

זכור את יום השבת לקדשו,
ששת ימים תעבד ועשית כל מלאכתך,
יום השביעי שבת לה'

PARASHAT BALAK

17TH TAMUZ 5782

15TH & 16TH JULY 2022

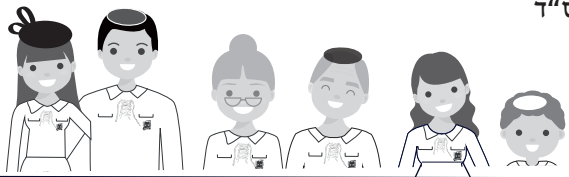
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בס"ד

SHABBAT LASHEM

THE VOICE OF BNEI AKIVA UK



A TALKING DONKEY

ZAK WOLFSON
SHEVET HINEINI

When Bilaam went with the servants of Moav to go to Balak, G-d, angry that Bilaam went with them, placed an angel on the road to prevent them from passing. While Bilaam was unable to see the sword-wielding angel, his donkey noticed it and veered off the path. Bilaam, frustrated with his animal's behaviour, hit it with his stick. The angel repositioned himself in front of the procession and the donkey, trying to avoid the angel again, pressed against a wall, squashing Bilaam's foot. Bilaam responded by hitting his donkey for the second time. The donkey, still confronted by the angel in front of her and now on a narrow path with nowhere to veer off to, laid down on the ground. Bilaam, in his anger, hit the donkey, once again.

וַיִּפְתָּח ה' אֶת־פִּי הַאֲתוֹן וַתֹּאמֶר לְבִלְעָם מַה־עָשִׂיתִי לָךְ כִּי
בִּיתְנִי זֶה שָׁלַשׁ רְגָלִים:

Then G-d opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Bilaam, "What have I done to you that you have beaten me these three times?"

At that point, a strange story becomes even stranger. G-d opens the donkey's mouth, and a conversation follows between Bilaam and his donkey. The now presumably injured donkey, asked for an explanation as to why she was hit. Bilaam, somehow unphased at the fact his donkey casually struck up a conversation, responded by claiming that she had made a mockery of him, and that if he had a sword, he would have killed her. Pleading her case, the donkey asked Bilaam to consider all the years they have been together and whether this was a regular pattern of her behaviour or not. Bilaam acknowledged that it was not, and at that point, G-d uncovered his eyes and revealed the angel to him. The angel rebuked Bilaam

for hitting his donkey three times and explained that the donkey saved his life by avoiding the angel.

How are we to understand a talking donkey? The most prevalent explanation is to attribute it to a miracle. The Mishna in Pirkei Avot 5:6 lists the talking donkey as one of the ten miracles of the last day of the creation. A textual problem with such an explanation is that even though talking donkeys is within the scope of G-d's abilities, it presumably wasn't in the realm of the expected for Bilaam and his Moabite company. The fact that they just take the talking donkey in their stride, presents a problem.

Another possibility is to follow the Rambam's view that any time almost anyone except Moshe encountered an angel, it happened in the context of a dream or vision. If so, the whole episode, including the donkey talking, took place in Bilaam's mind.

A third possibility is presented by Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzato, who pointed out that if you look carefully within the text, it never writes that the donkey speaks. He argued that, in reality, the donkey did not express a full, well-articulated statement, rather it brayed and bellowed as a response to getting hit, as if to say, "why are you hitting me?" Bilaam responded to the donkey's cries by saying that she humiliated him, the same as any pet owner may converse with their pet. Animals may not be able to talk using speech to formulate sentences in the way we do, but they can use forms of language to communicate. Our rabbit at home frequently makes an assortment of random but almost conversational noises and I am definitely guilty of conversing back in English!

Continued on next page

SHABBAT TIMES

London	In 20:56 Out 22:19	Oxford	In 22:59 Out 22:26	Leeds	In 21:11 Out 22:45
Manchester	In 21:15 Out 22:45	Bristol	In 21:02 Out 22:29	Liverpool	In 21:14 Out 22:47
Cambridge	In 20:55 Out 22:24	Birmingham	In 21:05 Out 22:34	Jerusalem	In 19:10 Out 20:27

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Perhaps, embedded in this strange interaction, is a veiled critique of Bilaam's broader behaviour. One of Bilaam's flaws was his inability to hear and understand what G-d really wanted from him. He couldn't pick up on the subtle cues and listen to what was really expected of him. It was a case of motivated listening, hearing what he wanted to hear and interacting accordingly. Bilaam's initial impatient and violent behaviour toward his donkey reflected this inability to understand the not-fully-articulated feelings of others.

In contrast, midrashim are abound describing the empathy and care that great Jewish leaders such as Moshe and David exhibited as shepherds towards their flock. How one listens and responds to those who are more vulnerable and unable to fully communicate is a great and revealing test for their true character. A test that Bilaam failed, and one we can aspire to pass - if we listen carefully.

