



פרשת בלק

CIRCLE TIME

AT YOUR
Shabbos Table

... FOR A Meaningful and Entertaining SHABBOS WITH YOUR CHILDREN ...

TELL ME A TALE >

A dvar Torah with a story.

WORSE THAN DEATH

כִּינּוֹן שֶׁדַּבְּרָה מֵתָה... חָס הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל כְּבוֹדוֹ שֶׁל
אוֹתוֹ רָשָׁע, שֶׁלֹּא יֵאמְרוּ זֶה הִיְתָה שְׁפִלְקָה אֶת בְּלַעַם
(במדבר רבה כ:י"ד)

As soon as she [the donkey] finished speaking, she died...
Hakadosh Baruch Hu had compassion for the honor of that
wicked man, so that people would not say, "This is the one
that got the better of Bilam!"

(Bamidbar Rabbah 20:14)

**Why was it so important to keep Bilam from being
shamed? Think of the kiddush Hashem that his
donkey represented!**

Rav Yisrael Yaakov Lubchansky did not want to be the *rav*
of Baranovitch, but after his father died, the townspeople
begged him to take over. He agreed to serve for a
short time, until they could find someone else.

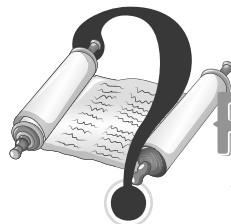
During that time, the board members of the shul came to
Rav Yisrael Yaakov with a painful issue. They wanted to fire the
shamash.

The *shamash* was responsible for opening the shul every morning before *davening*. It was cold and dark during Baranovitch winters, and the *kehillah* needed someone to light all the gas lamps and get the furnace going, so that the people would be comfortable when they came to *daven* and learn. The *shamash* had done a great job for years, but he simply wasn't up to it anymore.



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PARSHAH RIDDLES

Answers to this week's riddles appear on page 3.

- 1 What was the name of Bilam's father? His brother? His sons?
- 2 Which four times in this *parshah* did someone get angry?
- 3 Which two names in the *parshah* are different by only one letter – which can sound the same when pronounced in certain accents?
- 4 Which eight animals are mentioned in this *parshah*?
- 5 What are three meanings of the word קנה, all appearing in this *parshah*?

CHOLENT STORY

A story told in parts, designed to get children to come back to the table for the main course!

Recap: Reb Yitzchak invites Reb Shimon, who doesn't recognize him, for lunch and supper. When he doesn't return on time in the evening, the other paupers are suspicious.

Reb Shimon walked slowly back to the rundown place where he and his fellow beggars were staying. His heart felt lighter than it had in years. He had enjoyed a pleasant meal and wonderful, stimulating conversation. He didn't know why this rich man had taken a liking to him, but he was glad he had. Best of all, the rich man had invited him for supper again the next night!

More than the good food and comfortable home, Reb Shimon appreciated that the rich man genuinely seemed to respect him as a *person*. All too often, poor people are seen as just a nuisance or, at best, part of the scenery. Most people don't relate to them as respectable people who have fallen on hard times. But this rich man talked in learning with him and sincerely seemed excited to hear his opinion. What a change!

His mind lost in good thoughts and feelings, Reb Shimon did not notice the scowling faces of the other beggars. He was snapped back to reality by the sharp voice of the leader.

"Shimon! Nice of you to show up! Were you trying to run away with our share of your collections?!"

"Obviously not," Reb Shimon answered calmly. "Because here I am."

"We'll see about that. Hand over what you collected today." Reb Shimon emptied his pockets of the few coins he had received — he had been away from his post for quite some time, having lunch and supper with the rich man.

"Is that all? Where is the rest of it? This is much less than we usually get at that spot!"

"This is all. I did not get much today."

"He's lying! I know it!" one man shouted. "He collected a lot of money and used it to buy himself a nice supper!"

"Calm down, Yankel," the leader said. "Don't make unfounded accusations."

"They're not unfounded! Look at him! He looks well-fed! And why was he late? Ask him where he was!"

The leader turned to Reb Shimon. "Indeed, where were you? What kept you late?" he asked.

