

(1) שבת קכ: (2) דברים כג (3) מה:ב (4) יו"ד רע"ח: (5) או"ח עה
(6) ד"י [טו,טז] (7) או"ח עה:ד (8) שם כג (9) שו"ת מחזה אליהו
א"ה:ג,ד,יא (10) או"ח רעהיב

מעשה אבות סימן לבנים

ויהי אף אליקים כי חולך הוא ויתניצב מלאך ה' בדרך לשמן לו והוא רכב על אתנו ושני נעריו עמו וגו' (כב-כב)

The lessons of Bilaam the Prophet, his talking donkey, and the angel who stood in his way, are immense and valuable. Bilaam was a wicked man who was graced with Divine powers. Instead of using them for good purposes, he employed them to curse others, to build up his personal prestige, and gain wealth through illicit actions. Nevertheless, *Hashem* sent an angel of mercy to protect him and turn his heart away from sin. *Hashem* sends warning signals to each and every one of us on a daily basis. Some are meant to protect us and some are meant to harm us. It is up to us to make the correct choices in our lives, so that the angels who are sent, are “Angels of Mercy” and not, G-d forbid, “Angels of Death.”

After his emigration from Morocco to *Eretz Yisroel*, the holy **Baba Sali, Chacham Rabbeinu Yisroel Abuchatzzeira זי"ל**, would often travel around the country visiting the graves of *Tzaddikim* spread out throughout the land. He would generally sit in the back of the automobile, quietly engrossed in *Torah* and *Tefillah*, while a driver would take him to his preferred destination. On one occasion, there was a loud noise that was heard near their car, which alerted the driver to their passing of a large and heavy truck nearby. The truck was filled to capacity with crates of succulent oranges. The Land of Israel is known for its orange orchards and Jaffa oranges are enjoyed throughout the world.

Suddenly, the driver heard a voice from the backseat. “Stop the car,” ordered the *Baba Sali*, in a clear and strong voice. The driver dutifully stopped driving, pulling over to the side of the road, waiting to hear further instructions.

“Please ask the truck driver for an orange.” The *Chacham’s* driver was surprised at this unusual request. Ordinary pleasures of this world never had a place in the ascetic mystical life of the pious *Tzaddik*. And suddenly, he was requesting an orange. Additionally, the truck had pulled ahead and it would be a challenge to get him to stop. No doubt, there was a deeper meaning here. Nonetheless, the driver sped up and after a short time, succeeded in flagging down the truck driver.

After a pause that seemed inordinately long, a brawny tanned young Sabra stepped down from the truck. “What is it?” he asked impatiently as he walked over to the driver. “What do you want?” His voice was gruff.

“My friend,” said the driver of the *Baba Sali*, “I have a *Tzaddik* in my car. He asks if you can give him one of your oranges.” The driver spoke somewhat meekly.

The tanned man looked inside the car’s window and saw the *Baba Sali*. Then, he straightened and said, “No way! I don’t give out no free food! Not for anyone! You pay, you get. That’s it!” The man climbed back into his truck and shifted his mighty load into gear. He sped away in a hurry to get to where he had to go, leaving them in the dust.

The driver and the *Chacham* also continued on their way. The rest of the trip was conducted in silence.

After about an hour, they reached the next junction, where a group of policemen were blocking the road. The driver rolled down his window and asked, “What happened here?”

The policeman replied, “A couple of minutes ago, a truck carrying crates of oranges careened through the junction. The driver had obviously lost control of the brakes and the truck crashed into a central electric pole. The entire front of the truck was demolished. Oranges went flying everywhere and the driver was crushed. They’re now trying to extricate the man’s body.” The *Baba Sali’s* driver was completely and utterly speechless. This was no coincidence. He turned back to face the *Tzaddik* and respectfully asked for an explanation.

“When the truck passed near us the first time,” replied the *Chacham* softly, almost tearfully, “I vividly saw the *Malach Hamaves*, the Angel of Death, hovering above it. I immediately understood that the driver’s life was in danger. I wanted to save him. I thought that if I took a fruit from him and made a *beracha* on it, the merit of him answering ‘*Amen*’ would stand in his stead and he’d be spared the hand of strict Divine Justice.

“Sadly, the driver didn’t agree. He forfeited this merit and see what a huge price he has paid.”

אשר בחר בנביאים טובים ...

מה יעץ בלק מלך מואב ומה ענה אותו בלעם בן בעור ... (מכה ו-ה)

In the *Haftorah*, *Micha HaNavi* reminds us to never forget Bilaam’s intended curses. Though his goal was to curse *Klal Yisroel*, *Chazal (Sanhedrin 105a)* interestingly state that from the very praises and blessings Bilaam showered the Jews with, one can easily glean the full extent of frightening and devastating curses he so deftly prepared. How so?

Rashi explains that Bilaam chose the word "משכן" - encampment, to describe the tents of *Klal Yisroel*. This very word can also read as “*Mashkon*” - a pledge, to mean that *Hashem* would rather, “*take out his wrath on sticks and stones (of his Temple),*” to atone for the sins of His Nation

- no matter their spiritual state - then on the people themselves.

