



# Toronto Torah

Yeshiva University Torah miTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Balak

14 Tammuz 5773/June 22, 2013

Vol.4 Num. 37

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## Can G-d Change His Mind?

Rabbi Yair Manas

In the beginning of Parshat Balak, the Torah tells of a curious exchange between Bilam and the officers of Balak. At first, Balak requests that Bilam, "Go and curse this nation, for they are more powerful than me, and perhaps I will then be able to attack them, and evict them from the land. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed." (Bamidbar 22:6) That night, G-d appears to Bilam, and tells him, "Do not go with them. Do not curse the nation, for they are blessed." (22:12)

On the following morning, Bilam tells the officers that he cannot go with them, and Balak sends more important officers to convince Bilam to curse the Jews. Rashi, quoting a midrash, explains that Bilam told the first set of officers that he would not go "with you," implying that he would go with more senior officers. (22:13) These senior officers make the same request on behalf of Balak, that Bilam "curse this nation on my behalf." (22:17) That night, G-d appears to Bilam and tells him that he may go with the officers of Balak, but that he must do as G-d instructs him. (22:20)

Many commentators struggle to explain how and why G-d first told Bilam not to go with Balak's officers, and then told Bilam to go with them. Could it be that G-d changed His mind? In a discussion on prayer in his *With Perfect Faith*, Rabbi J. David Bleich writes, "[T]he very act of prayer, unless it be completely futile, assumes that prayer is efficacious. The apparent implication is that the will of G-d is subject to change. Yet G-d and His will are one. Hence, G-d's will, which is identical with His essence, is

eternal and immutable. Thus any change in the Divine will is an impossibility." If so, did G-d "change his mind" by allowing Bilam to go with the superior officers?

To answer the question regarding how prayer can work, Rabbi Yosef Albo (Sefer Ha'Ikarim Book IV Chapter 18, translated by Isaac Husik) writes that a person must prepare himself to receive the benefits that are bestowed by G-d. A person who does not prepare himself, "withholds the good from himself because he did not prepare himself to receive it." Rabbi Albo states, "As for the objection that the Divine will cannot be changed by prayer, the answer is that the Divine will in the first place is that the decree should be realized if the person in question continues in the same state, and that the decree should be changed if the person's state changes."

Perhaps we can extrapolate from this comment of Rabbi Albo to the case of Bilam. When G-d tells Bilam that he may not travel with the officers of Balak, G-d tells this to the Bilam in the state in which he currently exists. The Bilam from verse 12 is not allowed to accompany Balak's officers. But then Bilam debases himself. He tells the messengers that he cannot "go with you," thereby implying that he would be able to accompany greater officers. Rashi, as mentioned above, explains that Bilam was arrogant, and that he had meant to suggest that Balak had sent messengers of too low a stature. In moving his arrogance from latency to action, Bilam makes himself into a worse person. As Shlomo HaMelech writes, "A person of arrogance is an abomination to G-d." (Mishlei 16:5)

When G-d later gives Bilam permission to go with Balak's officers, G-d gives that permission to a different Bilam, the lowered Bilam. Just like Rabbi Albo suggests that a decree "should be changed if the person's state changes" for the better, so, too, a decree should be changed when a person's status changes for the worse. In this case, Bilam has earned new orders, which will lead to his humiliation and destruction.

One lesson that we learn from Bilam is that we must always guard ourselves from stumbling. When we stumble, we change ourselves, which in turn changes our relationship with G-d. Moreover, in line with Rabbi Albo's explanation, we must always ensure that we strive to improve, in order to prepare ourselves to receive the good from G-d.

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**To the honourees,  
chairs, committees,  
solicitors,  
participants  
and staff  
of our June 20<sup>th</sup>  
Evening of Tribute:**

**Thank you for  
making the night  
a great success!  
May we continue to  
grow and flourish.**

**MIDRESHET YOM RISHON CONCLUDES!  
SUNDAY MORNING TORAH FOR WOMEN  
10 AM AT BAYT, 613 CLARK AVE. W  
RABBI BARUCH WEINTRAUB: REBUILDING THE WALLS  
MRS. ELYSSA GOLDSCHMIEDT: GRIEVING WHAT I HAVEN'T LOST**



**YESHIVA UNIVERSITY  
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BEIT MIDRASH**

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פוגשים בחמשת מלכי מדין, כלומר מספר שבטים בעלי שהצטרפו יחד. הם נודדים במדבר ולא מחזיקים בשטח כלשהוא. בהיותם נודדים טיבם לנוע ממקום למקום על גמליהם ולבוזו, משום כך מתאר אותם הכתוב כארבה: "כי הם ומקניהם יעלו ואהליהם יבאו כדי ארבה לרב, ולהם ולגמליהם, אין מספר." באים, בוזזים והולכים.

