

Parashas Balak

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ט"ז תמוז תשפ"ה

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י"ל ע"י

קהילת שבתי בבית ד'

בנשיאות מורנו ורבנו הרה"צ
רבי גמליאל הכהן
רבינוביץ שליט"א

טיב הקהילה

English edition

באנגלית

טיב הפרשה

הבדל בין ישראל לגוי

טיב המערכות

Strong is your dwelling - איתן מושבך

After the wicked Bilaam tried to curse Israel and did not succeed, he left behind a few "parting words"... among them (24:21): וירא את הקיני: "And he saw the Kenite, and he took up his parable and said: Strong is your dwelling, and you placed your nest in a rock." Rashi explains: "I wonder from where you merited this, were you not with us in the counsel of 'להבה נתחכמה לו' - 'Come, let us deal wisely with them' (Shemos 1:10)? And now you have settled in the stronghold and refuge of Israel!"

The Gemara describes (Sanhedrin 106a): "Bilaam said to Yisro: Kenite, were you not with us in that counsel? Who settled you among the mighty of the world?!" And this is as Rebbe Chiyya bar Abba said in the name of Rebbe Simai: "There were three involved in that counsel: Bilaam, Iyov, and Yisro. Bilaam, who gave the advice—was killed. Iyov, who remained silent—was judged with suffering. Yisro, who fled—the descendants of his descendants merited to sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone."

In truth, we must understand how such a thing happened. Seemingly, at the time they took counsel together in the matter of "Come, let us deal wisely with him", they were on the same level. How then did it happen that Bilaam descended lower and lower, while Yisro rose and was elevated, until he merited that his descendants would sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone?

To understand, we must return to Egypt, where both of them were advisors to Pharaoh. Both of them understood at the time that what they were doing was not proper. Not only had they not shown gratitude toward Yosef, who had saved them from the shame of famine, and toward Yaakov Avinu, who had brought blessing to Egypt—but in addition to that, they took counsel together on how to harm their descendants and enslave them.

Both of them understood that they would not be able to change the plan of the wicked Pharaoh. But Yisro, even though he had nothing he could do about it, at least made a protest, and because of that protest, he was forced to flee from Egypt. He lost his position and his honor. In contrast, Bilaam did not want to give up his high status and cooperated with the wicked plans of Pharaoh.

The consequences of this story are known to us, but stories like it take place every single day. Each one of us is faced with challenges, and within the heart we know what the truth is. And although at the time of the challenge, it might seem as if the one who goes with the truth loses out, after some time the results become clearly visible: "Bilaam, who gave advice—was killed. Yisro, who fled—his descendants merited to sit in the Chamber of Hewn Stone." This is something worthwhile to remember at the time of a challenge!

- Tiv HaTorah - Balak

The difference between a Jew and a goy

(וילך בלעם עם בלק ויבאו קרית חוצות: (כב, לט

Bilaam went with Balak and they came to Kiryat Chutzos. (22:39)

Rashi explains: Kiryas Chutzos – a city full of marketplaces, with men, women, and children in its plazas, as if to say, "See, and have mercy, so that these should not be uprooted."

It is told in the Gemara (Shabbat 31a): A certain gentile came before Shammai. He said to him, "Convert me on condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot." Shammai pushed him away with the builder's measuring rod in his hand. He came before Hillel, and Hillel converted him. He said to him, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the entire Torah; the rest is its explanation—go and learn it." End quote of the Gemara.

This Gemara raises several questions:

1. What was the gentile intending when he made such a strange request? Did he not realize on his own that such a thing is impossible?! After all, the Torah is longer than the land and includes 613 commandments, each filled with many details. Did he truly intend to learn all this in the amount of time he could stand on one foot?!
2. Why did Shammai push the gentile away with the builder's rod? It is true that the gentile asked for something unattainable, but this still does not fall into the category of "wickedness" that would warrant such rejection and humiliation.
3. How could Hillel convert him in the end? Was it really so that by saying, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow," he had taught him the entire Torah?!

