



KINDER TORAH

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PARASHAS BALAK

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE DOING

"Abba, how can we understand Bilaam? He was a man full of contradictions."

"Can you give me an example, Chaim?"

"Yes, Abba. Bilaam was a *novi* (prophet) whose revelation was on a par with Moshe Rabbeinu's. Our Sages relate that in Klal Yisrael there never arose another *novi* like Moshe. However, amongst the nations, there was a *novi* whose *nevuah* was on the level of Moshe's. Who was that *novi*? Bilaam. Although his *nevuah* was so great, it did not inspire him to do good. He was prepared to destroy every one of Hashem's chosen people – man, woman, and child. How could such a gifted person do such a terrible thing?"

"That is an excellent question, Chaim. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l addresses this question in his sefer *Sichos Mussar* (27:5731). He goes even farther. Bilaam idealized his evil views and taught them to others. The *Mishna* (Pirkei Avos 5:19) relates that the *talmidim* (students) of Bilaam had *ayin ra'ah* – jealousy of their friend's success, haughty pride, and greedy souls. Bilaam was so evil that he taught other people to follow his evil ways."

"What a shame."

"I agree. However, Bilaam did appear to have a redeeming quality. He realized that there was merit to being good. He knew that the *Avos HaKedoshim* (Holy Forefathers) were *yashar* (straight in the ways of Hashem), and desired to die like them, as the verse states, 'May my soul die the death of the upright' (Bamidbar 23:10). In death Bilaam wanted to be like them, however, he was not prepared to live his life as they did."

"How could he do such a thing? Where was his *yashrus*?"

"Rav Chaim answers your question, Chaim. Bilaam's bad *middos* corrupted his sense of *emmes* and *yashrus*. His self-serving desires became his 'Torah' (so to speak) - his 'rules of life'. How could this happen? Because he did not take his knowledge to heart. His mind knew many things to be true; however, he did not apply them to himself. His knowledge was disconnected from his heart, desires, and his ways. He did not apply the *yashrus* and *emmes* to his own life, because it would interfere with fulfilling his desires for wealth and honor. This is what Rav Chaim refers to as 'a lack of

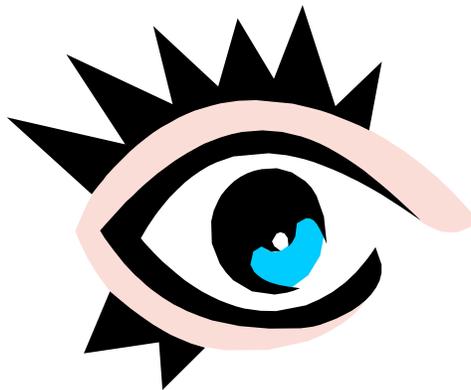
contemplation about one's ways.' The person does not think about what he is doing."

"How do we avoid such a thing, Abba?"

"A person must constantly ask himself the following questions, Chaim. 'Are my actions *emmes*? Are they in harmony with my knowledge? When I learn a piece of Torah wisdom, do I put it into practice? Do I live my life according to the *emmes* that I learned?' He must always strive to think about what he is doing, imbuing all of his actions with the truth of *yashrus*. Bilaam failed because his bad *middos* corrupted him. Therefore, we must learn from him to perfect our *middos*. If we tame our desires, then they will not interfere with our living according to the *emmes*. We can then objectively take the Torah that we learn and apply it to our daily actions."

"Thank you Abba, you have shed a lot of truth on a confusing issue."

"Chaim, we should all merit to live by this truth."



THE POWERFUL EYE

"Balak took Bilaam to Baamos Baal, and from there he saw the edge of the people" (Bamidbar 22:41). Bilaam only saw a small part of the Jewish nation. If he had seen more, the results would have been disastrous. Only Hashem's great mercy prevented a tragedy. What was Bilaam's crime? He never lifted a finger against the Jewish people. Or even planned to life a finger. Yet, he was executed in the war against the Midianim. The *Ha'amek Davar* relates that he looked upon Klal Yisrael with an evil eye. He had evil thoughts and feelings about us. This evil eye was so powerful, that Hashem had to change the *teva* (laws of nature) to protect us.

Why are thoughts so powerful? Rav Chaim Friedlander explains that thoughts are totally spiritual. They are not bound by the physical world in any way. They are the purest form of expression of the *neshama* (soul), which is also completely spiritual. Therefore, they have great power in the spiritual worlds. A pure thought can go straight up to Hashem's Holy Throne. He then considers it and if it is worthy of being fulfilled, He appoints angels to carry it out. So too, and evil thought can wreak havoc. Bilaam's evil eye, had it seen all of Klal Yisrael, and cursed all of us would have caused destruction.

Kinderlach . . .

There are two ways to look at our fellow Jews. With a good eye or an evil eye. "He annoys me by praying too loud." "Yes, but consider that he is in the Beit Knesset praying. That's good." "My friend in class took my pencil and broke it." "She's in a good school and a good class: yours. That's good." "He comes from a different country and his customs are strange." "Do you know how much he sacrificed to come here? He's a hero." "Imma, I'm hungry. Why isn't lunch ready yet?" "Three meals a day, seven days a week. Delicious, nutritious, and on time. That's great." Kinderlach, always look with the good eye. You will bring untold blessings to yourself, and all of Klal Yisrael.

Kinderlach . . .

Chaim's Abba gives us the key to living a life of emmes. We must learn Torah and know the emmes. Without knowing what is right and wrong, we have no hope of ever doing the right thing. We must work on our middos and perfect them so that they do not interfere with our understanding and applying the emmes. Uncontrollable desires corrupt the person. He cannot resist fulfilling them, even though he understands that they are wrong. We must apply the emmes that we learn to our daily actions. We must think about what we are doing and ask ourselves, "Is this emmes? Does this correspond with what I know to be right and true, or does it contradict it?" With Hashem's help, we will straighten all of our ways, and live a life of emmes and yashrus.

Parasha Questions:

- How many mizbechos did Balak build for Bilaam, and which animals did he slaughter? (23:1,2)
- How did Hashem call Bilaam? (23:4 and Rashi)
- Which mitzvos do we perform with dirt or ashes? (Rashi 23:10)
- Did Bilaam want to return to Balak knowing that he was not permitted to curse Klal Yisrael? (Rashi 23:16)

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