



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Balak 5776

July 22, 2016

A Taste of Torah

Eye For An I

By Rabbi Eli Mozes

In the long chronicles of the numerous, infamous people who attempted to destroy the Jewish people, there is an extensive chapter titled Bilam. A man who, on the one hand, merited an unprecedented level of prophecy and revelation from Hashem, yet attempted to bring a terrible end to Hashem's Chosen People. In Pirkei Avos (5:19), Bilam is held up as the archetypical counterpoint to Avraham and all that he stood for. We must wonder, what is it about Bilam which is so inimical to the Jewish way?

The mishna doesn't leave us guessing. "Those who have a good eye, a humble spirit, and a meek soul are among the disciples of our forefather Avraham. Those who have an evil eye, an arrogant spirit and an expansive soul are among the disciples of the wicked Bilam." The mishna is teaching us the attributes of a student of Avraham so that we can work on these character traits, while at the same time expunging any Bilam-esque attitudes from our hearts.

When we focus on these three things, the latter two, "a humble spirit and a meek soul," bespeak (according to some commentators) personal modesty and humility when relating to others, as opposed to Bilam's conceit and attitude of superiority. But what exactly is a "good eye," and how does that differ from a "bad eye?"

I heard a beautiful explanation of this term from Rabbi Shmuel Blech. When you think of Avraham, the *Amud Hachessed* (Pillar of Loving Kindness), and how he would open his tent to everyone, even three lowly travelers covered in dust (who were, unbeknownst to him, angels), how would you define his outstanding attribute? Would you not say that it was a good heart? Why, instead, does the mishna attribute his greatness to a good eye?

Rabbi Blech explained that if Avraham would have had a good heart, then his thought process would have been, "Look

at those three dusty travelers. They are likely idol worshippers! However, it's a mitzvah to be kind to everyone, so I will treat them like royalty." However, with a good eye, it's a completely different thought process. "Look at those three wonderful gentlemen; I can see the *Tzelem Elokim* (Likeness of G-d endowed to Mankind) shining through that thin layer of dust. What can I possibly do to accord them the respect they deserve? I had better run and slaughter three calves so that I can serve each one fresh tongue."

A good heart defines me as a person: It doesn't matter who you are, I will be kind and giving to you, because that's who I am. However, with a good eye, it's not about me, it's about you. I may not personally be such a giving, loving person, but when I look at you and see how great and noble you are, I have no choice but to treat you with the utmost respect.

People are complex, and how we view them is subjective. Every time we encounter someone, we are faced with the choice of either being a student of Avraham and always finding the good in him, or we can pull a Bilam, who thought that even amongst Hashem's Chosen People he could dig up enough dirt to paint them in a negative light.

This leaves us with one more issue we still need to address: What is the relationship between the good and bad eye and the other two attributes, which focus on humility versus arrogance? Perhaps we can say that the ability to look at others with a good eye is entirely dependent on humbleness. One who is haughty feels that the entire world revolves around him, and he will never be able to look at another with the express interest of finding good. He views everyone else as a nuisance, competition for his deserved seat at the top of the totem pole. The mind of the conceited person feels he must do whatever he can to cut everyone else down a few notches. It is only with humility that we aren't threatened by

Stories For The Soul

You Never Know

A man once came to Rabbi Aryeh Rodin, rabbi of Congregation Rodfei Shalom of Dallas, to make a contribution to his synagogue. The fellow, who was Jewish but not religious, spoke with Rabbi Rodin, and then gave him a donation for \$2,000. Rabbi Rodin was quite surprised at the man's generosity, and asked him why he had chosen to give such a large sum to a synagogue he had just encountered for the first time.

The man explained that he had just returned from Jerusalem. While there, he had visited the Western Wall and had seen a man praying with great intensity. The donor explained that he was very moved by this person's prayer and had resolved that he would make a contribution to the institution in Dallas where that man would feel most comfortable praying. Upon returning to Dallas, he asked some people where a man with side locks, a long black coat and broad black hat would pray were he to visit Dallas - and Rabbi Rodin's synagogue was the address he was given.

Rabbi Rodin and the man became friends. They studied Torah together, and the fellow and his family began attending services at the synagogue. The man, who was rather wealthy, also became a major donor to the synagogue, enabling Jewish outreach programs and, eventually, helping the institution construct a magnificent new building, which they desperately needed.

Rabbi Rodin comments that the Jew who was observed praying on that day hasn't the slightest inkling what he accomplished. After he passes from this world, he will come before the Heavenly Court, where he will be informed of the many merits he has due to the Torah studied and mitzvos performed in Dallas because of his actions. This fellow will likely respond, "What's Dallas?!"

Our Sages tell us that Balak's sacrifices to G-d, insincere as they were, had a positive effect: the famed convert Ruth descended from him in the merit of those sacrifices. We can never know what far-reaching effect even seemingly insignificant actions will have.

Kollel Happenings

SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention boys entering 7th grade and older! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Side Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursday, mincha 7:45 pm, followed by learning. Ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the schedule. For info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact rnf@denverkollel.org.

RABBANIT MIZRACHI ON JULY 31ST

The Women's Division of the Denver Community Kollel and Aish Denver present a video for women, *Leading up to Tisha B'Av*. Sunday, July 31st at 8 pm at Aish Denver. 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. Lecture sponsored by Reb Zvi and Shoshana Gelt. No charge, suggested donation of \$5 to help cover costs of future video presentations.

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SHACHNE SOMMERS

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights, 7:40-8:30 pm, at the Kollel for men, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at the Southeast Kollel Torah center, 8-9 pm, for men and women.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: How many of our *brachos* (blessings) are not recited on Shabbos, (besides the middle *brachos* of the weekday *amida* which are replaced by the one special Shabbos *bracha*)?

A: 1) The blessings on *tefillin*, which are not worn on Shabbos. 2) The final blessing before the *amida* at *maariv* according to the Ashkenazic custom (*Baruch Hashem L'olam*) is omitted on Shabbos. 3) *Kiddush Levana* is not recited on Shabbos unless it is the final

night of the month to do so (See Mishnah Berurah 426:12). 4) According to some, the blessing on blossoming trees should not be recited on Shabbos (see Kaf Hachayim, Orach Chaim 226:4)

This week's question: During the summer months, someone erroneously said "*mashiv haruach*" during his *amida*, did not correct the mistake, and yet does not have to repeat the prayer. How is this possible?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

The Rambam - Part X

Following the Rambam's passing, the controversy that swirled around him and his works continued. The Rambam's surviving son, Rabbi Avraham (known as Rabbi Avraham ben Harambam), was a great Torah scholar and prodigious individual in his own right. He succeeded his father as a halachic authority, as leader of the Jewish community in Egypt, and as the court physician in Cairo. Rabbi Avraham staunchly defended his father's positions from criticism and attacks; as with the Rambam's letters, much insight into some of the difficult passages in the Rambam's works can be clarified based upon his son's writings.

Unfortunately, the attacks on the Rambam's works did not abate. On the contrary, they increased. As often happens, great people disagree on ideas, while small people attack personally, and this situation was no exception.

In 1232, Rabbi Shlomo min Hahar (lit., Rabbi Shlomo of the Mountain; he was from Montpellier, and it was common for a person to bear the name of his native land), a prominent Torah authority in Provence,

issued a ban on the Rambam's works. Rabbi Shlomo felt that there were many who were being led astray by the confusion created by involvement in philosophy, and that the Rambam's works were abetting that trend. Several of his prominent disciples co-signed the ban, including the great medieval Torah authority and commentator Rabbi Yonah of Gerona (1180-1263). They were joined by the disciples of Rabbi Shmuel ben Eli of Baghdad, who, following in their teacher's footsteps, vociferously opposed the Rambam.

This ban was met by a counter-ban by the Rambam's supporters against the anti-Rambam camp. The masses joined the fray, and the fires of *machlokes* (dispute) raged uncontrollably. Some overzealous and misguided individuals denounced the Rambam's works to the Catholic Church, claiming they contained statements against Christianity. The Church was all-too-eager to take advantage of the opportunity and, in 1233, the Rambam's works were burned in a public square in Paris behind Champs Elysees.

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anyone else, and we can actually look at others and see what makes them special. The only way you can wear rose colored glasses is if your nose isn't way up in the air. Let us be students of Avraham, who, as

the aforementioned mishna states, "eat the fruits of their good deeds in this world and receive the World to Come," as opposed to the students of Bilam, who "descend into the well of destruction."