomayim means that one does not have the liberty to act without thinking and doing so is reckless and careless for which one is liable.

**חָטָ֔אתִי I have sinned (22:34)** - Why did Bilaam say that he sinned when the Malach rebuked him if he did not know that the Malach was standing there? How could one sin if one did not see the Malach offering a counterpoint? **Rav Chaim Sanzer**  explained that “not knowing” is a sin in of itself. Everyone makes mistakes but when it negatively impacts others, claiming “I didn’t know” is not an excuse.

**חָטָ֔אתִי I have sinned (22:34)** - In truth, what was Bilaam’s sin? The **Malbim** explains that Bilaam didn’t know what was happening in his life and that is a sin. One needs to think about what happens around him or her and learn from the experience. **Rav Yissochar Frand** added that Bilaam didn’t consider Hashem’s had in everything. This was a mistake. **Rav Aharon Leib Steinman** added that one can see how far Bilaam went NOT to see and understand the hand of Hashem.

**And it was in the morning that Balak took Bilaam and brought him to the Heights of Baal and from there he saw the edge of the nation (22:41**) – Why did Balak show Bilaam the nation? Why not have Bilaam curse him from home? The Ramban explains that a person is deeply affected by what he sees. Balak knew that the success the curse would have, would depend on what Bilaam sees. **Rav Wolbe**  adds that we find a similar sentiment when Moshe went atop the mountain to daven for the Jews in their war with Amalek. There too, Ramban points out the power of the Tefillah that comes when someone sees something. Rav Wolbe adds that even when we cannot see directly, we have the ability to picture something in our mind’s eye which enhances our experience and emunah in the event.

**They are a nation that lives alone (23:9) – Rav Schachter**  would often remind us that Bilaam realized that we live and die differently and are buried differently. He would often explain that it is not a curse to be different but rather an opportunity. It is forbidden for us to bury our dead with the dead of the non-Jews. Nechemiah identifies himself to the king as the place of Kivrei Avosai. People naturally are attached to the place where their forefathers are buried.

They are a nation (Am) that dwells by itself and is not considered by other nations (Goyim) (23:9) – **Rav Elchanan Wasserman HyD** noted that an Am is a nation with a common set of spiritual values. A Goy, is a nation that derives it connection through the fact that the land it is based upon, is its common heritage. Bnei Yisrael are unique because we continue to survive as a nation not only when we are on our land. Our land provides us with the opportunity to reach our real purpose – to fulfill the will of Hashem. However, it is not the land alone that makes us thrive.

**תָּמֹ֤ת נַפְשִׁי֙ מ֣וֹת יְשָׁרִ֔ים May my soul die the death of the righteous (23:10)** – The **Chofetz Chaim** notes that Bilaam wanted to die the death of the Jew because the life of the Jews isn’t a hedge of roses. It is not a big deal to die the death of a Jew as much as it is to live the life of Jews.

**At this point it should be said to Jacob and Yisrael what has Hashem wrought (23:23) – Rav Ovadiah Yosef** explained this possuk and Nevuah by pointing out that Bilaam was perplexed as to what the secret of the success of this nation was so that he could exploit it. However, he could not discover it. This was no surprise to Rav Ovadiah who chose to explain the possuk with a story – about the education minister Lillenthal who was the education minister under Czar Nicholas. He was unsuccessful at getting the Jews to enter the secular gymnasiums instead of attending the Chadarim. He discovered that the people were not willing to break the ruling of the Rabbis including **Rav Itzele of Volozhin** and Rav Shalom of Lubavitch. The minister summoned them to the palace and in the midst of ranting at them yelled: “I do not understand, I am offering your people EVERYTHING – a future, a way to get ahead, a way to find the culture. Why do they not want this? If they do not want this, what is the point of being a Jew?” Immediately he noticed Rav Itzele smiling and challenged him on it. Rav Itzele answered: “That is exactly what YOUR Navi says – “at the point they will say to Yaakov and Yisrael what did Hashem do in making a Jew? “ He added that the next possuk notes that when that happens, the world better watch out because as a nation the nation can rise like a lion that does not rest until they get their prey and destroy the enemy that is out to question their right to exist.

