


**Parashat Balah
(Israel)**

English version

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THE ART OF GRAPHOLOGY

I know this article is long, so if you stick to the end, I have a treat for you.

Living in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem, I have gotten to know some pretty interesting people. The Kollel guy across the street convinced me to try out his courses on graphology [handwriting analysis] and face reading. That was eight years ago, and today, I can decipher many things about a person's personality, just by reading the signature, or looking at a person's face. Usually, I have an 85%+ accuracy. (Just a few months ago, one of my learning partners who is in textiles told me he had an upcoming appointment with the head of sales in a massive retail chain in America: he was eager to have them take his line. After analyzing their faces, I was able to direct him as to the best approach to use with them. It worked like a charm...)

I took this a step further and learned how to read the way people are in their relationships, just by shaking their hands. I have given classes on these three, and it does not cease to entertain people. If I just look at the handwriting of a husband and wife, I can tell their Shalom Bayit problems, as the differences in personality that I read are the root of their disagreements. These signs of personality always give me, as a coach, a deeper look at the person I am trying to help, and they guide me toward the questions I should ask, helping me to know where to explore more.

And then, I moved to the other side of Bayit Vegan, closer to Eldad Nakar, who put out a Jewish book on reading body language, *עצמותי תאמרנה* - a successful book in Hebrew, which was translated into "In G-d's Image" by Feldheim [In my opinion, the English was not as successful.] I

got close to Eldad, and he never ceases to impress me with his deep knowledge and insights.

One day, Eldad pulls me over after shul. "I got to show you something. You told me about your learning and passion for graphology, which I also studied. Here. Look at what the Baal Haturim writes. In the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, Moshe was counting the Tribes. The words used to describe how he counted the tribe of Shimon, לְבִיטָה שְׁמֹנֶה עָשָׂר וְתוֹלְדֹתָם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם פְּקֻדֵי בְּמִסְפָּר שְׁמוֹתָם לְגִלְגָּלֹתָם The tally of the tribe of Shimon, their descendants, according to their families, according to their fathers' houses, by the number of individual names ... (Bamidbar 1;22) A seemingly, pretty unassuming passuk. Right? The Baal Haturim does not think so! The Baal Haturim, in his script of the Sefer Torah, the way the letters are written according to his version, the lamed, here, is written differently from the other lameds. (The Rambam, and the Tur, had different ways of how certain letters in the Torah were, and their opinions we do not go with, Halachically.)

Now, so what that the letter Lamed is not written the regular way, that Lamed is written! Right? Wrong! In my house, I have two fat books, one from the letter Aleph till the letter Lamed, and the other book, from the letter Mem till the letter Taf. There are 95 different ways that people make just the letter Lamed, and each one has meaning!

You see, one of the foundations of graphology is that all kids in school are taught how the letters are supposed to be, and all kids are taught exactly the same way the government wants the letters to look. The size, the angle, the curve. Why, if so, are their no two handwritings that are exactly the same???

The answer is the subconscious wants to convey the uniqueness of its personality, its strengths its weaknesses, its values and its tendencies, and it prefers to do so by preferring certain shapes, colors or curves over others. Those curves, shapes, and colors all mean things about a person's personality. This is why I just enter into someone's house, and I can tell you, according to the design of the house, the person's personality. And it goes two ways: if a person changes the colors in his life, of what he/she wears, the shapes, the curves, his handwriting and signature - the personality, itself, will change.

Graphology and reading people by their handshakes or body language have to do with your subconscious choices. There are at least 8 subconscious choices a person makes, when he shakes his hand, and how he shakes it: how he stands, how he smiles, how many times he pumps, how the hand tightens, if and how the web of the hand connects, etc. There is a norm of the successful handshake, and anything that is done differently is a red light indicating to something about how this person is in his relationships. Israel uses body language to "read" people as they come through customs, and when they ask you, before you board planes to and from Israel, if you packed your bags, they want to see if your eyes move, and in which direction. And that, in addition to the fact that they have trained personnel watching people's body language from tinted windows all over the airport.

Whatever you say, how you say it, whatever you don't say, are all signs for the therapist, whose eyes are peeled and ears are on high alert to pick up signs about underlying issues. We hold Bilaam accountable as being the person who is the antithesis, to Avraham Avinu, just from something he said, that he did not have to!!! Anyone who has a good eye (Contentment, not jealous), a low Ruach (humility, healthy ego/self-esteem, does not look for respect/honor/fame) and a Nefesh Shefela (does not chase passions/ desires/ lust/ materialism). And anyone who does not have these three traits is from the disciples of Bilaam. (Avot 5; 19)

Question: Where do we see that Bilaam had these bad traits? בַּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-עֲבָדָי בְּלֹק אִם-יִתְּרֵלִי בְּלֹק מְלֹא בֵיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוֹכֵל לַעֲבָר אֶת-פִּי יִקְנֶק אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת קַטְנָה אוֹ גְּדוֹלָה: And Bilaam answered, and he said to the servants of Balak, if Balak will give me his whole house of silver and gold, I won't be able to transgress the Mouth of YKVK my G-d, to do something small or big. (Bamidbar 22;18) From here we learn that Bilaam was not content with what he had, that he wanted fame and that he chased after material gain. What?!? All Bilaam said was that no matter how much you pay me, I can't transgress G-d's request! That sounds pretty noble, on Bilaam's side; he even said that YKVK is my G-d! Don't we see the Mishna in the end of Avot with the story of R' Yossi ben Kisma, that he said something very similar? Someone once met him and said, Rabbi, You want to live amongst us, and I will give you thousands of thousands of golden dinars, precious stones and diamonds? And he answered, My son, even if you give me all the silver, and gold and precious stones and diamonds of the entire world, I will live only in a place of Torah, because you can't take any money with you to next world. You can take only Torah and good deeds." What is the difference between Bilaam and R' Yossi ben Kisma?

The answer is, listen to the difference between what R' Yossi was offered, and what Bilaam was offered. Bilaam was never offered all of Balak's money, so why did he make mention of it? Ah!! It is because it is on his mind! The Torah teaches this principle, and our Rabbis deduce from the slightest, least necessary diversion from the norm, a path into the deepest psychology of the human mind!

When Hashem gave the Ten Commandments, that He, Himself, wrote on the twilight of the first Shabbat, He started with the word, אֲנִי. Our Rabbis tell us that this word is the acronym and stands for יהיית נפשי כתבית יהיית which means, G-d says, I put myself into the writing of the Torah, and I gave you Myself, through My Torah (Shabbat 105a). You can get to know G-d, through learning His Torah. When someone writes something, he is

giving himself to you, through what he writes and how he writes.

R' Shlomo Ibn Gabirol (1021-1058), someone that the Ibn Ezra (1055 – 1140) very much admired and respected, wrote in his *Sefer Mibhar Hapninim*, “The handwriting of a person shows you his mind, and the moral of man and his secrets are in his handwriting, and by deciphering each letter, his secrets are revealed.” (Shaar Hahakarah) The Maharal writes that the script of every nation is the essence of the nation, for every letter is simply a shape of the mind; this is why each nation has its own script. (Or Hadash 63; Shem Aryeh)

Getting back to the Baal Haturim. The basis of all Jewish psychology is broken down to נר"ן, which stands for, Neshama, Ruah, and Nefesh. (See *Orhot Tzaddikim Shaar Yirat Shamayim*). If we would place the Neshama, Ruah and Nefesh, the internal person, on the external map of man, the Neshama is paralleled to the head, the Ruach to the heart, and the Nefesh to the liver. The head is the place represented by the Neshama, as the Neshama is the part of the psychology that is in charge of the person's moral, ethical, spiritual, intellectual, value system. The Ruah is the ego, the self-esteem, how a person feels amongst his peers, and this is represented by the heart. This is why, when a person points to himself, he points to his heart, not to his head or to his lower body. The Nefesh, which is the animalistic drive of man, is represented by the blood, the liver, and lowest part of the soul map. This is the part of the psychology that is driven by passion, desire, lust, wanting offspring, the reflexes of fight or flight, the drive for material acquisition, etc.

These three drives are the different drives of psychology. Freud believed that the drive of all human behavior is the Nefesh, the animalistic drive. Jung believed the drive of man is his drive for self-esteem, and ego, Ruach. Frankel believed that man is driven by meaning, Neshama. According to Judaism, there is truth in all three. Hence, the word נר"ן, which stands for Neshama, Ruah and Nefesh. If we would look at a map of the functions of the different parts of the brain we

would see how the uppermost part is in charge of moral, the middle of the brain is more the part of social, and the bottom is the part that is for the animalistic part of the psyche.

In graphology, we split up the writing into three groups: the higher case letters, the middle case letters, and the lower-case letters. The letter Lamed is important, because in its height, it reflects a person's moral, ethical, spiritual, and value system, things that have to do with the mind and Neshama. While the middle height letters, show us the part of the man that is related to Ruach, the ego, self-esteem. The letters Kuf, Chaf Sofit, Nun Sofit, that are lower, are also important, for they show us the lower part of man and his passions, the Nefesh.

So many self-help methods, including the twelve steps of Alcoholic Anonymous, are connected to this break down of three and are the same “three” mentioned earlier in the Mishna Avot: a good eye, low Ruach, or humble spirit, and a Nefesh Shefelah. Nefesh is represented by Taavaa – passion - the relationship between man and himself. Kavod - honor, the ego, the self-esteem, and the relationship of man with others, which is Ruach. Kinah- jealousy, the belief of my purpose and uniqueness of my soul and the relationship of man with G-d, and is by the Neshama.

Now we can understand the Baal Haturim! The Lamed, of the tribe of Shimon, is crooked at its bottom, because the head of the tribe, Zimri Ben Salu, sinned, morally, and fell from his tribe. The Lamed is the tallest of all the letters, and this is the letter that reflects upon the leader of the tribe, Zimri, who was the Nasi Bet Av, the leader of the tribe. And since there is a crooked part of the letter, this is to tell you like the Midrashim learn, that there will never be, from Zimri onward, a Jewish Leader from the tribe of Shimon, although from every other tribe, we had a leader of the people. Also, the second Lamed of the word גלגלתם is made tall without a hat at the top of the letter, to show that Zimri will teach his tribe Shimon in an open, upright and brazen way, to act with promiscuity and immoral conduct.



In graphology, the way the person makes the top of his higher letters, tells us about the relationship with the father figure, as the father figure is usually responsible for establishing the moral, ethical and spiritual value system of the child. The relationship with the mother figure is found in the way the writer makes his lower letters, as a person's passions, desires, and material drive are developed through his mother. Zimri, the father figure, was not moral and caused his people to be immoral, and

therefore, there will never be a leader from the tribe of Shimon!

All this is learnt from how the script of the Baal Haturim had the letter Lamed of this passuk in the Sefer Torah!

Thanks for reading till the end! My gift to you, is, for the next week, you can WhatsApp a picture of your signature to +972585272023, and you can have your handwriting analyzed!