It may be said that this gentile greatly yearned to convert and to live his life as a Jew. For this purpose, he had already studied the entire Torah so that he would be able to fulfill the commandments immediately upon conversion. But before completing his conversion, he reflected to himself and considered what he was about to do. He reached the conclusion that conversion was like "a rose with a thorn." It is true that through it, one merits to join the holy nation and enter beneath the wings of the Shechinah, but on the other hand, one becomes obligated in 613 commandments and might, Heaven forbid, anger the Creator Baruch Hu if he transgresses them. Therefore, he came before Shammai to ask for a short piece of advice—how to live as a Jew without stumbling into sin. This is what he meant when he said, "Teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot," meaning: Give me brief guidance that will teach me how to safeguard and fulfill the Torah properly.

Before continuing to explain Shammai's actions, let us clarify Hillel's intent in responding with, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow." What advice was Hillel attempting to give? To understand this, we must recall what was often said by the righteous Gaon Rabbi Yisrael Yaakov Fisher zt"l, Av Beis Din of Yerushalayim:

The main suffering that afflicts a person is due to sins between man and his fellow. For sins between man and the Omnipresent, Teshuva is effective. Most Jews, after doing improper acts, are stirred with feelings of regret. In addition, every person experiences Yom Kippur once a year, and the very essence of the day atones for them. But for sins between man and his fellow, we have learned (Yoma 85b): *"Transgressions between man and his fellow are not atoned for by Yom Kippur until he appeases his fellow."* So long as the fellow has not forgiven him, the sins weigh on him and cause him to suffer. This is because one does not always remember whom he wronged, and even if he knows, those harmed do not always forgive so quickly...

From the words of the Av Beis Din, we learn that the primary obstacle preventing a person from being pleasing to his Creator are the sins between man and his fellow. This is what Hillel was saying to the convert: *"That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow!"* That is, if you wish to be a proper and pleasing Jew, be especially careful regarding sins between people, for atonement for them is not in your control. Therefore, beware of doing things that others find unpleasant or hurtful.

Now let us return to the actions of Shammai. Shammai the Elder also knew that this was the proper advice for that convert. However, he was unsure whether the gentile standing before him was capable of understanding it, and whether he was even worthy of converting. You must understand that this advice reveals the very distinction between a Jew and a gentile. For while among Jews such a concept is an obvious foundation, a gentile is not naturally capable of absorbing it.

As Chazal tell us (see *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer*, among others), before the giving of the Torah, HaKadosh Baruch Hu went to each of the nations and asked whether they wanted to receive the Torah. Each nation asked what was written in it, and HaKadosh Baruch hu answered with one of the commandments between man and his fellow. To one nation He said, *"Do not murder,"* to another, *"Do not steal."* Although they understood that these mitzvos would be good for them, since they would promote peace among them, they nonetheless refused to accept them, saying that their entire way of life depended on those very sins...

From here we see that the concept

of considering the feelings of another is not genuinely present among the nations.

However, within every nation there were also a few souls that did long to receive the Torah, and those souls were surely not comfortable with the corruption of moral traits. But since the entire nation did not choose the Torah, those souls were also prevented from receiving it at that time. Only in later generations could they be clarified and separated from their nations and join the chosen nation.

Thus, when that gentile came before Shammai the Elder, Shammai wanted to test him—to determine whether he was from among those souls worthy of conversion. For that purpose, he wanted to examine whether the concept of *"That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow"* resonated with him. So he struck him with the measuring rod, to see how he would react. If he were to express amazement at the blow, it would show that he was from the souls of true converts, since he would not understand how one could cause distress to another; for indeed, it is not proper for a person to do to someone else what he would not want done to him. But if he would leave without saying a word, that would indicate he was not from among those souls, because a gentile is not amazed when he sees someone strike another for no reason—he understands that if one feels like hitting, he hits...

And since the gentile did not say anything in response to Shammai, Shammai concluded

that he was not fit for conversion and left him.

