

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe Rabinowitz zt"l

פרשת בלק

Volume 6 Issue # 37

נתנדב לרגל יומא דהילולא
של האור החיים הקדוש זצוק"ל
ביום ט"ו תמוז
זכותו יגן עלינו

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וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אֶל בִּלְעָם לֹא תֵלֵךְ עִמָּהֶם, לֹא תֵאָר אֶת הָעָם כִּי בְרוּךְ הוּא: וַיִּקָּם בִּלְעָם בַּבֹּקֶר,
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל שָׂרֵי בְלָק לְכוּ אֶל אַרְצְכֶם כִּי מֵאֵן ה' לְתַתִּי לְהִלָּךְ עִמָּכֶם: (במדבר כ"ב י"ב-י"ג)

And Hashem said to Bilam, "Do not go with them; do not curse the Nation, for it is blessed!" And Bilam got up in the morning, and he said to the officers of Moav, "Go to your land, for Hashem has refused to allow me to go with you."

אִם יִתֵּן לִי בְלָק מְלֵא מִלֵּא בֵּיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכַל לְעַבֵּר אֶת פִּי ה' (כ"ד י"ג)

"If Balak would give me the fullness of his house in silver and gold, I would not be able to transgress the word of Hashem"

In this *parshah*, we learn about the story of Balak and Bilam who tried unsuccessfully to curse Bnei Yisroel. Through this story, Hashem demonstrated to us and the rest of the world the great love that He has for us, and the great kindness that He does for us. Indeed, we are supposed to learn the *parshah* and feel a gratitude to Hashem for His kindness, and we are to bring ourselves to a tremendous sense of humility to Hashem on account of this kindness. As the *passuk* in the *Haftarah* (מיכה ו' ה'-ו') reads: עֲמִי זָכָר /My nation! Remember what Balak the king of Moav advised, and what Bilam son of Be'or answered... **in order to remember the righteous acts of Hashem.** With what can I come forth to Hashem; how will I be properly submissive to the G-d on high?

The Character of Bilam

However, besides for these important ideas, there is another aspect of this *parshah* as well. Through the various interactions which are detailed, the Torah provides us with a close-up display of the profile of Bilam Harasha. We are not simply to dismiss Bilam as a *rasha* who has no relevance to us; we are rather to study his character carefully as it is displayed in the Torah – and learn from it what we should not become.

What kind of person was Bilam? Was he a failing lowlife who never amounted to anything, and all he could do was speak negatively about others? This was plainly not the case. He was the wise man of the nations to whom they turned for counsel. It was he who reassured a terrified world at the time of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* that Hashem was not destroying the world; rather the great event of *Matan Torah* was taking place (זבחים קט"ז). The *passukim* describe the great levels of *nevuah* to which he reached – ותהי עליו רוה אלוקים – (כ"ד ט"ז)/*And the Spirit of Hashem was upon him, (כ"ד ט"ז)*/he knows the thoughts of the Uppermost One. In fact, the *passuk* teaches us that his level of *nevuah* was comparable to that of Moshe Rabbeinu himself. (דברים ל"ד י')/There did not arise in Yisroel like Moshe. Chazal infer from this *passuk*, (ספרי שם), *But in the Nations there did arise. To which person is this referring? To Bilam Ben Be'or.*¹

The Three Negative Traits of Bilam

Clearly, Bilam was on a tremendously high level of *nevuah*, more than anything we can ever fathom. And yet, the Torah teaches us that the character of Bilam was lowlier than even the average *goy*

¹ Actually, the Sifri then goes on to delineate certain differences between the *nevuah* of Moshe and Bilam. At the same time, the point we are making is true. Bilam is still the single individual whose *nevuah* is compared to that of Moshe in any way.

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in the street. As Rashi demonstrates for us in the *pessukim* of the *parshah*, the three evil *middos* of Bilam caused him completed destruction. This is a tremendous lesson for us, as we will explain:

The *mishnah* in Avos tells us כל מי שיש בידו שלשה דברים הללו מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו ושלשה דברים אחרים מתלמידיו של מתלמידיו של בלעם הרשע עין טובה ורוח נמוכה ונפש שפלה מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו עין רעה ורוח גבוהה ונפש רחבה מתלמידיו של (אבות ה' י"ט) *Anyone who has these three traits is from the students of Avraham Avinu, and [whoever has] three other traits is from the students of Bilam Harasha. A good eye, a humble spirit and a mild soul – are [the traits of] the students of Avrohom Avinu. An evil eye, a haughty spirit, and a gluttonous soul – are [the traits of] the students of Bilam Harasha.*

Through his own example, Bilam 'taught' a way of life to the world. He 'preached' that one can live in whatever way he desires, with the most terrible *middos*, completely irrespective of his understanding in *ruchniyus*. Bilam was the greatest of *nevi'im*, second only to Moshe Rabbeinu, and yet he practiced the most depraved of behaviors.

- He had an **עין רעה/an evil eye**; He could not bear to see another's success. It was not enough for him to enjoy his own success in the manner that was granted to him. He needed to see to it that no one else should succeed in any way that was remotely near his. Such a situation would threaten his feeling of superiority. And if *chas v'shalom* someone would actually have something over him, that was the absolute end of the world. The concept of allowing others their own success was not in his radar screen.

As Rashi explains on the passuk (כ"ד ב') *וירא את ישראל*/And he saw Yisroel, Bilam attempted to utilize this *middah* against the Bnei Yisroel. The Bnei Yisroel's success bothered him terribly, and he tried to find an opening in which to place his eye of evil against them. (Hashem, as we know, thwarted his plan, when Bilam saw the greatness of Bnei Yisroel and was inspired to speak positively about them.)

- He had a **רוח גבוהה/a haughty spirit**. He considered himself greater than everyone else. Everyone was required to show him honor, while he was beholden to no one.

This was demonstrated when Bilam asked Hashem for permission to curse the Bnei Yisroel, and it was denied him. Hashem instructed Bilam, ברוך כי ברוך לא תארא את העם כי ברוך הוא (כ"ב י"ב) *"Do not go with them; do not curse the Nation, for it is blessed!"*

How did Bilam relate this to the officers of Moav? (שם) *לכו אל ארצכם כי מאן ד' לתתי להלך עמכם* (שם) *Go to your land, for Hashem has refused to allow me to go with you.* "Hashem permitted me to go," Bilam told the messengers of Moav, "but not **with you**. I am far too important for Hashem to allow me to join such a small and lowly group like yours. Tell your king to honor me in a far better fashion; then I will come along!"

As Rav Chaim Shmulevitz points out – out of Hashem's clear-cut response, which single word did Bilam 'hear'? *לכו אל ארצכם כי ברוך לא תארא את העם כי ברוך הוא* **with them!** Bilam did not deliberately mislead the messengers; rather, his haughtiness of spirit blocked his hearing and understanding. He truly 'understood' that Hashem simply commanded him to demand a larger and more honored group of men.

- Finally, he had a **נפש רחבה/a gluttonous soul**. He desired the most depraved pleasures. As Chazal teach us, his desires were so uncontrollable that he acted immorally with his own donkey.

In his response to Balak he declared (כ"ד י"ג) *אם יתן לי בלק מלא ביתו כסף וזהב* *If Balak will give me his entire house full of gold and silver.* Rashi explains that in Bilam's lowly greed, he sincerely wished, and felt entitled to, the entire house of Balak while it would be full of riches.

The Yeshiva of Bilam – One's Character Completely Unaffected by One's Understanding

Bilam taught this lowly behavior to the world – and one who acts in this fashion is following Bilam's teachings. He is thus a student of Bilam. He may daven a very long Shemoneh Esrai and spend long hours learning each day. He may know Gemara with Tosfos and *mefarshim*, and even the K'tzos and Rav

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Boruch Ber. He may have full crates of notebooks containing his own *chidushei Torah*. All of this is irrelevant. The more important question is, in whose *yeshiva* is he learning? – And the answer to that question is, the *yeshiva* of Bilam Harasha! The 'rebbe' of that *yeshiva* preached that one's level of understanding in *ruchniyus* has no effect on his character, and this individual is absorbing and following that message.

The Yeshiva of Avrohom Avinu

This is the lesson we are taught. It is not enough to simply concentrate on learning, davening, and *dikduk hamitzvos*. One must work on his *middos* as well. Bilam is the prototype example of one who did not do so, and we are to avoid following his negative example.

We must rather enroll in the other 'yeshiva', that of Avrohom Avinu. Avrohom Avinu, the *mishnah* tells us, had the exact opposite traits than those of Bilam.

- He had an **עין טובה / a positive eye**. He was so happy to allow others to have possessions and success. Whether it was more or less than what he had, made no difference. He did not feel threatened by others, and he would willingly share his own success with others.

[This *middah* was demonstrated when Avrohom told the king of Sedom **אם מחוט ועד שרוך** (בראשית י"ד כ"ג) *[I will not take] from a thread to a shoelace*. Although Avrohom had fought his war and was rightfully entitled to the spoils, he allowed the king of Sedom to keep all of it.]

- He had a **ריה נמוכה / a humble spirit**. Avrohom said to Hashem **ואנכי עפר ואפר** (בראשית י"ד כ"ז) *[I am but dust and ashes*. He did not have an inflated view of himself. He did not consider himself more important than all others, too important to take an interest in them and help them. On the contrary, he did tremendous *chessed* with all passersby, going out of his way to serve them. Through this *middah*, he was able to influence countless people to the true path.
- He had a **נפש שפלה / a mild soul**. He was not sold to his physical desires. He controlled himself and acted in accordance with what was proper, even at the expense of his own pleasure. [This was demonstrated when he said to Sarah **הנה נא ידעתי כי אשה יפת מראה את** (בראשית י"ב י"א) *[I know now that you are a woman of beautiful appearance* – implying that he only came to the realization when it was of a practical significance, whereas until then he had not known this.]

Avrohom Avinu preached the opposite message than what Bilam did. Torah and *mitzvos* must be accompanied by *middos* and self-control. A student of Avrohom Avinu has that self-control to be able live in a refined manner that is pleasing to Hashem. This was demonstrated in the person of Eliezer the servant of Avrohom. The passuk describes Eliezer as a **מושל / a ruler**. Chazal explain that he ruled over his own *yetzer hara* in the way that Avrohom preached.

Caring for Others

As children of Avrohom Avinu, we have the most direct access to his teachings and his message. We must become prime *talmidim* of his *yeshiva*, being pleasant and caring for others, rather than being consumed with our own selfish pride and desires, at the expense of others.

Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, rosh yeshiva of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in Baltimore, related the following incident that occurred between him and Rav Eliezer Yehuda Finkel, rosh yeshiva of the Mir in Yerushalayim:

Rav Ruderman had lived in Yerushalayim, and he was very close with Rav Lazer Yudel. At that point Rav Ruderman did not yet have a shtetlar and the two gedolim were discussing the situation.

"I have a great idea for you!" Rav Lazer Yudel exclaimed. "You can open a yeshiva in Yerushalayim!"

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"But how will I do that?" Rav Ruderman wondered. "There is room for another yeshiva in Yerushalayim?"

"Sure there is," was Rav Lazer Yudel's enthusiastic reply. He stood in front of the Mir Yeshiva on Rechov Bais Yisroel, and he pointed across the street. "You can open your yeshiva right here, across the street from mine! I can help you get bachurim and raise money. Come, let's get started!"

Rav Lazer Yudel had the *middah* of *ayin tovah* to its fullest. He was completely not worried about competition to his own *yeshiva*; such fears did not exist.

