

A PARASHA THOUGHT

How To Earn Olam Haba Without Any Effort



RABBI  
YEHUDA LEIB  
HENDELES

I sometimes think to myself that when looking at family pictures of a wedding, you can right away recognize the bride and groom just by looking at their expressions – while the rest of the family looks happy and excited, they often look tired and stressed. And no wonder – besides for the obvious nervousness and the fact that they are often fasting, the picture-taking itself can be quite an ordeal for them: “Stand like this. No, like that! Almost, almost. There you go! No, you’re off again”... and so on. It sometimes seems like the photographer is trying to find faults, and is criticizing every little thing! The obvious truth is, though, that it’s the exact opposite – the bride and groom are the center of attention and excitement, and the photographer is just trying to achieve perfection.

It’s the same thing with us, the Jewish people. Throughout the entire *Tanach*, we’re constantly hearing criticisms. This is wrong, that’s wrong. Here, the Jews are bad, there, they’re terrible. So some people feel that Hashem is constantly angry at us and we’re all a bunch of failures, on an individual level and on a national level. Indeed, most people, at some point or another, think to themselves that they’re failures and they’ve done everything wrong.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller, (*Toras Avigdor*), corrects this misconception, by explaining a startling statement in the Gemara *Brachos* (12b), which, on the surface, seems incomprehensible. The Gemara says that *Chazal* (the Sages) wanted to include this week’s *parasha* in the *Sh’m’a* we say every day! They wanted us to say, twice a day, “Hear o’ Israel, Hashem is ...one... and Balak ben Tzipor saw what the Jews did...” *Parshas Balak* together with *Shma Yisroel!*

The only reason they didn’t is because, had they done that, we’d have to spend the whole day in *shul*, which would be difficult for most people. But otherwise they would have! It’s a startling statement! How are we meant to understand this? Why should this week’s *parasha* be read together with our affirmation of G-d’s existence and the fundamentals of our belief?

But Hashem wants us to spend time thinking about the greatness of the Jewish people and its members. The *sefer Sharei Teshuva* (3:28) even says that one of the most important purposes of our creation was that we should praise all those who are mindful of their responsibilities to Hashem. So, together with *Sh’m’a*, *Chazal* wanted us to say, multiple times a day, the praises enumerated about the Jews in *parshas Balak*. They wanted us to understand that, with all our mistakes, Hashem loves us unconditionally and eternally – like it says again and again in this weeks’ *parasha*. The criticism is the same as that of the photographer at the wedding: it’s because we’re the center of Hashem’s attention and excitement, and He wants us to achieve perfection. But again, He loves us unconditionally and eternally. This fact is, indeed, from the fundamentals of our belief, like the *Sharei Teshuva* said.

So even now that this fact is not in *Sh’m’a*, we should make an effort to recognize who we and our fellow Jews are, and we should make an effort to praise ourselves and each other, as much as we can. And if we can do that, then, like the *Sharei Teshuvah* continues, “you will acquire merits without end -- without any effort or hard work!”

Have a wonderful Shabbos! 🌟

THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH RABBI YITZCHOK PREIS

**Q:** The very last *possuk* in the *parasha* reads “*Va’yehiyu hameisim bamageifa arba’a v’esrim alef* -- Those who died in the plague were 24,000.” The *trop* under the word “*bamageifa* - in the plague” is an *esnachta*, a note that is used to pause between ideas. However, in this short *possuk* there are no two ideas to pause between, so why this *trop*?

**A.** My *mechutan*, Rabbi Yoseph Levy, shared with me a source quoted in *sefer Kehilas Yitzchok* that even in this plague there was an element of Divine mercy. Even though 24,000 died, many of these Hashem chose from among those who were destined to die that year anyway, thus minimizing the overall impact of the plague. This is alluded to in the words “*Va’yehiyu hameisim bamageifa*.” Instead of translating “*hameisim*” as “those who died,” it could be understood as “those destined

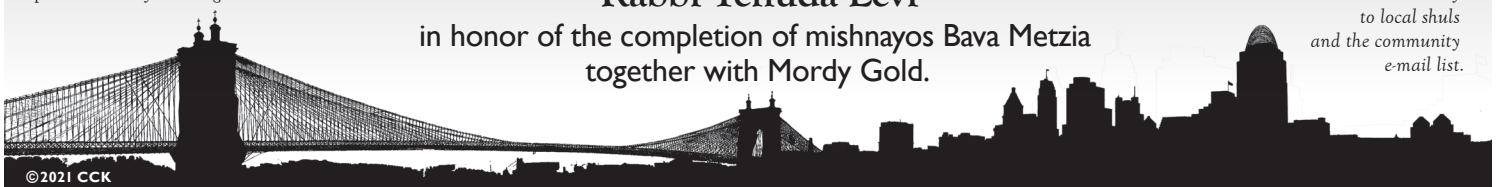
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## THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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to die.” With this understanding, “*Va’yehiyu hameisim bamageifa*” is an independent idea stating “Those destined to die were among the plague.” 🤖

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week’s)? Ask! Submit a question on the parasha by Monday at noon by emailing [parasha@cincykollel.org](mailto:parasha@cincykollel.org). Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

## A SHINING EXAMPLE

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

Rav Yakov Yisrael Kanievsky, known as the *Steipler Gaon*, once made a surprise appearance at a *bar mitzvah seudah* to which he had not been invited. He wished the father “*Mazel tov*,” then sat down next to the *bar mitzvah* boy, spoke with him for a few seconds, and left. After the *Steipler* left, the *bar mitzvah* boy explained that several years earlier, the *Steipler* had seen him enter the *Lederman’s Shul* on *Yom Kippur* carrying a large *sefer*, which the *Steipler* assumed was a *gemara*. He told the boy, “*Yinge’le* (young boy), now we going to *daven*; learning is for later.” The boy then showed the *Steipler* that he wasn’t carrying a *gemara*, but an oversized *machzor*. The *mechilah* (forgiveness) of a *kattan* (boy under *bar mitzvah*) is not valid, so the *Steipler* made sure to find out when and where the boy’s *bar mitzvah* celebration would be held, so that he could ask forgiveness at the first opportunity. 🤖



## TEFILLA TIDBITS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

This Sunday is *Shiva Asar B’tamuz*, which starts the three weeks. These weeks are the Jewish period of mourning over the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash* and the fact that we have not yet been worthy enough for its rebuilding. We know that there are specific *halachos* of *aveilus* (mourning) that we observe during these weeks, in order to decrease our happiness and focus on the *aveilus*. Besides the special *halachos* of the three weeks, *Chazal* (the Sages) instituted ways for us to not forget the *Bais Hamikdash* throughout the year. One of the ways is saying the chapter of *Tehillim* “*Al Nahros Bavel*” (137) before *bentching*. This chapter of *Tehillim* was written by *Dovid* more than four hundred years before the destruction, with divine inspiration about the exile from *Yerushalayim*. Even if we are not careful to do this the rest of the year, during the three weeks it is a good way to remind us of the *aveilus*. In the coming weeks we will try to provide some insights into this chapter of *Tehillim*. 🤖

## THE TRAGIC ARREST & IMPRISONMENT OF MAHARAM OF ROTHENBERG (PART II)

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

With Maharam at its head, the Yeshiva of Rothenberg flourished for several decades and was considered the most prestigious in all of Germany. Eventually, however, due to strong winds of anti-Semitism and persecution, Maharam decided it was time to leave Germany. In 1286, Maharam and his family embarked on the long and difficult journey to Eretz Yisrael. But Maharam never made it out of Germany. The *Pinkas Ha-Takanos* of Worms relates that when Maharam reached Lombardy (northern Italy) he was recognized by the apostate Jew Knepe. Knepe informed the Duke of Basel, with whom he was travelling, of Maharam’s identity and convinced him to persuade the local governor, Meinhardt, to arrest the grand rabbi. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz, Maharam was arrested and handed over to Emperor Rudolph I of Germany.

Emperor Rudolph I was informed of Maharam’s high status as leader of German Jewry and he imprisoned Maharam in a castle in Ensisheim (in the Alsace region of France) with the intention of extorting a colossal sum of money for his release. Maharam’s devoted students (namely Rosh, who was independently wealthy) quickly collected the ransom money, but based on the *halacha* in *Gittin* which prohibits the redemption of Jewish captives for more than their value, Maharam refused to allow his students to redeem him. Instead, Maharam sat in prison for seven years until his death in 1293.

Rabbi Shlomo Luria (Maharshal) in his *Yam Shel Shlomo* questions how Maharam, as the leader of German Jewry, could refuse to be redeemed? Was Maharam, the *Gadol HaDor*, not concerned that in his absence, there would be a tremendous lack of Torah knowledge?

Maharshal suggests that Maharam felt that if he would allow himself to be redeemed, other great teachers of Torah would be arrested and ransomed as well, which would lead to an even greater loss of Torah. Instead, Maharam refused to allow his students to redeem him and remained in prison. Meanwhile, in prison, he continued to teach both through correspondence and to a select group of students who were allowed to visit.

To be continued... 🤖