THE ART OF BEING PROMOTED

Why did Bilaam receive prophecy? So that the gentiles wouldn't be able to offer the excuse that if they had had prophets like Moshe, they would have been better than we were. So, G-d gave the gentiles a prophet on the same level of prophecy as Moshe. Ultimately, this prophet, Bilaam, only taught them improper and immoral conduct. (Tanhuma, B. Rabba)

The problem with this Midrash is that the gentiles' claim still stands! "If You would have given us a prophet whose character was on the level of Moshe's, we would have been better people! You gave us a prophet like Bilaam, so we were never given a real, fair, chance!

The answer is that the evil character of Bilaam actually came from the greatness and prophecy that G-d gave him! In contrast, when Moshe received prophecy, he became the humblest of men! *G-d said to Israel, I desire you, that even when I pour on you greatness, you lower yourself in front of Me. I granted greatness to Avraham, and he said, "I am only dust and ashes!" (Hullin 89a)*

So many times in life, we wonder why we are not being upgraded or promoted. Why is no one hiring me as a Rabbi? Why is my boss not upgrading me? Maybe, just maybe, if you would be the "celebrity" that you wish to be, you would be making the biggest mistakes of your life!

Bilaam's blessing, his gift, was his curse. He was the king of negative perspective, of finding the bad

side of people, which was a result of his haughtiness. Moshe, for example, mastered humility and was able to see the good in everyone, while in himself, he noticed only what need to be worked on and fixed, as mentioned in Iggeret Haramban, as one of the main facets of humility.

The Mishna in Avot teaches us that the master of the evil eye, the prime example of a haughty spirit, and the paradigm of an insatiable soul is Bilaam. The haughty spirit is the spirit that won't agree and admit that he is in the hands of G-d, dependent on G-d. Humility, according to Judaism, is one word: Dependency. Bilaam couldn't admit that he was in the hands of G-d, and that classified him as haughty.

Not admitting your dependency on G-d, and that G-d is involved in EVERYTHING, is what brings you to want what others have and what you don't, just as Bilaam was a גַּפְשׁ רַחֲבָה, an unsatiated soul. Bilaam wanted all the wealth of Balak, which revealed that Bilaam could never be happy with what he had. And thirdly, Bilaam saw only the bad in others, knowing that this could bring judgement upon them.

There is a huge difference between the self help and value system of the gentiles, and that of the Torah: in the gentile mentality, life is all about resourcefulness, the greatness of man. In Torah thought, humility and recognizing the greatness of G-d outweigh all other values. Precisely the difference between Bilaam and Moshe. The gentile



self-help preaches that the secret to success is desire for achievement and belief in yourself, because their definition of success is P3: pride, prosperity and pleasure. The Torah's self-help though, teaches, that success is H3: humility - dependency on G-d, happiness - contentment, and olam haba - eternity and immortality.

Fame, wealth and positions of power are not, in themselves, either good or bad, they just magnify you. Unless you are working on your character, magnifying who you are, can just make your life even more complicated than it already is.

It is amazing how humility is a pivot-point for developing good character traits. Why? Because the way you have G-d in your life is through humility. אני את דכא. The word את, 85% of the times, means nothing. It is an arrow; it tells you what is the subject of the verb or command. וְאָתָּה בָּךְ. את יקנך אלקיך. *And you should love YKVK your G-d.* The other 12% of the word את means "with". This is the difference between אותי and איתי, me and with me. (The other 8 % of the word את means "from"). G-d says, אני את דכא, I am *with* the humbled. And when a person is haughty, G-d says, "I can't be in the same world with that haughty person"! (Sotah 5a)

Good-bye is short for "G-d be with ye"! There is no greater blessing in life than having G-d with

you. The worst curse is G-d hiding His face from you, הסתרת פנים. But when you are humble, יקנך, אלקיך עמו G-d is with you, and no matter what you've done wrong, ולא יראך עמל, גישך אל, G-d will ignore your shortcomings. King David sinned twice in his life (jeopardizing the life of Uriah, counting the Jews), and, relatively, got away with it, while King Saul sinned only once (not killing Agag king of Amalek) and lost everything. Why? Shaul was the perfectly eligible person to be chosen as monarch... and the Talmud tells us that, that itself, was the problem. *The person who is given a position of power needs to have a קופה של שרצים, a skeleton in the closet, something imperfect in his past, so that he is always reminded to remain humble.* (Yoma 22b) King David started his life as one who was inappropriate to be king, accused by his great brothers of being a Mamzer. King David mastered humility and got away with things that others would not have gotten away with!

Humility is what protected us from the negative eye of Bilaam, from judgement. And, humility is the only way to have a relationship with G-d. יקנך, אלקיך עמו ותרועת מלך בו. The word ותרועת comes from the word, רעות, friendship. Humility is the only way to have G-d in our lives, and to have a relationship with Him.

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 אֶת יָדְךָ וּמְשַׁבֵּיעַ לְכֹל חַי רֵצוֹן. 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 אתה פותח את ידך, 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 בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך מוליכין אותו 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 רהמנא פטריה. *We are judged on what we really wanted to do, or what we really wanted not to do.*

ויגרש את-האדם וישפן מקדם לגר-עֵדן את-הפְּרָבִים ואת הַחֶרֶב לשמֹר את-דְּרֹךְ עֵץ הַחַיִּים: The Shem Mishmuel on parashat Vayeshev writes that the reason why people cannot reach their personal paradise is the *להט המַתְהַפְּכֵת*. 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.

1. Repeat what you want to yourself again and again and again.
2. 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.
3. PRAY FOR IT!!!

IN A DRONE’S EYE VIEW

We read in the Haftarah this week. עָמִי זָכַר-נָא מַה-יָעֵץ בָּלָק מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב וּמַה-עָנָה אֱתוֹ בְּלִעָם בְּנֵי-בְעֹר מִן-הַשְּׁטִימִים לְמַעַן יָדַעַת צְדָקוֹת יְהוָה. *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 יְהוָה לָנוּ נְזַכֵּר יְהוָה (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 יְהוָה לְבָנָי אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה יְהוָה יְרוּשָׁלַם הַאֲמָרִים עָרְוּ עָרוּ עָדָה 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 שָׁכֵב כַּאֲרִי וּכְלִיָּא מִי יִקְוֶנוּ 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.

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

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.

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' אותו 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. If we can just stop, think, and super-focus on our will to become great, nothing in the world can stop us!

IF ONLY I KNEW



I was asked by a Rosh Yeshiva to coach a certain student who was disobeying Yeshiva's rules. I asked the Rosh Yeshiva what his goal was in regard to the boy, what were his expectations from being in this relationship? His response was that all he wanted was to make sure that this student will have gained Yirat Shamayim (Fear of Heaven) by the time he left Yeshiva. I told him, that's nice. I asked him how he intends to accomplish that. He thought and thought. And then, he held my arm and said, "Yosef, I am going to shake him up. I will shake him up until he has Yirat Shamayim".

I did not ask him what he meant, and, until today, I still have no idea what his intention was. When I coached the boy, I asked him if he knew how to translate the words 'Yirat Shamayim'. I was shocked to learn that the boy had no idea! (After that, I asked many 18-year-old yeshiva students to translate the words 'Yirat Shamayim', but too many of them did not even know what the expression meant) I asked him to try and guess what the translation could be, and he said, maybe it means 'seeing Heaven'? It seems that he confused the Hebrew words יראה with ראה.

This week, though, I was blown away. I read in Alei Shur, by R' Wolbe, that the whole concept of Yirat Shamayim, fear of Heaven, is linked to the word 'seeing'. How do you fear G-d? By seeing outside yourself. Focusing on G-d's creations, G-d's way and all of G-d's works, and being amazed by them leads a person to Yirat Shamayim. By learning His Words. It is a lifelong battle, focusing on G-d instead of focusing on ourselves. Yirat Shamayim is all about awareness. Allow me to explain.

One of my biggest mistakes as a rookie coach was to try and help people to change. People do not need help to change. All they need is awareness, and then, they change on their own. The job of the coach is strictly to help the client achieve awareness. That's it. Awareness of his goals, awareness of his options, awareness of what is stopping him from achieving his goals. Once I try

and help the client, I am out of my zone as a coach. And I am only hurting the coaching relationship. The coaching business is the awareness business.

Why is awareness so important? The answer is simple but profound. You are what you notice. You are what you think about. You are what you focus on.

In this week's Parasha, Bilaam said to the angel of G-d, "I sinned, because I did not know that you were standing opposite me on the road..." The Sefer Chassidim writes that a person is judged and punished for what he does not know, because he did not pay attention to know. Bilaam confessed the sin that "he did not know". The Peleh Yoetz writes that someone who does not take out time to learn, and does not listen to classes, אין רגע בלי פגע, ואין פסיעה בלי פשיעה. *There is not a minute without doing evil, and there is not a step without a sin.* Probably because beneath the "I didn't know, I was not aware", is "I did not really want to know, I did not really want to be aware."

My Rabbi once told me something that shook me to the core. "I am not worried about the punishment I will get in the afterlife for the sins that I know I did in my lifetime, as much as I am worried about the punishment for the sins that I am not even aware of." Hence, the Chafetz Chaim says that the first accounting we need to deal with in Heaven, after 120, is why we lived without an accounting. Most 'mess-ups' in life, are due to a lack of awareness. "I just wasn't thinking"; "I did not realize." "I was spaced out". "I had no idea that it was forbidden." The worst things are said by people who are not aware of what they are saying. The worst emotional abuse is the result of lack of awareness. Always, your first line of defense in emotional abuse is, "Are you aware that what you just said is....?" Because lack of awareness is the most common of causes.

The most crucial intelligence you need in life is your emotional intelligence. And that is all emotional intelligence is: Awareness.

I WAS WRONG



What are the two most important character traits needed for a healthy marriage?

When asked by the shadchan what type of spouse you are looking for, make sure to stress these two characteristics that you need to find in your partner for life: Honesty and Responsibility. But how can one find out about another person if they are honest and responsible?

There are three words that hold a couple together, in the hardest of times. And the words are not “I love you.” The words are, “I was wrong.” Being able to say these words means that a person has two honorable traits. Honesty and Responsibility. These magical words are so powerful that no matter how ‘bad a boy’ you were, they can melt even the angriest of hearts. People shy away from this magical confession, for they are afraid that it will deflate their ego. Ironically, nothing builds the ego like doing the right thing, taking responsibility and being honest, or saying “I was wrong”. There are some who mistakenly skip these magical three words, and say instead, “I am so sorry”. But, sorry does not mean that you honestly admit that you are human, and that you can make mistakes. The people in your life do not need more sorry people. They need more honest and responsible people, people who agree that they have made a mistake. But still, people are afraid of being human, of making mistakes, of being wrong. Accepting being human is what makes great people great.

There is something very unique that is found only in Judaism. A part of our daily prayer is to say that we have sinned. Seemingly, the proper thing to do would be to admit that we sinned when we sinned, or upon our realization that we have done something wrong. Not as a daily prayer. Why did our Rabbis see fit that we admit our sins in our daily prayers, three times a day, in Shacharit, Mincha, and before going to bed?

