

פרשת בלק

גליון 33

ט"ז תמוז תשפ"א

מאת ר' ש. קאפלן שליט"א

A מצוה with no פרשה

The ספר החינוך writes that פרשת בלק is a unique פרשה since it does not have any מצוות. There is no מצוה given in בלק. We often learn through the פרשה and we

see a tremendous אריכות about the discussions between בלעם and הקב"ה

"When we only keep the letter of the law and we don't care about the spirit of the law, we are called עבדים."

בלעם and the ברכות and קללות of בלעם and הרשע. In great length the תורה describes the whole story between בלעם and בלק – backwards and forwards together with all the little details. The תורה regarding ענינים גדולים is מקצר, yet here the תורה in אריכות gives a tremendous בלק. What is *taka* the message we must take from פרשת בלק?

The משנה teaches in מסכת אבות that it is possible for a person to be מתלמידיו של "עין טובה, as the משנה writes, בלעם הרשע ורוח נמוכה ונפש שפלה תלמידיו של אברהם אבינו. עין רעה ורוח גבוהה ונפש רוחה תלמידיו של בלעם הרשע..." (ה', כ"ב)

The משנה is obviously telling us that we must learn the פרשה of בלק thoroughly and properly, because this is the message of the תורה: not to become תלמידים of בלעם הרשע – *not* to follow in his ways.

I want to bring out an important point which is very much נוגע למעשה, whether

regarding our בין אדם לבין אדם or בין אדם לאלהים.

The עבירה big

The פסוק describes that the מלאך said to בלעם, "אתכה הרגתי" (כ"ב, ל"ג), *I would now even have killed you*, clearly, the תורה is telling us that בלעם was חייב מיתה, as the רמב"ן writes, "חטא גדול חטא" – *he sinned a great sin*, בלעם did a terrible עבירה, and therefore he was חייב מיתה, until the extent that the מלאך exclaimed, "I should have killed you!"

And the big question is: What did בלעם do wrong? When we learn the פרשה we can look at בלעם as being a rather good

guy – rather decent. Look at what a statement he exclaims, "ויען בלעם ויאמר, אל עבדי בלק אם יתן לי בלק מלא ביתו כסף וזהב, לא אוכל לעבר על פי ה' אלקי לעשות קטנה או גדולה. If *were to give me a houseful of silver and gold, I am unable to transgress the word of Hashem, my God, to do anything small or great!*

"קום לך אתם" (כ"ב, in fact told him, "קום לך אתם" (כ"ב, *arise and go with them. – Go! You can go with them! The רבש"ע let him go, and yet the רמב"ן writes, "חטא גדול חטא" – he did a gevaldiga עבירה? He is חייב מיתה! What was the problem?*

And then, immediately after the רבש"ע tells him to go, it says in the פסוק, "ויהר, אף אלקים כי הולך הוא" (פסוק כ"ב) *God's wrath flared because he was going.* That's not fair! The רבש"ע just told him "קום לך אתם" – he can go, and then the רבש"ע is angry and annoyed with him? What's פשט?

Children and servants

We must try to understand the חטא of בלעם because we do not want to be תלמידים of הרשע. The עיקר מהלך is based on the words of ר' אלהנן ווסרמן הי"ד in his קונטרס דברי סופרים (סימן א' ס"ק כ"ד) "פעמים: בבא בתרא (י.) in גמרא The נקראים בנים, ופעמים נקראים עבדים. "בנים"

דכתיב 'בנים אתם לה' אלוהיכם, 'ועבדים' *sometimes*, דכתיב, 'כי לי בני ישראל עבדים.' *are called children and sometimes they are called servants,* "בזמן שאתם עושין רצונו של מקום אתם קרויים בנים, ובזמן שאין אתם עושים רצונו של מקום, *when they do the will of ה' they are called children, whereas when they do not do the will of ה' they are called עבדים – servants.*

When we do the רצון ה' we are called בנים yet when we do not do the רצון ה' then we are called עבדים. What's פשט in this גמרא? If we don't do the רצון ה' why are we עבדים?! When we don't do the רצון ה' we are nothing, not בנים and not עבדים! What does the גמרא mean, "ובזמן שאין אתם עושים רצונו של מקום אתם קרויים עבדים"?

Two shops and two boys

משל ר' אליה לאפיאן זצ"ל explains with a משל about a person who walks into a shop פסח, it's busy, people coming, people going. You see a boy working there, running around, back and forwards, *shlepping* boxes, stacking shelves, serving customers, helping customers taking their shopping to their cars – he's ממש busy – working as hard as he can, whatever needs doing he's running around doing it.

You then walk into the next shop and there you also find a boy sitting in the corner writing out the till receipts, however, between each customer he's twiddling his thumbs – dreaming into space. There are things which need doing in the shop, yet he's oblivious to the commotion which is going on around him, he's oblivious to what needs to be done, he's simply just writing out till receipts and not doing anything more than that.

So this fellow watching is wondering, "What's פשט? The boy in the first shop is running around – not stopping for a second! Whereas the boy in the second shop is only writing till receipts!?"

It was then when somebody gave him the answer, "The answer is very simple. The boy in the first shop you went into is the son of the owner – his father owns the place, it's the family business, he wants the business to run well – obviously he will work as hard as he can, he put's all his כוחות into the business.

Whereas the boy in the second shop is a boy who is looking for some money during הזמנים. He took on this job and does exactly what he is supposed to, that's his job. What about the shelves

that need stacking and the customers which are waiting to be served? But that's not his job – it's not his problem!"

The true רצון

Explains ר' אליה זצ"ל: When we do the רצון we are called בנינים – we are children, however, בזמן שאין אתם עושים, when we don't do the רצון, and rather we only do what's written and what we are told to do, then we are only called עבדים. When we only keep the letter of the law and we don't care about the spirit of the law, we are called עבדים.

There are two דרגות: A person can be שומר תורה ומצוות and yet nevertheless he is only an עבד – he does just what he has to do and nothing more than that.

This can be a מוסר for all of us: Often we daven שמו"ע and think to ourselves, "A person is יוצא with just being מכון the first ברכה... after מגן אברהם I can switch off and start dreaming about my summer holidays..."

Sometimes we are just ticking the boxes, that is a level of an עבד – sitting in the corner and doing exactly what we are told to do. The higher מדריגה is not just that I am here to tick the boxes, it's much more than that: I'm here to do what

– בן of a מדריגה wants! That is a – this is a מדריגה which we must strive to reach.

, ר' משה הלברשטם זצ"ל once came to איד, and asked if he can buy an אתרוג in a closed box – to take the lucky dip, “as I will save so much more time like that...” is it right to buy an אתרוג in a closed box?

Look how an אדם גדול answers such a question: He answered so cleverly: “If you buy your Borsalino hat in a closed box – off the shelf, you can buy an אתרוג in a closed box.” When it comes to buying a hat you try on twenty hats in three different mirrors on all ten angles, till you know which one suits you!

What are we trying to do in this world? Are we just trying to tick the boxes or are we trying to also do the רצון ה'? This is an extremely important factor in our עבודת ה'.

פי ה' the Only

is מרמז to us that this was רש"י (פסוק י"ב) "לא תלך, רבש"ע said, חטא's בלעם – You shall not go with them! Said בלעם, “I won't go! בסדר”, אקללם – I shall curse them from where I am!”

Said הקב"ה, “No! I don't want you to curse them either...”

“Oh!” said בלעם, “אברכם – so I will bless them...”

בלעם of חטא is teaching us: The הרשע was that he wasn't interested in what the הקב"ה wants, but rather only with what the הקב"ה says. As he exclaimed, "לא" – he can't transgress the letter of the law what the הקב"ה says, yet the רצון ה' he doesn't mind transgressing, he doesn't give two hoots, he doesn't care about the spirit of the law, as long as he can work within the framework of the law.

