



Parshas Balak

July 7, 2017

A Taste of Torah

Money Talks

by Rabbi Shmuel Halpern

This week's parsha begins with a very puzzling story. Balak, king of Moav, is desperate; the Jews are on the march and seem invincible. He sends messengers to Bilam, the great gentile prophet, asking that he come and curse the Jewish People. Bilam detains the messengers overnight and says, "I need to ask Hashem for permission." Hashem appears to Bilam in a vision and denies him permission; Bilam conveys this to the messengers, who return to Balak empty-handed.

Balak persists and sends a second set of messengers, promising great riches as a reward for cursing the Jews. For the second time, Bilam asks for permission to go along with the messengers; this time Hashem consents, but informs Bilam he will be able to utter only what Hashem wants him to.

The obvious question is: What changed? Why did Hashem initially deny Bilam permission, only to grant permission to Bilam's second request? Rashi explains that the second time around, when the terms of payment were so amazing, Hashem allowed Bilam to go along with the emissaries of Balak. At first glance, this explanation is extremely puzzling; Hashem is allowing Bilam to do the wrong thing for money?

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) provides a very powerful explanation for these words of Rashi. Rabbi Schwab explains that there's an enormous difference between an act done *lishmah*, purely for its own sake, and an act done for ulterior motives. Doing something *lishmah* is an enormously powerful medium for achieving one's goals, even when that goal is an evil one. However, when one is driven by

personal gain, one's actions are lacking in strength and focus. Whether one is a business owner, an army general or a politician, success is dependent on the power of one's mission, clarity of vision, and ability to focus.

If this is true regarding the mundane, it is certainly true regarding matters of eternity. The success of the fledgling Jewish Nation was of utmost importance; the entire future of humanity hinged on the Jewish People fulfilling their mission. Had Bilam's motive to curse the Jews been out of pure hate, his power would have been far greater, and it would have had dangerous consequences. Now that he was merely going for material gain, his attempts at cursing them would be much less potent.

Let us develop this concept of *lishmah* a bit further. It is the intent and motive which give an act its definition. If one gives charity purely for the sake of honor, the act is defined as one of seeking honor, not an act of giving. If there is a mixture of self-interest as well as a desire to give, the act is defined as such. It isn't all or nothing, for even a little bit of the correct motive goes a very long way. When we do positive things consistently, hoping to grow in purity of intent, we come to connect with the essence of what we're doing, and, with time, we arrive at a greater level of *lishmah*. This eventually gives our actions an entirely new significance, both in the mundane and, more importantly, in our service of Hashem. It is thus imperative to keep doing - even if our actions are not completely altruistic. With time and effort, we can truly grow in living our lives and performing our deeds for the right reasons.

Stories For The Soul

Worth Every Penny

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apta, also known as the Ohev Yisrael (the Lover of Jews), generally despised money, due to the materialism and temptation it represented. One Purim, though, he sat with a number of coins, fingering them, enjoying them, and generally seeming happy to have them in his possession.

Upon being asked to explain his sudden change of behavior, he explained: "Throughout the year, I need to stay far away from money and the temptations that come with it. On Purim, however, there is a mitzvah of *matanos la'evyonim*, to give gifts of money to the poor. If money is hateful in my eyes, then I am performing the mitzvah with a worthless item; that is not the right way to perform a mitzvah!

"Consequently, I am spending time developing an appreciation for money so that by the time I give the money to the poor, the coins will be something important and worthy with which I can perform the mitzvah!"

Our Sages infer the idea of performing a mitzvah even if one has a vested interest from the fact that Balak was rewarded for bringing sacrifices, even though his intent was to enable Bilam to curse the Jewish People. One should perform a mitzvah even with less-than-pure motives, but we must always strive to improve our mitzvah performance and the intentions that come with that performance.

Kollel Happenings

RABBANIT MIZRACHI AT THREE LOCATIONS!

The Women's Division of the Denver Community Kollel present a video for women, **Growth During Challenging Times**.

Three Locations & Times!

Sunday, July 16 at the Sommers home, 4902 S. Xenia

Monday, July 17 at Beth Jacob High School, 5100 W. 14th Ave.

Tuesday, July 18 at the Halpern Home, 210 S. Oneida St.

Rabbanit Yemima is one of the most in-demand speakers today, attracting hundreds of women to her lectures, where she presents deep messages with a sense of humor. Sponsorship available. No charge, suggested donation of \$5 to help cover costs of future video presentations.

SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention bachurim in Denver over the summer! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Side Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursday. Night seder begins at 8 pm, with ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the sedorim. For further details, info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact rmf@denverkollel.org.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: What great tragic event in Jewish history took place on the 9th day of Tammuz?

A: The verses in Yirmiyahu (Ch. 52) relate that the walls surrounding Yerushalayim were breached on the 9th of Tammuz. The Gemara (Ta'anis 28b) explains that while this was the case for the First Temple, the Second Temple's city walls were breached on the 17th of Tammuz. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 549:2) explains that we fast on the 17th (not the 9th), because marking the Second Temple's destruction is primary.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (quoted by Tosafos, Rosh Hashana 18b) argues with the abovementioned passage; the First Temple's city walls were breached on the 17th of Tammuz as well! Accordingly, the Yerushalmi explains that the date was recorded improperly at the time. The verses are only retelling the story as it occurred in the eyes of the people, but it is not recording the accurate date for posterity!

This week's question: What is the source for marking a parent's *yarzeit*?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Shlomo Luria, the Maharshal Part VII

In *Yam Shel Shlomo*, the Maharshal thoroughly analyzes and dissects the relevant Talmudic sources as well as later Torah authorities until his time. His decisions are predicated upon his analysis of the material, not draw conclusions based on the weight of earlier authorities. In this, he departed sharply from the approach of Rabbi Yosef Karo in his *Bais Yosef* and *Shulchan Aruch*, where he largely ruled in accordance with the majority of three major medieval giants, the Rif, the Rambam and the Rosh. The Maharshal believed that later generations were able to draw their own conclusions based on their own thorough study of a Torah subject, even if one's inference was at odds with the opinions of earlier authorities.

Another major work written by the Maharshal is *Chochmas Shlomo*, a gloss of the Talmud. Much of this work is devoted to correcting textual errors that had crept into the Talmud over the centuries due to copyist's and printer's errors. He also comments on the Talmud, Rashi and Tosafos. An abridged version of the commentary appears in the back of modern standard editions of the Talmud.

The original work is far lengthier than what appears in the back of the Talmud.

The Maharshal also wrote *Yerios Shlomo*, a super-commentary on Rashi's Torah commentary. His responsa have been published, as well.

The aforementioned Talmudic commentary *Chochmas Shlomo* is not the only work to appear on the pages of that section in the back of the Talmud; it appears on the bottom of the page, side-by-side with the commentary of the Maharam, Rabbi Meir of Lublin (1558-1616), who was the head of the yeshiva in Lublin. On the top of the page appears the commentary of the Maharasha, Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (1555-1631), a contemporary of the Maharam.

There is a story connected with this arrangement of commentaries. (*This story was originally published in the Yated Ne'eman, though it has been somewhat edited.*)

In Lublin, there were two yeshivos, one headed by the Maharam, and the other by Rabbi Shimon Zev Auerbach, the Maharshal's son-in-law.

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