



Balak- Pinhas



English version

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THE POWER OF DESIRE

My life's passion is helping kids from all over the world, of all ages, to improve their reading skills in Hebrew and English. Helping them to focus, to enrich their comprehension, increase speed and to acquire a burning thirst for learning. One of the biggest problems of the orthodox education system is that too many who graduate don't know Hebrew Grammar, or the laws of Dikduk of Lashon Hakodesh. (There are only 250 Shoreshim in the whole Lashon Hakodesh!) Dikduk is a complex subject, one that is challenging to study. Many educational systems attempt to introduce Hebrew grammar when children are not yet ready to grasp it.

One of the perks that came along with my life's mission of helping people with their Dikduk and reading is that there are things that I started to notice in my own personal learning and praying. This is what I realized this week.

פּוֹתֵחַ אֵת יָדְךָ וּמְשַׁבֵּיעַ לְכֹל חַי רִצּוֹן. Opens Your Hand(s) and satiates the desires of all living beings. There is somewhat strange in this passuk. פּוֹתֵחַ means He opens. יָדְךָ means Your Hand(s). It would have been more precise to say אַתָּה פּוֹתֵחַ אֵת יָדְךָ, if the one who opens Your Hands is You. Also, what in the world does the passuk mean, when it says all living desires? This bothered me, so I looked it up. And BAM! There it was, in the Malbim!

This is what he says: What opens the hands of G-d, to satiate all living beings? Ratzon! The word that is at the end of the passuk! Willpower opens the hands of G-d! If you are not having blessing in your life, if you are stuck in life, it is because there is something missing in *your* will, in the intensity of *your* desire. What does this even mean?

I am not sure. But as I researched the power of willpower, I saw that deep-set determination can do amazing things. We are taught this in life coaching. In Napoleon Hill's Think and Grow Rich, he writes that the first and most important element of success is a burning desire. The Maharsha learns from the words בְּדֶרֶךְ שְׂאֵדָם רוּצָה לֵילֵךְ מוֹלִיכִין אוֹתוֹ In the path that a person wants to go, "they" will take him. Who is "they"? Every time you want something, good or bad, you create an angel that will take you in that direction. (Maharsha Makkot 10b) Bilaam actually created an angel that told him, Get up and go with the people to curse the Jews. R' Chaim Shmulevits learns that this angel can even come to a person in the night and plant information in his mind and empower him to do good or evil! (See Yoma 83b. The "father" of the thief tells him, while he is sleeping, where the money is hidden, and thus empowers him.) G-d did not bring the first rain to His Creation until Man was created, until there was Man who *wanted* it. We have



heard stories of how, when people really, really want something, like saving the life of their own child, they somehow, suddenly, acquire superhuman strength.

Why did Balaam's curses have so much power? Who was he, anyway, that his blessings or his curses should have any consequence, whatsoever? And what lesson are we to learn from the whole episode?

קרוב יקנוק לכל קראיו לכל אשר יקראהו באמת. *G-d is close to all those who call out to Him, to all those who call Him, in truth.* What does it mean, to call out in truth? It means that you really, really, really want something. And you really, really, really know that only G-d can give it to you. This power of will is the power of the blessing of a father or a Talmid Chacham, or a prayer from a Talmid Chacham. Because when these people pray for you, when they bless you, they mean it with their whole heart. The Chafez Chaim said that the reason why Mashiach is not yet here is because we do not really want badly enough. A scary thought.

R Tzaddok says something amazing. This power of really wanting something was the secret to Bilaam's power. As much as he wanted all the money from Balak's storage houses, he wanted, even more, to be rid of the Jews. His power lay in his getting up early in the morning to saddle his own donkey, to be up, bright and early, to do what he **really** wanted to do. The only power in the universe that was able to save us was the intense desire of Avraham Avinu to heed to G-d's request to sacrifice his only son, Yitzchak, and *his* getting up, early in the morning, to saddle his own donkey. (See Rashi)

כל מילין דעלמא לא תליין אלא ברעותא. *All of the things in the world are dependent only on willpower.* (Zohar b 162) The Chida was quoted by the Gerrer Rebbe as having said the words אין לך דבר עומד בפני הרצון. *Nothing stands in the way of willpower.* (There is no

other source for those words) The Imrei Emet was quoted by the Gerrer Rebbe as having made a most powerful statement: *We are judged in the Next World, not on what we did or what we did not do.* אונס רחמנא פטריה. *We are judged on what we really wanted to do, or what we really wanted not to do.*

ויגרש את-הָאָדָם וישָׁכֵן מִקְדָּם לְגוֹ-עֲדוֹן אֶת-הַכְּרִבִּים וְאֵת הַהֶרֶב לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת-דְּרֹדַי עַץ הַחַיִּים: The Shem Mishmuel on parashat Vayeshev writes that the reason why people cannot reach their personal paradise is the *להט המתהפכת*. What does this mean? *להט* has another definition aside from *sword*. It also can be referring to burning emotion when someone has a great desire, being all intent on his goal. When the “wants” are contradictory, when they are wishy-washy, or *מתהפכת*, a person loses all serenity and ability for creativity. People cannot judge which “want” is the most important between conflicting issues. This is what holds people back from getting to the Eitz Hachaim, to Yishuv hada'at.

So how does one access his deep-set desires?

Here are the Selfie Steps. The Self-Help steps that you can immediately take to access your inner desire and its powers. It has a lot to do with your inner lexicon. The words you use in the back of your mind when you think.