אחרי שהבנו את אופי השלטון המדייני ואת דרכי פעולתם ניתן להבין את תוכניתו של גדעון באופן בהיר יותר. גדעון מתכנן לתקוף את מדין בלילה לעורר מהומה ולהביס את צבאם. הלוחמים נגשים עם שופרות כדי ולפיידים ומבהילים את מחנה מדין. ברור, כי גדעון מנסה ליצור הפתעה ומהומה במחנה מדין, אבל מה השלב הבא? כיצד הובסו המדיינים באמצעות שופרות בלבד?

לאחר שנודע לנו כי הצבא המדייני מורכב ממספר שבטים וטבעם לנדוד ולבוזו, ניתן להניח כי הם לא היו מורגלים ללחימה במחנה מסודר. כמו כן העובדה שהם היו מורכבים ממספר שבטים, חלקם אף לא מאותה אומה (מדין עמלק ובני קדם), גרמה לבלבול רב במחנה. כדברי הפסוק: "ויתקעו שלש מאות השופרות וישם ד' את חרב איש ברעהו ובכל המחנה וינס המחנה...". הבהלה שנוצרה היתה גדולה כל כך שבהעדר מנהיג אשר יאחד את הלוחמים ובלא ידיעה מיהם התוקפים שיכלו לבוא מבפנים או מבחוץ, התפזר המחנה לכל עבר.

הלל הורוויץ מעביר שיעור בספר שופטים כל יום רביעי בשעה 8:00 בAYT (השיעור הוא באנגלית)

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בספר שופטים (פרק ו') אנו קוראים על ההתמכרות של בני ישראל למדיינים. מה גרם למדיינים "להופיע" בשערי ארץ ישראל? בפרקים הקודמים (ד-ה') בספר שופטים ראינו כי דבורה וברק הביסו את יבין מלך כנען וכבשו את ארצו. עכשיו מסתבר לנו שלנצחון זה יש אופי כפול, הנצחון הבטיח רצף טריטוריאלי במרכז הארץ דבר שהיה נחוץ לבטחונה של המדינה אולם מצד שני החליש את מערכת הביצורים הכנענית שמנעה פלישות אל תוך תחומה של ארץ ישראל. העם, שעוד לא היה מורגל לתפעל מערכת ביצורים ומגנות שכזו מצא עצמו חשוף להתקפות המדיינים.

הפסוקים מתארים מצב קשה שכמוהו לא ראינו עד עתה ונדמה שגם לא מתואר לאחר מכן בתנ"ך. [מתוארים מצבים של הפסד במלחמה אך לא של שעבוד מהסוג הזה.] בני ישראל מתחבאים במערות, מבצעים עבודות פשוטות כחביטת החיטים בחתבא, המדיינים משחיתים את יבול הארץ ולא משאירים בישראל יבול או מקנה. לכאורה מצב זה תמוה מאוד שהרי היינו מצפים מעם כובש לעודד מסחר וכלכלה יציבה בכדי שיוכלו לקבל מסים, או לחילופין להשתלט על הארץ לטובת סיפוח השטחים. המדיינים ממשיכים לפשוט בארץ מחד אך מאידך לא מיסדים שום שלטון.

בכדי לנסות לענות על "בעית" המדיינים, ננסה להבין את אופים. מאוחר יותר באותו פרק אנו שומעים כי: "וכל מדין ועמלק ובני קדם נאספו יחדו ויעברו ויחנו בעמק זרעל." עמלק ומדין הינם בעלי אופי דומה, בהיותם שבטים נודדים. מטרתם של שבטים אלה אינה לכבוש כי אם לבוזו. הם אינם בעלי הנהגה קבועה ומסודרת אלא מספר שבטים שמתאחדים בכדי לתקוף. כך גם בספר במדבר אנו

## Bilam's Curse

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Our parshah conveys a long, strange story. Balak, King of Moav, summons Bilam to curse the Jewish People. The concept of cursing, which strikes us as odd, was taken very seriously by the participants in this encounter; Hashem Himself acts against Bilam's curse, changing the words coming out of his mouth. Even generations later, the event is being mentioned by Michah as an example of Divine protection of the Jews. (Michah 6:5) Why was Bilam's curse so dangerous? If G-d does not want to follow the curse, what threat can it bring?

Rav Yaakov Medan (Tikva MiMaamakim) suggests that the effect of Bilam's words would not have been limited to the supernatural realm. Bilam was a leading spiritual leader in the region, and his opinions were widely respected. The Jews, on the other hand, were in a very sensitive position; at this stage in their development, they might have been considered a nation worthy of independence and autonomy, but they might also have been considered a band of fugitive slaves

Bilam sought to play on Jewish insecurity. As the Talmud (Sanhedrin 105a) points out, Bilam's actual words show us what his intended words were. From the Talmud's examples, we draw the impression that Bilam intended to delegitimize Israeli independence and self-government: "Rabbi Yochanan said: From the blessings of that wicked man you may learn his intentions... that their kingdom should not endure ... that their kings might not be tall... that they might not have a king the son of a king... that their kingdom might not rule over other nations... that their kingdom might not be strong... that their kingdom might not be awe-inspiring."

The miracle of G-d changing Bilam's words served to transform his speeches into the direct opposite of what he and Balak had intended. Instead of pulling the rug from under Jewish independence and power, Bilam was the one to declare its establishment, "His king shall be raised over Agag, and his empire exalted." (Bamidbar 24:7)

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## 613 Mitzvot: #275-277, 286-290, 292, 491, 494

## Blemishes

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Eleven separate mitzvot instruct us regarding the status of physically blemished kohanim and korbanot.

One of the basic purposes of our korbanot is to demonstrate dedication, and so we should bring the best we possess. Of course, one might not be able to afford the finest offering, but one who brings an obligatory offering may choose from a sliding scale of options, so that a Jew who could not afford an expensive animal could still bring grain. It would be better to bring a complete

grain offering than a blemished offering of a more expensive variety.

To work in the Beit haMikdash, a kohen also had to be unblemished, for the same reason; the kohanim are the nation's "gift to G-d," performing the service in the Beit haMikdash. However, we do not disqualify people or entities from holiness due to physical blemishes; blemished kohanim, as well as korbanot, retain their ritual and personal sanctity.

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**Torah in Translation**  
**Braking on Shabbat**  
**Rabbi Yehoshua Neuwirth**  
**Shemirat Shabbat k'Hilchatah**  
**40:59**  
**Translated by R' Ezra Goldschmiedt**

[Note: In a car's combustion engine, spark plugs continually create controlled explosions which provide energy for the car's movement. Rabbi Neuwirth discusses one who drives a car on Shabbat to save a life, and how the car, upon reaching its destination, should be stopped. Further driving would not assist in saving lives, and so this would be forbidden. On the other hand, braking would turn lights on, and should be avoided. Therefore, Rabbi Neuwirth first recommends that one allow the car to stop by coasting, using the mechanical hand brake for needed assistance. He then adds:]

If one cannot do that which was mentioned above - e.g., one is transporting a patient who would be harmed by this manner of stopping, as in the case of one who is suffering from a broken bone, or a woman who is giving birth; or one cannot pay attention to all of these matters and still concentrate on driving - then he should brake the car in the normal manner. If the engine continues to operate after braking, one may ask a non-Jew to stop its operation. [A footnote adds that this should be done via indirect instruction, where possible.] If no non-Jew is present, there is room to be lenient and have a child halt the engine's operation. If no child is present, he may turn it off himself, ideally in an unusual manner.

*Footnote 129 to the text, commenting on the last line's permission to turn off the engine:* This happened with a G-d-fearing individual, Mr. Akon from Bnei Brak, before the Chazon Ish, and I also learned this from Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. Each small spark is a new flame, and so halting the engine only prevents creation of a new flame, and one certainly may be lenient in a situation of loss such as this.

This appears similar to fueling a fire with oil; one who would stop fueling it would not be liable for "extinguishing", since not all of the oil in the vessel was destined for lighting at that moment. Further, our case is even better, for in that case a large flame exists, and it is extended by the act of fueling, and now that fueling is halted. In our case, they create a new flame every moment, and halting the engine's operation only causes the non-creation of a new flame. There is certainly room to permit [turning off the

Rabbi Yehoshua Yeshayah Neuwirth was born in Berlin in 1927. His father, Rabbi Aharon Neuwirth, was an accomplished Rabbi who served communities in Germany, and eventually the Jews who escaped to Holland during the Holocaust. After Kristallnacht, the Neuwirths sent young Yehoshua to Belgium via the Kindertransport; he celebrated his bar mitzvah in the care of a foster family. He eventually joined the rest of his family in Holland, survived the German occupation, and moved to Israel in 1946.

