בס״ד

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DAF KESHER

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DVAR TORAH **SUCCESSFUL AND TALENTED**

Bilam and Balak were an extremely impressive team; yet they were unsuccessful in their mission.

Several verses into the Balak and Bilam episode, the Torah says: "Balak the son of Tzippor was king over Moav **at that time**" (Bamidbar 22:4). Those last words seem superfluous, as the Ramban and others note. The Torah could have also opened with "Balak the king of Moav saw …" instead of waiting a few verses and adding that he was king. Based on this, the Ramban suggests that Balak was a well-known powerful and accomplished military hero. The Torah therefore mentions that even though the famous Balak son of Tzippor was the king of Moav at that time in Moabite history, he was still terrified of the Jewish People.

Bilam was equally successful in his field. He had apparently made a name for himself as a spiritual hit-man, who for high fees would curse opponents – and he had a good track record. The Torah says that Balak sent messengers to Bilam "פתורה" - to a place called Petor (Bamidbar 22:5). But Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 20:7) , building on other meanings of the word פתר, say that the Torah here hints to Bilam's talents and success. פתור is also the Aramaic word for table – and the Midrash says that Bilam was so successful that people came to him like they would to a money changer. Countries from all over the area would send him their money and he would curse their opponents. The root פתר is also the Hebrew word used for interpreting dreams – Bilam began his career as a dream interpreter but then became a sorcerer and eventually got Ruach Hakodesh (spiritual insight). The Gemara (Berachot 7a) affirms that he possessed a unique spiritual talent – Bilam knew how to determine the precise micro-moment of Divine anger and direct it at his victims.

This dream team, the powerful king Balak and the talented spiritualist Bilam, were up against G-d's People, the People of Israel and thought they would win. Balak sent a delegation to hire Bilam, offered him a massive fee; and Bilam planned to do a standard cursing job. Why didn't they succeed?

The answer is obvious: G-d got in the way. He would not let His People be cursed or let Bilam turn His anger against His own beloved People, descended from His beloved Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

There is also a universal message in the Bilam and Balak story, one that transcends the Jewish side of this episode. In G-d's eyes, success, power, and talent pale in comparison with morals, ethics, and good character. This emerges from the clear contrast between Bilam and Avraham, evident through the many literary parallels between Bilam's trip to Moav and Avraham's trip to the Akeidah: both wake up early and saddle their own donkeys; both build altars and offer sacrifices; a Divine message comes down to both of them.

Avraham is humble, loving, and lives modestly; while Bilam is arrogant, jealous, and hedonistic (Avot 5:19). Avraham's morality and ethics triumphed over Bilam's talent, even his spiritual talents. This is a message for all people: Success, strength, and talents are only meaningful in the service of Hashem, but standing alone they will ultimately lose to morality and ethics.

Also in this week's Daf Kesher: Source Guide – "Say a Little, Do a Lot" · "Wait a Sec," by Rabbi Yitzchak Lerner

SOURCE GUIDE: **SAY A LITTLE, DO A LOT**

This week's Parshah includes an example of the saying: "The evil say they're going to do a lot, but end up not doing anything at all." This source guide opens showing how Balak illustrates this saying. It follows with two explanations of the principle that Avraham followed, "Say a little and do a lot" (Avot 1:15).

A. Avraham vs. Balak

Balak offers Bilam a hefty fee for cursing the People of Israel:

1. Bamidbar 22:16-18 (16) They came to Bilam and said to him, "Thus said Balak the son of Tzippor, 'Please do not hesitate to come to me. (17) For **I will honor you greatly** and do whatever you tell me to do. So please come and curse this people for me.'" (18) Bilam answered and said to Balak's servants, "Even if Balak gives me a house full of silver and gold, I cannot do anything small or great that would transgress the word of Hashem, my G-d.		**במדבר כב:טז-יח** (טז) וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ: ״כֹּה אָמַר בָּלָק בֶּן צִפּוֹר אַל נָא תִמָּנַע מֵהֲלֹךְ אֵלָי. (יז) **כִּי כַבֵּד אֲכַבֶּדְךָ מְאֹד** וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלַי אֶעֱשֶׂה וּלְכָה נָּא קָבָה לִּי אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה.״ (יח) וַיַּעַן בִּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל עַבְדֵי בָלָק: ״אִם יִתֶּן לִי בָלָק מְלֹא בֵיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲבֹר אֶת פִּי ה׳ אֱלֹקָי לַעֲשׂוֹת קְטַנָּה אוֹ גְדוֹלָה.״

See what Balak actually does:

