

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter XL: Balak (Num. 22:2–25:9)

Essay 10. The idolatry of Ba'al Pe'or

"**וַתִּקְרְאוּ לָעַם לְזִבְחֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן וַיֹּאכְלֵם הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶן. וַיִּצְמַד יִשְׂרָאֵל" וכו'.** ומקשים למה האריז הכתוב כל כך הנה לו לומר בקיצור "וַתִּקְרְאוּ לָעַם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶן", ועוד קשה מה שייכות ודבקות יש לאכילה עם ההשתחואה, ועוד שאם קראו אותם "לְזִבְחֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן . . . וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ" פשיטא שאכלו נמי.

“While Israel was staying at Shittim, the menfolk profaned themselves by engaging in sexual immorality with the Moabite women, **and they invited the menfolk to the sacrifices for their god; the menfolk did eat [the sacrifices], and they bowed down to their god. Thus, Israel attached itself to Ba'al-Pe'or, and the L-rd was incensed with Israel.**”¹ People question why the Scripture went to such lengths in its description, as it could have said simply, “**and they invited the menfolk, and they bowed down to their god.**” Another difficulty is what affiliation and attachment there is to the eating with the bowing down. Also, if Scripture had read “**to the sacrifices for their god, . . . and they bowed down,**” it’s obvious that they also ate of the sacrifice.

ונש לומר דבפרק ח' דיומא פליגי חד אמר שהמן תמיד הנה נבלע במאמנים וארבעים ושמונה איברים וקרא ד' וימד תהיה לה" וכו' מיתוקם בדברים שמתגרי אומות העולם מביאין להם, וחד אמר אפילו דברים שהאומות מוכרים להם מן מפיגם. ומה אני מקיים "וימד תהיה לה" לאחר שפרחו, ופירשו שם דמתלוקתם הוא אם מה שהתלוננו בשנה שנה שאמרו "ועתה נפשנו יבשה אין פל" וכו' מקרי סרחון גמור או לא, אבל מה שפרחו בשנת הארבעים לאחר שמת אהרן שאמרו "ונפשנו קצה בלחם הקלקל" כולי עלמא מודו דהוי סרחון גמור ומשם והלאה פסק המן מלהיות נבלע באיברים ועיי"ש.

It can be said that in the eighth chapter of tractate Yoma (75b), there is a dispute. One, Rabbi Yochanan, said that the manna was [completely] absorbed in all 248 limbs [of the body, so that there was no waste]. He reads the verses that, “there shall be an area for you outside the camp, where you may relieve yourself. With your gear you shall have a spike, and when you have squatted you shall dig a hole with it and cover up your excrement,”² is properly established as

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¹ Num. 25:1–3.

² Deut. 23:13–14.

referring to waste from eating items that the gentile merchants brought them. But one, Rabbi Elazar ben Perata, said that even regarding the items sold to them, the manna caused it to be completely digested.

How do I establish the verse, “you shall have a spike”? That is after they sinned. It’s explained there by commentators that their dispute regards what they complained about in the second year, that they said, “Now our gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to!”³ shows a complete sin or not. But regarding what they sinned in the fortieth year, after Aaron died, when they said, “and our souls loathe this miserable food,”⁴ everyone agrees that this was a complete sin. From that point on, the manna stopped being completely absorbed in all 248 limbs, and see there.

וְלֹכֵן אָמַר הַכֶּתוּב לֹא דֵי שִׁי נִתְקַרְאֵן לְעַם לְזִבְחֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן" אֵלֶּא אִף "וַיֹּאכַל הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶן", כְּלוּמַר אִף מֵה שֶׁהָיוּ אוֹכְלִין מִן הַמָּן הָיָה מוֹצִיא רָעִי וְהָיָה מוֹעִיל לְעִבּוּדַת פְּעוֹר. וְעֵבִירַת הַסֶּרְחוֹן שֶׁהִתְלוּנְגוּ וְאָמְרוּ "וַיִּנְפְּשׁוּנוּ קִצְצָה" גָּרַם לָהֶם לְהוֹסִיף זָדוֹן עַל פְּשַׁע בְּעִבּוּדַת פְּעוֹר.

Therefore, Scripture said, it wasn’t enough that the Moabite woman “invited the menfolk to the sacrifices for their god,” rather even “the menfolk did eat [the sacrifices], and they bowed down to their god.” That is as if to say that what they had eaten from the manna created excrement, and that was beneficial to the service of the Moabite god, Ba’al Pe’or. The Talmud indicates that the service of Ba’al Pe’or involved publicly exposing oneself and defecating.⁵ Also, the sin of corruption was that they complained and said, “and our souls loathe this miserable food,” which caused them to add a *zadon*, a premeditated conscious sin, to a *pesha*, an intentional rebellious act, in the service of Pe’or.

אִי נָמִי יֵשׁ לֹאמַר דְּאִיתָא בְּפֶרֶק ז' דְּסִנְהֶדְרִין דְּאִשָּׁה אַחַת שֶׁאַלְהָה לְכוּמְרִים בְּמַה עוֹבְדִין לְפַעוֹר אָמְרוּ לָהּ אוֹכְלִין תְּרַדִּין וְשׁוֹמְרִין שֶׁכָּר הִדְּשׁ וּמִתְרִיזִין לְפָנָיו לְפִי שֶׁהֵם דְּבָרִים הַמְשַׁלְּשִׁין אֶת הַמַּיְעִים וּמְרַבִּים זָכַל, נִמְצְיָנוּ לְמַדִּים שֶׁהִעֲבֹדַת פְּעוֹר אֵינָה תְלוּיָהּ בְּהַזְכָּל וְהָרָעִי הַנְּהוּיג לְצֵאת מִבְּנֵי אָדָם בְּאֲכִילַתָּם הִרְגִּילָה אֵלֶּא צְרִיךְ לְאָכּוֹל תְּרַדִּין וְכוּ' כְּדֵי לְהַרְבּוֹת זָכַל וְרָעִי, וְאָמַר הַכֶּתוּב "וַיִּתְקַרְאֵן לְעַם לְזִבְחֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן" וְלֹא דֵי לָהֶם שֶׁאַכְלוּ מִהַזְבֵּחִים "וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶן", אֵלֶּא אִף "וַיֹּאכַל הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ" שֶׁאַכְלוּ דְּבָרִים הַמְשַׁלְּשִׁים כְּדֵי לְעִבּוֹד עֲבוּדָה שְׁלִימָה וּגְדוּלָה, וּבִשְׁבִיל זֶה "וַיִּצְמַד יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבַעַל פְּעוֹר" שֶׁלְפִי שֶׁהִרְבּוּ לְחַטֵּא וְנִדְבְּקוּ בָּהּ כְּצִמִּיד פְּתִיל.

Alternatively, it can be said that it’s brought in the seventh chapter of tractate Sanhedrin (64a) that one woman asked the idolatrous priests how people served Ba’al Pe’or. They said to her, they eat a dish of beets and drink new beer and defecate before him. For

³ Num. 11:6.

⁴ Num. 21:5.

⁵ Sanhedrin 64a.

these are things that soften the bowels and increase excrement. We are able to derive that the service of Pe'or does not depend upon the excrement that customarily exits from people in their normal eating. Rather, it's necessary to eat a dish of beets etc., in order to increase the excrement, and Scripture says, "and they invited the menfolk to the sacrifices for their god," and it wasn't enough for them that they ate from the idolatrous sacrifices, "and they bowed down to their god." Rather, "they ate, and they bowed down to their god," meaning that they ate softening agents in order to serve the idol completely and greatly. Because of this, Scripture says, "thus, Israel attached [*va'yitzamed*] [וַיִּצְמַדְוּ] itself to Ba'al-Pe'or," that because they increased their sin, they attached themselves to it like a tightly-bound [*tzamid*] [צָמִיד] cover.

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