In Israel, Rabbi Neuwirth continued his studies at Yeshivat Kol Torah, where he developed a close relationship with Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. Rabbi Neuwirth became an accomplished scholar and author, founded and headed a number of yeshivot, and served as posek for Sha'arei Tzedek Medical Center. Like his mentor, Rabbi Auerbach, Rabbi Neuwirth was an apolitical figure, exceedingly humble and dedicated to the Jewish people. He passed away at the age of 86 on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

Although Rabbi Neuwirth wrote a number of important works, the most notable is his *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchatah*. Since its first printing in 1965, "*Shemirat Shabbat*" has become an invaluable resource for every Jewish home; a third edition is currently in the works. In many respects, these volumes catalyzed an entire genre of halachic publication: The comprehensive treatment of a specific topic with its own independent structure. This modern halachic work is known for its "user-friendly" organization and index, and its application of the laws of Shabbat to modern-day developments (see accompanying translation). Rabbi Neuwirth's ability to synthesize the scholarship of his teachers with that of experts in medicine and technology made his contributions to Jewish law invaluable.

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engine] in a case such as this. Furthermore, it is possible that the general population could be harmed if the engine would continue to operate. [In a separate paragraph, Rabbi Neuwirth explains that we are concerned lest a child enter this active vehicle and attempt to operate it.]

**This Week in**  
**Israeli History**  
**17 Tammuz 70**  
**Jerusalem Breached**  
**Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner**

*17 Tammuz is Tuesday*

In 66 CE, Rome's Emperor Nero ordered a tribute collector, Gessius Florus, to take funds from the Beit haMikdash. According to Josephus (*Wars of the Jews* 2:14), the Jews mocked Gessius Florus, and he responded with a massacre. This catalyzed a series of attacks, leading to the Roman siege of Jerusalem.

The siege began on Pesach in the year 70. Titus, who led the siege, permitted Jews to enter Jerusalem for the korban pesach, but he refused to allow them to leave, exacerbating the hunger of the city's residents. Several Roman legions surrounded the city, with large military camps set up on Mount Scopus and the Mount of Olives. Roman forces, armed with battering rams and siege towers, were bolstered by Arab forces as well.

The Jews inside Jerusalem faced additional troubles; as the Talmud (*Gittin* 56a-b) discusses and Josephus elaborated, the Jews were split into different camps. Yochanan Ish Gush Chalav, Shimon Bar-Giora and Elazar ben Shimon commanded different groups of anti-Roman rebels, while Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai argued that the Jews should sue for peace. Zealots incinerated the city's internal food supplies, in an attempt to force support for armed revolt. Ultimately, the northern wall of Jerusalem fell on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz. (For more on the dating of the breach, see *Taanit* 28b, Talmud Yerushalmi *Taanit* 4:5 and Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 549.)

Josephus Flavius (*Wars of the Jews* 6:6) contended that Titus did not wish to destroy the Beit haMikdash, and that he actually appealed to the Jews for peace. According to this account, the Jews rebuffed the offers for peace, and Roman soldiers independently set fire to the Beit haMikdash. (Abarbanel seems to adopt this view in his commentary to Daniel 9.) However, Roman historian Sulpicius Severus, likely based on the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE Roman historian Tacitus, recorded that the Beit haMikdash was destroyed at the initiative of Titus. For more, see <http://bit.ly/dn08Cm>.

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### Who is the prophet of our haftorah?

Michah's heritage is not mentioned in Tanach. The prophet is identified as coming from a town called Moreshet, which some link with the Philistine city of Gat; others identify this town with a city named Maresha, near Beit Guvrin. Michah is one of the few biblical prophets to be mentioned beyond his own book; in Yirmiyahu 26, the warnings Michah delivered to Jewish kings are cited as part of a defense for the prophet Yirmiyahu.

Michah prophesied to the Jews of the southern kingdom of Yehudah about 100-150 years before the destruction of the first Beit haMikdash, a time when Yehudah's power was in decline. Amon, once under Yehudah's control, had successfully rebelled and freed itself. (Melachim II 15) Following this, the nation of Aram had conquered Yehudah. The Assyrians had then conquered Aram; they liberated Yehudah, but the result was that Yehudah was now beholden to Assyria. Like his contemporaries, Hosheia, Yeshayah and Amos, (see Pesachim 87a) Michah rebukes the Jews and speaks of an impending punishment and exile. In particular, Michah criticizes the nation for social sins, and he is harsh in his rebuke for Jews who inhabit the great city of Jerusalem.

### What is the message of our haftorah?

Our haftorah begins with a promise that we will thrive in our exile when we act righteously. We will be independent of the nations among whom we live, and a source of blessing to others. (Michah 5:6) Enemies will not be able to harm us; we will be like a young lion among sheep. (5:7-8) G-d will eliminate weapons, for we will have no need of them; we will not need the protection of cities, either. (5:9-10) Jews will cease their search for deities and sorcery to aid them in their battles, and G-d will fight on their behalf. (5:11-14)

The second half of our haftorah presents a different tactic on the part of Michah. Instead of presenting a carrot to entice the Jews into good behaviour, Michah, speaking for G-d, challenges the Jews to justify their straying. G-d declares that He has not asked the Jews for much, (6:3) in exchange for providing us with our freedom, giving us good leaders, and protecting us from evil foes like Bilam. (6:4-5) Even when we sinned at Shittim, (Bamidbar 25) on the cusp of our entry into Israel, G-d still forgave us and brought us into the land. (Ibn Ezra to Michah 6:5)

G-d declares that He has never wanted great volumes of sacrifices; (6:6-7) as Rambam explains, G-d desires the closeness which is achieved through the korban, but the korban without the

closeness is meaningless. (Moreh haNevuchim 3:32) What G-d wants from us is: Justice, generosity, and a private, personal (*tzanua*) relationship with Him. (Michah 6:8)

### What is the connection to our parshah?

The blatant link between our parshah and our haftorah is in the appearance of Bilam in both. In our parshah, Bilam attempts to call upon G-d to harm the Jews, on behalf of the nations of Moav and Midian; G-d refuses to permit this. In our haftorah, Michah recounts the ways in which G-d protected the Jews in the wilderness, and he specifically cites the way G-d thwarted the plans of Bilam. (6:4-5)

An additional connection appears at the end of our haftorah, when the prophet Michah tells us that G-d wants to have a private relationship with us. (6:8) Bilam lacked this private relationship; at every turn, he reminded people that he could speak with G-d directly. (Bamidbar 22:8, 22:19 and 22:38, for example) The Jew is expected to be the un-Bilam, developing an internal religious life, a source of personal strength and inspiration.

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## Highlights for June 22 – June 28 / 14 Tammuz - 20 Tammuz

**Many of our shiurim are on summer hiatus, but opportunities remain!**

### Shabbat, June 22

**7:45 AM** R' Baruch Weintraub, Reasons for Mitzvot, Or Chaim **not this week**

**After Hashkama** Hillel Horovitz, Parshah, Bnai Torah

**10:20 AM** R' Baruch Weintraub, Parshah, Clanton Park

**6:15 PM** R' Mordechai Torczyner, Pirkei Avot, 105 York Hill Blvd, *university women*

**7:20 PM** R' Mordechai Torczyner, Daf Yomi, BAYT

**8:05 PM** Adam Frieberg, Pirkei Avot, Shaarei Tefillah

**After minchah** R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Avodah Zarah: Korbanot for Avodah Zarah, BAYT

### Sunday, June 23

**9:15 AM** Hillel Horovitz, Parshah, Zichron Yisroel, Hebrew (Shacharit 8:30 AM)

**10:00 AM Midreshet Yom Rishon BAYT, women**

**R' Baruch Weintraub: Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem**  
**Mrs. Elyssa Goldschmidt: How do I grieve for something I have not lost?**

**6:30 PM** R' Baruch Weintraub, Contemporary Halachah in Israel, **Hebrew**, 4 Tillingham Keep, *mixed*

**40 min. pre-minchah** R' Baruch Weintraub, Contemporary Halachah in Israel, **Hebrew**, Clanton Park, *men*

### Monday, June 24

**8 PM Beit Midrash Night at Bnai Torah, Clanton Park**

**8 PM** Hillel Horovitz, Melachim II, Bnai Torah

**9 PM** Hillel Horovitz, Rav Kook, Bnai Torah

### Tuesday, June 25 Fast of the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz

**1:30 PM** R' Mordechai Torczyner, Daniel: The Conclusion, Shaarei Shomayim

**8:30 PM** R' Baruch Weintraub, Rambam's Laws of Kings, Shomrai Shabbos, *men*

### Wednesday, June 26

**10 AM** R' Mordechai Torczyner, Women of Tanach 1 of 4: Rachav, Yeshivat Or Chaim

**8 PM Chabura Night at BAYT**

- Hillel Horovitz: Journey through Judges
- R' Mordechai Torczyner: Medical Halachah

**After Maariv Chabura Night at Shaarei Shomayim**

### Thursday, June 27

**10:15 AM** Laws of Berachot, BAYT, *women*, with R' Aaron Greenberg, R' Daniel Korobkin, R' Mordechai Torczyner

**8:00 PM** R' Baruch Weintraub, Sotah, Clanton Park