

Parshat Balak: Pilgrimage Power

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

When Bilaam set out on his donkey on a mission to curse the Jews, Hashem sent an angel to block the animal's path. Bilaam struck the donkey three times. The Torah then writes that the animal opened its mouth and complained, "What have I done to you that you have beaten me *shalosh regalim*-three times?" The commentators ask, why does the Torah use the peculiar expression *regalim* and not *p'eamim*? The donkey was warning Bilaam, "You will not be successful, as the nation you are trying to destroy celebrates the *shalosh regalim*, and it will be impossible to decimate them."

Rav Yosef Albo writes that our tradition rests on three principal beliefs- the existence of Hashem, the divine origin of the Torah, and reward and punishment. Sukkot is recognizing Hashem's existence and his involvement in our lives, Shavuot is the divinity of the Torah, and Pesach is reward and punishment-i.e. the punishment of the Egyptians and the reward of the Jews. The donkey wasn't referring to practical observance, but the acceptance of the three fundamental principles implicit in these festivals.

If we look deeper we find that these three holidays teach us *emunah* and *bitachon*. The Taam v'daat says that when a Jew would make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem he was not afraid to leave his property unguarded. He

relied on Hashem. *Emunah* is knowledge in theory, *bitachon* is faith in practice. The *shalosh regalim* were not only a manifestation of *emunah* but demonstrated belief in Hashem in a very practical way. Shem Mishmuel says this is the difference between the Jews and non-Jews. While non-Jews may want a relationship with Hashem, they will forgo it in favor of their own pleasures. For Jews, closeness to Hashem is more precious than anything.

The real test of measuring how pure your motivation is when you perform a *mitzva*, is how much *simcha* you have when you do it. The Jewish people went up to Yerushalayim with passion and joy. Bilaam blessed the Jews, "*Hen am k'lavi*"-They are like a lion. Rav Rice explains that the Jewish people pounce upon *mitzvot* like a lion hungry for its prey. Napoleon's war campaign was successful because he made sure that his soldiers were well dressed and fed. But his real secret was that he placed a klezmer band within each unit so that his troops would fight with electric energy. Any war or struggle, even against the evil inclination, can be vanquished through *simcha*. Happiness opens the pathways inside of us to be ourselves. If we work on taking away the sadness, *simcha* will automatically enter.

The second leg is *middot*. The Beer Moshe says Bilaam had three evil traits-a bad eye, a

haughty spirit, and a wide soul. Corresponding to this, the Jewish people have three positive character traits, mercifulness, bashfulness, and kindness. The three *avot*, forefathers, represent these *middot*. Avraham is *chesed*, Yitzchak is bashfulness, and Yaakov is merciful. If you are kind you cannot have a negative eye, if you are bashful, you cannot be desirous, and if you are merciful you cannot be haughty. Sukkot celebrates a time of mercy. Pesach negates desire which leads to bashfulness. Shavuot is *chesed*. When the Jewish people went up to Yerushalayim and left their fortunes behind they were saying, life is not about our material world. When a person has his priorities in order, his negative *middot* fall by the wayside.

The third leg is *kedusha* (holiness). The Shiviele Pinchas writes that Bilaam lifted his face towards the desert where the Jews had sinned with the Golden Calf. He hoped this gesture would help him destroy them. The influence of *chait ha'egel* is found in every generation, but Hashem in His *chesed* gives us a means of annulment through *batei b'shishim*. The sin took six hours. The moadim total fifteen days, $15 \times 24 = 360$, $60 \times 6 = 360$ hours of *kedusha*. The three festivals of sanctity nullify the six hours of distance. Fifteen days of total connection to Hashem and of living life enveloped in sanctity gave us the invincible strength to overcome Bilaam's evil designs.



The Words of Rav Yehoshua Ben Prachya

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Prachya said, "*Asei l'echa rav u'kenei lecha chaver v'hevei dan et kol adam l'chaf zechut*- Make for yourself a Rav and buy a friend and judge all people favorably." What does, "*Asei l'echa rav*" mean? Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Prachya wanted to imply that one should take for oneself one Rebbe to teach the Written Torah. Subsequently this should lead into *Mishna, Gemara, Midrash, Halacha, and Agadah*. It's valuable to learn from one Rebbe and to acquire his method in learning. This can then be applied to all branches of *Torah*. Therefore, it says, *asei* and not *kenei*. You're not making a *kinyan* in terms of having a relationship with the Rav and being inspired by him. Rather you're gaining an approach in learning, a *yediah* (knowledge), a greatness in *Torah* that is not limited to one area but spreads out to

the whole *Torah*.

