

בעזהשׁי״ת

Parshah Insights

Pertinent Inspirational
Insights on the Parshah

פרשת בלק

Translated from the outstanding Lev Shomaya Parsha series that contain highlights of the lectures and deroshos given by:

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The purpose of this publication is to make these wonderful Divrei Torah and chizuk available to the English speaking public. We are very grateful to Harav Low shlita for allowing us to glean selected inspiring thoughts.



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Our Finest Tool

In this week's parsha the Torah delineates the episode involving Balak, the king of Moav, and Bilaam, the 'prophet' whom he hired to curse the Yidden. When Balak saw the Yidden, who were camping near Moav and were poised to cross the Yarden and enter Eretz Yisrael, he became afraid that they would alter the balance of power in the area. He therefore sought to destroy them.

However, he knew that the Yidden had managed to leave Mitzrayim, which was theretofore unheard of. Additionally, on their way to Eretz Yisroel, they defeated any nation who attempted to fight them. He thus sought to conquer them in a different manner. He turned to the nation of Midyan, where Moshe Rabbeinu had sought refuge, lived for some time, and married Tzipporah, and asked them what was the power of the leader of Yisroel. They answered him, אין כוחו אלא בפה, all his strength lies in his mouth. Meaning, it's the koach of tefillah that protects them.

Thus, Balak decided to strike them using the strength that protects them. He hired Bilaam, whom Hashem had given some powers of prophecy, so that the nations should not complain that only Yisroel have prophets. His blessings and curses were said to be effective, and therefore he asked him to annihilate the Yidden through cursing them. Thus, the power of the tongue would fight the nation whose strength lies in her speech.

This episode highlights the unfathomable power of tefillah, with which Klal Yisroel were endowed. Indeed, even the nations of the

world recognized that therein lies our greatest strength. Therefore, they sought to destroy us through countering our greatest asset.

Even a Deficient Tefillah

The Trisker Maggid, in his sefer Magen Avraham, said that one can see a reference to this strength in the possukim where Balak instructs Bilaam to curse the Yidden. וירא בלק בן צפור את כל אשר עשה ישראל and Balak saw everything that Klal Yisroel did to the Kingdoms of לאמרי and סיחון ועוג. The surrounding nations relied on the אמרים, under the leadership of their kings, to protect them, for they were the strongest nations in the vicinity. When they saw that Klal Yisroel had conquered them they were afraid of what would happen to them.

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The Significance of a Sigh

He says in the name of his father the Rebbe R' Mordechai of Chernobyl, who said in the name of the Baal Shem Tov that even only a Yid's deep sigh for Hashem can have an enormous impact. He said that sometimes a Yid is engrossed in his work in the middle of the day, he is busy and distracted, yet he pauses, sighs and exclaims 'oy, I didn't yet daven Mincha'. This sigh is exceedingly precious to Hashem. This person demonstrates his readiness to tear himself away from all the diversions and burdens of everyday life, and dedicate himself to talking to his Creator. He is distraught over his lack of time and ability to connect more meaningfully. The Baal Shem Tov says that this act, these feelings, and this commitment, can 'split the skies'

since it is so precious to Hashem. How much more so is the actual tefillah.

A Meaningful Minchah

Chazal (ברכות ו:) tell us that one should be especially meticulous with the tefilla of mincha for it is a very opportune time to beseech Hshem. When Eliyahu Hanavi had the contest with the נביאי הבעל, he acknowledged how special the tefillah of Minchah is, and utilized it. The סור (סרל"ב) explains why this tefillah is so special. Shachris is davened at the beginning of the day, before we have become engrossed in, and distracted by our daily tasks. Thus, it is not so difficult to dedicate this time for tefillah. Maariv is recited once we have finished our daily tasks, it is also not such a difficult time to set aside for tefillah. Minchah, however, is recited in the middle of the day. We are mired in the difficulties of the day, yet we break ourselves free from that which binds us, and connect to our Father. Being that this tefilla requires more effort on our part, it is especially beloved.

This highlights that it's not only the actual words we utter, but the effort invested into our tefilla also has an enormous power.

Ideally, one should always think about the words he is uttering during tefillah. However, if a person is too distracted, and he fails to daven with the correct mindset and devotion, just the seemingly simple act of uttering the words of tefillah still has a great impact. The effort itself is valued. And the actual words, even if devoid of thought, are powerful. This obviously holds true for every tefillah, not only minchah. Indeed, minchah has a special power, but every single other tefillah also has the power to completely alter the entire universe. This is because we have given time and effort in a quest for קירבת אלקים, a close connection with our loving Father who cherishes every word of every tefillah a Yid utters, and thus He reciprocates our love.

The Inestimable Power of Every Single Tefillah

The Shamash (attendant) of the Rebbe R' Aharon of Chernobyl was extremely busy with his duties all day. Due to him being so harried, he often could not even daven a normal tefillah with the requisite kavonah that is desired. One day, he was so busy and did not have the time or energy to daven properly. Using his simplistic understanding, he decided that it is better if he skips that tefillah entirely. Later on, when he came into the Rebbe's chamber, the Rebbe - with his holy eyes - immediately discerned that the gabbai had not davened. When he questioned him, the gabbai sighed and commented 'what are my tefillos worth if they are said so hurriedly and without proper kavonah?' The Rebbe passionately exclaimed, 'Don't you see how impactful even your simple tefillos without kavonah are? I immediately noticed a difference in your countenance today which is because you had not davened!'

The Bnei Yissaschar cautioned that a person should always persist with his avodah and tefillah, even if he feels that they are not on the optimal level of אהבה and יראה. He said that a person should still always say גוי עשנו with great fervor, because even a tefillah that is not infused with love is still way better than any type of connection that a goy could ever merit. He said, therefore we say עלינו at the end of every tefillah. We say שלא עשנו כגוי הארצות for you have not made us like the other nations of the world; even though our tefillah was not as it should be, still it is way more elevated than anything a goy could achieve. Even a simple tefillah, without the ideal kavonah has unfathomable worth which the other nations can never access, thus we need to thank for our ability to access this gift.

R' Yosef Gigtelai (a great Kadmon, among the first writers on Kabbalah) in his sefer שערי אורה explains this concept using a reference from the verse in Tehillim (קב יח). פנה אל תפלות הערער ולא בזה את. תפלתם we say that Hashem turns to the tefillah of the downtrodden, and does not demean it. He says it can also be understood that, here,

the actual tefilla is ערער. One would think that a tefilla which is deficient would be despised by Hashem, however, it is not so - ולא בזה את תפילתם - Hashem does not demean even this tefillah. Every single tefillah, even one not uttered with the utmost reverence and kavonah, is still cherished on High.

Grab that which you can

The Chofetz Chaim gave a mashal to make us understand the worth of every word of tefillah. Sometimes one's mind wanders in the middle of davening, and we are then distressed over the poor quality of our tefillah. Thus, we give up on the rest of the davening. The Chofetz Chaim likened this to a woman standing in the marketplace near her stall of apples. Suddenly a thief comes and starts grabbing apples, she looks on with despair as all of her apples disappear. An onlooker yells at her that she too should start grabbing, at least she will remain with that which she captures. So too, the fact that our minds have wandered does not indicate that we should continue to let our tefillah be stolen from us. As soon as we notice that which has occurred, we should at least try to grab what is remaining, and daven the rest of the tefillah with intensity. Hence, we will save whatever possible.

He Knows the Passion in our Hearts

The Sefer Chassidim says that sometimes there are those who do not recite the tefillos correctly. They can mistakenly substitute a ה for a ח, or a ד for a ר, and even though the words are incorrect, and sometimes carry the opposite meaning of what was intended, still their tefillos are beloved. For example, instead of saying נפשי חכתה לה' my soul yearns for Hashem, they say it with a ה which is actually a curse which implies the exact opposite of what is intended, but still Hashem is בוהן ליבות he knows what the heart desires to say and accepts the tefillos of those whose hearts turn towards Him. If a person says פסוקי דזמרה, and his recitation is not fully correct, still his tefillos and zemiros are accepted by Hashem כריח ניחוח like a fragrant offering.

He said that there was once a Kohen who could not דוכן correctly. Instead of saying וישמרך and Hashem should watch over you, he said וישמורך and He should chas vesholom destroy you. A learned person who was there, told the hapless Kohen that he must stop saying the blessings immediately, for he is saying them incorrectly. He was thereafter shown from above that he must restore the Kohen to his duties of reciting יברכך immediately, for if not he will be punished. For Hashem knows and cherishes that which the heart wants to say, even if the lips do not utter them correctly.

Another story was found in a כתב יד, a handwritten note from the sefer Chassidim. There was once an ignorant shepherd who did not know how to daven at all. He would simply tell Hashem every day, with utmost sincerity, 'I only watch my master's sheep for pay, but were You to ask me to watch Your flock, I would do so without remuneration, for I love You so much'. This was his tefillah. One day a learned person heard him uttering this crude tefillah, and he admonished him, saying it is improper. He taught him how one should truly daven, and told him never to utter his old 'tefillah' again. The shepherd unfortunately forgot that which the Yid had taught him, however he also no longer said his earlier tefillah because the Yid had warned that it was improper. This Yid then had a dream, in which he was cautioned to tell the shepherd to reinstate his sincere, cherished tefillah. If he would not return to the shepherd immediately, he was warned, he would be punished for instructing him to stop saying a tefillah which was bringing Hashem a great nachas ruach.