The **Baal Shem Tov זי"ל** quotes *Chazal (Pesachim 88a)* that the first and second Temples are represented by Avraham and Yitzchok who are equated to a "הר" (mountain) and "סדה" (field) respectively. However, Yaakov is called "בית" (house) and represents the third *Bais HaMikdash* which will last forever. Bilaam cunningly intended for the first temples to be called "אהל יעקב" which is similar to a "בית" because he wanted *them* to last forever which would place *Klal Yisroel* as the "משכון" - the “pledge” - thus *Hashem* will take out his wrath on the people and not the buildings! Thankfully, *Hashem* turned this “blessing” into a praise of the Nation’s trait of modesty which surpasses any other nation in the world.

מחשבת הלב

מי מנה עפר יעקב ומספר את רכבי ישראל תמת נפשי מות ישרים ותוד אחריתי כמוך וגו' (כג-)

As Bilaam was enumerating the special traits of *Klal Yisroel*, he said, “*I should die a death like them and my end should model theirs.*” In reality, Bilaam was requesting *Olam Haba* - eternal life! He wanted to live like a goy but die like a Jew. Said the **Chofetz Chaim זי"ל** famously: “*It’s not a ‘kuntz’ to die like a Yid. The ‘kuntz’ is to live like a Yid!*” For Bilaam to ask to die like a *Yid* but to live like an animal his entire life, following every whim and desire, is an impossibility. Inheriting *Olam Haba* is only possible with a life of *mesiras nefesh* in *Golus*, with all its ups and downs. It’s a package deal!

In a similar vein, the *Gemara (Sotah, 21)*, contrasts the lives of two people who sought to buy into the *zechus HaTorah*. One was *Shimon Achiezri*, and the other was Shavna, the brother of Hillel. Azarya supported his brother Shimon on a constant basis and was awarded the title “שמעון אחי עזרי”, whereas Shavna, only at the very end, requested to pay Hillel for half of what Hillel had learned his entire life. To him, the *Gemara* says “בוז יבזו לו” - a disgrace unto him. Because to live your life full of money and pleasure, while your brother toils in *Torah* in poverty, is truly a disgrace. However, to support your brother’s *Torah* lifestyle and shoulder his burden is praiseworthy. That shows your own *chashivus* for *Torah*. And most importantly, that message is transmitted to your children, reminding them that a life connected to the *Torah* is the correct lifestyle.

The **Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh** has a *moiradika pshat* on the *posuk*, “ולא ראה עמל בישראל”, - “*He (Hashem) doesn’t see the toil of Bnei Yisroel.*” It means, he says, that *Hashem* observes His children serving Him and toiling in *Torah* study, and it’s not a burden on them. They really truly enjoy living a fulfilling *Yiddishe* life and that is one of the most crucial ways of ensuring that our dear children שירי will perpetuate our lifestyle and serve *Hashem* with happy hearts, אכ"ר.

משל למה הדבר דומה

ויגר מואב מפני העם ... ויקץ מואב מפני בני ישראל (כב-ג)

משל: There was once a king who owned vast tracts of land and major forests. He was very proud of his holdings and on many occasions, he wished to show them off to visiting dignitaries. He would organize hunting trips, where he would lead a group into one of his vast forests and hunt down game. There was just one problem: the king himself was a terrible hunter and could never actually bag anything!

His advisors needed to come up with a plan so that the king does not embarrass himself on these hunting trips. It was finally decided that a crack team of professional hunters would go out a day earlier and hunt game. They would catch their prey and prepare it in strategic spots, so that the next day, when the king comes through leading his hunting group, he would easily catch what he was looking for.

Indeed, the plan was a huge success. The next day, the king, riding his royal steed, led a group into the forest, and almost without trying, he managed to hunt and capture a great

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS ON THE MIDDAH OF דיבור פה ...

ויפתח ה' את פי האתון והאמר לבלעם מה עשיתי לך ... (כב-ב)

The *Medrash* tells us that *Hashem* is so kind and merciful on all His creations that when the donkey miraculously opened it’s mouth and rebuked Bilaam, *Hashem* killed the donkey! Why? So that people should not say, “Here is the donkey that rebuked Bilaam and he did not have what to answer!” Imagine! *Hashem* created this miraculous donkey just after the world itself was created - ערב שבת בין השמשות - The donkey carried out it’s mission and rebuked one of the most wicked people in the world! And *Hashem* killed the donkey, this precious miraculous creature! And why? Because it might be a source of unnecessary humiliation for Bilaam! Such is the consideration of *Hashem* for the honor of others!

What a powerful lesson it is for us! How often do we flippantly say or do things that cause pain or humiliation to others? We often make a joke about someone in the room and while everyone is laughing, we say, “Just kidding, just kidding.” Are we really kidding? That should be an indication that this was something that should NOT have been said.

When the *Mishna* in *Avos* lists the ten miraculous objects that were created *bein hashmashos*, it lists “פי האתון” - the MOUTH of the donkey! The fact that the donkey opened its mouth to speak was the powerful miracle! But there is also a message for us! Speech is powerful! Communicating with others is the miracle inside all of us. But at the very same time, we must be careful not to be the “donkey’s mouth.” Our words carry great import and how we say it is often scrutinized. We should take to heart the lesson of how *Hashem* considers the honor of all people, even the wicked Bilaam, and use our mouths and lips to show people honor and kindness. And if we have nothing nice to say, or we are not sure ... then let’s just keep our mouths shut!

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