



Parashat Balak



English version

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IN A DRONE'S EYE VIEW

We read in the Haftarah this week. עֲמֵי זָכַר-נָא מֵהַיַּעַץ בְּלֶקְךָ מִלֶּךְ מוֹאָב וּמֵה־עֲנָה אִתּוֹ בְּלַעַם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר מִן-הַשְּׂטִיִּים עַד-הַגִּלְגָּל לְמַעַן דַּעַת צְדָקוֹת קְנוֹךְ My nation, please remember what Balak, King of Moab advised, and what Bilaam, son of Beor, answered him from the Shittim until the Gilgal, in order to know the Righteousness of G-d. (Micha 6) Our Rabbis learn that Bilaam had a most powerful weapon: the knowledge of the arrival of the split moment when G-d “fumes”, each day. If Bilaam would have leveled his accusations against the Jews at that split moment, there would have been very serious ramifications to his claims. But G-d tells us that He did not fume all those days that Bilaam tried to present a case against the Jews (Berachot 7a). And G-d asks us never to forget this.

The Chida adds this “remembrance” to the remembrances that we recite each day, mentioned in the Siddur after Shacharit. “And I am fulfilling the Mitzvah, to remember that Hashem saved our fathers from Balak and Bilaam.” (Kaf Ahat 25 9).

The Zohar says something so powerful regarding this. *The reason why G-d does not listen to us, when we beg Him to remember the good we used to have in the times of the Bet HaMikdash זָכַר יְקִיָּוֶל מֵהָ זָכַר יְקִיָּוֶל לָנוּ הֵנָּה לָנוּ (Eicha 5), and the reason that He does not listen to us when we cry out to Him to remember the brutal destructions of the Temples, זָכַר יְקִיָּוֶל לְבָנֵי אֲלוֹהִים אֵת יוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַם הָאֲמָרִים עָרוֹן עָרוֹן יַעַד הַיְסוּד בָּהּ:*

(Tehillim 137) is because G-d is asking us, begging us, that WE first remember how G-d did not let Bilaam curse the Jewish Nation behind their backs! (Zohar, Behukotay 112)

Why is it so important to remember something that we were not even witness to?! The Exodus, the splitting of the sea, Har Sinai, the Mannah, the Well of Miriam, the Clouds of Glory, the war with Amalek and the other miraculous wars - those were all known to the people. They saw it, they lived it, and they could remember it and pass it on to their descendants. But we know of the episode with Bilaam, only because G-d told it to Moshe! Of all things, why was it so important to remember G-d's having prevented the curse? And why is it that if we do not remember His prevention of that curse, G-d doesn't want to remember the good times of the relationship between Him and His People, and the brutal destructions?

The answer is that the Jews knew nothing about this whole episode of Bilaam's attempt to curse the Jews. It all was completely “behind their backs”, and nonetheless, G-d saved them. Without even a single Jewish prayer, a single Jewish tear! G-d had no problem saving us - even though we had no idea that we were in such hot water - because G-d loves us more than we realize!

The lesson that G-d watches over us even when we are not watching over ourselves is such an



important lesson to keep in mind and remember. It is so important, that our Rabbis wanted to incorporate it into the recitation of the Shema - Bilaam's words describing our Nation כָּרַע שֹׁקֵב כְּאַרְיֵי וְקָלְבָּיא מִי יִקְיָמֶנּוּ *He crouches, and lies like a lion, and like a lion, who can make him rise?* (Berachot 12b) Bilaam compared the way the Jews go to sleep and how they rise to the way lions go to sleep and awaken. When we go to sleep, we are not afraid, because we know that G-d takes care of the things that we cannot take care of.

This is what happened with the city of Cheshbon. Cheshbon was a metropolis on the border of E Yisrael and in a strategic location. Cheshbon belonged to Moab and it was impossible to conquer. Sihon, king of Emori, hired Bilaam to curse the first Moabite King who ruled over the mighty Cheshbon city. Bilaam's curse was so strong that Sihon was able to conquer Moab and take the city of Cheshbon for his possession. Imagine Sihon's feeling of success!!! But G-d let all of this happen, because He wanted the Jews to be able to capture and take possession of Cheshbon. G-d did not let the Jews fight Moab. So, as long as Cheshbon was in the hands of Moab, the Jews could not fight for it. But now that Cheshbon was owned by Sihon and the Emori, the Jews were allowed to capture it!

Who would ever think of thanking G-d for letting Sihon take Cheshbon from Moab?! But, that is precisely what was needed for the Jewish People to be able to capture Cheshbon. G-d pulled the strings behind the scenes in a way that had long-term ramifications. And He always does.

We thank HaShem only for "good" that we can perceive with our senses. Something we feel, see, taste or smell. But what about the good things that

"happen", the good things that Hashem does for us that we do not even know about? How many times has G-d twisted reality behind the scenes to serve your needs, changing the outcome for the better, and you had no inkling that He was changing the script?

Life is filled with the greatest irony. Things that we fear most in life turn out to be not as bad or scary as we assumed, while things to which we paid only a minimum of attention, such as health issues, interpersonal relationships or stress levels actually present the biggest problems that we have to deal with. I asked my friends who are 65 years old or more what they had to say about this irony in life, and they all told me that it is so true. The things that hit us the hardest are the things that we least expected. So many times in life, we find ourselves in a rut over things that are, in fact, completely out of our control. Just when we thought we had things under control...

We would do much better if we were to perceive our reality with a drone's eye view, and accept the fact that there are many things over which we have no control that we are not even aware of. And still, everything is fine. Because even though we are not in control, G-d is always in control. And this is something that G-d begs us to remember.

If only we lived this way, G-d would remember the good Temple days, and G-d would remember all the suffering of our Nation in the days of the destruction of our Temples.

This one thought, that G-d takes care of the things that we are not even aware of, can be the most powerful thought we have as a Nation. It might even bring the Moshiach.

(1150)

THE WAY HEAVEN WORKS



There is a power that is the greatest power in the Universe. It is a power that we all have at our disposal, 24/7. With this power, we are able to change our destiny. We are able to accomplish the unconceivable. We are able to change the world. The power is called desire.

בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך בה מוליכים אותו. *In the way that a person wants to go, that is the way that they guide him* (Makkot 10b). The Maharsha explains the reason for using the word they, in the plural. Who are the "they"? The Maharsha explains that when a person has a desire, he creates angels. These angels direct the person in the way of his desires. That is the reason for the plural.

If you want to create a good angel, desire good. However, if you desire bad, you will create a bad angel. The things that happen to you in your life are the fruit of your innermost desires. The life you have is the direct result of the desires that you have. This power of desire is so strong that G-d changes His behavior, so as not to interfere with your desire, with your free will. Allow me to explain.

The nature of the world is that each day, there is a split second in which G-d gets angry. During all the days when Bilaam wanted to curse the Jews, he waited for that moment. But G-d did not get angry in those days (Berachot 7a). Why did G-d change His daily second of anger, just for Bila'am's sake? Why didn't G-d just tell Bilaam, "I do not allow you to go and curse the Jews", instead of changing His Way? Because G-d does not interfere with your free will. G-d prefers to change Himself, just so that He does not "interfere with" your free will. G-d is willing to give you angels, to use at your disposal, if you really, really want good, or you really, really want bad. It's your choice. It's all up to you.

I can never forget one of my first coaching sessions. It was with a yeshiva boy who had some sort of social problem. I remember trying to get him to open up. I asked him, "Out of all the boys in yeshiva, with which three boys would you be most interested in improving your relationship?" He

named three. And then, I said, "Out of the three, who would you want to speak to first?" He said the name. David. I told him to say three times, with all his heart and soul, that he wanted to speak to David. After he had said three times that he wanted to build a relationship with David, his phone suddenly rang. The caller ID said that it was David calling. The boy asked me if he should pick up the phone in middle of our session. I left the choice up to him. He answered the phone, and David asked if the boy was ready to join him for a walk, but only if he would be ready in the next 5 minutes. We were close to the yeshiva, so I encouraged it. The boy asked me, "Rabbi, are you a magician?" I told him that he had just tapped into his root of desire, and he had created some angels.

