

# O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT BALAK · 17 TAMMUZ 5775 · JULY 4, 2015 · VOL. 22 NO. 38

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### BUT DADDY, I CAN'T DO THAT!

*“Balak’s anger flared against Bilaam... ‘To curse my enemies did I summon you, and you have continually blessed them these three times!’ ” (24:10)*

Children, bless them, are convinced of their own limitations. “Daddy, I can’t do that! I’m exhausted! I just came in from shopping for a new dress at the mall. Do you have any idea how tiring shopping is?”

There are two kinds of “I can’t do that.” There’s the “I can’t do that” of someone if you ask them to walk naked through the streets. And there’s the “I can’t do that” of someone if you ask them to jump to the moon. The first expresses an extreme reluctance; the second a physical impossibility

With this distinction we can answer a paradox in this week’s Torah portion:

Why was Balak annoyed with Bilaam when he was unable to curse the Jewish People? Bilaam had already forewarned

him from the beginning that he couldn’t do it. He said, “If Balak will give me his houseful of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the world of the L-rd, my G-d, to do anything small or great.”

The answer is that Balak assumed that Bilaam was extremely reluctant to curse the Jewish People, as reluctant as someone walking through the streets without a stitch on.

This sticking point, he believed, he could overcome with the grease of sufficient money.

What Bilaam was really saying to Balak was that he could just as easily curse the Jewish People as fly to the sun.

There are some things that you *really* can’t do.

• Source: based on Rabbi Shimshon Pincus

## 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.

## NEDARIM 44 - 50

“A person can make his property ownerless (*hefker*) in front of one person according to Torah law. And why did the Rabbis require making it ownerless in front of three people? So that one person can acquire it, and the other two people are witnesses.”

This is the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi on our *daf*, which is cited as the ruling in the Shulchan Aruch. (Orach Chaim 273:7). This need to declare the property ownerless in the presence of one or three other people seems not to be in accord with what we do with chametz before Pesach. When we do “*bitul chametz*” — nullification of the chametz — there is no requirement to do this in the presence of anyone else at all.

One approach to understand *bitul chametz* is that it is not a declaration of *hefker*, but rather a mental process of renouncement. As the Rambam writes, “One annuls it in his heart, considers it as dust, and should think in his heart that he has no chametz whatsoever. Any chametz in his possession is as dust and is purposeless.” (Laws of Chametz and Matza 2:2) Another approach is that any chametz does not really belong to the “owner” once it becomes forbidden for him to have any benefit from it on erev Pesach. The prohibitions against having “your chametz” on Pesach mean not to have chametz that “you want”. If a person does *bitul*, saying it in solitude, or even via thought, he then does not “want the chametz” and therefore does not transgress. (Rabbeinu Nissim)

• *Nedarim 45a*

“Rabbi Shimon took a basket on his shoulder and said, ‘Great is work, that it honors its owner’.”

The “Rabbi Shimon” mentioned in this statement in our *gemara* is “Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai”. Rabbi Simon teaches elsewhere (Berachot 35b) that work is to be avoided since it takes away time and energy from Torah study. Perfection is only achieved through Torah. So, how can he praise the importance of work in our *gemara* when he carried a basket?

Answer: He was on his way to the Beit Midrash to learn Torah, and he took the basket in order to sit on it while he was learning, instead of sitting directly on the ground. He would be able to learn Torah better in this way. His physical exertion of shouldering the basket was not for the sake of work, but rather for the sake of the Torah and for the honor of the Torah. (Maharitz Chiyos; also see Rabbeinu Nissim and Rabbeinu Asher)

• *Nedarim 49b*



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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.

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# Abarbanel

## ON THE PARSHA

### Balak

There are numerous difficulties in the narrative of Parshat Balak. First of all, Abarbanel is puzzled by the fact that G-d is angry with Bilaam for going to curse the Bnei Yisrael, after having apparently given him permission to do so. Secondly, why in the end does G-d prevent Bilaam from doing so? Could the curse of Bilaam actually have any power over Bnei Yisrael? Abarbanel cites the opinion of the Ibn Ezra, who states that since G-d later in Shittim brings a plague on the people, others would attribute this punishment erroneously to the curse of Bilaam rather than the transgressions of the people. Abarbanel disagrees with this answer and demonstrates from a verse in the Prophet Micah (6:5) that if it weren't for G-d's merciful intervention Bilaam's curse would indeed have taken effect: "He summoned Bilaam... to curse you. But I refused to listen to Bilaam... thus I rescued you from his power." In addition, Yehoshua mentions the miracle that G-d performed in rescuing us from Bilaam's curse in his list of the miracles that G-d performed on behalf of the Bnei Yisrael. (Yehoshua 24:9)

