



### Balak – Willful Blindness



Pashas Balak recounts the tale of Bilaam, a non-Jewish prophet who is commissioned by Balak, the King of Moav, to curse the Jewish people. The first delegation sent to recruit Bilaam returns unsuccessfully, as Hashem reveals Himself to Bilaam and commands him not to curse the people, for they are a nation blessed by Him. Subsequently, Balak sends a second delegation, this time comprising a more distinguished assembly. On the second night, Hashem informs Bilaam that if they approach him once more, he may go, but he must only convey the words that I command him to express.

On the following morning, Bilaam rises early, saddles his donkey, and embarks on his journey. Suddenly, the donkey comes to a halt and refuses to move forward due to the presence of an angel wielding a sword blocking the path. Bilaam, who cannot see the angel, strikes his donkey to compel it to continue. The donkey, however, remains obstinate, and Bilaam strikes it once more. In response, the donkey crushes Bilaam's foot against the wall. After further blows, the donkey finally crouches down, refusing to budge even when Bilaam strikes it with a stick. In a miraculous occurrence, Hashem opens the donkey's mouth, allowing it to speak and ask Bilaam why he continues to hit it. At this point, Hashem allows Bilaam to see the angel. At this juncture, Hashem enables Bilaam to see the angel. The angel instructs Bilaam to proceed but cautions him to speak only what Hashem commands. Bilaam attempts multiple times to curse the Jews, but each time he opens his mouth, Hashem transforms his words, resulting in blessings for the Jewish nation. In the end, Balak dismisses Bilaam in disgrace.

### The Walking Dead

The Talmud, found in Avodah Zara (5A), lists four categories of individuals who are deemed as: a pauper, a blind person, a Metzorah, and someone who has no offspring. The Gemara subsequently cites verses that substantiate this teaching. The second individual on the list is the blind person. Elsewhere, the Talmud asserts that a blind person does not feel satisfied after eating because their inability to see the food diminishes the eating experience, which is an essential component of the eating experience.

Rashi remarks that Bilaam was blind in one eye. Yet, in his overall way of living, he was entirely blind. Imagine the scenario: Bilaam, as a prophet, has Hashem Himself appearing to him. Bilaam, himself, instructs the king's emissaries to wait while he seeks confirmation from Hashem regarding his participation in the mission to curse the Jews. Hashem clearly instructs him, 'Do not go.' Following a more prestigious invitation, Hashem permits him, and he proceeds on his journey. His donkey speaks to him, and he sees an armed angel who directs him to convey only what he is told. Yet, time and again, he attempts to curse the Jews but instead ends up blessing them. How is it that Bilaam observed all these occurrences yet was completely blind to the reality of his situation?

### Blinded By Yourself

Individuals frequently engage in self-deception by interpreting the world in ways that reinforce their preexisting views. A person's perspective is molded by personal interpretations and societal influences. Many individuals prefer to perceive themselves as virtuous and believe they are in the company of good people. This mindset can distort their perception of biases, leading to favoritism toward those they perceive positively or biases against those they perceive negatively. When such beliefs become deeply ingrained, altering opinions on particular issues becomes exceedingly difficult, even in the face of logical reasoning and factual evidence.



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Self-blindness may also appear in a more basic and personal manner. At the outset of their work with a new client, nutritionists encourage the client to create a list detailing the various foods and amounts they consume throughout a typical day. They then instruct the client to track their food intake the next day. The disparity can be quite striking, not because they are dishonest, but just because individuals generally prefer to view themselves as disciplined rather than gluttonous. This same method can be applied to any activity that a person seeks to modify, either by increasing or decreasing its frequency.

## **Correct Your Vision**

People understand the importance of having their vision checked to see clearly. Someone committed to personal growth must also be aware of the need to check their 'world/self-view' vision. If respected sources send messages indicating they are wrong, they should listen. Justifying continuing a mistaken path because it aligns with their worldview can lead to disaster. Often, there are signs that someone should change their actions, but these are ignored because change feels uncomfortable or frightening. Still, not changing can cause even greater discomfort.

Bilaam saw all the signs that he was wrong. He heard it from Hashem, his donkey, and the angel, yet his self-blindness kept him from listening, which ultimately led to his death at the hands of those he wished to curse. Bilaam, known for advising Pharaoh to destroy the Jewish Nation while they were in Egypt, carried this hatred and negative view throughout his life. Even after witnessing God's miracles for the Jews, he was still the one Balak turned to when he wanted to curse the Jews. All signs were pointing him toward changing his perspective, but he refused to see what even his donkey saw.

In life, moments of clarity can guide us correctly. Don't fall into Bilaam's trap and become blind to the truth by personal biases.

Have a wonderful Shabbos,

Binyomin Stolov



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