Reb Shimon's thoughts raced. He did not want to tell them about the rich man who had been kind to him. The man had clearly not done it for any of the others, although they had each had a chance to stand outside his store. It is even considered *lashon hara* to tell about the *tzedakah* someone has given, because it will cause others to jump on him. Besides, the men wouldn't believe him anyway. What should he say?

Reb Shimon answered evasively. "I was talking to someone," he said. "In Torah."

"Talking to someone?" Yankel shouted. "You expect us to believe that *that* kept you from supper?"

"Believe what you want. I had a wonderful, pleasant conversation in learning, and I enjoy nothing better in this world right now," Reb Shimon replied truthfully. *And I'm going back there tomorrow night*, he added silently to himself.

"Turn out your pockets," the leader ordered. Reb Shimon did so, revealing nothing incriminating.

"If that is all, I'll be on my way to bed," he said with finality. "Good night to you all."

His good feelings evaporated in the cloud of suspicion that followed him. He turned and walked away, but the rest of the beggars remained.

Yankel and several others continued to argue that Reb Shimon must be cheating. The leader was still unconvinced but was beginning to sway. Finally, he reached a decision.

"Yankel, *chevrah*, here's what we'll do. We will follow him and have him watched. If he is going to buy his own food or hiding something, we'll soon find out. Starting tomorrow, Shimon is under surveillance!"

TO BE CONTINUED...

2

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MIDRASH

The Donkey

What happened to Bilam's donkey? Where did it come from originally?

- *Midrash Talpios* ("Chamor") writes that there is a donkey that appears many times in the Torah. It was Avraham Avinu's donkey that he took to Har Hamoriah when he went to perform *Akeidas Yitzchak*. He gave that donkey to Yitzchak, who gave it to Yaakov. Yaakov gave it to Levi to use to collect *ma'aser*. Levi gave it to Kehas, who gave it to Amram, who finally gave it to Moshe. When Moshe fled to Midyan, he rode that donkey.
- Pharaoh's stargazers told him that the one who would lead Yisrael out of Egypt would be riding that particular donkey, so Pharaoh issued a warrant for the arrest and execution of the donkey. When told to go back to Mitzrayim, Moshe did not want to take the condemned donkey, but Hashem told him that all the people looking for the donkey had died. Moshe put his wife and children on the donkey and traveled to Mitzrayim.
- After Moshe passed away, the donkey retired, grazing peacefully near his grave on Har Nevo. It remains there until this day (just as we cannot find the grave, we cannot find the donkey), and it will return when Mashiach comes — as he will come riding that very same donkey!
- *The sefer Shimru Mishpat* quotes a *Midrash Shir Hashirim* that Bilam's donkey was the same one! However, the midrash does not appear in our text. Additionally, all these are called *chamor*, which is a male donkey, while Bilam's was an *ason*, a female. Furthermore, *Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah* says that Bilam's donkey died as soon as it finished speaking (see "Tell Me a Tale"). From all this, it appears to be a different donkey, but...
- *Pirkei d'Rabi Elazar* (30) describes the life of Avraham's donkey and says that Bilam's donkey was actually the *mother* of Avraham's! She was created *bein hashmashos* on Friday of the Six Days of Creation (as mentioned in *Pirkei Avos* 5:6) and birthed Avraham's donkey. Both mother and baby lived a very long time!

PARSHAH RHYME



Review the main points of the parshah with younger children, while challenging your family to complete the rhymes (use the “grammen” tune). Answers on the side!

- L
1. When we left Mitzrayim, everyone got scared,
2. Klal Yisrael were the people they _____.
- L
3. We smashed the Emori and their fear got worse,
4. They called on Bilam to give us a _____.
- L
5. Only *he* could fight people who had the power to pray,
6. But he said, “Overnight, I’ll hear what Hashem will _____.”
- H
7. Midyan’s leaders said, “Forget it, we’re out of luck.”
8. The only ones who stayed were messengers of _____.

Chorus

- L
9. Bilam reported, “Sorry, I can’t go.”
10. More noblemen came and said, “Think of the honor we’ll _____.”
- L
11. Bilam said, “I’ll ask Hashem again.”
12. This time He said, “Go with the _____.”
- L
13. Along the way, as they were walking,
14. Bilam’s donkey started _____.
- H
15. “There’s a *malach* in the road, can’t you see?! Please explain why you’re hitting _____!”

Chorus

- L
16. Bilam argued back, without any surprise,
17. Until Hashem opened his _____.
- L
18. The *malach* said, “Thank the donkey you’ll survive.
19. I could have killed you and left her _____.”
- L
20. Balak greeted Bilam with reverence
21. Then took him to a spot where he could see the Jews’ _____.
- H
22. But instead of the curse he was supposed to be expressing,
23. Bilam found himself giving them a _____.

Chorus

- L
24. He twisted and shouted and made funny faces;
25. He tried to curse them from three different _____.
- L
26. But there wasn’t a thing he could change or do.
27. Hashem said, “You’ll say the thing that I tell _____.”
- L
28. Balak said, “You’re really not helping me. “Run back to your land! Get out of here! _____!”
- H
29. But Bilam said, “There’s one way you can win.
30. To defeat Yisrael, you must make them _____.”

Answers: 2. feared 4. curse 6. say 8. Balak 10. show 12. men 14. talking 16. me 18. eyes
 20. alive 22. tents 24. blessing 26. places 28. you 30. Flee 32. sin

RIDDLE ANSWERS:

- The Torah explicitly tells us (22:5) that Bilam’s father was Be’or (most understand that to be his literal name). In *Parshas Vayishlach* (36:32), Be’or has another son, Bela (this is not Bilam — Bela lived in Edom, while Bilam lived in Aram; see *Ibn Ezra*). When Bilam met the *malach*, the Torah tells us (22:22) that his two sons were with him. *Targum Yonasan* says their names were Yannis and Yamris.
- ויחר אף אלקים כי הולך הוא (כב:כב)
 - ויחר אף בלעם ויך את האתון במקל (כב:כז)
 - ויחר אף בלק אל בלעם (כד:י)
 - ויחר אף ה' בישךאל (כה:ג)
- פֵּעוּר and פְּעוּר (people who speak Arabic often pronounce a “p” as a “b”).
- צְפוּר, שוּר, אֶתוֹן, פֶּר, אֵיל, רָאם, לְבִיא, אָרִי
- Curse: לְכָה קְבֵה לִי אֶתוֹ (כב:יא)
 Tent: וַיְבֵא אַחֵר אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל הַקֶּבֶה (כה:ח)
 Stomach: וְאֶת הָאִשָּׁה אֶל קִבְתָּהּ (כה:ט)

You may be surprised to find something familiar in every haftorah.

HAFTORAH: YOU KNOW NAVI

SUMMARY

The *haftorah* is from *Sefer Michah*. Michah was a *navi* who prophesied at same time as Hoshe'a, Amos, and Yeshayah, near the end of the existence of *Malchus Yisrael*. In the *haftorah*, Michah relays a message from Hashem reminding the people of the kindnesses He performed for them in the past and that He will do in the future and gently remonstrating them for their lack of gratitude.

Hashem speaks of the power of the Jews in the days preceding Mashiach, when they will be a mighty economic and military power, and describes the destruction and crumbling of the nations (Gog and Magog), which will be orchestrated by Hashem without firing a shot.

He then reminds the people of Hashem's kindness saving them from Egypt, leading them through the desert with Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam, saving them from Balak, and finally bringing them to Gilgal. Michah ends with a warning not to try to do a false *teshuvah* with lots of *korbanos*, but to commit to upholding Jewish values.

CONNECTION TO PARSHAS BALAK

In the *haftorah*, the *navi* explicitly tells the people to recall Bilam's plan and how Hashem foiled it. Several *pesukim* in the *haftorah* are interpreted by the midrash to be describing Bilam's strategy to get Hashem to agree to his curses with lots of *korbanos* and *nesachim*. The *haftorah* also alludes to Bilam's plot with Bnos Moav. The midrash finds allusion to Bilam's attempt to curse the Jews during Hashem's one angry moment per day and the fact that that moment did not occur that day. Bilam's ultimate blessings also are very similar to Michah's vision of the Jews in the times before Mashiach. Both refer to Yisrael's "rocks" and "mountains" (the *Avos* and *Imahos*); both comment on the lack of witchcraft among Jews; and both metaphorically refer to Yisrael as a lion. Both also prophesy about the End of Days.

YOU KNOW NAVI

A well-known Gemara (*Makkos* 24a) teaches that a series of *nevi'im* summed up the *avodah* required of us in consecutively shorter lists of essential principles, until Chavakuk boiled it all down to one. The second-to-last *navi* to condense the list was Michah, and his list of just three central principles of *Yiddishkeit* appears in the last *pasuk* of this *haftorah* (*Michah* 6:8): וְמָה ה' דוֹרֵשׁ – וְיִצְחָק עִם אֱלֹהֵיךָ – וְיִשְׁמַח בְּעֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְיִהְיֶה חֶסֶד וְיִהְיֶה לְכַתְּתָה עִם אֱלֹהֵיךָ – *What does Hashem seek from you, only to do justice and love kindness and walk modestly with your G-d.*

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

He was getting old and he couldn't wake up so early. He overslept every morning and the shul was locked, icy and pitch black each day when it came time for Shacharis. There would be a delay while someone went to go get the key and then they lit the lamps. The worst part was the cold. It took time to get a fire going in the furnace, and by the time the shul was warm, *davening* was over.

"Fire him?" Rav Yisrael Yaakov was horrified. "How can you just toss him away?"

"What can we do? The current situation is intolerable. We have spoken to him about it many times, but he simply cannot do it anymore!"

"I will speak to him."

The young *rav* went to talk to the old *shamash*, and sure enough, after that, the problem was solved! Thereafter, every morning when the people arrived for Shacharis, the shul was open, bright and warm. The *shamash* had apparently figured out that he could get everything done and then go back to bed, because he was never there.

After a while, the people forgot all about the issue. They never realized that it was actually Rav Yisrael Yaakov himself who was doing the *shamash's* job. He always went to shul early, and now he would light the lights and furnace and be learning at his seat by the time the first *mispallelim* arrived.

One night, the *shamash* couldn't sleep. He was awake when the clock struck the hour he was supposed to get up each day to do his job. *Oh well*, he thought, *if I'm up anyway, I may as well go do my job*. He dressed warmly and set out, trudging through the snow to the shul. To his shock, the building was wide open and the lamps were all lit! What was going on?! The *shamash* was shocked. *It must be beggars*, he thought. *They are taking advantage of the fact that no one is looking after the shul and they've moved in. What chutzpah!*

He rushed into the shul, ready to catch the squatters and make them pay. Sure enough, he saw someone working on the furnace. Imagine that! This person was even planning on lighting the fire, like it was his living room! He couldn't see the man's face because he was leaning into the furnace, working the bellows to get the fire started.

"Hey! You bum, you!" the *shamash* shouted, not realizing that the person trying to light the furnace was none other than the *rav* of the shul. "What nerve! Come here right now so I can deal with you!" Rav Yisrael Yaakov froze. The *shamash* must not see him! If he did, he would realize that the *rav* had been doing his job and would be terribly embarrassed. He had no choice but to remain with his head and upper body inside the furnace, hoping the *shamash* would give up and walk away.

But the *shamash* was filled with energy that morning. He continued to shout and yell, berating the trespasser in the shul. Rav Yisrael Yaakov just pushed himself deeper into the furnace, hiding from view.

Frustrated, the *shamash* began smacking the only part of the man in front of him that he could reach! Now the *rav* certainly had to hide! He waited, *davening* fervently for the *shamash* to give up and leave.

Then the fire in the furnace caught.

Now Rav Yisrael Yaakov was in real trouble. It was getting warm in the furnace, but the *shamash* was still standing right behind him, yelling and carrying on. He simply couldn't show his face! The embarrassment he would cause the *shamash* would be terrible! What was he going to do?

Finally, at the last possible moment, the *shamash* gave up and walked away. Rav Yisrael Yaakov pulled himself out of the furnace and ran all the way home, making sure not to encounter the *shamash*. When he arrived, the *rebbetzin* was shocked. Her husband's beard had been completely burned off! If the *shamash* had stuck around another minute...

Shame is worse than death. We will go to great lengths to avoid embarrassing another!



GEMATRIA

- The *gematria* of the letters *aleph* and *beis* in *milui* (the letters that spell out the names of the letters) totals 523.
- *Chazal* often contrast Bilam and Avraham Avinu. How many words does Avraham speak in the Torah? 523!
- How many words does Bilam speak in the Torah? 523!
- As an aside, the total words spoken by Yaakov, Rochel and Leah together is 1,820. This is also the total number of words spoken by the Shevatim and also the total number of times Hashem's Name is mentioned in the Torah!

(Ahavas HaTorah)

THIS DATE IN JEWISH HISTORY

The Gemara (*Ta'anis* 28b) tells us about five tragedies that took place on Shivah Asar B'Tammuz.

- Moshe saw Klal Yisrael serving the *egel* and broke the *Luchos*.
- King Menashe placed an idol in the *Heichal* of the Beis Hamikdash, sealing the decree for the eventual destruction.
- The walls of Yerushalayim were breached and the city was conquered in 3829/69 CE before the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash. According to the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Ta'anis* 4:5), this also happened on Shivah Asar B'Tammuz at the end of the First Beis Hamikdash era in 3339/422 BCE.
- The *Korban Tamid* in the First Beis Hamikdash was stopped, three weeks before the actual destruction.
- Apostomus, a Greek officer who ruled Eretz Yisrael before the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash, burned a *sefer Torah* in public (3823/63 BCE), setting a precedent for the horrific burning of *sefarim* throughout the centuries.

Several other tragedies that occurred on 17 Tammuz were later added to the list:

- 4859 (July 15, 1099): Crusaders captured Yerushalayim.
- 4908 (July 13, 1148): Anti-Jewish riots broke out in Cordova, Spain.
- 5151 (June 20, 1391): Toledo Massacre — Ferrand Martinez, Archdeacon of Ejica, incited a crowd to attack the Jews of Toledo, Spain. About 4,000 Jews were murdered in Toledo, and pogroms were sparked in other Spanish Jewish communities. This followed massacres started by Martinez in Seville, where 4,000 Jews were murdered and many others were forced to convert, as well as in Cordova. In all, about 50,000 Jews were murdered and 100,000 converted before the extinction of Spanish Jewry was completed with the mass expulsion on Tishah B'Av of 1492, around a century later.
- 5701 (July 12, 1941): 4,000 Jews of the Bialystoker ghetto were shot by the Nazis.
- 5701 (July 12, 1941): Several hundred Jewish women and girls were abducted from their houses and shot by the S.S. during the night in Khotin, Ukraine.
- 5730 (July 21, 1970): All Jewish property was confiscated in Libya.

May Hashem erase all tragedy from the world quickly and may Tishah B'Av be a Yom Tov this year!



TREATS FROM TARGUM

So much more than just translation — quick insights into Targum Onkelos!

וישלח מלאכים אל בלעם בן בער פתורה אשר על הנהר
ארץ בני עמו לקרא לו לאמר הנה עם יצא ממצרים הנה
כסה את עין הארץ והוא ישב ממלי (כבה)

And he sent malachim to Bilam ben Be'or, to Pesor, which is on the river in the land of his people, to call him, saying: "Behold, a nation has come out of Egypt, behold it has covered the eye of the land, and he sits across from me. (22:5)

תרגום אונקלוס: וישלח אֲזַנְדִין לֹת בִּלְעָם בֶּר בְּעוֹר לִפְּתוֹר אֶרֶץ בְּנֵי עַמּוּהָ לְמַקְרִי לִיָּה לְמִימְרָה הָאֵת עַמָּא נִפְקָ מִמִּצְרַיִם הָא חִפָּא יִת עֵין שְׁחֻשָּׁא דְאַרְעָא וְהוּא שְׂרִי מְלַקְבְּלִי

Targum Onkelos: And he sent *messengers* to Bilam the son of Be'or, to Pesor, which is in *Aram*, on the *Pras* [River] in the land of his people, to call him, saying: "Behold, a nation has come out of Egypt, behold it has covered the eye of the sun of the land, and he is *camped* across from me.

- Onkelos translates "*malachim*" as human messengers, unlike the *Zohar*, which says they were spiritual *malachim*. (Onkelos would have used the word "*malchaya*" for that, as he does elsewhere.) Onkelos goes to lengths to identify Bilam differently than some midrashim. He clearly defines his name as Bilam, son of Be'or, who lived in a place called Pesor. *Targum Yonasan* and some midrashim understand all these words not as names but as hints to the *nature* of Bilam, whose real name was... Lavan!
- As part of identifying Bilam, Onkelos gives the name of his land and the river: He says Bilam lived in *Aram* — Bilam says so explicitly later in the *parshah* (23:7). The river is *Pras*, the biggest river in *Aram*, which is called "the river" in *Bereishis* 15:18.
- The "eye" of the land means the sun, according to Onkelos, meaning Klal Yisrael are so numerous that they block the sun from reaching the ground.
- The word *ישב* is translated three different ways in *Targum Onkelos*! When it means living somewhere for a long time, it is translated as *יָתִיב* (see *Bereishis* 13:18 and 37:1). When it means waiting somewhere briefly, it is translated as *אֲוֹרִינֵו* (see *Bamidbar* 22:8). Here, it means something between the two — encampment — which is translated *שָׂרִי* (as in *ibid.* 22:1).

HALACHAH

Flattery

Balak was willing to honor Bilam, even though he was wicked, an example of chanifah, flattery. What are some halachos of flattery?

Is it forbidden to flatter someone?

It is forbidden to falsely praise or honor someone who does not deserve it (some exceptions apply; see further). There are nine different categories of flattery, which carry up to five different *issurei d'Oraisa*, least of all speaking falsehood.

What is the most serious form of flattery?

If someone did an *aveirah*, it is forbidden to tell him that it is okay. To do so may violate all five *lavin*, and *Chazal* say such activity contributed to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

Does it make a difference if the person you are flattering is a rasha or not?

The next three categories of flattery refer to a wicked person (defined as someone who openly and notoriously flaunts basic Torah values). It is forbidden to (1)

praise or honor such a person publicly or (2) even privately, or to (3) make a partnership with him. All these activities will cause others to act in a similar way and make it seem as if what he is doing is okay.

What if I must honor a person of this nature?

One may not tell the person he is doing the right thing, even if it involves a moderate level of risk. One may (non-verbally) show deference or respect for such a person if he is in a position of power and may otherwise cause him harm.

If the person does have good qualities, they may be praised — but not without mentioning that the person's wickedness is unacceptable.

What about a person who is not really wicked?

While it is permitted to praise such a person, it is forbidden to say he has qualities or qualifications that he does not actually have. We may not say someone is trustworthy, a *talmid chacham*, or qualified to *pasken* halachah unless we know for a fact that this is true.

What if I don't actually flatter a person but I just avoid rebuking him?

If there is *any reason* to believe a wrongdoer might listen to you, you must tell him that he is doing something wrong. If there is *no reason* to believe he will listen to you or ignore you, it is still important to say something. If there is *no chance* he will listen and he may even react harshly, it is better to be silent — unless *lashon hara* is involved.

If a group of people is speaking *lashon hara* together or making fun of a *talmid chacham*, it is forbidden to remain silent, even if they will surely not listen to the rebuke.

May I praise someone who is a tzadik?

We can and should praise a good person for his actual qualities, without exaggerating or speaking falsely. It is permitted to exaggerate the qualities of a *chassan* or *kallah*, or those of one spouse to the other, or even those of a *rebbe* to a *talmid*, as this will increase shalom or Torah learning.

THE LAST WORD

A one-liner worth remembering

"IT'S NOT SUCH A BIG DEAL TO DIE AS A JEW AL KIDDUSH HASHEM. THE REAL TRICK IS TO LIVE AS A JEW AL KIDDUSH HASHEM."

— Chafetz Chaim

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