

בעזרת

The Way of Emunah

Collected Thoughts
on the Weekly Parshah

From

**Rabbi Meir Isamar
Rosenbaum shlita**

Chukas - Balak



The Way of Emunah

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Parshas Chukas



An Open Mouth is Impure/Good and Bad Depends on One's Mouth/Words Rule Over Him/The Wisdom of Silence/Protection of the Mouth/Distancing a Person From His Creator/More Severe Than the Three Chamuros/The Golus of the Shechinah/The Connection Between Guarding One's words and the Mezuzah/The Worst Blemish/Transferring Merits/Do Not Speak Ill of Eretz Yisroel/Unclean Language/A Portion in Olam Haba According to One's Speech/Saved from Prosecuting Forces/L'Fum Tzaara Agra/Meriting the Hidden Light/Asking for a Pure Mouth/Accepting Words from One Who is Silent/The Purity of Rav Yitzchok of Volozhin's Speech/Unlimited Merits/A Segulah for Wealth/Coming Close to Holiness/One Who Overpowers His Speech is Called "a Man"/Not Speaking Without a Yichud/Hashem Rejoices With Those Who Guard Their Tongues

Parshas Balak

Balak was an Ehrliche Goy/His Students Rebuked Him for His Bad Middos/Hashem Doesn't Agree to the Destruction of Bnei Yisroel/He Wanted to Oppose the Early Morning Waking/Run to a Mitzvah or Flee from an Aveirah/The Protection of Tikkun Chatzos/He Wanted to Live Like a Goy and Die Like a Jew/Unity Cancels Curses/Blessed from Learning the Brachos/A Segulah Not to be Damaged by Sorcerers/The Segulah of Bitachon/The Entrance of "Hashiveinu"/Becoming a Tzadik in One Second/Thoughts of Mitzvos Save One From Aveiros/The Importance of the Simplest Jew/The Value of Every Jew/The Value of Every Mitzvah/Starting With Easy Mitzvos/A Moment of Teshuva and Good Deeds/The Preparation for a Mitzvah is Also a Mitzvah/They Won't Ask if You Were a Chasid or a Misnaged/Annuling Decrees With Amein Yehei Shmei Rabbah/Don't Honor Sinners/Bilaam's

War

וְכָל כְּלִי פֶתוּחַ אֲשֶׁר אֵין צָמִיד פֶּתִיל עָלָיו טָמֵא וְגו' (יט, טו)

Any open vessel which has no seal fastened around it becomes unclean. (19:15)

An Open Mouth is Impure:

Sefer Avodas Yisroel (Parshas Para) explains this verse to be referring to the importance of guarding one's words. It can be understood as saying that if one's mouth is always open, meaning that he says whatever pops into his head, he will inevitably end up speaking *lashon hara* and profanity. Thus, if one's mouth is an "open vessel", in the sense that one has "no seal", i.e., no filter on his words, he is impure, as he will certainly engage in forbidden speech.

Good and Bad Depends on One's Mouth:

Shlomo Hamelech says (Koheles 6:7): "All of a person's toil is for his mouth." This can be translated to mean that all the pain and suffering a person endures in this world is a result of improper use of the mouth.

Sefer Marpeh Lason (^{Amud Hayirah} 29:2) quotes the Shlah Hakadosh as saying that **all *tzaros* we have faced from the time of the creation of the world were caused by the sin of *lashon hara*.**

Words Rule Over Him:

Sefer Hachasidim (Siman 86) writes the following poetic words: "The rule for acquiring wisdom is silence. If words are worth a *selah* (coin), silence is worth two. When I speak, I

regret it. And when I don't speak, I don't regret it. Before I speak, I am in control of my words. But after I speak, my words are in control of me."

Once words have left a person's mouth, no matter how much he regrets them, he can never take them back. Therefore, one must be extremely careful before speaking.

The Wisdom of Silence:

When the Imrei Emes of Gur zy" returned to Poland after his first trip to Eretz Yisroel, his Rebbitzen asked him, "Don't Chazal say (Bava Basra 158B) that the air of Eretz Yisroel makes a person smarter? What wisdom have you brought back with you?"

He answered by quoting the

Mishnah (Avos 3:13): "The help for acquiring wisdom is silence."

Protection of the Mouth:

An ox once entered the Chofetz Chaim's home and caused much damage. The Rebbitzen got very upset and chased the ox out of the house, and the Chofetz Chaim told her, "There is no point in getting angry. You have two options to prevent this from happening again – either always keep the door closed or, if you want to keep it open, constantly keep an eye on it."

He then added, "The same is true regarding *ruchnius*. The *yeitzer hara* tries to push its way into a person's mouth in order to get him to cause damage by speaking forbidden words. One has two ways to prevent this. He can either always keep his mouth

closed, or he can keep it open but constantly remain on guard to ensure he only speaks good, permitted words.”

Distancing a Person From His Creator:

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh (Vayikroh 14:9) writes: **“Nothing distances a person from his creator as much as *lashon hara* does.”** With this in mind, he explains the words of the *pasuk* (ibid): “This shall be the rule of the *metzora* on the day of his purification, and he shall be brought to the kohen.” When a person wants to purify himself from the sin of *lashon hara*, he must come to Hashem (whom the Zohar Hakadosh refers to as a “Kohen”, see Chelek 3, 49B). Since he distanced himself from Hashem, he must be brought back to Him.

More Severe Than the Three Chamuros:

The Chida *zt”l* (*Sefer Lev Dovid*) quotes Sefer Birchas Tov as saying that *lashon hara* is the very worst *aveirah*. It is even more severe than the three cardinal sins of idol worship, immoral relationships and murder. Therefore, the current *golus*, which was caused by *lashon hara*, is longer and more difficult than the previous *golus*, which was caused by those three sins. He adds that the only way to rectify this is through Torah study.

Rav Shaul Katzin *zt”l*, one of the *Gedolim* of Yerushalaim, was very careful with his words. It is related that he once was sitting in his home and speaking to a close friend of his, when the man began to speak disparagingly about someone else. Rav Shaul

immediately screamed at him, “Get out of my house! I can’t listen to this!”

The man left in shame. A few days later, when they met again, Rav Shaul said, “Don’t think that I hate you now. On the contrary, the reason I yelled at you is because I love you so much and wanted to save you from a very severe sin!”

The Golus of the Shechinah:

The Kamarna Rebbe zy”a (Sefer Otzar Hachaim, Parshas Ki Seitzei) writes that it was revealed to him in a dream that the reason the Shechinah is in *golus* is because people do not watch their mouths and aren’t careful not to speak pointless words and *lashon hara*. He explains that all words are given to man by the Shechinah,

and when they are not used properly, the mouth becomes impure. When people who have defiled their mouths in this way try to daven, the forces of evil are able to grab away their words, thus sending the Shechinah into *golus*.

He continues to say that **the most important thing is to guard one’s words**. He bemoans the fact that every city in his times had a Rebbe, and the *chasidim* of each Rebbe felt that it was their duty to badmouth every other Rebbe.

The Connection Between Guarding One’s words and the Mezuzah:

The Chasam Sofer zy”a (Sefer Toras Moshe) writes that one reason why we place a *mezuzah* on our doorpost is to symbolize that one

must sanctify the “door” to his body (i.e., his mouth) if he wants his entire body to be holy.

Even if a house is full of sefarim, it still needs a *mezuzah*. So too, even if one is full of Torah, he still needs to guard his mouth in order to be holy. And even if a house is not full of sefarim, the *mezuzah* sanctifies the house. **So too, even if a person is not full of Torah and *yiras shomayim*, if his mouth is protected and kept holy, he is considered to be a sanctified person. This is because the mouth defines a person.**

The Worst Blemish:

The Chida *zt”l* (Sefer Pnei Dovid) writes: “I heard that *motzi shem rah* causes a blemish to the *bris halashon* (the covenant of the tongue). And when a person blemishes

the *bris halashon*, he certainly also blemishes the *bris hama’or* (a Kabbalistic term used to refer to the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people).”

The Sefas Emes *zy”a* (Parshas Metzorah 5650) writes: “It appears to me that blemishing the *bris halashon* is even worse than blemishing the *bris hama’or*.”

He brings proof to this from a *metzora* (who contracted tzoraas as a result of forbidden speech), who must be sent out of all three camps.

Transferring Merits:

The Chovos Halevavos famously writes (Shaar Hachniah, Perek 7) that many people come before the Heavenly Court on their Day of Reckoning and, when their good deeds and sins are added up, they are credited

for mitzvos that they never did. When they ask why they are being rewarded for things they hadn't done, they are

told, "These mitzvos were done by a person who spoke *lashon hara* about you."

So too, some people are not credited for mitzvos that they did do but are blamed for *aveiros* that they never did. When they ask where their mitzvos went and why they are being blamed for sins they never committed, they are told, "You spoke badly about so-and-so. Therefore, you were given his sins and he was given your mitzvos."

When people spoke badly about the Bais Yosef, the *malach* that regularly came to learn with him told him (Magid Meisharim, Parshas Vayakhel), **"Don't worry about them. They aren't**

hurting you; rather, they are helping you because when someone speaks *lashon hara* about his friend, he loses his mitzvos and they are given to the one he spoke about."

He concluded, "This is 100% fact. If people would know this, they would rejoice when they hear that people are speaking badly about them and would feel like those people are giving them gold and silver."

The Kamarna Rov zy"l speaks about the importance of properly utilizing one's words in Sefer Heichal Habracha (Parshas Netzavim). He writes that when one speaks *lashon hara* about a Jew – even about the lowliest person – it is as if spoke against Hashem. His friend is then given all of his mitzvos, and he is given all of his friend's *aveiros*. He is

sent to the lowest level of *gehenim*, and he has no atonement.

He adds that it is forbidden to believe the words of one who speaks *lashon hara* because he is considered a heretic and he certainly lies and deceives a lot. And he has no portion in Olam Haba.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 7B) says: “When a person is appointed to a position of authority over the public, all his sins are forgiven.”

The Chasam Sofer (Drashos, Drasha L'Shavuot, page 295, 4) asks why he deserves this. He answers that since it is natural for people to speak badly about authority figures, and when one speaks *lashon hara* about someone, all that person's sins are transferred to him. Thus, all the new leader's sins are taken off of him.

This is as Dovid Hamelech says (Tehillim 12:9): “Wicked men walk on all sides when the one who appears lowest to the sons of men is elevated.” This means that everyone who speaks badly about someone are deemed wicked.

The Chasam Sofer himself was extremely careful in this area. In the introduction to Sefer Mor Dror, written by a student of the Chasam Sofer, the author writes about him: “I never heard a disparaging word from him, even about people who were sinners and heretics in his eyes. On the contrary, he even greeted them with a smile.”

Do Not Speak Ill of Eretz Yisroel:

A *meshulach* once came from Eretz Yisroel to the city of

Volozhin, and the Netziv *zt”l* greeted him warmly. He sat him down at his table and asked him how the Yidden in Eretz Yisroel were doing. The *meshulach* began to speak harshly about the new settlers, but the Netziv stopped him and said, “I don’t want to hear anything bad about the holy land!”

The *meshulach* responded, “But what I am saying is true!”

The Netziv told him, “The *meraglim* also said things which were true, if not they would have been called ‘the *shakranim*’, rather than ‘the *meraglim*’.”

Unclean Language:

Rav Tzvi Hirsch Auerbach *zt”l*, Rov of Konin and author of Sefer Divrei Torah on Choshen Mishpat, once became very sick.

A doctor came to check him and said, “Stick out your tongue.”

The doctor looked at his tongue and said, “This tongue is not clean.”

Rav Tzvi Hirsch sighed and said, “It’s true. But who in today’s day and age can say that their tongue is really clean?”

A Portion in Olam Haba According to One’s Speech:

The pasuk states (Bereishis 2:16): “And Hashem commanded the man, to say...” Sefer Arvei Nachal (Parshas Bereishis) writes: “This indicates that the nature of a living person is to speak, to keep his mouth unsealed, as Chazal say (Chulin 89A): ‘What is the ‘*umnus*’ (craft) of a man in this world? To makes himself

like a mute. It is a hard job to be silent. For this reason, Hashem gave us the Torah, which is very deep. One must toil in it constantly. Thus, one can speak words of today at all times. (A non-Jew has no choice other than to speak about nonsense, as he has nothing else to discuss, but a Jew has the option to speak about Torah.) A man's main acquisition (portion in this world) is dependent on his speech because a part of his soul leaves him with every word. When one speaks frivolous words, these words go to the impure forces, but when one speaks words of Torah and holiness, the words – which are a portion of his *neshama* – go to the source of holiness.”

He adds: “If one wants to determine if he has a share in Olam Haba or not, he should contemplate what he spoke about throughout his life. If he

was careful not to speak wasteful, pointless words, and all his words were used for Torah and holy matters besides for a few used for mundane things when necessary, he will know that his soul is holy and he has a portion in Olam Haba. But if he always spoke about nonsense, he will know that even if he did many mitzvot and good deeds, it won't help him because his soul is in the grasp of impure forces.”

Saved from Prosecuting Forces:

The Chofetz Chaim *zt"l* (Sefer Kavod Shomayim, Perek 1, Ois 10) writes that if one is careful not to believe *lashon hara*, Hashem treats him measure-for-measure and does not believe claims brought against him by the prosecuting angels.

L'Fum Tzaara Agra:

Sefer Divrei Yisroel (Klalai Ohraysa, Ois 30) states the following explanation of the Mishnah (Avos 5:23): “*L’fum tzaarah agra*” (one is rewarded in accordance to the pain): The word “*l’fum*” can be translated to mean “the mouth”. Thus, the Mishnah is saying that the mouth can cause “*tzaarah* or *agra*”. It can cause pain through speaking *lashon hara*, or it can create reward through words of Torah.

Meriting the Hidden Light:

The following well-known words of the Vilna Gaon *zt”l* (from Igeres HaGr”a, a letter that he wrote to his family) are a tremendous source of inspiration for us all on the topic of *shemiras halashon*:

“Every individual will be judged for every word he says. One should not waste even a small word. Therefore, I exhort you to become accustomed to sitting alone **because, as Chazal say, the sins involving the tongue are the worst sins of all.** There is no reason to expand on this sin, as it is worse than all other sins...

Chazal say that all of a person’s mitzvos and Torah are not sufficient to overpower what comes out of his mouth. The work one has to do in this world is to make himself like a mute and to stick his lips together... And all the worst punishments (of Kaf Hakeleh) are because of pointless words that the mouth emits... That is in regards to pointless words, but in regards to *lashon hara*, *rechilus*, mockery, words that cause

discord and curses, and especially if those are said in the bais knesses or on Shabbos and yomtv, one gets an even worse punishment (and one is sent to an even lower place in *gehenim*).

One cannot even imagine the damage he can cause himself with one word. One should not waste even a single word... And one should not say any unnecessary word on Shabbos or yomtov because the holiness of Shabbos is very great and, as Chazal say, it was only permitted with difficulty to greet a friend on Shabbos.

We see how severe one word can be. You should know that for words and *middos*, one must habituate himself very much to act properly...

Until one's final day, he must "afflict himself." This does not

mean that he should fast or cause pain to his body. Rather, he must afflict himself by subduing his mouth and his desires. This is how one earns *Olam Haba*, as is stated (Mishlei 6:23): "The way of life (in *Olam Haba*) is rebuke and *mussar*." **Guarding one's mouth in this way is more effective than all fasts and physical afflictions.**

The Gr"a continues: **Every single second that a person closes his mouth, he is rewarded with a great, hidden light that no angel or creation can imagine.** The *pasuk* says (Tehillim 34:17-18): "Who is the man who desires life... protect your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking badly..." **In this way, one atones for all sins and is saved from *Sh'ol Tachtis*,** as is stated (Mishlei 21:23): "One who

watches his mouth (from excessive eating) and his tongue (from speaking bad words), protects his soul from suffering.”

The main thing is not to speak even positively about any man, and certainly not negatively. **The main way to merit Olam Haba is by guarding one's mouth. This is bigger than all of one's Torah and actions because the mouth is “Kodesh Kodashim.”**

Asking for a Pure Mouth:

The Gemara states (Brachos 18A): “Even if a sharp sword is placed upon a person's neck, he should not despair from Divine mercy.” The Chidushei Harim (quoted in Bais Yisroel) states that this is a hint about *lashon hara*, which is likened to a sharp sword because it comes from a sharp

tongue. The Gemara can be understood as saying that even though this sharp sword – i.e., one's tongue - is resting upon a person's neck, he shouldn't despair. Rather, he should beg Hashem for mercy and ask Him to save him by granting him a pure mouth.

Accepting Words from One Who is Silent:

The well-known Mashpia, Rav Shmuel Gronem *zt”l*, would travel every year to spend the month of Tishrei in Lubavitch. At the end of the month, he would go back to his home in the city of Zemin. One year, before he left, Rav Shmuel Ber of Borisov *zt”l* told him that he had something to tell him, and he shouldn't leave before he gave him his message.

The next day, Rav Shmuel Ber told him the same thing, so he stayed for an additional day. *lashon hara.*

A day later, Rav Shmuel Ber told him, “I changed my mind. I don’t want to tell you what I wanted to say.”

Rav Shmuel Gronem later declared, “I never in my life had such a crushing defeat!”

Rav Menachem Mendel Futerfus *zt”l* added that he meant to say, “From this decision not to speak, he learned more than anything he heard anyone else ever say.”

The Purity of Rav Yitzchok of Volozhin’s Speech:

Rav Yitzchok of Volozhin *zt”l* was extremely careful with his words. He avoided any trace of

He once needed to say that a certain person was liar. Since he didn’t want to say that word, he said, “This man has a great memory. Some people remember things that happened 10 years ago. Some even remember things that occurred 20 years ago. Those with the best memories can recall events even from 50 years ago. But **this man has an incredible memory that he remembers things that never happened at all.**”

Unlimited Merits:

On the other hand, the reward for guarding one’s tongue is great. Rabenu Yona writes in Shaarei Teshuva (Shaar 3, Ois 210) as follows: “Death and life are in the hand of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits

(Mishlei 18:21).” “Those who love it” refers to people who like to talk. The best advice for them is to “eat its fruits”, meaning that they should only speak words of Torah and *mussar*, as well as words of friendliness to others, praise for good things, and criticism of bad things, but not to speak any pointless words. **One can earn untold reward with his tongue**, as the pasuk says, “Life is in the hands of the tongue.”

The Gemara says (Bava Basra 9B): “One who gives a donation to a poor person receives six blessings and one who calms him with words receives 12 blessings.” The Maharsha explains that comforting a person with words is better than giving someone a donation without comforting him because the former is done with the body,

while the later is done with one’s money. We can learn from this the power of saying a “good *vort*” to a Jew in need of encouragement.

Rabenu Bechaya (Parshas Metzorah) writes: “Since ‘life and death are in the power of the tongue’ (Mishlei 18:21), if one enjoys talking, he should use this pastime to earn reward by speaking about matters of wisdom, truth, and peace. If one does this, the more he talks, the more reward he will get.”

A Segulah for Wealth:

Rav Chaim Palagi *zt”l* (Sefer Tochachos Mussar, Parshas Metzorah) writes that the punishment for speaking *lashon hara* is poverty. But **when one avoids this sin, he merits great wealth.**

Sefarim Hakedoshim also say *kedusha*.” that guarding one’s mouth is a *segulah* for wealth. The Chozeh of Lublin zy”a discerns this from the Gemara (Chulin 46A) that says: “Rich men are miserly.” He asks: Are all rich men stingy? Aren’t some of them very generous?

The Chozeh answers that this isn’t referring to money. Rather, it means that they are miserly with their words. **They guard their mouths and do not speak unnecessary words and, as a result, they were blessed with wealth.**

Coming Close to Holiness:

Rav Pinchos of Koretz zy”a (quoted in Imrei Pinchos, Shaar 7, Inyanim Shomin, Ois 133) would say, **“The more a person limits his speech, the closer he gets to**

One Who Overpowers His Speech is Called “a Man”:

The *pasuk* states (Tehillim 34:13): “Who is the man who desires life, who loves days to see good...” Sefer Reishis Chochmah (Shaar Hakedusha, Perek 11) notes that the Zohar Hakadosh (Parshas Terumah 158A) writes that one who overcomes his yeitzer hara is called “*ish*” (a man). So why is a man who guards his words called an “*ish*”? Because the temptation for the sins of the tongue is constant and it takes a lot of strength to overcome it. Thus, one who finds the inner fortitude to do this is certainly worthy of being called “a man”.

Not Speaking Without a Yichud:

Shortly before the passing of the Ropshitzer Rebbe zy”a, he accepted upon himself a “*taanis dibbur*”, and he stopped speaking completely. This caused his family and *chasidim* a lot of pain, as they felt that they couldn’t take care of him properly if he wouldn’t say what he needed.

His son, Rav Avrohom Chaim of Linsk zy”a, said to him, “My dear father, it seems to me that you have the ability to talk but you don’t want to do so. At least tell me the reason for this.”

The Rebbe opened his mouth and said, “My son, you should know that from the time of my youth, I never said a single word without a ‘*yichud*’. Now that I am weak and can no longer do this, I decided that it is better to stop talking than to talk without *yichudim*.”

Hashem Rejoices With Those Who Guard Their Tongues:

Sefer Birchas Avrohom relates that Rav Uri of Strelisk zy”a had a nusach hatefillah that included the words (in Tefilas Boruch She’amar) “*hamehulal b’peh atzmo*.” (He is glorified with his words themselves, rather than the more common version of “*hamehulal b’peh amo*”, He is glorified with the words of His nation.) The meaning of this is that **if a person guards his words to avoid speaking pointlessly or harmfully, he is already glorifying Hashem** – and one certainly glorifies Him if he uses his mouth to praise and thank Him.

Parshas Balak

וַיֵּרָא בָלָק בֶּן צִפּוֹר אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגו' (כב, ב)

And Balak son of Tzipor saw all that Yisroel did. (22:2)

Balak Was an “Ehrlicher Goy”:

Sefer Divrei Meir relates the following story:

A Rov once spent Parshas Balak in Premishlan, where he davened in the bais medrash of Rav Meir Premishlaner *zy”a*. Since there was no kohen present, this distinguished Tov was honored with the first *aliyah*.

As he made his way to the *bima*, Rav Meir stopped him and said, “Before you make the *bracha* on the Torah, I would like to ask you a quick question. Was Balack a Yid or a goy?”

The Rov answered, “Of course he was a goy! He was from the nation of Moav.”

Rav Meir then asked, “If so, why is an entire Parshah in the Torah named after a goy? Most Parshios are named after the first word in the Parshah, so why isn’t this Parshah called ‘Parshas Vayar’? The Parshah about Avrohom Avinu is called ‘Parshas Vayeirah’ because it starts with that word. So, why can’t this Parshah be called ‘Parshas Vayar’?”

The Rov did not know how to answer this question.

Rav Meir said, “I’ll tell you the answer with a story. One time, I was traveling by foot with my friend to see Rav Mordechai of Kremnitz *zy”a*, when it suddenly began to rain very heavily. The rain got harder

by the second and it became very cold and windy. We were stuck in the downpour and started to desperately look for any place to take shelter.

“Finally, we saw a small house, knocked on the door and ran inside. We found that it was inhabited by a non-Jew and started to leave, but the goy called us back and said, ‘Please be my guest and sleep here tonight.’

“He gave us nice accommodations and we slept well that night. In the morning, we got back on the road. As we walked, my friend and I had an argument. My friend said, ‘That was an *ehrilcher* (upstanding) goy.’ I disagreed and said that it isn’t proper to call a goy ‘*ehrllich*’. We decided that when we got to Kremnitz, we would ask the Rebbe about this.

