

PARSHA

## BALAK

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### WITH THE HEART

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

**O**n the verse, “The spirit of G-d was upon him” (Bamidbar 24:2), Rashi writes: “It entered his heart not to curse them” (which is why he blessed them by saying, “How beautiful are your tents”). The Siftei Chachamim explains that it is as if the verse said, “A different spirit took hold of him, the spirit of G-d, to bless them and not curse them.” Until now, what emerged from Bilam’s mouth did not come from his heart. It is only in this verse, in the blessing, “How beautiful are your tents,” that he experienced a heartfelt desire to bless them. This was the first time that his heart experienced such an awakening, when he saw the Children of Israel encamped by their tribes, imbued with holiness and modesty, at which point he uttered the deep truth that lay hidden within him. This blessing arose from the depths of his heart, not superficial like the rest, which is why it has endured for all time. It represents the pure truth, for he put his heart into it. This is what Rashi means by writing, “It entered his heart not to curse them” – this blessing came from the inner truth; it wasn’t just talk, which is why it was fulfilled.

From here we learn the importance of putting our hearts into every mitzvah we accomplish. We can pray every day, but in a completely superficial way, meaning without concentration, despite the verse that screams: “With its mouth and with its lips, it [the people] has honored Me, yet it has distanced its heart from Me” (Isaiah 29:13). We may sit down to study a book, and yet learn without concentration, impatiently waiting for the end so we can get up and leave, like a child who skips school. This is obviously not the path that Hashem has chosen, for the Holy One, blessed be He, commands: “Place these words of Mine upon your heart” (Devarim 11:18). In fact the essence of Torah must come from the heart, from the inner truth. In his wisdom King Solomon said, “My child, when your heart becomes wise” (Mishlei 23:15). What connection is there between the heart and wisdom? The answer is that if a person puts his entire heart into Torah, this Torah is solid, to the point that all wisdom will reside in his heart. Conversely, with Bilam it was only the blessing, “How beautiful are your tents” that endured for all time, for it was only into this blessing that he put his heart. Now when we put our heart into something, it lasts.

This is the meaning of the verse, “The living should take it to heart” (Kohelet 7:2). It is only when a person focuses all his attention on the meaning of life, on the goal of being human in this world, that he can distance himself from the evil inclination, destroy it, and draw closer to Hashem. In fact it is only by reflecting upon such concepts and examining the wisdom of the heart that we will feel compelled to better ourselves and improve our conduct.

When I was in London, someone came to see me for a blessing to have children. Through Hashem’s great mercy, a year later he had a son and came to thank me. Standing before me was this man, who was completely estranged from any trace of Judaism. I said to him, “Do you think that you should be thanking me?” He said yes.

“Think about it,” I told him. “Do you think you owe me any kind of gratitude?” In the end, he agreed and said, “It’s true, you prayed for me.” I then immediately asked, “To Whom did I pray?” Hesitating, he answered: “To G-d.” I then asked him, “Alright then...where is G-d in your life? How can you thank Him for the marvelous gift that He has given you?” He answered me, “I want to make a substantial donation.”

I didn’t leave him alone, however, for I asked: “But what will you give G-d?” He then innocently asked, “What can I give G-d? Will I make Him an offering?” I replied, “Thank Him by observing Torah and mitzvot, by putting on tefillin, by observing Shabbat.” All of a sudden he said, “But I’m a Reform Jew.” I was immediately taken aback, but quickly got back on track and said, “Know that you have been given this wonderful gift from the Holy One, blessed be He, not from Reform Judaism, which distances itself from Him.” That moment, thank G-d, became a time of great favor, for his heart became open to Torah, and words of truth entered it. He immediately committed himself to doing complete teshuvah. This is exactly what Rashi said about Bilam: His heart inspired him to bless the Children of Israel at a time of truth, with upright thoughts and great concentration. Under such circumstances, thoughts take root in the depths of the heart and produce the fruit of teshuvah and good deeds, for when we put our heart into something, it lasts.

A person who pays attention to his surroundings will ask why, in recent times, we have been using disposable plastic items, all made from petroleum products. The textile industry also uses a great deal of plastic. The reason is that in these last times preceding the Final Redemption, the Holy One, blessed be He, wants to draw all the sparks of holiness that have been dispersed throughout the world, even in the most distant places, including sparks of holiness hidden in oil wells. Hence G-d inspired the creation of these disposable items created from petroleum products, as well as all the other steps required in their production.