**הֶן־עָם֙ כְּלָבִ֣יא יָק֔וּם וְכַֽאֲרִ֖י יִתְנַשָּׂ֑א Behold, a people that rises like a lioness and raises itself like a lion. (Bamidbar 23:24) – Rashi** notes that the nations rises like a lion in order to daven and do Mitzvos. **Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein**  suggests that the Torah uses this allegory to depict the concentration that a lion has when he sets eyes on his prey. A lion is super focused so that he can properly attack and capture his victim. **Rav Shalom Rosner**  added that when we “pray” and perform mitzvot, we need to be focused. Too often we fall victim to routine. Moreover, with all of the technological devices, our meetings and conversations with others are often interrupted by phone calls and messages. If one is not multitasking, he or she feels as if they are “wasting” time. Our generation suffers from multitasking overload. We are often involved in so many activities that we aren’t focusing on any of them. The Torah is teaching us an important lesson. Don’t go somewhere physically but leave your head or heart out of it. It is our job to maximize our experience at all times, to keep our head in the game and get the most out of every experience. To be sure to give our spouse, children and friends our undivided attention when we are speaking with, or more importantly, listening to them. We have to first focus – like a lion. Then we need to internalize the moment and take it with us so that we can truly elevate ourselves.

**הֶן־עָם֙ כְּלָבִ֣יא יָק֔וּם וְכַֽאֲרִ֖י יִתְנַשָּׂ֑א They are a nation that rises like a lion (23:24) – Rashi** explains that this refers to the fact that the nations rises quickly in order to grab the Mitzvos of Tallis, reciting Shema and wearing Tefillin. The **Maharal** explains that the uniqueness of these Mitzvos is their frequency. Despite their commonplace, the person rises like a lion in order to grab the chance to perform them and does not become complacent in the ability to achieve. **Rav Yerucham Levovitz**  looked at it differently: Despite the fact that these Mitzvos are passed down generation to generation with regularity, a newcomer observing the observance like Bilaam was taken by the fierce desire of the first generation and blessed the future ones with that same tenacity and excitement in their observance of the same Mitzva.

**וַיָּ֥שֶׁת אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּ֖ר פָּנָֽיו And he turned his face toward the desert (24:1) - Rashi** explains that Bilaam planned on highlighting all of Bnei Yisrael’s transgressions here in order to get Hashem angry at us. Hence Bilaam turned to the desert where the Cheit HaEigel would be remembered. **Rav Wolbe**  noted that proper teshuva for a sin should not include deep analysis of the sin because the more one thinks about it the more susceptible s/he becomes to repeating it.

**And he turned his face toward the desert (24:1) – Rashi quotes Onkelos** who notes that by turning to the desert Bilaam was hoping to get Hashem to remember the sins of Bnei Yisrael in the desert. **Rav Wolbe**  explains that this is the style that comes out of the Sotah as well whose Korban is Mazkeret Avon – it reminds us of sin. Remembering sin can be dangerous as a result. Similarly remembering sin can also make one remember the enjoyment when it was committed which, in turn , could limit the power of the Teshuva from it. Proper Teshuva does not require a detailed analysis of the Avaira experience.

**תָּמֹ֤ת נַפְשִׁי֙ מ֣וֹת יְשָׁרִ֔ים וּתְהִ֥י אַֽחֲרִיתִ֖י כָּמֹֽהוּ Let my death be the death of the Yesharim (23:10)** - Bilaam seeks the death of a Jew since the Jewish life to him is not a hedge of roses. However, the **Chofetz Chaim** notes that there is no ‘kuntz’ to die like a Jew -- the bigger challenge is to live like one.

**ויעל פר ואיל במזבח He brought a bull and a Ram on the Mizbeiach (23:14)** – The Gemara (Sotah 47a) uses this text to teach us the principle of doing things even without the actions being L’Shmaah because from doing them Shelo L’shma we will come to doing them L’Shma. The proof is the Korbanos of Balak that ultimately became the basis of Mitzvos observed by his future great, great granddaughter Rus. How can one assume that Balak’s actions were a pretext for the future? After all, he remained an idol worshipper – what kind of proof comes from him to here? **Rav Elyashiv**  explains that when one does a Mitzva s/he does not merit to do it L’Shma as a result. Rather, the observance of the Mitzva itself is a Maala. Repeated Maalos often lead us to climb and strive to be able to do actions again and again in better and better ways. But it does not guarantee that this will happen – just that it is a possibility. But one who does not do Mitzvos until s/he does them L’Shma, will not get ANY credit in between and possibly will give up before fully trying.

**He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov and saw no Amal in Yisrael (23:21) - Rashi** explains that Amal refers to sin because it is laborious in Hashem’s eyes (it usually refers to labor**). Rav Wolbe**  explains that people relate to sin and Mitzva differently. When it comes to Mitzva performance we tend to be somewhat lethargic but we seem to always have energy for sin. Hashem sees it in the opposite. Deep down we know that every Mitzvah is worth more than diamonds. The difficulty we have when it comes to learning, davening or any other Mitzva is a result of ignoring that which we know to be true.

**הֶן־עָם֙ כְּלָבִ֣יא יָק֔וּם וְכַֽאֲרִ֖י יִתְנַשָּׂ֑א They are a nation that rises like a lion (23:24) – Rashi** explains that this refers to the fact that as Jews we do not sleep late but rather rise like a lion to grab onto the Mitzvos of Tzitzis and Tefillin. **Rav Shaul Yisrael**  noted that other nations in the world show their strength in their military superiority. We are different. We show our strength in the fact that everything we do, including our desires and thoughts, are dedicated to Hashem.

**נֹפֵ֖ל וּגְל֥וּי עֵינָֽיִם He falls and has an open eye (24:4)** - Why does Bilaam fall and only then have an open eye**? Rav Elimelech Biderman quoted the Shelah HaKadosh** who notes that sometimes it takes us to fall before we open our eyes and recognize that the reason we are falling is because of our lack of awareness of Hashem and then we open our eyes. Rav Biderman notes how foolish we often are, that we wait until things go bad before we recognize Hashem and then it is even more foolish that once the difficulty passes, we forget who helped us out.

**How good are your tents Yaakov (24:5) – Rashi** (citing Bava Basra 60a)explains that he saw that the Jewish tents were not facing one another. Yet in Sanhedrin (102b) the Gemara notes that Bilaam intended to curse the people not to have Shuls and Battei Medrash. How can we explain the apparent contradiction? **Rav Moshe Feinstein**  suggested that by praising the Jewish home, he thought he would get the people to remain there and not establish Battei Medrash and Shuls. This would ultimately prove to be a curse in that a nation cannot survive without Battei Medrash and Shuls influencing the masses to study and live Torah life.

**How wondrous are your tents Yaakov (24:5) – Targum Yonasan** explains that Bilaam was praising the tents of Yeshivos that Yaakov Aveinu learned in. The question needs to be asked: Why praise Yaakov’s tents? What tents of Yaakov was he talking about? Wasn’t Yaakov buried already? **Rav Moshe Shmuel**

**Shapiro**  explains that Bilaam was impressed by the consistency of the Battei Knessios and Battei Midrashos of the day that were clearly able to mimic those of Yaakov based on consistency and continuity of approach. THAT is the key to our survival.

**כָּרַ֨ע שָׁכַ֧ב כַּֽאֲרִ֛י וּכְלָבִ֖יא מִ֣י יְקִימֶ֑נּוּ  They are like a nation that arises like a lioness and raises itself like a lion not lying down until it consumes its prey (24:9) - Rav Ozer Glickman**  noted the description of rising and going to rest and the simile to lions as relevant to our people who need to approach Torah and Mitzvos with a valor as spirituality needs to be earned. Hence the Shulchan Aruch begins with the requirement to arise like a lion to serve Hashem -- Torah elevates life and does not provide an escape from it.

**הן עם כלביא יקום וכארי יתנשא When it kneels down and rests like a lion and like a leopard who will wake it up (24:9)** – Chazal (Berachos 12b) tell us that they were going to put Parshas Bilaam into Kriyas Shema but were concerned about Tircha D’Tzibura so they did not. Why would they have thought to include Bilaam’s curse attempt that went bad? **Rav Dr. Reuven Bulka**  noted that when developing a person’s sense of self, reinforcement is helpful. While Shema is the declaration of a person’s responsibilities, it is also a means of solidifying one’s faith. Knowing the positive feelings of the outsider who disagrees with you but still holds of you…that is inspiring. If not for Tircha D’Tzibbura it would be a GREAT way to start and end the day.

**אמרתי כבד אכבדך והנה מנעך ה' מכבוד I said I would honor you but Hashem has denied honor from you (24:11)- Rav Gershon Edelstein** cautioned that the desire for honor is indeed, a roadblock for a

person who is trying to acquire the Torah. He noted that real Talmidei Chachamim do not think about what their honor is in the eyes of their public. He spoke of his father who learned by Rav Boruch Ber in Kamenetz and never knew what the Rosh Yeshiva thought of him. As he told it: “Once a man who also used to be in the Yeshivah approached my father, long after he left the Yeshivah, and told him that he was known as one of the top boys in the Yeshivah. My father asked him, “Why did you have to tell me this?” He did not want to know this, as it only gave him a Nisayon of haughtiness! This was the great level of my father! He did not even want to know that he was known as a top boy in the Yeshivah long after he had learned there!” Torah success does not come from the promise of honor – it comes from the diligence to do that which is correct and complete by and for the individual.

**והנה מנעך ה' מכבוד I said I would honor you but Hashem has denied honor from you (24:11**) – The Mishna in Avos compares the students of Avraham to the students of Bilaam. Why doesn’t it compare Avraham and Bilaam directly? **Rav Schachter**  would often remind us that sometimes it is hard to see the differences in the people themselves as to whether they are proper or Reshaim. However, when one looks at the students, it becomes apparent as to who the teachers are. Rav Schachter would add that the proof is either in the fact that the students mimic the teacher who, behind the façade of Tzidkus reveal their real selves – or—that the teacher is not a good teacher and cannot inspire the students to a proper way of living, either because he, the teacher is not knowledgeable or cannot apply the Torah’s teaching to a practical conclusion. Bilaam was recognized for his spirituality but his ability to inspire spirit in the masses was null.

**לך איעצך Go and I will advise you (24:14) – Rashi** notes that the intent of Bilaam here is to advise Balak to use the weapon of Zima against the Jewish males as was done with Baal Peor in the next series of possukim. **Rav Elchanan Samet**  points out that the problem with this explanation is that the word “advice” seems to be forced based on the post-facto knowledge that Bilaam advised the solution of the daughters of Moav. It does not make sense in the context of the Possuk nor in the style of prophesy offered here in general. Thus, Rav Samet suggests a different translation for the word Eitza based on **Ramban** who refers to the advice as coming from Hashem which means that the intent of the word is some prophetic announcement – not human advice.

**אֶרְאֶ֨נּוּ֙ וְלֹ֣א עַתָּ֔ה אֲשׁוּרֶ֖נּוּ וְלֹ֣א קָר֑וֹב I will see him but not now (24:17)** - The Gemara notes that Moshe wrote the 5 Chumashim and Parshas Bilaam. There are many questions as to what Parshas Bilaam refers to. Some suggest it was a lost work. **Rav Schachter**  noted that he thought it was a reference to Nevuas Bilaam and was not a difficulty. After all, Moshe wrote the Ikkarei Emunah and included therein should be a belief in Moshiach. The belief in Moshiach is identified in this Possuk. Hence, the Gemara wants us to know that Moshe Rabbeinu wrote this section of the Torah and was including Bias HaMoshiach in it.

**Oy Mi yichyeh MeeSumo El (24:23) – Rav Schachter**  noted that the Targum uses the translation of “Veh” for the word Oy – suggesting perhaps that this is the source for the term Oy Veh. He explained in the name of the **Rambam** that this is the great challenge of wars involving nations that turn humans into Gods. The crusades and other wars were much more heinous because they were launched in the name of men turned into Gods. The **Netziv** adds that whenever a battle is launched over religious ideals then everyone who does not adopt the religion of the aggressor is liable to lose his or her life. These battles are much worse.

**Bilaam got up and went home Balak too (24:25) - Rav Gifter**  points out that even after this entire experience, nothing changed. Both Bilaam and Balak went back to where they came from -- unchanged.

**And, behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought to his brothers a Midianite woman in the sight of Moshe, and in the sight of all the congregation of the people of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the Tent of Meeting. (Bemidbar 25:1-6)** – The **midrash** speaks poorly of Moshe’s crying here. In fact it is because of this crying and inaction that the Midrash says no one knows where he is buried. Why is this seen as a punishment and for what is Moshe being punished? **Rav Aharon Lichtenstein**  suggests that when one is Nitzatzeil it means that he does not seize the opportunity in front of him to sanctify Hashem’s name. We need to strive in our service of God to maximize those opportunities that are presented to us, and not to be lazy and let them pass us by. We need to strive for the best in all areas of the service of God, whether in the study of Torah, in prayer or in our interpersonal relations. And we must recognize that failing to do so is not merely a lack of righteousness, but rather is a shortcoming in our service of God, one that we need to correct. That which is possible for us to fulfill is binding upon us.

**וַיָּ֣חֶל הָעָ֔ם לִזְנ֖וֹת אֶל־בְּנ֥וֹת מוֹאָֽב And the nation engaged in Zenus with the daughters of Moav (25:1) -Rashi,** (based onSanhedrin 106a), describes how the Bnos Moav were able to seduce the men of Klal Yisrael into znus. They would have an older woman outside of the shop and a younger women inside, who was selling the product for cheaper. The Gemara describes a whole elaborate plot to eventually get the men to succumb. How is it possible that in Egypt, when the Jews were on the lowest levels of tumah, this didn’t happen, but after ma’amad Har Sinai it did? **Rav Henoch Leibowitz** explains that if the young woman would have been on the outside, the men would have certainly walked away because it was too dangerous of a temptation. It was only because they felt safe that they engaged the older woman in conversation. Every step thereafter was the same. They never realized that they were falling into a trap because they gradually violated each line in the sand that they would have never crossed at the beginning. Sometimes we have to ask ourselves where we are in our lives and is that different from where we wanted to be years ago.

**וַיָּ֣חֶל הָעָ֔ם לִזְנ֖וֹת אֶל־בְּנ֥וֹת מוֹאָֽב The nation set out to be Mizaneh with the daughters of Moab (25:1) – Rav Gifter** explained that the people left the protection of the Ananei HaKavod. When they confronted their desire which they had not been tempted with before – in the Midbar – they failed. In life, the protection of the Ananei HaKavod provides helps us handle the tough environment that we find ourselves in, beyond the protective walls.

**וַיִּצָּ֥מֶד יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל לְבַ֣עַל פְּע֑וֹר And Yisrael joined itself to Ba'al Pe'or, and the anger of Hashem was kindled against Yisrael" (Bamidbar 25:2-3)** – Why does Peor play such a great role on Klal Yisrael’s image – it is constantly a theme that Hashem keeps reminding us of? **Rav Amital**  explained that Peor’s method of service was in its natural way. It made it acceptable to do or engage in a manner that while natural was not wholesome. Sometimes in life we need to decide that there needs to be an element of Busha in life in order to handle the challenges of healthy Torah-style living. Knowing when to glorify natural living and when to keep it personal and quiet, is part of Jewish success.

**וַיִּצָּ֥מֶד יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל לְבַ֣עַל פְּע֑וֹר  Baal Peor (25:3) -** How did Bnei Yisrael become addicted to Peor if it was so antithetical to their existence (think Mah Tovu)? How is it that 3000 died in the Cheit Haeigel and 24,000 here? **Rav Amital**  suggested that there is a basic ideological struggle between man’s animalistic tendency and who he really wants to be. Peor represents the natural animalistic sentiment of the human without a sense of Busha. That lifestyle is devoid of Torah -- it is the tyle of Adam and Chava. Bnei Yisrael are supposed to live Mul Peor -- opposite to this style.

**They were crying in front of the Ohel Moed (25:6) – Targum Yonasan** adds that they were also saying Kriyas Shema. The **Baal Shem Tov** (Vayikra 20:17) explained that when something – even something forbidden – that is rooted in a good intent, the good intent cannot be ignored (e.g. Marrying one’s sister is a Chessed )so what is to be understood about the experience here? **Rav Yisrael of Tchortikov**  explained that when the people cried in front of Ohel Moed it was the cries of Teshuva – which is why Pinchas was inspired to take a Romach – a reference to the 248 letters of Kriyas Shema which inspired his actions. This is why Hashem noted “Heisiv Es Chamasee” as opposed to “Heisir” because he returned the people to their Teshuva roots and engage in Ahavas Hashem.

