

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Balak

7 Tammuz, 5771/July 9, 2011

Vol.2 Num. 41

Shechitah: A guide for evolution

R' Mordechai Torczyner

One might be forgiven for thinking of shechitah, the newest Daf Yomi theme, as a dry topic, mind-numbing in its emphasis on minutiae. Indeed, the sage Rav (Bereishit Rabbah 44:1) argued that the point of the mitzvah is obedience, that there is no inherent value in those fine points. Rav said, "Why would G-d care whether one performed shechitah from the front or back of the neck? The mitzvot were only given in order to refine [G-d's] creations."

Others would disagree, though. Many chachamim, and particularly the mystics, have contended that the design of each element of a mitzvah involves deep arcana and is of cosmic importance. And beyond that, our masters and mentors, particularly among the chassidim, have attached ethical and moral lessons to the most dry legal codicils.

In a striking example, Rav Yaakov Yechezkel Greenwald, author of "VaYaged Yaakov" and Pupa Rebbe until his passing in 1941, taught lessons in personal evolution based upon the five central potential disqualifications in an act of shechitah:

Shehiyah (pausing)

Shechitah is disqualified if the shocheit pauses during the act. So, too, we who would improve ourselves must act with alacrity, not pausing and not allowing ourselves to be distracted. It is not for naught that we are encouraged, "Those

who are energetic rush to perform mitzvot first." Or as Pirkei Avot warns, one should never stall and say he will study when he finds free time, for with such an attitude he will never have free time.

Derasah (pressing)

A shocheit must slice an animal's trachea and esophagus in a back-and-forth cutting motion; if he becomes impatient and presses down into the neck, the shechitah is disqualified. In the same vein, we must be on guard against impatience with our own growth. We are expected to learn patiently, taking time and making certain that we truly understand the Torah we study. Further, we are expected to work on our character and our intellect simultaneously; one who sacrifices his personal growth in pursuit of rapid intellectual growth is guilty of *derasah*, pressing and trampling upon important components of self-development.

Chaladah (tunneling)

The shechitah knife must be visible to the shocheit as he cuts; tunneling into the neck so that the knife is hidden from view disqualifies the shechitah. Similarly, we must make sure not to hide our self-improvement from the public. Legitimate concern for modesty, or for embarrassment, might grow and cause us to go underground with our growth, but our commitment to HaShem and to Torah must include pride in our beliefs. As the Tur wrote (Orach Chaim 1), "One must be bold like a leopard, and not reticent before those who would mock

him." If all who are committed to Torah will plead modesty, the result will be a world devoid of visible Torah.

Hagramah (veering)

Shechitah must be performed within a specific vertical space along an animal's neck, and veering out of that space invalidates the shechitah. The same applies to our development - a Jew must recognize that certain sites are better suited for growth than others. Rabbi Akiva warned his son (Pesachim 112a) not to set up his studies in the town square, lest passersby distract him from his learning. Pirkei Avot instructs us, "Go into exile, to place of Torah study." For a practical example: Our homes are comfortable, certainly, but they are as filled with distractions as the town square; better to go to a beit midrash or shul to study.

Ikkur (uprooting)

There is some debate regarding the proper definition of *ikkur*; students of Daf Yomi will recall Rashi Chullin 9a and Rosh Chullin 1:13 as essential sources. Rav Greenwald chooses to explain *ikkur* as shechitah with a flawed knife, such that the trachea or esophagus is pulled rather than sliced. Comparing the act of shechitah with our actions of self-improvement, Rav Greenwald adjured us to aspire to flawlessness in our actions, since each defect will affect our results.

Rav Greenwald saw in shechitah and its laws a metaphor for the work we do in evolving our best selves, slaughtering our old identities and replacing them with a new and improved version of ourselves. Pairing energetic alacrity with patient care, being unabashedly public in our commitment, selecting our venues for growth wisely, and demanding a commitment to excellence at all times, we will perpetually create ourselves anew, each day better than the last.

torczyner@torontotorah.com

Parshah Questions

- Why did HaShem display anger toward Bilaam for going with Balak's messengers, after permitting him to go? (Rashi, Sifte Chachamim and Ohr HaChaim to Bamidbar 22:22)
- Who is Agag? What is his relevance to a Jewish monarchy? (Rashi, Rashbam, Netziv, and Meshech Chachmah to Bamidbar 24:7)
- To what do the words *ohalecha* (your tents) and *mishkenotecha* (your dwelling places) refer? (Rashi, Seforno and Netziv to Bamidbar 24:5)
- For children: Why does the Torah say that Bilaam hit the donkey three *regalim*, rather than use the regular word *pe'amim*, when saying he hit her three times? (Rashi to Bamidbar 22:28)

Did Bilam really think he could outsmart Hashem?

The Talmud cites several “all inclusive” principles. Hillel told the proselyte that the essence of Torah is, “Love your fellow as yourself,” and Rabbi Akiva said that this is the all-encompassing principle of Torah. Ben Azai said that the verse “This is the book of the generations of Adam” (*Breishis* 5:1) is all-encompassing. The Talmud says, “Which is a small verse upon which all the essentials of the Torah depend? ‘Know Him (Hashem) in all your ways’ (*Mishlei* 3:6, *Berachos* 63a).”

I would like to suggest that there is an all-encompassing verse of *mussar*, human behavior and psychology: “All the ways of a person are right in one’s own eyes” (*Mishlei* 21:2). Some people may do something wrong even though they know that it is wrong, but the overwhelming number of people believe that what they are doing is right, and are often very resistant to any suggestion that they may be wrong.

Perhaps this is the greatness of the patriarch Abraham in his willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac. For decades, Abraham vociferously protested the pagan ritual of human sacrifice. “G-d would never desire human sacrifice. This is an abomination!” If he carried out the Divine command to bring Isaac as an offering, he would have to declare, “All my life, I have been in error.”

Abraham was willing to do so. It is a sign of greatness to admit that one was wrong.

We are often victims of self-deception. When we have a desire to do something, the defense mechanisms in our subconscious minds can develop ingenious reasons why what we wish to do is right and proper. This is termed *rationalization*. We concoct logical reasons for what we wish to do and we believe them, and if criticized, we vigorously defend our mistakes.

Rabbi Eliahu Dessler in *Michtav M’Eliyahu* (*Search for Truth*) has a powerful essay on “the Perspective of Truth.” He cites the Torah statement that “a bribe will blind the eyes of a judge and distort even the thoughts of the righteous” (*Devarim* 16:19). We are all bribed by our desires, and we cannot think objectively. We rationalize our behavior. The Talmud says that even the minutest bribe can bring about a distortion of judgment.

The *tzaddik* of Apt was a judge in a litigation that went on for several days. Abruptly, he withdrew from the case, saying he had lost his objectivity.

On Friday evening, when he put on his *Shabbos kaftan*, he found an envelope with money that one of the litigants had put into a pocket. “Now I understand why I lost my objectivity. A litigant had tried to bribe me by putting money in my *kaftan*. Even though I did not discover the bribe until several days later, my thinking

had shifted to favoring him. I did not know why this was happening, but I felt that I had lost my objectivity. That is the power of a bribe. It can distort your judgment even if you are unaware of the bribe.”

How much more so are we subject to distortion when the “bribe” is within us, and has the power of a strong desire!

A *chassid* asked Rebbe Yisrael of Rhizin for a guideline to avoid faulty decisions. The rebbe told him that the way a tightrope walker keeps his delicate balance to avoid falling to his death, is that when he feels a tug to one side, he leans a bit to the other side. “Many of your desires arise from the *yetzer hara*. When you feel an urge to do something, pause and think of reasons why you should not do it. That may enable you to keep your balance, to do what is right.”

Forty years of treating people with alcohol addiction have shown me the validity of Rabbi Dessler’s observation. One recovered alcoholic said, “In all my years of drinking, I never took a drink unless I decided it was the right thing to do at the time.” The calamitous results of alcohol and drug abuse are totally ignored. The craving for the pleasant effect of the chemical blinds one to its disastrous consequences. One is bribed into rationalization. Rabbi Dessler states that intense learning of *mussar* and sincere prayer for Divine guidance can protect us from dangerous self-deception.