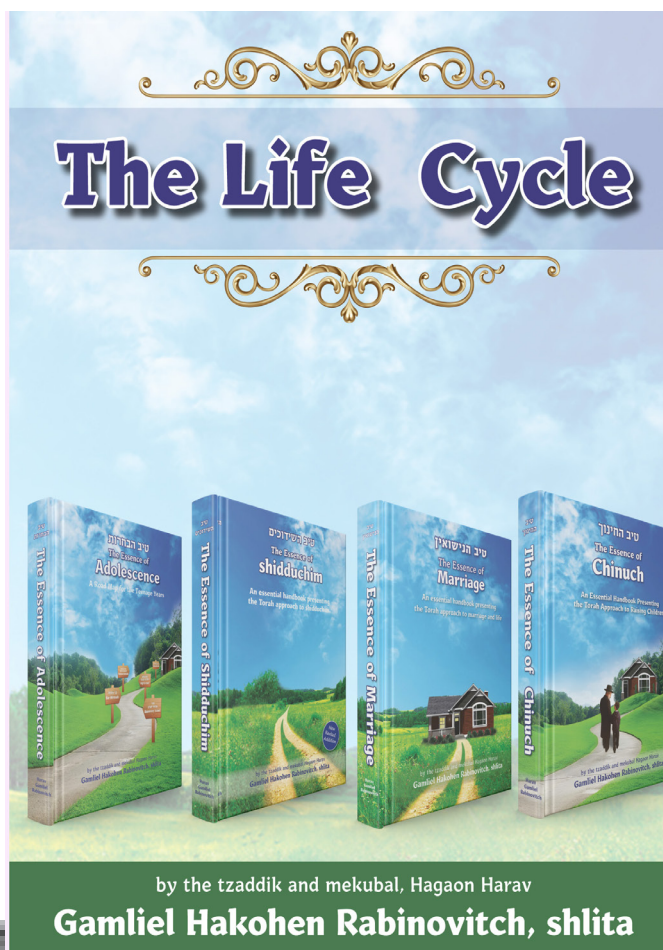
However, when he came before Hillel, he shared his pain—that Shammai had pushed him for no reason using the builder's rod. It then became clear that the reason he had not expressed amazement before Shammai was not due to indifference, but rather due to humility and reverence toward the sages of the generation. Hillel then understood that he was indeed worthy of entering beneath the wings of the Shechinah. Therefore, he gave him that same advice, which was also an indirect answer to explain the intent of Shammai's action with the builder's rod.

An illustration of this idea is seen in Rashi's commentary before us. Rashi explains why Balak brought Bilaam to *Kiryat Chutzos*—it was to arouse Bilaam's compassion upon the Moabite nation. And what did he want Bilaam to do with that compassion? To curse someone else! And that, even before Balak knew whether Israel intended to harm him at all. It is possible that Israel even tried to inform him that they had no such intention, since Hashem commanded Moshe accordingly, as it says (Devarim 2:9): *וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלֵי אֶל תִּצַּר אֶת מוֹאב וְאֶל תִּתְּגַר: בְּכֹחַ מַלְחָמָה* - *"And the Lord said to me: Do not distress Moav and do not provoke them to war."* And even if, as the leader of his nation, he did not believe them, the matter was still uncertain. If he had been an upright king, he would have requested only that Bilaam bless his nation, that

any enemies who seek their harm would not succeed against them. That blessing alone would have sufficed to remove his fear of Israel. There was no need at all to curse those who had not even intended harm toward him. Especially when he declared that compassion was rooted within him and asked Bilaam to arouse compassion as well. If you are compassionate, why do you not extend compassion to others?

But this is the essence of a gentile: for himself, he indeed has compassion. But to recognize that there is someone else in the world and that one must take his suffering into consideration—this, no. On the contrary, he desires to see others humiliated and distressed...

Fortunate are we—how good is our portion, how pleasant our lot—that we are counted among the people of Hashem, and that He has not made our portion like theirs, nor our destiny like all their multitudes.



‘יש עניין שיתהפך’

‘There is a concept that things can turn around’
‘Abba!!! I killed someone!!!!!! Abba, I had an accident!!!’

There is no more shocking phone call one can receive from one’s child. I could barely extract the information about the location of the accident, and I rushed to get there... The Hatzolah members at the scene said there was a head injury, and it was impossible to assess the condition until arrival at the hospital, where advanced equipment would be used to examine what was going on inside the head.

My son, shaking all over, told me that the bus was standing outside the station, picking up and dropping off passengers. He was passing the bus in the work pickup truck, overtaking it with great caution, when suddenly a young man ran out from in front of the bus straight into the middle of the road and was thus struck by the vehicle my son was driving.

