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בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל



על דש

AL E I DESHE

Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"a of Gur

The Eternal Zeal of Pinchas

וַיָּרָא פִּינְחָס בֶּן אֱלָעָזָר בֶּן אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן וַיָּקָם מִתּוֹךְ
הָעֵדָה וַיִּקַּח רֶמֶחַ בְּיָדוֹ.

When Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon the Kohen, saw this, he arose from among the congregation and took a spear in his hand (Bamidbar 25:7).

You are a holy Jew, with a pure neshamah, beloved by our Father; how can you introduce foreign connections into your heart?

The story of Pinchas's zealous act appears at the end of *Parshas Balak*. During Minchah, we continue reading in *Parshas Pinchas*, where it says בֶּן אֱלָעָזָר בֶּן אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן הָשִׁיב אֶת חֲמָתִי מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, בִּקְנָאוֹ אֶת קְנָאֲתִי בְּתוֹכָם, וְלֹא כְלִיִּיתִי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – *Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohen, turned back my wrath upon the Bnei Yisroel when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them, so I did not destroy the*

Bnei Yisroel in my vengeance (Bamidbar 25:12).

This *parshah* must be learned carefully. It applies to every individual—not in the sense of acting zealously against others, but rather being a *kana'i* towards one's own actions and impulses.

The Maharsha¹ points out the language used by Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 82a), הַבּוֹעֵל אֶרְמִיָּה, קְנָאִין פּוֹגְעִין בּוֹ. The word בּוֹ seems extra; what meaning does it add? The Maharsha explains based on a Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 54b) where a philosopher asked Rabban Gamliel, "It says in your Torah that Hashem is a jealous G-d. Why does He destroy the idol worshippers and not the idols themselves?"

Rabban Gamliel answered with a parable: A king had one son. That son raised a dog and named it after his father. When he swore, he would say, "By the life of the dog, my father!" When the king heard this, was he angry at the dog or the son? Of course, at the son.

The Maharsha explains that there are two distinct forms of jealousy. The first is the common, negative human tendency, where a person desires something another

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וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲלֹא דִבַּרְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִדְבַּר ה' אֹתוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה.

And he answered and said: Have I not told you that whatever Hashem puts into my mouth, that shall I be careful to speak? (Bamidbar 24:12)

A Tanna taught before Rav Chisda: One who withholds his prophecy is punished with malkos (Sanhedrin 89a). Tosafos raises two difficulties: First, there appears to be no prohibition in the Torah on withholding prophecy. Second, even if such a *lav* existed, *malkos* is not given when a *lav* involves no action (לֹאֲשֹׁאִין בּוֹ מַעֲשֶׂה).

Tosafos answers that the *malkos* is not given as punishment, for transgressing a *lav*—but as coercion, forcing him to fulfill the *mitzvas aseï*, just as we beat somebody who refuses to build a succah "even until death" (וַיִּבְנוּ תְּסֻכָּה וְעַד מוֹתוֹ). *Tosfos Rabbeinu Peretz* answers differently: Rav Chisda is of the opinion that even a *lav she'ein bo ma'aseh* is subject to *malkos*.

As for Tosafos' first question, *Tzofnas Paneach* explains that the *lav* is derived from the pasuk וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲלֹא אֶת אֲשֶׁר לְדַבֵּר – *And [Bilam] answered and said: Have I not told you*

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person possesses, such as wisdom, wealth, or strength. This type of jealousy only exists in the presence of competition. Hashem is not jealous at the honor given to the idols; being completely false, they pose no challenge or competition. The second form is the jealousy associated with Hashem when He is called “a jealous G-d.” This jealousy is directed at the Jew who, despite belonging to Hashem, lowers himself to honor *avodah zarah*.

Hashem’s anger is not at the idol—as the king in the parable is not angry at the dog, but at the son who equated a dog to his father. Additionally, calling the dog not “king,” but “father,” arouses the *kinah* of the king all the more so. Hashem says to the Jew: Besides being King, I am your Father, Who loves you. You could have a connection with your Father, your Creator — and you exchange that for a dog?

Maharsha explains that this is the *kinah* of Pinchas. אֶת קִנְיָתוֹ means that Pinchas’s zealotry was the same form of *kinah* as Hashem’s. His anger was not directed at the *bnos Moav*, but rather at the Jew who had degraded himself through such a lowly sin. That’s why Chazal emphasize פוגעין בו, to teach us that the focus of the *kinah* is entirely on *him*—not *her*, because she is mere illusion. The *kinah* is directed at the Jew, who has a *heilige neshamah* with the ability to connect with Hashem, and squanders that gift on emptiness.

You are a holy Jew, with a pure *neshamah*, beloved by our Father; how can you introduce foreign connections into your heart?

הָשִׁיב אֶת חֲמַתִּי מֵעַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִנְיָאוֹ אֶת – קִנְיָתִי בְּתוֹכָם – *he turned away my wrath from upon Bnei Yisrael, by avenging My vengeance among them*. The Chiddushei HaRim said that this pasuk is not only about Pinchas in his generation. Rather it speaks to every Jew in every generation. Every time a Jew is tempted by the *yetzer hara*, and he responds with *kinah* for Hashem—saying to his *yetzer hara*: “What are you offering me? Emptiness! I refuse to listen. On the contrary, I will fight back and increase my holiness!”—this turns away Hashem’s wrath.

And this is needed now more than ever. We need great mercy and kindness to turn back the anger from upon Klal Yisrael. The world is shaking. There is danger everywhere. It has been a long time since we experienced peace—first a global pandemic, then many other *tzaros*. Every person can turn away Divine wrath through resisting temptation.

The Chiddushei HaRim writes that Pinchas’s act empowered all generations. He planted within every Jew the ability to fulfill the words of Chazal (*Berachos* 5a), *A person must always stir up the yetzer tov against the yetzer hara*. In the very moment when sinful thoughts arise, a Jew can rise up with fiery determination and say to his *yetzer hara*, “How could I have such audacity against the Creator? I was created

to serve Hashem—how can I lower myself to this?!” Pinchas gave every Jew this power.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 82a) says that Moshe said to Pinchas, – קְרִינָא דְאַגְרָתָא – אִיהוּ לְהוּי פְּרוּוֹנְקָא – *Let the one who reads the letter be the one to deliver it*. What is this “letter”? This halachah isn’t written openly in the Torah; it was transmitted orally *halachah l’Moshe miSinai?! .* A well-known story about the Chafetz Chaim sheds light on this idea. In 1930, when the government mandated teaching secular studies in *chadarim* and *yeshivos*, the Chafetz Chaim declared that this was a *gezeirah* that requires *mesirus nefesh*, even giving up one’s life. Rav Elchanan Wasserman asked him for the source of this ruling. In reply, the Chafetz Chaim opened his cloak, pointed to his heart, and said, “It’s written *here!*”

Within every Jewish heart it is written that we must have *mesirus nefesh* for Hashem. As the Sfas Emes explains on the word בְּתוֹכָם—Pinchas, through his *kinah*, kindled the same fire within the hearts of all Jews, that same *kinah* for the honor of Hashem.

(סעודה שלישית פרשת בלק תשפ”ד, מאמר א’, עבר דרשא)

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that whatever Hashem puts in my mouth, that is what I must be watchful (אֲשַׁמֵּר) to speak. The term *shemirah* indicates a *lav*—as Chazal state in many places.

The Gemara questions how *hasra'ah* can be issued to a prophet who withholds his prophecy. How could anyone know he received a *nevuah*? Abaye answers based on the pasuk (Amos 3:7), כִּי לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה ה' אֱלֹקִים דָּבָר, – Hashem will do nothing unless He has revealed His secret to His servants the prophets. Hashem reveals the prophecy to all the other prophets as well, so they are fully aware that the *navi* in question has received a prophecy and is withholding it. They can therefore give him proper *hasra'ah*, and they can testify to *beis din* that he withheld his prophecy.

Rav Dov Landau asks why the testimony of the prophets is not disqualified as individual testimony (*eidus meyuchedes*). The Gemara (*Makkos* 6b) invalidates testimony from witnesses who saw an event separately—for example, from different windows—and did not see each other. Here, too, each prophet heard the message from Hashem individually. *Eidus meyuchedes* is valid only for monetary cases (*dinei mamonos*), but not for capital cases (*dinei nefashos*). The general rule is that *malkos* is equated with *dinei nefashos*.²

Let us analyze this question. According to *Tosfos Rabbeinu Peretz*—who explains that according to Rav Chisda, one receives *malkos d'Oraisa* for suppressing prophecy, because Rav Chisda maintains that one does receive *malkos* for a *lav she'ein bo ma'aseh*—this presents a serious question: since the

malkos are a punishment, they require valid testimony, and individual testimony (*eidus meyuchedes*) would indeed be disqualified.

However, according to the other view of *Tosafos*—that these *malkos* are given as coercion (*midin kefiyah al hamitzvos*)—then one could argue that *individual testimony* is acceptable, since the *malkos* are not administered as punishment but as enforcement. Only *malkos* of punishment are compared to *dinei nefashos*, as they are both forms of corporal punishment; the *malkos* of coercion might not be subject to the same rules.

This view is supported by the *Minchas Chinuch*,³ who writes that even when someone admits he has not fulfilled a mitzvah, *beis din* may still beat him to compel observance—despite the fact that a person's own admission is not considered valid testimony. This shows that when lashes are meant to enforce a mitzvah, and not to punish, valid testimony is not necessary. However, *Minchas Chinuch* would perhaps allow beating somebody until he cooperates and does the mitzvah, but not to the extent where he would actually die. Given that many Acharonim understand נפשו שתצא literally, that would have the status of *dinei nefashos* and would require formal testimony.

On the other hand, one might argue that even if the case is comparable to *dinei nefashos*, the nature of the testimony is different. The testimony offered by the other prophets does not directly accuse the individual of wrongdoing—it merely establishes the fact that he received a

prophecy. For this preliminary fact, even a single witness would be believed. Once that fact is established, *beis din* could rely on the testimony of two additional witnesses to determine whether he withheld the prophecy. This is similar to the ruling of the Rambam⁴ where one person testifies that a given substance is *cheilev*, and two witnesses later testify that someone ate it—the offender is given *malkos*, even though the *cheilev* status was established by a single witness. Likewise, here, one witness can establish the fact that a prophet received a prophecy, allowing *beis din* to compel him even to the point of death.

One might further analyze whether *eidus meyuchedes* is truly a concern in this context. The *Sefer HaBoneh*⁵ explains that Hashem reveals a prophecy not only to the individual prophet who is commanded to deliver it, but also to his fellow prophets, for the express purpose that they can warn him if he suppresses the prophecy and, if necessary, testify against him. If the very reason the *nevuah* is shared with them is to enable them to function as witnesses, it might be argued that their knowledge is a form of *nevuah* in its own right, just like any time a prophet receives revelation from Hashem and is commanded to share his revelation. We could then suggest that even a single prophet's testimony, in this context, would suffice, and the usual requirement for two witnesses might not apply—because their knowledge comes from Hashem and has the status of *nevuah*.

(בנאות דשא פרשת בלק שנת תשפ"ד, מילי דאורייתא)

² See *Gevuras Ari Makkos* 6b and *Chiddushei Harim, Choshen Mishpat* 34:32.

³ *Mitzvah* 557:6.

⁴ *Hilchos Sanhedrin* 16:6.

⁵ On *Ein Yaakov*, by Rav Yisrael of Modena.

Avraham vs. Bilam, Genuine Avodah vs. Superficiality

וישא משלו ויאמר, מן-ארם ינחני בלק מלך-מואב, מהררי-קדם: לכה ארה לי יעקב, ולכה זעמה ישראל.

He took up his parable and said: From Aram, Balak, king of Moav, has brought me, from the mountains of the East: "Come, curse Yaakov for me, and come, invoke wrath against Yisrael" (Bamidbar 23:7).

