



Parshas Balak

June 29, 2018

A Taste of Torah

Fatal Flaw

by Rabbi Chaim Yeshia Freeman

When discussing people, we have a tendency to categorize them as either righteous or wicked. However, we don't always pay attention to the different attributes which steered them toward their accomplishments or downfalls. It is important to reflect on people's character traits and personalities, as this will help us guide ourselves in the best direction to allow us to achieve our own aspirations.

The wicked Bilam was the greatest gentile prophet in history, and yet he was one of the most depraved people to ever walk the Earth. His warped views and ideas led him to curse an entire nation, leading to their downfall. His attempt to do the same to the Jewish People was thwarted only by G-d Himself. Later, in an advisory capacity for the nation of Midian, he counseled them to defeat the Jewish Nation by engaging them in very promiscuous behavior. His wickedness ultimately led to his destruction, as he was killed at a young age by Pinchas as retribution for his evil deeds. What led such a great prophet to behave in such a terrible way?

Our Sages provide us the underpinnings of Bilam's character. The mishna in *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of the Fathers) (5:22) teaches us that people with the following three character traits are disciples of Bilam: Those who have a bad eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the mishna teaches us

that those who possess the following three character traits are disciples of our patriarch Avraham: Those who have a good eye, a humble spirit, and a humble soul.

The Maharal (Rabbi Yehuda Loew of Prague; 1512/1526-1609), in his commentary to the Mishna, teaches us that these three character traits stem from one underlying attribute: The feeling of contentment or the lack thereof. If someone is content, he will not feel greed, as he is fine with what he has. He would be humble, for arrogance is a feeling of entitlement. And this would carry over to one's perception of others, as well, for one who is content with himself can rejoice in the accomplishments of another. However, if one is unfortunately missing this feeling of contentment, it can cause one to be greedy, arrogant, and not begrudge others their success.

This is so important to internalize and understand. Even if one were to study the entire Torah, one can still be left with these blemishes in his personal characteristics. It is thus vital to study the personalities of the spiritual giants of the Torah and attempt to emulate them, while simultaneously analyzing the wicked people of the Torah so as to avoid their failures. Such effort can guide us to live a healthy, productive life and not, G-d forbid, become a corrupter of society.

Stories for the Soul

From the Donkey's Mouth

Rabbi Eliezer Silver (1882-1968) served as a rav in Cincinnati during the first half of the 20th century. Cincinnati at the time was the center of a large community of Jews who strongly opposed Orthodox Judaism, making Rabbi Silver's efforts to promote traditional Judaism quite challenging.

Rabbi Silver wanted to build a new *mikvah* in the city to replace the aging facility. The best location was located across from a prominent non-Orthodox temple, and the membership strongly opposed the creation of the *mikvah* near their house of worship. The legal basis for their opposition was that a *mikvah* was a house of worship, which could not be built in a residential neighborhood.

A legal battle ensued, with the non-Orthodox opponents hiring a prominent Jewish lawyer and former mayor of Cincinnati, Murray Seasongood, to present their case. Rabbi Silver ultimately convinced Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, son of former President William H. Taft - both father and son were friendly toward the Jews and their traditions - to represent him.

The case hinged upon the Jewish definition of a house of worship, and Rabbi Silver testified on the matter.

At one point during the

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Kollel Happenings

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 12:00 pm. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention bachurim in Denver over the summer! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Denver Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursday. Night seder begins at 8 pm, with ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the sederim. For further details, info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact rmf@denverkollel.org.

THE LETTERS OF THE LAW: THE MELACHOS OF SHABBOS

Rabbi Shmuel Halpern received *semicha* (ordination) from Beth Medrash Govoha in 2016 and has spent the past four years receiving *shimush* (training in practical halacha) from Rabbi Micha Cohn of Lakewood. Rabbi Halpern now shares his halachic expertise in this weekly class that will help familiarize you with the laws of Shabbos. Monday evenings 8-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: There is a Torah prohibition of *aiver min hachai*, consuming a part of a living animal. What common food items are exceptions to this prohibition?

A: Eggs and milk. Another exception to the abovementioned rule is *mifarcheses* (an animal which has been slaughtered but is still convulsing), which doesn't fall under

the prohibition of *aiver min hachai* although it is still considered alive. For the sources and reasons for these exceptions, see Talmud Bechoros 6b, Chulin 33a and Tosafos, Chulin 64a.

This week's question: Is there a difference between a Jew's prohibition of *aiver min hachai* and that of a non-Jew?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, the Noda BiYehuda - Part XIII

At one point, during a battle with a Jewish heretical messianic group known as the Frankists (named after the movement's founder and leader, Jacob Frank), Rabbi Shmuel was imprisoned, along with his father's disciple, Rabbi Fleckels, for a time. Rabbi Yechezkel Landau passed away in 1793. Following his death, the *Haskalah* movement that he had opposed grew in Prague, and the traditional Jewish life for which he had fought so valiantly for weakened. Some of his own sons and grandsons became involved with the *Haskalah* at various levels. (It is important to note that many involved in the *Haskalah*

were fully-observant Jews. Ultimately, the movement caused much harm as its modernizing trends led down a slippery slope that culminated in mass assimilation by Western Jewry.) Yet Rabbi Landau's work lives on. His halachic works are a foundation for many later halachic discussions and decisions; his other works continue to be studied and analyzed in *batei medrash* across the world. His strong, fearless leadership and the policies he created during a time of great change provided guidance for later generations of Torah-true Jews to follow as new challenges arose.

Stories for the Soul

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questioning, the opposing lawyer asked Rabbi Silver about the mitzvos spelled out in the Torah and their relevance in the modern world. "Come, rabbi," said the lawyer cynically, "surely you don't believe everything the Torah says? For example, do you really think that a donkey opened its mouth and spoke?!"

"Well," retorted Rabbi Silver

immediately, "G-d has opened the donkey's mouth right here! You have been speaking for quite some time!"

Rabbi Silver ultimately won the case and built his *mikvah*. He is regarded as one of the early pioneer for American Orthodox Jewry, largely due to his determination and commitment to Torah-true Judaism under all circumstances.