

**Good Shabbos Everyone.** In this week's portion Balak, we read about the attempts of the evil Bilaam to curse the Jewish people. When Bilaam opens his mouth intending to curse the Jewish people, Hashem causes Bilaam instead to utter praises of the Jewish people. In Bilaam's first "blessing" he says about the nation of Yisroel, "Behold! It is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations." (Bamidbar 23,9)

Liora and her brother, Ayal, filled their pack backs with essentials, and took off from their native Israel for India. They traveled from one tourist attraction to the next, then split up to follow separate trails. Ayal stumbled upon Arachim's Bayit Yehudi hostel. He enjoyed the hospitality and listened to some fascinating lectures. Drawn to the extensive library, he discovered new concepts that changed his life completely. There at the Bayit Yehudi in India, Ayal opted for a life of Torah and mitzvos.

In contrast, Liora wandered further afield. In the 'holy city' of Varanasi, she came across a cult headed by a charismatic guru. He spoke eloquently of the brotherhood of all mankind, the spirit of the cosmos, and efficient exploitation of the earth's resources. She was entranced, and thoroughly won over.

When Ayal learned of Liora's new affiliation, he tried to extricate her from the cult, but her attraction to her new mentors was too strong. As a last resort, Ayal suggested that they both return to Israel for a visit with their parents. He made a condition with her: she must agree to attend an Arachim lecture together with him.

Liora had no qualms; she agreed readily, fully confident that nothing could cut her off from her new source of inspiration. The cult was her whole life; nothing could take its place. Brother and sister flew back home. Together, they set out for an evening with Arachim. Together they sat in the hall, waiting for the speaker to appear - but in vain.

After a considerable delay, an Arachim staff member mounted the podium and announced that the evening's lecturer was unwell. So that the audience not leave entirely empty-handed, he read to them a short summary of Jewish law concerning lost property. He explained the Torah requires someone who finds a lost object to assume responsibility for it, and to make a reasonable effort to locate the owner. He also described how a finder must ascertain that the claimant is truly the owner by asking for simanim, identifying marks or characteristics, to prove that this watch or book really does belong to him.

Liora was unimpressed, to say the least. The lecture that was meant to open new horizons had put her to sleep. Ayal was devastated. The entire trip home was for nothing! How would he ever get his sister away from the cult? He nudged Liora to wake her up, and, with a heavy heart, trudged out of the hall to head for home.

Liora had dozed during the lecture, but the Guardian of Israel sleeps not.... Liora flew back to her cult in India. Ayal enrolled in a yeshiva for baalei teshuva in Jerusalem. It was only a short while later that Ayal was suddenly called out of the beis hamidrash at his yeshiva. A visitor was waiting to see him. He turned to the room where his mystery guest was waiting, opened the door, and was dumbfounded to find his sister Liora!

She greeted him with a wide smile. "What are you doing here?" he asked with a wide grin. Her answer left him even more mystified. "I want to enroll in a school for baalos teshuva," she replied.

"You?" asked Ayal, delighted, but incredulous. "What happened? What made you change your mind about your 'wonderful' cult and its guru!"

Liora told him the full story. Once back in India, she had gone straight back to the cult. One day, the guru asked her to accompany him somewhere. As the two of them were walking along the alleyways of Varanasi, the guru bent down and picked up a fat wallet that someone had obviously just dropped. He opened it and found it full of bills and documents. With a smile of satisfaction, he tucked it into his pocket.

Liora was speechless. Some tourist had just lost a considerable sum of money, a driver's license, and other valuable documents. His name, address, and other personal details were all there in black and white. It would be a simple matter to find him by contacting through the police or local embassy of the country he hailed from. Why did her guru just take it for himself? Wasn't that like stealing?

In reply, the guru embarked on a long lecture of about the unity of the universe, the brotherhood of all men, and the dynamics by which the "energy of the cosmos" had "transferred resources" from the former owner of the wallet to himself. The two of them were actually one soul, divided between two bodies, he explained. The wallet had been lost so that the money would reach its "rightful destination."

Liora recalled the Arachim speaker and his presentation of the Torah laws that apply in such a case. The sharp contrast between philosophy perverted by greed and loyalty to the truth brought her back to her senses. She opted for the truth, and booked a ticket back home. Her mind was made up; her choice was Torah, and Torah alone. Another Jewish soul, wandering far afield, had found its way home. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**