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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Balak ✍️ Rabbi Akiva Niehaus

“I Can't Do That”

After Bilaam fails to do Balak's bidding, and blesses Bnai Yisrael three times, Balak turns to Bilaam with great fury. “I summoned you to curse my enemies, and behold! you have blessed them three times!” (Bamidbar 24:10) Bilaam responds, “I have already informed your emissaries that I cannot transgress the word of Hashem.” This exchange requires explanation. Being that Balak was previously made aware that Bilaam was powerless to defy Hashem's command, why was he now filled with anger when he saw he couldn't curse?

The Bais Haleivi [quoted in Bais Yitzchok] explains that when someone exclaims, “I can't do that”, there are two ways to understand his words. For example, if Reuvain tells Shimon to publicly shame a respected community leader, Shimon might respond, “I can't do that.” If Reuvain were then to ask Yehuda to pick up a large building, Yehuda would certainly answer, “I can't do that.” Although the two men used the same words to respond, the difference between them is blatant. Shimon's answer indicated that although he is physically capable of embarrassing someone, his conscience refuses to let him do so. Yehuda, on the other hand, responded that he is physically incapable of fulfilling the request.

The true meaning of their response becomes apparent when bribed with a large amount of money. The first fellow may indeed take up the offer, whereas the second person will continue to desist since the task is truly impossible.

When Bilaam originally told Balak that he is unable to defy Hashem's command, Balak thought that although Bilaam was physically able to counter Hashem's will, he was unwilling to do so. Balak, therefore, decided that with the proper incentives, Bilaam will eventually agree to curse Bnai Yisrael. When Balak saw that despite numerous offers of honor and wealth, Bilaam was unwilling to curse, Balak was outraged. He could not comprehend Bilaam's apparent stubbornness. Bilaam responds

that Balak made a grave error. When Bilaam stated in the beginning that he was unable to contradict Hashem's command, he meant that he was physically unable to do so, and no money in the world could change that.

The Lekach Tov writes that we must learn from here an important lesson about how to approach Halacha. When we learn that something is forbidden and realize that, “I can't do that,” what is our true intention? Do we believe that the forbidden act is physically possible but we are unwilling to defy Hashem's command, or do we feel physically incapable of doing something forbidden? As we have seen, there is an inherent danger in the first approach. When the stakes are high enough and the advantages to sin are very great, one could unfortunately stumble. On the other hand, if one feels that he is physically unable to sin, then he will be faced with less temptation.

Rav Moshe Feinstein Zt”l was once attending a convention and was asked to attend a private meeting in a side room. As he was about to enter the room, he noticed someone saying Shemoneh Esrei right next to the door. Knowing the Halacha that one is not allowed to walk in front of someone saying Shemoneh Esrei, Rav Moshe exclaimed, “There is a wall in front of the door which is not allowing me to enter!” Rav Moshe's fear of transgressing the Halacha caused him to visualize a wall thus physically preventing him from stumbling.

If we view Halacha from the proper perspective, then when faced with sin we will visualize that a brick wall is stopping us. With this approach, we may hope that Hashem will give us the strength to avoid temptation and stay true to the path of the Torah.

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Laws of Bedtime Shema and Hamapil

Rabbi Yisroel Langer

Chazal instituted the recital of Shema and the beracha of Hamapil to be said before one goes to sleep at night. The reason Chazal instituted it is to protect us from the dangers of the night. Lechatchilah one should say the beracha of Hamapil, the first paragraph of Shema¹ and the various chapters of Tehillim and pesukim that can be found in most siddurim. B'dieved, for one who is sick or weak it is sufficient to recite just the first paragraph of Shema and the beracha of Hamapil.² In regard to the proper order, some have the minhag of saying the beracha of Hamapil prior to the recital of Shema, while others say the beracha of Hamapil after the recital of Shema. The Mishna Berura³ rules that someone who may fall asleep during his recitation of Shema should say the beracha of Hamapil first. If someone is confident that he will not fall asleep until after he completes Shema, he should say the beracha of Hamapil after the recital of Shema.

No Talking

Anything a person has to say, or any food or drink that he would like to eat, should be done before reciting Shema. If one already said Shema and is hungry or thirsty, or if he has something of importance to be said he may talk but should repeat over the first paragraph of Shema again.⁴ With regard to talking or eating after the beracha of Hamapil, the Halacha is more strict. When one makes a beracha on food any speech uttered in between the beracha and the eating would be considered a hefsek and would invalidate the beracha. The view of the Mishna Berura⁵ is that the beracha of Hamapil is a beracha said *on* one's sleep just as one makes a beracha on food. The proof of the Mishna Berura is from the wording of the beracha in which we say "Blessed is ... Who casts the bonds of sleep upon *my* eyes and slumber upon *my* eyelids." Therefore one's talking or eating done after the beracha of Hamapil before one falls asleep is considered a hefsek. Furthermore, according to the Mishna Berura if one is unsure whether he will be able to fall asleep he should not say the beracha of Hamapil (safek brochos l'hakeil). Based on this, the Chazon Ish goes as far as to say that if one already made the beracha of Hamapil he cannot even make the beracha of "Asher Yatzar," as this would be a hefsek between the beracha of Hamapil and one's sleep.

The Chayeh Adam disagrees with the above. He holds that the beracha of Hamapil is not similar to the brochos made on food. It is a beracha of praise and thanks to Hashem that Chazal instituted to be said before one goes to sleep, but it is not a beracha said *on* one's sleep. According to the Chayeh Adam if one is unsure whether he will be able to fall asleep, he should still recite the beracha of Hamapil.⁶ If one talks or eats after reciting Hamapil, according to the Chayeh Adam, it would not be a hefsek.

The consensus of many poskim⁷ is as follows: One should Lechatchilah

act in accordance with the ruling of the Mishna Berura and not talk or eat after saying the beracha of Hamapil. However, if something urgent comes up one may be lenient and rely on the ruling of the Chayeh Adam. (Ex: if a child wakes up and needs to be pacified⁸.) According to these Poskim if one has to make the beracha of "Asher Yatzar" and he already said Hamapil he should certainly do so.⁹ In a situation where one knows in advance that there is a good chance he will have to make a hefsek before falling asleep (ex: a child will wake up, one is a doctor on call) many poskim hold that one should still say Hamapil. As always, for a final psak one should consult his own Rav.

Miscellaneous Halachos of Hamapil

- The beracha of Hamapil is only said at night, not during the day.¹⁰
- If one makes the beracha of Hamapil and falls asleep, and then wakes up during the night, he may talk as much as he likes and does not make the beracha a second time before returning to sleep.
- One who is an "onein," *Rachmonah Latzlan*, is still obligated in the bedtime Shema and Hamapil.¹¹
- On the first night of Pesach one only says the first paragraph of Shema and the beracha of Hamapil.¹² The reason is because we want to demonstrate that it is "*Leil Shimurim*".

¹ If one davened Maariv before nightfall, he must repeat all three paragraphs of shema. See M.B. 239 s.k. 1 that it is commendable to always recite all three paragraphs of Shema before going to sleep. If one does so he should say "E-I Melach Neman" prior to saying shema as the total of the 248 words of shema should protect his 248 limbs.

² M.B. 239 s.k. 9

³ M.B. 239 s.k.2

⁴ M.B. 239 s.k.4

⁵ Siman 239 s.k. 4 see Biur Halacha

⁶ The Aruch Hashulchan (239:6) brings proof to this opinion, for Chazal would not institute a beracha to be said *on* one's sleep, since sleep isn't in a person's ability to control.

⁷ HaRav Dovid Zucker shlit"ta, HaRav Shmuel Fuerst shlit"ta, see also Piskei Teshuvos 239 note 17 who brings a long list of Poskim who rule like the Chayeh Adam. See Sefer Minhag Yisroel Torah p. 321 who quotes the Divrei Chayim (Sanzer Rav ZT"l) that it's better to say Hamapil and talk afterward than not to say Hamapil at all, for one who sleeps without saying Hamapil is like eating without making a beracha. [There are dissenting opinions and various minhagim regarding this practice.]

⁸ See sefer Aleinu L'shabeiach (Hagoan R' Yitzchak Zilbershtein shlita) [Sefer Vayikrah p. 681] that questions whether one can pacify a child even according to the Mishna Berura. The halacha is that Speech that pertains the eating of food is not considered a hefsek between the beracha and the eating. So perhaps calming a child to quiet him can also be considered necessary for my sleep, and would therefore not be considered a hefsek.

⁹ HaRav Dovid Zucker shlita in the name of HaGoan Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky zt"l

¹⁰ M.B. 239 s.k. 8

¹¹ Minchos Shlomo Siman 91:25:9

¹² Rema 481:2 and see M.B. See Pri Megadim who quotes the Levush that for those who live outside of Eretz Yisroel the same halacha would apply for the second night of Pesach. [See Shem M'shmuel on the Yom Tov of Succos p. 148 that quotes the Avnei Nezer that when one sleeps in a succah he only recites the first paragraph of shema and the beracha of Hamapil].

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