

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Balak

June 23, 2010

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

<i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>	<u>Page</u>
1. <i>The Moment Could Make a Difference</i>	2
2. <i>G'd's Communication with Mankind</i>	2
3. <i>The Lethal Eye of Bilaam</i>	3
4. <i>Understanding the Connotation of Dust</i>	4
5. <i>Seeing G'd as He Wants to Be Seen</i>	5

About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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And over

Balak

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. The Moment Could Make a Difference

At the beginning of the Portion of Balak, Rashi cites the Midrash that asks, "Why did G'd allow His Divine Presence to come upon a non-Jew (Bilaam) who was evil?" In order to be qualified as a prophet, one must possess special spiritual qualities and characteristics. Not only was Bilaam deficient in every quality, he was evil and the antithesis of all that is holy. The Midrash explains, "It is so that when the Day of Judgment will come upon the nations of the world for all the evil that they had perpetrated they will not be able to respond to G'd that they chose an evil path because they were not given a prophet as the Jewish people were given. Thus, G'd offered them Bilaam as their prophet." If G'd would have offered them a prophet such as Moshe, then they would have had a chance to perceive truth and holiness. However, He presented them with Bilaam, who was a personification of evil whose behavior was depraved and perverted. He was a man who despised and detested spirituality to the extreme. Although he was a prophet, he believed that he could deceive G'd. Why was Bilaam, a man who was evil, a valid response to the claim of the nations of the world?

The Gemara in Tractate Zevachim tells us that when G'd was giving the Torah at Sinai to the Jewish people, the earth quaked so violently that the nations of the world believed that the world was coming to an end. They came to Bilaam, their prophet, stating, "G'd is destroying the world." Bilaam responded, "It is not possible that He is destroying the world, because after the Great Flood G'd entered into a covenant with existence that He would not destroy the world." They replied, "G'd only promised not to destroy the world with water. Perhaps He is destroying it with fire." Bilaam said to them, "You fools! Do you not realize that G'd is giving His strength/power to the Jewish people (which is the Torah). It is because of this monumental moment that the world is quaking." To this the nations of the world responded, "G'd should bless His people with Peace." Despite the fact that Bilaam had given them an understanding of the gravity and profoundness of the moment, they turned away and returned to their idolatrous and evil ways.

One would think that after experiencing such an awesome event such as the world quaking to the point of destruction that it would have impacted the nations to recognize truth. They should have embraced G'dliness and gravitate to become part of His people. However, this was not their interest. This was the first and last opportunity that was presented to the nations of the world to decide if they were to, at a minimum, become devout Noahides, or turn away from the path of G'd and ignore what they had witnessed. They chose the latter. Without Bilaam, their prophet, they would have not have been able to make a choice. It was only because Bilaam had given them an understanding of what was taking place at that moment, that the nations of the world were given the opportunity to make a choice. Bilaam's only value as a prophet was to explain to the nations at that moment what was taking place. Despite the source of the information, which was a Divine link, they chose to abandon G'd and everything that He represents. Beyond that point Bilaam no longer had any positive value regarding their spiritual growth.

2. G'd's Communication with Mankind

The Midrash asks, "Why did G'd allow His Divine Presence to come upon a non-Jew (Bilaam) who was evil? It is so that when the Day of Judgment will come upon the nations of the world for all the evil that they had perpetrated they will not be able to say to G'd that they chose an evil path because they were not given a prophet as the Jewish people were given. G'd offered them Bilaam as their prophet." By giving the nations of the world Bilaam, who was the personification of evil, to be their prophet, how will this satisfy their claim that they will ultimately make in their defense? Seemingly, the value of a prophet is to present to the nations a proper perspective in order to allow them to choose the correct path. This was not the case with Bilaam.

Rambam in the Thirteen Tenets of Belief writes, "I believe with absolute faith that all the words of the prophets are true." This is a fundamental of Jewish belief. If an individual is established as a prophet, when he speaks in the Name of G'd, it must be accepted as the true words of the Omnipotent One. Another of the Tenets states that

the prophecy of Moshe was true and that he was the father of all prophets, both those who preceded him and those who followed him. It is necessary to believe that the words of the prophets are true because G'd had created existence with a purpose and objective. Without G'd communicating to mankind his objective, man would have no inkling of His Will. It would be absurd to say that G'd created such a magnificent creation with a specific purpose and He left it in the hands of man to come upon His purpose without assistance. It is therefore compelling to say that G'd definitely communicated His Will to man through prophecy. One must believe that Moshe was the greatest of all prophets because it was through him that G'd had communicated the Torah to the Jewish people. If Moshe would not be accepted as the ultimate prophet, the Torah itself would no longer be immutable. It could be contradicted by others who claim to speak in the Name of G'd. The authenticity and immutability of Torah is based on this principle.

If G'd did not provide a prophet to the nations of the world, they could say that G'd had abandoned them and left their choices to chance. If in fact G'd would want them to live as proper Noahides there would be a line of communication to them through a prophet. Therefore, their claim at the end of time that they were not given a prophet would be justified. By giving them Bilaam, although he personally was evil and had no relevance to holiness or directing them along a righteous path, G'd provided him as the prophet for the nations. Thus, He revealed his interest in them. If Bilaam were to communicate concepts and principles that seem to be contrary to truth and goodness, they have a right to reject his teachings.

Since the destruction of the First Temple, there is no longer have prophecy. The era of prophecy came to an end with the building of the Second Temple. Nevertheless, the Jewish people were given the Torah, Written and Oral, which is the eternal Word of G'd that was transmitted through Moshe. It is the guideline and prescription for the Jewish people to live their lives until the end of time. Every conceivable issue relating to the spiritual and physical is determined through the Torah's perspective. Those individuals who are classified as Torah sages, because of their immersion and continuous involvement in Torah, become spiritualized through its study. Consequently, because of their advanced spiritual orientation, they are endowed with a sense and level of clarity to process all aspects of life to conform with Torah. These individuals are known to possess "*Daas Torah*." Their minds and senses are imbued with Torah perspective.

3. *The Lethal Eye of Bilaam*

Bilaam, the prophet of the nations of the world, was commissioned by Balak to curse the Jewish people to bring about their destruction. G'd initially said to him, **"You shall not go with them (the agents of Balak)! You shall not curse the people for they are blessed!"** Sforno explains, "G'd said to Bilaam, 'You shall not go with Balak's agents even if you do not intend to curse the Jewish people because when you will gaze upon them you will do so with an evil eye. As the Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that when Reb Shaishes had gazed upon a heretic, he became a heap of bones. G'd did not want the Jewish people to be subject to his evil eye.'"

The Gemara tells us that after Reb Shimon Bar Yochai had spoken critically about the Roman Empire, an individual who had heard his position shared it with another. As a result of this, it came to the attention of the Roman authorities. They ruled that Reb Shimon Bar Yochai must be put to death. Reb Shimon Bar Yochai and his son needed to flee and hide in a cave for thirteen years as fugitives. After this time had elapsed a heavenly voice called to Reb Shimon Bar Yochai and told him to return. He subsequently came upon the individual who had shared his position with another. Reb Shimon Bar Yochai said to him in amazement, "It is a wonder that you are still alive!" upon saying this he became a heap of bones.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Kama tells us that Rav Kahana, who was one of the leading Torah Sages in Babylon had fled to Jerusalem as a fugitive from the Persian government. He was invited by Raish Lakish, the disciple of Reb Yochanon to attend his Torah lecture. Rav Kahana had demonstrated his Torah greatness by refuting many of the positions of Reb Yochanon. Reb Yochanon, who was at this time in an advanced age was unable to see because his eye lashes had grown over his eyes. He asked two of his students to lift his eye lashes to be able to gaze upon this exceptional Torah sage. When he looked upon him, it appeared that Rav Kahana was smirking at him. When Reb Yochanon had seen this, he was taken aback and offended. Consequently, Rav Kahana died. It was later revealed that Reb Yochanon's understanding of what had taken place was incorrect. It was only because Rav Kahana had a deformity of the lip that it appeared that he was smirking. Rabbeinu Bachya explains, "Rav Kahana's passing is not due to the evil eye given to him by Reb Yochanon. Because of Reb Yochanon's level of purity and spiritual dimension this was not possible. Rather Rav Kahana's passing was due to Reb Yochanon having a lapse in Torah thoughts. Reb Yochanon during his entire

