

THE COMMUNITY PARSHA SHEET



PARSHAT BALAK

London's Leading Young Professionals Platform and Jewish Communal Centre



RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL
TAL Founder & Director

SMALL ACTIONS!

The great Sage Rav stated (Gemara Nazir 23b) a person should always endeavor to study Torah and perform Mitsvot, even if he is performing the Mitsvot for an alternative reason, and not for the sake of Heaven (Afilu SheLelo Lishma – Shemitoch Shelo Lishma Ba Lishma). For, through performing the Mitsvot even for the wrong means, he will eventually come to perform the Mitsvot through the right means.

This is an awesome statement inferring that even though a person might have ulterior motives when performing G-ds command, nevertheless, he is encouraged to carry out the Mitzvah, rather than not to perform it at all, for eventually he is guaranteed that he will perform the act appropriately.

Such a statement requires written verification from the Torah, Rav goes on to bring a proof from none other than Balak!

The Torah states that in his enthusiasm to curse Am Yisrael, he applied all weapons possible at his disposal, including offering up Korbanot – sacrifices to Hashem! In total he offered up 42 Korbanot (14 sacrifices in 3 different places) in order to pray and supplement Hashem to destroy Am Yisrael. There is no greater Shelo Lishma than that; using such a holy thing as Korbanot, a form of coming closer to Hashem, in order to ask for the destruction of Hashem's People. Yet nevertheless, states Rav, Balak was rewarded for this action, with a great descendant – Ruth, who in turn was the great grandmother of King David. Thus even Balak HaRasha has a hand in the coming of Mashiach Ben David! Although this is difficult to comprehend, nevertheless this is a fact – the power of a Mitzvah. Every act is judged by Hashem and reward and punishment are dealt accordingly.

The Gemara Sota (47a) that in the time of Elisha, 42 children were devoured by Bears. The Gemara ascribes this tragedy in essence to the 42 Korbanot that Balak offered up. His intention was to destroy Am Yisrael, and even though Hashem protected Am Yisrael at that time, nevertheless his intention was fulfilled in some respect many generations later in Elisha's time. How does this compliment with the statement of

Rav? Surely we see over here that the outcome of Balak's action was destructive and not beneficial?

The Gemara goes on to explain, that although the outcome of his action was good (Rut), the outcome of his intention led to bad (the death of the 42 children).

Rav Nevensal comments that there are three stages involved with performing a mitzvah, each one with its own level of reward and each one worthy of performing of itself. First, is the performance of the mitzvah even without the correct intention. Second we should vanquish all bad intentions, and third we should perform it for the sake of Heaven.

When a Non-Jew gives his wife a cup of coffee he is making her happy and ensuring a content and peaceful coexistence. Where is the difference between a Non-Jew and a Jew? In the intention of the action. When a Jew does the same action, if he were to pause before the action, and think that he is about to perform multiple Mitsvot; VeAhavta LereAcha Kamocho – love your neighbor as yourself, Gemilut Chasadim, Vedavakta Bo – clinging to Hashem, then he would be transforming his action into one that will not only ensure him Olam Hazeh, but also Olam Habah.

There are so many Mitsvot that we perform daily. Some are due to performance from our youth, such as Tefila – prayer, and others because it is the norm, such as preparing the meal, giving the children to eat. All these actions are Mitsvot, yet with the addition of one small thought, one can transform the Mitzvah into a Mitzvah Lishma. And if Balak who performed a mitzvah and lacked the Lishma was rewarded with a hand in the Mashiah, so much more so, will we be rewarded when we perform each Mitzvah Lishma!

Rav Shalom Schwadron's zs"l daughter once became seriously ill with a disease. The Rav was worried that she would transmit the disease to the rest of the children and decided that he was going to take his children to stay with their grandparents until the disease would cure. On his way to the grandparents he came across the revered Mashgiach of Slobodka HaRav Isaac Sher. Rav Isaac asked him where he was going. "Unfortunately my daughter is very sick, so I am taking my children to the grandparents until Bezrat Hashem she gets better." Rav Isaac

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looked at him and said "So what?" Rav Shalom didn't quite understand Rav Isaacs question, and thought maybe he didn't hear him the first time, so he repeated the reason to him again. Rav Isaac told him the cow leads the calf. Now Rav Shalom really was confused! The Rav continued, you take your children

because you are worried for their safety, but so does the cow take his calf when they are in need of help. What is the difference between you? Of course you need to take care of your children's health, but not because you are worried, rather because Hashem has commanded you Venishmartem MeOd Lenafshotechem (Devarim 4:15),

VeAhavta LereAcha Kamocho (Vayikra 18:19), Loh Ta'amod Al Dam ReAcha (16:19), that is why you are taking the children to their grandparents!

