



# Parshas "Balack"

מתוך 'ליקוטי שמואל'

Editor: Sam. Eisikovits

[eisikovits1@gmail.com](mailto:eisikovits1@gmail.com)

# Bilaam Lost His Shock Value

## Parshas [Balak](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Apparently, Bilaam had a relationship with Hashem that we can only dream about. And yet we see that he had an attitude that is hard to fathom. When Hashem asked Bilaam, "Who are these people with you?" Rashi explains that Bilaam answers Hashem arrogantly: "Even though I am not important in your eyes, I am important in the eyes of kings."

Later, in one of the most mind-boggling incidents in the Torah, Bilaam does not appear to be at all phased by the fact that his donkey starts talking to him. He just answers back and begins a dialogue with his donkey as if it was an everyday occurrence.

How do we explain the paradoxical personality of Bilaam? Rav Schwab offers an interesting insight. Hashem gave us certain senses. Most of us are blessed with the senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. But there is also a sixth sense. That is the sense of being able to be *nispael* (impressed). Hashem gave most human beings the ability to be impressed by certain phenomena in this world.

This sense of being *nispael* is necessary for our *avodas* (service of) Hashem. The Rambam speaks of a person becoming impressed and overwhelmed with the awe of creation, and of the wisdom and beauty of nature. This is a sense that we need to develop within ourselves — emotions of love and reverence towards the Creator.

However, just like the other senses can be deadened and destroyed if they are abused, the same is true with the sixth sense. If a person listens to loud music for long enough, he can lose his sense of hearing. If a person continuously eats very spicy foods, he can damage his sense of taste. Likewise, a person can lose his sense of being *nispael*. How does that happen? What costs a person his sense of being impressed?

Rav Schwab suggests that a person can lose his sense of being *nispael* through gluttonous indulgence in every passion and lust in the world. If a person is obsessed with enjoying, taking, eating, consuming, and all he ever thinks about is indulging in the most obscene and gluttonous fashion, then after a while, nothing impresses him anymore. He is so consumed with just enjoying himself that nothing gets him excited anymore.

If it seems hard to relate to this concept, all we need to do is to open our eyes and look at what has happened in the western world. Nothing makes an impression anymore. Movies have become more and more violent and explicit. Music has become more and more outrageous. The way people talk and the words we hear have become more and more astounding, because nothing makes an impression anymore. As a society, we have lost our sense of wonder. We have become coarsened.

To quote a recent piece in the Op-Ed page of the Baltimore Sun, "America has lost its 'shock value.' Nothing shocks anymore."

That is what happened to Bilaam. Nothing shocked him. His animal spoke to him and he took it in stride.

Everyone recognizes the seriousness of losing a sense of sight or hearing, *chas v'shalom* (Heaven forbid). We need to recognize that losing the sense of being *nispael* is a similarly serious by-product of the gluttonous and indulgent life that Bilaam lived.

### The *Tircha D'tzibbura* Of Reciting Parshas Bilaam Daily

The Torah testifies that Bilaam was "*yodeah daas Elyori*" (he knew the thoughts of his Creator). The Talmud (Brochos 7a) explains that this means that he knew how to precisely pinpoint the times that were auspicious for invoking the wrath of Hashem. The Talmud speaks of a certain moment each day when Hashem becomes angry with the world. Bilaam knew how to gauge that moment, and this knowledge was his secret weapon. He intended to synchronize his cursing of the Jewish people with that moment of Hashem's wrath, and thereby bring Hashem's wrath down upon the Jewish nation.

Rav Elyakim Schlessinger asks (in his sefer, Beis Av): If, in fact, Bilaam's power was limited to knowing the moment of Hashem's anger, that would seem to be a far cry from the Torah's testimony that he was *yodeah daas Elyon* — he knew the mind of his Creator. The Beis Av therefore cites a Rabbinic teaching regarding the creation of the world.

Hashem originally intended to create the world using only His *middas haddin* (attribute of justice). In such a world, if someone would do an *aveira*, the punishment would be delivered immediately. But when Hashem saw that human beings would not be able to exist in such a world, He partnered the *middas harachamim* (attribute of mercy) with the *middas haddin*. This does not mean that if someone does an *aveira*, Hashem will just forget about it. It simply means that Hashem extends a grace period. Hashem gives the sinner some slack, so to speak, giving him the ability to ultimately repent. This combination of *din* (judgment) and *rachamim* (mercy) is the way the world operates.

Bilaam knew "*daas Elyori*". That means that he was aware of Hashem's original plan. He knew that Hashem originally wanted to create the world with only the *middas haddin*. Bilaam knew that every single day of every single year there is one moment when Hashem returns to his original plan and looks at the world with the *middas haddin*. This is what the Gemara means that during one moment of the day, Hashem gets angry. At that moment, *chas v'shalom*, anything can happen. The *middas haddin* has free reign at that moment. This knowledge was Bilaam's great strength.

Bilaam's power was to always look at the world askance. The Mishna (Avos 5:22) teaches that Bilaam had an 'evil eye.' This means that Bilaam looked at the world in a non-generous fashion, rather than with an eye toward the *middas harachamim*. He would always look with an eye toward invoking the *middas haddin*.

This explains why Bilaam refers to himself as the "one eyed man." Who would ever describe himself as delivering "the speech of a one-eyed man?" Is being blind in one eye something to brag about and be proud of? Man was given two eyes: One eye to look at things with the *middas haddin* and one eye to look at things with the *middas harachamim*. Bilaam did not see the positive, only the negative. Bilaam bragged that he was a person who always looked only with an 'evil eye.' "My claim to fame is that I can invoke judgment against the Jewish people because I know when the Creator utilizes only his attribute of judgment."

Our great salvation was "lo hibit avven b'Yaakov" (He perceived no iniquity in Jacob) (Bamidbar 23:21). In all the days that Bilaam tried to invoke the attribute of judgment, Hashem in His mercy, abstained from anger and never looked at us with *middas haddin*.

Finally, homiletically, the Beis Av suggests that this is the intention of the Gemara in Brochos that says that if not for the *tircha d'tzibbura* (great trouble for the congregation), the *chachomim* would have instituted the recital of the parsha of Balak in the middle of the daily recitation of *Shema*. The standard interpretation of this Gemara is that we would have included

the reading of Balak within – in addition to — the reading of *Krias Shema*. However, the Beis Av cites an opinion from the Satmar Rebbe that the Gemara is making an even stronger statement: We would have REPLACED the reading of *Krias Shema* with that of Parshas Balak. If that is the case, how would that be *tircha d'tzibbura*? We can understand the *tircha d'tzibbura* if the option was to read both the three sections of *Krias Shema* AND Parshas Balak. The inclusion of such an additional paragraph in *Shema* would take more time, creating a burden for the congregation. If, however, the alternative was to replace *Krias Shema* with Balak, there would not have been a net increase in the amount of time required, so how would it trouble the congregation?

The answer is that the *tircha d'tzibbura* is from hearing twice daily – "*Kel zoem b'chol yom*" – that Hashem is angry every day at least momentarily and that at that time the *middas haddin* is given free reign. We would be demoralized. We would not be able to handle the thought. A smile would not appear on our faces the entire day. The thought is too chilling to contemplate daily. That is the *tircha d'tzibbura* to which the Gemara is referring.

Whether we recite it daily or not, this fact remains the truth. *Chas v'shalom*, when we see tragedies in our midst – tragedies that seemingly should not have occurred and do not seem to make any sense – we ponder and ask ourselves, 'Why?' Sometimes, such tragedies can be the result of the severe *middas haddin* that can affect anyone at any time. This is why a person must constantly examine his actions on a daily basis. Teshuva is not something that should only be relegated to the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* (Ten Days of Repentance). The antidote to *middas haddin* is the *middas harachamim*, which we will be granted if we show Hashem that we are constantly introspecting and that we are willing to improve.

## Red Heifer and the Death of the Righteous

### Parshas [Chukas Balak](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

#### Of The Righteous

Immediately after discussing the use of Para Adumah [Red Heifer] ashes to purify a person who came into contact with the dead, the Torah tells us of the death of Miriam [Bamidbar 20:1].

The Talmud says [Moed Katan 28a] that the juxtaposition of these two parshios teaches that "Just as the Para Adumah atones, so too the death of a righteous person atones".

What common denominator between Para Adumah and the death of the righteous provides atonement for the world? We must note that the Gemarah, in making the comparison between the two, is not relating to the purification dimension (Tahara) of Para Adumah. Rather, the Gemarah is relating to the atonement (Kapara) that Para Adumah provides.