Thus a Jew finds himself at home and recites the shehakol blessing over a plastic cup or utensil, be it for a Shabbat meal or any other meal, and he says the blessing with the proper concentration. Through such blessings, all these sparks of holiness are drawn out and elevated to their rightful place. Even sparks found in rocks and dispersed throughout the world

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are elevated when marble or similar material is imported from various countries and used in the construction of synagogues and houses of study. Hence even these sparks are elevated. It is precisely now, just prior to the Final Redemption, that the Holy One, blessed be He, is hastening to liberate these sparks.

As a result, through the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot, we draw forth and redeem the sparks of holiness that are found among non-

Jews. Hence we must strengthen ourselves in Torah and mitzvot, and take upon ourselves the yoke of Torah with devotion and a sincere love for Hashem. With every mitzvah that we accomplish, we must make an effort to be focused and act solely for the sake of Heaven and the glory of Hashem.

## Real Life Stories

### Gratitude

It is written, “Behold, a people that rises like a lioness” (Bamidbar 23:24).

Here Rashi states, “When they awaken from their sleep in the morning, they show the vigor of a lioness and a lion in grasping mitzvot, donning a tallit, reciting the Shema, and putting on tefillin.”

The maggid Rabbi Shabtai Yudelevitch recounted an amazing story concerning a man named Yaakov, who worked for The Jewish Agency for Israel. One morning he woke up and discovered that he could no longer see. He panicked, for he was now blind!

A renowned ophthalmologist by the name of Dr. Tikho immediately understood the gravity of Yaakov’s situation. He therefore admitted him to his hospital, which specialized in visual impairments, and provided him with first-class care. A day or two later, Dr. Tikho said to his patient: “This isn’t the right place for you. Your vision problem isn’t with your eyes, but with a tumor in your brain. It’s touching your optic nerve, which is depriving you of vision.”

On the advice of Dr. Tikho, Yaakov gathered all his savings, borrowed some money, and traveled to Germany to consult with Dr. Tzundak, a Jewish surgeon.

Dr. Tzundak gave him a warm welcome and treated him with the utmost devotion. Not long afterwards, he prepared him for brain surgery and opened his skull to remove the tumor. Afterwards, Yaakov remained bedridden for three months, under strict orders not to move. According to his doctors, any careless movement was liable to disturb critical areas of his brain, leading to sudden death.

To summarize, after three months of continuous suffering, Yaakov returned to health and the tumor that had afflicted his brain was now gone. During the operation, the surgeon had implanted a piece of metal (gold) into his brain. Now Dr. Tzundak joked with him that he should be careful about getting robbed, since there was now gold in his head!

Although Yaakov’s life had been saved, since he was still alive, his vision had still not returned, which was very difficult for him.

The surgeon explained that in order to regain his sight, a second operation was necessary: “I’m going to implant a module in your brain that will serve as an electrical connection between your brain and optic nerve. This should allow you to see like before.” Nevertheless, it was impossible to proceed with the second operation at that point on account of the cost, since “we don’t have the money” they sighed in unison.

Yaakov turned to financial aid organizations, as well as to his fellow Jews – merciful and children of the merciful – who helped him collect the necessary funds for the operation. With G-d’s help, he entered the hospital once more, this time for two months. His long disability had left him anxious and broken, but he continued to persevere and not lose hope. He wrote a description of the pain and suffering he endured, but we won’t get into that here.

One day Dr. Tzundak said to his patient, “Dear Yaakov, tomorrow

morning we’re going to remove the bandages covering your eyes, and G-d willing you’ll finally be able to see. I would like the first thing you see to be connected to a mitzvah. What can I show you?” The doctor thought aloud, and then said: “I’ll place tzitzit – concerning which it is said, ‘And you shall look upon them’ – before your eyes. I’ll stand in front of you when we remove the bandages, and you’ll see my tallit katan, which for that occasion I’ll wear over my clothes.”

Gripped by tremendous excitement, Yaakov couldn’t sleep that entire night. At eight o’clock in the morning, a nurse came and carefully removed his bandages. His entire body was trembling, so filled with emotion that he was. It was as if he were dreaming, for standing before him was a man enwrapped in a tallit katan, with his hand on his tzitzit and showing them to him.

At that point Yaakov burst into tears. He threw himself at the doctor’s feet and thanked him for going to so much trouble to heal him. “Thank you! Thank you so much!” he cried with indescribable emotion. Patting him gently on the back, Dr. Tzundak motioned for him to get up. Then they sat down at a table.

Once Yaakov had calmed down, a silence descended upon them. Then the doctor spoke a few words of wisdom:

“My dear Yaakov, it’s now been several months since you woke up and found yourself in darkness, your eyes no longer letting you see. Terrified, you traveled enormous distances to consult with various doctors, exhausting your savings and doing all that you could to collect huge sums of money. You were hospitalized three times for long periods of time, and you endured physical and emotional suffering that we don’t need to describe. You can write a book about your experiences and suffering. Yet now that you’ve regained your sight, your heart is overflowing with gratitude! You’re shocked and stunned. Just think that people wake up every morning and realize that G-d has opened their eyes without any suffering. And they can see. They see. They see!

“Yet to our great regret, many people recite the blessing, ‘Blessed are You... Who opens the eyes of the blind’ out of habit, quickly and without concentration, just to have fulfilled their obligation but without understanding the deep significance of these words. I am asking you, my dear friend, to always keep this moment in mind and to love G-d with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might. And especially when you read the blessing, ‘Who opens the eyes of the blind,’ think of what you’re saying, praise G-d, and thank Him.”

Content, Yaakov returned to Israel and did complete teshuvah. Over time, he was recognized for his fear of G-d and ethical values. He supported numerous people and raised a generation of children in Torah and good deeds, leading them all the way to the chuppah.

### Princes and Servants

It is written, “Bilam answered and said to the servants of Balak: ‘If Balak would give me...’” (Bamidbar 22:18).

The first emissaries sent by Balak, who were regular individuals, were considered by Bilam to be “princes.” As for the numerous and honorable emissaries that Balak later sent, they are described as “servants.”

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains why: Bilam was greedy and vain. He therefore described the first emissaries sent to him – men who yielded before him and spoke to him gently – as “princes.” On the other hand, he used the term “servants” to describe the second emissaries who addressed him with pride by saying, “So said Balak the son of Zippor: ‘Please do not hesitate to come to me’” (v.16).

In fact, they were reprehensible in his eyes and he considered them as mere servants.

### How Can I Curse?

It is written, “How can I curse? G-d has not cursed! How can I anger? G-d is not angry!” (Bamidbar 23:8).

What does “curse” (ekov) signify?

This word is formed by the initials of Amen, Kaddish, and Berechu. The Menorat HaMaor explains that Bilam cried out and said, “How can I curse them, since they recite Amen, Kaddish, and Berechu several times a day?”

### Only a Righteous Man

It is written, “He perceived no iniquity in Jacob and saw no perversity in Israel. Hashem his G-d is with him, and he has the King’s friendship” (Bamidbar 23:21).

The Sanzer Rebbe, Rabbi Haim, explained the juxtaposition of these two phrases as follows: “He perceived no iniquity – means that only a righteous man, who sees ‘no iniquity in Jacob’ and ‘no perversity in Israel,’ a man who does not look for sins among the Jewish people, but favorably judges all their deeds and ways of life, will merit to fulfill: ‘Hashem his G-d is with him, and he has the King’s friendship.’”

### A Heritage

It is written, “Edom shall be a conquest, and Seir shall be the conquest of his enemies – and Israel will triumph” (Bamidbar 24:18).

This verse is beautifully interpreted by the gaon Rabbi Yosef of Trani, who states that Israel had no right to conquer the land of Moab. It was only after Sihon conquered Moab that Israel was allowed to take from Sihon what had previously belonged to Moab.

In Sefer Tehillim we read, “And gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to Israel His people” (Tehillim 135:12), meaning that it was only after Sihon conquered Moab – after G-d gave Sihon the land of Moab as a “heritage” – that it could become a “heritage” for Israel.

This is the meaning of the verse: Since the Jewish people were not allowed to inherit Edom, it was necessary that “Edom... be a conquest, and Seir shall be the conquest of his enemies.” It was only after Seir inherited Edom that Israel was allowed to triumph and conquer the land of Moab.

### Incapable

It is written, “Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey” (Bamidbar 22:28).