The same Rebbe who taught you the sevaras (logical principles) to understand *Chumash Mishna and Gemara*. The Mishna tells us- Rav Meir said, one who learns from many Rebbeim is compared to someone who owns many fields and has to travel a distance to oversee his varied holdings. If you learn with one Rebbe, it's like planting all your crops in one field. It takes away the difficulty and gives the person a chance for more success. A person could have multiple Rebbes and explore different approaches to learning. But a young student starting out, should build a foundation for learning by studying with one teacher.

Chazal tell us, "*Eizehu chacham halomed*

m'kol adam-Who is wise, one who learns from every person." So why learn only from one Rebbe? *Asei lecha rav* means developing an appreciation and a love for learning which can be acquired by learning from one teacher. But when it comes to good *middot*, one can learn from every person. In fact, the Gemara in *Eiruvim* teaches, if the *Torah* would not have been given, we could have even learned good attributes from animals, modesty from a cat and proper conduct from a chicken...

We say every day, "*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem echad*." *Echad* doesn't mean the number one but rather something unique and special. We are unique and our *Torah* learning is unique. *Torah* stems from one source, Hashem, and all the branches that spawn from it are interwoven.

Parshat Balak: The Choice of Every Individual

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Avishai David

Parshat Balak discusses the episode of the evil prophet Bilam, who attempted to curse the Jewish nation. The Mishna in Avot says, "Whoever has these three qualities is considered among the disciples of Avraham: a good eye, a modest spirit, and a humble soul. In contrast those who exude arrogance are among the students of Bilam. The Mishna concludes with the difference between the two. The students of Avraham eat in this world and will eat in the next world while the students of Bilam will inherit *gehinom* and descend to the nethermost depths.

There are many analogies drawn between the syntax, tone, and tenor of the story of the Akeida and the saga of Bilam. After the Akeida, Hashem tells Avraham, "People who bless you will be blessed. People who curse you will be cursed." Similarly, Bilam is told by Balak, "People who curse you will be cursed. People who bless you will be blessed." Avraham saddles his donkey to carry out the word of Hashem. Bilam too saddles his donkey to carry out his mission to curse the

Jewish people.

Chazal say the Akeida took place Rosh Hashana. Similarly, Bilam constructed seven altars and offered a *parah* (cow) and an *ayil* (ram), the sacrifices that were brought on Rosh Hashana. Bilam said, "*Tamut nafshi mot yesharim*." He wanted to die the death of the forefathers who are called *yesharim*.

So we can understand the question of the Mishna, what is the comparison between the students of Avraham and Bilam? Yet Avraham is the recipient of blessing and Bilam is the recipient of curses.

Hashem gave the nations a great prophet who had the potential to bring them to repentance. Bilam and Avraham were both given incredible talent. Avraham used his gifts to carry out not only the command of Hashem but also His will. Bilam may have tried to convince himself that he was fulfilling Hashem's command but he certainly didn't follow His will. Avraham was not motivated by any self-interest while Bilam

was solely motivated by selfish concerns. Avraham tried to proclaim Hashem's unity while Bilam tried to curse Klal Yisrael.

At the end of the parsha the pasuk says, "*Vayakam Bilam vayelech vayshav l'mekomo*, Bilam got up and returned to his place." He was unaffected by all that happened. He even regressed somewhat. In contrast, after the *Akeidah*, Avraham was transformed and metamorphosized into a totally different personality. Avraham was the fulfillment of *Tzadikim yelchu bam*, the righteous shall go in them, while Bilam was the fulfillment of *u'poshim yichashlu bam*, and the sinners shall stumble in them.

Chazal say, "In the path that a person seeks to travel, he is led." Every person, through his choices, can chart his own destiny. He can use his talents in a positive or negative way. Bilam channeled his strengths to greater arrogance and greed while Avraham utilized his gifts for the honor of Hashem.