



Excerpts from the Chicago Community Kollel's Website

Parsha Encounters

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Parshas Balak - Rabbi Ephraim Weiss

It's All in Your Mind

It is quite ironic that one of the few times the Torah gives us a description of Acharis Hayomim via prophecy, it is done so through Bil'am HaRasha. Nonetheless, his visions in Parshas Balak, while somewhat cryptic, provide us with both the events and the lessons that will help us approach Acharis Hayomim, the end of time. In one such pasuk it says *"Hen Am Levadad Yishkon Uvagoyim Lo Yischashuv"* - *"Behold it is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations."* (23, 9)

The Netziv explains this pasuk as follows. As long as Klal Yisroel lives in seclusion from the other nations, it will survive, but if it attempts to dwell amongst the nations it will not survive. This lesson, explains the Netziv, has been shown numerous times throughout history. As soon as the Jewish nation began finding too much comfort among the other nations, it came under persecution.

We see a similar theme in Megillas Esther. When Haman approached the king with his plan to wipe out the Jews, he said *"Yeshno Am Echad Mefuzar Umeforad Bein HaAmim ..."* - *"There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples..."* (3, 8) The pasuk once again seems to imply that the fact that they were spread out among the nations had something to do with their deserving annihilation. In fact, the story of Purim begins with Jews partaking of the feast of King Achashverosh, which is another example of this theme of becoming too comfortable among the nations leading to our downfall. To explain this phenomenon, the Beis Halevi says that the purpose of Divine affliction is in fact, in order to separate us from the other nations. If we were to separate ourselves on our own, there would be no need for affliction from Hashem.

The Torah seems to be telling us something that completely contradicts logic. Logic dictates that the way to survive in Golus is to blend into the crowd and not try to act too differently from the other nations, lest we prompt hatred. But the Torah is telling us the exact opposite! The only way to survive is to keep our differences and separate ourselves from their ways.

Perhaps we can illustrate just how different we are supposed to be from the goyim by analyzing the Havdalah we say every week. *"Hamavdil... Bein Ohr Lechoshech Bein Yisroel LaAmim"* *"He Who separates... between light and darkness, between Yisroel and the other nations."* This seems to imply that the

relationship between Ohr and Choshech is the same as the relationship between Yisroel LaAmim. To the extent that Ohr is different from Choshech so too is Yisroel different from the Amim. In other words, the difference between us and the other nations is night and day.

All this is sensible on a theoretical level but in practice it seems impossible to separate ourselves from American culture. The *Yidische Shtetl* remained in Europe and we are forced to live in communities amongst non-Jews. Secondly, in order for us to financially support ourselves we are going need to go to work with the rest of American society, which encompasses most of our day, so practically it seems very difficult to maintain this level of separation.

In these circumstances we need to keep at least something completely holy. In seforim we find two entities that are referred to as being a microcosm of the Beis HaMikdash: our homes and our minds (see Nefesh Hachaim Shaar Alef). These two entities should be unaffected by the impure society in which we live. It should come as no surprise that the non-Jewish home is centered around entertainment. The non-Jew has no obligation to make the most of his time in this world, so his major interest is being entertained. He also has no problem with being *mafkir* his senses to Hollywood, allowing them to impose any images or ideas they please.

But a Jewish home is the complete opposite. This is where we make the most of every second of our lives. It is where we become partners with Hashem Yisbarach in creating and raising the next generation. A Jewish home is permeated with Torah and Mitzvos. It is a microcosm of the Beis HaMikdash, which is where the Shechina would reside. It is obvious that a Jewish home should have nothing at all in common with a non-Jewish home.

We also have to safeguard our minds for they too represent the Beis HaMikdash. We specifically have to make sure that our values are those set out by the Torah, not by American culture. Before one decides to allow anything into his home or his mind he should ask himself if he would be willing to bring it into the Beis HaMikdash, as it says in Nefesh Hachaim that if someone brings an immoral thought into his mind it is as if he brought a harlot in to the Kodosh HaKodoshim. May this be the first step in our permanent redemption and the coming of Mashiach speedily in our days.

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Wishing a Mazal Tov to Rabbi and Mrs. Eliyahu Weinschneider
and Rabbi and Mrs. Avi Banker on the birth of their baby boys.



