

ANOTHER PRODUCTIVE DAY!

by Rabbi Label Lam

"Behold, a people that rises like a lioness and raises itself like a lion. It does not lie down until it eats its prey and drinks the blood of the slain." (Bamidbar 23:24)

Behold, a people that rises like a lioness: When they awaken from their sleep in the morning they show the vigor of a lioness and a lion in grasping mitzvot, to don a 'tallith' [prayer shawl], recite the shema and put on 'tefillin' [phylacteries]. — [Mid. Tanchuma Balak 14, Num. Rabbah 20:20]

When Bilaam stood to curse the Jewish Nation and his prophetic eye opened, he perceived and uttered a most truthful and flattering portrait of our people. One of his observations seems at first like a characterization of a ferociously over aggressive people. With Rashi's help from the Midrash we end up with quite a different picture of Bilaam's insight into Israel's uniquely powerful formula for success.

Behold, a people that rises like a lioness: When they awaken from their sleep in the morning they show the vigor of a lioness and a lion in grasping Mitzvos, to don a 'Tallis, recite the Shema and put on 'Tefillin' - (Rashi)

It does not lie down: (A Jew does not lie down)... on his bed at night until he consumes and destroys any harmful thing that comes to tear him. How so? He recites the Shema on his bed and surrenders his spirit to the hand of the Omnipresent. Should an army or a troop come to harm them, the Holy One, blessed is He, protects them, fights their battles and strikes them (their attackers) down dead.

It seems that according to Rashi, what Bilaam had noticed was that the Jewish People get up and get busy with Mitzvos from the crack of dawn and they go to sleep with the recitation of the Unity of HASHEM and a yielding of their soul at the end of the day. That's it! That's the secret revealed.

Therefore when you see a fellow with a Yarmulka arriving at the office in the morning, you know this was not his first stop. He has invested up to an hour already enveloped in Tallis and Tefillin and prayerful contemplation, before a morsel of food touches his lips or the work day commences.

That alone is a powerful testimony to the devotion of the Jewish People and it's worth marveling at the endurance and consistency of this practice and its practitioners.

Here's a small but obvious question! Bilaam speaks firstly about the aggressive rising like a lioness to pursue Mitzvos, and then about the last moments before sleep. The order should logically be the other way around. "When you lie down and when you rise up!" First one experiences a good night's

sleep and then the hearty awakening. Why is it in the reverse sequence?

This same question jumps out when one begins to learn the Shulchan Aruch- the Code of Jewish Law: "A person should strengthen himself like a lion to arise in the morning to serve his Creator!" The problem I have is that the Shulchan Aruch, which is understandably going through the order of the day, is talking to a sleeping man. Get up like a lion? Napoleon himself admitted, "When I am awake I am Napoleon! When I am asleep, I am a horse!" This requirement begs the question, "How do you get up like a lion?"

I remember the look of shock on the students' faces and my own sense of confusion. Had the Rabbi misspoken? I went to pick up my boys from high school one evening, and we had all Davened Maariv together. Right afterwards, an announcement was made! The Rabbi said, "Shacharis, (morning prayers) are at 11:00 PM tonight!" What? Shacharis at night!? What can he be saying? Then the explanation followed, "If you go to bed by 11:00 tonight, then you will make it for Shacharis at 7:30 tomorrow morning!"

If you go to bed with a sense of purpose, you'll wake up with energy and direction! Go to bed like a lion! Wake up like a lion! Go to bed like a slug! Wake up like a slug! Contemplating HASHEM's Oneness prepares one for a day of fresh dedication, and sleep becomes a Mitzvah too. Maybe that's what Bilaam had in mind.

Maybe it is the right order! How can one put his head down at the day's end and sleep with peace? Live a day of devotion and having done all that you can, you can entrust your soul to HASHEM. It's the secret to a sweet sleep *and* the preparation for **another productive day**.

DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.