

Shiur L'Yom Shishi¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Balak:*** Numbers 25:1-9
 Haftarah: Micah 5:12 – 6:8
 B'rit Chadasha: I Corinthians 1:31

Israel was joined to Ba'al Peor.

[Numbers 25:3]

Today's Meditation is Proverbs 16:17-21, 25;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 12, *Sh'ma Koleinu* [Hear our Cry]

Vayeshev Yisra'el baShitim – And Israel abode at Shitim ... *vayachel ha-am liz'not el-b'not Moav* - when the people began to leave the Covenant lifestyle and adulterate with the daughters of Moav. Numbers 25:1.

What a crowd-teaser Bila'am was! What a dog-and-donkey show he could put on! No wonder kings smothered him with accolades. No wonder princes showered him with silver. No wonder persons of great national and cultural influence fawned over him! No wonder whole nations hung on his every word. No wonder millions of one-world-order minions were content to follow his '*whoever-I-bless-is-blessed-and-whoever-I-curse-is-cursed*' tour around all over Moav like starry-eyed groupies. No wonder the easily manipulated, easily deceived bought into his *schtick*, his *schmaltz*, his *glitz*, and his hype! Bila'am knew how to play *prima donna*.

Ah, but now the gild is off the lily. Balak and Moav have seen all they care to see. Bila'am's much-hyped 'curse Israel' tour has been cancelled just three venues in. So, what is Bila'am to do now? Does he have one more trick up his sleeve? Can he still find a way to advance the Not-So-New-World-Order agenda vis-a-vis B'nei Yisrael? In a famous comment, Rashi quotes Bila'am as telling his disappointed hosts: "*COME AND I WILL COUNSEL you regarding what you have to do. The God of these people hates unchastity, therefore tempt them to sin by means of your women.*" Thus Torah says ***Behold, these*** [*i.e.* the women of Midyan] ***were an enticement to B'nei Yisrael through the word of Bila'am.*** Numbers 31:16. Yeshua picked up the ancient midrash, describing Bila'am as having taught Balak how to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel – specifically by seducing them to do two self-destructive things: [1] eat unclean things that had been sacrificed to idols, and [2] commit fornication. See Revelation 2:14.

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The Vast Disparity Between Bila'am's Public Ministry and His Private Counsel

Bila'am's season of sowing has now come and gone. The only question still out is *what will be his harvest* – i.e. for all the noise he has made, what mark will he actually leave on mankind and Creation? Will he be remembered for the blessings he declared over B'nei Yisrael publicly – or for the seduction he counseled against B'nei Yisrael privately?

The same questions could, of course, be asked of each of us. Harvest time is coming. So what exactly have you been sowing in your season of relevance? What kind of fruit is growing in your life-garden? Considering what you have sown, weeded, and watered lately, what exactly should you, your family, and all the people and places you have been given the opportunity to influence expect to reap? Will the world be better because of what you have been sowing, watering, and weeding – or will it be worse because of it? Will the frontal boundaries that separate the clean and unclean and the holy from the profane be *clearer* to those who follow as a result of your actions this year – or will they be *more dangerously obscured*? Have you sown *beauty* ... or have you heaped up *ashes*? Have you sown *shalom* ... or *anxiety*? Have you sown *thanksgiving* and *praise* ... or *murmuring* and *complaint*? Have you sown *forgiveness* ... or *offense*? Have you sown *mercy* ... or *judgment*? Have you sown *joy* ... or *discontent*? Have you sown *hope* ... or *despair*? Have you sown *solutions* ... or *sarcasm*? Have you sown *revelation* ... or *rhetoric*? Have you sown *inspiration* ... or *condemnation*? Have you sown *healing* ... or *disease*? Have you sown *light* ... or *darkness*? Have you sown *clarity* ... or *confusion*? Have you sown *orthodoxy* ... or *artistry*? Have you sown *wisdom* ... or *folly*? Have you sown *emunah* ... or *paranoia*? Have you sown *love* ... or *hate*? Have you left behind a *blessing* ... or a *curse*?

What We Reap 'Raging Nations' – and People Caught Up In 'Vain Imaginations'?

Bila'am's prophecies about the fate of nations and people who reject the Holy One's message of blessing, *shalom*, hope, and reconciliation, and instead attempt to curse or destroy His Covenant People, have been delivered. He has revealed that six historic enemy peoples: the *Moavi* [*Balak's nation*] the *Edomi* [*the seed of Esav*], the *Amaleki* [*the raiders of the deserts in the South*], the *Keyni* [*i.e. the Midyani*²], the *Assyrians*, and ultimately the *Eberi* [*i.e. the peoples of the 'region beyond' - namely, Babylon and points North and East of the Euphrates*³] – will all ultimately diminish in

² Yitro, the *kohen* of Midyan, is also described as a *Keyni* [Kenite]. See **Judges 1:16**.

³ This prophecy of destruction includes the *Caliphate of Islam* that was based in Turkey, *Germany's Third Reich*, the *Kossacks*, *Tzarist and Bolshevic/Communist Russia*, and *Radical Anti-Semitic regimes in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran*.

influence on, if not totally disappear from, the world stage.

The Holy One caused every curse that the nations had hired Bila'am to pronounce on us to blow back squarely upon the heads of the '*nations who rage*'. Some of what you read in the course of our study of Bila'am's oracles concerning the enemies may alarm you. I hope it does. We need to know that *we are destined to have enemies* – and very serious and dangerous enemies at that. We need to know *who those enemies are going to be*. We need to know the level of *genocidal paranoia* of which they are capable. We need to know what *horrible atrocities* they want to commit. And we need to know *what is going to happen to them 'in the end'*. Do you know these things, Beloved? Are you *alert and oriented times four*? Have you received and internalized this week's '*Kingdom Briefing Regarding the Nations that Rage and the Peoples that Imagine a Vain Thing?*' Good! Now it is time that you heard *the rest of the story*.

But On the Other Hand ...

The nations that choose to *rage* and the peoples that delight in *imagining a vain thing* will be very, very unfriendly to – and will become more and more dangerous for - us and our children. However toxic, threatening, and even violent they become, though, underneath it all they will always remain *human beings*. They are sons and daughters of God, and their families and bloodlines are intended beneficiaries of Noah's Ark Building Project - just like us. Each has been beautifully designed, is carefully watched over, and is *passionately loved* by the same Creator Who beautifully designed, carefully watches over, and passionately loves us. They are our brothers and sisters. They are just sick. They are just blind people being led by those who are even more blind than they are. They are just *tumah*-infected. They are just *dis-information* poisoned. They are just *emotionally and pseudo-intellectually overstimulated*. They are just *brainwashed by political and ideological rhetoric*. They are just *love deprived*. They are just manifesting a conditioned response to all the *Serpent speak indoctrination* – which has been masquerading for centuries as 'public education', as 'news', as 'religion', as 'science', and as 'entertainment' - to which they have been subjected all their lives. They just have chronic cases of '*fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil*' *disease* and '*uncleanness over-exposure*' *syndrome*. They just suffer from mild-to-moderate paranoia ... and delusions ... and schizophrenia ... and narcissism ... and bi-polar disorder ... and chemical dependence ... and cognitive dissonance. They have moderate-to-severe post-traumatic stress syndrome, to the extent that they are now easily triggered into psychotic episodes. So, we need to be the adults in the room. We need to STAY CALM. We need to AVOID KNEE-JERK REACTIONS. We need to LEARN NOT TO TRIGGER their pathology unnecessarily. We need to FOLLOW PROTOCOLS. We need to WALK IN

WISDOM. We need to excel in EFFECTIVE INTERACTIONS. We need to become masters of PATIENT, MEASURED RESPONSES. We need to be careful never to give in to fear. We need to make sure we never surrender to hate. We have to be careful never to assume the role of judge, or jury, or jailer, or executioner. We have to be careful not to respond in kind.

While we need to know what kind of toxicity we are dealing with in the nations and people groups that get co-opted into the great Serpentine Conspiracy, we also need to understand that *overemphasis on the hatred, the perversion, the harsh rhetoric, and/or the cruelty of our enemies* can distract us from the purpose and destiny for which we were created and redeemed. We are held to a higher standard – because we have a higher calling. We are a royal priesthood. We are not here to compete with, much less make war upon, the nations. What we are here to do is *pray for them, bless them, model to them the deep, abiding shalom, the unflappable joy, the unshakable emunah, the unstoppable kindness river, the prescient wisdom flow, the awe-inspiring majesty procession, the problem-dissolving creativity process, and the wholeness-generating fruitfulness* of the Covenant Lifestyle. Even the slightest hint of *demonization or dehumanization of the peoples to who we are called to model the Kingdom Covenant Lifestyle is totally inconsistent with the heart of our Bridegroom-King and counterproductive to His Grand Redemptive Plan.*

When things go wrong in other nations we will often be blamed for it. We will find ourselves accused of every abominable scheme under the sun. From time to time we, our wives, and alas even our children will be savagely assaulted – and those who attack us will be so deceived as to believe that they are doing the world a great service. We will occasionally be forced to lower ourselves to engage in limited strategic military engagements with those who intend to effectuate genocide upon us. But we must not become like the poor, deceived, heartless savages that attack us. We must not return evil for evil. Our Bridegroom-King cares about those people every bit as much as He does us. The ‘*never again*’ attitude can therefore only be a very, very *small part* of our focus on the earth. The primary purpose of our calling is not to *suspect, or fear, or shun, or argue with, or conquer* the nations and peoples who hate us and clamor for our destruction. The primary purpose of our calling is to demonstrate the ability to *love such people anyway, and to keep being a Light unto them, even as they are trying to kill us.* Our highest calling is to *forgive them for their atrocities, and release blessings upon their progeny* even as our precious blood is oozing out of the wounds they inflict upon us and our children.

Of course we must be alert. Certainly we must remain sober. Of course we must

maintain watchfulness. But in the course of these things we must not ever let our vigilance make us even the slightest bit paranoid, much less angry, much less cruel. We must never allow ourselves to hate or feel disdain for or harden our hearts against other people – however vicious they speak or act toward us. Remember, our Bridegroom-King has intentionally *prepared a table for us in the presence of our enemies*. He deliberately uses our presence in their world to test their hearts. But He is also using their presence in our world to test our hearts.

So keep moving forward. Stay within the boundaries of the narrow road of Torah. Do not be deterred by anything from doing that which you were created to do, from being who you were created to be, and from loving and blessing the peoples and nations around you as you were created to love and bless them. Remember, however, that just because neither Bila'am nor his modern-day ilk in can effectively curse us does not mean we cannot experience the misery of a curse. We cannot be cursed externally; but what we CAN do, if we do not steward the precious gift of the Holy One's blessings faithfully, is *bring the sting of a curse upon our own head*.

The Rest of the Story – The Other Side of the Blessing Coin

Why is the Bila'am narrative included in the Torah? Neither our winding up being blessed nor our enemies winding up being cursed is either the end or the primary lesson of the Bila'am story. In the concluding aliyah of parsha *Balak* we are about to find *the true reason* this narrative is included in the Instruction Manual for Life on Planet Earth. In this concluding aliyah the beautiful, Divinely inspired blessings spoken by the mouth of Bila'am over us are shown for what they are - merely the prelude to and the foundation for the 'rest of the story'. Torah makes sure that we receive critical revelation about the 'other side of the coin' of blessing – i.e. the truth that *with every blessing from Heaven comes a corresponding responsibility on the part of he who is blessed to acknowledge, gratefully accept, humbly surrender to, faithfully steward, and graciously share with others all the blessings which he has received*. Not only are we to *be blessed*; we are to *be a blessing*. **Genesis 12:2,3**. Freely we have received; freely we are to give. **Matthew 10:8[b]**.

Heavenly Recycling – Paying It Forward

Have you considered the potential atmosphere-shifting power - and the Divine Brilliance - of the Holy One's protocols of blessedness? Could it be that when the Creator of the Universe blesses a person in Covenant with Him there might be more going on than just a supernatural version of a Random Act of Kindness? Could it be that every blessing the Creator of the Universe pours out into our lives is brilliantly designed by Him to function as a strategic weapon in the advancement of the Kingdom of Heaven into one or more of our spheres of influence - or even

beyond? Could it be that every blessing released into our lives carries a cross-generational assignment and is designed to meet eternal Kingdom Objectives every bit as much as it does our immediate personal needs? Could it be that our blessedness - as individuals and as a nation - is an essential component of the Grand Redemptive Plan of Our Bridegroom-King in Heaven? Absolutely! Take Avram for example. Avram was not picked out to be blessed just because the Holy One took a fanciful liking to him one day. He was blessed for a strategic, radically world-changing reason. He was blessed so he and his descendants could become a blessing to all the nations of the world. **Genesis 12:3 and 18:18.** He was blessed so that he would invest every blessing He received in the lives of all others who came into His sphere of influence, specifically by *teach[ing] his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Holy One, to do righteousness and justice.*” See **Genesis 18:19.** Blessings are not given to us for long-term storage in barns. See **Luke 12:15-21.** In fact, a blessing cannot truly be a blessing *unless it is shared.* A blessing unshared is actually a *blessing unfulfilled.* A blessing hoarded is actually a *blessing aborted.*

To a tight-fisted person any material ‘blessing’ they receive actually always winds up functioning as a curse. Having it is never as exciting as getting it. Once a miserly person gets something they desire, they have some tough decisions to make. Will they hide it or flaunt it? Will they pay to insure it? Will they buy a safe, erect a fence or build a building to keep it safe from weather, vandals, thieves, and curiosity seekers? Will they guard it with a gun, a security guard, or an alarm system? They have to maintain it. They have to worry about everything from losing it to having it depreciate in value. And of course, they have to fret over paying taxes on it. But it should be understood that blessings are not for *philanthropic* use either. Philanthropy is when a man or organization chooses to give something in his own name, for his own honor or to his own credit. A blessing that any man claims as his own or declares as evidence of his merit or generosity is a *blessing misappropriated.* Blessings are for sharing with others in such a way that the Holy One is the only one who is magnified. Sharing the blessings one receives from the Holy One while joyfully testifying of the goodness of the Bridegroom-King to others – that is what opens the floodgates of Heaven over a person’s life. The Divine Purpose behind the blessings men receive is thwarted – temporarily at least – if our receipt of blessing is not accompanied by a *willingness/passion to spread the evidence of His Kindnesses toward us all around our spheres of influence – and to give Him all the glory as we do so.*

Our Great Privilege and Responsibility to Serve As Stewards and Carriers-For-Hire of the Covenantal Blessings of the Holy One

The Holy One’s release of blessings upon His People is designed to work sort of

like *the Ultimate Kosher Pyramid Scheme*. Every blessing the Holy One releases upon one of His people – or His nation - is strategically timed to accomplish a series of Divine Purposes in multiple households and spheres of influence as it passes from recipient to recipient thereafter. Hence, each time the Holy One blesses us in some way – whether through a revelation download, a spiritual empowerment or ‘gift’, or any form of material provision beyond daily bread - we who receive such blessings become stewards. The receipt of the blessing ‘starts the clock’ for us to release it. We are, you see, never the ultimate recipients of any blessing. We are just carriers of Heavenly Cargo. Each blessing we receive has a strategic bill of lading⁴ built into it. Our job is to take good care of it while it is in our possession, then turn it over to the next carrier.

How do we know who He has planned for the next carrier of the blessing our King has entrusted to us? He will let us know. He does it through Divine Appointments. We are to respond to every blessing we receive by immediately looking around for Divine Appointments. exercise extreme vigilance to order our lives and human interactions and relationships in ways that will be *consistent with* and will *nurture the development to maturity of* those blessings – and then share them with the world around us. We are not on earth to be *receivers*; we are here to be *transmitters*.

With every blessing spoken over us comes an open invitation to the enemy of our souls to test it, mock it, and try to wrest it away. That, too, is an essential part of the Holy One’s plan. He knows that only a blessing that is deeply cherished, highly valued, carefully guarded and lovingly nurtured to maturity is truly even received, much less of any value for His kingdom's purposes. With great blessing comes great responsibility. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, from him more will be asked. **Luke 12:48.** Now, are you ready for some sobering nuggets of truth? Gird up your loins. The real reason the Bila'am narrative is recorded for posterity in Torah is about to be revealed.

⁴ A ‘*bill of lading*’ consists of the instructions of the sender of freight to all assigned carriers as to what is to be done with the freight. The bill must accompany the goods as they pass from carrier to carrier. At each hand-off, the bill must be signed by an authorized representative from the previous carrier to the next one who will take responsibility for the freight. The bill must also be signed by the ultimate recipient.

Every Area of Covenant Blessing Immediately Becomes An Object of the Enemy's Attack

The instant a blessing is spoken the door is thrown open by the Holy One for the enemy to do three things: 1. to *obsess over it*; 2. to *devise strategies against it*, and 3. to *mount an attack in an effort to abort it*. The Holy One knows the enemy will do this. It is all part of the plan. The blessings the Holy One pours into our lives are not for the purpose of enhancing our physical pleasure or comfort; they are about *our mission*. The blessings He releases over us are not to enable us to survive in a big, bad, cruel world of ever-advancing darkness; they are to empower us and weaponize us with all we need to invade and slowly fill up the cruel world with *oases of hope, cities of refuge, and beacons of Divine Light* that He knows will push back the darkness. Every blessing spoken by the Holy One, you see, contains a bondage-breaking *empowerment*, a darkness-banishing *commission*, and an atmosphere-shifting *authority to release the substance of the blessing on others*.

Serpentine Countermeasures:

A Flesh-Activating Abortion Protocol For Every Blessing Protocol

The enemy understands the power – and purpose - of the Holy One's Covenant blessings far better, it seems, than we do. He has a series of protocols to abort the mission inherent in each one. All you have to do to understand his strategy is to remember the tact taken by the Serpent in the Garden. The minute the Holy One blessed man with the freedom to eat of the tree of life and every other tree of the Garden except one the Serpent came forth out of the shadows, cleverly distracted Chava from the vast banquet of material blessings the Holy One had laid out for her and Adam, and cleverly planted a voyeuristic curiosity in Chava about the one fruit in the Garden the Holy One had wisely told his Beloved ones to avoid.

Something very similar to what happened in the Garden is about to happen on the plains of Moav. With what have we been blessed through the mouth of Bila'am? We have been blessed by Bila'am's mouth with the following things:

1. ***A set-apart approach to life that allows us to live at a far higher level spiritually – and for a far higher purpose - than other peoples and nations;***
2. ***A covenant-consistent way of dealing with our human urges and appetites that keeps us from carrying the filth of sin into our relationship with either God or man;***
3. ***bayit shalom* - i.e. lovely tents [marital and inter-family harmony];**
4. ***the carrying forward of the seed of Messiah* [a star out of Ya'akov, a scepter out of Israel].**

Bila'am's speaking forth of those blessings on behalf of the Holy One is going to provide the enemy a focal point for his attack.

The Incessant, Relentless Attack on Our Set-Apartness

The first area of blessedness against the enemy launched a campaign was our *'blessed set-apartness'*. For us, you see, *holiness* [Hebrew *kedusha*] is not a status; it is instead the equivalent of Samson's long Nazarite-like hair. As goes our *kedusha*, so goes our light, our salt, and our ability to carry the Holy One's love, blessing, and healing to the world. *Kedusha* is the *source of our strength*, the secret ingredient of our blessing and the essential *key to our having a positive influence* on the world.

Remember that when Bila'am spoke over us the first blessing he spoke in the name of the Holy One was that we were a people who *dwell* [the Hebrew verb is *shakan*] ***apart and will not be reckoned among the nations***. Numbers 23:9. So of course the first of attack against us will be our blessed separateness from the other nations and peoples. What is the nature of the attack against our set-apartness? We will be offered whatever enticements it takes to convince at least some of our number to take a little detour or break from the ways of Torah – which is the key factor of our separateness - and give the ever-popular *'doing what everybody else is doing'* lifestyle a try.

Here is a reality the Holy One knows most of us will have to learn the hard way: each culture and ethnic group in the world has its own *socially acceptable forms of flesh-pleasing, soul-destroying perversion*. Some of these socially acceptable forms of perversion are pursuits in the secular world – the love of money, the love of argument, the quest for self-actualization, the love of affirmation by men, the love of things like information, education, technology, and 'knowledge' that appeal to the ego of a fallen human mind. Others are actually very religious – albeit totally pagan - in orientation. But all the distinct perversions trumpeted by all the cultures of the world share one characteristic – they all celebrate and indulge one or more of fallen man's natural appetites, urges, lusts, tendencies, propensities, or fantasies. They all celebrate a characteristic of man in his fallen state. They are thus all ***chol*** – the opposite of holy. They are all thus about reducing all human beings to their lowest common denominator - the flesh - and thus denying man's glorious ***'in the image of the Holy One created He them'*** and ***"be holy as I am Holy"*** potential.

For the Moavi and Midyani the most popular socially acceptable form of perversion combined the idolatrous celebration of human sexuality with the actual idolatrous rites of worship directed at the 'natural' forces perceived by the confused mind of fallen man as *Ba'als*. The particular socially acceptable form of perversion that was endemic to Moav and Midyan was extremely sensuous and seductive. It was capable of triggering both man's sexual and religious curiosities

at the same time. Of course, if we had been diligently doing what we were supposed to be doing – *i.e. shakan-ing* on the plains of Moav - we would have been fine. We would have been fully thankful for and content with all the things the Holy One had provided us. We would have had no reason to want any comfort or pleasure or experience which the people around us had to offer. We would therefore have paid no attention whatever to the sensually titillating things the Moavi and Midyani were doing a few kilometers away from our self-contained camp. But alas somewhere between the last verse of chapter 24 of Numbers and the first verse of chapter 25 of Numbers we got distracted. We ceased *shakan-ing* in our own camp, and started *yashev-ing* in the Shittim/Acacia groves where the Moavi were engaging in their perverse forms of Ba'al worship.

Presented with the challenge of *interaction with the 'Raging Nations'* – will we be up to the challenge? Or will we instead get distracted by and caught up in what the peoples-of-vain-imagination around us do to entertain and express themselves? I am afraid that this time it will be the latter. The Moavi/Midyani attack on our separateness - and our dedication to the Holy One and His Ways as revealed in Torah - will meet with immediate success. You know the drill - the *lust of the eye* always triggers the lust of the flesh. The lust of the flesh then turns around and triggers *the pride of life*.

Encouraged by his ability to distract us with sensuality, the enemy of our souls will next attack and exploit our natural urges and appetites. He will invite us to test the waters of indulging our desert-weary flesh the way the pagans around us do. And we will find the forbidden waters sweet to the taste. He will then shift his attack to our *bayit shalom* – our 'lovely tents'. He will use lovely and provocatively dressed Moavi and Midyani women to erode the passion we feel toward our spouses and to distract us from teaching the Torah to and discussing its wisdom with our children. We will be tested on how important it really is to us to maintain 'lovely tents' in the face of the temptation of exotic, beautiful, suddenly very attentive and playful 'other women'. And finally, once he gets a foothold behind the lines of our *bayit shalom*, our enemy will attack our precious bloodline, enticing us to share our precious seed of regeneration – the precious seed from which the future Messiah is destined to come – with a people bent on our destruction.

Guard well the precious Divine gift of *set-apartness*, Dear Reader. Guard your purity of thought, word, appetite, and deed. Guard the potential of your relationship with your spouse and your children. And most of all, be diligent to guard your calling to bring forth the aroma and Presence of the Messiah in real time in the real world. In their capacity to distract us from these priorities lies the real danger of people like Balak and Bila'am. The real challenge they present is to

our identity, our purpose, our destiny, and our mission on earth at such a time as this.

The Enemy Always Attacks Us In the Very Areas of Life In Which the Holy One Has in Mind to Bless Us

The concluding aliyah of the *Balak/Bila'am* narrative begins with an ominous literary cue: ***Vayeshev Yisra'el baShitim ...*** [*i.e. And Israel just sat⁵ at Shittim*]. **Numbers 25:1(a)**. Do these words remind you of anything? Do you remember the parsha from the patriarchal chronicles that began with the phrase – and has been given the name - ***Vayashev***? In Genesis 37:1 Torah informed us ***Vayashev Ya'akov b'erezt megurei aviv b'erezt Kena'an*** [*and Ya'akov just sat in the area where his father had sojourned in the land of Kena'an*]. Thus began the dark story of the civil war that broke out between Yosef and his brothers. And here we are, generations later, after all the Holy One has done for us – and we find ourselves just *sitting* again. This time we are 'just sitting' in ***Shitim***. This time we are 'just sitting' in a pagan land, with pagan people living pagan lifestyles according to pagan priorities all around us all the time. Hmmmmn – I don't have a very good feeling about this – do you? The rest of the verse makes the danger clear:

Vayachel ha-am liznot el-b'not Moav

and the people profaned themselves with acts of mixture/fornication with daughters of Moab.