"There is room for both of us; come, I'll help you!"

This in such contrast to the natural tendency of people to try to chase all competition as far away as possible.

'My supermarket is over here! – You want to open up your own supermarket? Well, you better keep it out of sight, and out of mind! Make it a plane ride away! For someone to get from my supermarket to yours, he will have to make reservations weeks in advance!'

Such is truly the difference between a *talmid* of Avrohom Avinu and a *talmid* of Bilam Harasha.

Rav Lazer Yudel had the practice of giving money to any yeshiva bachur who would tell him a good chiddush in learning. It made no difference whether the bachur learned in the Mirrer Yeshiva or another yeshiva.

'You did an accomplishment? I'll give you a prize!'

Did Rav Lazer Yudel lose on account of his *ayin tovah*? The evidence screams to the contrary. The *Mir Yeshiva* spans many buildings and branches, in Yerushalayim and other cities. It is bursting at the seams. Moreover, because of his *ayin tovah*, Rav Lazer Yudel not only has *Mir Yeshiva* to his credit, but he has a share in the success of so many other individuals and *yeshivos* outside his own *yeshiva* as well.

Rav Yisroel Yaakov Fisher, dayan on the Eidah Hachareidis and rav in Yerushalayim, attributed much of his hatzlacha to the encouragement and incentives that he received from Rav Lazer Yudel. He did not learn in Mir Yeshiva, and yet Rav Lazer Yudel in effect became one of his rebbeim.

Such is the power of an ayin tovah.

Establishing our own Surroundings as the Yeshiva of Avrohom Avinu

Not only must we ourselves 'enroll' in the *yeshiva* of Avrohom Avinu, but we must also make our homes and surroundings become 'branches' of this *yeshiva*. Our homes are the place where we and all our family members learn to grow in our *Avodas Hashem*. Let the atmosphere be one in which the teachings of Avrohom Avinu are practiced and exemplified.

We need to realize that the way we act has a direct effect on those around us. It can be children, a spouse, siblings, *chavrusas*, friends, or co-workers. We are constantly teaching and influencing by our example. Let our example be one of concern and respect for others, rather than a life of selfishness and self-centeredness.

Rav Ahron Feldman shlita, rosh yeshiva of Ner Yisroel Baltimore related the following story at an Agudah convention:

There was a menahel of a yeshiva who hired an assistant to help him in the running of the yeshiva. Unbeknownst to the menahel, this assistant was a man of extremely poor character. He conceived of a conniving plan in which he turned many people against the menahel, until the menahel was eventually forced to leave his own yeshiva, leaving the control in the hands of the assistant.

There was, however, a group of parents who saw through the entire plot and realized how terribly this menahel had been wronged. They called him to a meeting, and they assured

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him that they would not watch this mistreatment lying down. They would fight with this assistant until justice would be done and the menahel would be restored to his rightful position.

When the menahel heard their plan, he objected forcefully. "Absolutely not," he declared passionately. "We will not fight this at all. Just let things be, and I will move on to other things."

"But why?" they argued. "We want to help you. We'll see to it that you'll win this fight. Why won't you allow us?"

"What do you think will happen if you take on this 'project'?" he asked. "Do you think the assistant is going to accept it? Obviously not. There will be fights and dinei Torah each side will accuse the other side of speaking lies and loshon hara – the whole nine yards will happen. Even if we would eventually emerge victorious, what kind of message and chinuch would be shown? I worked so hard to build this moisad with the intention of transmitting a Torah chinuch to the boys in the yeshiva. Do you think I would want to destroy the yeshiva in which I expended so much effort and toil?"

The menahel did not allow the parents to 'fight' on his behalf.

This menahel understood that his actions have an effect upon those around him, and he would not fight for his school at the expense of the terrible picture that would enter the hearts and minds of the *talmidim*.

Rav Moshe Leib Sassover was very involved in the mitzvah of pidyon shevuyim, particularly on behalf of poor Jewish tenants who were imprisoned on account of their not being able to pay their rent.

He once witnessed how a cruel goyishe man had hitched a Jewish man and his family to the front of his wagon while the horses were walking freely on the side. The cruel man, who was obviously the creditor of this family, was sitting inside the stately coach with his elegantly dressed wife and their young son. Every so often he would whip the hapless Jewish family and yell at them to move faster. It was a terribly cruel and painful sight to observe.

Rav Moshe Leib observed this scene, and he knew that if he wanted to help the Jewish family he must think fast. If he would not act quickly, the wagon would pass, and he would have no way of finding them afterward. Rav Moshe Leib stopped the wagon and pulled the door of the coach open. Before the coachman could say anything, Rav Moshe Leib burst into the wagon. He grabbed the young son of the couple and embraced him.

"What a beautiful son you have!" Rav Moshe Leib exclaimed. "His features are so fine, and he has such beautiful hair. His face looks absolutely angelic! Wow! What a pure child!"

The goyishe parents beamed with pleasure and pride when hearing these words.

Rav Moshe Leib continued. "Do you know what you are doing by treating this Jewish family so cruelly? You are damaging the heart of your son! This cruelty will be ingrained in his mind forever! He will lose all that purity!"

These words had an effect on the parents. They recognized the truth of Rav Moshe Leib's words and they set the family free.

Controlling Ourselves in Order to Set a Good Example

Although the above story is about an extreme scenario, there is a lesson which is relevant to all of us. Our actions in our home have an effect on our children. Even when we may be inclined to act a certain way, let us bear in mind how our children will be affected. Many times, this alone is ample reason to refrain from the behavior.

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Shloimy's wife purchases an expensive new decoration for their home. Shloimy knows that such an expense is way beyond their budget, and in fact, he has asked her repeatedly to consult with him before making such purchases. Moreover, this decoration is delicate, and judging by past experience, the piece is bound to be broken within two weeks.

Shloimy is preparing to really give it to his wife. Enough is enough. After the angry scolding that she about to receive from him, maybe she will finally get the message.

Before Shloimy goes through with this 'plan', let him consider what effect this will have on his home. Yes, if he screams at his wife loud enough, she may stop buying those shmuntzas. Shloimy will have 'won'. But at what cost? The children will see parents who scream at each other, and they will be scarred.

For the sake of the 'yeshiva' that is Shloimy's home, it is worthwhile for him to control himself.

Giving Up for Others

We must learn from Avrohom Avinu that rather focus on our own selfish needs, we must instead give up for the sake of others.

Rav Boruch Ber Leibowitz said about himself that were it not for the effort that he put into his shiurim and the needs of his talmidim, he would have been able to become more proficient in the rest of Shas. However, he gave up that madreigah in Torah for the sake of his Talmidim.

This is not a *b'dieved*; it is rather the way one *shteigs*. A person gives up for others and thereby he grows infinitely. If Rav Boruch Ber would have concentrated on his own growth, who knows if he would have reached the level of greatness that he did?

Parah Adumah – Becoming Tamei for Others Taharah

In last week's *parsha* we discussed the question of the *meforshim* on the *passuk* זאת חקת התורה / *This is the chok of the Torah*. We asked, why is the mitzvah of *Parah Adumah* considered a *chok* of the entire Torah? An answer that is given is that is due to the nature of the *chok* of *Parah Adumah*. Although the *Parah* purified those who were *tamei*, at the same time, those Kohanim who engaged in its preparation became *tamei* as a result. This reality could potentially have caused Kohanim not to want to become involved in the *Parah*.

'Why should I be the one to become *tamei*? Let a different Kohen do the job!'

The mitzvah of *Parah* then teaches us this concept which is so relevant for one's *shteiging* in all areas of the Torah. One must have the *middah* of doing for others, even at the expense of his own comforts.