“When we asked our question to the Rebbe, he asked me, ‘Meir, what is your source in the Torah for your contention?’

“I said that it is a clear Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 334). Rav Shimon bar Yochai says that it is a known halacha that Esav hates Yaakov. Since this is the law, if the goy had thrown us out, he would have been doing the right thing according to halacha. Then we could say that he is an *ehrllicher* goy. But this goy was nice to us. He was acting against halacha. Therefore, he is not an *ehrllicher* goy.

“The Rebbe responded, ‘You are correct.’”

Rav Meir concluded, “Balak’s actions are puzzling. He knew that Klal Yisroel was commanded not to fight against Moav (Devarim 2:9). So, why did he

hire Bilaam to curse the Jews? What did he have to gain from this? The answer is that he was simply following the halacha that Esav is supposed to hate

Yaakov. **Therefore, Balak was an *ehrllicher* goy. Since he was so *ehrllich*, an entire Parshah is named after him."**

וַיָּקָם בִּלְעָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל שְׂרָי בְלִקְחוּ לָכֵן אֶל אֶרְצְכֶם כִּי מֵאֵן ה' לַתַּחֲתִי
(כב, יג)

Bilaam arose in the morning, and he said to Balak's ministers, "Return to your land because Hashem refuses to allow me to go..." (22:13)

His Students Rebuked Him for His Bad Middos:

Rashi states: "This teaches us that he was haughty."

This seems to indicate that if he hadn't said these words, we wouldn't have known that Bilaam was haughty. This means that he hid his haughtiness and pretended to be a righteous person. From looking at him, no one could tell that he was a *baal gaivoh*, but one could discern this from observing his students.

From seeing how they acted, one

could tell that their teacher must be a bad person.

Rav Yechezkel of Kuzmir zy" a (quoted in Divrei Yisroel, Klalei Ohraysa, Ois 40) discerns this from the Mishnah (Avos 5:19) that says: "What is the difference between the students of Avrohom Avinu and the students of Bilaam the wicked..." Why does it only ask this question about the students? Why doesn't it list the difference between Bilaam and Avrohom themselves?

The answer is that based on

outsider appearances, there was no difference between them. **Bilaam was also a Rebbe.** To outsiders he looked like a pious person. However, from seeing

how his students acted, one could tell that there was a huge difference between him and Avrohom Avinu.

וַיָּקָם בִּלְעָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׂ אֶת אֲתוֹנוֹ וְגו' עַם שָׂרִי מוֹאָב (כב, כא)

And Bilaam got up in the morning and he saddled his mule and he went. (22:21)

Hashem Doesn't Agree to the Destruction of Bnei Yisroel:

Rashi writes: “We see from this that hatred corrupts the straight line (of dignified conduct), as he saddled it himself. Hashem said, ‘You wicked man, Avrohom their forefather already preceded you, as it is stated that he got up early and saddled his donkey (Bereishis 22:3).”

The Kotzker Rebbe zy”a explains that Bilaam wanted to destroy Klal Yisroel with his curses. Hashem was telling him that his plan would fail because

Avrohom Avinu also got up early and saddled his donkey to take his son, Yitzchok, to the *akeidah*. If his plan to slaughter his son had been allowed to play out, that would have meant the destruction of Klal Yisroel. However, just like Hashem didn't allow it to happen then – because He wants Klal Yisroel to last – He won't allow it now either, because He doesn't agree to the destruction of His nation.

He Wanted to Oppose the Early Morning Waking:

The Chasan Sofer *zt"l* writes that Bilaam got up early because he wanted to arouse an accusation against Klal Yisroel. He wanted to show that they are lazy and don't get up early to serve Hashem. Hashem responded by saying that Avrohom also got up early; therefore, his claim is invalid.

He adds that this may be the reason why the Avos enacted the three daily *tefillos*, so that we will always rise early to serve Hashem.

The Chidushei Harim *zy"a* (quoted in Sefer Likutei Yehuda) further explains that the complaint against Klal Yisroel was not really so great because Bilaam had the *yeitzer hara* on his side, which was helping him to do his wicked actions. When one does mitzvos, however, the *yeitzer hara* tries to find ways to trap

him and obstruct what he wants to do. Thus, the complaint was not really that strong.

Run to a Mitzvah or Flee from an Aveirah:

We actually learn two forms of *zerizus* from this Parshah – to emulate Avrohom Avinu and hurry towards a mitzvah by waking up early to serve Hashem, and, on the other hand, to not be like Bilaam, who woke early to hurry to commit a sin; rather, we must learn to flee from *aveiros*. This is as is stated in the Mishnah (Avos 4:2): “Run to a mitzvah... and flee from an *aveirah*.”

It is related that Rav Yaakov Dovid of Amshinov *zy"a* would always walk very quickly. He once met Rav Yechezkel of Kuzmir *zy"a* in Warsaw, who

asked him why he walked so fast. He replied, “A Jew must always be running. One must run to mitzvos and away from aveiros!”

וַיֵּלֶךְ בִּלְעָם עִם בָּלָק וַיָּבֹאוּ קִרְיַת חֲצוֹז (כב, לט)

And Bilaam went with Balak and they came to Kiryas Chatoz. (22:39)

The Protection of Tikkun Chatzos:

Sefer Bnei Shileishim explains that “Kiryas Chatzos” is a hint to the concept of “Tikkun Chatzos.” The *pasuk* is saying that Bilaam and his curses cannot harm those who recite Tikkun Chatzos.

He further states that the words “*efes kitzeihu tireh*” (you will only see part of them) is a hint to the mitzvah of *tzitzis* (which are placed on the “*katzeh*” – corner – of a garment). Thus, the Torah is saying that *tzitzis* are a protection from sin (as is stated in Menachos 44A).

מִי מֵנָה עֵפֶר יַעֲקֹב וְגו' תָּמֹת נַפְשִׁי מוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתִהְיֶה אַחֲרִיתִי כְּמֵהוּ (כג, י)

May my soul die the death of the upright. (23:10)

He Wanted to Live Like a Goy and Die Like a Jew: like a goy and die like a Jew. That isn’t possible.”

