

ohr SHABBOS

PARSHAS BALAK

In this week's Parsha, we read about the exciting episode where Bilaam's donkey talked back. Three times the donkey sees an angel and veers off the path. This was too much for Bilaam, who began to assault his animal. The donkey in response opened his mouth and began to berate Bilaam. "Why did you hit me these three times? Have I not served you and been good to you my entire life?"

Chazal infer from the expression "Zeh Shalosh Regalim", these three times, that the donkey was telling Bilaam that it was futile to attempt to annihilate the Jewish nation who celebrate three Regalim - Pseach, Shavuos, and Sukkos. This needs an explanation. Of all the merits that the Jewish people have, why did the donkey say that the merit of the three Moadim would ultimately be the cause of Bilaam's failure?

Rav Shaul M'Amsterdam offers the following explanation. The Pasuk (24:1) states that Bilaam looked towards the wilderness to view Klal Yisroel from a different angle. The Targum translates this Pasuk to mean that Bilaam looked back into the wilderness to try to remind Hashem of how the Jewish nation sinned with the golden calf. Bilaam tried to cause Hashem to look with disfavour towards the Jewish people in an endeavour to curse them.

One of the Piyutim that is recited during Pesach contains the following stanza: רצוי אלה, באלה הם מועדי. The commentators explain that this Piyut is explaining why we were forgiven for the sin of the golden calf. We were forgiven for saying אלה אלוי ישראל - the sin of the golden calf, as a result of אלה הם מועדי - the Mitzvah of the three Regalim.

The Sforno writes that even worse than the worshiping of the calf was the fact that the Jewish nation rejoiced. When Moshe saw the celebrating, he understood that the nation was not yet ready to accept the Torah. If all they had done was commit idolatry, there would have been hope. But as this transgression was done with merriment, it was a sign that they could not be given the Torah. And that is why only *after* Moshe came down and saw the excitement did he smash the Luchos.

The essence of a Yom Tov is to rejoice with Hashem. Therefore it was the merit of the three Moadim that earned us our forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. For the sin was primarily that the nation celebrated over something that was contrary to Hashem's desires. To rectify that, we celebrate three times a year and rejoice in our ability to follow Hashem's Torah and keep his Mitzvos.

In the incident of the golden calf, only 3000 deaths are mentioned, while the number of people who perished in the Ba'al Pe'or episode was substantially larger. A pagan cult of licentiousness is infinitely more serious than a metaphysical aberration into idolatry. (Rav Hirsch)

THE REST OF THE STORY:

What's behind the Pasuk?

By R' Yosef Dovid Rothbart

Although Hashem gave permission to Bilaam to accompany the officers of Balak, Bilaam knew that Hashem would not be pleased if he did decide to travel. But that did not prevent him from agreeing to go. He awoke early, saddled his donkey, and set out on his journey.

As he approached a road that was fenced in on either side by stone walls, an angel was sent to prevent Bilaam from travelling further. The donkey that Bilaam was riding suddenly stopped, too frightened to move forward. In the distance there appeared to be a man with a butcher's knife. (A donkey cannot see an angel.) Terrified, the donkey turned to the right but the stone wall prevented it from moving off the path. It swung its head to the left, but it had nowhere to go; the donkey was trapped. Left with no choice, the donkey squatted and nervously awaited its fate.

Bilaam was furious. He could see no reason why his stubborn donkey refused to move. Shaking with rage, he began to scream at his donkey as he hit it wildly. "How dare you make a mockery of me? How dare you just sit here and refuse to travel? Why, if I had a sword on me, I would kill you right now."

In the middle of this tirade, the donkey lifted its head and began to bray. Suddenly, the braying could be understood. The onlookers were shocked. Bilaam's donkey began to speak. It rebuked Bilaam for attempting to annihilate the nation of Hashem. It asked Bilaam why he was enraged by the fact that it had stopped walking. "Have I ever done something like this before?" the donkey demanded.

Bilaam began to agree, but the donkey did not wait for him to finish. "Listen to me well. Is it not true that you have trained me to recognize that, whenever something out of the ordinary occurs three times, there is a supernatural reason for this?"

"Yes."

"Did you not notice that I veered from the path twice before this moment when I stopped completely? Surely a wise man such as yourself, would, upon realizing the change in what he considered normal, ponder the reason for the change. Indeed, if a person did not contemplate the reason for the change, it would show a lack of intelligence."

Again Bilaam was forced to agree.

"If so," the donkey concluded, "you are exhibiting a tremendous lack of intelligence. During the entire time you merited to own me, I have never disobeyed you. Yet, today, I ignored you three times. Shouldn't you have contemplated this before reacting as you did?"

(based on yalkut Me'am Loez)

HALACHA

BY R'ELI KOHANANOO

Hilchos K'riyas HaTorah (part 4)

The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 139, 2) writes that if a person who is unable to read is called to the Torah, the Tzibur should protest his going up. This can be understood in light of a second Halacha that is recorded by the Shulchan Aruch. In Siman 141, 2, the Shulchan Aruch rules that if a person doesn't read together with the Ba'al Koreh, he has recited a bracha L'vatala. The reason is that Chazal instituted the bracha on the Torah for the person who reads from the Torah, not for someone else. The Tur (O.C.141) cites the Rosh (Teshuvos Klal 3, 13) that if a person reads along with the Ba'al Koreh, it is considered as if he read from the Torah even though his voice wasn't heard. Indeed, the Beis Yosef (ibid) brings Tosafos, who say that in our time, even if a person is proficient in reading from the Torah, he should still allow the Ba'al Koreh to read since if he read it would cause those who cannot read to be embarrassed. This opinion is cited by the Mishna Berurah (ibid, 8) L'Halacha, and it is the prevailing custom.

The Biur Halacha (141 s.v. L'vatala) asks a question on the Shulchan Aruch as follows: The Rema (139, 3) permits calling a blind person up for an Aliyah based on the opinion of the Maharil. It would seem that according to the Rema one wouldn't need to read along with the Ba'al Koreh for otherwise a blind person wouldn't be allowed to get an Aliyah. However, the Biur Halacha points out that even the Rema was hesitant to rely on this, and only allowed giving such a person an Aliyah in a situation that would cause strife, such as an Am Ha'aretz or a blind person.

He cites as proof to this that the Rema in his Sefer, Darkei Moshe (O.C. 141), favours the opinion of the Beis Yosef and not the opinion of the Maharil, who permitted calling up the blind for Aliyos. The Taz, however, brings a proof for the opinion of the Maharil from the Yerushalmi (Megilla) that allows one person to read the Torah and another to recite the bracha based on the principle of "Shomaiah K'oneh". The Pri Chadash as well asks this question on what the Shulchan Aruch wrote. The Biur Halacha rejects this proof by explaining that the case of the Yerushalmi is fundamentally different from our case. The case of the Yerushalmi is discussing reading the Megilla, which each and every person has an obligation to hear himself after reciting the bracha. Consequently, a person may read on behalf of others invoking the principle of "Shomeh K'oneh". However, reciting the bracha on Kr'ias HaTorah is only an obligation on the one called for the Aliyah, and if he does not read from the Torah, he is no different from the rest of the Tzibur who don't recite the bracha. (See the Biur Halacha further for a possible reconciliation of the Taz).

In conclusion, L'chatchila, a person should certainly read along with the Ba'al Koreh when called up for an Aliyah since according to many Rishonim (see Beis Yosef 141) and the Shulchan Aruch it is a bracha L'vatala if he fails to do so.

A SECOND LOOK

By R' Aaron Kutanowski

After receiving permission from Hashem to travel with the Moavites, Bilaam arose in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the officers of Moav. Hashem became angry when he went and an angel was dispatched to intercept him on the pathway. Rabbi Sorotzkin in his Sefer, Oznayim LaTorah, asks why Hashem became angry. In the previous Pasuk, Hashem allowed Bilaam to go with the Moavites. What, then, did Bilaam do that caused Hashem to become angry? Rav Sorotzkin suggests that the word 'Im' - with the Moavites - reveals Bilaam's true intentions. On the previous Pasuk, the Oznayim LaTorah speaks out that Hashem's permission to Bilaam was conditional. The Pasuk says: "If the men have come to summon you, arise and go with them, but only the thing that I shall speak to you - that shall you do" (22:20). Hashem's permission was given on the condition that Bilaam go with the men only as an emissary of Hashem, and not to join in the plot of Moav and Midian. Bilaam had been allowed to go with the Moavites only to communicate the wishes of Hashem, but Bilaam went "with the Moavites", with them in their mission; or, as Rashi says on the words "Im Saarei Moav", Bilaam and the Moavites had the same heart/desires.