Giving Up on behalf of One's Children

I heard the following *vort* from brother R' Yitzchok Mordechai shlita: In the *machzor* of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, there is a *tefillah* that is printed in the *Kedusha* of *Mussaf* which can be recited during מלא עולם כבודו while the *chazzan* sings the words **איה מקום כבודו**. In this *tefillah*, there is a choice of needs for which one may daven. A person can daven for either *ruach hakodesh*, tremendous wealth, or *ehrliche* children. However, one cannot daven for all three; he can only pick one.

The question is that presumably there is not a single person who would daven for *ruach hakodesh* over *ehrliche* children. After all, what good is one's own *ruach hakodesh* if *chas v'shalom* his children do not follow the proper *derech*? Similarly as well, no one in his right mind would daven for wealth at the expense of *ehrliche* children. After all, who needs wealth if his children *chas v'shalom* are off the proper path?

Assuming then that everyone will be choosing to say the *tefillah* about children, the question can be asked: Why does the *machzor* include the other two *tefillas* at all? Let it just have the one for children which is what everyone will say regardless! The answer is that the *machzor* is teaching us an essential prerequisite for having *ehrliche* children: If one wishes for *ehrliche* children, he must be prepared to give

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up on their behalf, whether from his chances of wealth, or even chances of *shteiging*. Indeed, it was Avrohom Avinu who taught us this great *middah of ayin tovah*, which includes generosity and forgoing from one's own possessions for others; and he merited that Hashem stated about him, למען אשר יצוה את בניו, ואת ביתו אחריו ושמרו דרך יהוה לעשות צדקה ומשפט (בראשית י"ח י"ט) */That he will instruct his children and his household after him that they should guard the way of Hashem, to perform tzedaka and justice.* Avrohom with his great *middos*, led his children into becoming Hashem's great nation.

The Happy Life of Talmidim of Avrohom vs the Bitter Life of Talmidim of Bilam Harasha

What are the end results of the opposing life-paths of Avrohom Avinu and Bilam Harasha?

The *mishnah* itself discusses this question. מה בין תלמידיו של אברהם אבינו לתלמידיו של בלעם הרשע תלמידיו של אברהם אבינו אוכלין בעולם הזה ונוחלין בעולם הבא שנאמר להנחיל אוהבי יש ואוצרותיהם אמלא אבל תלמידיו של בלעם הרשע של אברהם אבינו אוכלין בעולם הזה ונוחלין בעולם הבא שנאמר להנחיל אוהבי יש ואוצרותיהם אמלא אבל תלמידיו של בלעם הרשע */What is the difference between the students of Avrohom Avinu and the students of Bilam Harasha? The students of Avrohom Avinu eat in This World and inherit the Next World, as it says, 'There is what to bequeath to those who love Me, and I will fill their store houses.' But the students of Bilam Harasha inherit Gehinnom and descend into a pit of destruction.*

The *mishnah* teaches us that the difference between the two paths emerges both in this world and the Next World. Not only do *Talmidim* of Avrohom Avinu attain everlasting schar in *Olam Haba*, but they also enjoy a happy, content existence during their present lifetime. They are thankful to Hashem for the gifts that they have, and they are also happy for others' good fortunes. They do not feel that they are deserving of honor, and consequently they are happy with the way people treat them. On the contrary, they wish they could avoid the spotlight so that they could serve Hashem unassumingly.

Talmidim of Bilam, on the other hand, earn punishment in *Olam Haba*, and they live a most difficult life in *Olam Haze*. They are terribly jealous of anyone else who may have more than they, and they are constantly thinking that they are not being honored properly. [Haman is a prime example of this theme. With all the tremendous honor bestowed upon him as the second in command, he still could not live with the fact that the single person, Mordechai, would not bow. As the famous words he uttered וכל זה איננו שוה */And all of this [honor and wealth] is worthless to me.* Even all the honor and riches in the world could not grant him happiness.]

Let us indeed devote ourselves to becoming true *talmidim* of Avrohom Avinu, and bez"H we should reach this *madreigah*.

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