**Haftara**

**כְּטַל֙ מֵאֵ֣ת ה Like dew (Micha 5:6)** - Th remnant of Yaakov is compared to dew. Why dew? **Rav Dovid Feinstein**  explained that this refers to the Jews who survive the persecutions and hatred of the nations. They will be like dew -- the heavenly gift which Hashem provides even when we are undeserving. Even when there is a shortage of rain, the dew continues. Similarly, Am Yisrael will not only survive but will be a Beracha to the host nation like dew that is always a Beracha.

**And I will cut off witchcraft from your hand and Meoninim shall not exist for you (Michah 5:11)** – The Gemara (Sanhedrin 62b) notes that a Meonen is a faker who uses slight of hand to his advantage. Rabbi Akiva suggests that he is one who uses the calendar to express special times that are not spelled out as omens to be omens**. Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzsky**  decried the proliferation of people who seek out Segulos as omens. The only good omens are the ones consistent with the Shulchan Aruch. Similarly **– Rav Shteinman**  added that Segulos only work when connected to Mitzva observance.

**And I sent you Moshe, Aharon and Miriam (Micha 6:4) - Rav Yosef Carmel**  noted the contrast of Miriam versus that of Pharaoh and Bilaam. While they used their voices to murder and destroy, Miriam advises and believes.

**הִגִּ֥יד לְךָ֛ אָדָ֖ם מַה־טּ֑וֹב He has told you, O man, what is good (Micha 6:8)** – Why does Micha mention Adam as opposed to Bnei Yisrael? **Rav Schwab**  explained that Middos is something that every human being is held accountable for. Hashem told mankind what is expected of them but what does Hashem expect from us specifically? Tzedaka, Mishpat and Hatzleiya Leches.

**כִּ֣י אִם־עֲשׂ֚וֹת מִשְׁפָּט֙ וְאַ֣הֲבַת חֶ֔סֶד וְהַצְנֵ֥עַ לֶ֖כֶת What does Hashem ask of you, only to do justice, love Chessed and walk humbly with Hashem (Michah 6:8 ) – Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl**  noted how each of these traits is the opposite of the middos of Bilaam: Justice is the opposite of Bilaam’s wide soul that does whatever it wants. Loving Chessed counters Bilaam’s Ayin Hara that never wants to see something good in someone else. Walking humbly with Hashem is the opposite of Bilaam’s haughtiness.

**: והצנע לכת עם אלקיך And walk humbly with Hashem (Michah 6:8) – Rashi** explains that while man wants a person who wronged him to correct him publically, Hashem is ok with a private audience. While Rambam seems to support this idea (Hil. Teshuva 2:5), Raavad explains that if the transgression occurred publicly, the person needs to atone publicly. How is this Hatzneiah? **Rav Yitzchak Sorotzkin**  explains that the difference is whether 3 people know of the sin. Rashi is speaking about a situation where the sin may have occurred in front of others but is not in the public (read in front of three) view. If indeed, one sinned publicly, one would need to atone publicly.

**And walk with Tzniyus (Micha 6:8)- Rav Soloveitchik** noted that Tzniyus is often misunderstood as a discussion about sleeve lengths. However, he explained that anything that is Kadosh needs to be covered – as it adds a layer of distance and glamour to it. This is not only true for the soul of a person but for the body that contains it as well. He added that a Jew is a walking Sefer Torah and just as the Sefer Torah and the things in the Aron were not revealed, the human “Aron Kodesh” is the body and should be corrected as well.

**And walking humbly with Hashem (Micha 6:8)** – Often people confuse the idea of Tzniyus with that of actions. The **Alter of Kelm** explains that Tzniyus is about a way of living a life wherein one does not flaunt ANY aspect of his or her being (spirituality, physical attributes, talents, etc) as that would imply that the person was accepting it as HIS. The real aspect of Hatzneia Leches is an awareness that whatever we hold onto, really belongs to Hashem.

**וְהַצְנֵ֥עַ לֶ֖כֶת  And walk humbly (Micha 6:8) - Rav Schachter** explained that the word “Leches” comes form the concept of going to a Beis Avel instead of a party as explained by Koheles. He explained that in order to handle challenges in public, one ought to act in private and maintain as much of his privacy as possible.