



From the desk of
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

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OHR

Parashat Balak

HAMELECH

"Even Though You Are Small in Your Eyes, You are the King of Israel"

In our *parasha* (23:6) we learn about Balak's evil request to Bilam, "So now, please come and curse this nation for me, for it is too powerful for me ... For I know that whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is accursedThe *parasha* continues with a famous episode (27-33), "The donkey saw the angel of Hashem and crouched beneath Bilam. Bilam's anger flared and he struck the donkey with the staff... Then Hashem uncovered Bilam's eyes, and he saw the angel of Hashem standing on the road with his sword drawn in his hand. He bowed his head and prostrated himself on his face. The angel of Hashem said to him, "Why did you strike your donkey these three times ... The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. Had it not turned away from me, I would now have even killed you and let it live." Later, we find that Bilam says (24:16), "The words of the one [Bilam] who hears the saying of G-d, and knows the knowledge of the Supreme One, who sees the vision of *Shakkai*, while fallen and with uncovered eyes."

Questions:

The *parasha* tells us that Hashem gave Bilam such great powers of prophecy that he became renowned throughout the world that whomever he blesses is blessed and whomever he curses is accursed. Moreover, he knew the knowledge of

Hashem and saw Divine Images. How did he merit all of this?

The Spirit of Our times:

When we reflect on contemporary society, we see that there are two different modes of leadership: One is political and the other is based on Torah. There is a tremendous difference between them. It is well known that before every election, a politician will say whatever he needs to say to garner more votes and come out on top. During the election campaigns, he puts aside his own personal honor and self-respect, becomes friendly with every sort of person, and tries in every which way to convince anyone and everyone to vote for him. He will make countless promises and assure the people that when he is elected, he will be easy to approach and available to one and all. In reality, we see that this does not happen. When he is elected and comfortably ensconced in his high positions, he separates himself completely from the general population and becomes impossible to approach. Many buffers are set up between him and the common man, and all his are promises are completely forgotten. Instead of listening to the people, he uses power to lord over others. Sometimes, he will even take advantage of his prominent position to cheat and steal from the public. This is unfortunately not a rare occurrence, as recent times have so clearly demonstrated. Instead of serving the people and being concerned with the public good, the politician exploits his power to



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increase his personal wealth and solidify his own position.

However, this is not the way of the Torah. Every Torah great and community activist knows that the purpose of the position that Hashem gave him is to serve the nation. He measures his success by how much good he is able to do for others, for this is the community activist's purpose in the world. The very root of his soul is helping others, and, therefore, Hashem, the Cause of all Causes, put him in a position where he can help people on a grand scale. The Gemara says that all communal positions are announced from Heaven, because only Hashem, Who fashioned all souls, knows the souls' purposes in this world. Only Hashem knows how each soul can best accomplish its mission. With this introduction, we are ready to discuss our *parasha*.

Using Power and Prestige to Benefit the Nation

Our Sages say that Bilam was granted prophecy so that the nations of the world should not complain that they were not given a prophet like the Jews. These are the words of our Sages (*Bamidbar Rabba Parashat Balak* 20:1), "Hashem did not leave the nations of the world a cause for complaint, to say that Hashem distanced Himself from them - what did Hashem do? He gave the Jews a king, and He gave the nations a king: He made Shlomo king and He made Nevuchadnetzar king. This one built the *Beit Hamikdash* and this one destroyed it ... He gave David wealth and he purchased a house for Hashem. He gave Haman wealth and he bought

a whole nation to slaughter them. He made Moshe a prophet for the Jews, and He made Bilam a prophet for the nations. See the difference between them! A Jewish prophet warns his people about sins ... The prophet from the nations ... in his cruelty, wanted to destroy an entire nation for no reason, without any cause." It is extremely important to know that there are different types of leaders: Jewish leaders use their positions to benefit and serve the nation. The leaders of the nations take advantage of their positions to do evil. This is why the *parasha* of Bilam was written, to teach us the secret of success in life, to use our power for the benefit of others and not ourselves. Bilam was given greatness and used it for evil. He was lost from the world in disgrace. In contrast, the leaders of the Jewish people use their power for the good - to help and serve the nation. Therefore, they merit that power stays in their hands. This is why Hashem showed Bilam that the donkey knew more than him, as it saw the angel and Bilam, in front of Balak's servants, admitted that he had not. What a tremendous disgrace! For this is the lot of one who acts arrogantly - Hashem lowers him. On the other hand, one who acts in a humble manner - Hashem raises him.

The Secret of Success is Downplaying One's Accomplishments and Avoiding the Pitfalls of Arrogance

The Gemara (*Chullin* 89a) expounds on the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 7), "It is not because you were more numerous than the other nations that Hashem desired you' Hashem tells the Jewish people, I



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am enraptured with you [because] even when I give you greatness, you make yourselves small ... I gave greatness to Avraham, and he said before Me, 'I am dust and ash'... I gave greatness to Moshe and Aharon and they said, 'What are we?' But the nations of the world are not like this. I gave greatness to Nimrod and he said, "Let us go build a city [and rebel against Hashem.]" I gave greatness to Pharaoh and he said, 'Who is Hashem?'" You see from here that the proper path for a Jewish leader is to downplay himself (and his accomplishments), contrary to the way of the non-Jews to use leadership for personal power and self-gratification.

Our Sages additionally state, (*Bereishit Rabba Parashat Lech Lecha*) that there were four people whose images were imprinted on coins throughout the world: Avraham, whose coin featured an old man and old lady on one side, and on the other side a young man and young lady; Yehoshua, whose coin featured an ox on one side and a bull on the other; David whose coin featured a shepherd's stick and pouch on one side and a tower on the other; Mordechai, whose coin featured sack and ashes on one side and a golden crown on the other. Our Sages are teaching us that the great Jewish leaders never forgot their humble origins after they became great and renowned. Avraham always remembered that he was already an old man when Hashem performed a great miracle for him. David, at the height of his power, remembered the stick and pouch which he used to herd sheep. Mordechai, appointed to the highest

position in Persia, still remembered the sack cloth that he had once donned. These great men were unassuming, remembering Hashem's kindness to them, and in this manner were able to utilize their positions to serve the Jewish people.

A Beautiful Allusion – "Atem Keruim Adam" (You Are Called Man)

I saw a beautiful allusion in the *Sefer Sfeikos Melachim*: The Gemara in *Baba Metzia* (114b) says that the Jewish people are called "Adam" (Man) and not the non-Jews. This can be explained according to the aforementioned Gemara in *Chullin*, which says that Hashem desires the Jewish People, because when He gives them greatness, they make themselves small. The Gemara proves this from the words of Avraham, David, and Moshe. They passed on this wonderful character trait to the Jewish people, and to allude to this, the Torah called us "*Adam*" [*aleph, daled, mem*].

True Story About One Who Used His Power Properly

There was a Jewish shepherd who used to shepherd his sheep in the fields and play his flute. The king once went hunting and passed through the area where the shepherd and his flock were located. He heard the sound of the flute and was drawn to its pleasant tune. The king approached the shepherd and asked him if he was willing to leave his job as a shepherd and play his flute for him. He would pay him for this, as he very much enjoyed his tunes. He obviously agreed and came to the king to play for him; the king enjoyed it



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very much. The king would converse with him and saw that he was no mere shepherd; rather, he was very wise, and he found favor in the king's eyes. He therefore rose in the ranks, until, due to his wisdom and loyalty, he was made the officer of the king's treasuries. However, there were those who were jealous of him, especially because he was a Jew. They therefore always tried to slander him before the king, but the king did not believe them. They would slander him to the king, saying that he had stolen from the king's treasuries, and that was why he was so rich. They told the king that if he did not believe them, then he should search his house. There he would find stolen royal property. They finally persuaded him, and he suddenly surprised the man by telling him that he wished to go to his house with his troops. He obviously acquiesced, and they immediately went to his house. The king commanded them to search the entire house. They went from room to room, and they saw that the house was very simple, with no signs of wealth whatsoever. They finally reached the last room, which was locked. The king asked to open it, but the man pleaded that just this room should remain locked. However, this only increased their suspicions. His pleading was therefore useless, and they forced him to open it. His enemies rejoiced thinking that they had finally caught him. Yet much to their surprise, when they opened the door, all they found was his shepherd uniform, his stick, and his flute. The king therefore asked, "Why did you not want to open this door? There is nothing inside! Also, why do you have these things?" The man explained that from the time the king brought

him to his palace and raised him to power, he was afraid that he would grow haughty and treat people disrespectfully because of his position. He therefore entered this room every day and donned his shepherd uniform. He would hold his stick and play his flute, so that he should not forget where he came from. This way he would treat every man respectfully. The king rejoiced when hearing his words. He raised him above all his other ministers and punished those who had plotted against him.

Words of Mussar

We have learned our Sages' secret to success in every position assumed by an individual. Our Sages have shown us that throughout history, anyone who ascended to power and used his power for evil, had a bitter end and lost everything. On the other hand, those who used their positions to find ways to help others, saw their success endure. Every individual has some sort of power. There is one individual who is powerful because of his money and another is dominant in his home. There is one who yields power over his workers and another whose power stems from a particular public position or job. It is there that man is tested to see how he will utilize the power that Hashem has given him. Our Sages have taught us that anyone who wishes to succeed on his path and advance, should not look to bolster his own status. Rather, he should minimize himself and speak the language of the people, relating to them respectfully. Then he will be met with success.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka