

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

STREETS OF HEAVEN

“Bilaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, ‘If Balak will give me his houseful of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem my G-d to do anything great or small.’” (22-18)

A fable: A rich man, nearing death, is grieved because he has worked very hard for his money and he wants to take it with him to Heaven. He prays that he might be able to take along some of his wealth. An angel hears his plea and appears to him. “Sorry,” says the angel, “but you can’t take your wealth with you.” The man implores the angel, “Please speak to G-d. Please. Please. Maybe He’ll bend the rules just this once!”

Several excruciating minutes pass. Then the angel reappears and says, “Your petition has been granted. You may take one suitcase with you.” The angel disappears. Overjoyed, the man gathers his last strength and his largest suitcase and fills it with bars of pure gold. He places it beside his bed, waiting for his final journey.

Shortly afterwards, the man arrives at the Gates of Heaven. There to greet him is the Admitting Angel. Seeing the suitcase, the angel says, “Hold on, you can’t bring that in here!” “But,” the man explains, “I have permission from the Highest Authority!” The man asks the angel to verify his story.

The angel picks up his celestial cellphone and checks: “You’re right. You are allowed one carry-on bag, but I’m

supposed to check its contents before letting it through.” Opening the suitcase to inspect the worldly items that the man found too precious to leave behind, the angel exclaims:

“You brought pavement?!”

It’s not only Heaven’s streets that are paved with gold. In this world too, the streets are paved with gold — but you have to recognize it. You have to be aware of the glint. When you help an old lady across the street — you’ve paved this world with gold. When you take a piece of fruit and say a blessing, acknowledging Who the blessing comes from, you’ve paved this world with gold. When you dominate your bad character traits, you’ve paved your world with gold. And most of all, when you study the Torah — the holiest thing in this world — you’ve paved this world with gold.

“Bilaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, ‘If Balak will give me his houseful of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem my G-d to do anything great or small.’”

Who mentioned anything about a houseful of silver and gold? By Bilaam talking about money, he revealed his mercenary nature. As if to say, “If I were able to transgress G-d’s word, I would — but only for a king’s ransom.”

In the next world, all the gold and silver will be mere pavement. However, if you “pave” your life with good deeds and the service of G-d, you will find there’s more than a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Sources:

• Rashi; Gur Aryeh; Rabbi Menachem Nissel

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Balak, king of Moav, is in morbid fear of *Bnei Yisrael*. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilaam to curse them. First, Hashem speaks to Bilaam and forbids him to go. But, because Bilaam is so insistent, Hashem appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a *malach* (emissary from Hashem) blocks Bilaam’s donkey’s path. Unable to contain his frustration, Bilaam strikes the donkey each time it stops or tries to detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking Bilaam why he is hitting her. The *malach* instructs Bilaam regarding what he is permitted to say and what he is forbidden to say regarding the Jewish People. When

Bilaam arrives, King Balak makes elaborate preparations, hoping that Bilaam will succeed in the curse. Three times Bilaam attempts to curse and three times a blessing issues instead. Balak, seeing that Bilaam has failed, sends him home in disgrace.

Bnei Yisrael begin sinning with the Moabite women and worshipping the Moabite idols, and they are punished with a plague. One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a Midianite princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, grabs a spear and kills both evil-doers. This halts the plague, but not before 24,000 have died.

The Prophet Micha foresees “Yaakov’s Remnant” — the Jews who survive the mass murders and decimation of exile — sprout and flourish at the end of days. Once vassals, the Jews will grow into an independent people, relying on no person or nation for sustenance; once a sheep among lions, the Jews become like a lion who can attack its enemies with impunity. This stage is temporary, however; eventually, there will be no need for horses, chariots, or fortresses, as peace will reign in the land.

Micha then rebukes the Jews for their lax Torah-observance and reminds them of G-d’s historical kindness: G-d freed them from Egypt and put three fabulous leaders, Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, at their head. And — drawing on events from Parshat Balak — Micha recalls G-d’s special love of the Jewish People and His protection against the

nefarious plottings of Balak and Bilaam.

PLEASE DEW

“And Yaakov’s Remnant among the many nations will be like dew from G-d...which looks to no one and waits for no man.” (5:6)

Almost an entire Parsha, Parshat Balak, chronicles the spiteful attempts by Israel’s bitter foes to obliterate the fledgling nation. During these attacks, the Jews are entirely passive — perhaps even unaware; they are protected by G-d alone.

So, at the end of days, will the Jews be like the dew that condenses miraculously upon the grass, independent of any human agency. Like the dew, the Jews will bring the nourishing waters of Torah to a thirsty world.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

Misjudging others, as the following story illustrates, can make them feel like going...

TO THE DUMP! DUMP! DUMP!

We purchased a home. When we moved in, we found that the garage was filled to the brim with junk. The previous owners obviously didn’t want the stuff, so they left it for us as a “present.” And it was real

junk: Broken boards with rusty nails jutting out, tangled fishing line, large plastic buckets with holes on the bottom, a broken ladder, etc.

I scanned the local newspaper; by dusk someone came in an old pickup truck and hauled all the junk away for a reasonable fee. I was relieved that all this unsafe and useless stuff was out of the

way and that, finally, we could make use of our garage.

We went out that evening, and upon our return several hours later, we found a note tacked to our front door from a very angry neighbor: “How DARE you dump your junk on our lawn! What gives you the right to be so callous towards your neighbors? Why should we have to deal with YOUR junk?!” etc. etc. The junk was obviously identifiable as coming from us, since there were a few discarded moving boxes with our name amongst the stuff.

Needless to say, we were mortified. Unwilling to go the extra miles to the junkyard, the worker we hired had simply moved the junk from our garage to a neighbor’s lawn! But what was worse was that this irate neighbor didn’t sign his name to the note, and we had no idea which neighbor we had so grievously but unintentionally offended!

My husband and I spent the next hour driving up and down the neighborhood in search of the junk, so we could apologize to the neighbor and make arrangements to have it cleared away, but alas, we were unsuccessful in finding either the junk or the neighbor’s identity. To this day — 20 years and two cities later — we have been unable to ask forgiveness for the unreliable worker’s dirty deed. And I wonder if, for 20 years, those former neighbors, whoever they might be, have harbored resentment against us.

• Submitted by an Ohrnet reader

Send your stories to ohr@ohr.edu

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לע"נ
 הרה"ח ר' דוד בן ר' אהרון ז"ל
 ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

A QUESTION OF VALUE

If, for the purpose of *kiddushin*, a man gives a woman an item such as meat cooked in milk, from which it is forbidden to derive any benefit, the *kiddushin* is invalid. If he sells that forbidden item, however, and gives the woman the money derived from the sale, the *kiddushin* is valid.

An interesting question regarding this ruling of the *mishna* is raised by Mishneh Lamelech in his commentary on Rambam (*Laws of Marriage 5:1*). What if the woman is sick and requires the forbidden item to save her life, in which case she is allowed to derive benefit from it? Is *kiddushin* with a forbidden item invalid because the item has no value to the *man*, and it is therefore considered as if he gave her nothing; or, is it because such *kiddushin* taking effect will be considered as him deriving benefit from the forbidden item? If either of these is the reason, then the *kiddushin* will not be valid in a case where the seriously ill woman is allowed to derive benefit from the forbidden item. But perhaps the reason that *kiddushin* with a forbidden item is invalid is that the woman received nothing of value to *her*. If this is so, then in a case where her health condition allows her to benefit from the forbidden item, she has received something of value and the *kiddushin* is valid.

Rabbeinu Nissim (Ran), at the conclusion of the second *perek* of our *mesechta*, cites a statement by Rashi (*Mesechta Chullin 4b*) that the funds received from the sale of an item forbidden for benefit are only permissible for others, but not for the seller himself. According to this, Ran points out, the reason that our *mishna* rules valid a *kiddushin* made with funds derived from the sale of a forbidden item is that since the woman is permitted to benefit from those funds, it is considered as if she received something of value.

Mishneh Lamelech cites the above Rashi and Ran as sources for concluding that everything depends on whether the *woman* is receiving something of value to *her* and that in a case of an ill woman the *kiddushin* would be valid. In contrast, he cites the view of Ritva on this *mishna* that even if the woman receiving the forbidden item may eat it because her life is in danger, the *kiddushin* is not valid because the matter depends on whether it has value to the giver as well.

• *Kiddushin 56b*

MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

If a man appointed an agent to make *kiddushin* with a woman on his behalf and that agent went ahead and took her as a wife for himself, his *kiddushin* is valid.

A caveat is added by the *gemara* to this first *mishna* in the third *perek* of our *mesechta*: What he did is in fact valid, but

he is guilty of dishonest behavior. This concept, adds the *gemara*, is actually hinted at in the superfluous term “went ahead” used by the *mishna*, which was intended to communicate that he pursued a perfidious course of action.

Such a charge of dishonesty was initially raised against the Sage Ravin Chassida who went to make *kiddushin* with a woman on behalf of his son, who had expressed an interest in marrying her, but ended up taking her as his own wife instead. His behavior, however, is explained by the *gemara*: The woman’s family did not consent to her marrying his son, only him. But why didn’t he inform his son of this before making *kiddushin*, in order to remove any suspicion of dishonesty? Because of the concern that during the interval her family might have a change of heart and marry her off to someone else.

Why should this sage have worried that he would lose this match, since we know that a Heavenly voice dictates who will be united in marriage (*Mesechta Mo’ed Katan 18b* and *Mesechta Sotah 2a*)? Ritva offers a solution to this problem based on the approaches of the *gemara* cited above. In *Sotah*, the *gemara* distinguishes between a first and a second marriage, restricting predestination to the first one. As a father, Ravin Chassida was obviously involved in a second marriage, so he could not rely on this woman’s being predestined for him.

In *Mo’ed Katan*, however, the *gemara* indicates that even in regard to a first marriage there is a possibility of prayer causing a change in the Heavenly decree. Ritva in *Mo’ed Katan* explains that the merit of prayer can actually enable a man to marry a woman who had been predestined for another. This is why *kiddushin* can be made even during the Intermediate Days of a Festival, even though weddings are forbidden then, and this is why Ravin was worried that he would lose his opportunity.

This approach is in the spirit of what Tosefot (*Mesechta Shabbat 156a*) writes, that even though such circumstances as children, life and prosperity are predestined (*Mo’ed Katan 28a*), a great merit is capable of effecting a change in the Heavenly decree.

• *Kiddushin 59a*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did Moav consult specifically with Midian regarding their strategy against the Jews?
2. What was Balak's status before becoming Moav's king?
3. Why did Hashem grant prophecy to the evil Bilaam?
4. Why did Balak think Bilaam's curse would work?
5. When did Bilaam receive his prophecies?
6. Hashem asked Bilaam, "Who are these men with you?" What did Bilaam deduce from this question?
7. How do we know Bilaam hated the Jews more than Balak did?
8. What is evidence of Bilaam's arrogance?
9. In what way was the *malach* that opposed Bilaam an angel of mercy?
10. How did Bilaam die?
11. Why did the *malach* kill Bilaam's donkey?
12. Bilaam compared his meeting with an angel to someone else's meeting with an angel. Who was the other person and what was the comparison?
13. Bilaam told Balak to build seven altars. Why specifically seven?
14. Who in Jewish history seemed fit for a curse, but got a blessing instead?
15. Why are the Jewish People compared to lions?
16. On Bilaam's third attempt to curse the Jews, he changed his strategy. What was different?
17. What were Bilaam's three main characteristics?
18. What did Bilaam see that made him decide not to curse the Jews?
19. What phrase in Bilaam's self-description can be translated in two opposite ways, both of which come out meaning the same thing?
20. Bilaam told Balak that the Jews' G-d hates what?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 22:4 - Since Moshe grew up in Midian, the Moabites thought the Midianites might know wherein lay Moshe's power.
2. 22:4 - He was a prince of Midian.
3. 22:5 - So the other nations couldn't say, "If we had had prophets, we also would have become righteous."
4. 22:6 - Because Bilaam's curse had helped Sichon defeat Moav.
5. 22:8 - Only at night.
6. 22:9 - He mistakenly reasoned that Hashem isn't all-knowing.
7. 22:11 - Balak wanted only to drive the Jews from the land. Bilaam sought to exterminate them completely.
8. 22:13 - He implied that Hashem wouldn't let him go with the Moabite princes due to their lesser dignity.
9. 22:22 - It mercifully tried to stop Bilaam from sinning and destroying himself.
10. 22:23 - He was killed with a sword.
11. 22:33 - So that people shouldn't see it and say, "Here's the donkey that silenced Bilaam." Hashem is concerned with human dignity.
12. 22:34 - Avraham. Bilaam said, "Hashem told me to go but later sent an angel to stop me. The same thing happened to Avraham: Hashem told Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak but later canceled the command through an angel."
13. 23:4 - Corresponding to the seven altars built by the Avot. Bilaam said to Hashem, "The Jewish People's ancestors built seven altars, but I alone have built altars equal to all of them."
14. 23:8 - Yaakov, when Yitzchak blessed him.
15. 23:24 - They rise each morning and "strengthen" themselves to do *mitzvot*.
16. 24:1 - He began mentioning the Jewish People's sins, hoping thus to be able to curse them.
17. 24:2 - An evil eye, pride, and greed.
18. 24:2 - He saw each Tribe dwelling without intermingling. He saw the tents arranged so no one could see into his neighbor's tent.
19. 24:3 - "*Shatum ha'ayin*." It means either "the poked-out eye," implying blindness in one eye; or, it means the "the open eye," which means vision but implies blindness in the other eye.
20. 24:14 - Promiscuity.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

22:5	RAMBAN Balak's Rise to Power	24:20	Amalek
22:20	Bilaam's Mission	22:2	SFORNO What Balak Saw
22:23	The Donkey	22:6	Bilaam's Power
23:16	Bilaam's Prophecy	23:22	Jewish Conquest

NEWS JEWS

From: A. in Chicago

Dear Rabbi,

I live in Chicago. May I listen to Israel news programs on the internet Friday afternoon in Chicago when it's already Shabbat in Israel (e.g., 4:00 PM in Chicago is midnight in Israel)? The programs are being broadcast live from Israel. Thanks.

Dear A.,

No, you shouldn't listen. Here's why:

Obviously, such broadcasts involve Jews who are violating Shabbat by driving around, using computers, talking on phones and microphones, etc. Even though they may regard themselves as "non-observant," "secular," or "traditional," Jewish law nevertheless sees them as full Jews, obligated to observe Shabbat. (Some non-observant Jews are unaware of this; they are surprised to learn that religious Jews consider them just as Jewish as they themselves are.)

Therefore, listening may violate the rabbinic prohibition known as "m'sayeia," aiding someone in the act of transgressing.

How does listening aid them? They can tell how many people are logged on to their website; therefore, each listener encourages them. The more people who listen during

a particular time-slot, the more that advertisers are willing to pay to advertise during that time-slot. Thus, each listener greases the wheels of their Shabbat desecration.

The fact that they will "do it anyway" is irrelevant in this regard. The point is not that you are *causing* them to break Shabbat; rather, you are encouraging them to do so.

Another reason not to listen is that such listening weakens your sensitivity to the importance and holiness of Shabbat. Just as watching violence desensitizes you to violence, witnessing Shabbat desecration desensitizes you to Shabbat desecration. Someone concerned that not only he keep the commandments but that his fellow Jews do so as well will not feel comfortable looking on while they break Shabbat.

You know, Jewish tradition teaches that "Torah scholars increase world peace." (*Talmud Berachot 64a*) Instead of listening to the news Friday afternoon, why not take out a *Chumash* and brush up on the weekly Torah portion; your Torah study will be a merit for Jews in Israel and world-over; you will be increasing peace in the world.

In other words: Instead of listening to the news, do something about it!

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Open Miracles (Ohrnet Shmini):

In "Ask the Rabbi" several weeks ago, you answered the question "Why doesn't G-d do open miracles nowadays." You emphasized miracles of the past. But I think G-d certainly does miracles now, under our very eyes. The question is, do we have the eyes to see these miracles? Here are just three of the great miracles that occurred within the last 50 years — and there were many more!

- For two thousand years we prayed about the Jewish People returning to *Eretz Yisrael*. Many people may have thought it was just a pipe dream. Then World War II came, the German and Austrian Nazis, helped by eager peoples of other ethnic groups, tortured to death and murdered a third of the Jewish people. All hope seemed to be lost forever.

Only three years after the war, a newly reborn State of Israel came into existence. Jews streamed there from the "four corners" of the earth. Now we are so used to this fact that we keep forgetting: A great miracle occurred. And it is still occurring — right before our eyes.

- Less than twenty years later Nasser kicked out the UN troops that were supposed to prevent a new war with Israel. Hundreds of thousands of people marched in Cairo and other Arab capitals calling for the destruction of Israel and for pushing the Jews into the sea. The Arab armies were considerably more numerous than the IDF, and they were armed to their teeth with the newest and deadliest Soviet weapons. Egypt started the war by closing the straits and blocking the port of Eilat (an act of war according to international law). When the shooting started, Radio Moscow announced great Arab victories every hour: Jerusalem was on fire, they said, Tel-Aviv was burning, Jews were fleeing for their lives,

victorious Arab armies were about to liberate "Palestine" from the Jewish "occupiers."

A few (six) days later, the war was over. Israel won.

- Just recall the situation in the seventies and eighties. The Evil Empire armed and armed; it was at the peak of its might. Its troops and those of its proxies led wars on almost every continent. They were turning more and more anti-Semitic. Their arrogance knew no limits; there was no force in the world to stop their expansion. People everywhere were afraid of World War III, the nuclear destruction of the world.

And then — so quickly that few people realized what happened, as quickly as if an invisible Hand turned off the light! — without any war at all, the USSR was no more.

If these weren't miracles, I don't know what were. And people ask, "why don't miracles happen now?"

• Larry Kahaner

Re: Ohr.edu

Thank you, Ohr.edu, for your explanations on the weekly Torah Portion. I like the way you relate things to everyday life and make it understandable at any level.

• Jane Jacobs from Philly

I anxiously await each new installment of your "Ask the Rabbi." And even though I am a *shomeret mitzvot* (the best I can), I still learn a lot from the Parsha Q and A. I also love your sense of humor and word play.

• Brenda B.

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Saul Behr wrote us with the following riddle:

Psalm 100, “*Mizmor l’Todah*” (A psalm of thanks), is part of the daily *p’sukei d’zimrah* prayer. It corresponds to the *korban todah* (thanksgiving offering) brought in the Holy Temple. This psalm is omitted, however, on the day before Yom Kippur, since the *korban-todah* offering could not be eaten that night, as Yom Kippur is a 24-hour fast day. (Similarly, this psalm is omitted during Pesach, as the offering consisted in part of *chametz*-leavening).

Why, then do we say “*Mizmor l’Todah*” on the day before Tisha B’av, and on Tisha B’av itself, being that Tisha B’av is a fast day just like Yom Kippur?

Answer next week...

Gotta Riddle? Send it to ohr@ohr.edu

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS “QUESTION”)

How would YOU answer this question?

It says that G-d was angry that Bilaam went to curse the Jews (22:22). But G-d gave Bilaam permission to go, so why was G-d angry? Rashi answers this by saying that G-d was angry at Bilaam for going to curse the Jews “with great desire.” But where does Rashi see this in the text?

Answer:

It doesn’t say G-d was angry at Bilaam “because he went” but rather “because he was a *goer*.” (Not “*ki halach*” but rather “*ki holeich*.”) The difference is subtle and significant: For Bilaam, going to curse the Jews wasn’t a mere action among actions; rather, it was an action that defined him. At that moment, Bilaam was a “Goer,” a “Jew-cursing.” When a person expresses his essence, he acts with desire.

• Based on Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.edu with your questions on any Parsha!

I DIDN’T KNOW THAT!

Bilaam and Balak were ingrates! They would not have been born if not for Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov: Bilaam’s ancestor Betuel was born in the merit of Avraham binding Yitzchak on the altar, and Bilaam’s ancestor Lavan had children in Yaakov’s merit. Balak’s Moabite ancestors descended from Lot after Avraham saved Lot’s life.

• Ba’al Haturim



שְׁמַחְתֶּם עִלּוּם יְרוּשָׁלַיִם
“Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”