

Life Lessons & Overview

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This Parsha sheet was written l'ilui nishmas the murdered Yeshiva students: Yaakov Naftali ben Rachel Devorah, Gilad Michael ben Bat Galim and Eyal ben Iris Teshurah.

First Aliyah – Moav is frightened of Klal Yisroel. Balak, king of Moav sends messengers to Bilaam to curse them. Bilaam tells the messengers to spend the night. Hashem asks who they are, and then tells him not to curse Klal Yisroel.

Why didn't Balak seek to make peace with them instead of curse them and planning battle after such a curse? The Malbim explains that Klal Yisroel had a different religion, and there is not more passionate hate than religious hate. From the Malbim we see that other forms of hate can be assuaged with reason and logic. Not so, religious hate.

Second Aliyah – Bilaam sends away this first delegation. Balak sends a second delegation. Hashem says, "You can go with them but only do as I instruct."

Why did Hashem not allow Bilaam to go at first but did allow him to go with the second delegation? The Kli Yakar explains that the members of the first group were officers of the lords of Moav who were biased toward making sure that Bilaam would agree. The members of the second group were only representatives of Balak and thus had no additional agenda. Hashem was concerned that the first group might influence Bilaam to actually curse. We see from this Kli Yakar Hashem's tremendous love for Klal Yisroel, as well as the fact that it is always necessary to analyze who can be a negative influence to others and to arrange logistics in such a manner as to minimize such influence.

Third Aliyah – Bilaam goes with them. Hashem is angered and sends a hidden angel to block Bilaam's path. The donkey sees the hidden angel blocking. Bilaam strikes the donkey. Hashem opens the mouth of the donkey and they argue. Hashem allows Bilaam to see the Malach. Bilaam tells the Malach that he now sees that he has sinned. The Malach tells him to only say what he tells him to. Bilaam tells Balak this.

Why did Hashem send the Malach? The Psukim imply that it was to block his path because Hashem was angry. Rashi, however, seems to understand the words "to block his path" to mean to stop Bilaam from sinning, and that the malacha was an angel of rachamim – mercy. We see from here, Hashem's concern even for a Rasha, and to never give up on someone. Perhaps it can even be said that we should channel "anger" into productive methods of ensuring that others don't further sin.

Fourth Aliyah – Bilam goes with Balak who takes him to see a portion of Klal Yisroel. Bilaam instructs Balak to build seven altars. He does. They offer a bull and a ram on each. Hashem puts words in Bilaam's mouth that bless Klal Yisroel rather than hurt them.

Why did he take him to see a portion of Klal Yisroel? The Ramban explains that he did so to focus and concentrate on them better, because the psychology of a person is to focus more when something is in direct sight. We see how dedicated Balak was to ensure that his plan work that he even implemented psychological tools to counter anything that could go wrong. Kal v'Chomer, we should do the same thing and even more when it comes to Chessed and doing Mitzvos. We should take into account the possible psychological reactions of others to ensure that nothing goes wrong.

Fifth Aliyah - Balak takes Bilaam to another location, Sdei Tzofim. Again Bilaam says only blessings and good things. Balak says, "If you can't curse them, at least don't bless them." Bilaam responds that he can only do what Hashem tells him to do.

The question arises as to why Balak suggested another place when Bilaam had been unable to curse in the first place? The Ohr HaChaim explains that Balak knew that, in the future, they would suffer a great pirtzah setback at Sdei Tzofim. The Psetback they suffered there, however, was the loss of Moshe Rabbeinu. It seems, essentially, that Balak's thought process was not incorrect. Our sins could and do prevent the fulfillment of Bracha. We should keep this in mind when we are next tempted to do something improper.

Sixth Aliyah – Balak yet suggests another location, and once again Bilaam blesses them. Balak is furious, and says, "I brought you to curse them, but you have blessed them three times. Bilaam responds that he can only do what Hashem says.

Why did Balak suggest yet a third place when Bilaam had been unable to curse in the first two places? The Seforno explains that in this third place, Bilaam is seeing different people. Perhaps these people are on a lower level and the people of Israel can be cursed on their account. We see from this Seforno that even people of a lower spiritual level can affect other members of Klal Yisroel. We see from here that we have to worry about all segments of the community. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Seventh Aliyah – Bilaam says that he is returning home but will first tell Balak the future of how the other nations will eventually be destroyed. Bilaam returns home. At this point some of the nation of Israel begins to sin with the girls of Moav and got involved with Baal Peor - the Avodah Zarah. Hashem was angry at Klal Yisroel (and sent a plague). Hashem tells Moshe that the leaders must do away with those who were doing the idol-worship. Pinchas rams a spear through two of the violators and stops the plague.

How could a nation that saw all that Hashem did - sin with idol-worship? Rashi explains that they first stumbled in Zima (unseemly activity). The women then required of them to first worship the idol that they removed from their laps. We see from this Rashi how one sin leads to another – to the point where we can forget the very essence of who we are. We should take this as a lesson for all types of sins.