

Parashas

Balak

• 741 •

י"ב תמוז תשפ"ו

5786

י"ד ע"י

קהילת שבתי בבית ד'

בנשיאות מורנו ורבנו הרה"צ

רבי גמליאל הכהן

רבינוביץ שליט"א

טיב הקהילה

English edition

באנגלית

טיב הפרשה

טיב המערכת

ויזבח בלק בקר וצאן

Balak slaughtered cattle and sheep

Balak, the king of Moav, sent messengers to Bilaam to come and curse the people of Israel (22:5-6), and after the first time he did not accept the mission and did not come, Balak said to Bilaam (22:16-17), 'אל נא תמנע מהלוך אלי, כי כבד אכבדך מאוד', "Please do not refrain from coming to me, for I will greatly honor you." And what happened in the end? When Bilaam had already come to Balak, what did Balak do? ויזבח בלק בקר וצאן וישלח לבלעם' - "And Balak slaughtered cattle and sheep and sent to Bilaam and to the officers who were with him." (22:40) Rashi explains: "A small matter—only one head of cattle and one sheep." And we ask: is this "I will greatly honor you"? It is barely enough for a meal for Bilaam and all the officers who were with him. But in truth, why should it interest us how much meat Bilaam ate and how many animals Balak slaughtered in his honor?

The Gemara says (Bava Metzia 87a): "The righteous say little and do much; the wicked say much and do not do even a little." We indeed scorn the wicked Balak who said much and did not fulfill, but what about us? Do we fulfill what we promise? Do we stand by all the commitments that we accepted upon ourselves? After all, Balak promised a wicked man who was flesh and blood exactly like him, but we stood before the Days of Awe [Yomim Noraim] of the previous year, and we accepted upon ourselves "good" resolutions, and we made promises—to whom did we promise? To Hashem! The King of kings of kings, Who lives and endures. We promised and accepted upon ourselves so that we should be written for a good life; we requested another year of life, and behold we are here, alive and existing—and what remains from all our resolutions? Do we truly stand by them? Do we fulfill what we promised?!

We are in the month about which it was expounded: "Times of repentance are drawing near," and it is certainly possible and necessary already to make an accounting of the soul. So it is true that we must examine what happened with last year's resolutions, but more than that, we must draw conclusions for this year: what kind of resolutions are correct and fitting to accept upon ourselves. It is true that we want to do great and special things, but if we are realistic and accept upon ourselves resolutions that we are able to uphold, and we truly uphold them, then we will know that we are not like Balak and Bilaam, but rather that we belong to the group of the righteous, who say little and do much.

Tiv HaTorah - Balak

איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו

Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot

וַיִּשָׂא בָלַעַם אֶת עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל שֹׁכֵן לְשִׁבְטָיו וְתַהֲי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹקִים: (כד, ב)
Bilaam raised his eyes and saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes, and the spirit of G-d was upon him. (24:2)

Rashi explains: Bilaam raised his eyes – he wanted to instill the evil eye in them. Now, see that you have Bilaam's three traits: and evil eye, and a conceited spirit, and a broad soul [greed] which have been spoken of before. Dwelling according to its tribes – he saw each and every tribe dwelling unto itself and they were not intermingled. He saw that their entrances [to their tents] were not aligned opposite each other so that one should not peer into the tent of his friend. And the spirit of G-d was upon him – it entered his heart that he would not curse them.

With a superficial reading of Rashi's words, the posuk before us could be explained merely as "a narration of events as they occurred." At first, when the posuk says, "And Bilaam lifted his eyes," it seeks to express the extent of Bilaam's wickedness—that he lifted his eyes with malicious intent in order to cast an "evil eye" upon Israel, Rachmana litzlan. And once the Torah is already speaking about looking upon Israel, it also relates what one indeed sees when looking at them—"and he saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes"—he saw how each tribe dwells by itself, and also that their entrances are not aligned one opposite the other. And finally the verse adds and tells an additional detail: "and the spirit of G-d came upon him"—that although initially he wanted to curse them at that moment, the spirit of G-d rested upon him and his mind was transformed so as not to curse them.