One small thought changes going to Savta into spiritual actions and helps bring the Mashiach!



RABBI DAVID BAADANI

Director - TAL Chazanut Program

PARSHAT BALAK

Eliyahu HaNavi said: 'Once I was on my way and one person met me, and he said to me: Rabbi, I have two things in my heart and I love them completely, and these are: the Torah and the people of Israel, and I do not know which one of them is more important? And I answered: people usually say: Torah precedes all, but I would say: the holy people of Israel are before all' (Tanna Debi Eliyahu).

Eliyahu HaNavi, the herald of redemption believes that although the world tends to think that the love for the Torah precedes the love for the people of Israel. The truth is that the love for the people of Israel is desirable and important to G-d more than the Torah.

The love of G-d for his people is a love that

does not depend on any reason, not even on the observance of the Torah and mitzvot. The love of G-d for the people of Israel, is an eternal and unconditional love, like the love of a father to his son. Eliyahu Hanavi holds that the halachah is not according Rabbi Yehuda who ruled; While you behave like children (practicing Torah and mitzvot), you are considered 'children'. And when you do not behave like children, you are not considered 'children' of G-D. But according to Rabbi Meir, who says in any case, you are G-d's children, that love is unconditional and eternal.

Billam came to "bless" עם ישראל with an understanding that the love of הקב"ה for his children is a love that depends on the observance of the Torah and mitzvot, so he mentioned the iniquities of עם ישראל in an attempt to extinguish the love. But after seeing that לברך את ישראל it was

good in the eyes of G-d to bless Israel, he understood that G-d loves every Jew more than the love for an only child born to their parents in their old age (as the holy Baal Shem Tov described).

Let us return love to our Father in heaven, not in quantity but in quality. By concentrating on one ברכה, preforming one mitzvah for heaven's sake, one good thought, expressions of love in the small and simple things.

Let us take it upon ourselves to love every Jew no matter what level they may be on.

וכך אמר להם הקב"ה לישראל - בני אהובי כלום חסרתי דבר שאבקש מכם? ומה אני מבקש מכם אלא שתהיו אוהבים זה את זה ותהיו מכבדים זה את זה... (תנא דבי אליהו כח)

... And so G-d said to them to Israel - My beloved sons, I lacked nothing that I would ask of you? And what I ask of you is that you will love each other and respect each other ... (Tanna Debi Eliyahu 28).



RABBI BENJY STONE

Director - TAL Chavruta Program

PARASHA INSIGHTS

Some remarkable statistics:

Between the years 1918-1933 Jews made up 0.78% of the German population but accounted for approximately 15% of doctors and dentists, 25% of the lawyers and 80% of the key positions in the country's stock exchange.

Polish Jews made up 10% of the population in 1931 but accounted for 33% of the lawyers, 24% of the pharmacists and 56% of doctors in private practice.

16% of Nobel prize – winners in the science category between the years 1901 – 1962 were Jewish. Jews were overrepresented when compared with other groups by a factor of 6.6.

By 1919, 20% of students in all colleges at Harvard were Jewish. Other Ivy League colleges experienced a similar Jewish intake. At Columbia Jews made up 40% of the student body.

(Personality and Individual Differences 44

(2008))

Various theories have been advanced over time to pinpoint the secret of the Jews' remarkably disproportionate success (greater intelligence, work ethic, will power etc.). One of the more interesting theories posited is that Jewish mothers push their children to succeed more than their gentile counterparts (Marjoribanks (1972)). Now whilst some of us may find this latter theory compelling to a degree (do not grin), I think the expected general response to that theory will be one of raised eyebrows.

From our point of view, the statistics cited above come as no surprise.

In this week's sedra the subject of the relationship between the Jews and their surrounding nations is the focal point of Bilaam's landmark monologue.

Bilaam's first observation or beracha is that "(Klal Yisroel)...will dwell l'vadad (alone); they will not be counted amongst the nations". (23:9)

Now at first thoughts it is unclear exactly what beracha lies behind these words. Is living in isolation a blessing? Does Israel

enjoy the multi – directional media onslaught which awaits its' every move?

A quick look at the Kli Yakar and Ramban's comments on this pasuk resolves this question.

The Kli Yakar writes that at the time of Avraham Avinu's first interactions with Hashem, Klal Yisroel were selected by Hashem to be his people. They were "eternally separated from all the nations of the world with no attachment to any other nation" The greatest proof of this was that Hashem chose, on more than one occasion to take a population count of the Jews, whilst never choosing to take a census of other nations. One only counts what is most precious to him. Hashem took a further census of Klal Yisroel once they had set themselves in the formation of degalim, with the twelve tribes split into four camps. This purpose of this census was to show that the four camps – one of which was positioned in the North, one in the South, one in the East and one in the West – were a microcosm of the world itself, the message being that these camps were what mattered most to Hashem

in his world.