Napoleon Hill's book, Think and Grow Rich, is probably the forerunner of all self-help books written in the last hundred years. He writes that after studying many successful people, he realized that the most prominent trait common to all of them was their tremendous desire to be successful. But why are there some people who have a burning desire, but still do not seem to have reached their goal?

There are at least two reasons for this. R Chaim Kanievsky, shlita, points out an interesting lesson. Rashi mentions the concept of free will, of בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך בה מוליכים אותו, regarding Bilaam, at a later stage in the story than the Talmud does. The Talmud learns it from passuk 22, 20, קום לך אתם, G-d told Bilaam that he could go with the messengers of Balak. But Rashi learns it from the passuk 22, 35, לך עם האנשים, *Go with the people* (of Balak), the words of the angel Gavriel, after Bilaam was disgraced by his own donkey. The reason Rashi uses a later verse on which to base the concept of free will is because even when Heaven interferes and gives you signs that it does not want you to do something, it does not mean that Heaven will stop you. Even though Bilaam had an open miracle happen to him, rebuke from his donkey, still, G-d did not hinder his use of his free will. מאויבי תהכמני. We can learn the flip side from this as well, for people who chose to become great. Many times, people who give up on their desires for greatness



do so because when the going gets rough, they understand it as a sign from heaven that they have to stop making an effort, or that their path is blocked. The successful people, on the other hand, follow through and become great, disregarding all "signs from Heaven", or from the Yetzer Hara, and remain steadfast in their mission to attain greatness.

There is another reason why many people have not reached their desires. בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך בה מוליכים אותו, In the way that you want to go, in that way, they direct you. It bothered me, the extra word "בה", *in that way*. Just skip the word, בה, *in that way* - it seems superfluous!

The word בה is teaching us that sometimes, the objects of our desires and the direction we choose are actually dictated by an ulterior motive - the goals are camouflage, hiding a deeper intent. But superficial goals, that conceal the really passionate desires of the heart, are not sufficiently strong to create angels. You get angels only when every bone in your body is super-focused on a genuine desire. Your need to be completely clear about what you want, and why you want it. אחת שאלתי מאת ה' אתו אבקש שבתי בבית ה' כל ימי חיי. There is one thing I ask from G-d, and that is what I request. To dwell in in G-d's House all my life, etc... What is the difference between the שאלה and the בקשה, what was asked for, and what was requested? Why the doubletalk?

שאלה is what is asked for. But בקשה is the underlying request. Sometimes we ask for A, but really, we want B. B is what we really want, and we want A just in order to get to B. David Hamelech said, I am asking for the chance to be a Ben Torah, and that is all I want. To be a Ben Torah. No ulterior motives. Not to get a job as a Rabbi. Not to get a Shidduch. And not to become famous.

This is why coaching is so powerful. It taps into what you really want. Through coaching, you are able to discover the motives behind your actions and by doing so, to know what you really, really want.

You can have messages from Heaven, but Heaven leaves the choice up to you. הכל צפוי והרשות נתונה (Avot 3 15). G-d gives you free choice. It is one of the fundamental principles of Creation that there is reward and punishment. So, He does everything, just so that you have your free will.

It seems that the only thing that is stopping us from becoming the great people we want to become is our inability to define or recognize our real heart's desire, or our decision to give up. It we can just stop, think, and super-focus on our will to become great, nothing in the world can stop us!

Exciting news...

I am starting a summer podcasts series for women. These podcasts will be similar to the Women's Chabura classes but in an extremely condensed version. I will present the problem at hand, the Torah Wisdom, and the "Selfie Steps", the concrete tools that will allow you to transform your lives. Sign up via email and you will receive the link to download these podcasts, so that you can listen at your own leisure. I hope these 15 minute bursts of Torah Growth will help you reach your personal summer goals.



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