Rabbi Abba said, “Assuredly, by these words we learn the mind of Bilam, that he was not worthy for G-d’s spirit to rest upon him, and we learn that there was no power in his donkey to do either good or harm. We also learn from this donkey that animals are not capable of possessing a rational mind” (Zohar III:209b-210a).

Bilam could not even respond to the words and limited intelligence of his own donkey. How much more was he incapable of being inspired by G-d’s spirit!

## In the Light of the Parsha

### A Time for Restoration

It is written, “How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob” (Bamidbar 24:5).

In the Mishnah, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel cites Rabbi Yehoshua as stating: “From the day that the Temple was destroyed, there is no day that is not cursed” (Sotah 48a). Further on Rava says, “The curse of each day is more severe than that of the previous day, as it is stated: ‘In the morning you will say, ‘If only it were evening!’ And in the evening you will say, ‘If only it were morning!’” [Devarim 28:67]” (Sotah 49a).

What did Rava actually add to the words of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel? Furthermore, why has there not been a day without a curse since the destruction of the Temple? Let us try to answer these questions in light of the Vilna Gaon’s explanations. In the time of the Temple, a continuous offering was made every day. As we know, the world endures by the merit of these offerings. As a result, since the Temple no longer stands and offerings are no longer made, there is nothing left to sustain the world. Now just as a human body cannot endure without food, the world cannot endure without offerings, which is why not a day has passed that has not been cursed.

Our Sages have therefore instituted prayers to replace offerings, in accordance with the verse: “Our lips shall substitute for bulls” (Hosea 14:3). Yet one question remains: If prayers truly replace offerings, then why has there not been a day that has not been cursed?

In reality, our Sages have said: “Every generation in whose times the Temple is not rebuilt is considered as though that generation was the one in which it was destroyed” (Yerushalmi, Yoma 1:1). This teaches us just how intensely the Shechinah suffers. Despite our Torah studies and prayers made with diligence and conviction, the fact that the Temple has still not been rebuilt constitutes the greatest curse possible. If we do not allow its restoration, then the curse will increase from day to day. Now the sole purpose of our suffering is to awaken us to repentance and encourage us to restore the Temple. The term *bedek* (“restoration”) is formed by the same letters as *devek* (“attachment”), meaning that we must attach ourselves to G-d even in difficult times such as exile. By doing so, we will contribute to the restoration of the Temple in all its glory, along with the dwelling of the Shechinah.

## *In the Footsteps of our Fathers*

### *They Are All Tzaddikim*

People praised the Belzer Rebbe's extraordinary habit of constantly praising and extolling his fellow Jews. In every situation, he stressed a person's merit and positive side. He valued every virtue that he discovered in other people, using it as a springboard to plead on their behalf. One time, for example, the Rebbe was walking outside during Shabbat when a man passed right next to him smoking a cigarette. The Rebbe's assistant called out to him: "Don't you know that today is Shabbat?" The man replied, "Yes, I know!" The Rebbe then asked his assistant, "What did the man say?" When he told him, the Rebbe responded: "You didn't hear correctly. He said, 'Yes, I don't know!'"

In this regard, the Sanzer Rebbe derived a lesson from a verse in this week's parsha: "He perceived no iniquity in Jacob and saw no perversity in Israel. Hashem his G-d is with him, and he has the King's teruah" (Bamidbar 23:21). He taught that this refers to a person who finds no faults or deficiencies among the Jewish people, a person who does not dwell on their sins or mistakes, and who only sees their greatness. Such a person will merit that "Hashem his G-d is with him," meaning that the Shechinah will dwell with him. The Mishneh Halachot adds a marvelous touch to this explanation: Such a person will also merit "the King's teruah." Now the term teruah is literally interpreted to mean "sound," but since it comes from the root rea ("friend"), it means that G-d will be His friend and close companion. G-d loves a person who pleads for His children, the Jewish people.

The Rebbe of Zvhil, Rabbi Shlomo, had the habit of calling every Jew a tzaddik. One day a man came to see him for a blessing so that his daughter, who was already older, would get married. When he handed the Rebbe his kvitel [slip of paper with written request], the Rebbe asked him a question in his usual manner: "What do you want, tzaddik?"

A thought then crossed the man's mind, and he replied: "Rebbe, the fact that you're a tzaddik is known by all. The fact that I myself am a tzaddik has just been confirmed by you. I currently have a daughter who is at the age for marriage, and you have a son who is filled with virtues. It's an obvious match!"

