

IT JUST "HAPPENED"...

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In this week's Parsha, we are told that "Vayikar Elokim El Bilaam" - that G-d 'happened' upon Bilaam.

The hallmark of the careless, irresponsible person is the notion that something 'just happened'. It's not my responsibility, it just sort of happened. It is all too easy to find oneself denying one's culpability - blaming somebody else, or external circumstances - anything to avoid taking responsibility and accepting that, ultimately, we are the ones to 'blame' for whatever actions we take.

This may sound obvious yet it is amazing how often we find ourselves denying this feeling of responsibility for our actions. It is an awesome burden but one which nonetheless falls upon our shoulders since our actions and decisions affect our own lives, not to mention those of others.

The British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks relates the story of how he visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe many years ago. Rabbi Sacks told the Rebbe that "I find myself in such-and-such a situation". The Rebbe seemed dissatisfied with this statement. After several more attempts finally Rabbi Sacks said something to the effect of "I placed myself in such-and-such a situation..."

Whilst everything that happens may be Divinely ordained, the way we see things in our everyday lives we do not just 'find ourselves' in a particular situation, rather we 'place ourselves' there. Insofar as we have free choice, we are responsible for what happens once we get to that place where we supposedly 'just found' ourselves.

All of this brings us to the solemn period in Jewish Tradition known as the Three Weeks, beginning with the 17th of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, next Thursday. This three-week period, culminating in Tisha B'av, the 9th day of the month of Av, in three weeks' time, marks the period of the destruction of both Temples, the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish people. The Torah tells us that the Second Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred between people. The only antidote to baseless hatred is unconditional love and kindness. It is the only way to bring about a personal and a communal redemption process.

Likewise, we have seen such hatred and horror this past century, the only answer is a massive dose of kindness. As a friend of mine recently saw spray-painted on the wall of a train, "Do a random act of kindness". Indeed, there is no better way to put it. It is only through kindness to others, through 'random', unconditional acts of goodness, that we can redeem ourselves and the world around us. Things do not 'just happen', we make them happen. The Torah tells us that every day the Temple is not rebuilt, it is as if it was destroyed that very day. Each of us has a constant obligation to improve the world around us, to participate in our own 'rebuilding of the Temple'.

G-d set up the world in such a way that it depends upon our avodah, our efforts and actions. It is up to us to make it a better place for everyone.

SET IN STONE

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The first Parsha which we read this week is called "Chukas". The word Chuk, as previously discussed, means to engrave. Engraving entails strenuous efforts in order to achieve the desired result. On the other hand, once achieved, the results are 'set in stone' and very hard to remove.

Our approach to life and to the Torah has to be in a manner of chukim, of engraving. It is not enough for it to be the cherry on the pie, a nice book with some cute ideals in it. For our Judaism to operate effectively, to change us and to affect us, it has to be engraved deep within. Our Judaism must be something which is instantly recognizable, deeply embedded within us and not something which can be separated.

By fusing everything together, we are able to proceed beyond our own limitations and truly internalize the lessons that we are learning from our heritage. In this way we become one with the Torah, with our roots, with G-d Himself, in a deeply ingrained manner which cannot be uprooted.

Shabbat Shalom

Mordechai

WEEKLY THOUGHTS PAMPHLET

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