We must first examine the aspect of Para Adumah from which its atonement emerges. The Kapara of Para Adumah emerges from the fact that Para Adumah is a challenge to our faith (Emunah). Our Sages tell us that the Para Adumah was a cause for our being mocked by the gentiles. They used it to challenge our beliefs. They taunted us that it was a form of magic and witchcraft. How does it work? Why does it work? It is very strange. The whole set of laws associated with it are so paradoxical that it tests our very faith in the Divinity of the commandments. [The one upon whom the ashes are sprinkled is purified, but the one who

sprinkles the ashes is rendered impure! This is so unfathomable that even the wisest of men, King Solomon, could not perceive its reasoning.]

Therefore, when the Jews observe the ritual of Para Adumah, they are in effect saying, “We trust G-d”. It might not make any sense to us, but we are going to do it anyway. [N.B. Judaism does not demand belief without reason in the fundamentals, e.g. G-d and the Giving of the Torah — on the contrary. But once a person accepts that G-d gave the Torah, it becomes incumbent upon the person to follow its Laws, whether or not he or she understands each individual detail.] There are many things in life that do not add up and do not make any sense. We earn atonement as a result of the very fact that we are nonetheless prepared to follow G-d’s teaching.

In this week’s parsha, klal yisroel [the Congregation of Israel] had reached the end of the 40 years of sojourn in the wilderness. For the last 40 years they had the Well because of Miriam. As far as we know, Miriam only did one thing wrong in her life. She once spoke Lashon Hara [gossip] about her brother. She was immediately punished for that act.

Therefore, they could have wondered why Miriam had to die in the wilderness without being able to enter Eretz Yisroel. After all, she committed only one sin, and had already been punished for it. And yet... “And Miriam died there and she was buried there”.

“But it’s not fair!” Why wasn’t she allowed to go into Eretz Yisroel? It does not make any sense.

However, the death of the righteous atones. If a righteous person dies, we may ask ourselves why it happened. We wonder “this does not make any sense – he was such a good person!”

However, ultimately, we accept the death of the righteous with the same simple faith with which we accept the laws of Para Adumah. We are prepared to continue our lives with the same dedication to G-d and His Torah, despite our unanswered questions as to why things are the way that they are. This is the source of atonement that comes from the death of the righteous. The recital of “Tziduk HaDin” [accepting upon ourselves the righteousness of G-d’s Judgement], by saying “Hatzur Tummim Pu’u’lo — The Rock, his actions are perfect”, despite all our questions and latent doubts, is a tremendous atonement for us. And that is the linkage between the Red Heifer and the death of the righteous.

### **Taking Note of Even Small A Measure of Progress**

Moshe Rabbeinu was denied entrance into the Land of Israel as a result of the incident that is known as the “Waters of Merivah”. All of the Torah commentaries try to discover what Moshe did wrong. Rashi’s well-known interpretation is that Moshe hit the rock instead of speaking to it. The Rambam in his “Eight Chapters” explains that Moshe sinned when he publicly lost his temper and said “Listen here you rebels (shimu nah ha’morim), shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?” [Bamidbar 20:10]. It is as if Moshe lost his patience with his flock and addressed them in too sharp a manner.

We need to analyze the Rambam’s explanation. Moshe Rabbeinu had a very legitimate reason to be angry. From a historical perspective, it certainly must have been frustrating. This was the second incident regarding this “Well”. The same thing happened forty years earlier.

Moshe Rabbeinu could justifiably say, “I have had it with these people! They have not come an iota closer to belief in G-d after forty years under my tutelage.” Was it not understandable that Moshe needed to “let off a little steam” at them under such frustrating circumstances? And yet, the Rambam says that this was held against him. He should not have lost his patience.

In order to gain a better understanding of the Rambam's interpretation, it helps to note a subtle contrast between the two incidents in which the Children of Israel complained about lack of water.

Regarding the first incident in Parshas B'Shalach [Shemos 17:3], the complaint was phrased as follows: "The people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moshe and said 'Why is this that you have brought us up from Egypt to kill me and my children and my livestock through thirst?'"

Here in Parshas Chukas [Bamidbar 20:4] the complaint was "And why have you brought the congregation of Hashem to this wilderness to die there, we and our animals?" The texts are almost identical – except for one word. In Parshas B'Shalach the charge was that Moshe brought them into the wilderness to KILL them. In Chukas, they only charged that he brought them there to DIE. In other words, in Parshas B'Shalach they were charging Moshe with murder. Here they are only charging him with negligence — they would die in the wilderness because they had no water. However, they did not complain that Moshe was trying to KILL them.

