

“For from its origins, I see it rocklike, and from hills do I view it. Behold! It is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations.” (23:9)

Rashi explains Bilaam's description of *Klal Yisrael* as a nation whose origins are firmly entrenched and established as rocks and hills – the rocks allude to the Patriarchs and the hills to the Matriarchs. The nation's loyalty to their illustrious forebears protects them, allowing them to remain firm and resolute in their commitment to Hashem. In his *Simchas HaTorah*, **Horav Simchah Shepps, zl**, observes that here Bilaam is revealing the secret of *Klal Yisrael*'s invincibility, their ability to withstand the tremendous external pressures and challenges that have beset them from their earliest moments as a nation. Their roots herald back to the Patriarchs. The Jewish People are not some “new kid on the block” with another variation in religion. Their faith is deeply rooted in Patriarchs and Matriarchs who serve as an example for them to follow and emulate. Thus, they are able to stand alone, resisting the winds of change, the winds of apathy and, the winds of seduction that have bankrupted the moral compass of contemporary society.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* compares this to a world renowned artist who has painted an original, brilliant masterpiece. Now that the painting is before him on the easel, the next artist, who is not brilliant and certainly not original, will be able to copy his artwork. He has a guide, a standard to follow. Bilaam saw our “examples,” our *Avos* and *Imahos*, who paved the way for us. They pioneered the faith in Hashem which we loyally follow.

Perhaps we might add to this, something in the same vein. Bilaam was looking for the secret of Jewish continuity. Wherein lay our ability to survive a tumultuous history of degradation, persecution and slaughter? No nation has been through so much and has still been able to claim that it not only survived, but also continues to thrive and grow stronger and more committed. It is the Jewish family, the respect that children have for their parents, a respect that is taught by example, in which children observe how their parents revere their grandparents. The tree is as strong as its roots.

The *mesorah*, Torah tradition which is transmitted from generation to generation, is what protects us in *galus*, exile. We have a unique heritage which has been the glue that has kept us together throughout the vicissitudes of time. While this heritage is transmitted through a number of media, such as *rebbe/talmid*, *shul*/congregant, it is the vehicle of parents to children that is the most basic and most effective. If the father and mother do not inculcate their child with the basics of *Yiddishkeit*, its abiding and all-encompassing nature covering every aspect of life, then the *shul* and school have a tall order to supplement what is missing. More often than not, they fail dismally to replace the home unit.

The Torah introduces Jewish history with the story of the *Avos* and *Imahos*. This underscores the overriding significance of the Jewish home. Prior to becoming a nation at *Har Sinai*, we were a

family of Jews. What makes the parent-child relationship so strong? What is the anchor upon which the strength of the family unit is based? Why do some families seem to have more *mazal*, good fortune, in raising successful children, maintaining wonderful, close relationships with them throughout life? Perhaps the following true story will illuminate this phenomenon for us:

Two women who were old friends met after several years at a summer resort. Mrs. Goldberg (not her real name) had her son, Moshe, with her. Mrs. Friedman (also not her real name) had not seen Moshe since he was six-years-old; thus, she was taken aback by Moshe's pleasant and warm-natured demeanor. He had turned into a well-mannered *mentch*. Mrs. Friedman declared, "You know, I would give twenty years of my life to have a son like your Moshe!" Mrs. Goldberg countered, "That is exactly how I did it. I gave twenty years of my life to have a son like this!"

When parents sacrifice for their children – not just money, but time, pleasure and well-being – they concretize a foundation which will serve as a source of *nachas*, spiritual satisfaction, for them, for *Klal Yisrael* and for Hashem.