ZAK IS A MEMBER OF THE BNEI AKIVA MORESHET BAND

FROM THE ARCHIVES

'BORN THIS WAY,' BY ELLE STEEL | 5773

וְלֹא־יָקֻם נְבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה

Never again has there risen in Israel a Navi like Moshe (Devarim 34:10).

The midrash explains that finding a Navi within Bnei Yisrael like Moshe was impossible. However, it goes on to inform us that outside of Bnei Yisrael there was a Navi similar to Moshe, Bilaam. Chazal turn to the midrash to unfold this hidden connection between Moshe and Bilaam in this pasuk.

Chazal question the comparison of such a rasha (wicked person) to Moshe Rabbeinu, and come up with the following explanation. At the start of their lives, Moshe and Bilaam possessed almost identical characteristics. They were both wise and possessed a unique sense of spirituality. Moshe and Bilaam had the potential to achieve identical greatness; however, they chose different routes and ended up worlds apart.

In Shemot, we follow Moshe as he grows up in Pharaoh's palace with access to all the riches in the world. However, we begin to see Moshe as a character solely concerned with alleviating suffering. When people were suffering, be they Mitzri (Egyptian) or Ivri (Jewish), Moshe acted. When Hashem appeared before Moshe at the Burning Bush and presented him with his mission, Moshe actively chose to positively channel his qualities into his mission, looking out for the best interests of Bnei Yisrael.

Bilaam, by contrast, chose to channel his characteristics into helping himself. Balak approaches Bilaam for help with defeating Bnei Yisrael. Bilaam responds with the following,

וַיַּעַן בַּלְעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עַבְדֵי בַלַּק אֲמַן יְתוֹנֵי בַלַּק כֹּלֵא בִיתוֹ כְּסָף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲבֹר אֶת־פִּי ה' אֱלֹהֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת קִטְנָה אוֹ גְדוּלָה

Bilaam replied to Balak's officials, 'If Balak can give me a houseful of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem.' (Bamidbar 22:18)

This implies that were it not for Hashem, Bilaam would have used his powers for financial gain. In parashat Chukat, Sichon, King of Emori, succeeded in capturing parts of Moav by hiring Bilaam to curse the Moabites. In Parashat Balak, we read that Bilaam changes allegiances to help Moav, demonstrating that Bilaam will use his abilities to help anyone, regardless of Hashem's will, for personal gain.

A person may be born with tremendous qualities but this doesn't guarantee success. If success was measured by accumulation of knowledge, then Bilaam would be our role model just like Moshe. To be a role model, we must take our unique abilities and use them to perfect ourselves in a Torah way, just like Moshe Rabbeinu.

ELLEN IS IN SHEVET NETZACH AND WAS TECHNICAL DIRECTOR IN 5774

SNAPSHOT FROM THE CHOVERET

The Choveret is the educational handbook that Bnei Akiva UK madrichim use to create their activities and discussions in Sviva each week. This week, it looks at the meaning of ‘Torat Yisrael.’

A central part of our ideology as Bnei Akiva is that we also believe that Torah is something to be lived. And not just lived anywhere, but lived in the Land of Israel.

What does it mean to live Torah? For example, in the Torah it says that, “Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Shabbat of Hashem, your G-d: you shall not do any work.”

We all know about keeping Shabbat, and not doing any of the prohibitions attached to it, but creating a society based around Torah means that on Shabbat, everything shuts down, where no schools, places of work or shops are open and public transport is not running.

Living Torah also means creating a society which is built on the basis of Torah rules, where marriage and divorce are conducted according to Halacha and public buildings have to serve kosher food.

As mentioned in a previous Choveret, there are also mitzvot which are only kept in the Land of Israel. For example, every seven years is a shemitta year, where farmers are forbidden from harvesting their crops. Torat Yisrael means Jewish law isn't just something we do individually, but something that determines how we function as a society, in order that we communally enact the will of G-d.

There are interesting discussions to be had around how much we should enforce Halacha in the modern State of Israel, where the majority of the population aren't religious or aren't Jewish. Nonetheless, the ideal of Torat Yisrael means that we strive to create a society where everybody lives by Torah rules. Torat Yisrael means creating a Torah that can be built into a society around us, and it means building a society that is based around Torah.

THE WEEK IN PICTURES - ISRAEL MACHANE



The four Bnei Akiva UK Israel Machane Groups and their madrichim are having a fantastic time exploring Am Yisrael, Eretz Yisrael and Torat Yisrael!

WHAT'S GOING ON?

- Do you have a **parent or grandparent with an interesting life story** who you'd like to interview for our **Moreshet archive**? Contact chinuch@bauk.org for more info!

- **Mazal Tov** to **Yael Marcus** (Shevet Avichai) on her **Aliyah!**

- **Keep an eye out for exciting Bnei Akiva updates for all ages!**

- **Be sure to like our Facebook page (Bnei Akiva UK) and follow our**

Instagram (bneiakivauk) to get regular updates with what is going on in the Tnuva.

- **Visit bauk.org/feedback for contact details for all Mazkirut members and to leave any general feedback!**



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