If indeed this is the simple understanding, a person will not be able to understand why that wicked man should merit "and the spirit of G-d came upon him." Is it because he lifted his eyes in order to cast an evil eye upon Israel and thereby destroy them, and in addition wished to strike them with the power of his mouth—why should he be granted "the spirit of G-d"? Which seemingly means "holy spirit"—and is it in order to restrain his wickedness that Hashem must grant him "holy spirit"?!

In order to resolve these matters, we will mention another detail that Rashi brings here, namely that this wicked man was deficient in three bad traits, and they are: "an evil eye," "a haughty spirit," and "a broad soul." The source for his words is in Chazal (Avos 5:19), and see there that the holy Tanna says that just as Bilaam himself was deficient in these three, so too all his disciples; and in light of his words it can be said that since he was a prophet to the nations, all the nations are counted among his disciples, and all of them are deficient in these three traits.

And since this is the state of affairs, we can imagine how they conduct their way of life: since they have "a broad soul [greed]," each one worries to satisfy all his desires, and the successful among them merit to make prominent use also of the trait of "a haughty spirit," and they boast before their companions of their wisdom that enabled them to attain their great stature and wealth. In this way they belittle their less successful companions, and within those who are belittled the third trait is aroused, and they cast an "evil eye" upon the deeds of the successful and the arrogant. In addition, they become very eager to adorn themselves with the trait of "a broad soul" and to equal the successful ones, and thus they too will merit to boast and to establish their honor—

the trait of “a haughty spirit”—and in this way they will also repay the first successful ones in kind, and will likewise cause them to awaken an “evil eye,” and so it continues in a cycle... From here you may say that anyone who observes their conduct will testify and say that each one is a thorn in the eyes of all who see him, and peace and tranquility are far from them.

In light of the above, we can connect all the details stated in Rashi’s words, and thus they will be explained: Bilaam followed his base traits, and when he heard that the Israelite nation had covered the eye of the land, he feared that in the course of time the inhabitants of the world might recognize their great stature, and his “haughty spirit” would be trampled, and his counsel was to act according to his “method” and strike them by casting an “evil eye,” for this is how he would act toward all those of whom he feared that they might surpass him in greatness—and why should the Israelite nation be different from all of them?

However, when he looked at them for this purpose, a new world was revealed before his eyes. He saw that peace and brotherhood dwell among them, and that each one seeks to assist the other, and therefore Israel dwells according to its tribes—each one dwells near the members of his tribe, for they are his “relatives” whom he must assist first when there is a need.

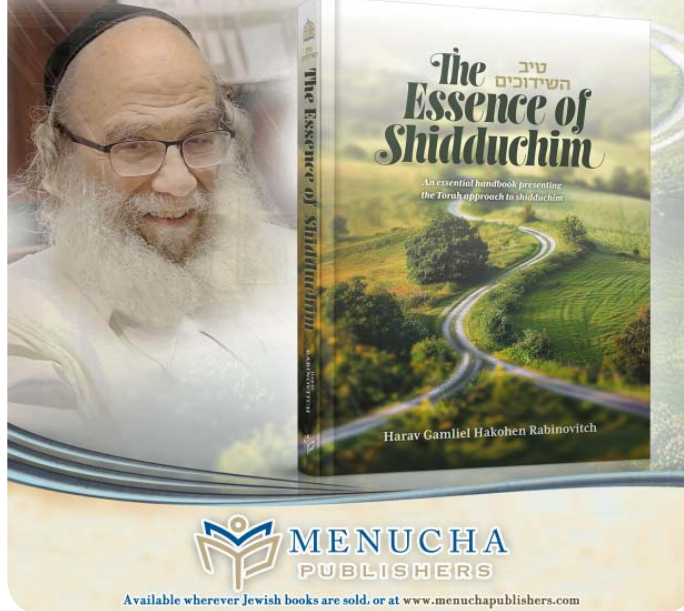
This was a riddle in his eyes; he was unable to understand how they could live in unity without envying one another, and in addition even to help one another...

But when he looked further, he discovered the solution, for he noticed that the entrance of

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one tent was not aligned with the entrance of another. Then he understood that they conduct themselves in the exact opposite manner of the nations: whereas among the nations each one seeks to display his good to the many in order to draw their eyes out, the people of Israel act the opposite—not only do they not reveal their good to others, they even conceal it. Moreover, even if someone desires to speak of his good, there is no one who wishes to hear him, for none of them wants to know what is occurring with his fellow. And this is precise in the

language of Rashi: “he saw that their entrances are not aligned... so that one should not peer into his fellow’s tent.” He did not say “so that they should not peer into his tent,” for then it would imply only that each one did not want others to recognize his good—which is also a good trait—but the truth is that even one whose fortune was not favorable sought to secure himself that he should not stumble and, chalilah, feed his eyes on that which is not his. He was certain that HaKadosh Baruch Hu measured for him the proper measure according to his need, and he did not wish to look at the good of another lest he stumble and desire luxuries.

Since this is so, “and the spirit of G-d came upon him”—that is to say, he understood and grasped through the power of prophecy within him what that spirit and proper outlook is by whose light the children of G-d walk, and therefore “it arose in his heart not to curse them”—he understood that in such a state the curse will not have dominion over them, for the curse and the evil eye

have power only over good that is flaunted against others, whereas that which is hidden from the eye is where blessing is found. We too must follow in the ways of our forefathers: to be careful not to boast before others, and not to desire the good of others, and to believe with complete faith that HaKadosh Baruch Hu provides each person with all his needs. And if HaKadosh Baruch Hu did not allot for this one the measure that He allotted for that one, it is a sign that he does not need it.

‘Bar Yochai, light’ ‘בר יוחאי אור..’

A difficult question—I struggled with Rashi HaKadosh, and I have no one to answer me!!! Everyone I asked remained with it requiring further investigation. Toward Shabbos I arrived in Meron, and behold, already on the staircase at the entrance to the apartment where we would stay for Shabbos, a longtime friend whom I had not met for years ran toward me and introduced me to his grandchildren, fine young lads, saying that they learn diligently and have strong command of Chumash with Rashi with great depth. I asked them which Rashi they were holding, and they were holding exactly the Rashi in question. I began to ask them questions on the topic until I reached the difficulty, and they answered a wondrous answer on the spot!!!

I was very happy with the answer and with the reception that I received from Rashbi—that before I had even entered, I had already received an answer!!!

Moreinu HaRav shlit”a



‘Praises to Most High G-d’ ‘תהילות לקל עליון’

Moreinu HaRav shlit”a, related: “It is known of the incident with Maran the Admor Rebbe Yoel of Satmar zy”a, who asked the attendant to bring him Tehillim, and the attendant brought him a thick volume of Tehillim with many commentaries. The Rebbe said to him: ‘Now I want

to say Tehillim and not to study Tehillim; please bring me a simple sefer Tehillim without commentaries!!!’

So too I set aside a special time for studying Tehillim in depth, in addition to what I say Tehillim in order...

Thus, every year, bli neder, in honor of my birthday, I take a sefer Tehillim with a new commentary in order to study it during the additional year that Hashem gives me.

This year I searched for a sefer Tehillim with a new commentary and did not find a sefer with a commentary that I had not yet learned. Less than a week before the birthday, a man from Boro Park came to me and brought me as a gift Tehillim with a commentary on the words—a very fine commentary that he authored and published.

I was so happy, to the point that trembling seized my entire body from the greatness of the hashgacha of the Creator, that He cares about my Tehillim and brings a person from the United States so that I should have the Tehillim for the new year!!!

Every Jew must strengthen himself and see how much HaKadosh Baruch Hu is pleased with our learning—each one according to his resolutions. Each and every person must know that HaKadosh Baruch Hu has satisfaction from him!!!

Moreinu HaRav shlit”a

טיב ההשגרה

טיב המעשיות

A Time for Spiritual Reckoning

כל רדפיה השיגה בין המצרים
(איכה א, ג)

All who pursue her will attain her between
(the straits. (Eichah 1:3

The holy work Zichron Shmuel (Parashas
Pinchas), cited in Baal Shem Tov al HaTorah
(on Eichah, §2), records the sacred words of
:the holy Baal Shem Tov as follows

The holy Baal Shem Tov said regarding
:כל רדפיה השיגה בין המצרים: the pasuk

When the holy Rav Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zy"א, was appointed to sit upon the throne of his holy forefathers, to lead the congregation of Yisrael—as hinted in the word "Rebbe," an acronym for Rosh Bnei Yisrael—he was then living in Yerushalayim, close to the place of the Beis Hamikdash. He resided in the home of his father, the holy Rav Shimon Nassan Neta zt"l, who passed to the eternal world on the third day of Tishrei, 5690.

The early years of his leadership were in the place of his fathers' residence. There he guided Klal Yisrael and there he served his Creator with awe and with total devotion of heart and soul.

The holy Rebbe was always bound with all his heart to the sanctity of the supernal Yerushalayim and to her purity, whose holiness surpasses that of the entire Eretz Yisrael (Keilim 1:8). As written in the responsa Chasam Sofer (Yoreh De'ah 233): "The inhabitants of Yerushalayim are closer to the place of the Mikdash than the other residents of Eretz Yisrael."

Yet at the same time, together with his great longing and deep attachment to Yerushalayim, its very residence was extremely difficult for him, for before his eyes he constantly beheld the magnitude of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and Yerushalayim, and the terrible anguish of the exile of the holy Shechinah. As stated in the prayer Nachem (recited during Minchah on Tishah B'Av): האבלה והחברה והבזויה והשוממה – האבלה – מבלי גביה, והחברה – ממעונותיה, והבזויה – מכבודה, והשוממה – מאין יושב. והיא יושבת וראשה חפז, כאשה עקרה שלא ילדה. ובלעוהּ – לגיונות. – "The city that is in mourning, destroyed, disgraced, and desolate—mourning for the loss of her children, destroyed of her dwellings, disgraced of her glory, desolate without inhabitants... She sits with her head covered, like a barren woman who has not borne, and legions have devoured her, and idolaters have inherited her." May Hashem comfort us speedily.

For this reason, together with other hidden considerations, he moved for a long period to reside in Tel Aviv, which at that time was a great metropolis of Torah and chassidus. Many great scholars and God-fearing men established their homes there and influenced Klal Yisrael with Torah and fear of Heaven.

In the course of time, however, when he saw the spiritual decline of Tel Aviv—when the city began to fill with worldly impurities and defilements, Rachmana litzlan—and on the other hand the city of Bnei Brak began to flourish in Torah and holiness, he left Tel Aviv, as many great sages and tzaddikim did, and established his holy court in Bnei Brak.

It is noteworthy that even there he established his residence on Yerushalayim Street, teaching that even there he never diverted his mind from the sanctity of the heavenly Yerushalayim. For his deep attraction and attachment to Yerushalayim never ceased. He himself testified that he never removed his mind from the holy

city.

After the passing of his righteous wife, his holy companion, Rebbitzin Ettli a"ח, he returned once again to establish his residence in the holy city. For several good years he lived within Yerushalayim, in his home and study hall on Tzefaniah Street, where he fulfilled within himself the pasuk (Tehillim 147:13), חזק בריחי שַׁעְרֵיךָ בָרֶךְ, — He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your children within you.

However, after some time the other side of the pain of the destruction and the anguish of the Shechinah again stirred within him. As we lament bitterly in the piyyut of Rabbeinu Amittai ben Shefatyah, אֲכַבֵּה אֶלְקִים וְאֶמְתִּיחַ, בְּרָאוֹתַי כֹּל עִיר עַל תְּלַח בְּנוֹיָהּ, וְעִיר הָאֶלְקִים מְשַׁפֵּלַת עַד שְׂאוֹל — "I shall remember, O God, and I shall sigh, when I see every city built on its hilltop, while the City of God is degraded to the lowest depth." That is, specifically "the city of God"—its godliness and sanctity.

As stated in Pri Megadim (Orach Chaim 561): "I heard from my revered father that he said, apparently in the name of the saintly Rav Gershon Kutover, that when he came to Yerushalayim and saw it in tranquility, with nations dwelling there, he wept and said: When we pray, 'When I see every city built on its hilltop'—this refers to the earthly Yerushalayim—'and the city of Hashem degraded'—this refers to the heavenly Yerushalayim. There the destruction is evident etc."

It is told that during one period he chose to live in a humble rented dwelling, saying to himself: How can I live in a house of my own when Hakadosh Baruch Hu, so to speak, has no abode in which to dwell?

