

A GOOD KIND OF COVER-UP

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

And Bilaam lifted up his eyes and he saw Israel dwelling according to their tribes. (Bamidbar 24:2)

The Mishnah is made up of six orders, Zeraim, Moed, Nashim, Nezikin, Kodashim, and Taharah (Seeds, Holidays, Women, Damages, Holy Things, and Purity). In the section of Damages, there is a volume called Bava Basra (the Final Gate), which deals primarily with the laws and responsibilities between people, and to the community at large. One such law, for example, is the right to privacy when people share a common courtyard.

The Mishnah states:

In a courtyard which he shares with others, a person should not have a door open facing another person's door, nor a window facing another person's window. (Bava Basra 60a)

One might argue that this law is common sense, while others might claim that is ridiculous; it all depends upon how much one values privacy and respects the privacy of others. However, whether or not it is a reasonable law, the Talmud questions its source and answers:

From where are these rules derived? Rebi Yochanan said, "From the verse of the Torah, 'And Bilaam lifted up his eyes and he saw Israel dwelling according to their tribes.' (Bamidbar 24:2). This indicates that he saw that the doors of their tents did not exactly face one another, after which he exclaimed, 'They are worthy that the Divine Presence should rest upon them!'" (Bava Basra 60a)

It is not everyday that an anti-Semite as nasty as Bilaam compliments the Jewish people, even in an underhanded manner. And, though later on Bilaam was forced by G-d to say nice things about us, here he was not compelled but spoke on his own volition. It is one thing to earn respect for being a good person from your friends, but it is something altogether different to earn such respect from your enemy.

Long before Bilaam came along modesty had already become the hallmark of the Jewish people, a major part of the tikun for the sin of Adam HaRishon. As Rashi points out, prior to the sin of eating from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah there was no need for tznius (modesty), so therefore there was no shame in living unclothed (Rashi, Bereishis 2:25). However, after the sin clothing became a must.

Kabbalah explains that it wasn't because they had been like children who had yet to gain an awareness of the difference between being clothed and unclothed prior to the sin. Rather, prior to

the sin their skin was light- like and transparent, which means it did not appear as our skin does now, and therefore, there was no need to cover it up. Clothing is for skin, not for light.

The light, of course, was not that of the body itself but of the essence of the soul. Rather, the body being as spiritual as it had been at first, was more translucent, allowing the light of the soul to shine through to the outside. This is what happened to Moshe Rabbeinu's body after G-d passed by him on Mt. Sinai, prior to his descent back to the camp after the sin of the golden calf (Shemos 34:29). Having been exposed to a high- level revelation of G-d, Moshe's body emanated light as he became elevated back to the level of Adam HaRishon prior to the sin (or at least close to it), and the light of his soul was able to shine through once again.

However, for the rest of us, our souls remain hidden inside our physical bodies, and as in the case of some, seemingly leaving no trace of a Neshama at all. For, whereas some act nobly revealing their souls through their actions, many do just the opposite. And, physical modesty is the fundamental difference between the two. It's one of those interesting quirks of life: the more you tastefully cover in the physical realm, the more you reveal your Neshamah from the spiritual realm.

It's not mainly a question of limiting physical temptation; it is primarily a matter of increasing spiritual awareness, which automatically results in the former.

SHABBOS DAY:

The entire glory of the daughter of the king lies on the inside. (Tehillim 45:14)

Thus Dovid HaMelech wrote:

Kol kevudah bas melech penimah - The entire glory of the daughter of the king lies on the inside. (Tehillim 45:14)

On a Pshat-level this is the posuk that sums up the need for a Jewish woman to be modest in all her ways, as royalty ought to be. However, on a Sod-level the "daughter of the king" refers to the soul, a piece of G-d, so-to-speak, and the posuk is reminding us of what must be the driving force in our lives, even if we cannot see it on the outside. Life is about baring the soul, not the body - something that Bilaam became cognizant of when viewing the arrangement of the tents of the Jewish nation below him, and the latter being that which the Western world is committed to with unbearable devotion.

