

Kinder Torah®

Parashas Balak

It's My Pleasure

If Balak will give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem" (Bamidbar 22:18). This statement is taken as a criticism of Bilaam. Our sages explain that he was motivated purely by a desire for riches and honor. Therefore he mentioned that even an outlandish amount of money would not allow him to go against Hashem's will. There is another mention of a staggering amount of silver and gold in the writings of our sages. "Rebbe Yosi Ben Kisma said, 'Were you to give me all the silver, gold, precious stones, and pearls in the world, I would still only live in a place of Torah'" (Avos 6:9). Not only is this statement not a criticism, rather it is a great praise of the Tanna and his love for Torah. What is the difference? The matter needs some thought.

Rebbe Nochumke of Horodna zt"l explains that it is all a question of attitude. Bilaam's attitude was "What can I do? I cannot go against Hashem's will." We understand that if Bilaam were able to go against Hashem, he would. That is definitely not the way that Hashem wants us to do His will. Contrast this with Rebbe Yosi Ben Kisma. "I would only live in a place of Torah." "Even if I were able to live someplace else, I would not want to go against Hashem's will." As the Mishna states, "Do His will as you would do your own will" (Avos 2:4). It was his greatest pleasure and privilege to do Hashem's will.

Kinderlach . . .

We know that obeying our parents fulfills Hashem's will in many ways. It fulfills the mitzvah of honoring and fearing them. It also gives honor to Hashem, for they are our closest connection to Him. We would not even think of disobeying them. But what is our attitude when we listen to them? "Okay, Imma. I'll do what you want." That is not a very positive attitude. "Imma, it is my pleasure to help you! Is there anything else that I can do?" "No Ezra, you've done it all. You've given us great nachas."

Bircas Ha'mitzvos

Who knows the first bracha that we say each morning?"

"Al netilas yedayim."

"Very good, Levy. Who knows what type of a bracha this is?"

"It is a 'bircas ha'mitzvah' (blessing made upon performing a mitzvah) Rebbe."

"Correct, Dovid."

"I have two questions, Rebbe. Why do we make brachos on mitzvos? Additionally, what should our kavannah be upon making these brachos?"

"Excellent questions Avi! The answers

form the subject matter of today's shiur. Let us begin with the source of the obligation to make a bracha before performing a mitzvah. The Rambam (*Hilchos Brachos* Chapters 1, 11) states that our Sages ruled that we must make a bracha on every mitzvah 'bein odom li'Makom' (between man and Hashem) before performing it.* Ezra and his Beis Din fixed the wording of each bracha. Why did these Sages require so many brachos (at least 100 per day)? They wanted us to keep The Almighty in the forefront of our minds at all times. Therefore, they required us to praise, thank, and make requests of Him before performing every mitzvah, eating any food, and while praying. 'Netilas yedayim' (washing of the hands) is in itself a mitzvah d'rabannan, upon which our sages fixed the bracha 'al netilas yedayim'. That answers the first question.



Let us now answer Avi's second question about the proper *kavannah* in *bircas ha'mitzvos* by looking into the words of the brachos, 'Asher kidishanu bi'mitzvosav vi'tzivanu . . .' – 'Who has sanctified us with His mitzvos and commanded us . . .' The concept of becoming holy by performing mitzvos is dealt with extensively in Torah and the *tefillos*. 'And you shall be a holy people to Me' (Shemos 22:30). The Eved HaMelech explains that this verse commands us to keep the entire Torah – to fulfill all of the positive commandments, and to guard against all forbidden things. By doing so, we will become a holy people! He cites the *Mechilta*, which states that each mitzvah that Hashem created for us adds *kedusha* (holiness) to our *neshamos* (souls). One who keeps the mitzvos is called a holy person. Our Shabbos prayers include the request, 'Make us holy with your mitzvos.' Our Yom Tov *tefillos* recount how Hashem chose us from among all the nations, loved us, wanted us, elevated us above all other languages, and sanctified us with His mitzvos. We see from all of this, that Hashem's mitzvos have the

power to raise the person's *madrayga* (spiritual level). Let me ask you a question class. What is *kedusha*?"

"It describes Hashem. He is holy – separate. His ways are different from the rest of the world. So too, we have to be set apart."

"Excellent, Simcha. The Avudraham cites additional verses that command us to become holy, just as Hashem is holy. 'For I am Hashem your God – you are to sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy, for I am holy' (Vayikra 11:44). 'You shall be holy, for I Hashem your G-d Am holy' (Vayikra 19:1). 'So that you may remember and perform all My mitzvos and be holy to your G-d' (Bamidbar 15:40). How do we accomplish this?"

"By keeping the mitzvos. They purify us. They make us holy."

Shlomo, I could not have said it any better myself. Therefore, before we perform each mitzvah, we make a bracha, 'Who has sanctified us with His mitzvos and commanded us . . .' The bracha reminds us that this deed that we are about to perform was commanded to us by the Almighty, Creator of the Universe. He gave it to us in order to increase our holiness. By performing the mitzvah properly, we will become *kadosh*, just as He is *kadosh*!"

"That is phenomenal, Rebbe! What an opportunity!"

"Yes, Shaya. The *bircas ha'mitzvos* are unique opportunities to contemplate on the mitzvah that we are about to fulfill. Firstly, we should learn the *halachos* well in order to know how to perform the mitzvah properly. Next, we should focus upon what we are doing and what is its purpose. Then we accomplish the objective that our sages intended – to keep The Almighty in the forefront of our minds at all times, and to become holy, as He is holy."

Kinderlach . . .

Netillas yedayim is a mitzvah that purifies the hands from the *tumah* that has settled on them during sleep. It very clearly increases a person's holiness. In addition to that, our Sages fixed an additional mitzvah upon this mitzvah – to make a bracha! This bracha declares that Hashem is the source of all blessing, the King of the universe, to Whom all knees must bend. He makes us holy (as He is holy) with His mitzvos, and has commanded us to wash our hands! What a praise and thanks to the Creator! What a deeper understanding and appreciation of the mitzvah! What a gift – an additional mitzvah of making a bracha! Kinderlach, make all of your *bircas ha'mitzvos* with great *kavannah*, and appreciate Hashem and His holy mitzvos!

* *Bircas HaTorah* is a dispute amongst the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* if it is *d'oraysa* or *d'rabannan*.