

A Torah Cure

R' Rafael Abu was a brave man. The *talmid hacham* from Jerusalem had been asked to move to Morocco by *Ozar Hatorah*, an organization begun by the activist and philanthropist, Mr. Isaac Shalom, together with R' Abraham Kalmanowitz, *Rosh Yeshivah* of the *Mir Yeshivah*, which worked tirelessly to save Sephardic youth in the Middle East by establishing a network for them, helping Sephardic Jewry fight the assimilation that was threatening their centuries-old communities. But the year was 1947, and with the tension between the Zionists and the Arabs at its height, for a Jew to move to a predominantly Muslim land was certainly an act of valor.

R' Rafael had consulted with the famed R' Ezra Attiah, *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Porat Yosef*, and after some deliberation R' Ezra had instructed him to take the job, and given him a *berachah* for success. R' Rafael had his beloved teacher's blessing; there was nothing to fear.

Upon his arrival R' Rafael immediately called a meeting of the community leaders. There was much to discuss: How could they combat the organizations that, under the guise of "modernization," were leading the youth astray? What kind of educational facilities had to be started? Who would teach the children? What kind of help was available from the community itself?

In the midst of a productive discussion R' Moshe Yifrach, one of the community leaders, stood up. "I apologize," he said to R' Rafael. "I must leave now. My son is ill, and I have some medicine that he must be given."

R' Rafael knew that R' Moshe's presence was absolutely necessary. They were making progress, but if R' Moshe were to leave, the meeting would soon break up, and all their plans would come to nothing. The future of the community was at stake.

He looked at the community leader with the confidence of a man who knows he had his teacher's blessing. "In the *zechut* of the Torah, your son will have a *refuah shelemah*, he will be completely healed. Meanwhile, you are needed here."

R' Moshe had a father's concern, R' Rafael a scholar's determination. The two men argued for a few minutes. Their words were interrupted by a sharp knock at the door. A man burst in, his face ashen. "R' Moshe? Has R' Moshe left yet?" he shouted.

R' Moshe looked at him, puzzled. "I am here, Dr. Waknin. What is it?"

The man was so excited he could hardly speak. "The medicine...the medicine..."

"Calm yourself," R' Moshe said sternly. "Sit down." He gestured to someone to give the man a drink. "Now, what is the matter?"

Dr. Waknin sighed deeply, took a drink of water and spoke. "I just realized that the medications I gave you for your son were not made up correctly. You have not... you did not..."

"I haven't given them to him...yet."

"Thank Heaven. If he would have taken them, he would have died!"

R' Moshe and all the other community leaders looked at R' Rafael Abu. "*Baruch Hashem*, R' Rafael Abu did not allow me to harm my son," R' Moshe said. He turned to R' Rafael. "Hashem is with you, guiding you; without even realizing it, you have saved my son's life." He smiled with relief and gratitude. "And now, let us sit down again; we have much unfinished business to take care of."

When telling this story, R' Abu attributed the miracle to the blessing he'd received from his *Rosh Yeshivah*, R' Ezra Attiah. He added that Hashem had orchestrated it in order to instill respect for him and his mission in the eyes of the people. (Stories of Spirit and Faith)

The Lorraine Gammal A"K Edition

לְעִילּוֹי נְשָׁמַת לְאָה בַּת בְּהִיָּה

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שַׁבַּת חֻקַּת-בָּלָאק * שַׁבַּת חֻקַּת-בָּלָאק

Haftarah: Michah 5:6 – 6:8

JULY 3-4, 2020 12 TAMUZ 5780

Candlelighting: **8:11 pm**

Morning Shema by: **8:18 am**

Evening Shema after: **9:09 pm**

Shabbat ends: **9:09 pm (R"Y 9:41 pm)**

Watch for an email for full Shabbat schedule of minyanim

Weather permitting, *Bircat Halebanah* will be recited on Saturday night.

Mabrook to Gabi & Renee Peretz on the birth of a baby girl. Mabrook to the grandparents, Ike & Sabrina Sasson.

Mabrook to Nathan & Shirley Cohen on the birth of a baby girl. Mabrook to the grandparents, Raymond & Lori Cohen.

A Message from our Rabbi

The outpouring of the rivers."

(*Bemidbar* 21:15) "וַיִּצְדַּק הַנְּחָלִים"

Rashi on this verse explains that rivers of blood signaled to Israel that G-d had performed a momentous miracle on their behalf. The Amorites had planned to ambush the Israelite camp as it passed through a deep gorge near the Moabite border. The Amorites hid in caves over a narrow pass, ready to push huge boulders down upon the Jews as they passed through helplessly. Miraculously, the cliffs that formed the walls of the gorge moved together with stone outcroppings moving into the caves and crushing the hidden Amorites. All of this was unknown to the unsuspecting Israelites until they saw blood flowing down into the gorge.

Hashem watches over us and benefits us without us knowing. The following story is told by Rabbi Elimelech Biderman. R' Feivel was a young man from B'nei Brak in need of funds, who traveled to America to raise money. In one particular city, he decided to hire a driver who would take him around town together with a number of other needy people who were collecting. To his dismay, there was a very bossy and aggressive individual in the car, who insisted on always being the first to enter at every stop, be it a home or a shul. Although this didn't seem fair, R' Feivel decided not to argue and allowed this person to go first.

After the group visited a certain shul, they continued on to their next stop. After the bossy person exited the car, R' Feivel showed the driver that he had received a check for \$1800 at their previous stop. Noticing the name on the check, the driver

was surprised, as the person was not known to give such large donations.

The next day the driver met the individual who wrote the check and asked about it.

“The truth is that I had just come to shul after successfully closing a deal that I had been working on,” the person related. “I had made a commitment that if I closed the deal, I would give its *ma’user* to the first collector I meet.”

“But there was a different collector who made the rounds in that shul first,” asked the driver.

After thinking for a moment, the businessman responded, “Now that you mention in, I did first use the restroom before entering the shul. That’s where I must have been when the first collector made the rounds.”

First, second, third, or last, a person will receive what is coming to him from the One Above. There’s no manipulating the system.

Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Reuven Semah

The Lesson of the Snakes

Aharon *Hakohen* had just passed away, and the people again became agitated. “The people spoke against G-d and Moshe: ‘Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in this wilderness? For there is no food and there is no water, and our soul is at its limit with the insubstantial food.’” If there seems to be one underlying theme about which they repeatedly complain – it is about the *mann*. Basically, they say they are disgusted with the *mann*.

The *pasuk* continues, “Hashem sent the snakes...and they bit the people, and a large multitude of Israel died.” Throughout *Sefer Bemidbar*, the Almighty punished the people in different ways. Here, Hashem uses a new method – they are attacked by snakes. Why snakes? Furthermore, the remedy for the snakebites was to look at a copper snake! This has to be the most peculiar anti-venom serum ever created! Just look at the snake and you will be cured. What is the message here?

The *Gemara* [Yoma 76a] says that the disciples of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked him, “Why did the *mann* not descend for Israel once a year (in a quantity enough to last them for a whole year)?” Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai answered them with a parable to a king who had an only son. He provided his son with his needs of sustenance once a year, for the whole year. Therefore, the son only came to see the king once a year, when he needed money. Therefore, the king changed his method and provided for his son’s daily needs, one day at a time. This way the king heard from his son every day.

So too it was with *B’nei Yisrael*. Every single day people would worry– maybe the *mann* will not fall tomorrow and my entire family will be wiped out in famine. The result was that everyone had their hearts focused on their Father in Heaven. The *mann* came from heaven so they needed to pray every day: “Master of the Universe, give us food.” That is why the *mann* came down every day.

The *Sefat Emet* adds that Hashem cursed the Snake – “You shall eat dust all the days of your life.” The world asks – what kind of curse is that? Dirt is readily available. The Snake will never worry about the source of his next meal. However, the curse is that the Almighty is, in effect, saying to the Snake: “Here is your sustenance. Do not bother me again. I do not want to see you ever again.” The contact that every other living creature needs to have with its Creator does not apply to the Snake. This is not a blessing. It is a curse.

This is why Hashem gave *mann* every single day. He wanted *Klal Yisrael* to realize that we are dependent on Him, and that “He is the one who gives you strength to act with valor.” That is precisely why they did not like the *mann*. Humans do not like to feel their dependence. We like to delude ourselves and think we are independent. That

is why they kept on complaining about the *mann*. Hashem had this calculation – you should know that you are dependent on Me. The people did not want to admit this fact.

Now the punishment they received makes sense. The punishment came from snakes because the people were acting like snakes – they did not want to be dependent on Divine handouts. Hashem was sending them a message: You want to be like the primordial Snake? Then the snakes will bite you. Do you know what the cure for this is? “You shall stare at the copper snake and be cured.” The *Talmud* [*Rosh Hashanah* 29a] comments that it was not a matter simply of looking at the snakes – because snakes cannot cure. The idea was that they put the snake on a high place and raised it on a flagpole. When they lifted their eyes towards their Father in Heaven, they were cured. The cure was in looking upwards and figuring out from where their help came from, and upon Whom they were dependent.

This is a lesson that is as important today as it was then. We think that with all our wisdom, we can go and we can come, and we can invent and we can function independently. However, it is “He who gives you strength to act with valor.” We dare not say, “It is my strength and the power of my hand which has made for me all this valor.” [*Debarim* 8:17] We need Him for every step and breath we take. The lesson of the snakes is one we need to integrate into our daily lives. (Rabbi Yissocher Frand)

Wonder-ful

In this week’s Torah portion, Balak, King of Moab, hires Bilaam the prophet to go and curse the Jewish people. G-d instructed Bilaam not to go when first asked by Balak’s men, but when Balak sent an even larger and more distinguished group of emissaries, G-d then allowed Bilaam to go — but both told him, and then sent an angel to warn him, that he would only be able to say the words G-d would place in his mouth. The angel came to Bilaam by blocking the road on which he was traveling. Bilaam’s donkey saw the angel, and stopped in its tracks. Bilaam, however, could not see the angel, and he struck his donkey to tell it to keep going. But even after straying off the path near a wall, the donkey could not get past the angel — so the donkey refused to budge, no matter how long Bilaam continued to hit it. At that point, G-d miraculously empowered the donkey to speak to Bilaam, and to ask Bilaam to stop beating him. Bilaam then responded to the donkey in anger, as if speaking to another human being.

How could this happen? How could Bilaam simply respond and yell at his donkey, and not realize that talking donkeys don’t ordinarily exist? Wasn’t that a profound message to Bilaam in its own right?

Rabbi Shimon Schwab zt”l explains that a completely self-centered man finds it challenging to see beyond himself. He tragically loses his natural sense of wonder. After many years of following the whims and desires of his heart, Bilaam had become so self-absorbed that he was even numb to the clearly miraculous.

While it is rare to find a person as immune to wonder as Bilaam, it’s common to feel little excitement with those things that are part of our daily lives. Every day and every moment, however, is different, and we owe it to ourselves to not fall into Bilaam’s slumber. A marriage cannot be permitted to “go stale;” rather, the couple must revisit the moments and the reasons that brought them together in the first place. Likewise, if our relationship with G-d has weakened and our prayer and observance have become routine, we must look for opportunities to be amazed by G-d’s world. Ponder the intricacy of nature, appreciate the odd “coincidences” which alert us to a Divine Hand at work. If we keep our eyes open and actively seek opportunities to focus our interest, we can restore our sense of wonder and be inspired even by the mundane, the daily grind — and cultivate our relationship with G-d. (Rabbi Mordechai Dixler)