Rashi says that Hashem understood through Bilaam's actions that his intent was sinful. When Avraham Aveinu prepared for Akeidas Yitzchak, the Pasuk used similar language as it does in describing how Bilaam prepared for his journey. The Pasuk says that Avraham arose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and was accompanied by two lads. Rashi in Vayeira (22:3) explains the reasoning behind each of Avraham's actions. "Avraham woke up early in the morning"; this shows Avraham's zealotness to perform the Mitzvah. "He saddled his own donkey", not commanding a servant to fulfill this task, foregoing his personal dignity, so as to perform the Mitzvah himself out of his love for the Mitzvah. He took two men with him, because a regal person does not have permission to travel without being accompanied by two men. Rashi is telling us that Bilaam's actions were the opposite of Avraham Aveinu's. Bilaam arose in the morning, in zealotness to perform a sin. He saddled his own donkey, overcoming his dignity, to perform a sin and expressing his desire to do it. And he brought two men along with him because he wanted to project to the world his nobility, as opposed to doing it for the proper reasons.

The Mishna in Avos says: "Those who have an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul are among the disciples of the wicked Bilaam" (5:22). We see Bilaam's evil eye in that he could not appreciate that Hashem's angel was on the path, while a simple donkey could, even though Bilaam was a prophet, a visionary. We see Bilaam's arrogant spirit in that he believed himself to be a regal person, yet he saddled his own donkey - showing that he was truly of very lowly bearing.

We see Bilaam's greedy soul from the comment of the Gur Aryeh on Bilaam mentioning storehouses of gold and silver to Balak: this reveals Bilaam's base desires, only motivated by personal financial gain (22:18). May we be blessed to be among the disciples of Avraham Aveinu, with a good eye, humble spirit and a meek soul, inheriting this world and the world to come through our Avodas Hashem.

Shabbos table discussions

- Before davening, a person is not allowed to go over to another person's house or place in shul to say Shalom or good morning (see O.C. 89, 2). However, if he meets a friend in the street, there are opinions that allow him to say Shalom or good morning. What would the Halacha be if a person called his friend on the telephone? (ע"י שו"ת אז נדברו הי"ד סי' ל"ד)
- In order to begin Shemona Esrei with the Minyan, a person may skip parts of davening (see O.C. 52, 1 regarding the situations to which this Halacha applies). Would this allowance apply to a woman who is not obliged to daven with a Minyan?

Shabbos STORY



By R' Yossi Bergman

In the previous week's issue, Zrodny prepared to tell his wife about his desire to convert to Judaism.

Zrodny told his wife how he had come to the conclusion that the only life he felt worth living was that of a Jew; his desire to become a Jew had become more overwhelming than ever. Therefore, there was only one thing for them to do, to part ways... She covered her face with her hands and wept quietly, shaking her head while her husband tried to console her. "Give me a little time to think about it," she said.

The following morning, she said to her husband:

"My dear Zrodny, remember you read to me not so long ago the Book of Ruth. My answer is the same as hers: *'Wherever you go, I will go; your people shall be my people, and your G-d, my G-d; only death will separate us...'*

After much discussion Zrodny and his wife agreed on the following plan: First, Zrodny would "disappear" and go to Amsterdam to become a Jew there. His wife would wait for his "return" for at least one year. Then, if she still wished to follow him, she would take their son and would set out to "search" for him. Leaving no trace of her whereabouts, she would eventually make her way to Amsterdam, with a view to convert.