Bilam was no fool. He was told in no uncertain terms that Hashem would not allow him to curse Israel, and he obviously knew the infinite power of Hashem. Yet, his hatred for Israel distorted his judgment, and he tried to do what he logically knew he could not do.

If we wish to do what is right, we must be on the alert and on the defensive. Our defense mechanisms operate in the subconscious part of our minds which is “cunning, baffling and powerful.” We must exercise our conscious mind to the limit with prayer and *mussar* to avoid self-deception.

Reprinted with permission from www.torahweb.org

613 Mitzvot: Mitzvah 100

To keep the *choshen* atop the *ephod*

R' Mordechai Torczyner

The kohen gadol wears a vest, called an *ephod*, as part of his uniform in the Beit haMikdash. He also wears a breastplate, called *choshen*, atop the *ephod*. The *choshen* holds twelve gems, representing each of the twelve tribes.

Mitzvah 100 instructs the kohen gadol to make sure that the *choshen* sits squarely on the *ephod*, and does not sway from that spot. The Sefer haChinuch explains that this is part of the precise Divine design for the

Beit haMikdash, reflecting beauty and completeness for all who visit. This seems to have been the view of the Rambam as well, for he wrote (*Hilchot Klei haMikdash* 9:10) that one is liable for separating the *choshen* and *ephod* only if he does so *derech kilkul*, in a destructive way; one who does so as part of maintenance of the garments, for example, would not be liable.

torczyner@torontotorah.com

Ha'Am V'Ha'Aretz

Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher

David Teller

Rehov HaGidem

Torah in Translation

Does Cursing Work?

Rabbeinu Bechaye to Parshat Balak

"Only the matter that I speak to you [shall you say]"(Bamidbar 22:20)...

Here we should ask: Did Bilaam have the power to damage and cause benefit, or not? If you say that he had (the ability to effectively curse), how is it possible that flesh and blood could change a decree of the Creator? For if the Creator decreed on Israel, "For they are blessed (Bamidbar 22:12)," how could (Bilaam)'s curse change what was already decreed? And if you will say there is no substance in his curse, then why did G-d stop him, as it says, "You shall not curse the nation (Bamidbar 22:12)"? Let Bilaam curse all day as long as G-d blesses (the Jewish people), like the passage, "They curse, and you bless (Tehillim 109:28)"!

The answer to this is that Bilaam did not have any power at all in his speech to effectuate a blessing or curse. There is proof that the curses he expressed did not have power, from the fact that the blessings he expressed did not have power. If he had power in his speech to bless, then when it became clear to him that it was not the will of G-d to curse Israel as Balak had commanded him, why didn't he bless Balak and his nation? This would have completed the intent of Balak that Israel should not rule over him. And why did he push himself into being rented for the silver and gold of Balak? Let him bless himself that he should become a great king over all the other kings, and he wouldn't need his (Balak's) silver and gold. Indeed, we find explicitly that he (Bilaam) blessed himself in saying "May my soul die the death of the upright (Bamidbar 23:10)", and his blessing was not fulfilled – rather, his end was terrible and his hope turned into frustration, for he died an abnormal death as it is written, "And Bilaam the son of Beor the sorcerer, they killed with the sword (Yehoshua 13:22)."

We see that he did not have the power in his speech to curse through his words. However, in his wisdom he knew how to

Rabbi Bachya ben Asher, (mid-thirteenth century-1340) known colloquially as Rabbeinu Bechaye, was one of the eminent biblical scholars in Medieval Spain. A talmid of Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet (the Rashba), Rabbeinu Bachya's principal work was his commentary on the Torah, modeling his style after the Ramban's use of Kabbalistic writings in his interpretation.

Unique to Rabbeinu Bechaye's commentary is his introduction to each parshah, in which he often underscores the fundamental ideas and questions that will be discussed. Each introduction begins with a verse from Mishlei and allows the reader to feel a part of Rabbeinu Bechaye's mental process in studying the parshah.

