

# A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam*

## PARSHAT BALAK

### DVAR TORAH: THE DONKEY'S WORDS

When Bilam's donkey opens her mouth and speaks, he says, "What have I done to you that you hit me these three times" (Bamidbar 22:28). The Hebrew expression used for "three times" is שלש רגלים. Why is the standard term for "times", פעמים, not used here? Rashi quotes the Sages' comment: "The donkey hinted to Bilam, 'You attempt to uproot a nation that celebrates the three pilgrimage holidays – שלש רגלים – every year?!'" The expression שלש רגלים alludes to the three festivals.

The Gur Aryeh (Maharal) asks why the donkey picked this particular mitzvah when she wanted to hint to Bilam that he should turn back. Why did she not pick mezuzah or kashrut or Shabbat or some other one?

To answer he presents a number of his views on time and the holidays. History, says the Maharal, and time in general, has a beginning, a middle, and an end. In this respect, time is in line with other aspects of the physical world.

The three pilgrimage holidays likewise take place in the beginning, middle, and end of the warm season of the year. [The holidays only take place during the warm period of the year that begins with spring and ends before winter. See the Maharal and Rav Hartman's comment #122 about winter in his edition of the Gur Aryeh.] Pesach is at the beginning of the warm season, Shavuot at its height, and Sukkot at its end.

Each one of these three festivals corresponds, says the Maharal, to a period of history – Pesach to its beginning, Shavuot to its middle, and Sukkot to its end.

Joy goes along with existence, completion and fullness. Mourning, on the other hand, is triggered by non-existence and loss, by death. The Jewish people's joy is also related to our existence. Because we exist in the beginning, middle, and end of history, we are joyous during the beginning, middle, and end of the year, during the three festivals. This is the joy of the festivals, "simchat yom tov".

Bilam's donkey was trying to convince him to turn back. Her strategy was to show Bilam that his pilgrimage to curse and destroy the Jewish people is a futile enterprise. Despite all of the attempts to destroy them, the Jewish people will continue to exist until the end of history. The Jews' joy during the three pilgrimage festivals is the expression of the indestructibility of the Jewish people, for, as the Maharal explained, joy only goes along with existence. The nation that exists throughout history celebrates the three festivals, for they are joyous about persisting through the beginning, middle, and end of time.

This reflects a major theme of our parshah, Israel's ability to last through the ups and downs of history. This miraculous persistence is rooted in their covenant with Hashem, the oath He made to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Israel will even, in the end of days that we pray will come speedily, do teshuvah on a national level, rejoicing during the Messianic period when we will once again celebrate the three pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

## SOURCE GUIDE: WHEN THE 17TH OF TAMMUZ COMES OUT ON SHABBAT

This source guide is based on a selection from a collection called שיח שרפי קודש, based on the teachings of the great leaders of Polish Chasidus, including Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, זצוק"ל, and a number of his disciples (including the Kotzker Rebbe, זצוק"ל, Rav Yitzchak Meir of Ger, זצוק"ל, the first Gerrer Rebbe, and Rav Henoch of Alexander, זצוק"ל).

The passage deals with how the Shabbatot of the Three Weeks affect that period we refer to as Bein Hametzarim, especially when the 17th of Tammuz falls out on Shabbat.

### A. The Shabbatot of the Three Weeks

The first selection is a quote from Rav Berish of Biala, of blessed memory (1820-1876, Poland). He was a talmid of Rav Mendel of Vorka, זצוק"ל.

<p><b>1. Siach Sarfei Kodesh, Bein Hametzarim, 4</b></p> <p>The Holy Rebbe, Harav Berish of Biala, of blessed memory, opened by saying: On the one hand the period between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av is referred to as "Bein Hametzarim," "Between the Straits (or Limitations)," whereas one who keeps the Shabbat is given an inheritance with <b>no</b> limitations (Shabbat 118a, see below).</p>	<p><b>שיח שרפי קודש, ימי המיצרים, אות ד'</b>          פתח הרב אדמו"ר הה"ק ר' בעריש מביאלע זצוקללה"ה מ"ז בתמוז עד ט' באב נקרא בין המצרים. וכל המשמר את השבת נותנים לו נחלה בלי מצרים, (שבת קיח).</p>
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The name בין המצרים is derived from the following expression in Eichah:

<p><b>2. Eichah 1:3</b></p> <p>... All those who pursue her (Israel) overtook her between the borders.</p>	<p><b>איכה א: ג</b>          ... כָּל רֹדְפֶיהָ הִשְׁיגוּהָ בֵּין הַמְּצָרִים.</p>
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Rashi explains:

<p><b>3. Rashi Eichah 1:3</b></p> <p>Between the borders – where there is a high place on both sides and nowhere to flee to. המצרים – are the borders of a field or vineyard. The Midrash says that this refers to the period between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av.</p>	<p><b>רש"י איכה א: ג</b>          בין המצרים - שיש גובה מכאן ומכאן ואין מקום לנוס. המצרים - גבולים של שדה וכרם ומדרש אגדה בין שבעה עשר בתמוז לתשעה באב.</p>
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Shabbat, on the other hand, frees us from metzarim: straits, borders, limitations:

<p><b>4. Shabbat 118a</b></p> <p>Rabbi Yochanan quoted Rabbi Yossi: Anyone who enjoys the Shabbat – they give him an inheritance without limitations, for it says (in the verse following the one that speaks of enjoying the Shabbat - Rashi), "Then you will enjoy Hashem and he will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you of the inheritance of Yaakov your father ..." (Yishayah 58:14).</p>	<p><b>שבת קיח.</b>          רבי יוחנן משום רבי יוסי: כל המענג את השבת נותנין לו נחלה בלי מצרים שנאמר "אז תתענג על ה' והרכבתוך על במתי ארץ והאכלתיך נחלת יעקב אביך וגו'" (ישעיה נח: יד).</p>
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The Shabbatot of the Three Weeks have the potential to free us from the limitations of the Three Weeks:

<p><b>5. Siach Sarfei Kodesh, Bein Hametzarim, 4</b></p> <p>That is, Shabbat's pleasure and observance nullify the bitterness and limitations and make them joyous and happy.</p>	<p><b>שיח שרפי קודש, ימי המיצרים, אות ד'</b>          היינו שהעונג והשימור משבת מבטלים את המרירות והמצרים ויהיו לששון ולשמחה.</p>
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In a previous section he explains the inner mechanics of how Shabbat can transform the Three Weeks:

## 6. Siach Sarfei Kodesh, Bein Hametzarim, 2

In the name of Harav Berish of Biala, of blessed memory: In the Arizal's writings it says that the two months Tammuz and Av are "two eyes" (likening the entire year to the human body). Concerning them it says, "My eye, my eye sheds [tears like] water" (Eichah 1:16). The two eyes in this verse refer to these two months in which the destruction of the Temple occurred because of our many sins. But on the holy Shabbat these days of the week become blessed, as it says, "One who has a good eye (is generous) will be blessed, for he gave of his bread to the poor," (Mishlei 22:9) for he gives forth a blessing. עין טוב means here the "good part of the eye," the holy Shabbatot of the months of the "eye." Those Shabbatot will bring blessing to those days and it will be good to all of Israel.

שיח שרפי קודש, ימי המיצרים, אות ב'  
בשם הר"ר בעריש מביאלע זצ"ל, בכתבי האר"י ז"ל איתא כי ב' חדשים תמוז ואב הם ב' עינים וע"ז נאמר (איכה א') עיני עיני יורדה מים ב' פעמים עיני הוא נגד ב' חדשים אלו שהי' בהם חורבן הבית בעוה"ר, וביום הש"ק נתברכו ימי החול מימים אלו כמאמר הכ' (משלי כ"ב) טוב עין הוא יבורך כי מלחמו נתן לדל שהוא המשפיע את הברכה, והיינו טוב עין טוב שבעין הוא הש"ק שבחודש העין, הוא יברך את הימים, וטוב יהי' לכל ישראל.

Tammuz and Av are the "eyes" of the year. Their Shabbatot are the choicest parts of the month, the "good part of the eye." And those Shabbatot, "the generous ones, the good eye," give blessing to the rest of the month. The Shabbatot of the Three Weeks, of the "eye" months of Tammuz and Av, have the potential to transform those months from bitter and limited to sweet and unlimited.

## B. When the 17th of Tammuz Itself Falls Out on Shabbat

### 7. Siach Sarfei Kodesh, Bein Hametzarim, 4

"The good eye" refers to when the 17th of Tammuz falls out on Shabbat. For the numerical value of the Hebrew word טוב is seventeen ( $\text{ט} = 9, \text{ו} = 6, \text{ב} = 2$ ). This means: On Shabbat, referred to as generous, "the good eye," will be blessed for it gives of its bread to the poor – for it blesses all of the days of the week.

שיח שרפי קודש, ימי המיצרים, אות ד'  
טוב עין הוא אם חל י"ז בתמוז בשבת כי טוב הוא בגימ' י"ז והוא בשבת שנקרא טוב עין הוא יבורך כי מלחמו נתן לדל (משלי כ"ב) שהוא המברך לכל ימי החול.