1. Only use positive inner lexicon. I want, not I should, I should not.
2. Use the word NOW.
3. Be realistic. Be specific. Make your inner statements time bound.

Examples. I want to eat a nutritional breakfast this morning. NOT I want to lose weight. Or, I should not be so fat.

I want to think Torah thoughts now, and NOT I should not be looking at things I am not

supposed to look at, or I should not be wasting time in my day.

I want to give attention, affection, appreciation to my loved ones. And NOT I should stop being the person I am in this relationship.

I want to get up at 6 am tomorrow morning. Not I can't wake up late again.

4. Repeat what you want to yourself again and again and again.

5. BEWARE conflicting wants. You need to choose: health vs. food freedom, saving money, saving time. Learning Torah vs. Making money, freedom, materialistic desires. Financial stability vs. living a relaxed lifestyle, living without a budget.

6. PRAY FOR IT!!!

EGO ON HOLD

Leaders never became leaders by concentrating on their ego. They served the people in some way and became leaders incidentally, somewhere along the process. It is amazing how far we could go in life if we would just put our egos on hold and focus on our goals without involving our self-perspective in it. This is something we can learn from the “Woe” of the Elders.

ונתתה מהודך עליו – ולא כל הודך, זקנים שבאותו הדור אמרו: פני משה כפני חמה, פני יהושע כפני לבנה, אוי לה לאותה כלימה *And you (Moshe) shall give of your shine to him (Yehoshua), and not all of your shine... The Elders of that generation said, that the face of Moshe shone like the sun, while the face of Yehoshua shone like the moon. Woe to this embarrassment! Woe to this shame!*

This needs an explanation. What was it that caused the Elders such great embarrassment? And what was so bad about having Yehoshua lead them? What did Yehoshua do that was so embarrassing?

The Chida explains. The Midrash tells us that Yehoshua merited being a leader after Moshe, since he was Moshe's assistant; he would arrange the benches in the study hall for people to sit and learn comfortably. (Rabba Naso 6, 5) The Elders had been embarrassed to do what

Yehoshua did; but now, they saw that it was specifically in this merit that Yehoshua became the leader of the Jews. ‘*Woe to this embarrassment. Woe to this shame*’ that we were embarrassed to arrange the benches in the study hall. *The embarrassment that we felt then has caused us, the elders, to be students of the young Yehoshua.*

Imagine how far in life we could get if we were willing to subject ourselves to shame for doing the right thing. If we would be willing to admit our mistakes. If we would not be afraid of getting a “no”. If we would not be afraid to give a no. If we would be able to accept the fact that we came from nothing, and everything we have is a gift from G-d.

Almost 150 years ago, there lived in Vilna a shoemaker named Zelig. Zelig was a nice guy, and a guy who barely made ends meet. One sunny day, Zelig got an inheritance that turned him, in no time, into a very rich fellow. Zelig then became R Zelig, and an important personality in town. When Zelig's son married the Rabbi's daughter, it put Zelig in a new light of respect in the eyes of all the townspeople.

Mr. Bitter could not watch the honor, respect and dignity R' Zelig was now receiving at the wedding. R Zelig, the former shoemaker!?

How did this simple shoemaker “get ahead”? Mr. Bitter came over to Zelig at his son’s wedding, when Zelig was surrounded by all the respectable people in town wishing him Mazal Tov. Mr. Bitter raised his shoe over the heads of the crowd and asked Zelig, above all the voices of the well-wishers, “Is it worth it for me to fix this shoe? How much would it cost to fix?”

Zelig took this insult, this embarrassment, too hard; he turned as white as a ghost. He fainted on the spot. The doctors came to help, but it was too late. Zelig was dead. The wedding was over.

This story went viral. It reached the ears of R’ Yisrael Salanter, who had no rest from the tragic outcome of this despicable behavior. He decided to open the Mussar movement. He wanted people to improve their character, so that this would not happen again.

What?! Because of one rare story, of some wicked Mr. Bitter, we need to initiate a Mussar Movement for all of Klal Yisrael?! Normal people do not act this way!! Why, because of just one bitter person, does everything need to change?

The answer is that the Mussar Movement was not created for the one-in-a-million Mr. Bitter. It was created for all the Zeligs out there. “Zelig. You have money. You have honor. You merited having your son marry the Rabbi’s daughter! Everything is so good for you! Be happy with what you have! Why do you get so shaken up because of what people

say to you or about you?!? Why would you faint – or die – from some silly comment?!”

No. Not for Mr. Bitter. But for all the Zeligs out there who take an insult too much to heart, who don’t know how to deal with embarrassment, who take embarrassment in this world too seriously, while they make light of the embarrassment one might have in the World to Come. R Yisrael Salanter started the Mussar movement for people like you and me, who care too much about what people think about us.

Embarrassment is a tricky Middah. One of the signs of the Jewish people is to be shy, embarrassed.(Yevamot 79a) From the Talmud (ibid.) it is clear that Fear of G-d is really just embarrassment from G-d (also see Rambam Moreh Nevuchim, brought in the first Rama Orach HaChaim). G-d has given us so much; how can we not feel embarrassed? After all, we are recipients of things that we have not earned. But all this is the good, positive type of embarrassment. The bad embarrassment is to be embarrassed because of what people think about us, when we are actually doing the right thing. A person needs to know how to manage embarrassment. Embarrassment was created so that people would not be takers. For people to be appreciative.

Many times in life, you need to pick – Either be embarrassed in this world, or be embarrassed in the next World. We pray not to be embarrassed in this World, but more importantly, not to be embarrassed in the Next World, ולא נבוש לעולם ועד.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H