2. Bamidbar 22:36-40 (36) Balak heard that Bilam was coming; so he went out toward him to the city of Moav which is on the border of Arnon, at the extreme edge of the border. (37) Balak said to Bilam, "Did I not send [messengers] to you to call for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I indeed incapable of honoring you?" (38) Bilam said to Balak, "Behold I have come to you, do I have any power to say anything? The word G-d puts into my mouth, that I will speak." (39) Bilam went with Balak, and they arrived at Kiryat Chutzot. (40) **Balak slaughtered cattle and sheep and sent [some] to Bilam and to the dignitaries with him.**		**במדבר כב:לו-מ** (לו) וַיִּשְׁמַע בָּלָק כִּי בָא בִלְעָם וַיֵּצֵא לִקְרָאתוֹ אֶל עִיר מוֹאָב אֲשֶׁר עַל גְּבוּל אַרְנֹן אֲשֶׁר בִּקְצֵה הַגְּבוּל. (לז) וַיֹּאמֶר בָּלָק אֶל בִּלְעָם: ״הֲלֹא שָׁלֹחַ שָׁלַחְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ לִקְרֹא לָךְ. לָמָּה לֹא הָלַכְתָּ אֵלָי? הַאָמְנָם לֹא אוּכַל כַּבְּדֶךָּ?״ (לח) וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם אֶל בָּלָק: ״הִנֵּה בָאתִי אֵלֶיךָ עַתָּה. הֲיָכֹל אוּכַל דַּבֵּר מְאוּמָה? הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר יָשִׂים אֱלֹהִים בְּפִי אֹתוֹ אֲדַבֵּר.״ (לט) וַיֵּלֶךְ בִּלְעָם עִם בָּלָק וַיָּבֹאוּ קִרְיַת חֻצוֹת. (מ) **וַיִּזְבַּח בָּלָק בָּקָר וָצֹאן וַיִּשְׁלַח לְבִלְעָם וְלַשָּׂרִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ.**

The Midrash compares these two verses together, and comments:

3. Bamidbar Rabbah 20:17 "Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep" – The righteous say a little and do a lot, like Avraham, concerning whom it is said (when he hosted the three guests), "I will take some bread," but he later [said to Sarah], "Quick, take three se'ah measures [of fine flour] (a large quantity) ... And Avraham ran to the cattle (so he could also prepare meat for the guests)" (Bereishis 18:5). The evildoers say a lot and do not even do a little. Balak said, "For I will surely honor you very much (with a large payment)" (Bamidbar 22:17). But when Bilam came all Balak sent him was one ox and sheep (see commentators on Midrash Rabbah who uncover where the Midrash derived this). Bilam began gnashing his teeth at him – for he was very greedy. He said, "This is all that he sent me? Tomorrow I am going to place a curse upon his possessions." "Bilam said to Balak, 'Build for me seven altars'" (Bamidbar 23:1).		**במדבר רבה כ:יז** ״ויזבח בלק בקר וצאן״ – הצדיקים אומרים מעט ועושין הרבה, כאברהם שנאמר, ״ואקחה פת לחם״ ואח״כ ״מהרי שלש סאים ... ואל הבקר רץ אברהם״ (בראשית יח:ה). ורשעים אומרים הרבה ואפילו מעט אינם עושים. בלק אמר ״כי כבד אכבדך מאד״ (במדבר כב:יז), וכשבא לא שיגר לו אלא בקר וצאן אחת. התחיל בלעם חורק שיניו עליו שהיה נפשו רחבה. אמר: ״כך שלח לי? מחר אני נותן מארה בנכסיו.״ ״ויאמר בלעם אל בלק: 'בנה לי בזה שבעה מזבחות'״ (במדבר כג:א).

B. Resha'im and Talking

Harav Yerucham Levovitz, זצ"ל, (1873-1936, Mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva) describes the approach of the resha'im (evildoers), who talk a lot about what they'll do.

a. Through talking a lot about what they'll do, the rasha satiates himself with the good feeling that comes from thinking about the results of his future actions. That is sufficient to calm his conscience, and what he spoke about doing never actually gets done.
b. The rasha never really intended to do what he said he would (he just want to create that impression):

4. Daat Torah Parshat Vayeira The speech of evildoers flows, in truth, from the fact that in their minds they never even intended to do what they said they would. All of his declarations are only aimed at his desire to satiate himself by only saying he is going to do good. The statements of the evildoers come to nothing, for their statements and actions are distinct. This is why he feels free to speak without any reservations. On the contrary, his speech diminishes his actions, for his speaking satiates his desire and calms him (and he needs not act to accomplish that). This is why speech (about future actions) is hated before G-d.		**דעת תורה פרשת וירא** והאמירה אצל רשעים נובעת באמת מזה שאינו עולה אפילו במחשבתו לעשות מה שאומר. כל אמרותיו אינו אלא מתוך רצונו להשביע עצמו באמרו לעשות טוב, אמרותיהם של רשעים אין מהוים כלום, אמרותיהם ומעשיהם שנים הם, ולכן זהו מה שחפשי הוא באמרותיו באין מחסום לפיו, ואדרבה האמירה ממעטת את המעשה, כי האמירה משביע רצונו ומניחה רוחו. והוא הענין אשר שנואה היא האמירה לפני המקום.

