



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Balak

HAMELECH

Parashat Balak and Kriat Shema

Our Sages thought to put Parashat Balak in Kriat Shema, but it was too lengthy. Why did they deem it worthy of daily mention? Gemara Berachot explains that it makes reference to this that Klal Yisrael say Shema as they wake up and before retiring for the evening.

The truth is that we can gain great inspiration from Parashat Balak when we take a look at Bilaam and his donkey. We see a man who is not able to speak as he wishes and we see a donkey who is given to speak. We see Hashem in control of everything, all the time.

When we read Kriat Shema, we are to focus upon accepting upon ourselves Ol Malchut Shamayim. What is included in that? Some people think about how Hashem controls everything in the world, but they forget to think about their own life. They may think about the heavens and the stars and how Hashem has each one follow its orbit. Then they think about the apples on the trees and the grain in the fields and how Hashem has it all grow and become available for eating.

But what about his personal life? His successes and disappointments? Some people are prepared to give credit to Hashem as long as other people are not involved. But once people are around,

they tend to blame them for their disappointments or attribute to them their success, preferring to be oblivious to Hashem's involvement.

Once Hashem makes a decision regarding when a certain occurrence should take place, no one can make it happen any earlier or later (Chovot Halevavot, Shaar HaBitachon). Nothing is by chance.

Big And Small

Now, a person should really try his best to control his mouth, to watch what he says. But regarding this as well, we are to learn from this parashah that at times, Hashem even takes away a person's ability to choose what or what not to say.

Bilaam said something very interesting. He admitted that, "I cannot transgress the word of Hashem, to make small or large." What does that mean?

The Vilna Gaon explains that, as we know, Hashem has many appellations, each with varying connotations. Hashem Himself is unchanging, but we refer to Him with different names in relation to how He is relating to His creations at this time.

For example, Hashem's Famous Four-Letter Name – Yud Kay Vov Kay connotes compassion. When it appears in shortened form – Yud Kay – connotes *din* – strict judgment.



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Elokim connotes *din*, while His Name which consists of only the first two letters – Alef and Lamed – connotes mercy.

Bilaam knew all of this. In his wicked attempt to curse the Jewish People, he tried to use Hashem's Name of *din*. But he was unsuccessful.

"Whatever Hashem puts in my mouth, that is what I am sure to say," admitted Bilaam. What did Hashem put in Bilaam's mouth? The *medrash* mentions two views: either a fish-hook or a "bit" – one keeps the tongue in the mouth and one forces it out. I.e, sometimes Bilaam tried to keep it short and Hashem made a point of having him say more than he wanted to say. At other times, Bilaam wanted to say something longer and Hashem cut him short.

As mentioned, Bilaam wanted to invite *midat hadin* to deliver the curse. So he tried to say "Elokim", but Hashem stopped him short, forcing him to say "Keil". Then Bilaam tried to say Hashem's two letter name of Yud Kay. But Hashem forced him to say the whole four letter name of Yud Kay Vov Kay. This is what Bilaam meant when he said, "What can I curse?" "Keil" is not a name for cursing. And how can I arouse Hashem's wrath? The Name of Yud Key Vov Key does not do that!"

Bilaam acknowledged that he was unable to say what he wanted to say and was forced to say that which he would have preferred not to.

We are also taught that Bilaam knew exactly when Hashem "angers" each day. It is only for a fraction of a second. Bilaam wanted to utilize that moment to utter a one-word curse, "Caleim" – "Finish them off". But Hashem turned it around and had him say "Melech" as in "Teruat melech bo".

What is the connection between large and small? Well, those three letters – kaf, lamed, mem – are neighbors in the Alef Bet. From small to large they spell out "kalem". From large to small, they spell out "melech". Bilaam lost control of his mouth and could not speak as he wished. He had no control neither of words whose gematria gets bigger or gets smaller. (Ben Ish Chai)

The Mouth Says it All

We find some other places in the *parashah* which allude to Balak's lack of control of his speech. Balak said, "Am I not able to afford you honor?" And so it was. Balak also said, "Come curse for me", which could also mean that Balak is the object of the curse.

Why did Hashem have the donkey talk? To teach this lesson, that a person does not necessarily have full control over his mouth. Just as Hashem had the donkey speak, so too, when He wants, He can make Bilaam say that which he had not intended to say. A person can plan what to say. But he needs Hashem to help him actually



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articulate it (Mishlei 6:1). This also goes for *tefillah*. That is why he begins each *Shemoneh Esrei* with a plea, "Hashem, open up my lips and allow my mouth to speak of Your Praise."

If a person prays and the wrong words come out, that is a bad omen. If he is *chazzan*, it is a bad omen for the entire congregation (Berachot 34b).

On the way to the *akeidah*, Avraham told the lads, "We will bow to Hashem and then we will return to you." Because he used the plural "we", Yitzchak also returned (Moed Katan 18a).

He's a Rich Man

There was a wealthy philanthropist who, at a certain point, decided to stop earning more money and instead invest in *tzedakah*. He opened up a few *gemachim* and renovated shuls. His personal funds were soon almost depleted, so he went around collecting from others, encouraging them to participate in his many mitzvah missions. He travelled once abroad to collect money for needy families before Yom Tov. He found a wallet which obviously belonged to a non-Jew. He pocketed the money – an exorbitant sum – planning on using it all for *tzedakah*.

A bit later, police accosted him and ordered him to empty his pockets. When they found the large sum of money, they got suspicious. He explained that he was a businessman and they could even see in his passport that he travels a lot. The police

asked if he could give the name of a business associate who could vouch for him. Without thinking, he immediately mentioned the name of a well-known wealthy man.

The police began dialing his number and our philanthropist immediately regretted what he had said. He could not understand why he gave the name of a man who had recently become upset at him, due to all his involvement in worthy causes.

The police got through and inquired about the trustworthiness of the person in question. On the other end of the line, Mr. B thought to himself; why are they asking about him? I guess he's on to another collecting scheme. Well, I'm gonna mess him up! I'm gonna tell 'em that he's a wealthy businessman! That way he won't be able to collect a cent!"

Once the police heard that Mr. A was a wealthy businessman who travelled across the world, they left him alone.

Here, too, we see that sometimes we say things and don't know why, but Hashem put words in our mouths which are to our benefit.

Let us realize that Hashem is always in control. Let us try to say things which Hashem approves of and let us see the Yad Hashem in everything.

**Shabbat Shalom,
Mordechai Malka**