life was never distracted from Torah. Because of this misunderstanding Reb Yochanon had a lapse in Torah thought and thus Rav Kahana was to be culpable.” Despite the fact that Rav Kahana was a victim of a misunderstanding, he was nevertheless the cause of Reb Yochanon’s lapse of Torah thought. The basis of culpability is “G’d brings culpability to the hands of those who are not worthy.”

The Torah tells us that there was great strife between Sarah, our Matriarch and Hagar her maidservant. When Hagar was given to Avraham as a wife, she soon conceived. After conceiving she began treating Sarah with a degree of disrespect. The basis for this insubordination to her mistress was that although Sarah had been married to Avraham for many years, she was not able to conceive. If in fact Sarah was as holy as she appeared to be, why did G’d deny her a child. It was evident to Hagar that her persona of holiness was only a façade. Chazal tell us that Sarah had given Hagar the evil eye, thus causing her to miscarry. We see that there are many instances in which the holiest of people can give an evil eye in a particular circumstance. The evil eye does not necessarily emanate from any spiritual impurity possessed by the individual.

We see that even the holiest and most spiritual person when he focuses on an element that is perceived as evil, he can give that individual the evil eye. King David writes in Psalms, “I despise those who hate You...” Reb Shaishes had gazed upon a heretic, who was evil. Because of the disdain that Reb Shaishes had for the heretic, the evil eye caused him to become a heap of bones. Reb Shimon Bar Yochai, suffered for many years as a result of the irresponsibility and carelessness of an individual. When Reb Shimon Bar Yochai saw him, he focused upon the injustice that he had endured as a result of his actions. This caused him to become a heap of bones. When Reb Yochanon believed that Rav Kahana was smirking at him, it was not something that would be classified as evil. If this is so then why did Rav Kahana die? It was because it was the first time in Reb Yochanon’s life that he became distracted from Torah thought. When Sarah, our Matriarch saw that Hagar was undermining her position as the Matriarch and discrediting her as a devout woman, it indicated a negative aspect in her being. She thus gazed upon her with a negative eye that caused her to miscarry.

Bilaam’s evil eye was the most lethal. It was able to uproot and destroy a nation. It was because his essence was evil. He thus saw the Jewish people, who represent holiness and sanctity in the most negative context. G’d therefore commanded him not to accompany the agents of

Balak to see the Jewish people, regardless of his intent to not to curse them.

4. Understanding the Connotation of Dust

The Torah states when Bilaam had gone to bless the Jewish people he said, “**Who has counted the dust of Yaakov or numbered a quarter of Israel?...**” Bilaam did not initially intend to bless the Jewish people, but rather, his evil eye was attempting to find an entry point through which he could curse them. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, “This evil one, through his cunningness and guile was trying to find a way to bring harm upon the Jewish people. He was trying to find a point of vulnerability. He had initially mentioned the holy Patriarchs, who were the foundation of the Jewish people to impart some level of impurity upon their beginnings. When he realized that he could not, he tried to quantify and measure the Jewish people so that they should be susceptible to his evil eye. (The Jewish people are not permitted to count themselves. When a census must be taken, it is only through the half-silver coin (*machtiz hashekel*)). As Chazal tell us, ‘Blessing only comes upon something that is not measured, weighed or counted.’ Therefore, the evil one attempted to quantify them in order to undermine their existence. However, he was not able to do so. Thus he said, ‘**Who has counted the dust of Yaakov...**’ The Torah tells us that the Jewish people are compared to dust as it states regarding the blessing that G’d had given to Avraham, our Patriarch, ‘**Your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth....**’ Although this blessing was given to Avraham, it did not come to fruition until Yaakov. This is the reason the verse states, ‘**...the dust of Yaakov.**’”