The Rebbe replied, "It's true. You are a tzaddik, and I am as well. However you should associate with a tzaddik like yourself, and I should associate with a tzaddik like myself."

One day a tax collector, an apostate Jew, went to see the Rebbe of Zvhil, Rabbi Shlomo, to provoke a dispute in the middle of Shabbat. The Rav addressed him in his usual manner: "What do you want, tzaddik?"

Surprised by this exchange, those who witnessed it exclaimed: "Rebbe! Does a brazen and apostate Jew deserve to be called a tzaddik?" The Rebbe then explained: "A verse says, 'Your people will all be tzaddikim' [Isaiah 60:21]. This Jew therefore presents us with a problem in understanding the verse. But better to have a problem with the person than with the verse!"

### *No Such Thing as a Simple Jew*

It often happened that when people visited Rabbi Moshe Shemuel Shapira (the Rosh Yeshiva of Beer Yaakov) as he was studying Torah, they had to stand next to him for several minutes until he noticed their presence, so focused was he on learning the subject before him.

One day as he was studying in yeshiva, a representative from a non-profit organization came to collect money. After a few minutes, Rabbi Shapira noticed his presence and greeted him with warmth and joy, as if he had been waiting a long time to meet him. "Welcome," he exclaimed as he warmly extended his hand to his visitor.

A little surprised by this, the man was certain that in his intense concentration, Rabbi Shapira had confused him with an important Rosh Yeshiva. He therefore excused himself by saying, "I'm just a simple Jew."

"There's no such thing as a simple Jew!" exclaimed Rabbi Shapira with trembling. "Do you know what it means to be a Jew? Let me show you what it entails: I am standing in your honor because you are a Jew!" Rabbi Shapira then rose to his full height and shook the man's hand with great respect. Not knowing what to do, the man left the yeshiva with his face beaming.

## *The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family*

### *The Merit of a Place*

Each year Rabbi Pinchas Hacoen of Marrakech would go to pray by the grave of his grandfather Rabbi David ben Baruch for his Hilloula. He was accompanied by people infused with faith in G-d, and they would gather together in Mogador prior to leaving for the Hilloula.

One year this group was ready to travel from Mogador to Marrakesh by car, but it wouldn't start. Being faithful Jews, they began to pray for G-d to send them a miracle by the merit of the tzaddik Rabbi David ben Baruch in order to arrive in time for his Hilloula.

As they were still praying, they saw Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan at a distance. He was making his way to the grave of his grandfather, the saintly Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol. Rabbi Pinchas Hacoen then sent his assistant to tell Rabbi Haim that their car wouldn't start: "We can't drive, and the Hilloula is soon approaching!" he was told to say. When Rabbi Haim arrived, he asked Rabbi Pinchas: "Why didn't you tell me that you were in town, as you do every year?" Rabbi Pinchas replied, "We arrived in Mogador very late at night, and I didn't have time to tell you. Now we won't be able to make it to the cemetery in time."

Rabbi Haim then asked Rabbi Pinchas to accompany him to the grave of Rabbi Haim Pinto Hagadol and pray there. After doing so, they returned to the car. Rabbi Haim then threw a rock at the car and cried out, "G-d rebukes you, Satan!"

At that point a miracle took place, for the car started!

Before leaving for the grave of Rabbi David ben Baruch, Rabbi Pinchas asked Rabbi Haim a serious question: "Why was I unable to benefit from the merit of my grandfather on his Hilloula, whereas you were able to benefit from the merit of your grandfather?"

His face shining and filled with authentic humility, Rabbi Haim replied: "G-d forbid. We both have the same merit. However I asked for it in my place, here in Mogador, whereas you benefit from your merit in your place, meaning in Marrakesh, not here."

## *Guard Your Tongue*

### *Making an Effort to Remain Silent*

A person who is melancholy by nature, and who needs to speak about all kinds of things in order to feel better, will have a difficult time remaining silent and not speaking about people, regardless of who they are. If such a person is obligated to speak about someone, he should do so briefly in order not to commit a transgression. I heard that the gaon Rabbi Raphael of Hamburg resigned his position as Rav four years before his passing, and when people came to visit him, he would ask them not to speak about people. — Sha'ar HaTevunah