In this week’s Parasha, we see that Bilaam, the Rasha, who was on his way to curse the Jews, got into an argument with his donkey. The donkey, upon seeing the angel in his way, attempted to veer to the side of the road, upon which Bilaam gave it a

beating. Then again, while passing through a narrow path in a vineyard, Bilaam’s donkey saw the angel of G-d and tried to move to the side, crushing Bilaam’s leg. Bilaam continued to hit the donkey. Again, the donkey tried to continue on the road with Bilaam on its back, when the Angel of G-d got in the way a third time, with no shoulders on the road. Bilaam’s donkey crouched on the ground with Bilaam on its back. Bilaam got furious and hit the donkey with an even bigger stick.

And Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey, and it said to Bilaam, “What did I do wrong to you, that you hit me three times?” Bilaam answered, You have disgraced me! If I would have had a sword in my hand, I would have killed you! The donkey replied,” Am I not the donkey who was faithful to you?” The donkey rebuked Bilaam, and Bilaam had nothing to reply. And then, G-d opened Bilaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel. Bilaam bowed. The angel then rebuked Bilaam for his having mistreated the donkey. And the angel was even going to kill Bilaam, but instead, the angel killed the donkey.

And then Bilaam, who now realized that he was in deep trouble, did the slyest thing, to save his skin. He said the magical words: “I was wrong”. Bilaam said to the angel of G-d, ” I erred, for I did not know that you were standing opposite me; and now, if (my trip) is bad in your eyes, I will return.”

The Midrash Rabbah asks, *Why did Bilaam say “חטאתי , I erred?” Because he was smart, and he knew that nothing could stop misfortune from being visited upon a person, more than Repentance. For anyone who sinned and says “I was wrong”, the angel of evil has no power over that man.*

Imagine that. Even a man so wicked as Bilaam, who was doing everything in his power to destroy the Jewish People, used for his own benefit the ability to say חטאתי, I was wrong, and it saved his life. Here, the man who knew G-dly things that no one else knew, said that he did not know what his donkey knew, that an angel was in his path. He admitted that he was human, and “got away with murder”.



When we admit that we were wrong, we make use of a tool that has such great power. It builds us. It saves us from misfortune. And this is why we say it three times a day.

POWER OF THE OPTIMISTIC EYE

Why is thinking positive so important? Because negative thinking can destroy. Bilaam, the wicked sorcerer, was hired by the nations of the world to put an end to the Jews. His power was nothing more than the power to curse. Bilaam, the most negative person on earth, could wipe out the Jewish Nation with his Evil Eye. No one, nothing, could stop him. Except G-d. How does a curse or the Evil Eye affect another's destiny?

Judaism teaches us about the greatness of Man. The power of thought and a person's beliefs are among the greatest powers in the universe. Thinking and thought can change destiny. This is the power behind the Evil Eye. Wondering how someone deserves success puts that person under Heavenly scrutiny. *Does he really deserve what he's got? Maybe, it should be taken away from him.* Negative thoughts provide power for curses and the Evil Eye. In a recent Daf Hayomi, (Taanit 8a) the Talmud illustrates the power of belief with a story.

Once, a twelve year old girl was walking home. She fell into a deep pit on the side of a deserted road. A young passerby noticed the stranded girl and said, "If I lift you from this pit, will you marry me?" She answered in the affirmative. The two of them swore that they would marry. They looked for witnesses, but they were alone. Then, they noticed a rat, walking near the pit, and they both decided that the pit and the rat would be witnesses. The girl remained true to her word, refusing any other offers of marriage. But, eventually, the boy forgot his promise and married someone else. The young couple had a son. A rat came and bit the child, and he died. A second son was born, but fell into a pit and died. The wife asked her husband, "What are these strange occurrences that happen only to us?" He remembered his promise to the girl; he remembered the pit and the rat that they called to

Try to find it in your day, the ability to say, "I was wrong". This can improve your relationships, with others, with G-d, and with yourself. And more than that. Genuinely happy people are honest and responsible. You will become genuinely happy.

witness their agreement, and he told his wife everything. She asked for a divorce, and he married the virgin that he had, originally, promised to marry. It is from this account that our rabbis derive the concept of the power of belief. Even belief in a pit and in a rat. What we believe – whether it is positive or negative – is going to happen! No one said it better than R' Nachman of Breslev. "Know this. Thought is extremely potent. If a person intensifies his thinking about something, he can make it reality!!!" (Likutei M, A, 193)

But there is something positive we can learn from the Evil Eye. If thinking negatively, pessimistically, can hurt, what can positive thought do? What would happen if I would be optimistic about myself and others, my family and my community? If Bilaam could destroy with his negativity, surely we can build and revive ourselves and others with a positive outlook. Being positive is the magnet that keeps couples together. It is the secret of family bonding and of successful communities. And the only chance a parent has to be appreciated by his children as they grow is staying positive. Needless to say, Bilaam had no wife, no family and no community. All he had was a donkey.

A community member approached my father, Rabbi I. Farhi, with a dilemma. She invited a neighbor who was not as blessed as she was, and made her feel welcome. But, it seems that every time the neighbor came, something would go wrong in the house. *Rabbi, I feel that she is giving me the Evil Eye. Should I stop inviting her?*

My father responded in the following manner. The Evil Eye is mentioned in the Talmud. It *does* exist. People are not aware though, that it works mostly with negativity and pessimism. A person can bring



an Evil Eye on himself and even on his own, beloved children, Heaven forbid, via negative thinking. Instead of allowing negativity to spoil the relationship between these two women, we can bring compassion into the picture. *That woman must feel that she is missing something. Instead of*

distancing her, pray for her that she also have blessing in her home. Pray for her that she have what she is missing. The woman prayed for her neighbor, and G-d answered her prayers. And, things stopped going wrong when that neighbor came for a visit.

DEEPER THAN LOVE...

One of the secrets of the successful salesman is being aware of what the customer *really* wants. The pinnacle of service lies in the ability to listen and understand exactly what is the underlying want of your client. Comfort, or pleasure. Fashion, or luxury. Find out what it is, and then sell him exactly that. The same is true in our relationships. Between husband and wife, there is something that is called a love map. It is the wants, the deepest wants of your spouse. If you are not aware of the wants of your spouse, if you are not serving those wants, then the relationship is at risk.

Many times, the person that we are dealing with in business, or the person that we are trying to improve our relationship with, asks us for something that he is not necessarily looking for. For example. A woman may ask her husband to take out the garbage, when she is really looking for a helping hand. If he just takes out the garbage, fine. But, if he takes out the garbage and also does a few other household chores, he will have a wife who feels understood. He will have forged a deep bond of togetherness with his wife. Why did she not ask for a helping hand? Why did she mention only the garbage? Because the requests people make are not what they really want. The requests are like a verbal code, hinting at a desire that, sometimes, they are embarrassed to express explicitly. They are asking for whatever thought is in their head at the time, but often, asking in a kind of a code. If a man walks into a pharmacy and asks the pharmacist to fill his prescription, he is actually asking to feel better, not for a box of medicine. If the pharmacist is aware of this and suggests that the man buy a few items that help one to feel better along with the medicine, eliminating some of the side effects, the customer will reach for his wallet. That is what he really came for.

The same is true with the mitzvot in the Torah, the commandments of G-d. In the Torah, there are some things that our rabbis tell us are the Will of G-d, although it does not say this anywhere in the Torah. For example, according to one opinion, צער בעלי חיים, causing pain to living creatures, is forbidden by the Torah, not only from our Rabbis. There is no place in the Torah that says so explicitly. Still, our rabbis learn the prohibition of causing pain to animals from a passuk in Shemot (23; 5) that seems to be telling us something else entirely *כי תראה חמור שונאך רובץ תחת משאו והדלת מעוזב לו עוזב תעזוב עמו* *When you see the donkey of your enemy (a sinner) collapsing under his load, and you would refrain from helping him, you must help him.* The passuk is telling us to help our enemy in his time of need, but the way it tells us, in addition, not to leave his donkey collapsing under his load, shows that Hashem cares about donkeys! That is how we know that one cannot cause pain to an animal. We figure it out; we read behind the words. Another two examples of this kind of interpolation is building a sukkah and baking Matzot. There is no mitzvah that says that one should do either of these things. But, if you do not, you won't be able to sit in a sukkah on Sukkot, and you won't be able to eat Matzot at the seder table. Both are mitzvot that are derived by "figuring out" what is G-d's Will.

This can give us a new way to look at mitzvot. The word mitzvah is usually interpreted as commandments, ציווי means command. There is another, deeper meaning. מצוה is from the root צוות which means "bond", or together. The mitzvot are not only commandments. They provide us with a way of bonding with G-d. One can do a mitzvah to get over with it. One can pray with the intent of getting on to the next thing on the



schedule. But praying is a way of connecting, not just something on the “to do” list.

Bilaam acted this way....**אלקי' לא אוכל לעבר את פי ה.**
Even if Balak gives me all his treasures, I cannot transgress the Word of G-d. (22;18) Bilaam worried only about a technicality: transgressing the Word of G-d. He did not care in the least about the Will of G-d. What G-d wants. G-d did not forbid Bilaam to go with the men of Balak . It was of no concern to Bilaam that G-d really did not want anyone to curse the Jews. G-d's Will was not a matter of importance for Bilaam.

This leaves us with a big question. Why does G-d not ask for what He wants? The answer seems to be that part of our service is discovering the want on our own. That extra effort, to figure out what is really being asked for, is your way of displaying sincere love and care.

There are some people for whom we do things only when they request it. These are people with whom

we have a more distant connection. But, when it comes to the people we really love, we do what we can for them, even without being asked. And this is what we pray for every day in our prayers. **רצה ה' . אלקינו בעמך ישראל ולתפלתם שעה** . We ask Hashem, please do not listen to our prayers only because we are asking You to give us what we need. Please provide us with our needs because Your desire is in Your Nation. Because You love us.

This is one of the secrets of relationships: it is accurately reading the love maps, discerning what the other person wants. It is not only doing what the other person asks for or says he wants. It is about making him feel that you care for him. And I will leave you with the line someone left me at the bottom of his email.

“At the end of the day, people do not remember what we do for them. Rather, people remember how we make them feel.”

EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE

Most people agree that there are 613 mitzvot in the Torah. However, the definition of the word *mitzvah* has different meanings in the eyes of different people. Some people believe, mistakenly, that the word mitzvah means a good deed. This is a serious and grave mistake, for this would imply that mitzvot are *suggestions* of good deeds. Take it or leave it, depending on the mood or circumstance. In reality, the root of the word mitzvah is commandment. A commandment is something that you *have to do*, so long as you are a religious believer.

As explained in the previous article, the word mitzvah, in its deeper meaning, also comes from the Aramaic word **צוּתָה** , meaning *bonds and ties*. Through these mitzvot one can *connect* with his Creator. Rabbi Laurence Kelenman offers a new perspective. First, he explains that in every relationship of love, the greater the attention given

to details by the one expressing love, the greater the love. If a spouse sees and notices the attention, effort and thought put into the relationship by the partner in marriage, his or her love is much greater. And when one does *not* notice, when one does not care to acknowledge these efforts at showing affection, then the person is... just mean! Egotistic. Names that I do not feel should be written. And when someone *does* recognize love given by the spouse and wants to know how to show love in return, he/she will look for details to act upon to express love in return. What a beautiful relationship.

This pertains to our responsibility to recognize how much G-d does for us, both quantitatively and qualitatively, attending to our every need in great detail, as well. We should be *humane* and recognize it. Then, we will be able to – and will – love Him much more. And, we should express our



love in return. In detail, in 613 details. These are the 613 commandments, 613 expressions of love.

This week, Bilaam's donkey teaches us how not a single one of the Mitzvoth can be missed or ignored. When the donkey reprimanded Bilaam he said, "... and now, you hit me three times." However, instead of using the word פעמים for the word "times", the donkey used the word רגלים, or *occasions*. Literally, the word רגל means foot. He hinted to him – you are seeking to uproot a nation that celebrates שלשה רגלים – three festivals, each year!

Why did he mention now, out of all the mitzvoth of the Torah, the merit that the Jews have for celebrating the three festivals?

The answer, a beautiful one, is given by the *Melo Ha'Omer*. We find in the Midrash that G-d asked Bila'am – "It is your wish to curse and uproot the Jewish nation? Who, then, will keep the Mitzvoth of the Torah, if not the Jews?" Bila'am, may his name be erased, said, "I will".

TOUCHING THE SUN

On one occasion, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l was delayed from setting out to an Agudas Yisrael convention by a man who was praying in the aisle (or doorway). The law is that one may not pass in front of someone who is in middle of the Silent Prayer (Shemoneh Esrei). So Rav Moshe stood there waiting patiently with his students while this man finished his prayers. His students wondered about Rav Moshe's strictness since there is a view that one can be lenient when a person is praying in a place where he is blocking other people's freedom of movement. Why, then, did Rav Moshe not rely on this leniency, especially since many people were waiting for him at the convention? He explained that he could not move because *there was a brick wall in the way*. That is, he realized that G-d's Presence is in front of someone who is praying.

I want to use this well-known story as a way of getting a handle on one of the key issues in this week's Torah portion, Parashat Balak. It concerns

This is what the donkey was telling him, but Bila'am did not understand. Every year, three times a year, the Jews celebrate the festivals and keep the mitzvah of ascending to Jerusalem by foot. Now, it is to this fact that the donkey was referring when he exchanged the word "times" with "occasions", hinting at the Three Pilgrimages, known as שלשה רגלים, of the Jewish year. The Halacha is that only a person who can *walk up* the mountain to Har Habayit has the mitzvah of Oleh Laregel. Being that Bilaam was crippled in one leg, he could not take the place of the Jews in keeping the mitzvah, for he was exempt from one of the 613- *walking by foot up the mountain of the Temple three times a year*. If not for this one mitzvah, Bila'am could have cursed us and destroyed us.

We do not know what even one mitzvah can do for us. We do not know how much we need each and every one of the 613. They are all expressions of love, that each and every one is so very precious to G-d.

the meaning of the words we rely upon all too often: *I can't...*

When King Balak asked Bilaam to curse the Jews, the latter replied that even if he would be paid with all the gold and silver in Balak's treasure house, "*he can't*" transgress the word of G-d. Despite the very good reason Bilaam provided, Balak got enraged. We wonder, though: Couldn't he understand that some things are impossible?

The answer given by R' Shimshon Pincus zt"l is that there are two different types of "I can't." One type is simply a statement of fact, such as, "I can't jump up and touch the sun." This is how someone expresses that he is truly incapable of doing something even though he might really want to. But there is another kind of "I can't," such as "I can't go to a black-tie affair wearing a bathing suit!" This one is not final, not absolute. If someone would offer ten million dollars to the one who attends the black-tie affair in a bathing suit, some people just might change their "I can't" to "I



can!” But, obviously, the “I can’t touch the sun” will not change even if someone is offering twenty million dollars.

When Bilaam told Balak that he couldn’t transgress the word of G-d, Balak understood him to mean that if he gets offered enough money, the “I can’t” will change to an “I can.” He obviously got

BUILDING AND DESTROYING NATIONS

The famous Mishnah in Avot teaches that *whoever has an evil eye, haughty spirit, and a strong desire to pursue pleasure and materialism is a disciple of Bilaam. In contrast, whoever has a good eye, humble spirit, and self-restraint is a disciple of Avraham* (Ch. 5). Let us stop for a moment and ask ourselves why Avraham and Bilaam are chosen by the Tanna to represent the two ends of the spectrum. Wouldn’t Moshe or Aharon also be a perfectly suitable example of a mentor of these three positive traits? And wouldn’t Pharaoh or Lavan also serve as a mentor of these negative traits?

The fact is that the very names Avraham and Bilaam already suggest a contrast. In Hebrew, the name Bilaam communicates the concept of *bli am* – without a nation. The name Avraham, on the other hand, means *Av Hamon Goyim* – the father of many nations. Avraham’s salient traits – as enumerated above – may well be the keys to his ultimate success in “*nation building*.” Bilaam, on the other hand, embodies the power not of building, but of destroying.

King Solomon said: (משלי יח' א') לתאווה יבקש נפרד Rabeinu Yonah explains (in Shaarei Teshuva) that when someone in a relationship is seeking materialism, he is essentially seeking to be a loner. When relationships are built on both parties’ shared interests in pursuing pleasure and materialism, the relationship can only last as long as the fun lasts. Once the fun ceases, the relationship will most likely wither. Furthermore, when one is focused on oneself, the needs of the other person are easily overlooked. The only relationships that will last are those where both parties share goals and life ambitions. Thus, we can see how Bilaam’s

frustrated when he realized that when Bilaam said “I can’t,” he meant that he was truly incapable due to G-d’s opposition. Indeed, Bilaam did not need a large check from Balak to motivate him to curse the Jews. He hated the Jews no less than Balak, and wanted them gone. But Bilaam understood that transgressing G-d’s will was just like jumping up to touch the sun.

emphasis on the pursuit of pleasure works against any long-term bond or union. Avraham was the epitome of kindness, going out of his way to live in a desert with an open tent to all passersby in order to be there when people needed him the most – and without expecting anything in return. Only with this ethic can a nation be built and preserved. Another tendency that can destroy any relationship is haughtiness, which stems from an exaggerated sense of self-importance. If a husband (or wife) believes that he is greater than his spouse, this can only cause distance between them. *It is important to feel important, but not to feel more important than others.* While Bilaam is the archetype of haughtiness and self-importance, Avraham is just the opposite. *He would ask visitors who wished to thank him for his food and hospitality to thank G-d instead.*

Bilaam wanted to harm the Jews in the desert by unleashing his “Evil Eye” against them, as we will explain. But he was unable to do so. וירא ישראל שוכן לשבטיו...מה טובו אהלהך יעקב משכנתך ישראל (כד'ה:) *When he saw the entrances of the Israelite tents not facing one other, he proclaimed: “how great are your tents, Jacob; your dwelling places, Israel.”* What was it about the arrangement of the Israelite tents that compelled Bilaam to utter a blessing instead of the curse he wanted to deliver?

We can answer this question with the previous idea. One risks arousing the evil eye if he boasts about his success to another person. We cannot underestimate the damage caused in any community because of boasting about one’s successes or possessions to the ones who don’t have much of either. With all his evil heart, Bilaam wanted to inflict this fate on our nation. He wanted



to point a finger at the Jews and claim that they, too, flaunt and boast about their success. But upon seeing their tent openings not facing one another, he realized that no-one is trying to show off his standard of living. Those people blessed with wealth followed Avraham's great example of using

all the excess resources to help others. Let us follow in the ways of our great Forefather Avraham, and cultivate in ourselves a good and generous eye, a humble spirit, and the self-restraint that keeps us from self-destructive over-indulgence.

Bitter Aftertaste of Honey

לא תאר את העם כי ברוך הוא (במדבר כ"ב: י"ב)
Do not curse the nation, for it is blessed. (Numbers 22:12)

When Bilaam heard that the Jews are a blessed nation, he said to G-d: "If they are blessed, allow me to bless them." The Holy One responded in the negative: "They do not need your blessing because they are already blessed." Rashi explains this response by citing the folk saying about the wasp: "I want neither your sting nor your honey."

Applying this to modern times, we see that there are two ways that the future of the Jewish people can be threatened. One way, of course, is through the sting of our enemies. We felt this most recently during the Holocaust when one third of our nation was wiped out. But there is another threat, the threat of honey. The honey of the gentile nations that host us – their kindness and acceptance – can ultimately threaten our future even more than the sting. As Rabbi Noach Weinberg zt"l noted, we have lost more Jews to intermarriage in America than we lost in the Holocaust!

Of course, we must accept that we are still in exile, and show respect and appreciation to the gentiles who host us in their countries. Still, if we get too

close, and what is sweet to them becomes sweet to us, then our people are in danger of losing both its identity and its future.

*
We raise a cup of wine and sing on the night of the Passover Seder: שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותנו והקדוש ברוך הוא מצילנו מידם (In every generation, they stand up against us and attempt to eliminate us. But the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hands.) There were many evil people over the generations that wanted to get rid of us. Some showed it, and others did not. However, we must guard against the נשיקה (kiss) as much as we are guard against the נשיכה (bite).

This major truth of Jewish survival applies not only to becoming overly friendly with our gentile neighbors and colleagues. It also applies to building our life's values along the same "honeyed" lines as theirs. Indeed, if we want to appreciate the honey in our values and lifestyle, we will have to uproot many of the non-Jewish values that may have seeped into our orientation. This is not an easy task because those alien values may have seeped in through the most subtle channels: movies, songs, and even advertisements.

WHEN I CAN'T SAY "I CAN'T"

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Dr. J, the basketball player who invented the slam dunk, was asked, "Do you think it is possible that you can jump up and touch the top of the backboard as well?" His response was: "Put a twenty dollar bill up there and we will all find out!"

If the discussion above rang any bells with you, may I suggest that you take a few minutes to do the following short exercise? I myself have found it very useful:

Jot down all the things in life about which you say: "I can't." And then ask yourself which of the two definitions of the word impossible below is closer to your way of thinking:

- 1) An action that was never done by anyone, and will never be done by anyone.
 - 2) An action so strongly regulated by your value system that no other value in the world can influence your perception of it.
- The difference between the two, of course, is that the second definition may be subject to change for most people. Not for a Rav Moshe – whose supreme value was not to transgress any of G-d's laws and to recognize G-d wherever he is.

If we muster enough constancy and dedication, what we sometimes consider to be impossible or out of our range may actually prove to be achievable. This insight can open up new vistas for us all.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H