

June 24, 2010

Shabbat Shalom!

When do we gain greater knowledge or have greater awareness, when our eyes are open or when our eyes are closed? When we say the Sh'ma, we are commanded to close our eyes so that we can concentrate on God and, especially, on the oneness that unites us all. We also know that, even with our eyes open, we can't know everything. Appearances can be deceiving and don't tell the whole story. It is like trying to evaluate a person's character only by their words, when we know that the words may have little meaning until they are backed up by deeds.

In the Torah reading for this week, the prophet Balaam was called by Balak, King of Moab, to curse the Israelites. Instead, Balaam was allowed by God only to bless them. In the beginning of one of the sections of blessing uttered by Balaam, he declared, "Word of Balaam son of Beor, word of Balaam whose eye is true (literally in the Hebrew – whose eye is closed), word of him who hears God's speech, who beholds visions from the Almighty, bowing low to the ground, but with eyes unveiled." Balaam's eyes were "unveiled," but they were "true" BECAUSE they were CLOSED, not open. This passage teaches us about what can be seen and what can be known. Just because we think something isn't seen – or, for that matter, heard – doesn't mean it isn't known or won't be known. We reveal ourselves through our actions, no matter what we have said or done in public or private. Senator Joe Lieberman once said that, as a public figure, he tries to reach the same level of integrity in private as when he is serving in his leadership role. There is no difference. Behavior, language, and character must be consistent, because eyes that are closed or open will recognize any inconsistency.

Balaam could not curse a people that deserved blessing. In truth, everyone deserves a measure of blessing. Let us remember this as we continue to work together as a community.

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry