



## הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד מרדכי מלכא שליט"א נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד  
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,  
ישיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד  
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### Parashat Balak

#### Man is Led in the Way he Wishes to Go

##### Question:

Our *parasha* (22:8-20) teaches us that when Balak originally sent messengers to hire Bilam, Bilam refused to accompany them. Yet the second time, Bilam acquiesced. The question is why did Bilam only agree the second time?

#### Man is Led Along the Path He Chooses

The *Gemara* (*Makot* 10b) states, "*Be'derech she'adam rotzeh leilech bah molichin oto*, A person is led upon the path that he wishes to go." The *Gemara* proves this concept from the incident in the Torah involving Bilam, when Hashem commanded Bilam to go with Balak's men after he had been asked a second time. Secondly, from an incident in *Neviim*, and thirdly, from a *pasuk* in *Ketubim*. The verse from *Ketubim* is (*Mishlei* 3:34), "*Im la'letzim hu yalitz u'le'anavim yiten chen*, If one befriends scoffers, he will scoff, and if [one befriends] the humble, he will find favor."

#### An Explanation of Bilam's Action

The *Gemara* understands that was a seeming contradiction in the episode with Bilam. The first time (22:12) we find that Hashem told Bilam not to go with Balak's men. However the second time (22:20) Hashem told him to go. Is this not a contraction? The *Gemara* explains this seeming contradiction by stating that "*Be'derech she'adam rotzeh leilech bah molichin oto*, A person is led upon the path that he wishes to go." The explanation for our Sages statement is as follows: The first time Bilam asked Hashem if he should go, and Hashem responded that he had no permission to curse the Jewish Nation, for it is a blessed nation. In the morning Bilam should therefore have told Balak's men that Hashem does not want him to curse the Jewish Nation, and he was therefore prevented from joining them. However, Bilam was both wicked and arrogant, as indeed, our Sages state that anyone displaying three characteristics, amongst them arrogance and an evil eye, is from the disciples of the wicked Bilam. Therefore, when he rose in the morning, he did not say that Hashem had forbid him to go. He merely told Balak's messengers that he could not go with them. Rashi explains that Bilam was saying that it was not in accordance with his lofty standing to go with them. Therefore Balak sent even more distinguished messengers to persuade Bilam to come to him. That was why Bilam would not go to Balak the first time, but not because Hashem had forbade him to curse the Jewish Nation. Therefore when Balak subsequently sent more distinguished messengers, Hashem told Bilam that he could now go. For this teaches us that in whichever path man wants to go he is indeed led. This is why the Torah goes out of its way to relate how Bilam refused the first time. Even though we know that everything in the Torah is



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significant, and Rabbi Akiva expounded mounds of *halachot* on even every *kotz* in the Torah. But now we can understand that the Torah wishes to specifically teach us something by relating Bilam's first encounter with Balak's men as well as the second encounter. Namely, it teaches us the amazing principle that man is led along the path he wishes to tread. If we see that this applies to one who chooses a wicked path, how much more so does it apply to one who chooses the holy path. This is as our Sages that "One who comes to be purified is assisted." Not only is the door opened to allow him to choose his path, as it is by the wicked, but he is even helped along the path, as we will now explain.

### One Who Comes to be Contaminated, the Door is Opened for Him

From our *parasha* we learn that man is led along the path he wishes to tread. This means that he is not prevented from doing so, because he is given free choice to do as he pleases. Yet our Sages (*Avodah Zarah* 55a, *Yevamot* 38b, *Shabbat* 104a, *Menachot* 29b) teach us even more. They state, "*Im la'leitzim hu yalitz, v'la'anavim yiten chen*," "If one befriends scoffers, he will scoff, and if [one befriends] the humble, he will find favor," Reish Lakish expounds (*Mishlei* 3:34), "*Ba le'tamei potchin lo, ba le'taher mesayin oto*," "One who comes to be defiled, *potchin lo*, they allow him [he is given the opportunity to do so]; one who comes to be purified, they assist him." *Potchin*, literally means "they open the door for him," which implies that he is not prevented from taking the sinful path he chooses. However, our Sages teach (*Masechet Avodah Zarah*) that there is a different explanation. The Gemara teaches that Ben Zonin asked Rabbi Akiva that we know that idolatry is a falsehood. Yet we find that if one is sick and he goes to pray in a house of idol worship he is healed. Why is this? Rabbi Akiva answered by way of a parable: There was once an individual who lived in the city, who had a sterling reputation for honesty. Since he was so trustworthy, people would give him items to watch, even without having any witnesses to witness the item being handed over. Once an individual gave him an item to guard, but since he did not trust him, he had two witnesses view the transferal. A different time, he gave over an item with no witnesses present. The man's wife suggested that they deny having received the item since the man did not trust them. To this her husband responded, "Because this fool did something improper, I should lose my reputation for being trustworthy?" So too, with suffering, replied Rabbi Akiva. Hashem has decreed exactly when and how man's suffering is going to cease. However, when the day arrives, the ill man goes to a house of idol worship! He then thinks that his prayers were effective. In Heaven they say that this man should not be healed, therefore he will not believe that the idol helped him. But just because this fool acted improperly, Hashem does not refrain from healing him. The Gemara concludes that this is because "one who comes to be defiled, *potchin lo*, they allow him [he is given the opportunity to do so]; one who comes to be purified, they assist him."

We see from the Gemara that not only is an individual not prevented from choosing the evil path, but he is even assisted; he is beguiled into believing that he has chosen the proper path, and he then continues along his path of darkness.



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### One who Comes to be Purified, They Assist Him.

However, Hashem rewards on a far greater level than he metes out retribution. About one who wants to do good the Gemara does not only say *potchin*- the door is opened for him; rather it states *mesayin* – he is helped. If Hashem goes out of His way to beguile the sinner into believing that he has chosen the correct path, Hashem helps the upright individual manifold. This is the explanation of *mesayin lo* – Hashem will perform miracles and wonders to help him along the path of the righteous. This is as Shlomo Hamelech teaches (*Mishlei* 16:9) "Man's heart contemplates his way, but Hashem guides his footsteps." Rashi explains that if an individual contemplates taking the righteous path, then Hashem will assist him as our Sages state, "one who comes to be purified, they assist him."

### Story About R' Chaim of Volozhin

Rav Reuven Bengis related a story about Rav Chaim of Volozhin that had been passed down from generation to generation, heard from the one it happened to. R' Chaim was always careful to recite a *bracha* in front of another person, so that he would respond *amen* to the *bracha*. Otherwise, he would not make the *bracha*. One time, he was absorbed in a deep topic of *Shas* until very late at night. His head started hurting him very much, due to his extreme thirst. However, since everyone was sleeping, he could not recite a blessing, since no one would be able to answer *amen* to it. It was very difficult for him. Suddenly, he heard knocking on the door. He rose and opened it. Standing there was a student of the yeshiva, who apologized to R' Chaim for coming so late. He too, had been engrossed in a difficult Talmudic topic and did not succeed in understanding it. He decided to check if there was any light illuminating from R' Chaim's house; if there was, he would go and ask him for an explanation. Seeing that there was light, he decided to go. R' Chaim obviously greeted him happily. He only requested that since he had a headache, he would like to take a drink and afterwards explain the topic to him. Indeed, R' Chaim made a *bracha* and drank, and then explained the topic clearly, at which point the young man departed. The next day, R' Chaim entered the *Beit Midrash*, approached the young man and thanked him, for in his merit, he was able to drink. The student was confused, "But I did not come to the Rav's house last night!" R' Chaim could not believe it. "But you requested me to explain you the topic that you were studying. I explained it to you – you don't remember?" He responded that he was not in the Rav's house last night at all. Only then did R' Chaim realize that a miracle had been wrought for him. Eliyahu Hanavi had been sent to him in the guise of the student so that he could answer *amen* (Brought in *She'al Avicha Va'yagedcha* part 1 pg. 87).

### How the Brisker Rav Prevented the Draft

The Israeli government wished to draft Jewish girls into the army, and they had a unanimous agreement. They were only missing the signature of the Minister of the Interior, a man named Shapiro, who was presently in *chutz la'aretz*. The Brisker Rav sent him a message stating that since he



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originated from a town near Brisk, he was obligated to follow the his ruling, and he was commanding him to stay in *chutz la'aretz* for an additional week. Shapiro asked how it would help, for ultimately he would have to return. Nevertheless, the Brisker Rav insisted that he delay his return, which he did. A week later, the Brisker Rav told him to request an additional week of absence. Shapiro was surprised – how much longer would this go on? But the Brisker Rav insisted that he remain for at least another week, and so he did. During that time there was a tremendous outcry in Eretz Yisrael as well as in *chutz la'aretz* opposing the draft and rallies were staged. Ultimately the government's decree was annulled. The Brisker Rav was asked how he knew that his plan would work. He responded that our job is simply to try as hard as we can to prevent the decree for as long as we can.

### Words of Mussar

We have learned that the Torah teaches that it is man who sets his path in life, whether for good or bad. One who chooses an evil path, Heaven forbid, is given the ability to do so and to erroneously think that the path he chose was the correct one. **This is as the wisest of men, Shlomo Hamelech stated in Mishlei (12:15), "The path of the fool is upright in his eyes, and the one who listens to counsel is a wise man."** It furthermore states in *Mishlei* (21:2), **"All of man's ways are upright in his eyes..."** This means to say that a fool also believes that he is doing the right thing, as does every individual. However one who chooses the truly correct path receives Divine assistance. This means that Hashem even changes nature to help him on his path. Man simply must do what he can; for the moment he begins to put in effort, Hashem helps him and grants him the ability to succeed and rise to great heights in Torah and Heavenly fear. Man's obligation is to do what he can and to the best of his ability, even though logic dictates that he no chance to succeed. By doing so, he will receive Heavenly assistance and his dream will become a reality.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rav Mordechai Malka