I took my son home while he was completely shattered, broken beyond comfort. Neither I, nor my wife, nor his wife were able to calm, encourage, or console him. He lay in bed, crushed and broken, not knowing his own soul, trying to understand what sin he had committed that Hashem brought about such a terrible decree through him—to kill a soul or, at best, to cause serious injury?! Until three o’clock in the morning we tried to calm and comfort him, but he was in his mourning and his sackcloth!!!

The next day I received a phone call from an unknown number. The call began with words of thanks—for the accident. I did not understand what he wanted, and then a wondrous story became clear. On the line was the young man who had been struck by my son. He told me that at the hospital, they examined him and found not even one fracture—only a small cut that required stitches.

The doctor said that despite that, it had still been an accident with a large vehicle that struck him, and insisted on doing a CT scan. On the CT scan they saw pressure from a cervical vertebra pushing toward the spinal cord. They rushed him into surgery—and saved his life. In the best-case scenario, he could have been paralyzed for life.

He also told me that for a long time he had been unable to control his fingers, and the doctors had not been able to identify the source of the problem. The surgery resolved the issue. Because of the accident, he received the gift of a healthy life!!!

P.S. In response to my question—how did he get my number? He said that he copied the number from the vehicle that hit him. That was the number of my company—my son works for me...

What seemed to us like misfortune turned into goodness!!!

We made a large Kiddush to give thanks to Hashem!!!

ש.ב.

Even a Small Measure of Yiras Shamayim

“לא הביט און ביעקב ולא ראה עמל בישראל ה’ אלקיו עמו ותרועת מלך בו” (בב, כא)

He has seen no iniquity in Yaakov, nor perceived any perversity in Yisrael; Hashem their God is with them, and the shout of the King is among them. (23:21)

The holy Chiddushei HaRim interprets this *pasuk* in the context of *yiras Shamayim*. As long as a Jew possesses even a small measure of *yiras Shamayim*, the Almighty forgives their transgressions, granting them Divine assistance and abundant mercy.

The *pasuk* alludes to this: *He has seen no iniquity in Jacob, nor perceived any perversity in Yisrael*. Even if a person sins and is filled with iniquity, having succumbed to the evil inclination and transgressed, Heaven does not focus on their sins or scrutinize their wrongdoings—but only if *Hashem their God is with them*. This means that they have not completely severed their connection with the Divine.

As long as a Jew maintains a connection between this soul and their Creator and retains even a small measure of *yiras Shamayim*, the *pasuk* assures: *Hashem their God is with them, and the shout of the King is among them*.

The Chiddushei HaRim adds that even if a person has fallen and is buried in sin, if he still harbors a slight measure of *yiras Shamayim* that prevents him from descending further into worse transgressions, there is still hope. This restraint, born from his *yiras Shamayim*, can become the basis for a transformation that will ultimately return him to his Father in Heaven.

This principle is reflected in the *pasuk* (Shmuel I 2:6), *ה’ - Hashem... מוריד שאול ויניעל, brings down to the grave, and raises up*. Sometimes, when a Jew has fallen and cannot awaken on his own initiative, Heaven deepens the “grave” before him. By making the person perceive himself as higher than the pit open before him, he feels elevated and is saved.

Thus, *Hashem brings down to the grave*—He deepens the grave itself to prevent further descent *and raises up*—helping the Jew perceive himself on a higher level. As the world appears to sink lower, the Jew standing above that pit has already begun to rise with the perception that he could fall so much lower, bringing him closer to Torah and *yiras Shamayim*.

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One of the holy *talmidim* of the Baal Shem Tov *zt”l*, used to plead in his prayers that if *chas veshalom* he were ever at risk of succumbing to sin, Hashem should take him from this world immediately to spare him from transgression.

This *talmid* feared deeply for his soul, lest the physical temptations of this impure world lead him to ruin, distancing him from reward and bringing him closer to loss. His fear of corruption was so great that he prayed to sacrifice his life rather than falter in even the slightest sin. Indeed, this *talmid* passed away at a young age, as he had requested.

This story demonstrates the potential intensity of yiras Shamayim. It was embedded so deeply within this talmid that he preferred death over the slightest chance of falling into sin, a truly astonishing level of fear and devotion.

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Rav David Deutsch *zt”l*, author of *Ohel David* and one of the great *ge’onim* of Hungary in a generation rich with *talmidei chachamim*, shared a unique friendship with the Chasam Sofer *zt”l*. Their mutual respect and correspondence are evident in the *Shu”t Chasam Sofer*, where Rav Deutsch is frequently mentioned.

Rav David’s extraordinary fear of Heaven was renowned. He maintained strict personal stringencies to avoid even the appearance of transgression. One notable example involved the use of flour. A well-known halachic concern is the potential presence of insects in flour, which requires sifting before use. Rav David, however, did not trust anyone else—not even his closest *talmidim* — to sift his flour. He insisted on personally sifting it multiple times and refused to eat any baked goods made from flour he had not sifted himself. He adhered to this stringency for many years.

On one occasion, Rav David visited the illustrious city of Pressburg and stayed as the guest of the Chasam Sofer. The Chasam Sofer, deeply honored to host such an esteemed scholar, welcomed him with great joy. The two sages sat together in an atmosphere of love and respect, engaging in profound halachic discussion, as is the way of *talmidei chachamim*.

This exchange between the two giants of Torah reflected not only their erudition but also

their shared dedication to *yiras Shamayim*—living lives infused with awe and reverence for the Divine.

The Chasam Sofer hosted his esteemed guest, Rav David Deutsch, with great honor. A special selection of baked goods had been prepared for the occasion and brought to the table. The Chasam Sofer personally took some cakes from the tray, placed them on an elegant plate, and served them to his beloved guest, inviting him to partake with the *berachah* over the food.

Rav David felt uneasy, caught between two conflicting concerns. His long-standing practice was eating only baked goods made from flour he had sifted. But it seemed improper to refuse the offering of the Chasam Sofer, the leading *gaon* of the generation.

Sensing Rav David's hesitation, the Chasam Sofer smiled and reassured him: "Here, there is no need for concern. Know that two of my most devout and capable *talmidim* sift the flour in my home with the utmost care, and we rely on them completely."

Rav David tried to decline politely, explaining that for many years, he had been stringent about not eating baked goods made from flour sifted by others, regardless of the circumstances. However, he feared that his refusal might appear disrespectful to the Chasam Sofer, implying distrust of the halachic kashrus under his supervision. Reluctantly, and out of deference to his host, he decided to eat the cakes.

With great trepidation, Rav David took one of the fresh cakes in his hands, ready to recite the blessing over it. Yet, as he held the cake, two small worms suddenly emerged and crawled out!

Rav David recoiled in shock, but the Chasam Sofer, with an understanding smile, remarked: "It seems that Heaven greatly values your stringency and has arranged for these worms to appear, so you need not compromise your established practice. These worms were not present in the flour before—it is clear they must have appeared after the baking, as any worms in the flour would have been burned in the oven. Everything has been orchestrated so that you can maintain your admirable *minhag*." Turning to the *talmidim* around him, the Chasam Sofer added: "From this, we must learn the extent of *yiras Shamayim*. If a person has accepted upon himself a good *minhag* or stringency upon himself, he must guard it diligently and not deviate from it under any circumstances."

That you may learn to fear Hashem your God.

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My beloved son, Rav Dov HaKohen *shlita*, a *posek* of the Edah HaChareidis in our community in Beis Shemesh, told me about an event he witnessed with his own eyes. This story contains an important lesson in pure *yiras Shamayim*.

Rav Yaakov Blau *zt"l*, a *dayan* and *posek* of the Eidah HaChareidis and the Rav of the Sanhedria neighborhood in Yerushalayim, displayed exceptional *yiras Shamayim* in all areas of his life.

Rav Dov HaKohen, my son, and his grandson, shared an incident from one Shabbos when he stayed with his grandfather: During the Shabbos meal, a man approached Rav Blau with a question. On Friday afternoon, a few minutes after sunset, he discovered that the Shabbos hot plate was cold and realized the plug had not been fully inserted but was dangling loosely.

The man described how he had tried to use his elbow to push the plug into place without success. Eventually, after several attempts, he managed to secure the plug, and the hot plate began to heat the food. He now wanted to know whether the food could be eaten on Shabbos.

Rav Blau was visibly shaken and exclaimed in distress: "What have you done? This is a serious transgression! You may not eat any food on that hot plate, as it was heated in violation of Shabbos laws!"

He explained that, as ruled in the Mishnah Berurah (*Orach Chayim* 261:6), food cooked or heated on Shabbos, even inadvertently, is prohibited for use: "Even *bediavad* (after the fact) if one kindled a flame or performed any other type of *melachah* during *bein hashemashos* (twilight), it is forbidden to derive benefit from it, just as if it were performed on Shabbos itself, where it is forbidden even if done unintentionally."

Rav Dov then asked his grandfather about the ruling in the Biur Halachah (*ad loc.*), which permits, in some instances, reliance on the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam that sunset occurs later. If the act was performed during the twilight period (*bein hashemashos*), and there is halachic doubt as to whether Shabbos has begun, one may benefit from the action.

And these are the words written there: "After the case, if someone transgressed and lit, or performed another prohibited act after sunset, when there is a dispute among the *poskim*, one may be lenient *bediavad* to benefit from it. This is similar to what the Magen Avraham writes in *Orach Chaim* 323:11 regarding immersing new vessels, that if someone transgressed and immersed them [on Shabbos], it is permissible to use them *bediavad*, since there are authorities who permit it *lechatchilah*."

Now, in the case of our inquiry, where the act occurred a few minutes after the time of sunset in the *luach* when the sun is no longer visible to the naked eye, according to several opinions, this is still not considered halachic sunset, and does not the Biur Halachah explicitly permit leniency *bediavad* in such cases?

Rav Blau, the great *posek*, provided an astonishing response, teaching an important

and lofty principle in halachic rulings based on pure and uncompromising *yiras Shamayim*:

"I am well aware of the leniency suggested by the Biur Halacha in this matter—it has not escaped my attention," he said. "However, this case presented to us is fundamentally different. This questioner stands here and recounts what he did—violating Shabbos after sunset—with complete calm, showing no sign of remorse or regret for the desecration of Shabbos that he committed, *Rachmana litzlan!* He doesn't even bother to ask whether his actions were correct or how he should have handled the situation upon discovering the cold hot plate. Instead, he simply narrates that his family sent him here out of concern the food might be prohibited..."

"With such a questioner, we must adopt a stricter stance to instill in him and teach him the proper fear of Heaven—that he must take care to avoid even the possibility of sin and not casually permit himself to act with such disregard. Anyone who carefully examines the words of the Mishnah Berurah and Biur Halacha will see how that great gaon was deeply cautious regarding the time of sunset, urging people to avoid, at all costs, even the possibility of violating a Torah prohibition. He even ruled that Shabbos' preparations should be finished earlier to avoid any doubtful prohibitions. Only in cases of great necessity did he find grounds for leniency bediavad."

"Therefore, had this questioner come seeking ways to rectify his soul for the Shabbos desecration he committed after sunset, expressing remorse and regret, we might have exerted ourselves to find a post-facto leniency—perhaps due to the disputed timing of sunset among the authorities, or the possibility that his action was not a full-fledged prohibited act but done indirectly. However, this is relevant only in cases of a great *bediavad*, as explicitly stated in the Biur Halacha.

"This case before us is different. It appears to reflect a disregard for the sanctity of sunset, *chas veshalom*. Here, we must adopt a stricter approach to instill in him the proper *yiras Shamayim*, so that he learns to observe the halachah meticulously, and whoever is *machmir* will be blessed."

To whom does this message apply?

It is important to emphasize that this discussion is not a halachic ruling. As stated numerous times in this forum, any practical halachic questions must be directed to a qualified halachic authority. Our intent here is solely to teach a lesson in *yiras Shamayim*—to exercise vigilance in avoiding even the slightest possibility of transgression, to be cautious in halachic matters, and not to casually permit oneself to act based on personal reasoning.

This is especially true regarding the critical matter of "the beginning of Shabbos," where people sometimes tend to be lax, waiting until the very last moments before Shabbos begins, thereby entering into serious doubts of Shabbos desecration, *chas veshalom*. A person with wisdom and *yiras Shamayim* in his heart will safeguard himself and his household from approaching even the possibility of transgression. As Chazal said: "Go away, go away," we tell the *nazir*. 'Go around, go around—do not come near the vineyard!'