The Chofetz Chaim *zt”l* said about Bilaam, “He had a ‘big appetite’. If one wants to die like a Jew, he must live like a Jew. But this *rasha* wanted to live

My ancestor, Rav Tzvi Hirsch of Kretchnif *zy”a* would say. “It is said that one who merits davening at the gravesite of Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk *zy”a* will

no pass away without doing *teshuva*. I say that **it is better to daven at his *kever* that you should live with *teshuva*!**"

That was Bilaam's mistake. He wanted to die like a Jew, but he didn't want to live like a Jew.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בִּלְקָם לֵךְ נָא אִתִּי אֶל מְקוֹם אֲחֵר וְגו' אָפֶס קִצְהוּ תִרְאֶה וְכָלּוּ לֹא תִרְאֶה וְקִבְּנוּ לִי מִשָּׁם (כג, יג).

Balak said to him, "Come with me to another place from where you will see them; however, you will see only a part of them, not all of them... (23:13)

Unity Cancels Curses:

The Rebbe of Radzimin zy"l explains that Balak was giving advice to Bilaam. He was telling him that if the nation was "in parts", meaning that they were fractured and lacked unity, then

he would be able to "see them", meaning he will be able to curse them. If, however, they would be "all of them", i.e., united and at peace with each other, then he would not be able to curse them.

הִנֵּה בִרְךְ לְקַחְתִּי וּבִרְךְ וְגו' (כג, כ)

I have received (an order) to bless, and He has blessed... (23:20)

Blessed from Learning the Brachos:

The Ben Ish Chai *zt"l* asks why Hashem orchestrated events so that Klal Yisroel would be blessed by the wicked Bilaam. Do we need the blessings of a

rasha?

He answers that, in truth, Bilaam's blessings had no power to do any good for us. He only had the power to curse, not to bless. However, there still was a great benefit from his *brachos*

because these blessings are written in the Torah and are read each year by *tzadikim*, who use them to learn how to bless us.

Thus, Klal Yisroel was blessed by being given this opportunity for *tzadikim* to learn how to give good brachos.

כִּי לֹא נִחַשׁ בְּיַעֲקֹב וְלֹא קָסָם וְגו' כַּעַת יֵאמַר לְיַעֲקֹב וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מַה פָּעַל
א-ל (כג, כג)

For there is no divination in Yaakov and no sorcery in Yisroel. In time it will be said to Yaakov and Yisroel, 'What has G-d wrought?'

A Segulah Not to be Damaged by Sorcerers:

The Dubno Magid *zt"l* (*Sefer Ohel Yaakov*) explains this *pasuk* with a *moshol*:

A general of an army once heard about a wise man who lived in a faraway land. He heard that this genius had created an ointment that, when smeared on the body, made it impenetrable to arrows or spears. Since this general was in the middle of fighting a war, he wanted this cream very much. He traveled to the wise man's homeland and

paid him a fortune for his product. The man smeared it on his body, and he set off to return home.

On the way, he bumped into a group of robbers, who began shooting arrows at him. The cream did its job and he was not hurt at all. When the thieves saw that they couldn't harm him, they started to flee. However, the general called to them in a gentle voice and said, "Don't run away. I won't hurt you."

They came to him and he gave them food and drink. They asked him why he was being nice to

them after they attacked him, and he answered, “This trip cost me a lot of money. I had to pay a lot for the ointment, as well as for travel expenses. I knew that when I got home, people would ask me why I spent so much on an unproven product that I didn’t really know worked. I was too scared to test it myself by sticking myself with an arrow or knife. But you have done me a favor by shooting arrows at me and proving that it works. Therefore, I owe you something.”

Bnei Yisroel had always known that since the time of Yaakov Avinu, they had special protection from sorcery, and that no form of magic could harm them. They knew that Yaakov had lived in the home of his enemy, Lavan, who had attempted to hurt him with sorcery but had been unable to

do so. However, they had never tested it on themselves, so they couldn’t prove it. Perhaps some of them were lacking in *emunah* and didn’t fully believe it. One everyone saw how Bilaam had been unable to harm them with his powers, however, it was proven to all that they possessed this power.

Thus, Balak told Bilaam: Look what you did? Not only didn’t you harm them, you also did them a favor by proving that they cannot be harmed by sorcery! He was saying that it was already known that evil magic cannot hurt Yaakov’s descendants but now, you have revealed for all to see that Hashem continues to protect them.

The Segulah of Bitachon:

We see that Hashem has put into the nature of the world that sorcery cannot harm the Jewish people. So too, He has instituted a natural fact that if one has genuine *bitachon*, he will succeed in whatever he does, even if he is doing a bad thing. This is as is said in the name of the Vilna Gaon zy"l; "If one has *bitachon* in Hashem, even if he is a thief digging a tunnel to rob

a house, he will succeed with his robbery!"

The Rov of Telshe, Rav Yehuda Leib Bloch *zt"l* writes (Shiurei Daas, Chelek 1, page 59) that this is because Hashem made the power of *bitachon* into a natural phenomenon. If one trusts in Hashem, he naturally will succeed at whatever he is doing, even if it is an aveirah.

מַה טּוֹבוֹ אֹהֲלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֶיךָ וְגו' (כד, ה)

How good are you tents, Yaakov, your Mishkans... (24:5)

The Entrance of "Hashiveinu":

Rashi explains that he saw that the doors of their tents did not face each other.

Rav Osher of Ropshitz zy"l (quoted in Sefer Ohr Yesha) explains that Hashem tells Klal Yisroel (Malachi 3:7): "Return to Me and I will return to you." He also says

(Yalkut Shimoni, Shir Hashirim, Remez 988): "Open for me an opening the size of the eye of a needle and I will open for you an opening the size of the door to a hall." In other words, Hashem asks us to take the first step of "opening a small door" by wanting to do *teshuva* and regretting our misdeeds, and, in return, He will provide us with a

lot of help to purify ourselves completely. Klal Yisroel responds, however (Eicha 5:21): “Return, Hashem, to us, and we will return.” We ask Him to take the first step of taking us back to Him, without any action on our part.

Accordingly, Rashi can be understood as saying that “the doors to the tents don’t face each other”, meaning that there is a dispute regarding who must open the first “door” to *teshuva*. Hashem asks us to open the door, but we pray from Him to open the door to *teshuva* for us. Regarding this, it is stated: “How good are your tents, Yaakov.” This means that our request, that Hashem open the door first, is also good, as this shows that we want to do *teshuva*. In this merit, Hashem will open the door for us.

Becoming a Tzadik in One Second:

The *pasuk* (Tehillim 103:12) states: “As the distance of east from west, He distanced our transgressions from us.” The Shidlovitz Rebbe *z”a* (quoted in Sefer Divrei Bina, Parshas B’haaloscha) explains that when a person is standing and facing east, he can turn in one second to face west. So too, Hashem has so much mercy on us that he makes it very easy for a person to turn himself around and become a complete *tzadik*. This is as Chazal say (Kiddushin 49B) that if one marries a woman on condition that he is a complete *tzadik*, the marriage is valid because he may have had thoughts of *teshuva*, which deem him a *tzadik*.

The way this works is, as we said, just the desire to do *teshuva*

and return to Hashem, opens the door to allow Him to enter and purify us.

Thoughts of Mitzvos Save One From Aveiros:

The Sefas Emes (Parshas Haazinu, 5634) proves that good thoughts are very potent from a *kal v'chomer*. The Gemara (Yoma 29B) says that thoughts of sin are worse than actual sins. If so, since we know that “*middah tova merubah*” (the measure of good is always bigger than the measure of bad), it is certain that **when one thinks that he wants to do mitzvos, he has accomplished more than he could have even from actually doing mitzvos**. He adds that such thoughts also help a person avoid all sin.

The Importance of the Simplest Jew:

The concept that asking Hashem to return us to Him is a merit that leads to our purification and full *teshuva* is linked to the mitzvah of *milah*. Sefer Divrei Bina (Parshas Lech Lecha) notes that the literal translation of the word “*milah*” is “a word”. This indicates that just like a *bris milah* sanctifies a person for life, so too **if one says one proper word to Hashem, he can merit sanctification for life**.

Furthermore, even a good word said in an offhand manner or accidentally is beloved by Hashem and can help change a person for the better. This is seen from a story involving a villager who would often travel to Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk *zy”a*. The Rebbe would praise him and say, “His heart burns with love

of Hashem.”

One Shabbos, Rav Elimelech honored him with davening *Pesukei D’Zimrah* for the *amud*.

When he reached the chapter of “Shir Hamaalos”, when he was supposed to say “*Hala’ag Hasha’ananim habuz l’gai yonim*” (Tehillim 123:4: “With the ridicule of the complacent, the contempt to the valley of doves”), he instead said, “*Hala’ag hasha’agagim*.”

Rav Elimelech announced that the entire Heavenly host rejoiced over this sweet mistake.

The Value of Every Jew:

Every Jew is incredibly valuable to Hashem, even those who have committed many sins. This is as is seen from the verse (Shir Hashirim 7:6): “Your head

(*harosh*) upon you is like Carmel and the braided locks of your head (*dalos roshecha*) are like purple (*agraman*).” The Medrash (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 7:12 and Tanchuma on Parshas Tetzaveh 6) explain this to mean that “*harash*” (the lowly people) amongst Klal Yisroel are equal in value to the one who went up on Mount Carmel (Eliyahu Hanavi, see 1 Malachim 18:42), and the “*dalos*” (those who are poor in mitzvos) are equal in value to Daniel (who the verse in Daniel 5:29 describes as wearing “*arguna*”, which is a similar word to “*argaman*”).

Every good word and good deed is valued greatly in Shomayim, so every Jew is treasured.

The Value of Each Mitzvah:

The reason each and every

mitzvah is so valuable is because every mitzvah creates a “garment for the *neshamah*.” This is seen from the verse (Koheles 9:8): “At all times, your clothing should be white.” The Kli Yakar (Bamidbor 15:38) explains this to be a reference to mitzvos, which are the clothing of the soul.

There is, however, a major difference between clothing for the body and clothing for the *neshamah*. Clothing for the body is made of many threads stitched together, as one string wouldn’t suffice to make an entire garment, but the clothing for the soul can even be made from one “thread”, i.e., one mitzvah. This is as Rav Yochanon states (Sanhedrin 111A) that **even if someone only keeps one mitzvah, he can be saved from Gehenim**. The Kli Yakar writes that the reason for this is because

one mitzvah leads to another (Avos 4:2). Therefore, as soon as a person does one mitzvah, he has the ability to do all the mitzvos. Even if he doesn’t end up doing them all, since he had the power to do them, it is considered as if he did them.

Starting With Easy Mitzvos:

The Mishnah states (Avos 4:2) that one should run to do a “*mitzvah kala*” (easy mitzvah). Rav Avrohom Azulai *zt”l* (the grandfather of the Chida) explains that one who wants to perfect himself must start with easy mitzvos so as not overextend himself. Once he gets used to doing easy mitzvos, it will be easier for him to do harder mitzvos. In this way, he can rise from one level to the next. Therefore, the

Mishnah says to first run to an easy mitzvah, rather than starting with a hard mitzvah, and one will then be able to climb the ladder, step by step.

A Moment of Teshuva and Good Deeds:

Therefore, one should not make light of even the seemingly smallest mitzvos, as performing them will lead to performing “bigger” mitzvos. Furthermore, even the smallest good deed or good word is treated with much value in Shomayim. In this vein, Sefer Toras Avos (page 87) relates that Rav Yechiel of Mosh zy”a explained the Mishnah (Avos 4:3) that says that “there is no man that doesn’t have his hour (sha’ah)” by saying that this refers to an hour of Torah and good deeds in this world, which are is

very valuable in Shomayim. He explained the Mishnah to be saying that one who doesn’t have even this “**is not a mensch (man) at all.**”

The Preparation for a Mitzvah is Also a Mitzvah:

Not only is every mitzvah greatly valued in Shomayim, so is every preparation one makes to do a mitzvah. It is related that Rav Yitzchok of Vorka zy”a once went outside to recite *Kiddush Levana*, with his *chasidim* trailing after him. It was wintertime and the moon was covered by clouds, and the Rebbe waited for quite some time until it was visible so he could say the *bracha*.

