

THE Sfas Emes ON THE Parsha

Parashas
Chukas-
Balak

תרס"ג

The Question

The following *pasuk* appears in the first *aliyah* of Parashas Balak:¹

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אֶל־בִּלְעָם לֹא תֵלֵךְ עִמָּהֶם לֹא תֵאָר אֶת־הָעָם כִּי בֵרֻךְ הוּא :

G-d said to Bilaam: "Do not go with them! Do not curse the people because they are blessed."

Hashem tells Bilaam not to go with Balak's messengers to curse Bnei Yisrael and, interestingly, says the reason is that "they are blessed." Not because they are His *am segulah*, or because He gave them His Torah, or for any other countless reasons, but "because they are blessed."

Why is this specifically the reason Hashem chose when He told Bilaam not to curse Bnei Yisrael?

Furthermore, what exactly does the *pasuk* mean when it says that "they are blessed"?

The Answer

The Sfas Emes explains that Bnei Yisrael themselves are *brachah*. This is exactly what Hashem promised Avraham Avinu, as the opening *pesukim* of Parashas Lech Lecha state:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ־לְךָ מֵאֵרֶץ כְּנָעַן וּמִבְּרֵית אֲבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָרְאָה:

Hashem said to Avram, "Go from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, [and go] to the land that I will show you."²

וַאֲנִי־שָׂךְ לְךָ גֵּדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדַּלְתִּי שְׁמְךָ וְהָיָה בְּרָכָה:

"I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you and make your name great; and you will be blessing."³

This explains the Rashi on this *pasuk*, which brings the *Midrash Tanchuma* in which Bilaam told Hashem that if he could not curse them, he would bless them instead, to which Hashem replied, "They don't need your *brachah* because they are *brachah*." The Sfas Emes says that the idea here is "ואין ארור מתברך בברוך" — an accursed one cannot connect to a blessed one." The *Bereishis Rabbah*⁴ quotes this from Avraham Avinu, when he explained to Eliezer why his son Yitzchak cannot marry Eliezer's daughter.

As part of this discussion, we need to understand a key point: What exactly is a *klalah*? To understand this, we need to

go back in the *Chumash* to the first instance of a *klalah*. After Adam Harishon's *cheit*, Hashem tells him, "ארורה הארמה בעבורך" — The land will be cursed because of you."⁵ Any power that a curse possesses has its source in the *cheit* of Adam. Before the *cheit* of Adam, there was no such thing as a curse in the world.

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שעיקר התפלה להיות בנאל אלו יישיש, וכוונתו כשהוא נכנסה בברכה שרונה לוי תפלות כונן צוה' תחומות הצוא, וחס ג' ויני הכמות הרל פסג שפלה רוח נמוכה עין טושה. עיי שידע וואגין טהבל וטעני' מוילא יס לו עין טושה, ולשיח' ב' דברים על בלעם הם המדבקות צושי' וואו היסוד הנכונה לכן עיקר כמו על בלעם הרשע הקללה, ובאמת ז' אלו הנצי' מהעדרין בכל יום ילוי על אדם מתבצר עליו בכל יום הוא כונן וטעם בלעם צדוקר ועין אורו הנצי' להורגן השם להורגו זה וטעם אחרים צדוקר שרין האדם בכל יום לייגע טלמו צהכונה ג' נצי' היל כ'י לאלה וכלל: ארור לבדך כי כל קוים נשי' עיי הטיול כונן וועליו אים טוב וזה זוכה לחס על חסר בכל יום:

תריס"ג

בפסוק כי בך הורא הוא פי טעם צנחום הנכונה כונן וט' צרכה ולכן איל חסם לריכס לבסכתו כי אין ארור ומדבק צדוקר, וטעם הוא כי כל מה הקללה נא רק מחסא הראשון טכ' ארורה הארמה צנחוקר, כי קודם החסא לא י' מולא כלל הקללה, רק עיי אקילה עידי טוב ורע נחצרה הרע בכל דבר ולכן מולא ארור צעולה, ואלוהי הנכונה טעם טעם טעם י' צהם קלח העריות, וטעם זה י' בלעם וקלל לוי טעם כונן חול שידע לבין השעה טעם טעם טעם דכחיו ואל זועם בכל יום, וגם זה טעם בכל יום טל ארור העריות טעם, וואו יודע דעם עליון וטל חצי' הדעת טוב ורע ורע י' לו חסיה, אכן צבי' זה זכר לנכונה השליטה עלי העריות מל' החורה טן החיים כונן פח לעמו יסן כי יצדק אר עמו צעולה הוא צרכה הנאל צה החורים טקדמה לעולם וכוונן כן צבי' קדמו לעולם, ואיחא ורע כי

פרשת פינחס

ביה פינחס תרלי"א בקיצור ראשי דברים

במדבר דין טעול טכר, כי י' טעם וקודם צבי' אף כי טעם צבי' אהבה וקודם וטעם כי עיי יחל הטיות טעם אהבה הנצי' נחצי' טעם טעם טעם אכן כי כוונתם ר', לואח טעם לרוע על אסין לרורות, זה וטעם, אכל פיסק זכר בי' דין אל הכוונה וצבי' לרורות עיי וכוונן

Adam's sin of eating from the *Eitz Hada'as Tov u'Ra* mixed *ra* into everything in the world (the *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that "*da'as*" is a type of knowledge that involves mixing), and as part of this process, brought the concept of "curse" (*klalah*) into the world.

Let us discuss Bilaam's strange response to Hashem telling him not to curse *Bnei Yisrael*, where he asked if he can bless *Bnei Yisrael*. Why would Bilaam, a *rasha*, be interested in blessing *Bnei Yisrael*? The Sfas Emes gives a fascinating answer to this question: Ever since the *cheit* of Adam Harishon, which mixed *ra* into everything, whenever one person gives another a *brachah*, there is a bit of *ra* mixed into that *brachah*.

It was in fact through this that Bilaam drew his power to curse. The Gemara in Brachos⁶ says "שירע לכון השעה שהקב"ה כועס" — that Bilaam knew how to pinpoint the extremely brief moment each day when Hashem, so to speak, "is angry." What exactly does this Gemara mean? It seems quite cryptic. The Sfas Emes explains that this "anger," which is essentially "*ra*," is "born" each day after the moment when the "*tov*" is mixed into the world (as a result of the *cheit* of Adam Harishon eating from the *Eitz Hada'as Tov u'Ra*). This is what "יִרְדַּע דַּעַת עֲלֵיוֹן" means — that Bilaam drew his power from the *Eitz Hada'as Tov u'Ra*, which led to the *ra* being born each day anew, and which he learned how to seize.

Bnei Yisrael, on the other hand, were *zocheh* to *brachah sheleimah* without any *ra* mixed into it, as we are connected to the *Eitz Hachaim* (Torah). As it says, "ה' עוֹלָמֵנוּ יִתֵּן ה' יִכְרֹךְ אֶת־עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם,"⁷ The Midrash⁷ tells us that "עוֹ" refers to Torah, so this *pasuk* is telling us that we "became *brachah*" through the power of the Torah which preceded the world, just like *Bnei Yisrael* preceded the world. An obvious takeaway here is that the more we are *osek b'Torah*, the more connected we are to this special type of *brachah*.

As we know from Rashi, the *pasuk* in *Parashas Bereishis*, "וַיֵּאמֶר וְיִהְיֶה־אֹרֶךְ יְמֵי אָדָם,"⁸ which refers to the first day of Creation, was not referring to sunlight because the sun was not created until the fourth day. Rather, it was referring to a spiritual light, the *ohr haganuz* that Hashem determined the world could not

handle, and which He hid it away for the *tzaddikim*. The Sfas Emes explains that Hashem saw that Adam would do the *cheit*, leading to *tov* and *ra* being mixed together. He therefore hid away this pure light as a protective measure so that no *ra* could get mixed into it, to save it in its purity for *Bnei Yisrael*, s it says, "וְעַמְּךָ כָּלֵם צַדִּיקִים" and "אֹרֶךְ יָרֵעַ לְצַדִּיק וְלִישְׂרָאֵל לֵב שְׂמֹחָה"⁹

Tying it to Shabbos

This special *brachah* we are discussing, intrinsic to and defining *Bnei Yisrael*, appears on Shabbos in the form of the *neshamah yeseirah*. The *neshamah yeseirah*, a form of this *brachah*, cannot appear during the week, as it would be exposed to the *Ra* that is present then. However, on Shabbos, which is *kulo tov*, it can safely appear.

The connection between this special form of *brachah* and Shabbos is brought in a Midrash that ties the *pasuk* about Shabbos from *Parashas Bereishis*, "וַיִּכְרֹךְ אֱלֹקִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ,"¹⁰ with the following *pasuk* from *Mishlei*,¹¹ "כִּרְכַּת ה' הִיא תַעֲשִׂיר וְלֹא־יוֹסֶף" "עֲצֵב עֲמָה." The Midrash explains that this type of *brachah*, which we experience only on Shabbos, has no *ra* mixed into it from the *etzev* and the *klalah* that came into the world through the *cheit* of Adam Harishon.

Practical Takeaways

To summarize, the Sfas Emes is telling us here that we, *Bnei Yisrael*, are *brachah*. That is an incredible thing. A practical takeaway from this beautiful piece can be to simply pause every so often and contemplate this concept, because that alone will naturally be *mechazeik* us regarding our elevated role in this world — that we should try our very best to always be a *kiddush Hashem* and represent ourselves as this "*brachah*" to the world. It will also motivate us to connect more and more to this *brachah* that is part and parcel of our very being through our *limud haTorah*, *shemiras Shabbos*, and our appreciation and connection to Shabbos, by focusing on being present during Shabbos and tapping into the incredible spiritual energy that is in Shabbos, as touched upon above.

⁶ 7a.

⁷ Shemos Rabbah 27:4.

⁸ Tehillim 97:11.

⁹ Yeshayah 60:21.

¹⁰ Bereishis 2:3.

¹¹ Mishlei 10:22.