Vatikrena la'am lezivchei eloheihen

They called the people unto slaughtering ceremonies to their gods,

vayochal ha-am vayishtachavu l'eloheihen

and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

Vayitzamed Yisra'el le-Ba'al Pe'or

So Israel was joined to/bound up with Baal of Peor,

'Just Sitting' Can Be Extremely Hazardous To Your Health

To *sit* [Hebrew *yashab*] or *not to sit*, that is the question. Please note, in this regard, that to *sit*, as that verb is used in the context of the Redeemed Community's behavior at Shitim, is not the same thing as to *rest*. To *sit* – *i.e. yashab* - means to disengage and disconnect from our Bridegroom-King and our mission, and

⁵ Please note that while we have just been blessed as a nation that *shakans* [*i.e. dwells by laying down, resting, residing, abiding*] apart, we are described by Torah in the days after Bila'am's oracles not as *shakan*-ing on the plains of Moav overlooking Yericho but as *yashev*-ing - *i.e. squatting* - among the Moavi. The subtle distinction in the verbs chosen by the Author of Torah is observable only in the Hebrew, but it tells a fascinating story. To *shakan* means to dwell in a place from a mindset of self-sufficiency, to be at peace, and to want for nothing from anyone around you. To *yashev* on the other hand means to temporarily occupy something in a 'sitting' state – half at rest, half on the alert, and hence to remain in a state of concern and dissatisfaction. To *yashev* means to 'squat' – *i.e. to occupy something that you know belongs to someone else but which you want for yourself and decide to simply occupy in a fleshly-indulgent way and appropriate to your own uses.*

embrace idleness, inertia, and irrelevance. To *rest* – i.e. to *shabat* and/or to *nuach* – means to do the exact opposite; it is to re-engage and reconnect with our Bridegroom-King and our mission, to re-focus and recharge, and to therefore prepare for a greater impact than ever. Rest is actually all about *movement*. It is about intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually processing what one has just experienced, and about preparing intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually for what is coming. Sitting, on the other hand, is disengaging. Sitting is stagnating. Sitting is going dormant - and ultimately going dark. Sitting is opening up one's mind, heart, and soul to the dark energy swirling around your location. Sitting is absorbing the worst aspects of the prevailing worldview, mindset, attitude, priority matrix, paranoia, lust, vocabulary, and behavior patterns of the people and culture in which you *sit*. As Sh'lomo put it in Proverbs 19:15 [Rabbi's son translation]: ***A slothful man falls into a deep sleep; and an idle person focuses upon and yields to his fleshly appetites.***

Just sitting – i.e. *disengaging from the active and aggressive pursuit of the Holy One, His Heart, His Ways, His Redemptive Plan, and His Will* – is always toxic to the Redeemed. Just sitting – i.e. *getting distracted from our mission by the obstacles, challenges, circumstances, diversions, foreign cultures, and territorial spirits we encounter along the way of our journey* - never turns out well for us – or, for that matter, for the world. We are, after all ***am levadad yish'kon uvagoyim lo yitchashav*** [i.e. 'a people who dwells apart and will not be thought like the nations']. **Numbers 23:9**. We have been redeemed to follow and attend to a Glorious King as He leads on a Magnificent Journey and employs us in a World-Changing Mission. Our King knows what is good for us. He teaches us to rest⁶ from our labors each week by spending an entire 24-hour period actively engaged in delighting in Him and enthusiastically seeking and receiving downloads from His Heart, as we actively commemorate and bask in the holiness and blessing of the Seventh Day of Creation⁷. Our King does not, however, intend for us to ever just 'sit' comfortably in any foreign, secular, or pagan culture cesspool. He designed us to be actively engaged at all times in soaking up and being energized by His passion, by His energy, by His Light, by His Brilliance, by His Goodness, by His Wisdom, by His Mercy and Kindness, by His majesty, and by His Beauty. He wants us to maintain a Covenant focus and passion, a Kingdom of Heaven *cross-generational perspective*, and a *long-term redemption-and-restoration worldview*; and He

⁶ The Hebrew verb the Holy One utilizes in relation to the day of 'rest' is *shabat*, not *yashav*.

⁷ Contrary to popular theology, we are not called to simply 'sit' idly on the 7th Day. While it is a day of refraining from 'ordinary work', we are specifically instructed to do two things: 1. we are to actively and aggressively 'remember' the Sabbath of Creation Week [Genesis 2:1-3], and 2. we are to 'keep' – i.e. cherish, guard, and protect – the holiness of that day. That means we shift the focus of our energies from physical labor and producing tangible results in the physical realm to engaging and exercising our capacities for *Kingdom memory* [i.e. 'remembering'] and for *shamar-ing holiness* [i.e. 'keeping'].

knows that for us to steep in and soak up instead any earthly culture's focus, passion, perspective, or worldview would be anathema to our essential purpose and our *tikkun olam* mission. He does not want us to sit still in, or absorb, any earthly nation, ethnic group, or culture's 'dream' [American dream included!] – or any earthly nation, ethnic group, or culture's priority or value matrices, its appetite matrices, its offense, outrage, revulsion triggers, its sentimentality activators, its human labeling system, its *cynical, sarcastic, or sensual* catch phrases, or its *lashon hara*. His Plan involves us walking in *shalom* [a state of peace; contentment; calm], in *simchah* [an abiding sense of joy arising from childlike wonder, awe, and gratitude], in *tikvah* [a sense of hopefulness, expectation, optimism, excitement, enthusiasm] and in *bitachon* [a deep level of trust that leads to confidently *sh'ma*-ing our King's instructions, no matter what the challenges appear to be]. He knows that our light to the world will go out, and our salt will lose its savor, if we lose the momentum of forward movement in the Kingdom and start to absorb any other culture's subliminal messages of discontent, of paranoia, of hate, of ethnic pride, of class envy – much less its coping mechanisms, its obsessions, its modalities of worshipping its 'gods', its time management and calendaring priorities, its pet addictions, its destructive behavior patterns, or its perversions.

We need to keep *focused upon and reaching out passionately for the fruit of the tree of life* – or we will drown in the poison juice of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We've got to keep *exiting Egypt* – or we will fall right back into bondage. We've got to keep *loving the Holy One, our first and foremost love*, with all our heart, mind, and strength - or we will begin to lust after and have affairs with the things and ways and nations and cultures and priorities of the world. We have to keep *aggressively seeking* – *i.e. 'seeking first' - the Kingdom of Heaven and pursuing the high calling of its level of righteousness* – or we will begin to wither and die. We've got to keep *going up to Jerusalem, the City of our King* – or we will absorb the paranoia of Paran, the blasphemy of Ba'al-Peor, the perversion of Amsterdam; the bloodlust of Chicago and Mexico City; the perversion of Bangkok, Amsterdam, and Hollywood; the greed of Wall Street; the arrogance of Portland and Seattle; the debauchery of New Orleans; the toxic partisanship of Washington, DC and Ottawa; the filthiness of San Francisco and Vienna; the shallowness of Los Angeles and Paris; the snobbishness of London, Berlin, and Moscow; the seething rage of Mecca, Medina, Riyadh, and Ramallah, the *etc., etc., etc.* - all the way to the abomination of mystery Babylon. We've got to keep *walking in step with, and stay in constant communication with, our Bridegroom-King* – or we begin to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, to stand in the way of sinners, and *sit* in the seat of the scornful. That is when our light goes out. That is when our salt loses its savor. Heaven forbid we let that happen!

But If We Are Not Moving Forward With the Kingdom Mission ... Well, What Exactly Do You Think is Happening To and Through Us?