In regard to the first question, Abarbanel answers that G-d gave Bilaam permission to go with the messengers of Balak, but He did not give him permission to curse anyone. Rather G-d made it clear to him, "That which I tell you to say, you will say". This could mean that he should bless them, or could mean that he should curse them or could mean to not say anything at all. However, G-d was clearly not giving Bilaam *carte blanche* to curse Bnei Yisrael. Bilaam should have understood that since G-d did not intend for him specifically to curse them, there was no point in his

going with the messengers. Bilaam should have clearly explained to them that he would go with them, but there would be no purpose and nothing to be gained from their requests at all. However, he misled them by telling them that G-d had given him permission to go with them. As a result, he incurred the wrath of G-d.

Thus, G-d prevented Bilaam from cursing the people, but not because he had the power to uproot the merit of the Forefathers and the merit of the entire nation at Mount Sinai. Rather the whole world knew that Bilaam was a prophet who inquired of G-d, as Balak himself stated at the beginning of the Parsha, "Because I know that those whom you bless are blessed and those whom you curse are cursed." (Bamidbar 22:6) As a result, if Bilaam had cursed Bnei Yisrael, the nations of the world would have trusted his curse, girded themselves for warfare and been courageous and confident of success on the basis of that curse. Therefore, G-d intervenes and prevents the curse from occurring. All the nations would realize that the success of Bnei Yisrael comes directly from G-d. They would no longer have the courage to stand up against them. When that curse is turned into a blessing, Bilaam's attempt to curse Bnei Yisrael is turned to Bnei Yisrael's advantage, as it weakens even further any opposition to their goal of entering and conquering the nations inhabiting the land of Canaan. This is what Rachav says to the spies sent by Yehoshua to reconnoiter Jericho, "I know that G-d gave you the Land, because the fear and dread of you has fallen upon us." (Yehoshua 2:9) How did Rachav know this? From the words of blessing of Bilaam. Thus the entire episode of Bilaam should be considered as an example of the great kindness that G-d performs on behalf of his nation, Israel.

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Rav Bulman *zt"l*  
on the  
Torah Portion of the Week

## RE-QUEST

**From: Nati**

*Dear Rabbi,  
If I ask a rabbi a question and he gives me an answer that I'm not sure about, either because I'm not sure it's correct, or it may not be the correct answer for me, or it may be too stringent when there is room for leniency, am I allowed to ask another rabbi for his opinion? Or would that be considered disrespectful and inappropriate?*

Dear Nati,

I'm going to assume that you have not posed this question to another rabbi before asking me! (Smile)

But seriously, if you ask a rabbi a question and are not fully comfortable with the answer for whatever reason, you may ask another rabbi, but with the following conditions:

For one, you should first ask the first rabbi for clarification.

If the concern is that the answer itself is not accurate, you may respectfully ask the source for the answer, or ask if it's conclusive that the answer apply or not apply to the particulars of your specific case.

If the concern is that the answer might not be applicable to you personally, you may certainly express why you think your personal situation might be an exception.

And if it's a case where you think there's room for leniency, you may ask the rabbi if that's so and if he would feel comfortable ruling as such.

If, after clarifying with the rabbi, you're still not comfortable with the answer, you may deferentially express your concerns and let him know that, with all due respect, you'd like to ask another rabbi's opinion. The rabbi should not take offense at this, and should respect your need to feel comfortable with the guidance of the Torah. If he has any doubt

about his answer, this may also give him the opportunity to reconsider.

If you end up asking another rabbi, you must tell the second rabbi from the outset that you're currently asking for a second opinion. This gives the second rabbi a chance to ask who the first rabbi was and what he said in order to ascertain if he wants to answer and in what fashion. He may prefer to consult the first rabbi before giving you an answer. You should allow the rabbis to give you the correct answer while proceeding in a fashion that will, in their estimation, preserve the honor of the Torah.

