



NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה. MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM
FROM THE PARSHAH

Last Blessings

וְעַתָּה הִנְנִי הוֹלֵךְ לְעַמִּי. (במדבר כד, יד)

Now I am going to my people. (*Bemidbar* 24:14)

From now on, I am like the rest of my people, because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has left me. (*Rashi*)

Bilaam lost his power of prophecy at this point, after having blessed the Jewish people. But why now? He spoke only the words that *Hashem* placed in his mouth. If because he was such a *rasha*, and had such a desire to devastate the Jewish people, that was nothing new. He was like that all along, even before he went to Balak. So why was prophecy taken away from him after he finished bestowing his blessings?

The Torah said previously about Bilaam:

– וַיִּקַּר ה' אֶל בִּלְעָם וַיִּשֶׂם דָּבָר בְּפִיו –
“*Hashem* came to Bilaam and placed something in his mouth.”¹

What did *Hashem* place in his mouth? *Rashi* explains it was a bit and bridle and reins, like you put in an animal's mouth so you can pull it and make it go the direction you want.

Let's say you don't need to lead an animal from one place to another. You won't notice the fact that it doesn't want to go. But when you start trying to lead it, it digs in its hooves and resists with all its strength. Now you see very clearly how much it doesn't want to go.

Someone standing on the side of the road might see an animal walking along, and not know what a fight it put up to stay in its place, and how begrudgingly it is now moving. But the person pulling it knows very well how hard it is to get this animal to move.

This is how it was with Bilaam. When *Hashem* put a bit and bridle on him, and pulled him forcibly to bless the Jewish people, it became abundantly evident how much Bilaam wanted to just curse and curse. So after he finally blessed, *Hashem* took the power of prophecy away from him. ●

¹ *Bemidbar* 23:16.

Bilaam Broke the Limit

וַיִּשְׁלַח מַלְאָכִים אֶל בִּלְעָם בֶּן בְּעוֹר. (במדבר כב, ה)

Balak sent messengers to Bilaam ben Beor. (*Bemidbar* 22:5)

As far as modesty was concerned, the ancient world placed limits on what kind of behavior was considered acceptable. There was a consensus about what is okay and what is immoral. It takes special power to break such universally accepted conventions. That was Bilaam.

Bilaam attained greatness in wickedness. He was not just a common, run-of-the-mill *rasha*. Thus he could break down borders of behavior that the whole world observed.

Chazal say that ten portions of licentiousness descended to the world, and the Arabs took nine of them.¹ On the other hand, we see that the Arab way

1 *Kiddushin* 49b.

of dress is exceptionally modest.

How do the two go together?

Dressing modestly was once the norm, and over the course of time, things changed. People broke through the formerly observed borders. But, as we mentioned before, it takes someone great to initiate such a change.

The Arabs are a lowly nation, as *Chazal* say,² and there was no one among them great enough to break down the borders. So they kept on behaving like always. ●

2 *Kesubos* 66b.

PARSHA TOPIC

Misplaced Korbanos

וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם אֶל בְּלָק בְּנֵה לִי בָזָה שְׁבַעָה מִזְבְּחֹת וְהִכֵּן לִי בָזָה שְׁבַעָה פָּרִים וְשְׁבַעָה אֵילִים.
(במדבר כג, א)

Bilaam said to Balak, “Build me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams. (*Bemidbar* 23:1)

Bilaam said before Hashem, “Their forefathers built before You seven altars, and I set up as many as all of them put together.” (*Rashi*)

Bilaam’s “Holy” War

Bilaam was the very embodiment of all the

impurity and evil in the world. He waged a “holy” war against the Jewish people. As is usually the case with wars, he did not direct all his efforts in just one

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורגר ז"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס ז"ל

נרבת נכדיהם ~ עטרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם

direction. He tried every angle.

First of all, *Chazal* tell us that Bilaam knew how to determine the exact moment when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is angry. But *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, in His great mercy, refrained from all anger during the whole time that Bilaam sought to curse the Jewish people.¹

Another thing he tried was to put an *ayin hara* on them, as it says וישא בלעם את עיניו – “Bilaam raised his eyes.”² Rashi explains this to mean that he tried to put the evil eye on them.

Another thing he tried was mentioning *Cheit Ha'eigel*.³ He wanted to draw *Hashem's* attention to the Jewish people's sins.

But there was a certain powerful tactic that Bilaam employed, in addition to the above, and that is what I want to talk about.

Bilaam built a lot of altars and offered a lot of *korbanos* on them. Three times, he set up seven altars, and offered on them seven bulls and seven rams. The Torah elaborates on this point. It seems that this is where Bilaam put in his main energy, in the “holy” war he waged against the Jewish people. We need to understand what he wanted to gain by offering all these *korbanos*.

First, we will bring out a certain general point about *korbanos*.

What's in a Korban?

Let's talk about animal sacrifices. An animal is quite similar to a human being. True, it is not on the same level as a human, but it does have a *nefesh* similar to that of humans. An animal can thus be used to represent a human being. People have the quality of growth, and so do animals. And when an animal is burned, it returns to its source, which is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, because everything returns to its source when it is burned up.

A *korban* is thus taking an animal, which is similar to a human being, and burning it on the altar.

1 *Berachos* 7a.

2 *Bemidbar* 24:3.

3 *Ibid v. 1*, see *Targum Onkelos ad loc.*

Now, a human being contains within him all the spiritual worlds, as R. Chayim Volozhiner explains in part one of *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim*. When we put an animal on the altar and burn it, this is like bringing the entire world, and everything in it, back to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

A *korban* properly offered is called *reach nichoach*, a “pleasing fragrance.” In other words, the *korban* ascends to Heaven and is accepted *l'ratzon*, willingly and graciously. So to speak, it enters the depth of *Hashem's* Will. *Hashem* is pleased that we have brought His world back to him.

This makes *korbanos* greater than all other *mitzvos*. Every *mitzvah* accomplishes a certain specific thing, but offering a *korban* encompasses everything. All the 248 limbs and organs, and the 365 sinews and nerves.

This is such a sublime matter that the Vilna Gaon remarked that if we would bring one *korban* with proper *kavanah*, the world would reach its ultimate goal.

We see that *korbanos* express something very, very deep. It is a matter of bringing everything back to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. So to speak, we say: *Hashem*, the entire world and everything in it is Yours!

Never Too Lofty

The world has a whole system of *kefirah*, of denying belief in *Hashem*. I am not talking about the modern iteration of *kefirah*, by which people deny the very existence of the Creator, because this is simply ridiculous and not even worthy of discussion. I am talking here about the *kefirah* of the ancient Greek philosophers. The Rambam addressed the issues they raised and wrote at length to refute them. Also the *Rema* wrote a special book about *korbanos*, called *Sefer Toras Ha'olah*, in which he refutes the arguments of the philosophers against our faith.

What did these philosophers of ancient times say?

Their argument basically went like this: G-d is so great and awesome, so infinitely above our world, so beyond human comprehension, that He

really has no connection to the world He created. It is categorically impossible for G-d to relate to the physical world, to act upon it, to even care about what takes place there. That's what they argued.

There were various levels to this *kefirah*. Some argued that *Hashem* doesn't even know what is happening in the world. Others argued that that G-d knows what people do in the world but doesn't care.

This is actually the subject of *Sefer Iyov*. Iyov described G-d's loftiness and greatness at great length, and argued that for this very reason, He doesn't care about us.

What do we say? How do we answer this? We say that if G-d really was as great as the philosophers claimed He is, He would indeed be incapable of maintaining a relationship with something as small as the world of human beings. But G-d is much, much greater than that! He is way above anything the philosophers could even imagine. And for this very reason, He is capable of relating to even the smallest of things.

I will give you an example. *Shlomo Hamelech* was the wisest of men and knew the language of animals. When we encounter animals, we don't understand what they are saying. To us, it is just noise. This is because our level is far above that of animals, so we can't even relate to what they say. But *Shlomo Hamelech* was able to communicate with an animal. He understood its language.

How did *Shlomo Hamelech* do it? Was it because he was closer to the level of an animal? Not at all. He was far above our level of intellect, and surely far above that of animals. And for this very reason, he was able to understand them and communicate with them.

מִי כֵה' אֵלֵינוּ הַמְגִבִּיהִי לְשָׁבֶת – Who is like *Hashem* our G-d, Who dwells so high?⁴

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is very, very lofty. And for this very reason:

⁴ Tehillim 112:6.

הַמְשִׁפִּילִי לְרֵאוֹת בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ – He lowers Himself to see in heavens and earth.⁵

Because He is very high, He can reach very low.

It's Not an Aquarium

Emunah means believing that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is connected to the world and relates to it. *Kefirah* means not believing that G-d is connected to the world.

Someone who doesn't even believe that the world has a Creator is not called a *kofer*. He is just an idiot. He is like someone who sees a table and thinks that the table came to be on its own. It just happened. This is how the modern world thinks, and it is nonsensical. The *kofrim* of ancient times believed that the world has a Creator, but they didn't believe that He continues to run the world.

All religions believe in G-d and believe that G-d is connected to His world. So what is special about Judaism? We believe not just that *Hashem* knows what happens in the world, and not just that He runs and oversees everything in the world, but that He has a personal connection to us. He loves and cares personally about each one of His children.

And this is a very powerful love.

Let's say a person has an aquarium. He looks with interest at all the pretty, decorative fish swimming around in there, and gives them food. Despite the distance between them, if there is a fish that doesn't eat, he tries to find a solution. However, it doesn't worry him overly much, because he doesn't love the fish personally. The distance between them is too great for that.

That's not how *Hashem* loves us.

Let's say there is a very devoted preschool teacher, who loves little Saraleh dearly. The teacher is dedicated to all the children, and of course to Saraleh, and does everything for them. But it's still not like the love that the mother has for her little

⁵ *Ibid* v. 7.

Saraleh. A parent's love is something else altogether.

Hashem, due to His immense desire to bestow goodness upon us, does not just know us and pay attention to us and watch over us. He is **הבוחר בעמו** **ישראל באהבה** – He “lovingly chooses His people Yisrael.”

The first word that *Hashem* spoke to the Jewish people was **אנוכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים** – “I am *Hashem* your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” He did not say that He merely created us, but that He went down into *Mitzrayim* to take us out of there. He took care of us and carried us on eagles' wings. He has a personal relationship with us. He loves us in the fullest sense of the word.

This is what the whole Torah is about. It is as *Shlomo Hamelech* describes, in his great wisdom, the Giving of the Torah: **ישקני מנשיקות פיהו** – “May He kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.”⁶

And when we speak of Torah in *davening*, the words are overflowing with expressions of love: **אהבה רבה אהבתנו וגוי חמלה גדולה ויתירה חמלת עלינו וגוי**.

The Deepest Love of All

Bilaam knew that *Hashem* loves the Jewish people. But he thought that there is a place where this love comes to an end. Deep down, there is a place where *Hashem* says, so to speak: I do love the Jews, but after all, I am the Creator, and they are just creatures. The distance between us is infinite.

This is the place that Bilaam wanted to tap, to access. And how do you access the deepest depths of *Hashem's* holy Will?

⁶ Shir Hashirim 1:2.

By *korbanos*.

Bilaam decided to offer one *korban* after another until he brought as many sacrifices as all the *Avos* did. He thereby sought to do away with the whole world, to nullify everything, and get to the place where there is only G-d Himself, the One and Only. A place where there is no world and no Jewish people and no anything.

And when Bilaam gets to this place where G-d's connection to the Jewish people comes to an end, this is where he will mention *Cheit Ha'eigel*. He will say to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*: You don't truly care about the Jewish people. And they sinned before you by worshipping a golden calf. How low! Why don't You just get rid of them altogether?

What did *Hashem* answer Bilaam?

You are so foolish. You are trying to present to Me the sins of My children? That's like presenting a father with the bad deeds of his child. Do you think the father will stop loving his child because of that?

Hashem's love for the Jewish people is deeper than deep. That very place, deeper than deep, is where *Hashem's* love for the Jewish people is. That is where it emanates from.

Bilaam didn't understand this. He was a classic *kofer*. He tried to dig deeper and deeper because he thought there must be a point where G-d's relationship with the Jewish people comes to an end.

But Bilaam was utterly wrong, and *Hashem* showed this by refraining from all anger during that whole period. By doing so, He was expressing how His relationship with His children, the Jewish people, is infinitely deep. It is a relationship of infinite love. No matter how deep you go, it never stops. ●