



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM
BALAK / בלק
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MARRIED AND SINGLE

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When we want to say that two people are very different, we commonly say that they are "like fire and water." In this week's portion, we read about two people who, on one hand are very similar but on the other hand, are completely different, like fire and water.

We read about a man named Bilam who was a prophet for the gentile nations, the only such prophet ever to arise.

He received messengers from Balak, King of Moav, telling him to go curse the Jews. Bilam told them to stay the night and he would give them his answer in the morning. That night, G-d came to Bilam and told him, "Do not go with them. You shall not curse these people for they are blessed." In the morning, he sent his refusal.

Then, new messengers come and again he tells them to stay the night and wait to hear what G-d tells him. That night, G-d says to him, "If you want to go, go, but only what I tell you shall you do."

Bilam awoke in the morning, very happy to go curse the Jews. Along the way, he encounters all kinds of obstacles and he knows with certainty that they are from G-d but his hate for the Jews was so great that he ignores them and continues on his way. In the end, not only does he not succeed in cursing the Jews, but the blessings



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that he gave were so lofty and warm that they are now the prayer of "Mah tovu", "how good are your tents, Jacob, and your dwelling places, Israel!"

Who was Bilam and what was his strength?

At the end of the book of Bamidbar, the Torah tells of Moshe's passing and says, "And there never arose amongst the Jews a prophet like Moshe." The sages say, "Among the Jews, there was never a prophet like Moshe but for the nations of the world there was. Who was this prophet like Moshe? Bilam ben Beor."

The Torah is telling us that Bilam was a prophet in the same category as Moshe! This is astounding. None of the prophets in all the history of the Jews ever reached Moshe's greatness yet Bilam does?

This begs a question. How is it that someone on Moshe's spiritual plane would want to curse the Jews? How could he want to curse anyone, let alone the Jews? Bilam himself testifies to the great miracles that happened to them during their exodus from Egypt, when he says "Here is the nation that went out of Egypt." Even a regular guy would have known that G-d loves the Jews, so how did Bilam come to such a low? After receiving a clear message from G-d that he would not be able to curse them, he still tries to force G-d to permit him to curse them! How could a prophet want to go against G-d's wishes?

There is a story that happened to Bilam that also happened to Moshe. In this parsha we read that Bilam arose early in the morning, saddled his donkey and went



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on his way. Then "The donkey saw an angel of G-d standing in the path with a sword drawn in his hand and the donkey turned off the path." Bilam became very angry with the donkey and hit it three times. Then "Bilam's eyes were opened and he saw the angel standing in the path with a sword drawn."

In this situation, anyone, even someone not on Bilam's level, would understand that G-d does not want him to go. The angel even says to him "Had the donkey not turned aside before me, I would also have killed you." Despite this, Bilam refuses to hear the message and continues going.

With Moshe we find a similar story: When Moshe begins his journey to Egypt to free the Jews, we read in Shemos "Moshe took his wife and two children and put them on the donkey....and it was on the way at the inn that he met G-d who wished to kill him." Rashi explains "an angel, because Moshe did not circumcise his son, Eliezer."

So, Moshe too met up with an angel wishing to kill him while he was on a donkey. But there the similarities end. Moshe's wife, Tzipporah, understood immediately what was going on, "took a sharp stone and cut off her son's foreskin" thereby saving her husband's life.

So what is the difference between Bilam and Moshe? Simple. Moshe had a wife to stop him from making a mistake while Bilam did not! Moshe was married; while with Bilam, the Torah never references a wife. (In fact the Gemara says that Bilam used to have relations with his donkey.)



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What is the difference between a married person and a single person? There are people who are with their partner for many years yet have no interest in getting married. What deters them? Married life truly is a big commitment. He can no longer do whatever he wants; he now has to do whatever she wants. Before marriage, he was free to do anything in the world, without any responsibilities, and this relationship was just to make him feel good and happy. One simple way to put it is that before marriage there was only love, now there is some fear mixed in. A fear of doing something against her will. Another way: He respects her wishes.

In our relationship with G-d there are two models: Moshe was 'married' to G-d and therefore, in addition to the great love that Moshe had for G-d, there was also a fear of G-d and so he did what G-d wanted. Bilam, on the other hand, was not married to G-d and therefore was not obligated in any way. He used his relationship with G-d only for his own good and benefit, trying to force G-d to do what he wanted.

How does a person come to this? A person who has only love and no fear, can reach a point where he will do something against G-d's will. In our personal lives this is true, too. When a person has only love for G-d, that love can drive him to do a mitzvah even when doing so at the wrong time would be going against G-d's will.

For example: A person with great love for the mitzvah of shofar might go so far as to blow it even when Rosh Hashana falls out on Shabbos; he simply can't hold back. Or a woman who wasn't able to light Shabbos candles before sunset on Friday



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evening, out of her great love for the mitzvah might light them even though it's too late, because she has no fear of G-d.

Married life teaches us to do not what we want to do but what is correct and right.