The Inherent Power of Tefillah

The הגדולה established the order and exact wording of our tefillos, imbuing it with unbelievable kochos. The Nefesh Hachaim (שער ב פרק יג) says that they established the tefillos in a way that they will be able to achieve everything a Yid will need, till the end of times. Just by uttering the holy words that the הגדולה אנשי כנסת put together with Ruach Hakodosh, from holy sources, one will be able to achieve

every single thing that must be achieved on this world and the upper spheres.

Additionally, just the effort of setting aside time to daven is also extremely beloved by Hashem. The desire of a Yid who wants to talk to his Father is truly treasured. Hence, even if he erroneously does not pronounce the words correctly the way it was established, or if omits something, the desire is there and thus the tefillah is still very powerful.

Both aspects of tefillah are very important, and each one by itself can also effect great changes. Simply saying the words is already effective. And having כוונה and showing effort for tefillah and love for Hashem is also very powerful. Together, both an accurate recital of the tefillos, accompanied by sufficient intentions has far-reaching effects.

Utilizing All our Weapons

In פרשת ויחי, before Yaakov Avinu was niftar, he benched Yosef and granted him an extra portion in Eretz Yisroel. He said שלקחתי מיד האמרי בחרבי ובקשתי (מח יב) I took this part of the land from the Emori, using my sword and bow and arrow. Targum translates it as בצלותי בבעתי the two weapons are a reference to two expressions of tefillah, meaning that Yaakov had acquired this land using different types of tefillah. The Brisker Rav explains the difference between these two types of tefillah and why they are compared to a sword and bow and arrow. Chazal established that a person will be able to daven in two ways; both reciting the established tefillos that the אנשי כנסת הגדולה prepared for us, and using his own heartfelt words to praise and beseech our Father.

The sword is a sharp weapon that is inherently powerful, upon contact the mighty blade can exact a high toll. This is like the tefillos that Chazal established, they are inherently powerful, and simply reciting them can have a great effect. The effect of the arrow however,

is dependent upon the mastery and strength of the shooter. If the shooter pulls it towards himself accurately and with precision then it can hit the target with a deadly bow. So too, the tefillos that we utter in our own words must be heartfelt, said with passion and love, in order to reach their target. Both forms of tefillah are extremely powerful and should be utilized as an expression of our love and desire for closeness with Hashem as well as to beseech Him for our needs.

Additionally, one must surely do his utmost to daven with an understanding of what the words mean, and with deep concentration and thought for every word in every tefillah. Still, if one stumbled and did not daven in an ideal fashion, the simple act of stating the words are extremely beloved on High, and have the power of a sword - to affect change and bring blessings upon us.

Never Underestimate the Power of Tefillah

As previously expounded, one must not forget the power of our tefilla, since this is what's our special koach, as the Midyanim had noted and excluded any other imaginable powers we can possess his strength is only in his mouth **אין כחו אלא בפה**.

In the times of the Ksav Sofer - R Shmuel Binyamin Sofer - the son of Chasam Sofer, there was a severe tragedy which befell a certain Yid. An incident occurred where a thief robbed a set of money and expensive valuables from the mayor of the town. Whilst performing this cunning act, he was noticed, and people started chasing after him. Whilst on his escape, the robber threw the collection finery into the house of a Yid who was actually his landlord in order to save himself. This way, everyone will think it was this Yid who stole the money and he would be saved.

Although he didn't completely get away with it, he told the authorities that he had been employed by his Yid to perform the robbery for him. His lies were believed and the authorities saw this

Yid as the main culprit whilst he got away with only a small punishment. The Yid was subjected to capital punishment.

Since the Ksav Sofer was Rav then in Pressburg, he tried all different ways of convincing authorities that it is not this Yid's fault. Nothing worked. Every night, he would faint of exhaustion and agmas nefesh. One night his saintly father appeared to him in a dream, asking him 'How is it that you're not doing anything for this Yid?' Dumbfounded, he responded: 'Have I not done everything in my power?!' To this, the Chasam Sofer replied, you forgot the main thing, you haven't davened.

Reinvigorated, the Ksav Sofer assembled everyone in the town - men, women and children in the middle of the night - and ordered them to be mispallel for this yid.

Miraculously, the following morning, the authorities decided to once again cross examine the actual robber since it might lead to setting the facts straight. After intense interrogations, they realized he was contradicting himself a few times. The truth emerged, and the Yid was deemed completely innocent.

Once again, this serves as a reminder that although we may need to do some hishtadlus, our main power is tefilla. We must ensure never to underestimate this power!

May we be zoche to utilize our greatest gift, the power of tefillah, to get closer to our Father and effect the final geulah, במהרה בימינו אמן.

גוט שבת