Toward the end of his life that tzaddik once again took up his staff and satchel and moved back to Bnei Brak. There, in Shikun Hei, he established a dwelling for Hashem. Even during that period, when he bore our illnesses and, to our great sorrow, was stricken with paralysis, he continued the order of his holy service with all the strength of heart and soul that remained to him.

And the memory of the sanctity of Yerushalayim he never removed from his heart, constantly seeking her in holy service. As the halachah states (Rosh Hashanah 30; Sukkah 41), we enact customs in memory of the Mikdash, as derived from the prophecy of Yirmiyahu (Yirmiyahu 30:17), כִּי אֶעֱלֶה אֶרְבֶּה לָךְ וּמְכַוְנֶיךָ אֶרְפָּאךָ בְּאֵם ה', — For I will restore health to you, and heal you of your wounds, says Hashem; for they have called you an outcast: 'Tzlon—no one seeks her.' From this we learn that we are required seek her.

On the twenty-fourth day of Teves 5744 he ascended heavenward in a storm. Then his holy body returned to the holy city, where he was laid to rest on Har HaZeisim, the Mount of Olives, facing the place of our holy and glorious Beis Hamikdash. There he rests in honor, until he will awaken speedily together with all the deceased of Yisrael, Amen.

Contemplating the Reason for Mourning

Top of Form

"If they do not direct their hearts during the mourning of the days of Bein Hametzarim toward the pain of the holy Shechinah, and merely perform the practices by rote, chas veshalom — as it states (Yeshayah 29:13), מְצֹות, אֲנִישִׁים מִלְמַדָּה — people who follow commands by rote — or simply in order to quiet their conscience, they can be compared to the enormous colored man, who once stood waiting at a subway station in the United States. Suddenly he noticed a small child who had fallen and rolled off the platform directly onto the train tracks, only a moment away from the train that was rushing toward the station at great speed.

To everyone's astonishment, that man immediately collected himself and, with extraordinary swiftness, jumped down onto the tracks, seized the child with one hand, and lifted him back onto the platform. At the very last moment he saved him from certain death.

When everyone came to thank that strong man for having rushed to save the life of the little child, he did not understand why they were thanking

"Because these days are yemei shevirah – days of spiritual brokenness – and the sitra achra prevails, Rachmana litzlan. However, one who strengthens himself in Hashem Yisbarach during these days, overcomes the evil inclination, and examines his deeds – particularly in the area of the holiness of the sacred yesod—attains the Shechinah even more during these days.

"And this is clear to one who pays attention to this during these days. This is also the meaning of (Yirmiyahu 15:19), וְאִם תּוֹצִיא יְקָר מִזּוּלָּה — 'If you bring forth the precious from the vile....'" (See also Avodas Yisrael, Parashas Massei, in the name of the Maggid zy"א.)

In other words, the Baal Shem Tov explains the meaning of the pasuk: Why is it specifically that all who pursue her attain her bein ha-metzarim? After all, these are difficult days for Yisrael. The answer is that precisely because they are "days of spiritual brokenness"—in the darkness of these days of mourning, when we lament the destruction of Yerushalayim and the exile of the holy Shechinah, which accompanied Klal Yisrael wherever they were exiled (Megillah 29a)—the sitra achra gains strength, Rachmana litzlan. Yet precisely for that reason, וְגַם אֵת זֶה לַעֲמֹת זֶה עֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹקִים, — "God also made this opposite that" (Koheles 7:14). Just as the state of brokenness and the descent into the impurity of the sitra achra intensify, so too the power of holiness and purity strengthens to counteract it, though it remains concealed within the darkness.

Therefore, precisely in these dark days, all who pursue her—all those who exert themselves and strengthen themselves with courage of spirit and soul so as not to fall, chas veshalom, into the net of impurity spread before them—are assured by the word of the Most High that they will attain her during these very days.

Accordingly, one who strengthens himself in his closeness to Hashem Yisbarach during these Three Weeks, who overcomes the evil inclination and examines his deeds, will certainly fulfill the promise of the pasuk: that he will attain an even greater closeness to the Shechinah during these days.

The holy Baal Shem Tov zy"א, adds a further insight, teaching that these words apply particularly with regard to the holiness of the sacred yesod. For during these blazing summer days—the months of Tammuz and Av—that impurity associated with the blemish of yesod bursts forth more strongly in the world and within the inner soul. Consequently, greater vigilance is required, particularly in guarding the holiness of the sacred yesod. For this reason these months are called the "months of the eyes," as we have received from our master the Arizal zt"l (Pri Etz Chaim, Rosh Hashanah, derush 1), since greater caution and distancing are required in matters of guarding the eyes. Concerning this, the pasuk (Eichah 1:16) laments: עֵינַי יוֹדְדָה מַיִם — For these things I weep; my eye, my eye flows with water. See there, and the discerning will understand.

The holy Baal Shem Tov concludes that this matter is "clear to one who pays attention to it during these days." Concerning this the pasuk states (Yirmiyahu 15:19), לָכֵן, כִּי אָמַר ה', אִם תָּשׁוּב [ותתחיל מעצמך באתערותא דלתתא], וְאֲשִׁיבְךָ [באתערותא דלעילא – ואז] לִפְנֵי תַעֲמֹד [בהשגת קירוב שכינה ביותר]. וְאִם תּוֹצִיא יְקָר מִזּוּלָּה [בשמתוך יחולל] של [הטומאה יתוציא] ותעלה את היקרא עד מאוד – אז כפי תהיה — Therefore, thus says Hashem: If you return, then I will bring you back, and you shall stand before Me; and if you bring forth the precious from the vile, you shall be as My mouth.

That is to say: If you return—if you begin from your side with an awakening from below—then I will bring you back with an awakening from above, and then you shall stand before Me, attaining an even greater closeness to the Shechinah. If you bring forth the precious from the vile—when from the "vile" of impurity one extracts and elevates the precious to a very great height—you shall be as My mouth, as explained in Perek Hapo'alim (Bava Metzia 85a). Reflect on this carefully, Amen.

The Rebbe of Lelov's Bond with Yerushalayim

him. He explained simply that he was in a hurry to get to work, and he realized that if an accident were to occur here the trains would certainly stop running for about five hours—as had already happened several times in the past—and he might lose about fifty good dollars from his wages (\$50 = 5 × \$10 per hour). Therefore, in order that the trains should continue running according to schedule, he moved that unruly child off the tracks...

From this story we may learn about many matters in life, for what matters is the intention of one's heart (see Berachos 15a). In other words, the intention of the heart is what truly defines the matter. Thus, in our own case: if one does not contemplate and reckon with the inner reason for the mourning, and the intended purpose of it — to bring gratification to the Borei Yisbarach — then we resemble that black man who, while saving an entire world of life, had all his heart and intention directed merely toward his own personal profit of fifty dollars... Another Nisan Has Passed By....

One day during the month of Nisan in the year 5761, I spoke with Maran the gaon and tzaddik Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fisher zt"l, the rav of Zichron Moshe and av beis din of the Eidah HChareidis of the holy city, author of Reponsa Even Yisrael.

During the course of our conversation, the gaon suddenly burst into bitter tears and said: "Behold, year after year passes in the bitter exile, and from the beginning of the year we have already arrived now at the month of Nisan—yet we have still not been redeemed! And yet this is a time favorable for redemption, as Chazal testified (Rosh Hashanah 11a): 'In Nisan they were redeemed, and in Nisan they are destined to be redeemed.'"

From here you may see and learn the moral lesson that emerges for us: how greatly the tzaddikim long and yearn for the complete redemption—the redemption of the Shechinah and the redemption of holy Klal Yisrael. After all, concerning this very trait we are asked after one hundred and twenty years one of the very first questions (Shabbos 31a): "Did you anticipate the Redemption?"—and what shall we answer; what shall we say when the day of reckoning arrives?

It is therefore fitting—at the very least during these days of Bein Hametzarim —to arouse within our hearts to seek that which our souls love: both regarding the personal exile, the estrangement and distance from the Divine spark of His Shechinah that resides within every individual; and regarding the collective exile, the exile of Knesses Yisrael and the holy Shechinah whose glory is cast down in the dust. May the complete redemption and the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash come speedily in our days, Amen. To Feel the Pain of the Destruction

It was the custom of the city of Baghdad for a large congregation (berov am hadras Melech) to gather during the days of Bein Hametzarim at midday, to recite Tikkun Chatzos in the large beis haknesses. The entire holy congregation participated, having closed their businesses and ceased from work at that hour.

One of the Jews of the city came with a question before Maran the gaon Rav Yosef Chaim zt"l, author of the Ben Ish Chai. He said that in truth he did not feel in his heart the pain of the destruction, and sitting on the ground for Tikkun Chatzos appeared to him merely like the act of a monkey... for he recited the kinnos superficially, without intention and without feeling. If so, perhaps it would be better not to come to the beis haknesses at all, since this custom is not an absolute obligation like the three daily tefillos that we are halachically required to recite.

In his reply, the Ben Ish Chai explained to him with sound reasoning that the primary element in all our service is the action of the mitzvos, or the speech of prayers and supplications. This element is the decisive factor—more than the thought and intention

in the heart.

Therefore, a person must do and say what is required of him, and he must not, chaililah, separate himself from the congregation regarding the custom to recite Tikkun Chatzos. Rather, he should sit together with everyone and recite it, even if it is only a verbal recitation.

Moreover, the Ben Ish Chai added sharply that it is possible that the entire root of such a question originates from the evil inclination that blinds a person's eyes, transforming a mitzvah into a transgression and a transgression into a mitzvah. For that deceptive yetzer hara is precisely the one who arouses such a "question" in his heart—that he supposedly does not recite the kinnos correctly. In this way it displays the outward signs of purity so that it appears as though he is seeking the truth... yet his hidden intention is actually to nullify the person from the performance of mitzvos and from matters of holiness. May Hashem protect us.

Note the words of the gaon Rav Yosef Chaim mentioned above, who elaborates further with powerful words and reliable sources in his remarkable work Responsa Rav Pe'alim (Orach Chaim, 1:1, the fourth section of the responsum). Study it and you will derive great satisfaction.

The Impact of One's Actions

We may connect this with the well-known inquiry often discussed in the courts of chassidim, attributed to the holy Rebbe Rav Bunim of Peshischa zt"l. He was once asked which path is preferable: to sit at the "head," in the honored place in the east of the shul, while in his heart he thinks and feels that this is not truly his place and that he belongs below in the west—or the opposite: to sit below at the side of the beis midrash while inwardly feeling offended, believing that his proper place is actually above in the east?

The tzaddik answered that it is obvious that action is stronger and more powerful than thought. Therefore, although outwardly the first man's heart appears full of humility while the second man's heart is filled with pride—nevertheless the concrete action is the determining factor. The practical act itself will eventually conquer the heart.

Even a naturally humble person, if seated in honor that he does not deserve, may eventually fall into the trap of pride and arrogance—may Hashem protect us. Conversely, the proud person who sits in the lower places of the hall will, through that action, implant humility within his heart.

This principle was already stated explicitly in Sefer Hachinuch (mitzvah 16), where it states:

"Know that a person is shaped according to his actions, and his heart and all his thoughts continually follow the deeds that he performs—whether for good or for bad.

"Even if a person is completely wicked in his heart, and the inclination of his thoughts is evil all day long, if he will stir his spirit and devote his effort and occupation steadily to Torah and mitzvos—even if not for the sake of Heaven—he will immediately incline toward the good, and through the power of his actions he will kill the evil inclination, for hearts are drawn after actions.

"And even if a person is completely righteous, with a straight and perfect heart that desires Torah and mitzvos, if he constantly occupies himself with corrupt matters—such as, for example, if the king forced him and appointed him to a sinful trade—if all his occupation throughout the day is in that trade, then after some time he will turn from the righteousness of his heart and become completely wicked. For it is known and true that every person is influenced according to his actions."

Looking for Leniencies

My esteemed father-in-law, the gaon and tzaddik Rav Yaakov Blau zt"l, a dayan of the Eidah Chareidis, and rav of the Sanhedria neighborhood here in our holy city, related to me that during the days of Bein Hametzarim many people would ask his opinion—both at his halachic office and by telephone—regarding leniencies in the laws of mourning over the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

Regarding this, he once told me with the pain of his pure heart that he could not understand it. For it is plainly evident that when people sit shivah in mourning for a relative no one searches for leniencies or dispensations in the laws of mourning. On the contrary, if questions arise then, they are generally questions of stringency—seeking to know in what further ways one should conduct oneself more strictly.