This is a subtle but very significant difference. This does represent "progress" on their part. If forty years earlier they accused their leader of being a murderer and now they were somewhat more respectful in how they talked to him, that is a step forward. According to the Rambam, Moshe was punished for failing to take note of this subtle, miniscule difference. Moshe should have appreciated that difference. He should not have spoken down to them as "rebellious ones".

There is a great lesson here. These are tremendous words of encouragement for anyone who is in the teaching profession — or anyone who is in the 'parenting business'. Sometimes we may tell something to our child at age 10 and then need to repeat it to them when they are 15. They appear to be at the exact same level that they were at five years ago. We can give instructions to students at the beginning of the year and we do not necessarily notice progress. At the end of the school year, the students will still sometimes act incorrectly without constant correcting. However, this is a misperception on our part. We sometimes need to be on the lookout for such a small thing as the way something is articulated, and even for the body language of the way something is said. Even a subtle change in attitude can be called progress. That is a level of progress that should be appreciated, not summarily dismissed.

This is difficult. It is frustrating. We want to see major progress. We want to see overnight dramatic change. But it does not always happen like that. Progress comes in incremental steps. This is something that Moshe Rabbeinu had to recognize and his failure to recognize it by losing his temper with the words "Shimu nah ha'Morim" is perhaps the reason that — for all his greatness — he was held accountable.



Written by Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

There is a scene in *Fiddler on the Roof* where the idealistic Perchik tells Tevye, “Money is the world’s curse!” Tevye replies by pointing to the heavens: “Then may the Lord smite me with it and may I never recover!”

I was once talking to someone who was going through a tough financial spot. He was unburdening himself by telling me the stress it was causing him. Late in the conversation, we observed that everyone knows there is no relationship between money and happiness; wealthier people are not happier or less stressed than poorer people. However, he told me, it can be very difficult to relate to that fact, in the moment, when you feel that the source of all your problems stem from just one cause, a lack of money. This principle applies to most hardship: when we are in it, we tend to feel that if we could just find a way to solve this one problem we would live happily ever after.

In *Balak*, *Bilaam* ventures on a mission to curse the Jewish people. His donkey leads him astray on the way, the verses tell the story best,

*“The donkey saw the angel on the road with his sword drawn; so she turned aside into a field. Bilaam beat the donkey to get it back onto the road. Then, the angel stood in a path of the vineyards, with a wall on both sides. The donkey saw the angel, and she pressed against the wall (to squeeze past the angel), crushing Bilaam’s leg, and he beat her again. Then the angel stood in a narrow place, where there was no room to turn right or left. The donkey saw the angel, and it crouched down under Bilaam.”*

Eventually, the gig is up, *Bilaam* is shown the angel as well and understands why the donkey was leading him off path. On reading this passage this year I couldn’t help but juxtapose the story of *Bilaam* and the donkey to what so many go through when they are struggling with a difficult life-curveball thrown at them.

In the moment, *Bilaam* was certain that the issue he had to reckon with was his recalcitrant donkey. He immediately attempted to solve the problem. He beat his donkey over and over again. The donkey was making things worse and worse. I am certain, *Bilaam* felt if he could just get that donkey back on the road, his problems would be entirely solved. What he soon understood was that the donkey was avoiding something scarier, the angel with a sword. The donkey was acting exactly as he should



have, he was saving him. When the big picture is made clear, *Bilaam* realized he was expending all his energy fixing the donkey, when the donkey had nothing to do with his problem!

Although it might seem that the solution to our misery is simple, that all we need to do is to solve the problem that we know is causing us so much misery, the story of *Bilaam* illustrates how easily someone can exhaust himself trying to solve something that never needed fixing in the first place. We need to make sure we are not exhausting ourselves by investing our energy and worrying about beating the wrong donkey!



Written by Rabbi Daniel Leeman

We have been taught that Bilaam was on the same level of prophecy as Moshe [1].

But was the evil Bilaam really on par with the righteous Moshe?

We have also been taught [2] that when “Bilaam arose early to saddle his donkey” [3], G-d said, “Evil one! Avraham already came before you, as it says, ‘Avraham arose early and saddled his donkey’” [4]. The question is asked [5] what is so special about being before, and why is Bilaam being referred to here as ‘evil’?