The Rebbe saw that the *chasidim* were freezing and it

was hard for them to wait. He told them, “The Mishnah says that *mitzvah gorere mitzvah*. This can be translated to mean that if a mitzvah is *goreres* – it ‘*shleps*’, i.e., takes a long time – then the waiting is also a mitzvah.”

They Won't Ask if You Were a Chasid or a Misnaged:

On one occasion when the Chofetz Chaim *zt”l* was in Warsaw, someone asked him if

he was a *chasid* or a *misnaged*. He answered, “I am neither. I am just a Jew who tries to fulfill what is written in Shulchan Aruch!”

The Chofetz Chaim added, “Chazal say (Shabbos 32A) that when a person ascends to the World of Truth, they ask him if he set aside time to study Torah and if he did business honestly. They do not say anywhere that one will be asked if he was a *chasid* or a *misnaged*. We see that those are the main things.”

וְהָיָה אֶדוֹם בְּרִשְׁתָּהּ וְהָיָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲשֵׂה תָהִל (כד, יח)

Edom shall be possessed, and Se'ir shall become the possession of his enemies, and Yisroel shall triumph. (24:18)

Annulling Decrees With Amein Yehei Shmei Rabbah:

Chazal say (Zohar Hakadosh, Chelek 3, 21, see also Shabbos 119B) that

reciting *amein yehei shmei rabbah* with all of one's strength “rips up a harsh decree of 70 years.” Sefer Ohr L'Shomayim writes that this idea is hinted to in this verse. The word “*edom*”

can be understood to be a hint to harsh decrees. Thus, the *pasuk* is talking about a time when harsh decrees are issued against the Jewish people. It then says “*yereisha*”, which can be an

acronym for “*amein yehei shmei rabbah*”. Thus, it is saying that if one says *amein yehei shmei rabbah* with all his strength, this can annul harsh decrees.

וְהָיָה אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּא וַיִּקְרַב אֶל אַחֲרֵי אֶת הַמִּדְיָנִית לְעֵינֵי מֹשֶׁה וְגו'
(כה, ו)

Then a man from the children of Yisroel came and brought the Midianite woman to his brethren, before the eyes of Moshe. (25:6)

Don't Honor Sinners:

Sefer Likutei Shoshanim relates that the Rebbe of Savrin zy”a would travel every year to spend time in Kishinov, where he was the official Rov of the city. While he was there, the locals merited seeing open miracles.

In this city, there lived a wealthy man who had fine *yichus* and was also very learned. However, he unfortunately had heretical ideas. His friends urged him to speak to the Rebbe. They

told him that he could engage him in debate, and he could also speak to him in learning, since the Rebbe was a tremendous *lamdan*. At first, the wealthy man refused to go, but after he heard a lot about the Rebbe’s greatness, he decided that he did want to meet him.

He told his friends that he agreed to see the Rebbe, but he asked them to go first and tell the Rebbe about his *yichus* and prowess in Torah so that he would be greeted with respect.

They did as he asked, and the man went with his friends to meet the Rebbe.

When he entered the Rebbe's room, he gave "*shalom*", and the Rebbe immediately began telling him a story. He related, "When Klal Yisroel finished erecting the Bais Hamikdosh, the Satan went to Hashem and said, 'The entire point of my existence is to convince people to sin. But now that they built the Bais Hamikdosh, I no longer have a purpose. If I persuade someone to sin at night, the morning Tamid will atone for him. If I get someone to sin by day, the evening Tamid will atone for him. So why should I continue to exist?'

"The Satan kept complaining until he succeeded in getting the Bais Hamikdosh to be destroyed, and for the daily Tamid to be

stopped.

"However, we still had the wise men of the Sanhedrin. When they heard that someone sinned, they would judge him and punish him accordingly. The Satan then complained again, telling Hashem that he can't convince people to sin because they are afraid of the punishment. Again, he succeeded in getting the Sanhedrin to be disbanded.

"Still and all, our people were strong and if it became known that someone sinned, he was shamed and placed in excommunication. Once again, the Satan complained that he couldn't persuade people to sin, and this too ceased to be the case. And today, people are able to sin without fear.

"Despite all this, the Satan wasn't satisfied. In our

generation, he asks for even more. He even wants the sinner to be honored so that they can do aveiros like Zimri and demand reward like Pinchos!"

הַפְּטוּרָה: עַמִּי זָכֵר נָא מַה יָּעַץ בִּלְקָם מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב וּמַה עָנָה אֹתוֹ בְּלִעָם בֶּן בְּעוֹר וְגו' לְמַעַן דַּעַת צְדָקוֹת ה' (מִיכָה ו, ה)

My people, remember now what Balak king of Moav planned, and what Bilaam the son of Beor answered him... so you may recognize the righteous deeds of Hashem. (Micha 6:5)

Bilaam's War:

The Bais Yisroel zy"ra said, "The war with Bilaam was very difficult. Bilaam wanted to uproot the entire nation of Klal Yisroel and destroy Yiddishkeit. This is why the *navi* exhorts us to remember what he planned. We have to always remember the war he waged against the Jewish people."

He quoted his father, the Sefas Emes zy"ra, as saying that Bilaam was a young man. He was only 32 years old. He also was blind and he had a limp. Klal Yisroel didn't take him seriously. They

didn't realize how much he wanted to harm them, and they couldn't imagine that he had the ability to hurt them at all. Therefore, the *navi* tells us to remember how even a young, crippled person can hurt us.

This is a lesson to us to be careful around all enemies. **We must not underestimate any of our haters** because we don't know what they are capable of. We can also learn from this how much we have to be on guard from the *yeitzer hara*, and how we always must daven to Hashem to have the strength to overcome it.



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