

Pulse OF Emunah

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life

LESSONS

SOMEONE IMPORTANT

Baruch Schwartz (name changed) was a young man who had earned a reputation in his school as a troublemaker. One day, Baruch was sent to the principal's office for the umpteenth time, where he sat through the principal's usual lecture about the importance of behaving properly, having values and goals in life, and so forth.

The next day, Baruch underwent a miraculous change. Suddenly, he became far more cooperative and well mannered, and before long he had become a model student.

The entire faculty was curious to know what the principal had said that had affected him so deeply, but the principal admitted that he had no idea what had caused the change.

Finally, the teachers decided to ask Baruch himself what had brought about his transformation.

"I wasn't really paying attention to a word the principal said that day," the boy confessed. "But in the middle of our conversation, his intercom buzzed, and the secretary told him he had a phone call. 'I can't talk now; I'm in a meeting with someone very important,' the principal told her.

"When I left his office, those words kept echoing in my mind. The principal thought I was very important! It made me feel so wonderful that I decided to buckle down."

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gem

OF THE WEEK

MOSHE, AHARON, AND MIRIAM

By Rabbi Moshe Pogrow

Throughout the long years of wandering in the Midbar, the women of *klal Yisrael* never lost faith in Hashem the way the men did, and they were not included in the decree of death in the wilderness. Mothers and grandmothers entered Eretz Yisrael with the new generation, bringing with them firsthand memories of Egypt and Hashem's guidance in the Midbar. The spirit of these Jewish women is a credit to Miriam, who set for them a shining example.

The *perek* which describes the deaths of Miriam and Aharon comes right after *parah adumah*, which teaches the Jewish view of death. It declares that what made Miriam did not die when she died; she left her body behind and returned to Hashem, the Source of all life. Only a spiritually blind person would confuse a *tzaddik* with an inert body already beginning to decay. How can one identify a corpse with someone who, minutes before, had thought and will, spiritual strength and moral power? A *tzaddik's* death is like a man leaving the room, leaving his coat behind.

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powerful
PRAYER

B'CHOL NAFSHECHA:
AT ALL COSTS



We are called upon constantly to make sacrifices for Hashem, but most of the time they are relatively small. For example, we resist temptation for something forbidden, or exert ourselves to do a mitzvah. Less frequently, we are required to do something harder. And sometimes, we are required to give up our lives. Generally speaking, if threatened with death, we are supposed to do the *aveirah—v'chai bahem*. The exceptions are when this takes place in public, by force of the government, or concerns the three cardinal *aveiros*, we must allow ourselves to be killed. *B'chol nafshecha*—we must love Hashem even at the cost of our lives.

Adapted from Emunah in the Classroom

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A HOLY CAMP

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation


Toward the end of Parshas Balak, we read about the shameful incident at Baal Peor. After Bilaam failed to curse the Jewish people, blessing them instead, he was about to leave Moav in disgrace when he decided to offer Balak some advice. What was Bilaam's suggestion? "The G-d of this nation despises immorality." He presented Balak with a spiteful plan to ensnare young Jewish men using the girls of Moav. Many succumbed, and in the resulting punishment from Heaven, 24,000 of the Jews perished.

The leaders of gentile nations have always known this truth: *The G-d of this nation despises immorality*. Achashverosh was aware that the Jews had been promised redemption after seventy years. But he miscalculated, thinking that the time had come and gone. Although he was happy not to lose his subjects, he was unsure if this decision by G-d was final, or if there was a chance He would change His mind and redeem the Jews anyway. Achashverosh asked Haman what to do.

"The G-d of Israel despises immorality," Haman said. "Make a party with plenty of temptations and invite all the Jews of Shushan. Their G-d will want nothing to do with them anymore, and you will never lose them."

Nevuchadnetzar knew it, too. There were two scheming Jews, Achav and Tzidkiyah, who desired Nevuchadnetzar's beautiful daughter. Each one told her that he was a prophet, and that Hashem had sent her a message to submit to his friend. Confused, the girl consulted with her father. "It is impossible that they received such a prophecy," he told her. "The G-d of the Jews hates immorality." He had both men thrown into a burning furnace.


In general, the *brachos* that we recite to thank Hashem for the mitzvos are said over positive commandments. There is only one blessing that thanks Hashem for a negative commandment: the one said by the *mesader kiddushin* under the *chuppah*, expressing gratitude for the prohibitions of immorality. Am Yisrael's pride and joy is our purity.

Hashem warns us that His protection is conditional. "*Vehaya machanecha kadosh*, your camp must be holy. If He sees any immorality, He will turn away." In these times, when we are in desperate need of His protection, we must be exceptionally careful in all matters of *kedusha*, and thereby merit *nissim* and *yeshuos*. 

But note the difference between this *perek* and Moshe's *petirah*. When Moshe dies, it says, "*Vayivku bnei Yisrael es Moshe*." Here, after the death of Aharon, "*kol beis Yisrael*" mourned him. Aharon loved peace and pursued it, so the magnitude of his loss was felt by all. In contrast, Moshe's power, uncomfortable to some people, was truth and justice.

A few days earlier, the people had complained about Aharon, but now they all mourned him. This reaction teaches us that all their rebellions were merely temporary. In their normal state, the people knew and appreciated their great leaders. They had three leaders to thank for the three miracles that provided for them in the Midbar: the *be'er*, in the *zechus* of Miriam, *ananim*, in the *zechus* of Aharon, and the *man*, in the *zechus* of Moshe.

The *navi* Micha defines our mission: "*Ki im asos mishpat, v'ahavas chesed, v'hatzneia leches im Elokecha*." These three elements also characterize the work of our leaders: "*asos mishpat*," justice, was the primary mission of Moshe; "*ahavas chesed*," love of love, compassion, sacrifice for others, characterized Aharon; and "*hatzneia leches*," unpretentiousness, modesty, moral purity—traits of Jewish womanhood—were fostered by Miriam.

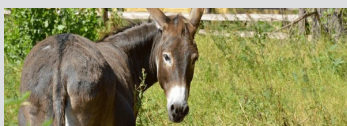
The three gifts that promoted the people's physical wellbeing correspond neatly to the spiritual gifts fostered by the three leaders. *Tznius* is the quiet, hidden spring from whose depths all holiness flows; *chesed* is the protective cloud; and justice is the bread on which all human life depends. 

Based on the commentary of Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch zt"l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.



wonder WORLD

ADVANCE WARNING



How do animals know things that people don't?

In Parshas Balak, Bilam's donkey sees a *malach* blocking the path, while Bilam himself sees nothing. Even *b'derech hateva*, animals can often sense things that people cannot—especially impending danger. But how? Animals have sharp senses. Donkeys and horses, for example, have excellent hearing, picking up sounds too quiet or high-pitched for us to hear. Their wide-angle vision allows them to spot movement from the side and sense predators. Some animals can detect earthquake vibrations before humans feel anything. Others sense changes in air pressure before storms. This helps keep our egos in perspective: even an animal can see what you can't! Paying attention to them can help keep us safe.al. 

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