That being said, a person should make every effort to find "a rabbi" who he considers to be "his rabbi" whom he consults consistently, if not on everything, at least on specific matters. So one may have several rabbis — one for *halacha*, one for advice, one for *shalom bayit*, etc. — but whom he consults consistently and relies upon completely. In this way a person avoids "shopping" among different rabbis in order to find the answer he's looking for. That would be disrespectful to the rabbis and to the Torah.

This doesn't mean a person can't try many rabbis in his search for one who he resonates with consistently. But once he finds that rabbi, he should be willing and confident enough to accept that the rabbi is knowledgeable enough and knows him well enough to give him the correct answers which are also right for him personally.

Similarly, if for whatever reasons a person wants to find a different permanent rabbi, he may continue to consult other rabbis until he finds another he can be consistent with, but he should be constantly looking to commit himself to one rabbi (at least in each area of interest, as above) to whom he accords his trust and accepts his decisions, opinions or advice.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### ZION GATE — THE BIG KEY

When Rabbi Mordechai Weingarten heard a knock at the door of his home in the courtyard of the Ohr HaChaim Synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem he could hardly have imagined who was seeking entry.

As the last official *muchtar*, district head, of the



Old City, he was the liaison between the British Mandate officials and the Jews. As the British evacuated the Walled City, a British officer had come to present the rabbi with an old, rusty, foot-long key to Zion gate, as a gift from England to the Jewish People.

## SHEMONEH ESREI: THE FIFTEENTH BLESSING

**“The offspring (*tsemach*) of Your servant David, may You speedily cause to sprout forth....”**

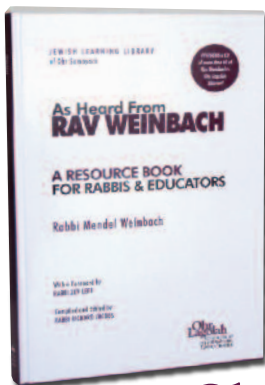
**E**sther, my six-year old daughter wanted to show me her flower that she brought home from school. I thought she had drawn another picture of flowers as she often did. To my surprise, she approached me with a flower pot in her hand, with the beginnings of a plant sprouting through the bottom. She had precise written instructions on how to take care of her flower. So, together as a family we made sure each night to water the plant that we placed in a good spot in the window for sunlight. All was going great for a while; the plant grew so big that we could hardly believe it, until one day it died. We were all a little sad.

When speaking of the return of the “Davidic Monarchy” the term we use is “*tsemach*”, the same word that refers to the sprouting of a plant. Based on a verse from Zechariah: “Say to him, ‘Thus said G-d, Master of Legions: ‘Behold, there is a man, his name is Tsemach, and he will flourish in his place; he will build the Temple of G-d,’ ” our Sages explain that the name of Mashiach, a direct descendant of David, will be Tsemach.

There are numerous lessons we can learn from the above

points. From the comparison of the restoration of *Malchut Beit David* — the kingdom of the House of David — to a sprouting plant, we learn that just as a plant begins to grow under the surface of the ground, hidden from the human eye, so too the “throne” of David is rebuilt each day in this time of darkness and exile. Although we fail to see the spiritual progress we are making through our fulfillment of Torah and *mitzvot*, we nonetheless draw closer each day to our long-awaited redemption. The later stage of a plant’s growth after it has surfaced illustrates this point as well, since a plant grows so slowly that the process of growth is not visible to the human eye.

The story above also shows us a very important lesson. Man is needed to work and care for the land. Without our work we would not benefit from the land at all. It is also Man’s spiritual work that causes the growth the Davidic Throne. We provide the water and sunlight, so to speak, with our Torah and *mitzvot*, through which the throne of David is rebuilt. We are slowly but surely getting closer to the end of days, when we will all merit seeing G-d’s return to Jerusalem, and the kingdom and throne of David restored.



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## SHABBAT

**A**t the time of the giving of the Torah G-d called to Yisrael and told them: My son! I have a treat in the world and I'll give it to you forever if you will accept My Torah and keep My commandments. They answered: G-d! What is this treat that You will give us? G-d told them: It is the "World-to-Come". Yisrael answered: G-d! Show us an illustration of the World-to-Come. G-d said: Here is Shabbat which is one-sixtieth of the World-to-Come, which is all Shabbat. (Otiyot d'Rabbi Akiva)

This above teaching of Chazal deserves a clear explanation, as it must be pointing out an essential idea behind the meaning of Shabbat. In what way is Shabbat similar to the World-to-Come? In order to come to an understanding, we need to first study the World-to-Come and recognize both its connection and reflection in this holy day of Shabbat.

One description of the World-to-Come is found in Pirkei Avot where it says, *He (Rabbi Ya'akov) used to say: Better one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the entire life of the World-to-Come; and better one hour of spiritual bliss in the World-to-Come than the entire life of this world (Avot 4:22).* Based on this Mishna the commentaries explain that both this world and the next have their individual advantages. While the World-to-Come is superior in its reward and compensation for the performance of *mitzvot*, this world is superior in its potential for repentance and additional fulfillment of *mitzvot*. Once one leaves this world, the opportunity to improve one's spiritual standing ceases to exist. It is told of the Vilna Gaon that as he was laying on his deathbed he clung to his tzitzit and cried. He explained, *How precious is this world that with a few coins one can gain reward for the mitzvah of tzitzit and merit the countenance of G-d's Shechina. In the World-to-Come, however, it is impossible to attain such wealth.*

We can now begin to understand the depth behind the statement of Chazal we presented in the beginning. The Gemara says, *He who toiled on erev Shabbat eats on Shabbat, while he who didn't prepare on erev Shabbat doesn't eat on Shabbat (Avoda Zara 3a).* In other words, it is the preparations one makes before Shabbat that one enjoys on Shabbat. The Gemara uses this principle to describe the nature of the World-to-Come. Just as Shabbat is a manifestation of one's preparation from the previous six days, the World-to-Come is a manifestation of one's life in this

world. It is in the World-to-Come that one enjoys his accomplishments from this world, just as it is on Shabbat that one can enjoy his labor from the previous six days.

The laws that govern the day of Shabbat are a reflection of the above idea. Shabbat is a day during which one is meant to feel like he has entered the World-to-Come. Once one leaves this world, his ability to create and perform new activities disappears. In a similar vein, when one leaves the first six days of the week and enters the holy day of Shabbat, his ability to create becomes forbidden, hence the halacha that forbids the 39 categories of creative activity on Shabbat. Additionally, just as in the World-to-Come there is no more work that one may possibly perform, so too on Shabbat we are commanded to view all of our endeavors and undertakings that we began during the previous week as complete. As the Midrash says: *When Shabbat comes it shall be in your eyes as if all your work is done so that you shouldn't think about work (Mechilta to Shemot 20:9).* Furthermore, just as there is no concept of preparing for what comes next when one is in the World-to-Come, so too we are not allowed to prepare on Shabbat for after the Shabbat. In all these ways Shabbat is truly a taste of the World-to-Come.

The Reishit Chochma explains that G-d gave us the Shabbat as a way to constantly remind ourselves of the ultimate goal. Every Shabbat we are reminded of the fact that this world is a temporary journey towards the World-to-Come in which we can no longer improve our spiritual standing, thus urging and inspiring us to make the most of the time we have here. The Imrei Pinchas goes even further and suggests that the way we feel on Shabbat is actually an insight into the quality of the World-to-Come that is awaiting us. According to this, one who spent his week pursuing and accomplishing futilities will experience his Shabbat as a senseless and pointless day, while one who was spiritually active during the week will feel a sense of accomplishment and completion on this holy day. In this sense Shabbat is the perfect indicator of how we have spent our week. With this gift called Shabbat we are able to detect the quality of our time spent in this world and with G-d's help merit to make the most of our precious time here.

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- 1:00pm **Rav Nota Schiller**, Rosh Yeshiva, Ohr Somayach
- 1:45pm **Mincha**
- 2:30pm **Rav Moshe Shapiro** (עברית)
- 3:15pm **Rav Moshe Lazerus**
- 3:55pm **Rav Yitzchak Breitowitz**, Rav, Kehillos Ohr Somayach
- 4:35pm **Rav Yisroel Reisman**, Rosh Yeshiva, Torah Vodaath
- 5:15pm **Rabbi Dr. Dovid Gottlieb**
- 5:55pm **Rabbi Danny Kirsch**, Director, JLE London
- 6:35pm **Rabbi Dovid Kaplan**
- 7:15pm **Rav Zev Leff**
- 7:55pm **Rabbi Richard Jacobs**
- 8:11pm **Ma'ariv** (Followed by Refreshments)

Registration: 20nis at the door from 12:30pm