Efron the Hittite is another midrashic example of a rasha who never really intended to do the great act he said he would do. He talked about doing something extraordinary – giving Avraham the field of the Me'arat Hamachpelah without charge – but ended up not delivering anything at all. He instead asked Avraham for the large sum of 400 silver pieces. Rav Yerucham asks the simple question: How did Efron make such an about-face so quickly? How did he flip from offering everything to asking for a high fee? He must never have really intended to give Avraham the field in the first place, and was hiding behind a smoke-screen of words.

C. Tzaddikim and Acting

Tzaddikim, on the other hand, speak as little as needed. They follow Shamai the Elder's direction:

5. Avot 1:15 Shamai says: Make your Torah permanent; say a little and do a lot; and welcome every person with a pleasant countenance.		**משנה אבות א:טו** שַׁמַּאי אוֹמֵר: עֲשֵׂה תוֹרָתְךָ קֶבַע. **אֱמוֹר מְעַט וַעֲשֵׂה הַרְבֵּה**, וֶהֱוֵי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּסֵבֶר פָּנִים יָפוֹת.

There is an obvious moral advantage of minimizing talk about future actions – it minimizes the possibility of broken commitments. One who says, "I will do X, Y, and Z," might end up not doing X, Y, and Z; he risks not keeping him word. "Better you should not vow, than to vow and not pay" (Kohelet 5:4).

But there is another aspect of "Talk a little but do a lot," says Rav Yerucham. The tzaddikim who live by that approach emulate Hashem. There is no disparity between Divine speech and Divine action. Even His speech is active: "G-d said, 'Let there be light; and there was light'" (Bereishit 1:3).

B. Torah: Active Speech

Torah learning can be an extreme example of G-d-like speech, where speech itself is transforming. Thus Harav Yehudah Leib Alter, זצ"ל (1847-1905), the Gerrer Rebbe, author of the שפת אמת, explains (in his comments on Parshat Naso 5636) that Shamai, in this Mishnah, teaches us the nature of our Torah learning – it should be primarily transformative, making us better and more elevated people. The transformative aspect of our Torah should be the lion's share of each word of Torah we learn. This is what is meant by "speaking a little" – referring to the actual learning component of our Torah – yet "doing a lot" – referring to the transformative component of our learning. Torah should make us better people more than it makes us smarter people. The Torah should change our selves more than it changes our brains.

RECLAIMING MISSED POTENTIAL BY RABBI AVRAHAM FISCHER

The month of Tammuz is beclouded by the fast of the 17th, when:
1. the tablets were broken [by Moshe, after the sin of the Golden Calf];
2. the Tamid (daily sacrifice) was annulled [during the siege of the First Temple];
3. the city was breached [at the time of the Second Temple];
4. the evil Apostomos burned the Torah; and
5. he erected an idol in the Temple [during the days of the Second Temple] (Taanit 4:6).

The sin of the Golden Calf exemplifies Israel's fickleness, "For they are an inconstant generation, children without trustworthiness" (Devarim 32:20). Rashi says, "At Sinai they said, 'We will do and we will listen' (Shemot 24:7), and shortly thereafter they broke their promise and made the Calf."

The 17th of Tammuz is characterized by tragically missed potential. Originally every month was meant to contain a festival – Pesach during Nisan, Pesach Sheni during Iyar, Shavuot during Sivan – until the sin of the Golden Calf nullified the festivals intended for the summer (Pesikta Rabbati-Addition, Chapter 4). Had it not have been for the sin of the Golden Calf; the 17th of Tammuz, when Moshe brought down the tablets from Hashem, would have been a festival!

The Maharal (Netzach Yisrael, Chapter 8) says that with each of the events of the 17th of Tammuz, "Behold it is possible otherwise." By this, I believe, he means that each tragedy could have had a different outcome. If they had been taken as a summons to sincere teshuvah, perhaps an even greater tragedy could have been prevented.

By listening to the "wake up call" of the 17th of Tammuz, we can transform it into the festival it was meant to be.

שבת שלום ומבורך

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Shapell's *Darché Noam*
דרכיה דרכי נעם

The following digital Torah resources have been extremely helpful in researching and preparing the Shapell's Daf Kesher: DBS – Hataklitor Hatorani, Otzar Hachochmah, the Bar Ilan Responsa Project, and Hebrewbooks.org.

We mourn the tragic deaths of Sergeant Shlomo Rindenow and Sergeant First Class Hussam Tapesh, may their memories be blessed. We continue to pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.