Just like a kid or a בחור who wants to do something or go somewhere, and the father tells his son, “No I don't want you to go...” The boy then asks his father so many times until the father screams, “Okay! Go! Just go!”

Does the father want the child to go?! When the boy goes is he fulfilling the רצון of his father? He may be fulfilling the words of the father, but not the רצון. H's not transgressing his father's words, yet he's not doing the רצון האב either. He – בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך מוליכין אותו – He wanted to go so the הקב"ה told him to go, yet nevertheless, " – ויחר אף ה' כי הולך הוא" –

"I'm not happy with you בלעם! You're not doing the 'רצון ה'."

Said the מלאך, "You're מיתה...". and as the רמב"ן writes, "חטא גדול חטא" – he did a חטא.

We must not focus only on what הקב"ה tells us, it must be more than that. We mustn't be "בדיעבד אידן" with just having שמו"ע during the first ברכה of כונה.

We have to serve Hashem constantly thinking to ourselves, "Is this what הקב"ה wants off me? Is this what it means to be a לכתחילה איד?"

Three times a year

The חמור said to בלעם הרשע "כי הכיתני זה שלש פעמים" (כ"ה) *What have I done to you that you have struck me these three times?* רש"י writes, "רמזה לו, אתה מבקש, לעקור אומה החוגגת שלש רגלים בשנה" *She intimated to him, 'You seek to uproot a nation which celebrates three festivals a year!'*

I once heard a *gevaldiga* פשט from ר' דוד גסיון נסיון was a tremendous שלש רגלים: צאהן for all the אידן to leave their homes and go up to ירושלים. There were no alarms or security, the nearby גוים could have come and taken whatever they wanted. A tremendous מדריגה of ישראל.

But we have a פשטה עצה! The גמרא in (ג) teaches is that if you haven't got קרקע in ארץ ישראל then you are פטור from עלייה לרגל. A פשטה עצה: מדאורייתא a person can be נכסים by himself without anyone knowing about it, and then he has no קרקע so he doesn't have to go up to ירושלים! Still keeping within the framework of the law!

Said the חמור to בלעם, "You fool! You don't do the 'רצון ה' and you want to then go and uproot a nation which do the רצון ה' – they go up to לרגל – they fulfil the רצון ה'." By being עולה רגל, כלל ישראל displayed their רצון to be מקיים the רצון ה', they didn't try to get out of it and still be מקיים the law, they went further than that, they went out of the way to do the רצון ה'.

רצון ה' does the לכתחילה איד.

Pay us our wages!

I would like to bring out that this is not only בנוגע to our עבודת ה' regarding our נוגע למקום, this is also very much נוגע regarding our לחבירו:

The גמרא in (פ"ג.) brings a story about a person who hired porters to *shlep* a barrel of wine from the port to his house, with warning the porters to be careful about its valuable contents.

"תברו ליה הנהו שוקלאי" – they tripped and fell over and the barrel smashed.

The owner of the barrel said to his workers, "Pay me! You're חייב to pay me!"

"We haven't got any money," they exclaimed.

שקל לגלימייהו – he took away their clothes.

They came in front of רב and רב told him, "True they are חייב, but have רחמנות on them, give them back their clothes, don't be מדקדק בדין with them, as it says in the "פסוק "למען תלך בדרך טובים"

רב then saw that the porters were upset, "Why are you upset?" he asked.

– עניי אנו וטרחינו כולה יומא וכפינו ולית לן מידי – "We earn what we need for our family for a daily basis," they exclaimed, "we worked the whole morning *shlepping* the barrel and yet we will come home empty handed without any money to feed our family!"

Said רב, "זיל הב אגרייהו" – *go pay them their wages!* as it's written, "וארחות צדיקים תשמור"

The גמרא is teaching us the ענין of going לפנים משורת הדין.

A fake coin

The גמרא in (צ"ט:) tells us about another story where a lady who wanted to sell produce who came before ר' חייא. ר' חייא was a מומחה in checking whether a coin was real or forged, he would test the coins with his fingers and his mouth. ר' חייא tested the coin for this lady and told her that it was real.

A few days later it was נתבבר that this coin was a fake.

The דין is that an אומן is פטור for such a mistake, yet ר' חייא told רב to go and pay her! She needs the money! As the גמרא there teaches, "אשר יעשון זו לפנים משורת הדין".

We must live our lives with a דרגה of לפנים משורת הדין.

משל למה הדבר דומה, if you lend your gadget to a friend and it comes back with a small scratch or dent – everything is working fine. על פי דין you have the full rights to charge for the damage – "Pay me!" However, as we see from these גמרות there is an ענין to be מוותר.

A painter and £400

A דין תורה once told me about a גביר once had. What was the דין תורה? A great גביר – a multimillionaire had come to a דין תורה. Why? Because he hired a

painter to do a job, yet the גביר was not happy about the way the job was done.

The painter had come to בית דין to be תובע his weeks work of four hundred pound!

The דיין actually פסקנד that the גביר was right – he wasn't מחויב to pay him.

Just for four hundred pounds?! When someone knocks on his door, he gives a thousand pounds! Why couldn't he pay the painter the four hundred pounds, saving a poor fellow such pain – going home without making a penny the entire week.

These are the opportunities to go לפנים משורת הדין, and in our little lives we also often have these little instances where we are very מקפיד to keeping to the דין, perhaps go and be מוותר?! Go לפנים משורת הדין throughout your life.

We must become better than just keeping to the actual law, let us go a step further: לפנים משורת הדין.

It's not just about what it says in שולחן הקב"ה, the question is: What does הקב"ה want from me – whether within בין אדם לבין אדם or במקום לחבירו.

This is what we learn in פשרת בלק. This is what it means to be a תלמיד of בלעם, to stick only to the principles of הרשע, and nothing more than that. As ר'

נחום זצ"ל would say, "There is one principle in life: not to have any principles."

Don't have so many principles, go further – go and be מוותר, be flexible. Move out of the mindset of being מקפיד on every פרוטה, and when a person is מוותר the רבש"ע pays him back with כפל, you won't lose out.

Only keeping to the letter of the law is מתלמידיו של בלעם הרשע.

And as the משנה continues that we must be מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו. By אברהם אבינו we find the exact opposite: At the שמים, אל, called out from מלאך, עקידה, "אל, שמים, מלאך" – תשלך ירך אל הנער" – *don't do it – don't shect your child.* ל. teach us that אברהם אבינו still wanted to afflict a wound – to make a small cut! He wanted to do the רצון ה' with such a passion and such a desire! I want to do something for You! I got to such a נסיון – let me do something!

Then said the מלאך, "ואל תעש לו מאומה" – don't do anything! He then ran and found an איל in the bush and offered it up! Why? Because he wanted to do something – he was desperate to fulfil the רצון ה'. He could have jumped up dancing, "Phew! My יצהק is going to

live!" No! no such thing – he's looking to be מקיים the 'רצון ה', not just the 'פי ה'.

This is מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו which we must try and emulate, not to be rigid in keeping exactly to what we need to keep to. It's not just about going down the list and ticking the boxes, without the heart and feeling in doing the 'רצון ה'.

We must train ourselves in both בין אדם בין אדם, we must lift ourselves up a notch and do all that רצון ה' wants me to do – to fulfil the 'רצון ה'. It's not just about what is written in הלכה – what I am מחויב to do, it's about doing the 'רצון ה'. We must change our mindsets to try and do the 'רצון ה' and not to use 'לא אוכל לעבור את פי' of נוסח's בלעם

"ה", it's more than not just being עובר in what it says in שלחן ערוך, it's more than that: it's to be מקיים the 'רצון ה' together with what it says in שולחן ערוך.