The Ramban adds that Bilaam's point was "Just as I can see the Jews encamped in isolation, so too will they forever be separated (from other nations), living in security...They will sit at the top of the world, no nation will be able to defeat them and they will never become insignificant when compared to the other nations of the world.

In view of the above, the meaning of the pasuk when it tells us that Klal Yisroel will dwell "I'vadad" is not simply that klal Yisroel will live in physical isolation, but rather that they will be outstanding. Their achievements will be exemplary when set against those of other nations.

We are now drawing near to explaining those remarkable statistics cited above.

In one of the earliest interactions between Hashem and our people, Avraham Avinu is instructed to "step outside, gaze at the heavens and count the stars, if you can count them...your offspring will be as numerous" (Bereishit 15:5)

The Netziv (Ha-emek Davar) writes that this promise did not relate to the number of Avraham's future descendants (which had already been the subject of an earlier beracha (see Bereishit 13:17)). The promise in fact related to the nature of his offspring – that they would be "men of stature". Although, writes the Netziv, "The nations of the world also develop men of stature, they are a relatively low proportion of those nations as a whole, where as in the case of Klal Yisroel, the proportion is much greater".

Indeed when in Parashat Voetchanan, (Devarim 7:7) Hashem informs Klal Yisroel that it is "not because of their great size that I chose you" The Netziv writes that the "size" mentioned here does not refer to the total

number of Jewish people but their great wisdom, which stood out over and above other nations.

In light of the above are we to conclude that we are guaranteed eternal and unconditional success? Certainly not.

The word "I'vadad" – which is understood here to refer to our outstanding success is typically translated as "alone". The implication is that our success is inextricably intertwined with the maintaining of our separateness as a people. Indeed our history shows a correlation between Klal Yisroel's willingness to assimilate and our corresponding downfall.

The Ramban points out here that the unique separateness of the Jewish people which Bilaam noted, was facilitated by the universal subscription of Klal Yisroel to the authority of the Torah.

But what can we do to ensure that we remain subscribed to the authority of the Torah?

Before we answer that question lets deal with another.

Amongst all of Bilaam's berachot, we only find one which deals with a specific mode of behaviour of one Jew towards another (ben odom lechavero). The gemarah (Bava Basra 42b) states that in observing

"How great are your sanctuaries, Yaaakov" (24:5)

Bilaam gazed at the neverending encampment and marvelled at the fact that the entrance to one tent was never set opposite the entrance to another tent "so that one could not peak into his neighbour's tent". What was the significance of this behavioural choice? And why is this behavioural habit in particular, the only one highlighted by Bilaam? I recall R' Matisyahu Salamon shlit"a of Lakewood Yeshiva asking why one in general likes to "peak into anothers' tent", to know what is going on in other peoples' lives. He

answered that by nature we like to know the latest gossip because we have an innate desire to pass such information on. R' Matisyahu stated further that we have been given an antidote to this negative inclination – that of learning Torah. He explained that the drive to create a chidush (original Torah thought) is based on a desire to pass that new information onto another person. We can satisfy our desire to gossip by giving over our original Torah thoughts to other people.

Rav Matisyahu continued by picking up on an interesting phrase in teffilat shacharit. We ask Hashem to "light up our eyes with your Torah". Now if the intention here were to simply ask for better understanding of Torah then surely the request should have been more explicit. What were Chazal driving at by using the words "Light up"? Rav Matisyahu explained that the request here is not for greater understanding. We ask to illuminate our eyes with Torah. When ones' eyes are illuminated by something bright, one cannot see anything else other than the brightness. So too here, we ask that Hashem illuminates our eyes with Torah, that we enjoy our learning so much that we do not see or want to know of other matters.

It was through their appreciation and enjoyment of learning that Klal Yisroel managed to stay so close to the Torah enabling them to lose interest in gossiping; It is this appreciation for Torah which Bilaam was singling out for praise.

Perhaps it is this enjoyment of Torah learning, the making of our learning the "light of our lives", that is the key to ensuring that we can continue to cling to the Torah which – as we have seen in the Ramban – is the key to cementing our separateness as a nation. This in turn will guarantee that we are zoche to the beracha of dwelling "I'vadad" and our future success as a people.



HALACHOT BY RABBI ELI MANSOUR

The Proper Way To Vocalize The Amidah

Which is the proper way to recite the Amida – silently, or audibly?

