

# Balak 5776

BS"D Parashat Balak 5776

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

## Dwelling Apart

The infamous Bilam was greatly inspired by the configuration of the Jewish encampment and its particular way of life, and he called out (Bamidbar 23,9)

אֶל מִן הַצֻּרִים אֲנִי רֹאֶה אֹתָם וּמִן הַגְּבוּהִים אֲנִי מֵבִטְרֵם אֶת הַעַם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכֵּן בְּיַסְדָּם וְלֹא יִשְׁחַח אֶת הָעַמּוֹת  
הַגְּדוּלוֹת:

*From the rocky peaks I see them, from the heights I view them (the Jewish nation of the future), a people that dwells apart and is not concerned by the (gentile) nations*

An example of Jewish “dwelling apart” was told to me by one of our sons-in-law, who was sent by Tzahal to negotiate a transaction with the German Federal Police, whose headquarters is in the former Gestapo building in Berlin.

When they broke for lunch, the Germans feasted on wurst, sauerkraut, bacon and lots of beer, while our son-in-law took out his lunch of a mana chama – dehydrated vegetables which become edible when boiling water is added.

While the Germans were feasting away, one of them remarked to the Israeli officer with a kipa on his head eating away at the Osem company mana chama, “Haven’t the Jewish people suffered enough?”

At first glance it’s a good joke. However, underlying the

comment was the German's intention to exonerate his people from what they did to us in the Shoah. He was saying, "how strange and different you are from the civilized peoples of Europe. We partake of the best foods that this land can offer, while you struggle with dehydrated veggies. What happened to your people during the last 2000 years is a consequence of your law that has turned you into "a people that dwells apart and is not concerned by the (gentile) nations."

The Torah does not intend to make the Jewish people isolationists. On the contrary, King Solomon and those who followed him sent merchant ships to all the known world at the time; and international delegations met with King Solomon and with his heirs, establishing political and economic relationships with major powers such as Assyria, Aram, Egypt, India and eastward.

The Jewish ideal is to be involved with the world, while at the same time to be fiercely protective of our particular spiritual status, making sure that it is we who are influencing the nations while being impervious to any of their anti-Torah influences.

In the words of our prophets (Yeshayahu 2,2 and Micha 4,1) the nation in the Holy Land will be the desired model for the gentile peoples. They will stream to our shores to learn law and morality and offer their sacrifices at our Bet Hamikdash. It will be a great time to be alive – for the Jews and also for the gentiles.

In the interim, as we prepare the Medina for world leadership and dominance, it is incumbent on every Jew to participate in laying a brick on a brick in constructing the earthy Gan Eden; whoever turns his back in denial of this spiritual calling will not live to share its fruits.

# 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Entebbe Operation

While the loyal citizens of the Medina are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Entebbe operation to free the hijacked Israeli citizens and other Jews, there appeared a letter to the editor in the last edition of Mishpacha magazine. The writer quotes a renowned posak (Halachic authority) in Bnei Brak who declared that the operation was forbidden by Halacha for reasons of pikuach nefesh – threat to the lives of the soldiers. According to the writer, the rabbi suggested that appropriate halachic response would have been to yield to the demands of the Arab-Moslem terrorists!

I cast a long shadow of doubt on the veracity of the writer's quote. I cannot fathom that any responsible, erudite rabbi would make a judgment that runs counter to halachic logic and precedent, for the following reasons:

1- When I am asked by people who suffer from serious medical conditions, if they are permitted to fast on Tish'a Be'av or Yom Kippur, I politely answer that this is a question for a doctor, not a rabbi. I don't recall that this posak had a wide-ranging military background.

2- I am quite certain that the General Staff did not inform the rabbi of the classified military details. How many soldiers would be sent and from which units; the fuel capacity of the planes; the length of the runway in Entebbe; the number of Ugandan soldiers and their positions at the airport; the weather forecast for Entebbe; alternative plans in case something goes amiss; how many fighter planes would be accompanying the cargo planes; what weapons the soldiers would be carrying and their fire power; how many doctors would have to accompany the force; how low the planes would have to fly in order to be under the radar; etc.

And even if they would have informed the rabbi, he should have replied in good conscience that he is not a military man so the matter is beyond his expertise to voice a judgment.

3- If it is true that the rabbi vetoed the mission on halachic grounds of pikuach nefesh, then there would be many great men in the Tanach who were sinners.

Yehonatan, son of King Shaul and his shield bearer went out alone against the entire Philistine army. The young David Ben Yishai who stood alone against Goliath. The small band of Maccabim who took on the superpower of Greece, and I am certain this rabbi lights Chanuka candles every year.

4- The halachic concept 'pikuach nefesh' is a matter for individuals, not when contemplating the fate of the Jewish nation. There is no greater danger to life than all-out war, yet the Torah requires to do so in defense of our Holy Land, and the war is called "milchemet mitzva" – a mitzva war.

5- Moreover, my personal feeling is that questions pertaining to great national issues of the Medina should be directed to rabbis who were born here. A person born in a particular country has "antennae" that sense the mood of the nation which cannot be acquired by an oleh to the land.

An individual who was born in a little town in Eastern Europe growing up in the shadow of fear of a gentile has the head and personality necessary for questions pertaining to a shteitle, but another head is necessary when dealing with life-and-death issues of the nation in the Land of Israel.

6- There is a factor when dealing with Am Yisrael in our Holy Land which does not exist when dealing with pikuach nefesh of individuals. It is called "kevod Yisrael" – national honor of Yisrael, and is tantamount to the honor of the Creator, as we learn from the drama of David and Goliath (Shmuel 1 17,45-47):

(יְהוָה עִמָּנוּ וְיִשְׁעוּ עִמָּנוּ וְיִשְׁעוּ עִמָּנוּ וְיִשְׁעוּ עִמָּנוּ וְיִשְׁעוּ עִמָּנוּ (שְׁמוֹעַל א' י"ז, כ"ה-כ"ז)

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל הַפִּלִּיִּטִּים וְאֶל כָּל אֲשֶׁר עִמָּם וְאֶל כָּל אֲשֶׁר עִמָּם 'וּ אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ:

(וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל הַפִּלִּיִּטִּים וְאֶל כָּל אֲשֶׁר עִמָּם וְאֶל כָּל אֲשֶׁר עִמָּם 'וּ אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ (וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ:

(וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ וְאַתָּה יְהוָה יִשְׁמָרנוּ:

*45 David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.*

*46 This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.*

*47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give all of you into our hands."*

*Israeli citizens and other Jews who are being held by Arab-Moslem terrorists is an affront to the Jewish nation and to the Creator who has chosen us as His beloved nation. This goes beyond the usual parameters of Halachic physical pikuach nefesh. It is the pikuach neshama of us all and defines who we are.*

Unfortunately, many of the Medina's present leaders do not always act in accordance to the sensitivities of national honor. If they would, they would not have freed thousands of convicted terrorists in return for dead bodies. They would have constructed a bet kneset on Har Habayit (the Temple Mount) and would have compulsory Torah studies in all schools,

and the list goes on.

David ben Yishai would have acted differently.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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