

בס"ד  
י"א תמוז תש"פ  
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## פרשת חקת/בלק

When Bilaam first encounters Hashem, he is immediately asked, "מי האנשים" "Who are these men with you?" Why did Hashem, the Omniscient One, ask this? Did He not know the identity and purpose of every single one of Bilaam's accomplices? Rashi<sup>2</sup> answers that Hashem was trying to cause Bilaam to make a mistake, while the *Medrash Tanchuma*<sup>3</sup> explains that Bilaam thought that he would be able to shrewdly find a time to curse before Hashem realized, thinking that not everything in the world was revealed to the Ribono Shel Olam. As a result of Hashem's question, Bilaam became discombobulated, bringing truth to the *pasuk* of "יְשָׁרִים דַּרְכֵי ה' וְצַדִּיקִים יִלְכוּ בָם" "But why did Bilaam add the title of "מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב"?" Was the simple response of "בֶּלֶק" an insufficient one? Rashi<sup>6</sup> continues with his answer, and explains that Bilaam was responding to Hashem, "Although I am not important in Your eyes, I am considered important in the eyes of the kings."

The *Gemara* in Sanhedrin<sup>7</sup> says that בלא's name should be interpreted as "בלא עמ" - he was a man of no nation, and had no portion in the World-to-Come.<sup>8</sup> Bilaam, it seems, was an ostentatious egotist, and solely relied on his materialistic accolades and approbations. As he stood in front of Hashem, his immediate inclination was to boast about which sinful kings found him to be important, rather than recognize his place before the Master of the Universe. In Pirkei Avos<sup>9</sup>, it says that one who possesses an evil eye, a haughty spirit and a limitless appetite is a *talmid* of Bilaam the wicked, in contrast to a *talmid* of Avraham Avinu, who was the antithesis of each of these lowly traits. Bilaam pursued unwarranted and undeserved praise, going after what did not belong to him,<sup>10</sup> and took tremendous pride in his vain accomplishments; this led him to a lifestyle of

<sup>1</sup> במדבר כב:ט

<sup>2</sup> רש"י במדבר כב:ט ד"ה מי האנשים האלה עמך

<sup>3</sup> מדרש תנחומא בלק ה, במדבר רבה כב:ט

<sup>4</sup> הושע יד: - "The ways of Hashem are straight, and the righteous shall walk in them, and the rebellious shall stumble on them."

<sup>5</sup> במדבר כב:י

<sup>6</sup> רש"י במדבר כב:י ד"ה בלק בן צפור וגו'

<sup>7</sup> סנהדרין קה.

<sup>8</sup> משניות סנהדרין י:ב

<sup>9</sup> פרקי אבות ה:ט

<sup>10</sup> אורחות צדיקים - שער הקנאה

conceit and narcissism, as well as the unmitigated gall to pat himself on the back for these accomplishments before Hashem.

In the current day and age, it seems that external acclaim and laudation with a supplement of admiration is more coveted than ever. People crave a “follow” or “like” from others, and are quick to promote themselves and publicize any signs of approval and respect from people of prominence. The adjective “esteemed” and description “critically acclaimed” are hastily touted and imprinted onto curricula vitae, and a person validates their work through approbations instead than a sense of self-fulfillment. However, these praises are fleeting and ephemeral; it is imperative that we avoid striving for these forms of endorsement, lest we be mistaken for **תלמידי בלעם**, as a person who seeks the accreditation and recognition of everybody ends up fitting in with nobody. Rather, we should strive to be **תלמידי אברהם**, with a good eye, a humble spirit and a moderate appetite, as the only place where we should try to obtain validation and approval is in the eyes of Hashem.