



Parshat Balak: The Choice of Every Individual

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Avishai David

Parshat Balak discusses the episode of the evil prophet Bilam, who attempted to curse the Jewish nation. The Mishna in Avot says, "Whoever has these three qualities is considered among the disciples of Avraham: a good eye, a modest spirit, and a humble soul. In contrast those who exude arrogance are among the students of Bilam. The Mishna concludes with the difference between the two. The students of Avraham eat in this world and will eat in the next world while the students of Bilam will inherit *gehinom* and descend to the nethermost depths.

There are many analogies drawn between the syntax, tone, and tenor of the story of the Akeida and the saga of Bilam. After the Akeida, Hashem tells Avraham, "People who bless you will be blessed. People who curse you will be cursed." Similarly, Bilam is told by Balak, "People who curse you will be cursed. People who bless you will be blessed." Avraham saddles his donkey to carry out the word of Hashem. Bilam too saddles his donkey to carry out his mission to curse the

Jewish people.

Chazal say the Akeida took place Rosh Hashana. Similarly, Bilam constructed seven altars and offered a *parah* (cow) and an *ayil* (ram), the sacrifices that were brought on Rosh Hashana. Bilam said, "*Tamut nafshi mot yesharim.*" He wanted to die the death of the forefathers who are called *yesharim*.

So we can understand the question of the Mishna, what is the comparison between the students of Avraham and Bilam? Yet Avraham is the recipient of blessing and Bilam is the recipient of curses.

Hashem gave the nations a great prophet who had the potential to bring them to repentance. Bilam and Avraham were both given incredible talent. Avraham used his gifts to carry out not only the command of Hashem but also His will. Bilam may have tried to convince himself that he was fulfilling Hashem's command but he certainly didn't follow His will. Avraham was not motivated by any self-interest while Bilam

was solely motivated by selfish concerns. Avraham tried to proclaim Hashem's unity while Bilam tried to curse Klal Yisrael.

At the end of the parsha the pasuk says, "*Vayakam Bilam vayelech vayshav l'mekomo,*" Bilam got up and returned to his place." He was unaffected by all that happened. He even regressed somewhat. In contrast, after the *Akeidah*, Avraham was transformed and metamorphosized into a totally different personality. Avraham was the fulfillment of *Tzadikim yelchu bam*, the righteous shall go in them, while Bilam was the fulfillment of *u'poshim yichashlu bam*, and the sinners shall stumble in them.

Chazal say, "In the path that a person seeks to travel, he is led." Every person, through his choices, can chart his own destiny. He can use his talents in a positive or negative way. Bilam channeled his strengths to greater arrogance and greed while Avraham utilized his gifts for the honor of Hashem.

The Art of Jewish Parenting: Individual Attention #6

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Although we must be careful to treat every child equally, there is another side. Shlomo Hamelech says in Mishlei, "*Chanoch l'naar al pi darko.* Teach a child in his or her unique way." Chazal say, "Just as every person's face is different, so too are their attitudes, beliefs, and abilities." Every child's talents and personality is different. As parents, we are our children's teachers. The Torah commands us, "*V'shinantem levanecha.* You shall teach your children." Although our teaching may be informal and by example, we must know that each of our children deserves his or her uniquely tailored education.

Yaakov and Esav both had the same parents and upbringing. Nevertheless the Torah spells out the divergent paths they took. Some people may think this was preordained. Yet the Torah emphasizes again and again that every person has free choice. Rashi notes

that until Yaakov and Esav reached the age of 13, one could not tell the difference between them. But when they passed their 13th birthday, Yaakov went to the house of study while Esav escaped to the fields. Rav Hirsch explains that the education that worked for Yaakov failed miserably for Esav.

In contrast, the Torah emphasizes the uniqueness of the twelve tribes. We see that Yaakov gave each of his children his own blessing. It was both a prediction of their future and their potential and led them on their role to self-fulfillment in their own distinctive way.

Educators should address each child's unique nature. The tribe of Levi symbolizes Torah and service of Hashem. The tribe of Yehuda is kingship. You wouldn't want to educate a Levi to be a businessman. Their goal is different. You wouldn't expect Zevulun, blessed with business acumen, to learn Torah day and

night. It wouldn't be his particular mission.

There is a certain basic education we give all children. They learn to pray from the same siddur and are taught Torah from the same books. However, as the child grows older education has to be differentiated. Some children are more passive and studious while others are more active and mischievous. We have to take each child's tendencies and talents and develop it accordingly. The studious type can be guided to become a *talmid chacham* or a teacher of Torah. The active type can go out into the world and create institutions of *chesed*. When a student reaches high school, educators must concentrate not just on basic education, but on focused education, according to each child's individual nature. If we do this, we will have a much better chance at successfully reaching our *chinuch* goals.



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Sage Guidance: Avos D'Rebbe Nosson – Introduction #1

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

Avot d'Rebbe Natan is an explanation of the tractate Avot, which is a part of Seder Nezikin. It consists of eight chapters that discusses topics of *middot* and *derech erez*. The Torah does not begin with the first *mitzvah* of sanctifying the new moon but rather with the story of creation. The Torah wanted to begin with the *middot tovot* that we can learn from our forefathers. Avraham personified *chesed* (kindness) and concern for others. Yitzchak represented *gevurah* (strength) and self sacrifice to live a Torah way of life. Yaakov was *emet* (truth). The book of Bereishit is not just a collection of simple Bible stories. It teaches us *middot* that are crucial preparation for accepting the Torah. We can find a hint to this in Parshat Bereishit. After Adam and Chava ate from the tree of Knowledge, they were sent out of Gan Eden "*lishmor et derech etz hachaim*, to guard the way of the tree of life." The Binyan Yehoshua, a commentary on Avot D'Rebbe Natan, explains that *derech* refers to *derech erez* and *etz chaim* refers to Torah. *Derech erez* is a prerequisite to Torah.

The Gemara in Moed Katan mentions a

certain student who would ask many questions while his Rebbe gave his lectures. However, when the Rebbe gave a public lecture to the masses the student kept quiet. He understood that if he asked a question and the Rebbe wouldn't know the answer he would embarrass him.

The Mashgiach of Slabodka taught that *derech erez* is a prerequisite that prepares a person to learn Torah. The Binyan Yehoshua cites the Yalkut, Bar Kapara asked, "Where is the entire Torah encapsulated in a few words?" He answers, in the area of *derech erez*, which is summed up in the verse, "*B'chol derachecha d'heyahu*. In All your ways you shall know God." Avot d'Rebbe Natan brings out this point in a potent way. Chazal say, "*Yesh chochma b'goyim*. There is wisdom among the non-Jewish nations." The nations build great edifices and advance in technology. Our purpose is *derech erez*, *middot*, *chesed* and living a full Torah life.

The first chapter of Avot d'Rebbe Natan begins like Pirkei Avot. "*Moshe kibel Torah m'Sinai*." Avot d'Rebbe Natan mentions that Moshe had

to be at Har Sinai six days before the giving of the Torah. He had to go through preparation and purify himself of all physicality before he could accept the Torah. Ma'amad Har Sinai was not just a historical event but it is something we relive every day. Moshe had to accept the Torah with *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) to teach us that self-discipline is a prerequisite to accepting Torah.

It says in Devarim, "*V'yadata hayom v'hashevota el levavcha*. You shall know today and you shall set it firmly in your heart." It does not say, *el sichlecha* (in your mind). In Ahava Rabbah we ask Hashem, "*V'ten b'libeinu bina*. Put understanding into our hearts." It does not say *V'ten b'sichlenu*, and put in our minds. Avot d'Rebbe Natan emphasizes that the Torah we study must penetrate our hearts. Our learning has to impact our essence. It must affect our *middot tovot*, the way we deal with others, and how we think. Torah brings out the divine presence inside us. By studying *Avot d'rebbe Natan*, we can actualize Hashem's directive of, "*V'halachta b'drachav*," to follow in His ways.