

This week, we are introduced to a very unique individual: Bilaam.

The existence of people like Bilaam show us that Hashem gives each and every one of us different kochos hanefesh. There is no one in the entire world – past, present, or future – who is exactly like you. When we will stand in front of the kisei hakovod, Hashem will not ask us why we didn't use the kochos hanefesh of anybody else. He will ask us why we didn't use the kochos hanefesh he gave us individually.

There are two people who had very similar kochos, and did very different things with their kochos: Moshe and Bilaam. Bilaam was given the koach of nevuah, but he lost his olom haboh! Where did he go wrong? And what did he want to do to Klal Yisroel?

The Mishna in Ovos says as follows:

כל מי נשיש בידו נשלושה דברים הללו, מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו. ושלשה דברים אחרים, מתלמידיו של בלעם הרשע. עין טובה, ורוח נמוכה, ונפש שפלה, מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו. עין רעה, ורוח גבוהה, ונפש רחבה, מתלמידיו של בלעם הרשע.

Sometimes it is very difficult to know who a person really is. He can put on a show and be very convincing. The way to find out is to see who are drawn after him and become his followers and what they do to continue in the path he has put them on. The Mishna tells us to look at Bilaam's talmidim – who he inspired with his personal example.

Bilaam was a very impressive, incredibly talented individual. When you met him, you wouldn't immediately perceive where he went wrong.

Avrohom raised vast numbers of talmidim. He stood up to Nimrod and made a massive impact on his generation. But he was humble about it. He didn't take credit and didn't feel superior to anyone else. He saw the good in every human being. Some people are so interested in promoting themselves and bolstering their image as someone who is great, that when they meet another person, they immediately want to put them down to a lower level than they are. They don't care enough to respect the greatness and goodness in other people around them. Avrohom Ovinu would meet a person and look for the good in them. This is what he wanted to see and he wanted to find things to respect and admire about other people. That is why he made such a positive impact.

Bilaam was always looking to puff himself up. When he met another person, he resented their good qualities and wanted to highlight the negative about them.

Avrohom was satisfied with what he had – he wasn't lacking anything that made him chase after things other people had. This is why he refused to take any spoils from the King of S'dom. But Bilaam never had enough. He revealed this when he said, "if Bolok would give me a house full of gold and silver..." His appetite for material wealth and taivoh was unsatiable. The nature of a baal taivoh is that he is never satisfied.

Chazal are telling us that when your middos are corrupted by these major flaws, you will misuse and ruin the greatest kochos hanefesh that Hashem gave you and cause your own destruction.

Bilaam had a dilemma. His greatness of spiritual potential made him realize that the righteous who work on themselves and perfect themselves will receive tremendous reward in the next world which will go on forever. But he still couldn't give up the immediate and short-lived gratification of taivoh in this world, in order to achieve

the ultimate pleasure of the spiritual world. He wanted both – but he couldn't have both and yet he wasn't willing to give up one for the other.

Bolok saw what happened to Sichon and Og and felt threatened by Klal Yisroel advancing close to his border. But he had no reason to feel threatened. Klal Yisroel always offered a peaceful option. But, Sichon refused and he was conquered as a result. Sichon and Og caused their own destruction. Moav could have picked up on this and dealt with Klal Yisroel without antagonism. But Moav had a deep-seated hatred of Klal Yisroel. Why? Because Avrohom Ovinu and Klal Yisroel stood for the power of ruchniyus to conquer the world. The nations of the world want to deny this reality and claim it is military might or superior resources that determine who will dominate the world. They resent Klal Yisroel's message that Hashem determines the direction of the world through moral calculations of mitzvos and aveiros and not by material factors.

We see today how much the world resents the Jews – but this resentment is always seething underneath the surface throughout history. Look at what is happening in Europe, France, the United States, etc. Why? It has nothing to do with Gaza – these people have no clue about what's happening in Gaza.

People who want a life of taivoh and hefkeirus look at Klal Yisroel as a threat to their way of life. We represent spiritual values and a clear moral reality of absolute right and wrong. Moav saw what happened to Sichon and Og who decided they want to stop Klal Yisroel and were destroyed as a result. So Moav decided to switch tactics. Use the spiritual power of a novi to get Hashem to curse Klal Yisroel. But Hashem is not going along with it. He tells Bilaam straight away that he won't succeed in cursing Klal Yisroel. But Bilaam convinces himself that he can manipulate Hashem into doing what he wants.

After the whole story is over and Bilaam has tried three times to get Hashem to curse, he admits defeat. Klal Yisroel have too many zechuyos. Our foundations are too strong – the mesorah of the Ovos and Imahos cannot be budged. They are an isolated nation – immune to the historical forces that control the fates of all other nations. This is both the tragedy and salvation of Klal Yisroel.

We are living through a very interesting period of history.