Other works of Rabbeinu Bechaye include his Kad HaKemach, a sefer of 60 chapters covering a wide range of philosophic and ethical teachings, and Shulchan Shel Arba, which details proper conduct during different meals, as well as a discussion of the World to Come.

figure out the time that G-d would become angry, and he definitely had the power in his speech to curse.

Nonetheless, the question still stands in its place: We know that Hashem did not get angry in those days (Brachot 7a), so all of his words and wisdom were nullified, the strength of his speech and wisdom collapsed... So why didn't (G-d) leave him to curse them? Why did He say to him, "Do not curse the nation (Bamidbar 22:12)"?

The answer is that G-d knew of the plague that was to occur (see the end of the Parshat Balak), and lest they say that the plague was because of Bilaam's curse, He prevented him from cursing. But, certainly, Bilaam did not have any power from the side of his speech to bless or to curse, only from his wisdom in identifying the time when G-d would be angry.

dteller@torontotorah.com

A small street in Yerushalayim, joining Betzalel and Hamaalot, was named, for a long time, HaGidem – the Amputee. This was meant to honour Joseph Trumpeldor, who died defending Tel Hai in 1920. The name offended the residents, though; why name a street for a hero's handicap?

The neighbours wrote to the municipality, demanding that the street be listed using Trumpeldor's actual name, but they ran into a spelling problem. One of the local residents, a Mister Guttman, was a loyal supporter of the Herut movement and a veteran member of Etzel (a.k.a. the Irgun, the militant right-wing pre-state organization). Guttman said that according to the instructions of Herut leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the name Trumpeldor should be written with the Hebrew letter *tav*, and not a *tet*. [This was because Jabotinsky and his followers had established the Beitar movement, and they wanted the name Beitar to refer to more than Bar Kochba's second century CE fortress. They also wanted it to be an acronym for "Brit Yosef TRumpeldor." Since the fortress was named Beitar with a *tav*, they should use a *tav* in the acronym, and so Trumpeldor would need to be spelled with a *tav*.] On the other hand, the rest of the residents were members of anti-Herut parties Mapai and Mapam, and they wanted to spell Trumpeldor with a *tet*, to oppose Jabotinsky's spelling. Because of the arguments, the name of the street remained HaGidem.

Several years ago, the street was finally renamed Trumpeldor [with a *tet*], but not without trouble. Businesses located on the street demanded compensation from the city for their need to change advertisements, stationery and business cards.

Excerpted and adapted from an article in Ha'Aretz

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/a-walk-across-jerusalem-history-1.202461>

Why did HaShem display anger toward Bilaam for going with Balak's messengers, after permitting him to go?

- **Rashi** suggests that G-d was angry with Bilaam because Bilaam knew that G-d did not want him to go and yet he desired to go. **Siftei Chachamim** elaborates that Bilaam was only given permission to go for his own financial benefit, but G-d understood that he desired to curse the Jewish people. It was this evil desire that angered G-d.
- When turning down the messengers of Balak after their first appeal, Bilaam tells them that Hashem instructed him not to participate. Now, says the **Ohr HaChaim**, Hashem instructs him to go but he does not tell them he is following Hashem's instruction. By doing this Bilaam gave the impression that he would go regardless of Hashem's wishes.
- Additionally, the **Ohr HaChaim** notes the Torah's depiction of Bilaam traveling separately from officers who were sent by Balak to retrieve him. This may indicate that Bilaam began preparing, in solitude en route, to curse the people, without waiting for Hashem's instruction as he was supposed to.

Who is Agag? What is his relevance to a Jewish monarchy?

- In blessing the Jewish people Bilaam states "...His king shall be exalted over Agag, and his kingdom shall be upraised." **Rashi** tells us that Agag is the king of Amalek whom

Shaul, the first King of the Jewish people, would defeat in war.

- **Netziv** adds that the survival of Agag from that war is significant because it was the reason that Shaul would lose his throne. The reference of "his kingdom shall be upraised" refers to Dovid becoming king after Shaul's death. The ultimate redemption of the Jewish people will be a descendant of that dynasty which arose through Agag's survival.
- Assuming the approach of Rashi, **Meshech Chachmah** points out that this is the only prophecy of Bilaam addressed to a specific person. This may be why the prophet Michah (6:5) emphasizes the defeat of Agag in Gilgal as the most impressive of Bilaam's statements. It was most specific, and it was clearly fulfilled in Shaul's victory.
- **Rashbam** argues that "Agag" is the title of each Amaleki ruler, like the title Pharaoh or Avimelech. Therefore, this may be more of a general statement, consistent with Bilaam's other prophecies, rather than a reference to the battle fought between Shaul and Amalek.

To what do the words *ohalecha* (your tents) and *mishkenotecha* (your dwelling places) refer?

- In one approach, **Rashi** suggests that *ohalecha* refers to the Mishkan and Batei Mikdash, which brought atonement to the people via their korbanot. *Mishkenotecha* refers to the periods when there is no Beit HaMikdash, and no sacrifices can be

brought; the Beit haMikdash is likened to a collateral (*mashkon*) taken with the intention of being returned. Their destruction served as atonement for the people.

- **Sforno** sees *ohalecha* as a reference to the study houses of Israel where Torah is learned. [Yaakov is described in the Torah as someone who sat in the Ohel and studied Torah.] *Mishkenotecha* refers to the Temples and synagogues of the people, where the spirit of G-d (from the word *Shechina*) rests. These were impressive in the eyes of Bilaam because their presence alone provided merit for the nation as a whole, even for those who did not study and pray in them.
- **Netziv** notes that both *ohel* and *mishkan* here are in the plural tense. The two *ohalot* are the tents of men and women. The two *mishkenot* are the meeting places of those who study Torah and those who devote their life to the betterment of the community. The four statements of Bilaam that follow address each of these groups individually.

For children: Why does the Torah say that Bilaam hit the donkey three *regalim*, rather than use the regular word *pe'amim*, when saying he hit her three times?

In his rebuke of Bilaam, the donkey hints to her rider that he will not be successful. "Surely," said the donkey, "You will not succeed in destroying a nation that celebrates three festivals (*regalim*) every year."

dzirkind@torontotorah.com

Schedule for the Week of July 9, 7 Tammuz

Shabbat, July 9

7:45AM R' Azarya Berzon, Ramban Al HaTorah, Or Chaim

Post-Hashkamah R' Azarya Berzon, Clanton Park

Post-Hashkamah, R' Meir Lipschitz, Shaarei Shomayim

One Hour before Minchah, R' Azarya Berzon, Masechet Kiddushin, Mizrahi Bayit

Sunday, July 10

6:30PM R' Azarya Berzon, Gemara Kiddushin, Shaarei Shomayim

7:30PM R' Azarya Berzon, Masechet Makkot, Shaarei Shomayim

Monday, July 11

7:15PM R' Meir Lipschitz, Halachah in the Kitchen Week 2 of 4, 3000 Bathurst #1201, Women

7:45PM R' Azarya Berzon, Rambam, Clanton Park

9:30 PM R' Azarya Berzon, Ramban al Hatorah, 12 Midvale Road

Tuesday, July 12

7:45 PM R' Azarya Berzon, Halachah and Hashkafah for Life, Clanton Park

7:50PM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Minchat Chinuch at Clanton Park, Egg Matzah

8:30PM Dovid Zirkind: Interactive Parshah, Westmount Learning Centre

Wednesday, July 13

7:15PM R' Azarya Berzon, Highlights of the Week's Shiurim, Clanton Park

8:30PM R' Azarya Berzon, Beit haMikdash and Aveilut Shomrei Shobbos

Thursday, July 14

7:45PM R' Azarya Berzon: Rav Soloveitchik on the Mitzvah of Kriyat Shma, Clanton Park

10:00PM R' Azarya Berzon: Rambam Hilchot Talmud Torah, Clanton Park

Mon-Fri 6 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner: Daf Yomi, BAYT