The prophet wrote:

He has told you, "O man, what is good! What does G-d require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and walk modestly with your G-d." (Michah 6:8)

Again, here is the message reiterated by Dovid HaMelech and the rest of Torah for that matter. The Vilna Gaon also saw in this, a message about the End-of-Days. (There are some who find it ironic that at this time in history the name of the President of the United States is Bush, similar to the Hebrew

word for shame (bushah), which Adam and Chava experienced as a result of the sin.):

Every act at the Beginning of Redemption must be consistent with the posuk, "Walk modestly with your G-d" (Michah 6:8), as revealed in the words, "Place it in the ears of Yehoshua" (Shemos 17:14), who was from the line of Moshiach Ben Yosef. The word b'aznei (in the ears of) is literal, but it also hints to Sod (secret) in gematria (Bais-Aleph-Zayin-Nun-Yud). Rabbeinu had an additional hint from the posuk, "Secrets of G-d to those who fear Him" (Tehillim 25:13). Sod when expanded is Samech-Mem-Chof, Vav- Vav, Dalet-Lamed-Yud-Tav, and has the gematria of Moshiach Ben Yosef, who will gather in the exiles. Regarding the posuk, "It is the glory of G-d to conceal a thing" (Mishlei 25:2), the words "to conceal a thing" equals "you have brought up the tribes." Therefore, Rabbeinu told us to call the overseers of the ingathering of the exiles "Vision of Tzion" rather than "Return of Tzion." (Kol HaTor, Ch. 1:14)

In other words, when it comes to working on important matters for the Jewish people, it is important to avoid unwanted publicity. As much as our egos crave attention and appreciation, if we are truly committed to redemption and being a part of it, then we want to avoid attention, for it is such attention that lands the Sitra Achra on our heads and who makes it his business to interfere with those involved in the tasks of geulah. Receiving public attention means getting his attention as well.

This is what Rabbi Chaim Vital taught according to the Arizal:

For a great soul to leave the Klipos, you should know, it must be done with trickery and scheming, as it happened with me. Since the Chitzonim had thought that I was lost among them, G-d forbid, they did not suspect anything when The Holy One, Blessed is He, took me out as a tzelem makif of HaRav Maggid Mishnah. They had thought that this was to their benefit, and that I had been transformed into an "enemy." Thus, you will find that many great souls have come in the bodies of simpletons, and sometimes even in the children of evil people, just as Avraham was born from Terach. In fact, Chazal have said (Midrash Rabbah 38:19) and it is in the Zohar as well . . . However, through this G-d tricked the Chitzonim . . . the Chitzonim had no idea that it was his tikun . . . It was similar with respect to Dovid HaMelech, who only left the Klipos at the time of the incident mentioned by Chazal on the posuk, "Behold, in iniquity was I fashioned" (Tehillim 51:7; Yalkut HaMakiri, Tehillim 69). For, he had thought that his father Yishai had fathered him through a concubine, whereas in truth it had been through an actual wife . . . However, had it not been for all of this, the Chitzonim would never have let him leave. This is also the reason for the episodes of Tamar, Rus, Rachav, all the souls of converts, all the kings from Dovid, and Moshiach who will have come from Rus the Moabite and the union of Yehudah and Tamar. Rebi Akiva himself was the son of converts who descended from Sisera. This is the trickery and the scheming that The Holy One, Blessed is He, uses against the Klipos in order to free a soul exploited amongst them. Understand this. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 38)

We've discussed this idea many times before, and I even go into it in more detail on my website (www.thirtysix.org). However, the basic idea is that when it comes to doing anything that deals

directly with redemption, it is advisable to do it as secretly as possible.

Most countries would have jumped at the opportunity to confirm such an ancient historical find; here, it seems, there are those who would rather keep it buried and out of the public mind, for obvious reasons. Finding the Aron HaKodesh from Moshe Rabbeinu's time, especially at this explosive time in world history, could only serve to stir up religious fervor, and perhaps even more than that.

Of course, if the time has indeed come to unearth such ancient hidden treasures, it will happen no matter how hard the Klipos struggle to prevent it from happening. The only question is, how much aggravation will they cause good and well-meaning people along the way? Hence, it is best to walk modestly with G-d, that is, keep such matters as quiet as possible for as long as possible. This, says the GR"A, is what G-d alluded to when He told Moshe to speak b'aznei Yehoshua - in the ears of Yehoshua, b'aznei having the gematria of Sod (mystery).