This is the message we must take out of the פרשה, it's not just about "לא אוכל בלעם on טענה, this was the לעבור את פי ה'" הרשע, he wasn't interested in being מקיים the 'רצון ה'.



"Thought on the פרשה..."

The משנה in פרקי אבות teaches, "כל מי שיש בידו שלשה דברים הללו הוא מתלמידיו של אברהם, *Any person who has these three traits is among the תלמידים of אברהם our forefather, and anyone who has three different מדות is among the תלמידים of בלעם הרשע*" (ה', כ"ב) "עין טובה ורוח נמוכה ונפש שפלה תלמידיו של בלעם הרשע, *Those who have a good eye, a spirit that is humble and a soul that is meek, are the תלמידים of אברהם אבינו. עין רעה ורוח גבוהה ונפש רוחה תלמידיו של בלעם הרשע...*" "אברהם אבינו *whereas אברהם אבינו תלמידים of אברהם אבינו תלמידים of בלעם הרשע*. And as the משנה concludes, "מה בין תלמידיו של אברהם אבינו לתלמידיו של בלעם הרשע?" *What is the difference between the תלמידים of אברהם אבינו and the תלמידים of בלעם הרשע?* "אברהם אבינו אוכלין בעולם הזה ונוחלין לעולם הבא... אבל תלמידיו של בלעם הרשע יורשין גיהנם ויורדין *אברהם אבינו benefit from their good deeds in this world and inherit the world to come... but the תלמידים of בלעם הרשע inherit גיהנם and descend into the well of destruction.*"

I had a קשיא on this משנה for many years – a *gevaldiga* קשיא: For bad מידות do you need a Rebbe? Do you need a Rebbe to teach you this? "יצר האדם רע מנעוריו" – a persons nature is to have bad מידות! You don't need a Rebbe for this? a person is born with bad מידות and then it's a person's job to work on himself. So to have good מידות you need a Rebbe – you need an אברהם אבינו, but for an רוח גבוהה, עין רעה, and a נפש רוחה do I need to be a תלמיד of בלעם הרשע? Why do we need a Rebbe for this?

I want to suggest an answer, to which we will see that this was the שיטה of בלעם הרשע: בלעם הרשע exclaimed at the end of the פרשה, "איתן מושבך ושים בסלע קנך" (כ"ד, כ"א), *Strong is your dwelling and set in a rock is your net*, explains רש"י "תמה אני", *I wonder*, "מהיכן *from where you (יתרו) became worthy of this?*" "הלא אתה עמי היית", *Were you not with me* "בעצת הבה נתחכמה לו", *at the time we gave the advice, "Come, let us act wisely to it?"* "ועתה נתישבת באיתן ומעוזו של ישראל", *Yet now you have settled in the stronghold and citadel of ישראל!*

בלעם was wondering – and he said to יתרו, "What's פשט? You are now together with כלל ישראל! But we were once upon a time plotting against כלל ישראל to destroy them?!"

I don't understand. "תמה אני" – בלעם is wondering! What does he find שווער to understand? What did you do there?! "הז"ל tell us that בלעם was "יעץ" – he gave his advice to פרעה! What did יתרו do? He ran away! He didn't give any advice – he ran to מדין!

It's חלוק ביסדו! What is בלעם wondering about "We were together!" No you were not together! Of course יתרו joined ישראל כלל – he ran away from the "עצת הבה נתחכמה לו"! חשוב'ער – a תלמיד חכם – a חשוב'ער when one says to another, "That person is a big חכם..." And he replies, "Yena! I sat on the same bench as him in ישיבה!"

Very good you sat on the same bench in ישיבה, but what did he do with his life and what did you do with your life? Once upon a time – many years ago you were together! So what?! What's בלעם's קשיא!?

בלעם had נבואה, he was given it לעכו"ם. Because of this בלעם came up with his שיטה, similar to the שיטה of איוב: As איוב said, "בראת שור פרסותיו סדוקות, ברבש"ע! בראת חמור פרסותיו קלוטות, בראת גן עדן בראת גיהנם, בראת צדיקים בראת רשעים..." meaning: there's no בחירה in this world – it's tough luck, there is nothing you can do about it, that's how a person is created, however a person is he has to live with it, he can't change himself.

As the (בבא בתרא ט"ז.) teaches, "בקש איוב להפוך קערה על פיה", I once heard a פשוט from ר' ירוחם זצ"ל in the name of ר' לייב גורביץ זצ"ל: If you come into a room and the plate on the table is lying the normal way you know it's there to be used. But if you walk into the room and you see the plate turned upside down – facing the table, you know you're not meant to touch it – it's not for using, nothing to do with it – just leave it.

איוב believed that a person is like a turned over plate – there's nothing to do – leave a person how he is, if that's how he is created then that is how he is created!

בלעם also believed, "A person is born with a יצר הרע – it's a difficult life, a very hard. But leave things as they are! There is nothing you can do about it!"

As he exclaimed, "תמות נפשי מות ישרים" (כ"ג, י') – he wants to live his life like בלעם "עולם הבא" and he hopes that eventually "ותהי אחריתו כמהו" – I will still receive עולם הבא and he hopes that eventually "ותהי אחריתו כמהו" – I will still receive עולם הבא, I don't have to work hard down here to merit עולם הבא, I have a strong יצר הרע and there is nothing to do about it, that is how I am born! Just like I was given נבואה I will

also be given everything else! I don't have to do anything, אונס רחמנא פטריה, I will be okay – תמות נפשי מות ישרים –

So this is בלעם לשיטתו, he didn't understand how יתרו got so far in life! How did things change? Just because he worked hard in life does that mean he receives more שכר?!

בלעם of שיטה – and there is nothing you can do about it. This was the הרשע: Life is too hard, and a person can't change himself – a person cannot work on himself.

You don't need to be a תלמיד to have bad מידות, but you need to be תלמיד to have this שיטה and to believe that there is nothing to do to change ones bad מידות. Have such a שיטה you become a תלמיד of הרשע, for this you need a Rebbe.

The משנה is telling us: If a person has a רוח גבוהה, עין רעה, or a נפש רוחה – he must be living his life with this שיטה, because if you will be a תלמיד of אברהם אבינו – to know that a person can work on himself and his יצר הרע, then he won't have these bad מידות, the fact a person has these bad מידות – the fact a person is a בעל תאוה or a בעל גאוה, he obviously has given up – he is obviously leaving the plate upside down – he's not working on himself, such a person is following in the way's of his Rebbe בלעם who also had such a שיטה.

If you live your life in such a way you remain with an רוח גבוהה, עין רעה, and a נפש רוחה because you end up working on yourself.

We are of course all תלמידים of אברהם אבינו and we hold just the opposite: We must work on ourselves, and even if sometimes it doesn't work, but שבע יפול צדיק וקם – keep going, keep fighting the יצר הרע and like that we will all remain תלמידים of אברהם אבינו and be "תלמידיו של אברהם אבינו אוכלין בעולם הזה ונוחלין לעולם הבא", משנה of the קיום to the זוכה "תלמידיו של אברהם אבינו אוכלין בעולם הזה ונוחלין לעולם הבא", *The benefit from their good deeds of אברהם אבינו, 'להנחיל אהבי יש, ואצרותיהם אמלא.* *in this world and inherit the world to come, as it is said: To bequeath to those who love Me a possession, and their storehouse I will fill.*

(ר' ישראל ראקאו שליט"א)



אברהם דוב הכהן כהן – Avrohom Dov Kohn

All mistakes, omissions and errors are mine.