According to plan, Zrodny made his way to Amsterdam. He went to the Beis Din, where he introduced himself as a friend of the Count Valentin Pototzky. Zrodny related to the Rabbis how he and Valentin had decided a number of years earlier, while both were students at the Polish academy in Vilna, to become Jews; that Valentin did in fact go to Amsterdam, while he could not go along at that time, for reasons which he explained to the Rabbis. "I assure you," Zrodny concluded, "that in all these years, and in the face of all that I had to sacrifice, my resolve to become a Jew has remained as unshakable as my friend's."

"The Ger Tzedek, Avraham ben Avraham, left Amsterdam only a few days ago," the Rabbis told Zrodny. However the Rabbis assured him that they were satisfied with his complete sincerity and determination to become a Jew.

After converting in accordance with Halacha, Zrodny was given the Hebrew name Boruch ben Avraham.

A year later, much to his surprise, his former wife and child came to the Bais Medrash where he was learning Torah. She barely recognized her husband with his full-grown beard, Peyos and dressed in Jewish garb.

They had a heart-to-heart talk, during which she told him that she had been counting the days until she could come and join him in the Jewish faith, so that they could all live together as a happy Jewish family. But the man who was her former husband had other ideas.

"Do you remember our discussion before I left you? I must tell you quite definitely that I have no intention of marrying you even if you should become Jewish. I have nothing to offer you. My soul thirsts for Torah; I have so much to make up for all my wasted years. Take my advice, go back home; you have an easy and comfortable life ahead of you..."

She rose, took her son, and with deep sadness in her voice said, "Keep well."

"Take care of the boy," he said, as they walked out.

Several weeks later a woman and a boy walked into the Bais Medrash where Boruch (Zrodny) was learning Torah. As he looked up in astonishment, the woman introduced herself with a smile: "I am Rachel bat Sarah, and this is little Avraham..."

"I thought you had gone back to your parents?"

"You should know me better than that," Rochel said. "I just wanted you to know that I will take good care of our son and see to it that he grows up to be as good a Jew as you. I really came to say goodbye..."

There was an awkward pause as Boruch considered the new situation. Then he said very earnestly, "Rachel, will you be my wife?" Rachel's eyes welled up as she hugged her son and eagerly nodded her consent.

The Bais Din that had brought them under the wings of Hashem also joined them in marriage. Soon afterwards, Boruch, Rochel and little Avraham left quietly for the Holy Land, where they lived a holy life of Torah and Mitzvos.

Boruch had only one regret, that he had not had the opportunity to meet Avraham ben Avraham to whom he felt an eternal debt of gratitude for showing him the way of truth.

To be continued...

RIDDLE

By R' Naftali Spiegel

Who taught Balak Magic?

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Please include your name.

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Answer to last week's riddle: If a person is Mafkir his object for a specific person, the object still belongs to him.

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Did you know...

- That by granting the gift of speech to the donkey, Hashem was sending a message to Bilaam? Just as Hashem can bestow the gift of speech to an animal which otherwise could not speak, so too He can remove the ability to speak from a person in order to prevent him from speaking against the Jewish people.
- Immediately after the donkey finished speaking an angel killed it? This was in order that idol worshippers not make this wondrous creature into an object of worship. It may also have been out of consideration for Bilaam: if the donkey had lived, people would always have referred to it as "the donkey that rebuked Bilaam". Although Bilaam was a Rasha, Hashem still was concerned for his reputation.
- The vision of Bilaam was extraordinary? He could see more with one eye closed than another person is able to see with both eyes open.
- It is possible to glean from the blessings of Bilaam how he intended to curse the Jewish nation? The first curse that Bilaam intended to invoke against the Jewish people was that they should have no shuls or places of study.

Instead, Hashem caused him to say, "How good are your tents, Yaakov, your tabernacle, Yisrael!"

The reason why Bilaam planned to curse the Jewish people that they should lack houses of study and shuls was that he knew that when the Jewish people spend time in these places in the presence of the Shechina, they have the ability to reach very high levels and to have their Teffilos answered.

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riddle

By R' Naftali Spiegel

What do Ribbis, Tzitzis and using inaccurate measurements all have in common?

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Answer to last week's riddle: The Parah Adumah was always burnt on Wednesday.

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