Why, then, regarding this great mourning of ours in these days, is it not the same? Is it not precisely concerning such a matter that Chazal protested (Yevamos 122a), "Should a kohenes not be regarded with at least the same credibility as an innkeeper?"

However, the reason is simple. Tragically, people do not truly feel what we have lost in our exile, nor to what extent each individual is lacking through the personal exile of the soul within him. We do not sense and do not understand: for what are we mourning here? And for whom are we mourning here? Concerning this it is taught (Taanis 30b): Whoever does not mourn for Yerushalayim will not see its rejoicing. Conversely, the measure of goodness is even greater—whoever does mourn for Yerushalayim will merit to see its rejoicing, as it is written (Yeshayah 66:10), Rejoice with Yerushalayim and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all who mourn for her. Amen.

A Tishah B'Av Memory

I remember when I was once a young bachur in the large beis haknesses of the distinguished neighborhood of Batei Ungarin on the bitter and fateful day of Tishah B'Av. In the shul they prolonged the recitation of the kinnos for many hours, while the members of the congregation—God-fearing and upright men—sat upon the ground, bent in their heavy mourning.

I then noticed two young men standing outside in the entrance hall, conversing with one another.

At that moment the well-known righteous man, Rav Yudel Cohen zt"l, passed by—a God-fearing Jew of distinguished stature who was entrusted with several important communal responsibilities. Among other things, Rav Yudel served as the Selichos veker—the one who would awaken the neighborhood for Selichos. In the depth of the night he would walk through the streets between the homes of the neighborhood, his heart stirring as he called out in his moving melody:

"Tayere Yidden! Shtait oyf tzu selichos, shtait oyf tzu avodas HaBorei yisborach Shemo!" "Dear Jews! Arise for Selichos, arise to serve the Creator, blessed be His Name!"

He was also responsible for several other sacred communal matters in the neighborhood.

When he saw the two youths standing there and conversing calmly, he approached them with heartfelt emotion and exclaimed: "Ich ken dos nisht farshteyn! — I cannot understand this! How can one speak so calmly at such a moment? This is like one whose deceased lies before him, chas veshalom! At this time we must picture before our eyes our Beis Hamikdash—our sanctuary and glory—burning in flames! How is it possible to divert one's mind from the mourning and prolong idle conversation?!"

That sacred cry which burst forth from a pure and clean heart still echoes within my heart even after the passing of many decades. It teaches one to understand and appreciate how far these matters reach, as the wisest of men says in the Book of Wisdom (Mishlei 1:5): יִשְׁמַע הַכֶּהֱן וְיִסְפֵּי לֵהֱלֹךְ וְיִבְנוּ תַּחְבּוּלוֹת יְהוָה, - A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will acquire counsel.

A Prayer for Redemption

May it be the will of our Father in Heaven that the promise of Zecharyah the prophet be speedily fulfilled for us (Zecharyah 8:19): הַאֲמַר ה' יְבָאוֹת צוֹם הַרְבִּיעִי וְצוֹם הַחֲמִישִׁי וְצוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, וְצוֹם הַיָּמִים וְצוֹם הַיָּמִינִי יְהוָה לְבֵית יְהוָה וְיִהְיֶה לְשִׂשׁוֹן וְלִשְׂמֵחָה וְלִמְנוּחַיִם טוֹבִים וְצוֹם הַיָּמִינִי יְהוָה לְבֵית יְהוָה וְיִהְיֶה לְשִׂשׁוֹן וְלִשְׂמֵחָה וְלִמְנוּחַיִם טוֹבִים - So says Hashem of Hosts: the fast of the fourth month (the Seventeenth of Tammuz), the fast of the fifth month (Tishah B'Av), the fast of the seventh month (the Fast of Gedaliah), and the fast of the tenth month (the Tenth of Teves) shall become for the house of Yehudah joy and gladness and cheerful festivals; therefore love truth and peace; Amen.