The history of Zionism of the 1880's and 1890's is simply mystifying. The Jews in Russia were suffering unbelievable anti-semitism and the various factions of Jews tried to solve it in different ways. The Netziv, the Beis HaLevi, and the gedolei Torah of the time said our troubles come from our desire to assimilate and find favor with the non-Jewish society we live in. The non-Jews are pushing back. The Zionists said the reason people hate Jews is because we are always outsiders who don't belong anywhere. We don't have our own country with a flag and a language that make us like all other nations of the world. They believed the world will stop hating us if we just became another normal nation like Honduras and Guatemala. But we see that the opposite has occurred. Jew-hatred around the world is on the rise precisely because of what is happening in Israel. No-one in America is talking about the 45 American citizens killed by Hamas on Simchas Torah. No-one mentioned that four American citizens are being held hostage by Hamas. Why? Because we are Jews.

When we understand that we are unique and cannot simply pretend to be just another "normal" nation, when we embrace our uniqueness

as the nation of Hashem who represents spiritual values, then the persecutions with end. Klal Yisroel shouldn't be measured in the same terms of physical power and material resources like all the other nations are measured.

כי קראש צרים ארצנו ומגבעות אשורנו הן עם לכדד ישכן ובגוים לא יתחשב:

Onkelos explains this phrase to mean that in the future, Klal Yisroel will dominate the entire world. Hashem will judge everyone, and Klal Yisroel will emerge as the only ones who are worthy to survive judgment.

ארי כריש טויה וזיתיה וקרמתא סכיתיה הא עמא בלחודיהון עתידין דיחסנון עלמא ובמחסיא לא יתדנון גמירא:

Bilaam is telling Bolok that he is misreading Klal Yisroel altogether. He sees this mass of people and thinks they pose some kind of military threat. But he has it all wrong. Their power only comes from their level of commitment and fidelity to the spiritual goals that Hashem has placed on them. Hashem treats them on a different level than anyone else.

Bolok takes Bilaam to different vantage points to see whether they can detect a flaw or weakness in Klal Yisroel that will make them vulnerable to being cursed. But Bilaam declared that this isn't how Hashem deals with Klal Yisroel. You can't manipulate Hashem by highlighting this or that negative detail. Hashem deals with the totality of Klal Yisroel and their mission in this world to be His representatives.

Bilaam praises Klal Yisroel for their eagerness to get up with zerizus to do mitzvos. These are the middos that are intrinsic to Klal Yisroel's nature. Part of kedushas Yisroel in each Jew's neshomo is an enthusiasm to do mitzvos.

There is an incredible Rambam in Hilchos Geirushin which explains why when a husband gives consent for a get under torture by beis din it is a kosher get – even though the halacha requires fully free choice of the husband to give a get. How can he be using his free will to agree to a get if he is getting beaten up to agree? The Rambam answers that deep down in the neshomo of every Jew is the desire to keep halacha and do the will of Hashem. This is something special and unique about the neshomo of every Jew. There may be external pressures and taivos which obscure this rotzon and prevent it from being fully expressed. So you beat this person up so he has a balance of pressure between doing the right thing and the wrong thing, and this is where the real person emerges.

This Rambam is telling us incredible things about the neshomo of each

and every Jew. It is a special and unique creation of Hashem which desires to do good. Tznius is also an inherent middoh in the neshomo of a Jew. A person has to guard this purity of the neshomo and not let it get obscured by taivos and other pressures.

What can a person do to re-invigorate the core desire of a Jew to do good under the burden of all these pressures in his life?

כנהלים נטיו כגזת עלי נהר כאהלים נטע ה' כארזים עלי מים:

What does a stream of water have to do with tents? Chazal explain the posuk is teaching us that entering the tents of the Torah works like a mikvah that refreshes and purifies a sullied and stained neshomo. Immersing one's self in the Torah to try to understand it on a deep level, can reset the purity of the neshomo to want to do only good. We affect the entire world with our neshomo by bringing kedushoh or tumoh into this world. And the imbalance between kedushoh and tumoh is what causes everything to happen.

But the non-Jewish world resents these ideas. They don't value this goodness and purity of a neshomo that we represent. All they care about is brute force and material wealth. But sometimes that beautiful neshomo that Hashem gave us gets distracted and gets pushed in the wrong direction. We don't always jump out of bed to do mitzvos. What can we do to reset our neshomo? Immersing ourselves in Torah.

The bottom line of what Bilaam tells Bolok is that he doesn't have a clue about where Klal Yisroel's unique power comes from. And there is no way to manipulate Hashem like you can manipulate all these spiritual forces through avodo zoro. We don't bribe Hashem with tzedoko money to give us a license to do what we want. Hashem looks at the totality of Klal Yisroel as an extension of the Ovos and Imahos. And when we stray from that mission, we can return to Torah to get our neshomos back on track.

So Bilaam tells Bolok that all his schemes and tricks are of no use.

We are living in difficult times where Klal Yisroel world-wide are under attack. We have to remember who we are and what our unique power is. When people complain that Bnei Torah are learning Torah instead of joining the army and fighting, they are not aware that the outcome of the war is not due to having more soldiers or better military equipment and technology. The outcome is due to Hashem intervening to fight our enemies and He will only do this when we are dedicated to His mission. The army is only as strong as the spiritual force of Klal Yisroel. Hashem doesn't deal with us like all other nations. When we get confused about our mission, we can return to the Torah and re-orient ourselves again, to know what we are supposed to do.