The *Kedushas Levi* explains that the word ארה (curse) can also be understood as a term meaning selection, as Chazal (*Shabbos* 73b, *Bava Basra* 82a) use the word אורה to mean picking figs. Balak asked Bilam to select and identify what positive trait of Bnei Yisrael was shared by Moav. Balak hoped that by identifying this quality, he might be able to manipulate and corrupt it to harm Bnei Yisrael. Accordingly, the pasuk can be read, יעקב לי ארה – Come, select from within me a resemblance to Yaakov, ולכה זעמה ישראל – in order that we can spiritually harm the Bnei Yisrael.

The *Kedushas Levi* doesn't specify what trait Bilam selected, because Balak's premise was fundamentally mistaken. The good deeds and qualities of the nations of the world share no similarity to Bnei Yisrael. Their goodness is only external and self-serving. Balak built seven altars imitating the seven altars of the Avos. However, the Avos built the *mizbechos* after experiencing a miracle or after passing a *nisayon*. The *korbanos* they offered were an expression of a deep connection to Hashem. Balak's altars were devoid of meaning.

We learn in the Mishnah (*Avos* 5:19), *A good eye, a humble spirit, and a modest soul are the traits of the disciples of Avraham Avinu; a bad eye, a haughty spirit, and a greedy soul are the traits of the disciples of Bilam HaRasha.*

Why does the Mishnah list all three negative traits explicitly? After listing the positive traits,

it could have simply said, "and whoever has the opposite is a disciple of Bilam."

The Mishnah continues: *What is the difference between the disciples of Avraham and the disciples of Bilam? The disciples of Avraham are destined for Olam Haba while the disciples of Bilam are destined for Gehinnom.*

Since it's clear that Avraham and Bilam are complete opposites, what is the Mishnah's question what is the difference?

The *Sfas Emes* explains that outwardly, Bilam appeared to possess the three positive traits. He said: ויתן לי בלק מלא ביתו כסף וזהב, – *Even if Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem, my God, to do anything small or great* (Bamidbar 22:18). That might sound like the words of a tzaddik—yet beneath the surface we glimpse Bilam's greed. And although he kept insisting that he would speak only what Hashem placed in his mouth, this was only superficial. Despite being a *yode'a daas Elyon*, he committed bestial sins, because his heart remained impure.

This is why the Mishnah explicitly lists Bilam's three negative traits. Even when they may resemble Avraham's traits externally, their inner nature is entirely different. The Mishnah asks, *What is the difference...?* because careful discernment is needed to perceive the distinctions that hide beneath the surface.

Chazal (*Berachos* 12b) wished to incorporate *Parshas Balak* into *Krias Shema*, so that during *Kabbalas Ol Malchus Shamayim* we would be reminded to serve Hashem in truth, like disciples of Avraham Avinu—not superficially, like Bilam.

When Bnei Yisrael conduct themselves properly and sincerely accept *Ol Malchus*

Shamayim, the nations can search for something similar within themselves—but there is no real comparison.. A Jew's actions, when done properly, stem from the depths of his *neshamah*. A Jew knows he was sent into this world for one reason, to bring *nachas* to his Creator. His davening, his Torah, and his *mitzvos* are not performed for pride or recognition, but to fulfill his mission.

At the beginning of one's *avodas Hashem*, it is normal to have personal motives, and this

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is entirely acceptable. Chazal (*Pesachim* 50b) acknowledge this reality: *A person should always engage in Torah and mitzvos even not for their own sake, because eventually he will come to serve Hashem lishmah.* However, while still in the stage of *shelo lishmah*, one must remain focused on progressing toward *lishmah*. As long as a person is still driven by self-interest, he is still on the journey and has not yet attained the true goal of *avodas Hashem*. One must constantly remember that the ultimate purpose of all *avodas Hashem* is to attain the level of serving Hashem *lishmah*.

(סעודה שלישית פרשת בלק תשפ"ד, מאמר ב', עברא דרשא)