Just as dust cannot be counted, measured, or quantified to any degree, so too the Jewish people cannot. If in fact the blessing was given to Avraham, why was it not fulfilled until Yaakov? Although Avraham only had fathered Yitzchak, which is one individual, the Torah tells us that Yaakov went down to Egypt with seventy individuals. Relative to an infinite and unquantifiable number, Yaakov had no greater relevance to “dust” than Avraham. If so, why did the blessing only manifest itself with Yaakov?

Anything that exists is quantifiable. In contrast, G’d is and His Wisdom are unquantifiable. The Torah, being G’d’s Wisdom is unlimited and infinite. Although all of the Patriarchs were uniquely spiritual, Yaakov was the only Patriarch that embodied and personified the Torah. As the verse refers to him, “**The perfect man, who dwelt in the tent (of Torah).**” Therefore, the blessing

that G'd had given to Avraham manifested itself only with Yaakov because he was the Patriarch that had relevance to the infinite. This is the reason Chazal tell us that Yaakov was the most special of the Patriarchs.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that there are three instances in which one is permitted to alter the truth. One of those circumstances is, if one is asked, "Is it true that you have studied so many tractates?" One is permitted to alter the truth in order not reveal the extent of his Torah knowledge. The Commentators explain that it is because of modesty/humility that one is permitted to answer in this manner. However, with the understanding that Torah is something that is unlimited and not quantifiable, if one were to quantify his Torah knowledge by answering the question truthfully, it would impact negatively upon the spiritual value of his Torah. Although one has in fact studied a specific and measurable amount of Torah, the innate value of that is unlimited. Thus, by quantifying it, one would put limitation upon something that is not limited—thereby diminishing the truthfulness of its essence. Therefore, one is permitted to alter the truth.

The Torah states, "If you toil in My Torah you will merit all blessing." What does "toil" connote? It is one's unlimited dedication to the study of Torah itself. One can only merit the Torah and its blessing when one's involvement in the unlimited is itself at an unlimited level. With this we can understand the Gemara in Tractate Megillah which states, "If you have toiled and come upon it (Torah), you can believe it. If you did not toil and came upon it, do not believe it." One can only come upon Torah, which is infinite, if one is selflessly committed to it. Therefore, only the one who truly toils can come upon its truth.

5. Seeing G'd as He Wants to Be Seen (From Chukas)

The Torah tells us that after Miriam had passed away, the living wellspring that had provided water for the Jewish people in the desert ceased. The Jewish people, seeing that they were without water complained to Moshe. The Torah states, "**The glory of Hashem appeared to them. Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, 'Take your staff and gather the assembly...and speak to the rock before their eyes and it shall give its water.'**" The Torah continues, "**Moshe said to the Jewish people, 'Listen now, O rebels, shall we bring forth water from this rock?' Then Moshe raised his arm and struck the rock with his staff.."** Because Moshe had struck the rock rather than speaking to it as G'd had commanded him, G'd said to Moshe and Aaron, "**Because you did not**

believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, you will not bring this congregation into the Land that I have given them." Thus, G'd decreed that Moshe will pass away before the Jewish people enter into the Promised Land because he did not follow His command. What precipitated Moshe's failing regarding the rock?

Rabbeinu Yonah explains that because Moshe had referred to the Jewish people as "rebels", he was punished. By addressing G'd's Chosen People in a unbecoming manner, he forfeited his right to enter into the Land with them. Rashi in his commentary explains that Moshe was punished because he struck the rock rather than speaking to it as G'd had commanded him. Regardless of how Moshe extracted the water from the rock, the Jewish people were provided with water through a miracle from the Hand of G'd. G'd's Name was sanctified in either case- whether he spoke to the rock or struck it.

The Midrash states, "The Jewish people said to Moshe, 'You know how to extract water from a stone.' If Moshe were to request that the stone should give forth water it would do so. Moshe was in a quandary. If he were to listen to them and bring forth water from the stone as a result of their request, it would appear that he himself was the one responsible for extracting water from the stone. It would seem that he was the one who caused the miracle Moshe wanted that it should be clear that it was G'd who brought forth the water and not him. If they would perceive this incorrectly it would be a desecration of His Name."

The Gemara tells us that Reb Chanina Ben Dosa was traveling with his donkey loaded with bushels of harvested wheat that was going to be used to make matzos for Passover. He had come upon a river. If he were to wade across the river with his donkey, the wheat would come in contact with the water and thus become invalidated to be used for matzah. He thus commanded the river to split so that he should be able to pass through and not put the status of the wheat into jeopardy. The river would not split. Reb Chanina Ben Dosa said, "If the river does not split, then I will decree that water shall never flow in this location ever again." Subsequently, the river split and he was able to cross with the wheat. However, his Arab attendant was left behind on the other side of the river. Reb Chanina Ben Dosa again decreed that the river should split on behalf of his attendant who he needed to assist him. The river once again split. Why was the river bound to the dictate and command of Reb Chanina Ben Dosa?

The Prophet states, “For His Glory He created it.” The explicit purpose of Creation is only to continuously glorify G’d’s Name. Every aspect of existence is bound to this prerequisite. Reb Chanina Ben Dosa, who was at a level of righteousness and spirituality that the entire world was sustained in his merit, accommodating his need is synonymous with G’d’s Glory. The objective of every aspect of his life was to guarantee and perpetuate the purpose of existence. Therefore, when Reb Chanina Ben Dosa gave the ultimatum to the river to split, the river followed his command. Identically, the Jewish people believed that Moshe was able to extract water from the stone through his own initiative because of his spiritual dimension of person. Moshe believed that it would be forbidden to acquiesce and accommodate their request. In fact, the water being extracted from the stone was unrelated to his dimension of spirituality but rather only to G’d’s Dictate and Will. He was therefore in a quandary as to what to do. If it would not be perceived correctly, it would minimize G’d’s Glory.

The Midrash continues, “Moshe was put in a precarious position as a result of the demands of the Jewish people. For forty years he did not become angry with them. Although there were many times that they had complained, he restrained himself not to become angry. (Eitz Yosef, a commentator on the Midrash explains that he did so because he believed that if he were to become angry with the people, he would be included in the decree that was upon the Jewish people after the sin of the spies, that the generation should perish in the desert.) The Jewish people said to Moshe, ‘Does it matter which rock gives forth water?’ (Meaning, they believed he was able to extract water from any rock) Moshe became angry and said, ‘You rebels...’” He was angry because it was irrelevant to the Jewish people whether G’d’s Glory would be manifested or not.

Moshe was completely nullified to G’d. He was pained that the Jewish people were not sensitive to G’d’s Glory and Honor. This was the basis for his failing.

6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Path of the Just
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Makkos
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi- Bava Basra
2:00pm	Mincha

Special Weekday Classes

Monday

11:30 – 12:30pm **Talmud: Chagigah**
 Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
 Enter on 54th Street

1:00-2:00 pm **Ramchal: Derech Hashem**
 Location: Cedarview Capital 1Penn Plaza (45th FL.)

Tuesday

12:10 - 1:10pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**
 Location: Yad Avraham

Wednesday

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Chagigah**
 Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL.)
 Enter on 54th Street

1:00—2:00 pm **Rambam Hilchos Talmud Torah**
 Location: Yad Avraham

Thursday

11:00 –12:00pm **Duties of The Heart**
 Location: Yad Avraham

12:30 – 1:30 pm **Talmud: Chagigah** Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25th FL)

YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Through Friday

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah