

How goodly are your tents O' Yaakov, your dwelling places O' Yisrael. (24:5)

Rashi explains that Bilaam was impressed by the modesty and sensitivity which the arrangement of the tents demonstrated. It indicated the importance of the family unit. Bilaam *ha'rasha* posits that the perpetuation of *Klal Yisrael* is contingent upon the preservation of the family unit, which is central to Jewish life and identity on several levels. Within Jewish families (that bond together) we transmit traditions, customs and rituals from generation to generation. The family serves as the primary setting for learning about the history – both religious and cultural – of our people. Parents, as well as grandparents, play a significant role in inculcating children with the importance of Jewish values (through the Torah perspective), such as: positive character traits; a sense of ethics; and the responsibility one has towards the Jewish community in general and towards every individual Jew in particular. Last, a cohesive family is able to survive the vicissitudes of life, both personal and communal.

Bilaam understood this. While it really does not take the wisdom of a pagan prophet to verify this lesson, it shows that even an evil pagan who had no love for our people (begrudgingly) affirmed this verity. Bilaam used the word *tovu*, goodly, which *Horav Mordechai Ilan, zl*, feels has unique significance. In other words, the concept of *kiyum*, perpetuation, preservation, has an intrinsic connection with the concept of *tov*, good. He bases this on *Chazal* (*Bava Kamma* 54:B) who ask: "Why does the first set of *Dibros*, Commandments, not use the word *tov* while the second set of *Luchos* does use the word *tov*? (This is in reference to the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av v'eim*, concerning which it is written, *U'lmaan yitav lach*; "So that it will be good for you.") *Chazal* explain that, since the First *Luchos* were destined to be shattered (as a result of the Golden Calf), the word *tov* does not apply. Apparently, good bespeaks permanence, and the first *Luchos* regrettably lacked this quality. *Nitzchiyus*, eternity, is equated with goodness. Thus, the term *tov* is used with regard to Torah, Yerushalayim and the family unit. The *bayis haYisraeli*, Jewish home, will endure.

At a marriage ceremony, we recite the blessing *Mekadesh Amo Yisrael al yidei chuppah v'kiddushin*, "He sanctifies His nation, *Yisrael*, through *chuppah* and *kiddushin*." The *Tashbeitz Katan* (465) writes the following: "Take the following rule in your hand (do not forget it). We derive the customs concerning *chassan* and *kallah* from the first 'nuptials': *Matan Torah*, for, during that Revelation, Hashem appeared to *Klal Yisrael* as a *chassan* toward his *kallah* (*Klal Yisrael*). Thus, at the heightened moment of his *chuppah*, every *chassan* is on the level of *Klal Yisrael* at *Har Sinai*." *Rav Ilan* employs this analogy to underscore the *kedushah*, sanctity, that *Klal Yisrael* is to safeguard concerning building and preserving the Jewish family. One who gets married should feel the elevated sanctity that permeates the moment. It is the commencement of the Jewish family. As the *chassan* at *Har Sinai*, Hashem showed us the significance of the marriage bond, what it represents, and how we should protect it against any incursion.

The bedrock of Judaism is the family unit. In order for us to realize this ideal, the cycle must begin

with the parents. The harmony that reigns between the parents sets the tone for the present household, as well as the future when the children grow up and set up their own homes. As in every area of *Yiddishkeit*, our *hadrachah*, guidance, comes from *daas Torah*, the wisdom of the Torah, as our *gedolim*, Torah giants, teach us, both by example and by oral and written lessons. Having said this, I refer to the marriage of one of the *gedolei hador*, *Horav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, zl*, whose marriage of nearly eighty years was a lesson in marital harmony, bliss and respect for one another.

The *Rebbetzin* played an integral role in the *Rosh Yeshivah's avodas hakodesh*, service to Hashem. She supported him and his *talmidim*, and she gladly opened her home to the multitudes of people from all walks of life who came to seek his counsel. The *Rosh Yeshivah* would reiterate this constantly, both to his *Rebbetzin* and to others. She was his full partner in his *avodas hakodesh*, without whom he could not succeed.

On *Motzoei Yom Kippur*, when *Rav Scheinberg* was already ninety-nine years old, he was served cake and coffee in his office following the fast. He drank the coffee but saved the cake. As he was walking home, he asked the student who accompanied him whether the cake was still intact. When he arrived home, he took the plate of cake and called out, "Basha! Look what I brought you!" Obviously, it was not the piece of cake, but the thought behind it that mattered.

"Gratitude is a foundation of Judaism and the most important basis of peace between neighbors and between husband and wife" was a comment often heard from the *Rosh Yeshivah*. He was acutely aware of and indebted to his wife's sacrifice, when, in the early months after their marriage, she accompanied her husband to Mir, Poland, so that he could learn in that Torah citadel. At that time, life in Mir was very primitive. Freezing cold in the winter, they managed with no central heating and minimal electricity. They lived there for five years. *Rav Scheinberg* remarked about his wife's devotion to his Torah study, "She went from the full refrigerators of America, a land of comfort, to the deserted, poverty lifestyle in Mir." She gave it up because Torah was her husband's life, and she respected her husband. This is what every marriage needs in order to survive: mutual respect.

I conclude with the poignant farewell the *Rosh Yeshivah* gave to his life's partner. During the *Rebbetzin's* final hours, the *Rosh Yeshivah* entered her hospital room and asked the doctors whether she could hear him. (We must remember that both husband and wife were very old at the time.) "Possibly," they replied.

Rav Scheinberg approached the bed, and, in a tranquil voice, uttered the words of one of his favorite songs, *Ko amar Hashem Zacharti lach chesed ne'urayich ahavas klelulosayich, lech teach Acharai ba'midbar b'eretz lo zeruah*; "Thus said Hashem: 'I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the wilderness, into an unsown land (*Yirmiyahu* 2:2).'" If this is the way they took leave of one another, we can have a glimpse of the respect, love and gratitude that had permeated their home for almost eighty years.