

SEFER ALIYOS REFOEL ZEV ON THE PARSHA

Parshas Balak

THE IMPOSSIBLE EITZAH

Delicately woven amidst the text and commentaries of the Torah, lies a tapestry of profound lessons that provides deep insight into human nature. As we study the Torah's laws and narratives, we see that some of the lessons are relatively overt, while others are more subtle. Careful analysis will often reveal yet another of the Torah's infinite pearls of wisdom – sometimes in unexpected places. Perhaps one such lesson lies quietly tucked away in *Parshas Balak*.

Balak, the king of Moav, wanted to hire Bilam, the world's most powerful sorcerer, to curse the Jewish nation into oblivion. Balak sent a delegation of distinguished noblemen and officials to present Bilam with an offer. Bilam was assured generous compensation should he accept the job.

Bilam surprised the delegation when he responded that he would first have to consult with Hashem. Hashem told Bilam that he had no permission to accept the offer. When Bilam informed the delegation of Hashem's response, they promptly returned to Moav to report his refusal. Balak then sent a second, more prestigious delegation to Bilam with a more generous offer. Once again, Bilam informed the emissaries that he must consult with Hashem. This time, Hashem's response was more mysterious than before. Hashem said, "If these people came to summon you, go with them. But only that which I speak to you, shall you do." Did Hashem change His original position? Why didn't He simply respond, "Don't go!" as He had reacted before?

Rashi explains Hashem's instructions: "If this summoning is for your benefit, and you are doing it for the money, rise up and go with them."

Could it be that, according to *Rashi*, Hashem was allowing Bilam to go simply because Balak was offering to pay him?

The *Maskil L'David* explains that Hashem was not granting permission to Bilam at all. Hashem was saying that if Bilam could procure payment by merely accompanying the delegation back to Moav, then he could go. But of course, Balak was only interested in paying Bilam if the latter would be successful in cursing *Bnei Yisrael*. So in effect, the answer to Bilam's request was the same as the first time: "No." *Rashi's* implied message is also written explicitly in the *Daas Zekeinim* in their explanation of Hashem's response: "If you believe that you can profit by accompanying them, go – and don't say that I caused you to lose out on the reward. Just

realize that you will only be able to say that which I command you to say (and you won't be able to curse *Bnei Yisrael*)".

This explanation is perplexing. Why did Hashem even bother responding to Bilam's complaint? It's almost hard to imagine a less justified position! Bilam was hired as the hit man for the genocide of millions. Is it any wonder that Hashem, the loving Father of the *Bnei Yisrael*, would not grant permission to this *rasha* to carry out this request?! Yet Bilam displayed unimaginable audacity and sought to justify his request by claiming, "But Hashem, what about my *parnassah* (livelihood)? If You don't allow me to accept this mission, You will diminish my income!" Can a murderer justify his profession with the claim, "I have to put food on the table; I have mouths to feed!"? So, given the nature of Bilam's request, we are left with a strong question: Why would Hashem feel compelled to respond to such a claim?

Secondly, Hashem's response to Bilam is inconsequential. He "allowed" Bilam to go under conditions that were impossible. As the *Maskil L'David* explains, there was no money awaiting Bilam for merely accompanying the delegation. The entire salary was contingent upon Bilam cursing *Bnei Yisrael*. Why did Hashem respond to Bilam's insane request with empty advice?

Perhaps we can learn a profound lesson in *kochos hanefesh*, human dynamics from Hashem's conduct. Namely, in an argument, people need to feel validation. They need to feel that the other party understands their circumstances and identifies with their concerns. To assure a person that he is understood, it is important to communicate this directly to him.

In Bilam's total wickedness, he believed, on some level, that his livelihood justified the murder of millions. Since this is what he felt – as absurd as it was – Hashem knew that it would be most effective to show Bilam that He identified with Bilam's dilemma: "Bilam! If there were a way in which you could profit from this trip without cursing My children, I would let you go! But since there is not..." Hashem was speaking to the area of Bilam's concern. By offering Bilam the impossible *eitzah*, Hashem was empathizing with Bilam. It is possible that, intellectually, Bilam knew that Hashem was well aware of his complaint, but he didn't feel it. He needed Hashem to verbalize His empathy in order to truly accept Hashem's response. But in the end, in spite of Hashem's ultimate show of empathy, Bilam's overwhelming wickedness and hatred for *Bnei Yisrael* motivated him to disregard Hashem's order, and he attempted to curse the Jews anyway.

By observing Hashem's ways, we can learn more about ourselves and further excel in *bein adam la'chaveiro*, our interpersonal relationships. ❖

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במדבר כב
(כ) ויבא אלוקים אל בלעם לילה ויאמר לו אם לקרא לך באו האנשים קום לך אתם ואך את הדבר אשר אדבר אליך אתו תעשה:

רש"י שם
אם לקרא לך - אם הקריאה שלך וסבור אתה ליטול עליה שכר קום לך אתם:

משכיל לדוד שם
אם לקרא וכי וסבור אתה וכי. נ"ל דה"פ אם אתה סבור ליטול עי"י הליכה זו מצד דברים אחרים שכר קום לך ואך על ענין הקללה על כרחך את הדבר... אף על פי שידע בלעם שפיר שלא היה שום שכר אלא ע"ע הקללה וזה לא היה רוצה הקב"ה אפ"ה וילך...

דעת זקנים מבעלי התוספות שם
אם לקרא לך - פי' אם אתה סבור להשתכר בהליכתך קום לך אתם ואל תאמר שהפסדתי שכרך ואך ידוע תדע כי את הדבר אשר אדבר אליך אותו תדבר על כרחך: