



Ludicrous Licentiousness: Parshat Balak

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

Parshat Balak recounts the sin of the Jewish people with *Baal Peor*. Rabbi C. Shmulevitz asks two questions. What is the connection between sinning with the Moabite women and worshipping *Baal Peor*, and how could *Bnei Yisroel* have fallen to such a depraved level. The Mikdash Halevi points out that *Bnei Yisroel* were just completing their forty year sojourn in the wilderness and were about to enter *Eretz Yisroel*. It is at this moment of victory and completion that one has a tendency to let one's guard down, and Satan took advantage. In addition, adds the Leket Sichot Mussar the voice of Balaam blessing the Jews had been carried throughout the Israelite camp, adding to their arrogance and sense of invincibility. *Bnei Yisroel* became complacent, they settled in, *vayeshuv* rather than merely camped, *vayachanu*. When Hashem sees us as too complacent, we are courting tragedy.

Bnei Yisroel were camped in *Shitim*. Letitcha Elyon cites the definition of Rabbi Yehoshua that the root word of *Shitim* is *shut*, senselessness, while Rabbi Eliezer sees the root as *loshut*, to wander about aimlessly. The Sefer Haparshiot also notes two meanings, wandering aimlessly and the exact opposite, a straight line, like the tall and straight *atzei shim* tree. This represents the attribute of justice says Rabbi Rivlin, while the circuitous route represents kindness. *Bnei Yisroel*, as does each of us, contained within themselves both of these attributes, the ability to remain

on the straight and narrow in awe and fear of judgment, and the ability to explore the world. *Baal Peor* is the furthest point of no restriction, where anything and everything goes. Even when we start going off the *derech*, the aspect of *din* and the straight path must lead us back. Balaam was looking for that one moment of judgment to make Hashem angry at *Bnei Yisroel*, but could find none, for *Bnei Yisroel* and the world was filled with Hashem's love and *chesed* at that time. But loving kindness unrestrained becomes perverted, even leading to incestuous relationships. At this moment, there was no counterbalancing restraint of judgment to keep *Bnei Yisroel* in check, says the Drash Mordechai. *Bnei Yisroel* had internalized the *Avinu*, our loving Father, but had forgotten the judgmental *Malkeinu*, our King aspect of Hashem. The Oznaim LaTorah cites Gemara Sanhedrin that the Satan knows he cannot succeed if he wrenches us harshly away from our path. He therefore seduces his prey with seemingly insignificant steps. Here in *Shitim* the men went out merely to see the wares in the market. This first thin thread of desire slowly pulled them in with ever thickening strands until they sinned completely. Rabbi I. Schwartz notes that most of the time we are running toward something we desire external to ourselves. Both run, *ratz*, and desire, *ratzon*, share the same Hebrew root. One must find a place of quiet serenity and disconnect ourselves from the outside world at least for a few minutes. There our vision will turn inward to our true essence, and we will

connect to the essence of Godliness within ourselves.

The Netivot Shalom explains that the blood of *emunah*, faith, is part of our DNA but it must be guarded through the discipline over our desires, represented by the blood of circumcision. Balaam understood that if he could break through the bounds of discipline and entrap *Bnei Yisroel* with physical desire, he would then easily be able to break the bond of faith, and *Bnei Yisroel* would worship an alien god. Therefore Pinchas attacked the source of the downfall *Zimri* and *Kozbi* rather than those worshipping *Baal Peor*.

What was the allure of *Baal Peor*? Rav C. Shmulevitz explains that this god represented permissiveness without restraint. Even the Torah recognizes that as human beings we have desires and passions. But it places restrictions that will bring us back even when we fall into temptation. Balaam knew that if the Israelite men would succumb to licentiousness with the Moabite women, they would eventually succumb to the allure of *Baal Peor*, and anger their God. *Baal Peor* proclaims our godliness in that we are limitless and without restraint. Yiddishkeit says we need to build fences around ourselves to preserve that Godly image. We believe the greatness of man comes precisely from his ability to control himself, thereby giving him the opportunity to soar beyond physical limitations.



The Mitzvah of Rebuke Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson

There seems to be a contradiction in the Gemara. A number of opinions tell us to give rebuke even if it won't be heeded. But the Gemara in Yevamos and Beitza tell us to refrain. The Ritva in Masechet Gittin suggests that the Gemara in Yevamos refers to a group. If a group is sinning and they will not listen to rebuke, one should be silent. However for an individual, perhaps there is merit in giving rebuke even many times. Another Ritva in Masechet Beitza tells us that when the sin is unintentional one should not give rebuke. However if it's intentional one should give rebuke even if the sinner won't listen.

There's a fundamental disagreement how we view the *mitzvah* of rebuke. The Sefer Hachinuch seems to say, if you won't accomplish anything by rebuking the sinner cease and desist. If there's a chance he'll listen, go up to the point where he is ready to cause you bodily damage. The Sefer Yereim makes a distinction between intentional and unintentional sins. If it's unintentional and you

know the sinner won't listen don't give rebuke. If it's intentional, rebuke him although he will not listen. The Rambam seems to follow the Sefer Hachinuch's interpretation. In line with Rashi, he emphasizes the idea of rebuke as a form of helping the sinner. If it will not accomplish anything perhaps there is no obligation. The Yereim says there's two elements to the *mitzvah* - the first is to help out the sinner and the second is for the one who is obligated to rebuke. One may not be apathetic to sin. However if it is unintentional and rebuking the sinner will make the sin intentional that overrides the issue of apathy. If the sin is intentional and is an open act of rebellion against Hashem, the Torah mandates that one must take a stand although the sinner may not listen.

There's a disagreement in the Gemara up to what point one must go to rebuke a sinner. The Avnei Nezer suggests, if you want to help your friend, push until the point that he's ready to hit you. If you are rebuking so as not to remain apathetic, then go up until the point that he's

ready to scorn you. Another differentiation can be learned from *Masechet Brachot* which recounts how Eli rebuked Chana for praying silently, thinking she was drunk. Rav Elazar learns from this that if you see someone doing something improper you have to give rebuke. Tosfot asks, don't we learn the *mitzvah* from a verse in Chumash? It answers that although a particular act may not be a Torah prohibition, it might only be improper behavior, one must still give rebuke. However if the idea is to offer rebuke as a form of chesed, then even if it's not a prohibition but just improper behavior one should rebuke. If it's a matter of defending the honor of Hashem then rebuke would only apply to an actual sin not improper middot. If you have knowledge of a person's improper behavior but you have not seen it, perhaps one can suggest based on the Gemara in Erchin, that if it's a matter of helping a friend, you must give him rebuke. However if it's a matter of not being apathetic to sin perhaps one must only take a stand if the sin was done in one's presence.

Netivot Olam-Two Forms of the Yetzer Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The *yetzer hara's* purpose is to draw a person after him so that he too becomes evil and gets consumed by his feeling of lack and emptiness. Imagine a girl living alone in a small apartment in Brooklyn. She has a job but it's unfulfilling and pays very little. She views life as unbearable and tells herself she has no future. All of these thoughts resonate as true because there is a certain level of lack in this girl's life. The *yetzer hara* is too involved in the situation for her to see objectively. However if she was to compare herself to a young girl in 1945 forced to hide in a basement, bereft of human contact, she could see that her life is really full of possibilities. She could say blessings over food joyously, she could engage with people, she could change the world and herself. At the moment, she's in the clutches of the *yetzer hara* because she sees her life through the prism of expectation as opposed to the prism of reality. This is the *yetzer hara's* job- to keep us out of reality

The Maharal quotes a Gemara- Rav says the *yetzer hara* is compared to a fly that sits at the two openings of the heart. Like a fly, the

yetzer hara is despicable and transient. One of the ways to bond with Hashem is to enjoy the physical world but that does not mean we must get emotionally engaged in it. Imagine how ridiculous we will appear in the next world when we will look back at our lives and see how much emotional effort we invested in going after desires that really didn't get us anywhere and never really gave us all that much pleasure.

There are two views of the *yetzer hara* expressed in the Gemara. One view says opposites attracts. Another view says what people want is to become more complete. It isn't that we're drawn to the opposite because we like it. We like ourselves and therefore we seek greater completion. Rav says the *yetzer hara* is despicable and evil and will find itself in something despicable and evil. Another view says we are drawn to the *yetzer hara* which is opposite because we like excitement. So are we attracted to the *yetzer hara* because it resonates with the part of us that is despicable and we are drawn to something that affirms that? Or are we drawn to it because we are aware of our own inner purity and want to try

something different? The Maharal tells us there's a part of us that's lacking, no matter how pure we think we are. Hashem is infinite. A person can go higher and higher and never have a moment of boredom or emptiness. The part of the person that says I want to try something else is the part that's lacking. The *yetzer hara* goes after *Bnei Yisrael* more than any other nation and goes after Torah scholars more than other people. This is because if you're almost perfect the little black spot that decreases one's perfection is felt more acutely. According to the opinion of Shmuel, the more a person wants perfection and the closer he is to it, the more empowered evil becomes. According to Rav, the lack that the person feels so acutely at the moment is within their essential self. When a person feels despicable, it's very easy for him to fall. His *tzura*, his sense of essential identity is injured. So he just gives up on himself and says, "I'll do what I'll want."

We should be very careful never to insult someone's *tzurah*. Never suggest that a person's essential self is anything less than beautiful.