

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT BALAK · 7 TAMMUZ 5774 - JULY 5, 2014 · VOL. 21 NO. 41

Together with all of Klal Yisrael

we mourn the senseless and tragic murder of
Naftali Fraenkel, Gil-Ad Shaer and Eyal Yifrah הי"ד
May the families be consoled among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

EARLY RISERS

"And Bilaam arose early in the morning and he saddled his donkey... (22:21)"

One of the interesting aspects of anti-Semitism is the tremendous enthusiasm with which Jew-haters go about their plans. A cursory glance over the blood-stained history of our People reveals that from the Crusades to the Nazis to the Arabs a unifying enthusiasm bordering on religious fervor emerges to stamp out Israel.

The arch anti-Semite in the week's Torah portion, Bilaam, was extremely enthusiastic to destroy the Jewish People. So much so that he arose at the crack of dawn to execute his plans.

"And Bilaam arose early in the morning and he saddled his donkey..."

Rashi comments on the above verse, "Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, 'Evil One! You have already been preceded by their Patriarch Avraham, as it says, 'And Avraham arose early in the morning and saddled his donkey'."

What is the connection between Avraham and Bilaam?

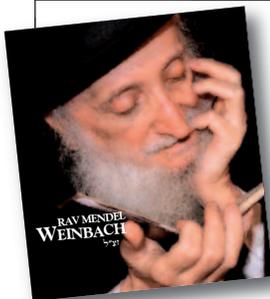
Why does the fact that Avraham woke up early and saddled his donkey have anything to do with Bilaam's doing the same thing? Did Avraham create a mystical precedent that prevented all early-saddled donkeys from being exploited for the sake of evil?

G-d was telling Bilaam: "If Avraham awoke early with the intention of fulfilling My Will to offer his son Yitzchak as a *korban*, and despite his alacrity nothing became of his plans because I wished the Jewish People to descend from Yitzchak, then how much the more so when you arise early and saddle your donkey to cause evil to the Jews against My Will will nothing come of your plans!"

When our enemies arise against us with such enthusiasm, can there be a stronger weapon against them than to emulate our father Avraham Avinu and do the Will of G-d with as much, if not more, enthusiasm?

• Source: based on the Kotzker Rebbe

A Memorial Tribute to Rav Weinbach zt"l



The Memorial Tribute Book for Rav Weinbach zt"l is available in print at Ohr Somayach.*

A PDF format is available for free download on www.ohr.edu.

* Suggested minimum donation for the printed version is 36 nis.

Proceeds will be used for the Gemach Charity Fund established by Rav Weinbach, zt"l.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Balak, king of Moav, is in morbid fear of *Bnei Yisrael*. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilaam to curse them. First, G-d speaks to Bilaam and forbids him to go. But, because Bilaam is so insistent, G-d appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a *malach* (emissary from G-d) blocks Bilaam's donkey's path. Unable to contain his frustration, Bilaam strikes the donkey each time it stops or tries to detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking Bilaam why he is hitting her. The *malach* instructs Bilaam regarding what he is permitted to say and what he is forbidden to say regarding the Jewish People. When Bilaam arrives, King Balak makes elaborate prepara-

tions, hoping that Bilaam will succeed in the curse. Three times Bilaam attempts to curse and three times blessings issue instead. Balak, seeing that Bilaam has failed, sends him home in disgrace.

Bnei Yisrael begin sinning with the Moabite women and worshipping the Moabite idols, and they are punished with a plague. One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a Midianite princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This halts the plague, but not before 24,000 have died.

TALMUD Tips

ADVICE FOR LIFE

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

TAANIT 23 - 31

“When the charity collectors saw Rabbi Elazar from Birta in the marketplace they tried to hide from him.”

Our *gemara* tells us that Rabbi Elazar's daughter was to be married and he went to the market to purchase a dowry for her. However, the charity collectors knew of his “super-generosity” and did not want to approach him for fear that he would give them virtually everything he had. Nevertheless, he ran after them and forced them to tell him why they were collecting now. When he heard that they were gathering funds for the marriage of two orphans to one another, he gave them all his money except for one *zuz*, with which he bought wheat for food for his family. But no dowry for his daughter.

A question is raised based on the teaching of our Sages that one should not give more than a fifth of his wealth to charity (*Ketuvot* 50a). However, this is true when goes out to seek potential recipients for charity; but if one is approached with a special request for need to feed or clothe or help another — there is no limit on the amount of charity given. It is even admirable to give more than a fifth, as in this case. (See *Ahavat Chessed* by the Chafetz Chaim, 20:2)

The Maharsha on our *sugya* asks why charity to strangers should precede the needs of his own daughter and answers in a way that he notes is not too satisfactory.

• *Ta'anit* 24a

“One who mourns for Jerusalem merits and sees her happiness, and one who does not mourn over Jerusalem does not see her happiness.”

This oft-quoted statement is taught in a *beraita* on our *daf* and is based on a verse in Yeshayahu chapter 66. It has been pointed out that the statement is in the present tense and not in the future: “merits”, “sees” — instead of “will merit”, “will see”. If one mourns the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and Jerusalem, he merits that G-d will right now “open his eyes” to see the rebuilding and current happiness of Jerusalem. And, as a result, he is happy as well (Maharsha).

• *Ta'anit* 30b

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did Moav consult specifically with Midian regarding their strategy against the Jews?
2. What was Balak's status before becoming Moav's king?
3. Why did G-d grant prophecy to the evil Bilaam?
4. Why did Balak think Bilaam's curse would work?
5. When did Bilaam receive his prophecies?
6. G-d asked Bilaam, "Who are these men with you?" What did Bilaam deduce from this question?
7. How do we know Bilaam hated the Jews more than Balak did?
8. What is evidence of Bilaam's arrogance?
9. In what way was the *malach* that opposed Bilaam an angel of mercy?
10. How did Bilaam die?
11. Why did the *malach* kill Bilaam's donkey?
12. Bilaam compared his meeting with an angel to someone else's meeting with an angel. Who was the other person and what was the comparison?
13. Bilaam told Balak to build seven altars. Why specifically seven?
14. Who in Jewish history seemed fit for a curse, but got a blessing instead?
15. Why are the Jewish People compared to lions?
16. On Bilaam's third attempt to curse the Jews, he changed his strategy. What was different?
17. What were Bilaam's three main characteristics?
18. What did Bilaam see that made him decide not to curse the Jews?
19. What phrase in Bilaam's self-description can be translated in two opposite ways, both of which come out meaning the same thing?
20. Bilaam told Balak that the Jews' G-d hates what?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 22:4 - Since Moshe grew up in Midian, the Moabites thought the Midianites might know wherein lay Moshe's power.
2. 22:4 - He was a prince of Midian.
3. 22:5 - So the other nations couldn't say, "If we had had prophets, we also would have become righteous."
4. 22:6 - Because Bilaam's curse had helped Sichon defeat Moav.
5. 22:8 - Only at night.
6. 22:9 - He mistakenly reasoned that G-d isn't all-knowing.
7. 22:11 - Balak wanted only to drive the Jews from the Land. Bilaam sought to exterminate them completely.
8. 22:13 - He implied that G-d wouldn't let him go with the Moabite princes due to their lesser dignity.
9. 22:22 - It mercifully tried to stop Bilaam from sinning and destroying himself.
10. 22:23 - He was killed with a sword.
11. 22:33 - So that people shouldn't see it and say, "Here's the donkey that silenced Bilaam." G-d is concerned with human dignity.
12. 22:34 - Avraham. Bilaam said, "G-d told me to go but later sent an angel to stop me." The same thing happened to Avraham: G-d told Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak but later canceled the command through an angel.
13. 23:4 - Corresponding to the seven altars built by the Avot. Bilaam said to G-d, "The Jewish People's ancestors built seven altars, but I alone have built altars equal to all of them."
14. 23:8 - Yaakov, when Yitzchak blessed him.
15. 23:24 - They rise each morning and "strengthen" themselves to do *mitzvot*.
16. 24:1 - He began mentioning the Jewish People's sins, hoping thus to be able to curse them.
17. 24:2 - An evil eye, pride and greed.
18. 24:2 - He saw each tribe dwelling without intermingling. He saw the tents arranged so no one could see into his neighbor's tent.
19. 24:3 - "*Shatum ha'ayin*." It means either "the poked-out eye," implying blindness in one eye; or it means "the open eye," which means vision but implies blindness in the other eye.
20. 24:14 - Promiscuity.

