

NEFESH SHIMSHON



DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM
THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

When a Prophet Goes Bad

וַיִּשְׁלַח מַלְאָכִים אֶל בִּלְעָם בֶּן בְּעוֹר (במדבר כב, ה)

He sent messengers to Bilaam son of Beor. (*Bemidbar 22:5*)

You might ask, why did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* bring His *Shechinah* to rest on an evil gentile? It was so the nations of the world will not have the opportunity to say, “If we had prophets, we would mend our ways.” *Hashem* granted them prophets, and they broke down the world’s mores. Originally, the non-Jews refrained from forbidden gender relationships. But Bilaam advised them to abandon themselves to licentiousness. (*Rashi*)

It is commonly asked how Bilaam refuted the claim of, “If we had prophets, we would mend our ways”? The nations of the world could still claim that if *Hashem* would have given them a righteous prophet like Moshe, they would have turned out better. What was accomplished by giving them the evil Bilaam?

This question is based on the mistaken assumption that Bilaam was an evil person who became a prophet. This is not so. Bilaam was not evil even though he was a prophet; he was evil *because*

he was a prophet. The faculty of prophecy made Bilaam’s inner being go bad.

How so?

“It is not because you are more numerous than all the peoples that *Hashem* desired you”¹ – *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said to Yisrael: I desire you because even when I shower you with greatness, you minimize yourselves before Me. I gave greatness to

¹ *Devarim 7:7*.

Avraham Avinu, and he said, "I am dust and ashes." To Moshe and Aharon, and they said, "What are we?" To David, and he said, "I am a worm and not a person."

But the idol worshippers are not like that. I gave greatness to Nimrod, and he said, "Come, let us build a city." To Pharaoh, and he said, "Who is *Hashem*?" To Sancheriv, and he said, "Who among all the gods of the lands?" To Nebuchadnezzar, and he said, "I will rise up on the heights of a cloud." To Chiram king of Tyre, and he said, "I sat in the dwelling of G-d, in the heart of the seas."²

Greatness is a factor that promotes growth. It causes the seed planted deep down to grow. When a person is little, the hidden points inside him are so little and so deep down that they are not noticeable to others. But when he grows greater, his inner self grows as well, and then it manifests itself externally, and his true nature is revealed.

This explains the difference between the Jewish people and the nations of the world. When they are still small, the differences between them are subtle, because they are buried deep inside them. But when they grow greater, it becomes apparent who they really are. *Avraham Avinu*, Moshe and David, when they grew, their humility grew along with them. But

Nimrod, Pharaoh, Sancheriv and Nebuchadnezzar, if not that they became great, we would not know much about their true inner nature. When they grew, their wickedness grew along with them, and revealed who they really were.

We may assume that if Bilaam had not become a prophet, he would have been the best and most praiseworthy non-Jew of all time. He would have been a singularly proper person and displayed all kinds of desirable qualities. *Hashem* chose the best non-Jew that existed, and granted him tremendous greatness, prophecy like that of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. This caused his inner self to grow and develop. What came out? The most wicked person you can find. He even eliminated the world's moral practices.

This definitively refutes any claim of the non-Jews that if they had been granted prophets, they would have bettered themselves.

Avimelech, who took Sarah, was a prophet. *Hashem* spoke to him. And so were Bilaam, Lavan and Eliphaz son of Eisav. They all were prophets of the nations. Amazingly enough, all these "prophets" tried to uproot everything good. We know what Bilaam tried to do, and what Lavan tried to do. Eliphaz grew up around *Yitzchak Avinu* and knew very well that according to *Halachah*, he may not obey his father if his father tells him to transgress a Torah prohibition. Yet, he still sought to kill Yaakov.

A prophet encompasses the entire world, as the Rambam writes. Thus, every prophet of the nations, who encompassed the whole world, wished to uproot and destroy the whole world. ●

² Chulin 89a.



לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

גדבת נבדיהם ~ עשרת הקנים בני בנים והתפארת בנים אבותם

The Life and Death of Bilaam

תָּמַת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתֵהִי אַחֲרֵיתִי כְּמֵהוּ. (במדבר כג, י)

May my soul die the death of the just, and may my end be like his. (*Bemidbar* 23:10)

It is most amazing that *Bilaam Harasha* wished for himself the death of the *tzaddikim*. He said, “May my soul die the death of the just.” Who are the “just,” the יִשְׂרָאֵל, whose death Bilaam so desired?

Chazal say¹ that these יִשְׂרָאֵל are Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. They died by a kiss from *Hashem*.² It is simply astounding that a person as lowly as Bilaam longed for such a lofty thing. He lived a life of abandonment to physical desires. He broke down the world’s mores. And he didn’t even realize that anything was amiss with himself. On the contrary, he felt he deserved to die by מִיתַת נְשִׁיקָה – a kiss from *Hashem*.

Here the Torah teaches us and warns us how profoundly a person can delude himself and not be aware where he is holding, what his true state is and what is in store for him.

Bilaam wanted to end up in *Gan Eden* with the *tzaddikim* of the Jewish people. However, he never expressed a desire to live like *tzaddikim*. He only wanted to die like one. He preferred to live a life of physical desires, wickedness and abandon. It’s just that when his life draws to a finish, he wants to die like a *tzaddik*, like a good Jew, and go to *Gan Eden*.

Bilaam is not alone in this. A lot of people make every effort to die like a *tzaddik*. They make sure *Kaddish* will be recited for them, people will learn *Mishnayos* for their *ilui neshamah*, and of course to have a proper Jewish funeral and to be buried in a proper Jewish cemetery. They think that dying like a *tzaddik* will somehow entitle them to go to *Gan Eden* like the *tzaddikim* do. Bilaam made the same mistake.

We know that only someone who lives like a *tzaddik* will die like a *tzaddik* and be with the

tzaddikim in the next world. If a person doesn’t live properly it won’t help him to die properly.

The *Seforno* explains Bilaam’s wish of וְתֵהִי אַחֲרֵיתִי כְּמֵהוּ – “May my end be like his,” as follows:

May my end, and my offspring, be like that of the Jewish people. A person’s children and descendants are called אַחֲרֵיתוֹ, “his end.”

Bilaam wanted to have children who will be *tzaddikim*.

This, too, is quite common these days. People earnestly desire for their children to be *tzaddikim* and learn Torah. They exert themselves greatly to this end. But when it comes to themselves, they get by with a meager portion of Torah and *mitzvos*. Bilaam made the same mistake.

Why is this a mistake? Because “Like father, like son.” Most children follow in the footsteps of their parents. The way to have good children is by being good parents who follow the path of Torah. This is what we *daven* for every morning in *Birkas Hatorah*. We say וְנִהְיֶה אֲנַחְנוּ וְצִאצְאֵינוּ וְגוֹי לִוְמַדֵי תוֹרַתְךָ – “May we and our descendants... be learners of Your Torah.” It goes together: “We and our descendants.”

It is so foolish for parents to allow themselves to watch inappropriate content yet not allow it to their children. If it is bad for your child, it is bad for you, too. Similarly, some people come home in the evening and sit down to read the newspaper or do some other nonsense, and tell their son, “Pick up a *Mishnayos* and review what you learned today in *yeshivah*.” This is the way of Bilaam. Bilaam does as he pleases, and his children are supposed to be *tzaddikim*...

What is good for the child is good for the parent. The father, too, can pick up a *sefer* and learn something. And the mother can take a *Tehillim* or a *Chumash*, as well. This is the way to have children who are truly *tzaddikim* and *yesharim*. ●

1 *Avodah Zarah* 25a.

2 *Bava Basra* 17a.

Krias Shema Al Hamitah

לֹא יִשְׁכַּב עַד יֹאכַל טֶרֶף וְדָם חָלְלִים יִשְׁתֶּה. (במדבר כג, כד)

He does not lie down until he devours prey and drinks the blood of the slain.
(*Bemidbar 23:24*)

“He does not lie down” at night on his bed, until he devours and destroys any malicious force that comes to prey upon him. How? He recites the *Shema* upon his bed and deposits his spirit in the hands of *Hashem*. If a camp and a division come to harm them, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* protects them and fights their war and throws down the slain corpses of their enemies. (*Rashi*)

The Way You Sleep is the Way You Wake

The *Shulchan Aruch* begins with the laws pertaining to getting up in the morning.

One should gather strength like a lion to get up in the morning to serve one’s Creator.¹

The *Rema* comments on this as follows:

When one lies down on one’s bed, one should be aware before Whom one is lying, and as soon as one wakes from one’s sleep, one should arise with alacrity to serve one’s Creator, may He be blessed.²

The *Shulchan Aruch* talks about waking up in the morning, and *Rema*’s comment talks about going to sleep at night: “When one lies down on one’s bed...” Why was this comment made here, at the beginning of *Orach Chayim*? Shouldn’t it be at the end of *Orach Chayim*, in the *halachos* of going to sleep?

The answer is if you go to sleep like a lion, you can wake up like a lion. But if you go to sleep like a donkey, you won’t wake up like a lion. The only way to rise in the morning like a lion is to go to sleep like a lion.

The way a Jew gets up in the morning is fundamental. It is a classic example of putting in a little effort and reaping great profits. Some people get up in the morning like this:

הַדֵּלֶת תִּסּוּב עַל צִירָהּ וְעָצַל עַל מִטּוֹתוֹ – The door turns around on its hinge, and the lazy person on his bed.³

What is this metaphor telling us? We all know that lazy people roll over from side to side in bed, rather than getting up and doing things.

A door turning on its hinge might accumulate miles upon miles of revolutions. Nevertheless, it stays in its place. It doesn’t get anywhere. It makes zero progress because it ends right where it began.

This is what a lazy person is like. He wakes up at 6:30 AM and rolls over on his other side. He wakes

1 *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 1:1.*

2 *Rema ad loc.*

3 *Mishlei 26:14.*

up again after a quarter of an hour, and again rolls over and continues sleeping.

If a person gets up in the morning in such a lazy way, his whole day will be out of shape. He gets to *shul* late and dices up the *Tefilah* into little pieces and chooses which ones he will say. *Pitum Haketores* is not necessary. That's for *baalei batim*.... The purpose of *Uva l'Tzion* is to hold up the world, and my personal world is in ruins anyway.... That's the way a lazy person's whole day goes. Consequently, he makes no progress.

If a person goes to sleep in order to get up the next morning with zest and energy, if he goes to sleep with awareness of *Hashem* and His Oneness, with words of Torah, then the way he gets up the next morning will be completely different. And as a result, his afternoon and evening will be different, too. And that night he says *Krias Shema* again, and this puts the whole following day on the right track. In such a way he can become a different person altogether. But when the two points of going to sleep and waking up are weak, the whole day is weak.

It Pays Off

Keeping Torah and *mitzvos* calls for employing proper tactics.

כִּי בַתְּחִבָּלוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ מִלְחָמָה – You should wage war with tactics.⁴

Sometimes you need to devise a successful plan, as in business.

A successful business deal is one in which the investment is small and the profit is great. The *Vilna Gaon* is said to have taken hold of his *tzitzis* before he passed away, and remarked, “What a wonderful world is the world that I am about to depart from. In this world, for a few pennies you can buy *tzitzis*, and every moment that one wears *tzitzis*, it is equal to all the *mitzvos* put together.”

This is an example of a good business deal. Such a small investment and such great returns! You just

wear *tzitzis* all day and earn many thousands of priceless *mitzvos*.

Up in heaven, *Hashem* has a computer, so to speak, with which He calculates all the *mitzvos* a person does. Every moment a person wears *tzitzis* he is gaining a *mitzvah* equal to all the 613 *mitzvos*. Worlds upon worlds of *mitzvos*. And this brings him blessing, *parmassah* and success.

Here's another example of an easy *mitzvah* to do. Someone lives in an apartment building that doesn't have good lighting in the stairwell. It turns off all the time and people get stuck in in the dark in the middle of climbing up the steps. So this person took a little initiative. He bought a light bulb for a few pennies, connected it to an electric wire, and affixed it to the ceiling of the stairwell. Now there is light all night long. People can access their apartments and go down to the street. Children, elderly people, sick people now have light. He might have even forgotten about the whole thing, but everyone knows that in this stairwell, there is always light.

This is an easy investment. And in the meantime, he is accumulating thousands of *mitzvos*. And *Hashem* records it all. It is recorded that he did a *mitzvah* of saving a life, because an elderly person would have stumbled in the dark, broken a leg, and perhaps even died. Or a little child would have got stuck in the dark in the middle of the stairs and become very frightened. And the *Gemara* says⁵ that a little child's fear can endanger his life. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* writes everything down. Such a little investment, and such great returns.

A person needs to look for *mitzvos* like these. It is like investing money in a savings account with very high interest.

A Bed That Isn't Jewish

Also the *mitzvah* of *Krias Shema she'al hamitah*, of reciting *Shema* before going to sleep, is one of those *mitzvos* that entails a small investment and brings in tremendous profits.

4 *Mishlei* 24:6.

5 *Yoma* 84b.

The obligation to recite *Shema* before going to sleep is stated expressly in the *Gemara*.⁶ And it appears as a standard *halachah* in *Shulchan Aruch*.⁷ Everyone knows that this *mitzvah* exists, but not everyone knows its vast value and importance.

Let's say a *yeshivah bachur* studies *Gemara* assiduously from morning to night. He gets home from the *yeshivah* at 12:30 past midnight. And he still wants to keep on learning. He thinks to himself that he will just put his head down for a few minutes, to gather a little energy, as he is feeling kind of tired. So he puts his head down for "five minutes" and wakes up the next morning at 7:00 AM.

"Okay," he thinks to himself, "so I missed *Krias Shema she'al hamitah*. But it's not so terrible."

However, the *Gemara* looks at it differently. It's hard to find something that *Chazal* describe in such forceful language.

"And don't linger on מיטת ארמית, the bed of a non-Jew"... [this means,] don't sleep without *Krias Shema*.⁸

Rashi explains that if you sleep without reciting *Krias Shema she'al hamitah*, your bed is like that of a non-Jew.

What are *Chazal* saying? Why do they describe it in that particular way? *Chazal* don't exaggerate; they speak exactly. And they say that someone who goes to sleep without *Krias Shema* is sleeping on the bed of a non-Jew. The term "non-Jew" expresses total departure from the realm of *kedushah*.

6 *Berachos* 4b.

7 *Orach Chayim* 239.

8 *Berachos* 8b.

People generally sleep between five and eight hours a night. This represents a very big chunk of our lives. Eight hours a night adds up to a third of our lives. Even if a person sleeps only six hours a night, it is a quarter of his life. Consequently, if a person has the habit of going to sleep without *Krias Shema she'al hamitah*, it means that for a quarter of his life he is living like a non-Jew.

However, someone who accustoms himself to reciting *Krias Shema she'al hamitah* properly is gaining, by means of this small investment, that for a quarter of his life, he is sleeping like a Jew!

By reciting *Shema* and thereby recognizing *Hashem's* Kingship over himself, he is with *Hashem*. He is sitting in *Hashem's* lap, so to speak. And then he falls asleep with his thoughts attached to *Hashem*, wrapped up in *Hashem's* Oneness. He is attached to *Elokei Yisrael*. This is a Jew. But otherwise, it is like he is sleeping on the bed of a non-Jew. Such a small effort put in produces such a vast difference.

The *Rema* cites the *Rishonim* as saying that *Krias Shema* should be recited close to one's bed.⁹ In other words, if a person recited *Krias Shema she'al hamitah* a long time before going to sleep, he needs to recite it again, close [in time] to his bed.

I did not find the explanation of this *halachah* written anywhere, but it stands to reason that a person needs to recite שמע ישראל ה' אלוקינו ה' אחד close to going to sleep, because a Jew should fall asleep with awareness of *Hashem's* total Oneness, that there is nothing other than Him. ●

9 *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim* 239.