Our Bridegroom-King does not ever disengage from the great Mission to which we have been called; and He does not intend for us to do so either. He does not intend for us to unplug from the Grand Redemptive Plan for mankind and Creation – under any circumstances. Wherever we are, we are called to be *active agents of transformation*. That is our assigned ‘light function’. In whatever environment He places us we are called to be *effectual catalysts of change*. That is our assigned ‘salt function’. He has not redeemed us and put His Ruach in us at such a time as this to ‘*just sit*’. If we choose to ‘just sit’ anyway, it *never turns out well* – either for us or for the cultures around us.

We were created, and we have been fully empowered, by the Holy One to ‘*take dominion*’ over whatever sphere of influence He assigns us⁸. The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as ‘take dominion’ is *radah*. *Radah* is a highly active verb, meaning *to tread as a winepress, and thereby to make productive and useful*. We are here to recognize, awaken, and develop the latent potential for goodness – and bring out both the beauty and the functionality – in every person, place, and situation in which we find ourselves. That is what it means to ‘*be a blessing*’ [Genesis 12:2] and to be the agents through which ‘*every family on earth is blessed.*’ [Genesis 12:3]. For sons and daughters of the Covenant, ‘just sitting’ is dangerously dysfunctional. When we just ‘sit’ a process I call ‘*spiritual rigor mortis*’ begins to set in.

The Process – and Tumah [i.e. Uncleaness] - of Spiritual Rigor Mortis

Just as in the physical realm *inaction carries with it a negative form of inertia*⁹, so in the spiritual realm inaction carries with it an insidious form of *tumah* [i.e. what our English Bibles call ‘uncleaness’¹⁰]. Inaction is to the spirit of man a *creeping form of death*. ‘Just sitting’ makes us sitting ducks for an ‘unbalanced force’. In the spiritual realm, the most common ‘unbalanced forces’ that act upon people who ‘just sit’ are fear, worry, dissatisfaction, depression, despair, anger, offense, lust, greed, gluttony, voyeurism, self-righteous judgmentalism, self-obsession, and

⁸ See Genesis 1:26, where the Creator says: ***Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion [Hebrew verb root radah] over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.***

⁹ Newton’s First Law of Motion or the ‘Law of Inertia’ states that *a body at rest remains at rest unless acted on by an unbalanced force*. An unbalanced force is an individual **force** that is not balanced by a force of equal magnitude and in the opposite direction.

¹⁰ Lest anyone think the Holy One’s instructions concerning what is ‘clean’ [Hebrew *tahor*] and ‘unclean’ [Hebrew *tamei*] are no longer applicable, consider the admonitions of Rav Shaul [i.e. the apostle known in Western Christianity as ‘Paul’], Kefa [i.e. ‘Peter’], and Yochanan [i.e. ‘John’] in II Corinthians 6:17 & 12:21, in Galatians 5:19-20; in Ephesians 4:19 and 5:3 & 5; in I Thessalonians 4:7, in II Peter 2:10 [in the context of 2:9-15], and in Revelation 16:13 and 18:2.

attitudes of victimization and entitlement. The first casualties are therefore our love [for both the Holy One and for our fellow man], our *shalom*, our joy, our longsuffering, our kindness, our goodness, our faithfulness, and our self-control. When these go, we lose our ability to have a positive impact on our families, friends, workplaces, faith communities, marketplaces, and world. We disengage from our essential mission of *radah*-ing.

When we ‘just sit’, you see, our interests and attention turn to ourselves. The ‘law of our members’ – which cry out for sensual pleasure and avoidance of growth or pain at all costs – conspires with the ‘law of our minds’ – which cries out for information about the evil in other people and in the world in general - to derail our delight in the ‘law of the Holy One’ and our pursuit of His Kingdom and its righteousness. When we ‘just sit’, therefore, our passion for our Glorious King immediately starts to wane. Our wonder at His Beauty begins to fade. Our delight in His Companionship disappears. Our hunger for the Light of His Countenance languishes. Thirst for the Living Water of His Words eludes us. Our joy begins to dissipate. Spontaneous outbursts of thanksgiving and praise cease from our lips. Our love – for the Holy One, for our fellow man, and even for our spouses and family members - grows cold. All our soulish, physical appetites become enhanced. Our ears and eyes – as well as our minds - start to wander. Our feet, hands, tongues, and other bodily components are never far behind.

When we ‘just sit’, any unclean spirits that inhabit the area in which we allow ourselves to get comfortable – and there always are plenty – have a field day. They can light on us easily when we are just ‘sitting’. We are like sitting ducks. We look and smell like ‘roadkill’ to them. Like vultures they circle - then descend for the feast. They light next to us. They cluck over us. They screech the serpent’s lies into our ears to see if we will respond - in the Spirit, in the flesh, or not at all. Then they target our flesh. As they pick away at our flesh, our fleshly appetites, urges, and drives kick into overdrive. Every time we just ‘sit’, therefore, we find ourselves *coveting things*. We find ourselves wanting that which is contrary to our Bridegroom’s plan. We sense our time is short, and we want our ‘bucket list’ of sensual pleasures while we can still have them.

The ultimate target of the unclean spirits that attack us when we ‘just sit’, however, is far deeper than our flesh. Their ultimate strategic objective is our *soul* – i.e. our will, our minds, and our emotions. *Tamei* spirits therefore use the beachheads they have established in our flesh to launch an offensive against each of these areas. As they take territory in our wills, our mind, and our emotions, they set up subversive operations centers. Some people call them ‘strongholds’. Every time we ‘just sit’ in the midst of foreign cultures we therefore find ourselves getting apathetic about

what our Bridegroom desires. We find ourselves gravitating toward *philosophies of the mind* – thoughts that are *far from His Thoughts* – and totally inconsistent with our Bridal calling. We indulge thoughts, attitudes and opinions that emanate from the ‘dark’ side – the so-called ‘wisdom’ of fallen man, which is earthly, sensual, and demonic¹¹. **James 3:15**. Our family members and friends begin to notice *the vocal inflections of the serpent* – i.e. complaint, criticism, accusation, labeling, sarcasm, coarse speech, paranoia-tinged rhetoric, cynicism, self-righteousness, profanity, and the like – in our conversations. We jump on bandwagons. We stand on soapboxes. We pontificate. We sermonize. We vent. We blame. We accuse. We label. We rant. We curse. Instead of watering the earth with pure, peaceable wisdom from Heaven as we are called to do we start to poison our sphere of influence with political, ideological and doctrinal opinions. We take offense at trifles. We focus our energies on advocating ideas instead of nurturing people. We build imaginary walls between us and others. Within those walls we poison ourselves, and anyone who dares breach the walls, with self-pity, self-righteousness, self-loathing, self-promotion, self-indulgence – indeed in self-everything.

When we ‘just sit’ we begin to see so much evil in people that we *find mercy irrational and inappropriate*. We prefer the frigid sensation of revulsion to the warm rush of compassion. We begin to find our assigned mission of looking for the latent goodness, beauty, and creativity in other human beings and in places and situations, awakening that potential, and nurturing it toward wholeness, to be impractical, boring, and ... well ... *beneath us*. We begin to take pleasure in looking for the evil in other people, finding fault with them, and then substituting our opinion of their worthlessness for the Holy One’s opinion of their value.

When we ‘just sit’ we begin to *find patience with others and with situations – i.e. being slow to anger, and willing to postpone gratification – disdainful*. We would rather feel the momentary ‘high’ of outrage and offense. When we ‘just sit’ we begin to see the denial of self, and any surrender of our wills to the greater good of the Kingdom, to be unfathomable. Instead we go for all the gusto we can dream up. We start to write things down on our ‘bucket list’ that Yeshua voluntarily suffered and died to atone for. We begin to *find forgiveness difficult*, and to come up with any excuse to justify holding a grudge. We vastly over-estimate the extent and accuracy of our knowledge database as well as our capacities of reason, logic, and

¹¹ James 3:13-17 says: *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

discernment. Therefore we start to ignore or justify certain ‘pet’ sins – in ourselves and our circle of cronies – even while we loudly condemn different sins that we see (or imagine) operating in others. We redefine righteousness to suit our own tastes. We lose our appetite for personal holiness.

