

BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

In this week's portion, the Torah commands us with quite a tall order. Because of flagrant ingratitude, in which Ammonites and Moabites forgot the kindness of our father Avraham toward their forebear Lot, we are commanded not to allow them to join in marriage into our nation. The directive does not preclude Ammonites and Moabites from converting or marrying other Jewish converts. It also does not prohibit Ammonite women converts from marrying into the fold. It does prohibit the direct descendants of Avraham, who epitomized kindness and gratitude, from marrying Lot's male descendants who were so cruel to the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us in the exact way their ungraciousness manifested itself. "Because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt, and because he hired against you Bilaam son of Beor, of Pethor, Aram Naharaim, to curse you" (Deuteronomy 23:5). But in an atypical deviation from the initial narrative, the Torah inserts the following verse: But Hashem, your God, refused to listen to Balaam, and Hashem, your God, reversed the curse to a blessing for you, because Hashem, your God, loved you" (Ibid v.6).

The Torah then continues to conclude the directive: "You shall not seek their peace or welfare, all your days, forever" (Ibid v. 7).

Why does Hashem interject the story of His compassionate intervention into the prohibition? The Torah previously detailed the story of the talking donkey, the interceding angel and Balak's subsequent failure to curse the Jews. Why interject G-d's love in halting Bilaam's plans when the Torah is presenting a reason not to marry Moabites? It has no bearing on the prohibition.

A classic story of a new immigrant's encounter with the American judicial system involved an old Jew who was called to testify.

"Mr. Goldstein," asked the judge, "how old are you?"

"Keyn ayin horah, eighty three."

"Just answer the question, Mr. Goldberg. I repeat. How old are you?"

Goldberg did not flinch. "Keyn ayin horah , eighty-three."

"Mr. Goldberg," repeated the judge, "I do not want any prefixes or suffixes. Just answer the question."

But Goldberg did not change his response.

Suddenly Goldberg's lawyer jumped up. "Your honor," he interjected. "Please allow me to ask the question. The Judge approved and the lawyer turned to Goldberg.

"Mr. Goldberg. How old are you, Keyn ayin Horah?"

Goldberg smiled. "Eighty three."

In what has become a tradition of the Jewish vernacular, perhaps originating with the above verses, no potential calamity is ever mentioned without mentioning or interjecting a preventative utterance of caution.

"I could have slipped and chas v'sholom (mercy and peace) hurt my leg."

"They say he is, rachmana nitzlan, (Heaven save us) not well."

"My grandfather tzo langa yohrin (to longevity) is eighty-three years old," of course, suffixed with the ubiquitous "kayn ayin horah!"

An ever present cognizance of Hashem's hand in our lives has become integrated into traditional Jewish speech patterns. Thank G-d, please G-d , and G-d willing pepper the vernacular of every Jew who understands that all his careful plans can change in the millisecond of a heavenly whim. And so, beginning with Biblical times, there are no reference to occurrences of daily life found in a vacuum. They are always surrounded with our sincere wishes for Hashem's perpetual protection and continuous blessing.

Good Shabbos

This week's Drasha / Faxhomily is Dedicated by the Hirsch & Friedman Families, in memory of Henry Hirsch.

The Henry and Myrtle Hirsch Foundation are the prime supporters of Faxhomily World-Wide

Copyright © 2002 by [Rabbi M. Kamenetzky](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

If you enjoy the weekly Drasha, now you can receive the best of Drasha in book form! Purchase **Parsha Parables** at a very special price!

The author is the Dean of the [Yeshiva of South Shore](#).

Drasha is the e-mail edition of FaxHomily, a weekly torah facsimile on the weekly portion which is sponsored by **The Henry and Myrtle Hirsch Foundation**