The Shulchan Aruch writes (101) that when praying the Amida one must move his lips and enunciate the words; thinking the words in one's mind does not fulfill the obligation, as indicating in the verse describing the prayer of Chana, mother of the prophet Shemuel: "Only her lips were moving..." (Shemuel I 1:13). This ruling of the Shulchan Aruch is shared by all authorities.

There is, however, disagreement among the authorities as to how loudly the Amida should be recited. The Shulchan Aruch rules that one should recite the Amida softly enough so that those standing near him will not hear his prayer, but loudly enough to allow him to hear his own prayer. Among the Kabbalists, however, we find different traditions in this regard. The Chid"א (Rabbi Chayim Yosef David Azulai, Israel, 1724-1806), in his work "Birkei Yosef" (a commentary to the Shulchan Aruch), records a tradition he heard in the name of students of the Arizal (famed Kabbalist,

Israel, 1534-1572) that the Amida must be prayed silently. If one's prayer is even slightly audible, the "Chitzonim" (harmful spiritual forces) are capable of disrupting the prayer's efficacy and preventing it from reaching its destination. By contrast, the Siddur Beit Oveid (in Hilchot Tefila, 75), after recording these comments of the Chid"א, cites a ruling from the Kabbalist Mahari Seruk, a student of the Arizal, that one must pray loudly enough to hear his own prayer. Thus, different traditions exist as to the proper way to recite the Amida according to the Kabbalah.

The Ben Ish Chai (Rabbi Yosef Chayim of Baghdad, 1833-1909), in his work "Od Yosef Chai" (Parashat Mishpatim, 3; listen to audio for precise citation), rules that the Halacha on this issue depends on the individual's ability to properly pronounce the words and concentrate on his prayer. One who feels that he can accurately enunciate the words and pray with concentration reciting the Amida inaudibly, then he should do so, in accordance with the tradition cited by the Chid"א. If, however, one suspects that he

might swallow his words or experience difficulty concentrating unless he recites the Amida audibly, then he should follow the Shulchan Aruch's ruling and pray the Amida loudly enough to hear his words. The Ben Ish Chai adds that his father followed the practice to recite the Amida audibly.

Chacham Ovadia Yosef, in his work Halichot Olam (vol. 1, p. 157), writes that the Halacha follows the position of the Shulchan Aruch, that the Amida should be recited audibly. This will enhance his concentration and ability to pronounce the words properly. Of course, those who recite the Amida audibly must ensure to recite it softly enough that only they – and nobody else in the synagogue – can hear their prayer.

Summary: According to all authorities, one must recite the Amida with his lips, and not merely think the words in his mind. One should recite the Amida audibly, such that he – but nobody else – can hear his prayer. If he feels capable of properly enunciating the words and concentrating while praying silently, the Ben Ish Chai says to pray silently.



WEEKLY PARSHA OVERVIEW

Parshat Balak

Balak, King of Moav, is in morbid fear of the Bnei Yisrael. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilaam to curse them. First, G-d speaks to Bilaam and forbids him to go. But, because Bilaam is so insistent, G-d appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a malach (emissary from G-d) blocks Bilaam's donkey's path. Unable to contain his frustration, Bilaam strikes the donkey each time it stops or tries to detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking Bilaam why he is hitting her. The malach instructs Bilaam regarding what he is permitted to say and what he is forbidden to say about the Jewish People. When Bilaam arrives, King Balak makes elaborate preparations, hoping that Bilaam will succeed in the curse. Three times Bilaam attempts to curse, and three times blessings are issued instead. Balak, seeing that Bilaam has failed, sends him home in disgrace.

The Bnei Yisrael begin sinning with the Moabite women and worshipping the Moabite idols, and they are punished with a plague. One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a Midianite princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This act brings an end to the plague — but not before 24,000 people died. The laws of the Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer, are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. Hashem commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe

hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of Hashem's mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock produced water merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. The Jewish People resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him for 30 days. Sichon, the Amorite, attacks Bnei Yisrael when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, Bnei Yisrael conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.
Rabbi Sinclair, Seasonsofthemoon.com



1. Why did Moav consult specifically with Midian regarding their strategy against the Jews?
2. What was Balak's status before becoming Moav's king?
3. What happens to a field where oxen graze?
4. Why did Hashem grant prophecy to the evil Bilaam?
5. Why did Balak think Bilaam's curse would work?

A

1) 22:4 - Since Moshe grew up in Midian, the Moabites thought the Midianites might know where in lay Moshe's power.

2) 22:4 - He was a prince of Midian.

3) 22:4 - It shows no sign of blessing.

4) 22:5 - So the other nations couldn't say, "If we had had prophets, we also would have become righteous."

5) 22:6 - Because Bilaam's curse had helped Sichon defeat Moav.

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