

**July 3, 2009**

**Shabbat Shalom!**

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*How do we create a positive image for ourselves about our character ? Self-esteem is a possibility for anyone to maintain on their own and with encouragement and affirmation from other people. There are, however, times when feedback might make it harder to maintain self-esteem and that positive view (one book I recently read spoke about this in terms of “the dipper and the bucket,” where the “bucket” is one’s self-esteem and the dipper is a comment or action that lowers or can add to the positive feelings that a person has for himself or herself). Such comments may have some foundation, and it’s up to us to sift through them to be sure that how we think of ourselves mostly matches how others see us. There are times when that feedback from the outside has little or nothing to do about what is on the inside of the recipient of a comment, but, instead, says more about what is on the inside of the one making a negative comment that may not be constructive in any way.*

*As the Israelites passed through Moabite territory, Balak, the Moabite king, called on Balaam, a prophet from a nearby land, to curse the Israelites. However, as much as he tried, Balaam couldn’t offer one negative proclamation about this large multitude of the future Jewish people traveling along their journey. He thought he could, but he had to keep telling Balak that he could only say what God had allowed him to say. One of those declarations is MAH TOVU – How good are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel.” Condemnation, almost automatically, turned to admiration as Balaam looked down on this people that continued to journey along its road to freedom.*

*We don’t always have Balaams around us – an external “seer” who, through it all, can only admit that we have every reason to preserve our self-esteem and positive self-image because our “tents” and “dwellings” – the general effect of our character and our actions – do bring something desirable and productive to our community and blessing to the world. In moments when we need that extra voice on our side, we can think of Balaam and remember the many people who have seen what good we can do and what impact we can have that have, without solicitation, offered us the blessing of their support. May we remember to find that good in our fellow community members (and, I would add on July 4th weekend, fellow citizens) and speak it freely, whenever we can!*

**-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry K.**