When we just ‘sit’ we begin to behave reactively instead of proactively. We begin to think, speak, and act hypocritically. Our approach to life becomes intellectual, emotional, philosophical and ideological. We start applying whatever truth we know without either humility or compassion, and we start giving out whatever compassion we can muster in ways that are totally inconsistent with our Bridegroom-King’s truth. We allow ourselves to feel *compassion for the cruel* and *admiration for the fool*. We start getting restless, getting covetous, getting critical, getting offended, and getting cynical about the words and ways of the Holy One our Bridegroom-King. And in the course of doing this, at the same time we start getting more and more morbidly curious about – indeed obsessed by - what other people are doing or not doing. We focus our attention on the antics and statements of politicians, celebrities, sports figures, and entertainment icons. We debate political points. We argue over religious beliefs. And we rush to judgment about who is to blame for all the drama. That is what happens when the people of the Holy One just ‘sit’ in the midst of the foreign cultures to which we are called to be *the light of the world*. This is how it always turns out when the people who have been set apart to serve as the *salt of the earth* loses its savor instead of mediating our Bridegroom-King’s love, mercy, kindness, forgiveness, goodness, hope, joy, longsuffering, wisdom and justice.

It is Time to Get Up - And Get Our Meditation On!

Never just ‘sit’ in the midst of a foreign culture doing its foreign culture things, Beloved. Remember Psalm 1: ***Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the Torah of the Holy One, and in His Torah he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree planted by the rivers of living water, which brings forth fruit in its season. His leaf also will not wither, but whatever he does will prosper.*** Stay engaged in the Great Divine Rhythm. Get and keep your delight and meditation on! As Yeshua said: ***Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*** Matthew 11:29. If we ever ‘just sit’, therefore, let it be *at the feet of Mashiach*. See Deuteronomy 33:3, Luke 8:35, 10:39, and John 12:3. Which brings us back to our meditations in the week of parsha *Balak*. The prophet of the nations has tried in vain to curse the people the Holy One has bound Himself by Covenant to bless. The Covenant bond the Holy One made with Avram and his progeny forever was simply *too strong*. No man - nor any conspiracy of men - can break that bond.

Hence no matter what Balak did, or what vantage point he showed Bila'am, every time Bila'am opened his mouth concerning the Hebrew nation what came out was a new and even more glorious blessing.

All the time Bila'am was speaking the Camp was at total, blissful peace. Not a single serpent or scorpion was able to bruise a Hebrew heel. Not one spirit of *tumah* [uncleanness] was able to find a place to attach itself in any Hebrew heart. No arrogance or self-righteous attitude took root in a single Hebrew mind. No folly or vanity brought depression or disgrace to a single Hebrew soul. No complaint was spoken. No jealous rage erupted. No rebellious attitude manifested. Not so much as a hint of greed or gluttony or lust arose to pervert a single Hebrew's appetite. No sickness fell. No plague broke out. Nothing whatever disturbed the *shalom* of the Camp of the Redeemed. It was like when He declared **Light, BE!** and light simply WAS. Through Bila'am's oracles the same voice thrice declared **YOU ARE BLESSED** over us, and BLESSING simply was. That is the effect of the Covenant Blessing of the Most High – at least when men accept it, are thankful for it, and release it as freely as they receive it. Our Divine Bridegroom has spoken eternal blessing over us¹² you see - and *no adversary in Heaven on or earth can undo that which He has spoken.*

But Wait? What Then is an Appropriate Level of Interaction With Non-Torah Observant People and Cultures?

What level of relationship with the nations, peoples, and cultures that cohabit the earth with us is appropriate and necessary to our great mission of redemption and restoration - and what level and degree of interaction with such nations, peoples, and cultures is dangerous and counterproductive? Where are the lines? What are the boundaries? Where are the 'safe harbors' – and the 'no fly zones'? How do we keep from absorbing other peoples' and cultures' negativity? How do we keep our light shining in the darkness – yet not being doused out by it? How do we keep our Kingdom salt from losing its savor? How do we keep from becoming just another stinking *cesspool of toxic waste* instead of the *fragrant fountain of blessing* we were called to be and *immersion in Torah, by inclusion in Messiah, and by infilling with the Ruach Ha-Qodesh* has empowered us to be?

There are two primary approaches that will guarantee a destructive/toxic level of interaction with the nations and peoples of the world: the pathway of *isolationism*, and the pathway of *assimilation*. Let us discuss those two dangerous approaches in turn.

¹² See Genesis 12:2-3, 22:17, & 26:3, 24; Exodus 20:24; Numbers 6:27; and Deuteronomy 15:6.

1. the Pathway of Isolationism

The first unbiblical way of approaching intersections with the realm of non-Torah observant peoples and cultures is the path of *isolationism*. If we follow this path we go into *reaction mode*. We *react* to the presence of those who are not like us - and who are not blessed with our precious gift of revelation of and relationship with the Holy One - on a knee-jerk basis. That means we *turn up our noses, harden our hearts, and do everything we can to keep other nations and peoples as far away from us as possible*. That means we keep *building higher and higher walls and barriers – physically and emotionally – to keep others out*. That means we keep *creating new and more difficult obstacle courses to prevent intrusion in our lives by ‘uncircumcised Philistines’*. That means we *only have conversations and interactions with those who look like us, think like us, talk like us, dress like us, eat like us, spend money and leisure time like us, and worship like us*. Whether out of *fear* or out of *arrogance*, those who follow this path quickly become proud, hard, judgmental, easily offended, and cruel. They start to consider everything and every person they characterize as ‘*goy*’ or ‘*trefe*’ to become an *intolerable abomination* in our eyes. Heaven help us. We were created for better than this. We are the light of the world; a city set on a hill cannot be hidden. **Matthew 5:14**. If we separate completely from the world, how will the Divine Light in us be seen? And if it is not seen – well, *what good is it?*

2. The Pathway of Assimilation

The second unbiblical and dangerous way to have a destructive level of interaction with the nations and peoples of the world is to choose the opposite extreme - the way of *assimilation*. If we take this path we allow ourselves to be seduced by the sensual enticements and socially acceptable perversions indulged in by other cultures. We yield ourselves to manipulation by the same *tamei* [unclean] spirits, to being deceived by the same dead-end philosophies, to participating in the same socio-political *gotcha games*, and to allowing ourselves to get caught up in exactly the same deadly *sensuality-run-amok* patterns of thought, speech, and action from which we have been placed on earth at such a time as this to set people free.

Those who follow the path of assimilation so crave being liked and accepted by the peoples around them that they start to – indeed *aspire to* - look like them, think like them, talk like them, dress like them, eat like them, spend money and leisure time like them, and worship like them. Oh Beloved – we are the salt of the earth; we are not supposed to look like everyone else. If salt loses its unique, Divinely designed flavor, it is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. **Matthew 5:13**.

The Way of Assimilation Acted Out Before Our Eyes

Today's aliyah of Torah gives us a stunning object lesson in the dangers, sorrows, and shame of the pathway of assimilation. As we conclude parsha *Balak* we find the nation that the Holy One would not allow Bila'am to find fault in or curse behaving like anything but the Betrothed Bride-to-be of the ever covenant-faithful God of Creation. It seems *every generation has its weakness*. The generation of the Exodus had a problem with *the basics* – like trusting the Holy One for food and water. The weakness of the generation now encamped on Moavi land was much more exotic. Having received food and water from heaven since childhood this generation came to *expect such provision*, accept it, and count on it as its *right*. What excited this generation was therefore not leeks, onions, and seafood, but was instead *skimpily clothed, dark-skinned girls who battered their eyes at them and invited them to come with them to their sensual parties and idolatrous celebrations*. Acting according to the counsel of Bila'am - who had knowledge of exactly what areas of our lives were untested and open to attack when we were 'just sitting' - the young women of Midyan and Moav *put on a show that turned the heads and stirred the prurient interests* of the young Israeli warriors. So enthralled were the young men that they were willing to abandon their covenant with the Holy One like a worn-out shoe (which, of course, none of these had ever seen, because of the Holy One's supernatural provision) for a few moments of deviant pleasure with Gaga and Beyoncé *et al* - and of course *the demons they rode in on*.

What was so wrong with a little 'testing the waters' of the culture around us? The Talmud describes the 'worship' of *Baal Peor*. Tractate *Avodah Zerah* 3 states that the area in front of the idol was used as a latrine and that the worship of the idol consisted of defecating before it. In his comments Rashi says that *Pe'or* [meaning 'opening', sometimes used to refer to a person's lower digestive system] was so called "*because they would uncover before it [i.e. in front of the idol Baal Peor] the end of the rectum and bring forth excrement; this is its worship*." What did the Moavi – much less the blessed sons of Israel – find appealing about this, you ask? Perhaps what so captivated Moav – and B'nei Yisrael, for that matter – was the *moral relativism* of it all. Defecating on ground that which is supposedly 'holy' is an act that makes a bold statement – a declaration that absolutely nothing - not even something considered to be a 'god' - is deserving of honor. After all, a man who will defecate on his god's 'turf' does so for one reason, and one reason alone – to prove to himself and the world that *he lives by 'no rules'*, and that *he will do whatever he pleases no matter who objects*.

The 'worship' of *Baal Pe'or* was in reality not worship of a god – even a false god – at all; it was *the exact opposite of worship*. It was the adoption of irreverence – the *fear of no god*, and the *acceptance of no bounds on personal behavior* – as

one's way of life. This licentious philosophy is very easy to embrace. Such a philosophy calls every perversion normal, and labels every restriction premised upon either morality or common decency 'prudish' and 'unenlightened'. After all, if nothing is sacred, nothing is vile. Oh Israel. *What are you doing?* This 'nothing is sacred, nothing is vile' philosophy is the exact opposite of the Holy One's plan for you. The Holy One has set you as a shining kingdom of priests, to shed the Holy One's moral and spiritual light abroad in the world, and to *'make distinction between the holy and the profane, and between that which is tahor and that which is tamei.* Your uniqueness is your shield, and your purity is your sword, Beloved. Please, please, *do not lay down your sword and shield* anywhere but in the Courts of the Bridegroom King!

***What Then Are the Kingdom's Rules of Engagement?
With Regard to Other People-Groups and Cultures?***

So we now understand that both the pathway of isolation and the pathway of assimilation are lethal mission-killers. So how ARE we supposed to behave in relation to our neighbors? What IS a safe and appropriate level of interaction with the non-Torah observant peoples and cultures we see every day? This is where the Torah comes in. If we do not know and walk in the Torah, we are sitting ducks. If we just know and walk in the letter of the Torah, and do not know and walk intimately with the Author of the Torah as our Bridegroom-King, we are doomed to compromise and failure. But with the unbreakable Commandments of God and the Testimony of Yeshua there is indeed a way to not be overcome by evil, but even yet to overcome evil with good. It is the more excellent way.

What is the more excellent way? It is simply to do what the Torah says. It is to approach every person culture in the world in a state of *wise as serpents while simultaneously being harmless as doves.* It is to constantly maintain a commitment to *love the Holy One our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength, live by the sh'ma-protocols of intimate relationship instead of by belief-systems, doctrines and theologies and creeds, stay on His Calendar instead of adjusting to the calendars of the secular and pagan sources, and surrender our time and energy and passion in the great adventure of knowing and being known by the Holy One, teaching His Ways to our children and households, that we and they may keep the way of the Holy One, to do righteousness and justice.*

That means that at the very least we will not make ourselves *tamei* for the sake of 'table fellowship', nor profane the Shabbat or Mo'edim of our Divine Bridegroom in order to make a little extra money or fit in with the calendar and priorities everyone else around us follows. It means we will not fear what the people around us fear, hate what they hate, love what they love, or celebrate when they choose to celebrate. It means we will not dress or eat, or entertain ourselves or our children,

or choose a friend or a mate, or educate a child, the way they do, much less build our relationship with our God around a series of regular ‘meetings/services’, sacraments, and ritual’ the way those around us who engage in religion do. It means, quite frankly, that we will *love the people around us*, and *serve them*, and *carry on business with them*, and *treat them with honor and respect* – but we will never join them in their disobedience to Torah. We will never try to become like them. We will never dress, or adorn ourselves, or talk, or eat, or drink, or look at the material world, or indulge our flesh, the way they do. If you want a little more guidance in this regard, please read and meditate on Proverbs 16:17- 32.

***Restoring the Kedusha [i.e. Holiness/Separation]
that is So Essential to our Mission***

Thank heaven that the Holy One loves His betrothed far too much to let her wallow in such filth and to sink so far below her calling. The Holy One steps out of the cloak of invisibility and incorporeality and tells Moshe what he needs to do to fix the mess that is unfolding. His instructions to Moshe are:

Kach et-kol-rashei ha-am

Take the princes of the people,

V'hoka otam l'Adonai neged ha-shamesh

and yaka – separate/dislocate – unto the Holy One, exposing them to the sun.

v'yashov charon af-Adonai miYisra'el

This will turn away the burning of the Holy One's af in relation to Israel.'

Some interpret this as an instruction to execute the princes – *i.e.* to hang or impale them. But that interpretation reveals the judgmentalism of the reader – not the heart of the Speaker. The actual decree of the Holy One is neither harsh nor brutal. It is merciful and wise. All the Holy One actually says is that *the leaders* of the tribes of Israel – *i.e.* those who have a watchman's responsibility, and have shirked it, such that those under their leadership have gone astray - are to be separated out and exposed to the sun. The people must see something stunning happening. Intermixing with *Baal Peor* has, you see, brought a cancer into the camp. It is of such a destructive nature that it cannot be cured. It must be *completely eradicated*. The Holy One, in His omniscience, knows exactly what it will take to get the sons and daughters of the Covenant to want to turn away in revulsion from this new addictive behavior. He knows that lectures – or lesser disciplines of any kind - will not work. He is not an immature child throwing a temper tantrum; He is a Great Physician prescribing a life-saving remedy.

Unfortunately the elders in the Camp of the Redeemed did not carry out the Holy One's purification instructions. The Great Physician's treatment regimen was not implemented. His Words fell on deaf spiritual ears. The judges did not *sh'ma*. Those among our number who led the people in the way of Bila'am did *not get*

separated out in an eye-catching way. They instead decided to continue with business as usual. The ineffective princes just kept doing the same thing, expecting a different result. They kept letting the men under their authority continue to pollute themselves and the ‘lovely tents’ of their families. They kept letting household after household slip into perversion - *on their watch!* They continued standing aghast while men under their command consorted with Midyani mistress after Midyani mistress. They continued committing acts of unthinkable debauchery in front of the idols of Moav. The failure of the elders of Israel to take the specific steps the Holy One had told them to take only emboldened those carried away in the ‘nothing is sacred, nothing is vile’ philosophy. And then, as often happens, someone finally pushed the envelope a little too far. One of the very princes that the Holy One had decreed was to be set apart/dislocated, but was not, was *Zimri*, from the tribe of Sh’mon. Emboldened by the failure of the elders to carry out the instructions of the Holy One, this man was brazen enough to bring a Midyani princess lover back to the camp with him, parade her through the camp, to the very door of the Tent of Meeting, and cavort with her in the *Manifest Presence of the Holy One*. Talk about daring God - or anyone else - to do anything about it!

Hang on a minute, though – hasn’t Torah assigned someone the responsibility of dealing with intrusions of the profane and unclean into the most tahor and kadosh place on the earth? Isn’t that the Torah duty of ... the sons of Levi? Is anyone in that tribe paying attention? Doesn’t anybody in that tribe remember what Torah says about maintaining the sanctity of the Tabernacle’s courts? The eyes of the Holy One go to and fro through the tents of the Levi’im, looking for someone who remembers His instructions.

Behold, A Son of Levi Arises, and Defends the Mish’kan!

Zimri and Cozbi cavorted on - *as the entire camp of the Redeemed gazed on in prurient curiosity and the nonchalant attitude of a lukewarm heart.* Perversion spewed forth in a place that was created to bear the sweet fragrance of blessing, life, health, joy, purity, and peace. Drawn to the bed of uncleanness Zimri and Kozbi were creating in the Mish’kan, the Death Angel descended upon the camp. A rapidly spreading plague quickly consumed 24,000 of the promising young men. But then something happened. Deep within the spirit of a young man named *Pinechas*, son of Elazar – Aharon’s grandson, a holy passion awakened. Deep called unto deep, and all its waves and billows washed over the young priest-in-training. Perceiving that the source of the plague killing his companions was the perversion Zimri and Cozbi were releasing at the entrance to the *Mish’kan*, Pinechas rose up to defend the sanctity of the holy structure that had been placed in his tribe’s charge. Note, however, that Torah does not describe Pinechas as getting the least bit angry. Do you see him as angry as he takes up his spear, Beloved? Or

do you see him weeping? How you see Pinchas in this instance – like how you see Yeshua as He arose to cleanse the Temple by driving out the moneychangers - says a whole lot more about you than it does about those Biblical actors. If you imagine Pinechas as acting out of outrage, then you probably also see Yeshua as acting out of wrath and anger when He drove the moneychangers out of the Temple¹³. But please consult Holy Writ. Nowhere in the Biblical account of either instance does it say that either Pinechas or Yeshua acted out of anger. Neither does Holy Writ Note describe either the Temple-cleansing actions of Pinechas or of the Master as affected by either outrage or revulsion. Holy Writ describes what seized both as something altogether different. Holy Writ describes what motivated them not as ‘anger’ – but as ‘zeal’. Mark the difference very, very well, Dear Ones!

Zeal and anger are worlds – indeed kingdoms - apart. The zeal that motivated Pinechas and Yeshua was not a human emotion – it was a divine passion. It was not energy from the dark side of human nature – it was LIGHT from the heart of the Creator of the Universe. Please note therefore that Pinechas did not rant, nor did he rave. He did not threaten. He did not go looking for trouble. Trouble had come to him, and had invaded threatened to take over the *Mish'kan*. And since the elders of Israel had proven they were not willing to follow the Holy One's instructions as to how to deal with this rapidly spreading wildfire, he just got up and dealt with it. He took a spear in his hand, walked straight to the spot inside the sacred grounds of the *Mish'kan* where Zimri and Cozbi were publicly bumping and grinding in the sand and ... and he impaled the prince of the tribe of Sh'mon and his Midyani consort with one swift, merciful blow. His actions were calm, considered, careful and precise. His strike was surgical.

In this particular instance Pinechas *alone got it 100% right*. But please take note of what Pinechas did *not* do. He did ‘get radicalized’. He did not join a movement. He did not succumb to offense or rage. He did *not* conspire against or lie in wait to kill anyone. He did *not* invade anyone's home or other private chambers. He did *not* trespass on anyone's property. He did *not* act out of a hypersensitive sense of morality, revulsion, shame, or self-righteousness. He did *not* inflict any collateral damage. He did *not* spread gossip, accusation, or propaganda. He did *not* incite anyone else to violence. What *did* he do instead? He acted out of a Divinely enhanced understanding that in this particular circumstance, as the Holy One had said clearly to Moshe, this particular plague simply could not be stopped any other way. Not to inflict vengeance or punishment on anyone, but to preserve the holiness of the *Mish'kan* and the Camp, Pinechas took up his assigned position as a guardian of the Holy Sanctuary, took spear in hand, took aim, and let it fly.

¹³ See Matthew 21:12-14, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48, and John 2:12-17 for the descriptions of four different inspired writers concerning Yeshua's cleansing of the Temple. In not a single instance is there any suggestion that Yeshua was angry or outraged. He was moved by another passion entirely – *i.e.* zeal.

The Holy One guided Pinechas' spear to its target. The trajectory of that spear was therefore every bit as sure as the trajectory of David's smooth stone. In a split second, with one swift blow, all the bumping, the grinding, the blasphemy, and the perversion that the 'Way of Bila'am' brought into a camp of people who had resorted to 'just sitting' came to an abrupt halt. Just like that, the dark spell of the siren song being simulcast by *b'not Moavi* and *b'not Midyani* was broken. Just like that, the blinders of assimilation-syndrome fell off the eyes of the men of B'nei Yisrael. Instantly the plague lifted. In the twinkling of an eye an entire generation that had become hopelessly lost was gloriously found, and an entire people who had become pitifully blind could once again perfectly see.

We will speak much more of Pinechas next week. He has a whole parsha of Torah named after him. In the meantime, I will say with regard to his conduct what I said earlier in the week with regard to the activities of Balak and Bila'am – please *don't try this at home*. Blessed is he who is not offended.

Questions For Today's Study

1. List all the violations of the Torah you see taking place in Numbers 25:1-9.
2. In the haftarah we have been reading this week from the book of HaNavi [the prophet] Micah the Holy One has announced that in the end days, as He calls us back to Israel, He will destroy the cities of our exile, judging the nations who refused to listen to the Torah we taught and lived in their presence. In today's final aliyah of the haftarah, the writer [in Hebrew *Micha*] engages in a prophetic dialogue with the Holy One on behalf of Israel. The question *Micha* is asking the Holy One, on behalf of the nation coming 'home' from exile, is '*When these [end time] things occur, How shall I come before You?*'

***How shall I come before the Holy One, and bow myself before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with olahot [KJV 'burnt offerings'], with calves a year old?
Will the Holy One be pleased with thousands of rams? With tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my disobedience - the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?***

The point of the poignant questions is an important one. It is not enough, for an estranged Israel, in the end of times, just to return to the land of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. That must be *just the beginning*. The ultimate return of Israel must be the return *TO THE HOLY ONE* and His overshadowing Presence. The prophetic question therefore is '*Once I return to the land, HOW WILL I ENTER AND EXPERIENCE THE FULNESS OF YOUR PRESENCE?*' The Holy One answers this critical end-times question as follows:

Higid lecha adam mah-tov
He has shown you, O man, what is good.

umah-Adonai doresh mimcha

What does the Holy One require of you,

ki im-asot mishpat

but to make/build/do/cause to take shape mishpat,

v'ahavat chesed

and to highly prioritize and passionately pursue mercy/covenant faithfulness

V'hatz'nea lechet im-Eloheicha

and to walk humbly with your God?

[Micah 6:1-8]

[A] In the 'end days' how are the regathered remnant of Israel to 'draw near' to the Holy One?

[B] The operative verb phrases in the instruction of the Holy One to end-time Israel are to 'act justly', to 'love mercy', and to 'walk humbly with ... God'. Using your Strong's do a word search on each of the words in the operative verb phrases, and explain what each means in a Hebraic sense.

3. In today's reading from the apostolic scriptures Shaul continues his discussion concerning the difference between those who live *by the Voice* and those who live *by other means - such as* one's own (or one's society's) strength, wisdom, or customs. Shaul closes out the thought with a quote from the prophet Jeremiah, saying: *as it is written, "He who glories/boasts"¹⁴ let him glory/boast in the Holy One."* **1Corinthians 1:28-29.**

[A] Go back to the verse that Shaul quotes – i.e. Jeremiah 9:24. Read that verse in its full context, namely Jeremiah 9:1-25. Then summarize what you think are the main points Jeremiah is trying to make in that chapter.

[B] What is the Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as 'glory' or 'boast' in Jeremiah 9:24? Look up that verb in Strong's and Gesenius. Write it in English and with Hebrew letters and vowel markings. Meditate on it. Then Describe the Hebraic word picture you see developing as you meditate on that word.

[C] What do you think it means to 'glory/boast' in the Holy One?

[D] What other things besides the Holy One does Yirmayahu say people are improperly glorying/boasting in?

*May you know true wisdom, true power, and true nobility.
And may you never fall victim to spiritual deception.*

The Rabbi's son

¹⁴ The Greek verb used is *kauchaomai*, pronounced *kow-khah'-om-ahce*, Strong's Hebrew word #2744, meaning to boast in something or rejoice concerning something. For other uses of this verb, see Romans 2:17, 2:23, 5:2, 5:3, 5:11, as well as I Corinthians 1:29 and 3:21, 4:7, and 5:12, and perhaps its most famous use, in Ephesians 2:9.

Meditation for Today's Study

Proverbs 16:17-21, 25

***The highway of the upright is to depart from evil.
He who keeps his way preserves his soul.***

***Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.
It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor,
Than to divide the plunder with the proud.
He who heeds the Word finds prosperity.
Whoever trusts in the Holy One is blessed.
The wise in heart shall be called prudent.
Pleasantness of the lips promotes instruction.***

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***There is a way that seems right to a man,
but in the end it leads to death.***