

# THE CRIME OF AMMON AND MOAV WAS NOT ABOUT BREAD AND WATER

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #1171 – Dating Someone Before You Are Divorced? Good Shabbos!

## The Crime of Ammon and Moav Was Not About Bread and Water

The *pasuk* says in Parshas Ki Seitzei "Neither an Ammonite nor a Moavite should enter the Congregation of Hashem..." [Devorim 23:4] We may not marry a descendant of the nations of Ammon or Moav "...because they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you went out from Egypt..." [Devorim 23:5] Then the *pasuk* throws in "...and over the matter that they hired against you Bilaam son of Beor to curse you." [ibid.] The Torah spells out those commandments in *pesukim* 4 and 5. Then *pasuk* 6 continues "And Hashem did not desire to listen to Bilaam and He turned his curse into a blessing for the L-rd your G-d loves you."

The Dubno Maggid asks an obvious question on this last *pasuk*. These *pesukim* are dealing with the reason why it is forbidden to marry a descendant of Ammon and Moav. This *pasuk* should tell us the reason for this prohibition and nothing more. The reason is because they sinned against you twice – first by not providing you with bare necessities (bread and water) when you were close to their territory and second because they even hired the sorcerer Bilaam to curse you. That suffices to explain to us why we should never marry them.

Why does the *pasuk* need to go on further to state "And Hashem did not desire to listen to Bilaam and He turned his curse into a blessing..." That is ancient history! It happened in Parshas Balak! If the Torah wants to tell us that Hashem loves us, it should tell us this over there in Parshas Balak. This is not germane to Parshas Ki Seitzei. Our parsha is interested in telling us one thing – the reason to hold a grudge against Ammon and Moav which justifies the Torah's forbidding intermarriage with their descendants. Why does it repeat the fact that Hashem did not listen to Bilaam because He loved Klal Yisrael here in Parshas Ki Seitzei?

The Dubno Maggid, as is his holy style, provides us an answer by relating a parable: To what can the matter be compared? There was a fellow who went to the trade fair and loaded up his wagon with all types of goods and wares that he was going to sell. Sale of this merchandise was going to be a good part of his income for the coming year. Later, he is on his way home. He stops at an inn and

stays there overnight. The next morning, he wakes up, and he goes to get his wagon with all the wares. Lo and behold, it has been stolen! (They stole his car. They stole his truck. We can easily update the parable to our own times). All his merchandise is gone. All the money that he spent at the fair is down the drain.

He starts walking home by foot. He goes through mountains and valleys and valleys and mountains. Lo and behold, at the top of one mountain what does he see? He sees his wagon with his donkey with his wares **and** he finds the thief! He goes over to the fellow and shouts, "You thief! You stole my wagon! You stole my merchandise!" The thief confesses and said, "You are right. I am sorry." The merchant said, "Okay, fine. Just give me back my wagon."

The thief is thinking, "This fellow is a very nice person. He does not punch me. He does not take me to the police." Then the thief says to his victim "But, shouldn't you pay me for schlepping your wagon up all these hills? It was not easy taking all these wares up the mountains and through the valleys! At least pay me for that!" The merchant said to him "What Chutzpah [Gall]! Now I am furious at what you did to me!"

The Dubno Maggid explains this *pasuk* similarly. Ammon and Moav are saying "Why are you being so harsh on us? Okay, we did not want to give you the water. True, we did hire Bilaam to curse you. However, in the end, you received blessings from Bilaam's utterances. You should really appreciate what we did for you!" The Almighty responds "Forget what they said. It is not because of them that you received blessings. Rather, Hashem did not wish for you to be cursed. He loves you and switched the curses to blessings. It has nothing to do with them and therefore they cannot claim credit for allowing you to receive blessings.

Thus far are the words of the Dubno Maggid. However, I saw a slightly different explanation to this question. It is an answer that the Tolner Rebbe bases on a Kli Yakar in this week's parsha.

Besides the initial question asked by the Dubno Maggid (Why is it necessary to tell us here "And Hashem did not desire to listen to Bilaam..."), the Tolner Rebbe asks several additional questions:

First: Rashi says that the expression "because they did not greet you with bread and water" refers to the scheme they suggested to have the daughters of Midyan engage in promiscuous relations with Klal Yisrael. This seems to be a very far-fetched interpretation. How did Rashi come to this conclusion?

Second: The Ramban says an amazing thing here. According to the Ramban, Ammon and Moav did in fact provide bread and water to Klal Yisrael! To prove this contention, he cites an explicit *pasuk* in Parshas Devorim [2:28-29]: "You will sell food to me for money and I shall eat and you will give me water for money, and I shall drink... As the children of Esav who dwell in Seir did for me, and the Moavites who dwell in Ar..." So, what then does it mean here in Parshas Ki Seitzei "Over the matter that they did not greet you with bread and water?"

Third: Did they need bread and water from the Children of Moav? The Torah tells us – whatever it means – "Over the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water." They needed bread and water? What happened to the Mann? What happened to the Well? The Mann did not stop until they came into Eretz Yisrael. At this time, they were still being fed with Mann and their thirst was still being quenched by water from the Rock that Moshe struck. What, then, is the meaning of the complaint against Ammon and Moav that they did not provide them with bread and water?

The Ramban offers an amazing idea: For the thirty-nine years that they were in the Wilderness, their bread and water was provided by the Mann and the Well. However, the Ramban says, in the fortieth year that they were in the Wilderness, they started buying "soda". He does not literally say they bought soda but he does say that in that fortieth year, there were adults in Israel (*Gedolei Yisroel*) who began purchasing other beverages (e.g. – wine and other juices) for their drinking pleasure (*l'taynug*) rather than for reasons of urgent need or for merely quenching their thirst. They were close to the Land of Israel and they were trying to get used to the concept of "going to the store and buying." They began purchasing things for consumption. It is this type of purchasing that is referred to in Parshas Devorim where Bnei Yisrael mention the fact that they engaged in commercial transactions with the children of Esav and with the Moavites who dwell in Ar.

Knowing all of the above, the Kli Yakar puts it all together for us. This is what happened: Certainly, their main complaint against Ammon and Moav was the fact that they caused them to sin (the plan involving the daughters of Midyan). The Kli Yakar explains: They were approaching Eretz Yisrael. They had become used to having more than just bread and water. They had already bought more luxurious items. They had become accustomed to wine. They are approaching the Children of Ammon and Moav. They are tired and hungry and they are thirsty for the wine to which they have become accustomed. What was their sin? It was "because they did not **GREET** you (*al dvar asher lo **KEEDMU** eschem*) with bread and water." They said "Wait!"

The Jews were thirsty, their tongues were sticking out already anxious to consume the beverages, yet the Ammonites and Moavites made them wait for it. All this was a plot. When people are hungry and thirsty and are anxiously waiting for something, then when they finally get it – they do not stop to ask any questions.

It was because of this that when the food and drink was finally brought out to them, they consumed "the meat slaughtered to their gods" (*zivchei Eloheihem*) – i.e. forbidden non-Kosher meat – and they consumed their "wines of libation" which placed them on the road to sin and promiscuousness. Ammon and Moav told the Jewish men – when they saw how desperate they were for good food and beverage – "Well, if you really want to taste our best wine, go inside that tent over there..."

Inside the tent, seductive daughters of Midyan were waiting with their little idols. They offered them food and wine (and Chazal say also fine linens) – and aroused their sensual desires. The whole scheme was to be able to trip them up into engaging in forbidden sexual relations. This was the

major crime of Bnei Ammon and Moav. This, says the Kli Yakar, is the nuance of meaning hidden in the words "because they did not **GREET** you (*keedmu eschem*) with bread and water." They were not forthcoming with the food and drink and made them desperate. Desperate men do desperate things.

This is exactly what Rashi says when he links the words in Devorim 23:5 with the plot involving the Midyanite daughters. When one nation attacks another nation be it in self-defense or be it in the passion of the moment because they hate them, that is one thing. But when you sit and you plot in order to destroy another nation -- that is when the Master of the Universe says "This I will not allow." It was malicious. It was malevolent. It was spending time and mental energy just in order to spiritually ensnare them. That is a grievous sin.

The Gerer Rebbe once said that we know that in each and every generation there have been those who arise against us to destroy us. But no one ever did to Klal Yisrael what the Nazis, *ymach shmam*, did. The formulation of "the Jewish problem" and the plotting and the propaganda and all that the Nazis did – not just the fact that they went to war. This was a "Master Plan" to destroy the Jewish people. This is precisely why the Master of the Universe abhors Ammon and Moav. They cannot come and say "Well, what did we do worse than anybody else?" No. You plotted. You schemed to make the *Ribono shel Olam* angry at *Klal Yisrael*, knowing well that "the G-d of these people detests sexual immorality." This malevolence involved such trickery and such forethought."

The Almighty emphasizes: I did not let it happen. Do you know why? "Because the L-rd your G-d loves you!"

The Tolner Rebbe, who gave this schmooze [lecture regarding ethical matters] in the midst of the spiritually pregnant month of Elul, noted: If we see the anger that the Almighty had against Ammon and Moav because of their evil plots against *Klal Yisrael*, imagine if we plot for good and sit down in the days of Elul and try to figure out positive spiritual strategies. The complaint against Ammon and Moav was that they sat down to figure out negative spiritual strategies. They **strategized** to do evil. The Rebbe said that the Divine Attribute to reward exceeds the Divine Attribute to punish. If we sit down during these days and we strategize to spiritually improve, what a positive effect it can have.

Let us sit down and say "Listen. We have been here and we have done that in the past. But what are we going to do this coming year to make our Teshuva last? What concrete steps are we going to take?" If a person has the forethought to strategize how this year is going to be better, that will ingratiate him to the *Ribono shel Olam*. Just as He took out His wrath on Ammon and Moav for their strategizing to do evil, if we strategize to do good, how much more so will we find favor in His Eyes.

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