When the ‘Ohev Yisroel’, the Apta Rav, R’ Yehoshua Hershl, was on his travels it happened that he encountered a steep hill. He quickly descended from the wagon drawn by his horse, and ascended the hill afoot.

“Holy Rabbi,” inquired his attendant, “why did you come down from the wagon and climb this steep hill afoot?”

“Because,” replied the Rabbi, “I am afraid the horse will call me to court; it will claim that I had no pity on it, making it draw me up the hill.”

“And if so,” probed the attendant, “would you not win the case on the ground that the horse was meant for man’s service?”

“Yes,” said the Rabbi, “there is no doubt that I would win; but I would rather walk up the hill a dozen times, than find myself in litigation with a horse!”

Perhaps with regards to their level of prophecy they were equal, but Moshe was nevertheless greater because unlike Bilaam, he was wise enough not to have disputes with his donkey!

Indeed we have been taught that wisdom is greater than prophecy [6].

But there is a prerequisite to true wisdom: awe of G-d [7].



Perhaps it is in this that Avraham was ‘before’ Bilaam: Avraham prepared his donkey and went “as commanded by G-d” – primarily with the awe of G-d, whereas Bilaam prepared his donkey and went “with the officers of Moav” – against the main ([8]) will of G-d, i.e. awe of G-d. Subsequently Avraham, like Moshe, had enough wisdom to treat his donkey fairly, but Bilaam, who not only treated his donkey harshly, but even ended up arguing with it... and losing! [9]

Be wise and don’t get ‘court’ out!

Have an ee-awesome Shabbos,

Dan.

Additional sources:

[1] See Rashi, Bamidbar 22:5

[2] Rashi, Bamidbar 22:21 (Medrash Tanchuma 8)

[3] Bamidbar 22:21

[4] Bereishis 22:3

[5] E.g. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, Ohel Torah (from haskamah of HaRav m’Polonsk to Ben Yechaved Av; Zar Zahav 28b)

[6] Bava Basra 12a

[7] Tehillim 111:10

[8] See Bamidbar 22:12 (and Rashi 22:22, 35)

[9] Bamidbar 22

וְהָיָה כִּי יֵרָאֶה בִּלְאָם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיָה כִּי יֵרָאֶה בִּלְאָם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Written by Benjamin Rose

Shteit the posuk: “Mah Tovv Ohalecha Yaakov”

Regarding this Posuk, Two gemaros offer contradictory explanations about what the brocha refers to. The gemara in Bava Basra (60a) says that this refers to the wonderful homes of Bnei Yisroel whose doors do not directly face each other and are the epitome of Tznius, modesty and refinement, which Bilam saw and marveled at.

Another Gemora in Sanhedrin (105b) implies that this bracha is referring to the Yeshivos and Batei Knesses that will never cease to exist. The gemara says that we see from Bilam’s bracha what his intentions were. In this case he wanted to curse us that there should be no Yeshivos and Shuls.

Rav Moshe Feinstein in Darash Moshe says that there is no contradiction here. When Bilam saw the

beautifully set up homes, he believed that the homes are so wonderful that we do not need Yeshivos. The upbringing we receive at home is sufficient. While that is true says Rav Moshe, it is still only half the equation. The other side of Chinuch must come from the Yeshiva, the Rebbe'im, and good friends.

This bracha of Mah Tovv would have ultimately proven to be a curse. Therefore Hashem turned around the "curse" by having Bilam give a bracha that no matter how wonderful our home are, the Yeshivos and Shuls should always exist for a complete chinuch.

## **Humor**

1. May you be so rich your widow's new husband will never have to work another day.

Zolst du zayn azoy raykh, az dayn almunahs man zol darf keynmol nisht arbetn a tog.

2. You should be turned into a blintze, and a cat should eat you.  
Vern zol fun dir a blintshik un di kats zol dikh kayn.

3. May your wife eat matzah in bed and may you roll in the crumbs.  
Zol dayn vayb essen matzos in bet, un du vet zich valgeren in di breklach.

4. May your husband's father marry three times, so that you have not one, but three mothers-in-law.  
Zol dayn man's tatte khasunah hoben dray mol, un du vest hoben nisht eyn, nor dray shviggers.