לע"נ

מרת פייגא בת ר' דוד ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Abarbanel

ON PARSHAT BALAK

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

This Parsha features the strange episode of the confrontation between the gentile prophet Bilaam and the *malach* or messenger of G-d, which features a verbal exchange between Bilaam and his donkey. Abarbanel points out the obvious difficulties with this narrative. A speaking donkey is clearly a miracle and G-d only performs miracles out of absolute necessity. If G-d's intention was to prevent Bilaam from cursing the Jewish nation, He could have simply appeared to him in a dream or vision without invoking such a bizarre scenario with a talking animal that is capable of seeing a messenger of G-d who remains invisible to the prophet Bilaam.

Bilaam believed that G-d related to the Jewish People in two different ways. He realized that G-d had a special relationship with the nation, a Divine Providence and intervention which prevailed over the natural forces and influences of the physical universe. He believed, however, that they were also subject to these natural forces as well, and would manifest themselves through destructions and exiles that the nation would suffer. This is what he intended to convey to Balak. G-d, on the other hand, wanted to prevent Bilaam from saying anything other than the exact words that G-d wanted him to say. Giving the donkey the power of speech was a dramatic way of demonstrating to Bilaam that G-d alone grants the power of speech.

Abarbanel goes on to elucidate the nature of the relationship between natural forces and Divine Providence. Bilaam began his "career" as an astrologer and sorcerer, with knowledge of how events on earth were influenced by the stars. Once he became a prophet he understood that there was a concept of Divine Providence whereby G-d acted directly and not through the influence of the stellar configurations. However, Bilaam was uncertain whether Divine Providence could prevail over the natural order or, vice-versa, if the natural order always remained in place. He understood the latter possibility from that fact that G-d had told him, "Do not curse this nation, for it is blessed." He took this to mean that by cursing them and bringing down the natural order to their detriment, he could overcome their special blessing from G-d. In his mind, G-d was instructing him not to curse them in order to prevent this from happening.

In order to remove this mistaken notion from his mind, G-d used the situation with the *malach* and the talking donkey as a metaphorical lesson. The moving donkey represents the motion of the heavenly bodies. Bilaam, the rider of the donkey, represents the separate force that sets them in motion. The *malach* represents G-d's Divine Providence, as it says in Psalms "He will command his angels for you, to protect you in all your ways." When the donkey sees the *malach* he turns away immediately to demonstrate that the natural order must give way to G-d's Divine Providence. Bilaam's attempt to force the donkey back onto its proper path demonstrates that the movements of the heavenly bodies and their influences below are the result of the constant direction of the forces that set them in their proper path. Sometimes there is a collision between the natural order and Divine Providence, such that each one prevents the other from expressing itself fully. In such a case Divine Providence will always emerge victorious. This is illustrated by the passage of the donkey through a narrow lane between two fences. Bilaam, who represents the director of these heavenly movements, scrapes his foot against the fence when the donkey moves aside for the *malach*. Not only must the natural order yield to Divine Providence when they clash, but its influence will be "injured" — i.e. reduced — just as Bilaam's foot was injured, while the *malach* remains unscathed.

Additionally, there are situations where there is no room at all for both. Only one can be expressed. This is illustrated by the next incident in the narrative where the passage is so narrow that the donkey cannot move aside at all. This was Bilaam's ultimate dilemma. What happens when they are in absolute and total opposition? In this case the natural order gives way totally to the Divine Providence, as illustrated by the final act of the donkey — crouching down before the *malach*. It is at this point that G-d opens Bilaam's eyes to enable him to see the *malach* and to understand the answer to his question. There are times when the Divine Providence supersedes the natural order, but there is never a time that the natural order can supersede Divine Providence. It is at this point that Bilaam is forced to admit that he has sinned by trying to curse the Jewish nation.

REWARDING SERVICE

From: Boris

Dear Rabbi,

We are told that that we should serve G-d without thinking of the reward. This makes sense to me, since it seems more sincere. But is this really the case in Jewish teachings, and if so, how can one do this practically? And what about other thoughts that come to mind when we learn or do mitzvot?

Dear Boris,

Yes, this is the case in Jewish teachings.

For example, Pirkei Avot, a collection of ethical teachings from the Talmudic sages, states, "Don't be like servants who serve their master to receive reward, but rather be like servants who serve their master not to receive reward, and let Fear of Heaven be on you" (1:3).

You see from here that we are to serve G-d without thinking of the reward. Rather, our intentions should be solely to serve G-d.

In fact, one version of the teaching goes so far as to say, "...rather be like servants who serve their master on condition that they receive no reward".

According to this, we must banish all thoughts of reward, and in fact desire to serve G-d with the understanding that there be no reward at all.

Admittedly, practically this is very hard to do. What's more, as you note, we often have other intentions and thoughts, like how we look, what others think of us, whether we'll get some tangible benefit from it, or even when the prayer or mitzvah will be over.

As far as working on not serving for reward, personally, it helps me to consider that since I fall so short of what I could be doing, I am culpable for "mis-doing" what I do. In this way, I consider it as if I'm doing it despite the fact that I'll be held accountable for doing it wrong, and therefore not for the reward.

As far as dealing with other distracting thoughts, I personally find it helpful to remind myself that absolutely none of the factors or considerations that are distracting me would exist for me if I did not exist. I owe my entire existence, including everything in my personal reality, to G-d. Therefore, it is only to Him, and with thoughts only of Him, that I should serve.

Once Rabbi Chaim of Krosno witnessed how a certain man appeared in the central square claiming he would tightrope across the dangerous river running outside of the town, but only if everyone paid a certain amount for the spectacle. After the onlookers gathered and the money was collected, the man proceeded to cross with great caution to the amazement of the crowd.

When the rabbi's disciples asked him what he thought of the feat, he replied, "Even though he did it entirely for the reward, I guarantee you that while suspended above the treacherous waters he didn't think about the money at all, but only about what he was doing, because the moment he would have broken his concentration on crossing he would have fallen."

We must learn from this tightrope walker that even though we are promised reward upon crossing over, we must not think about that at all while we're crossing, but rather concentrate only on making sure we take exactly the right steps to ensure that we get to the other side – any distracting thoughts or intentions on the way might topple us into the tumultuous depths.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

BIRIYAH – TOMBS OF THE GREAT

Less than a mile north of Tsefat is Biriya, where two great figures in Jewish history are buried.

One is Benayahu ben Yehoyada, who was one of King David's most important aides, both as a scholar and a warrior, and whose great deeds and holiness are described in



the Talmud and the Zohar.

The other is the Talmudic Sage Abba Shaul. In addition to his great scholarship he was proud of his role as a gravedigger, about which he once said "The evil inclination cannot be found in the cemetery."

DO NOT ADD TO THE TORAH

There is what seems like a pretty clear-cut verse in the Torah: “You shall not add to that which I command you and you shall not subtract from it, to keep the commandments of the L-rd your G-d...” (Deut. 4:2)

G-d made the world. He gave us a Torah with the instruction manual for living. Just read the manual and do what it says. Don't add anything. But wait a second! No adding stuff? What about all the decrees added by our Sages? For example, the Torah instructs us not to eat meat and milk cooked together, but the Sages *added* a prohibition not to eat even chicken or fowl together with milk. And what about Chanuka? There's no verse for that in the Torah. It happened a thousand years after the Torah was given. Didn't the Torah say “no adding”?

Well, as you have probably guessed by now — as with all things in Judaism, it's not quite that simple.

Rashi, our indispensable aid to understanding the Torah, paraphrases our Sages' comments on our verse:

“You shall not add; for instance, by putting five scrolls into *tefillin*, using five species for the *lulav* or wearing a garment with five *tzitzit* — and similarly you shall not subtract.”

These are very specific examples, where the problem is with adjusting parameters of a single mitzvah. Clearly Rashi was bothered by our issue. How can it be that the Torah forbids adding and yet we add things? The very simple answer is that the Torah never forbade adding extra things to do. The verse is simply saying, “Don't think that the details are not specific. If G-d says four He means four, and not five or three. This is a very neat answer. The only weakness is that really the Torah could simply have said “Don't add.” Once G-d says that He doesn't even want more, then surely you would know He doesn't want less!

There is another approach. The famed kabbalist, the Ramban (Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, Nachmanides, 1194-1270) holds that the verse is actually forbidding adding new things, as we first understood. It's just that the Torah itself gave the Sages the right to introduce new decrees, with one very important caveat. A person must know that these are *additions* and have not come directly from the Torah. They may be good additions, even indispensable, but they must never be confused with the actual commands G-d wants or doesn't want according to those written in the

Torah. The Rambam (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, Maimonides, 1135-1204) says pretty much the same thing, in more detail (*Hilchot Mamrim* 2: 9).

Actually, this is one way to understand the sin of Adam and Chava (Eve) in Gan Eden. G-d's words to Adam were, “Don't eat from that tree.” Chava told the snake, “If we eat from that tree *or touch it*, we will die.” So the snake, seeing an opportunity, pushed her into the tree. Of course, when she touched it, nothing happened. “You see,” said the snake, “it's all a lie. Adam made it up.” So Chava ate. And we all know what happened next. Where did she get the idea that it was forbidden to touch the tree? Some commentators say that Adam made the first ever addition to G-d's command. Reasoning that it would be better to refrain from even touching the tree, to avoid any possibility of eating from it, he told Chava that even touching was forbidden. Adam's mistake was not in wanting to safeguard Chava by keeping her away from the tree, but rather that he should have trusted her enough to explain to her what G-d really had said and what had been added. The first sin, the most cosmically disastrous event in history, was caused by a man underestimating a woman. Let that be a lesson to all of us.

The wording of the verse, which was problematic according to Rashi's explanation above, is easier to understand according to this approach of the Ramban. Why say both “you shall not add” and “you shall not subtract”? The answer: the meaning of the verse is “You shall not add and therefore you shall not subtract.” What you may think is more and better is actually less and worse. Adam thought he was doing holy work by telling Chava not even to touch the tree, and he may have been, had she been aware of the reason. But he actually made matters a whole lot worse.

In order to do what G-d wants of us we must be aware of the details, the whys and the wherefores of everything we do. That takes a lot of learning, which is one of the reasons Jews have always valued education and scholarship so highly. In fact, even our word for a synagogue, a *shul*, really means a school. Learning is all and knowledge is power. Because to do the right thing, you first have to know what the right thing is.

THE SHEMONEH ESREI - THE THIRD BLESSING (I)

G-d's Sanctity

"You are Holy, and Your name is holy."

We begin this blessing by proclaiming G-d as holy. What does this mean? It is written in Psalms, "G-d is high above all nations, His glory is (even) above the heavens (113:4)." Thus, when we praise G-d as holy we are saying that His essence is totally beyond all of the worlds that He created, including the most sublime heavenly realms.

However, although G-d remains forever beyond the grasp of creation, at the same time He reaches out from above, making Himself present in both the upper spiritual worlds as well as in this world. This is the meaning of the verse, "Who is like the Lord our G-d, Who dwells on high (above the heavens, yet) lowers Himself to see (i.e. govern) upon heaven and earth (Psalms 113:5-6)."

According to the above we can understand why it is necessary to mention that not only is G-d holy, but His names are holy as well. "You are holy" refers to G-d's essence, which remains totally above all of creation. This is the highest level of holiness. Next we say "Your name is holy," since it is through the name of G-d that He becomes revealed and manifest within creation. Although this level of Divine revelation is part of creation it is still holy, since G-d's name is

ultimately connected to His essence — thus both His essence and His name are holy.

"...and holy ones will praise You... forever."

The "holy ones" who praise G-d is a reference to the nation of Israel. On the surface, calling Israel holy presents us with a difficulty. How can we attribute the same quality (holy) both to G-d as well as His people? Does a king share his royalty with his entire nation?

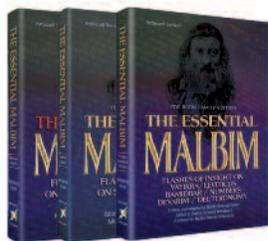
The answer to this dilemma is found in the beginning of the Torah portion of *Kedoshim* where G-d commands us, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." But how does G-d's holiness provide a reason that we should be holy? The answer is that when G-d created us, He instilled within us a unique quality that derives from Him; for man's soul is a part of G-d above. Regarding this soul, which was carved from under G-d's throne of glory, it is explained that man was created in the image of G-d. Thus, it is by virtue of this soul that we are able to become holy.

It must be noted that the level of holiness we attain is incomparable to G-d's holiness. G-d is holy in a true sense, but our holiness only stems from G-d, and is a result of His benevolence. That is why we praise Him as the true Holy One.

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