Halacha Encounters

Kavod Habrios

Rabbi Ari Friedman

In the episode of Zimri and Pinchas, we find Pinchas taking justice into his own hands by killing Zimri even though his rebbi, Moshe Rabbeinu, was still undecided as to what should be done. According to Shmuel's explanation in the Gemorah (Sanhedrin 82A), when Pinchas sensed that the actions of Zimri were causing a *chillul Hashem*, he did not accord his Rebbi, Moshe Rabbeinu, the honor of letting him preside over the matter, but instead acted immediately to ensure that the honor of Hashem would not be compromised. The Gemorah explains that whenever a conflict arises between the honor of Hashem versus the honor of a man – even a Rav, the honor of Hashem takes precedence. This principle is extended to areas of halacha as well. Every now and then a situation arises where adhering to the halacha will cause embarrassment to a person. Nevertheless, he must adhere to the halacha and not place his own honor before the honor of Hashem. An often mentioned example of this concept is if someone were to be informed while he is outside his home that he is wearing *Shatnez*. The halacha (Berachos 19b, Yoreh Deah 303) is that he must remove his clothing even though doing so causes him great embarrassment. Similarly, if one has an embarrassing stain on his clothing on Shabbos he may not clean it.

Exceptions – *Shev V'all Tasseh*

There are two basic exceptions to the above rule where we would allow *Kavod Habrios* to take precedence over the halacha. The first exception is "*Shev V'all Tasseh*" – (See Berachos 19, Tosfos in Shevuos 30b, Orach Chaim 13) where if the transgression of the halacha will be a passive one, it is permitted. For example, if one has an embarrassing deformity or an offensive tattoo on his arm, he may be permitted to passively overlook his obligation to put on tefillin if he cannot find a private place to do so. Another example according to the Rema, is if one were to notice that his friend is wearing *Shatnez*. Although one is obligated to inform his friend, since doing so would necessitate his friend to remove his clothing and thereby suffer great embarrassment, he may overlook his obligation and wait for a more convenient time. (Yoreh Deah 303. See Rambam who argues there. See also Kovetz Haaros 48-10 and Kehillos Yakov Shevuos 26 and sefer Kavod V'hadar Teatrehu Page 12)

This leniency, however, only applies to a case of "*Gnai Gadol*" – great embarrassment. (Magen Avra-

ham 13-8) If one were to incur anything less than a "great embarrassment" he may not transgress Torah Law. What we may consider to be a great embarrassment may not always be consistent with the halacha's perspective, and a *shaila* should therefore be asked in case of doubt.

D'Rabbanan

The second exception regarding *Kavod Habriyos* is by *Isurei D'rabbanan* – Rabbinic Law. (Berachos 19b Orach Chaim 13) When faced with an *Isur D'rabbanan*, Chazal permitted one to transgress the halacha even *B'kum V'asseh* – actively. For example, if one finds himself in the restroom on Shabbos without pre-cut bathroom tissue, he may (for lack of a better option) tear the paper roll employing a "*shinui*" – backhanded manner (Ex. using his elbows). Tearing in this manner is only an *Issur D'Rabbanan* and is permitted in a case of personal dignity, which falls under the category of *Kavod Habrios*. (see Shmiras Shabbos for the details of this halacha 23-16) Another example would be if someone were to have an embarrassing piece of food stuck between his teeth on Shabbos. The halacha permits him to use a splinter of wood as a toothpick even though this splinter would normally be considered *muktzah* – an *Issur D'Rabbanan*. (M.A. 322-4) Unlike the heter of "*Shev V'all Tasseh*" mentioned in the previous paragraph, an *Issur D'Rabbanan* may be transgressed even in a case of minor embarrassment. (M.A. 13-8)

Source of Embarrassment

An important point is made by the Ohr Sameach (Chidushei Rav Meir Simcha Bava Metziah 30b) regarding *kiyum hamitzvos* versus *kavod habrios*. He explains that there may only be leniencies when the embarrassment involved is caused indirectly by the mitzvah and not by the actual mitzvah itself. For example, in the case mentioned earlier where someone is embarrassed to reveal his arm in public he may be exempt from putting on tefillin. In that case it is not the mitzvah of tefillin itself which he finds embarrassing, rather the necessity to reveal his arm. Revealing one's arm is not the mitzvah of tefillin. However, if one is in a busy airport and is embarrassed to put on tefillin in public, it is the actual mitzvah which he is ashamed of. In such a case we apply the dictum – "*Ritzono shel Makom Zehu Kvodo Shel Adom*" – the will of Hashem is the honor of man. One should not be embarrassed to keep the Torah. Rather he should strengthen himself and realize that *kiyum haTorah* is well worth any discomfort it may cause him.

Rabbi Friedman is a full-time member of the kollel. To dedicate an issue of Parsha Encounters call the kollel at (773)262-9400