



הוא היה אומר...

מעשה אבות סימן לבנים

וישלח מלאכים אל בלעם בן בעור פתורה אשר על הנדה ארץ בני עמו לקרוא לו וכו' (כב-ה)

“*No prophet in Israel ever arose like Moshe*” - *‘In Israel none arose, but in the gentile nations one arose. And who was it? Bilaam.*’ These words of the *Sifri* (דברים לט) would lead one to believe that Bilaam was on equal footing with the great *Moshe Rabbeinu*, as far as prophets go. This would include the *Avos*, *Aharon Hakohen*, *Dovid Hamelech* the list goes on and on! And yet, nothing could be further from the truth. Rashi states: “*For what reason did the Holy One blessed be He rest His Divine Presence upon a wicked non-Jew? So that the nations should not be able to open their mouths and say that had we had prophets of our own, we would have stayed good (not sinned).*” In the end, *Hashem* gave them a prophet - Bilaam - who breached all rules of morality and licentiousness, and was a bane upon the world. Rather than do all the good he was capable of, Bilaam was an evil man through and through, who brought the world much pain and misery.

The era of Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) wreaked terrible havoc upon the world of the Lithuanian Yeshivos. There were many bright young boys who had actually shown signs of genius as *Yeshivah* students, but were swept up in the excitement of the times and the false promise of something “better” on the other side. These potential *Rabbanim*, future leaders and *Torah* scholars left *Torah* study and service of *Klal Yisroel* to become intellectuals and professionals in service to themselves, at best! Young men, who at the early age of sixteen or seventeen disappointed the ambitions of their parents and the expectations of their *rebbeim*, and were withdrawn from the *Yeshivah* to enter the world of academics and commerce, denying all possibilities that perhaps at eighteen and nineteen, they would begin to blossom as *Talmidei Chachamim*, as is so often the case. The resultant loss to our impoverished generation, is unfathomable and immeasurable.

When **R’ Yaakov Kamenetzky ZT”L** was still a student learning in Slabodka, a visitor came to the *Yeshivah*. This man was college educated and thought quite highly of himself. He let it be known to anyone and everyone that before he attended the university, he had learned in the Volozhiner Yeshivah, under the great *Rosh HaYeshivah*, **R’ Chaim Soloveitchik (Brisker) ZT”L**, and he challenged the *bachurim* of the Slabodka Yeshivah to test him in his knowledge of the Talmud. A few did and found him to be quite knowledgeable.

He then proceeded to inform the students that after he left the *Yeshivah*, he studied under Professor Albert Einstein in the university. This piqued the curiosity of the students as well, and the *bachurim* were anxious to hear his assessment of his experiences with two intellectual giants; the brilliant *Rosh HaYeshivah* and *Gaon* in *Torah* knowledge, R’ Chaim Soloveitchik and the world-renowned scientist, Dr. Albert Einstein. The students wanted to know: Which man was a bigger genius and which possessed greater abilities?

As the students crowded around the man expectantly, he pondered long and hard for a correct response. In the spirit of intellectual honesty, he believed he owed them a truthful answer. Finally, he smiled and replied, “Indeed, this is a difficult question. But if I had to venture an answer, I would say that Dr. Einstein was the more brilliant of the two.” The students were shocked, but the man quickly continued. “He may have had a slightly better mind, but R’ Chaim ... ahh ... who could match R’ Chaim? Through his genius he could take any topic and make anybody understand it. Einstein may have been slightly smarter, but what good is being so smart if you cannot give over your knowledge to the next generation? Nobody, but nobody had R’ Chaim’s ‘*koach hasbara*’ - his gift for explanation!”

R’ Yaakov would emphasize this point. Einstein had neither R’ Chaim’s *koach hasbara* nor his *Torah* knowledge and commitment to *Yiddishkeit*. Had there been no Einstein - the physicist - what kind of place would this world be? For one, there would be no nuclear bomb, with its attendant threat of impending disaster to all mankind. If on the other hand, Einstein had been a comrade in *Torah* with R’ Chaim, imagine how rich the world would be!

משל למא הדבר דומא

אם יתן לי בלק מלא ביתו כסף וזהב לא אוכל לעבור את פי ה' וכו' (כב-ה)

משל: A rich man once came to the **Baal HaTanya, R’ Schneur Zalman of Liadi ZT”L** with a confession. Although he was known as a wealthy man involved in many charities and organizations, he had recently lost almost all of his money. He was teetering on the brink of financial ruin.

“*Rebbe*,” he said, “I am willing to undergo hardship should that be the Divine Will. However, I feel I cannot allow my investors and my charities to suffer. What should I do? I truly need an economic miracle!”

The *Rebbe* looked at him and said, “You seem to know

what you need. How about what you are needed for?”

Upon hearing the words of his *Rebbe*, the *chasid* fainted on the spot. An attendant rushed in and revived him with some cold water on his face and some strong smelling salts. Immediately, he embarked on an earnest and intense program of prayer, fasting and intense Divine service.

After several days had passed, the *Rebbe* looked at him and said warmly, “I see that you have turned away from being so intensely focused on your own needs. Go home. The Lord will surely bless your efforts with success.”

ויאמר בלעם לבלק התיצב על עלותך ואאלה אהלי יקרה ה' לקראתי ודבר מה ידאני והגדתי לך (כג-ג)

The *Tosefta* (ברכות ז) informs us that if Bilaam had determined the exact moment of the Almighty’s wrath and said the word “יָלֵם” - “*destroy them*,” *Hashem* would have destroyed the Jewish people. The curse “כלם” is so short that even the angels would not have been able to prevent Bilaam from uttering it. Only *Hashem* could stop Bilaam.

What is interesting is if Bilaam had the ability to find that precise moment and eradicate *Klal Yisroel*, why did he wait until now? Why didn’t he do this earlier, while still in Midian? What exactly did he need Balak for?

Chacham Dovid Pinto Shlit’a (Pachad Dovid) explains that Bilaam required Balak’s participation - namely that he should respond *Amen* - to enable the curse to take effect. The last two letters of the name בלעם together with the last letters of the name בלק spell out the word “עמלק”. Likewise, the first letters of both their names spell out the word “בלבל” which means to confound or confuse. Bilaam recognized that in order to do what Amalek was unable to do earlier during the sojourn of *Bnei Yisroel*, it was necessary to “cool off” the intense spirituality of the Jewish people as well as confuse (לבלבל) them into sinning. By performing both these actions, and by employing Balak to assist him with these tasks, he felt he would be invincible.

We find this idea alluded to in the *Haftorah*: “*My people, hear now what Balak, King of Moav schemed in order to recognize the righteous acts of the Lord.*” (מיכה ו-ה) This refers to *Hashem*’s kindness, for even though Bilaam knew exactly when *Hashem* would become became angry, still *Hashem* acted with Bilaam measure for measure: Bilaam attempted to confound *Bnei Yisroel*, so *Hashem* confounded Bilaam by appearing to him by chance (“מקרה”). This weakened him so that he would not succeed in “cooling off” the Jewish people and not curse them as he had planned.

EDITORIAL AND INSIGHTS
ON THE WEEKLY MIDDAH OF ...

דבון

The *Gemara* in *Makkos* (יז) describes how *Hashem* told Bilaam not to go with the messengers of Balak to curse the Jews. From here the *Gemara* learns out the famous dictum, words by which a person should live his life: בדרך שאדם רוצה “*In the way that a person wants to go, he is led.*” *Hashem* does not interfere with a human being’s free will. Whereas all life circumstances are predestined in all situations, in the case of good and evil, man is given the freedom to choose. And then, based on the direction he chooses *Hashem* helps him along.

The *Mashgiach*, **R’ Wolbe ZT”L** taught that whatever a person truly wants in life, whether it is spiritual or even physical in nature, he will usually obtain it because nothing stands in the way of a strong will.

R’ Avigdor Miller ZT”L explains that one who desires and seeks wisdom is helped from above and that the amount of heavenly assistance he receives is in direct proportion to the sincerity of the seeker.

The **Alter of Novardok ZT”L** was known to say: “There is no such thing as I cannot. One who says he can’t is simply lacking *ratzon* (will). That is why he thinks that he can’t!”

R’ Zelig Pliskin Shlit’a writes that a “lack of spiritual accomplishment does not come from a lack of ability but from a lack of will. Therefore, the most important thing for a person to work on is to intensify his will to do the will of *Hashem*.

May *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* give us the ability, insight, wherewithal and opportunity to truly fulfill His *ratzon*.

TORAH GEMS

וישא בלעם את עיניו ורא את ישראל שכן לשבטיו ... מזה טובו אהליך יעקב משכנתוך ישראל (כד-ב)

Bilaam, who certainly had no desire to see good in *Klal*

Yisroel, was overwhelmed when he saw the way Jewish tents were erected. The entrance of one tent did not face the entrance of the neighboring one, so that people could not see inside another’s tent. They knew that it is a human weakness to be inquisitive and even intrusive. Thus, they took the necessary precautions to set up their tents in a way that neither family could pry on the other, or even see the other’s private actions by mistake. In response to this beautiful way of life, Bilaam proclaimed “מזה טובו אהליך יעקב משכנתוך ישראל” - “*How exemplary are your tents, Yaakov; your abodes, Yisroel.*” Adds **R’ Pesach Eliyahu Falk Shlit’a**, it is understood that we too are to set up our homes on these lines.

In *Shiras Devorah*, Devorah the Prophetess sang the words, “מנשים באהל תבורך” (שופטים ה:כד), “*She (Yael) should be blessed by the women of the tent.*” Rashi explains that the “*women of the tent*” are our Matriarchs. They are referred to with this title because concerning each of them, the *Torah* mentions her *tznius* in connection with her tent. A tent is a temporary abode, whereas a house is a permanent dwelling. Our *Imahos* looked at life in this world as just a temporary sojourn in which a person prepares himself for a blissful future in *Olam Haba*. They therefore paid their full attention to all that was important and substantial and were not enticed by the transitory pleasures of this world. In this way, their *hashkafos* had a direct bearing on how they acted with *tznius*.

Thus, the *posuk* says, “*How precious are your tents Yaakov, your sanctuaries Yisroel.*” When people understand that their homes are just tents, they are inspired to pursue real values: *Torah* study. Houses of study are fully occupied by men learning *Torah* - encouraged to do so by wives who appreciate the greatness of *Torah* learning. Hence, אהליך, “משכנותך ישראל” (Jewish homes) leads to *Yeshivos*.

דרגה יתירה

FROM THE WELLSPRINGS OF
R’ GUTTMAN - RAMAT SHLOMO

ויאמר אלקים אל בלעם לא תלך עמהם לא תאר את העם כי ברוך הוא וגוי (כב-יב)