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

G-d shall command the blessing upon you in your hidden things. (Devarim 28:8)

There is another adaptation of this idea, as the Talmud states:

Rebi Yitzchak also said, "A blessing is found only in what is hidden from the eye, for it is written, "G-d shall command the blessing upon you in your hidden things" (Devarim 28:8). The School of Rebi Yishmael taught, "A blessing comes only to that over which the eye has no power, for it says, 'G-d shall command the blessing upon you in your hidden things.'" Our Rabbis taught: When one goes to measure [the corn in] his granary, he should pray, "May it be Your will, O L-rd our G-d, to send a blessing upon the work of our hands." Having started to measure, he prays, "Blessed is He who sends a blessing on this stack." But if he measured and then prayed, it is a vain prayer, because a blessing is not found in that which is [already] weighed, measured, or counted, but only in that which is hidden from the eye, as it says, "G-d will command the blessing upon you in your hidden things." (Bava Metzia 42a)

It is natural for people to want to exhibit their successes in public. It seems as if part of the enjoyment of having material wealth is not just to use it, but for others to see us use it as well. For many, it makes them feel special to have something that others do not, especially if they define themselves by their material possessions.

However, that can be the fastest route to losing what one has, because it can invoke feelings of hurt and jealousy by those less fortunate, and that can invite ayin hara (the evil eye) and Divine judgment. The Talmud addresses this issue elsewhere:

Abaye said, "From this it can be inferred that there wasn't one who did not take [a portion in the land]. For, should you think there was one who did not receive [a share], would he not have complained? And, if it be said that the Torah only recorded [the case of him] who complained and benefited, but

did not record [the case of anyone] who complained and did not benefit, [it can be said] that the children of Yosef certainly complained and did not benefit, and [yet] the Torah recorded their case. There, [it may be said that the Torah desired] to give us good advice, that a person should be on his guard against ayin hara. This was what Yehoshua told them, as it says, "Yehoshua said to them, 'If you are great people, go to the forest'" (Yehoshua 17:15). He said to them, 'Go and hide yourselves in the forests so that an evil eye may have no power over you.' They answered him, 'We are of the seed of Yosef over whom the evil eye has no power, as it says, "Yosef is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a fountain" (Bereishis 49:22).' And, Rav Avahu said, "Do not read, by a fountain, but those who transcend the eye." Rebi Yosi, the son of Rebi Chanina said, "[this is inferred] from the following: 'And let them grow like fishes into a multitude in the midst of the earth' (Bereishis 48:16). [This means that] as the fishes in the sea are covered by the waters and no eye has any power over them, so in the case of the seed of Yosef no [evil] eye has [any] power over them.'" (Bava Basra 118a)

But for the rest of Klal Yisroel that does not descend from Yosef and enjoy this special blessing, we have to act like the fish and cover up the best we can, within reason. It's the only way to maintain the blessing, which by the way, does not necessarily mean to maintain the wealth. For, sometimes a person can remain wealthy for the sake of those he helps with his money. Rather, 'maintain the blessing' means keeping a close connection with G-d, which is the whole point of all that we own in the first place.

MELAVE MALKAH:

He spoke in a parable, and said, "Bilaam, the son of Beor, the strong man with the penetrating eye testifies. The one who heard the sayings of G-d, who saw the vision of G-d testifies, falling, but having his eyes uncovered: How good are your tents, O Ya'akov, your dwellings, O Israel!" (Bamidbar 24:3-5)

That's not what Bilaam meant to say. He really meant to curse Ya'akov's tents and dwellings, namely the Battei Midrashos and Battei K'nesios, and he would have, had G-d not changed his words around to make him bless the Jewish people instead. And, if anyone had an ayin hara, it was Bilaam.

However, the Torah is showing us that even though ayin hara can be all around us, by acting modestly and working on the tikun for the sin of Adam HaRishon, G-d protects us against its effects. Not only that, but He even goes one step further: He turns the curse into a blessing!

Alarming, as we venture further into the time period that corresponds to the sefirah called Yesod, a sefirah of relationship and chayn, there is a tendency to cover up that which is meant to be revealed, and to reveal that which is meant to be covered up, even in the Torah world. The whole point of Creation was free-will, and the whole point of free-will is to make decisions that bring out the soul and reveal its light to the world, thereby purifying the body and moving inch-by-spiritual-inch back towards Kesones Ohr (Clothing of Light).

And, as we have said before, this last 2,000 years of history correspond to the mitzvah "to love G-d . . . with all your possessions." Sometimes that can mean sacrificing materialism for spiritual growth,

and it often does. However, it can also mean going about one's business in a modest way, not attracting the attention of those less fortunate, and not causing pain to those who truly feel their lack.

It's a cover-up of a different sort, and one that has the approval of Heaven and the promise of increased and maintained blessing.

Have a great Shabbos,
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