This last point, that Shabbat brings blessing to the rest of the week, is not self-evident from the words of the Chumash itself. "G-d blessed the seventh day," but how do we know the rest of the days' blessing comes through Shabbat? But it is stated explicitly in the Zohar:

### 7. Zohar II 88a

"Remember the Shabbat day to make it holy" (Shemot 20:8). Rabbi Yitzchak said: It is written, "G-d blessed the seventh day" (Bereishit 2:3), and it is written concerning the manna, "Six days you should gather it, and on the seventh, Shabbat, it will not be" (Shemot 16:26). Since there is no sustenance found on it (the seventh day) what blessing is found in it? Rather, thus we learn: All the blessings of above and below are dependent on the seventh day. We also learn: Why was there no manna on the seventh day? It is because from that day all the six lofty days are blessed through that day. Each one of them gives its sustenance in its day, from that blessing that they are blessed from the seventh day.

זוהר חלק ב' פת.  
זכור את יום השבת לקדשו, רבי יצחק אמר, כתיב (שם ב ג) ויברך אלקי"ם את יום השביעי, וכתיב במן (שמות טז כו) ששת ימים תלקטוהו וביום השביעי שבת לא יהיה בו, כיון דלא משתכח ביה מזוני מה ברכתא אשתכח ביה. אלא הכי תאנא, כל ברכאן דלעילא ותתא ביומא שביעאה תליין, ותאנא אמאי לא אשתכח מנא ביומא שביעאה, משום דההוא יומא מתברכאן מיניה כל שיתא יומין עלאין, וכל חד וחד יהיב מזוניה לתתא כל חד ביומוי, מההיא ברכה דמתברכאן ביומא שביעאה.

Throughout the year the Shabbat is the source of blessing for the rest of the week. But during the period of Bein Hametzarim, Shabbat's function is doubly crucial. It brings the usual blessing to the rest of the week, but it also needs to break down the limitations and bitterness abundant during this period. When the Seventeenth of Tammuz itself falls out on Shabbat, its characteristic is that of the generous one, the good eye (Tammuz is one of the two "eyes" of the year, shedding tears over the destruction). Because it gives of its bread to the poor one (the period of Bein Hametzarim), it is a source of blessing.

## THE LEADER & HIS PEOPLE BY RABBI FYVEL SHUSTER

Bilam was evil, yet was nevertheless a prophet. Rashi (Bamidbar 22:5) asks, “Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, have His Divine Presence rest on an evil gentile like Bilam?” He answers that Hashem did not want to the nations of the world to have an opening to claim, “If we would have had prophets we would have become better. You gave Israel prophets but didn’t give us any.” He gave the nations a prophet but that prophet led them to terrible things. Previously the nations held to a certain level of personal modesty, but Bilam advised sending the Midianite women to entice the Jewish men to worship idols, ‘breaking fences.’

Their obvious response should have been: ‘But You gave Am Yisrael Moshe Rabbeinu as a prophet and we were only given Bilam! Qualitatively there’s no comparison.’ One approach I heard to resolving this is that an appropriate leader comes from the כֹּהֵן, the power and the nature of the nation. A nation merits a leader because of its greatness. Israel merited a Moshe Rabbeinu – until they sinned – but the nations of the world merited a Bilam.

The leader’s stature is dependent on his constituency. Even Israel no longer merited Moshe’s high level prophecy after they sinned at the golden calf. Moshe Rabbeinu was told: "לך רד" – “Go down” (Shemot 32:7). Go down from your position. I only gave you greatness because of the people (Berachot 32a). The Baal Shem Tov once shared this lesson with his talmidim. He used to daven Shmoneh Esrei for an extremely long time. Usually his talmidim would stay with him, but once some of them thought they would have a chance to slip out, buy something to eat, and come back before the Baal Shem Tov finished his Shemoneh Esrei. They did it, but came back to discover that he’d already finished. They said to him, “How can it be? We know that you always daven for such a long time.”

The Baal Shem Tov replied, “Let me give you a mashal, a parable. Imagine someone who saw an extremely beautiful bird in a nest high up on a tree, and wanted to do reach it. But he knew that he wasn’t tall enough to climb by himself, and there was no ladder to be found. But since he was there with his friends he gathered them together, stood them on each other’s shoulders until he was able to climb high enough to reach the bird’s nest. Without his friends he would have been lost and would have had to give up the quest.”

The Baal Shem Tov turned to his talmidim and said, “When I pray I try to reach a level the Zohar refers to as “The Bird’s Nest,” but I am not tall enough to reach it by myself. Do you think I would have the power to daven Shemoneh Esrei for so long without you behind me?”

This issue is dedicated in memory of  
Ariela Rut bat Avraham, ז"ל

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*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v’Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples’ programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at [www.darchenoam.org](http://www.darchenoam.org) +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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[rabbi.dr.moshefreedman@gmail.com](mailto:rabbi.dr.moshefreedman@gmail.com)

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