

Bolok

בלק

The Gemara (Sukkah 52a) says that the yetzer ha'ra appears to the righteous as a mountain and to the wicked as a thin hair. **R' Yosef Yoizel Horowitz z"l** (1847-1919; the Alter of Novardok) explains: The Gemara (Shabbat 105b) teaches that the yetzer ha'ra entices a person to stray by starting with one small sin. The wicked are those who say, "What's so terrible? This is just a small sin, like a hair!" The righteous, however, have foresight. They see the mountain that this small sin will develop into. (Madregat Ha'adam: Ma'amar Tikkun Ha'middot)

ויבאו אל בלעם ויאמרו לו כה אמר בלק בן צפור אל נא תמנע מהלך אלי

"They came to Bil'am and said to him, 'So said Balak son of Tzippor, 'Do not refrain from going to me'." (22:16) R' Shlomo Oheiv z"l (Ragusa, Italy; late 1500s) writes: Commentaries ask why Balak said, "Do not refrain from going to me," when he should have said, "Do not refrain from coming to me." It appears to me, writes R' Oheiv, that this was intended to show honor to Bil'am. Generally, a lesser person "comes" to a greater person. Therefore, Balak did not say to Bil'am, "Come to me." Rather, Balak used words that could be understood to mean, "As you are going about your own business, please go in my direction." (Shemen Ha'tov)

ויען בלעם ויאמר אל-עבדי בלק אם-יתן-לי בלק מלא ביתו כסף וזהב לא אוכל לעבר את-פי ה' אלהי לעשות קטנה או גדולה **"his houseful of silver and gold..."** (22:18) In this week's parsha, Balak, the King of Moav sends high-ranking officials to commission Balaam to curse the Jewish people. Hashem appears to Balaam and tells him not to go. Balaam's response to Balak's officials is: "If Balak would give me his household of silver and gold, I

could not transgress the word of Hashem." Our Sages see in this response the corrupt nature of Balaam's character. Rashi explains that by mentioning a houseful of gold and silver, he reveals his greed (as if to say that if he were able to transgress the word of Hashem, he would, but only for a huge sum of money). Many of the commentaries attempt to differentiate between the statement of Balaam and that of Rabbi Yossi Ben Kismah in Pirkei Avos. Rabbi Yossi Ben Kismah relates the story of how he was invited to leave the city of his residence, a city renowned for its Torah scholars, in order to join a different city which was devoid of Torah. His response to the invitation was, "If you give me all the gold and silver and precious gems in the world, I will not leave my city of accomplished Torah scholars." How is this response different than Balaam's which says that ? One could, perhaps, say the difference is the following: Balaam was more specific in his request for the net value of Balak's estate, indicating his true desire, while Rabbi Yossi Ben Kismah did not quote a definite amount of money. However, this would create a new difficulty after with a statement made by King David in the Book of Psalms. There, King David affirms his love for the Torah with the verse, "Your Torah is more valuable to me than thousands of gold and silver (pieces)." Clearly, from specifying an amount does not indicate greed. The answer lies in the careful reading of Rashi. Rashi says that from the verse we see the corrupt nature of Balaam's character, for he desired the wealth of others. Rashi explains that Balaam's wickedness is revealed by his focus on the wealth of Balak, rather than the mere mention of money. The desire for greater wealth is intrinsic to human nature. However, it is of wicked nature to specifically desire to possess that which is owned by another. (Rabbi Zweig on the Torah)

Bilam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "If Balak will give me his houseful of silver and gold, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem, my G-d, to do anything small or great" (22:18) R' Avraham Grodzensky z"l hy"d (mashgiach of the Slobodka Yeshiva; killed in the

Holocaust) taught: We read (Tehilim 19:10), "The fear of Hashem is pure." In fact, one can have fear of Hashem which is pure or fear of Hashem which is not pure. It all depends on a person's character. King David said (Tehilim 27:4), "One thing I asked of Hashem ... Would that I dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life." These words demonstrate fear of Hashem which is pure. However, if one has any ulterior motives, then his fear of Hashem is not pure. Still, it can be "more pure" than the fear of Hashem felt by those on a lower level. Even the person who descends to the lowest possible level still has some fear of Hashem. Our Sages hold Bilam out (in Pirkei Avot) as the symbol of the worst possible character traits, yet even he acknowledged G-d's dominion over him (in the above verse). Nevertheless, Bilam sought to curse Bnei Yisrael, and his fear of Hashem had little practical impact on his behavior. Why? Because he was blinded by the bribes that Balak offered him. (Torat Avraham)

Dog fight

"וירא בלק את כל אשר עשה ישראל לאמורי" - משל למה הדבר דומה? לזאב שבא וחטף גדי מן הצאן. והיה שם כלב של קדרים, שיצא והיה מנבח בו ומריב עמו. אמר לו הזאב: אתה כלב של קדרים, למה אתה מנבח ומריב עמי? שמא נטלתי דבר משלכם? לא נטלתי אלא מעדרו של רועה, ואתה מה לך בעסק הזה? וזהו שנאמר "מחזיק באזני כלב, עובר מתעבר על ריב לא לוי" [משלי כ"ו, י"ז]. [ילקוט שמעוני].

ויבא אלקים אל בלעם לילה ויאמר לו אם לקרא לך באו אנשים קום לך אתם ואך את הדבר אשר אדבר אליך אתו תעשה

Hashem said to Bilam go with them, but the things I say to you is what you are permitted to do. It is very obvious from this Pasuk that Hashem did not wish Bilam to curse Benai Yisroel. So why did Hashem let Bilam go? Why did Hashem give permission? We see from here the power that is given to the Yetzer Horah. A situation where it is obvious even to Bilam that he will not be successful in cursing the Jews and yet he tried with all his effort to to it anyway. A person should learn from this to try to understand the Evil Inclination and learn to conquer it. (Rabbi Moshe Feinstein)

ויעמד מלאך ה' במשעול הכרמים גדר מזה וגדר מזה

"The angel of Hashem stood in the path of the vineyards, a fence on this side and a fence on that side." (22:24) Rashi z"l writes: The term "Gader" / "fence," without further definition, is one of stone. [Until here from Rashi] **R' Yochanan Luria** z"l (1440-1511; Alsace) asks: How does Rashi know that the fence was made of stone. Maybe it was made of wood? He answers: Kabbalists say that Bil'am was a Gilgul / reincarnation of the soul of Lavan, who had taken an oath (Bereishit 31:52), "This mound [of stones] shall be witness, and the monument shall be witness, that I may not cross over to you past this mound . . ." The mound of stones became the fence on either side that tried to remind Lavan/Bil'am of his oath. In this light, R' Luria adds, we can understand Bil'am's words (23:20), "Behold! to bless have I received— He has blessed, and I shall not contradict it." Besides referring to Hashem, this verse can mean: It was my desire to bless Bnei Yisrael, as we read (Bereishit 32:1), "Lavan awoke early in the morning; he kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them." I cannot now retract that blessing and curse them. (Meshivat Nafesh)

Just keep away

"ויאמר אלקים אל בלעם לא תלך עמהם" - אמר לו: אם כן אקללם במקומי - אמר לו: "לא תאר את העם". אמר לו: אם כן: אברכם. אמר לו: אין הם צריכים לברכתך - "כי ברוך הוא". משל שאומרים לדבורה: לא מדבשך ולא מעקצך.
[במדבר רבה כ', ט'].

ויפתח ה' את-פי האתון ותאמר לבלעם העשיתי לך כי הכיתני זה שלש רגלים

Hashem opened the mouth of the she-donkey (22:28)

Regarding the return of the Ark of the Covenant from the Pelishtim, the Ritva cites the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 24b) on the following verse (Shemuel I 6:12): "The cows set out on the direct road [vayisharnah] [root: Y,Sh,R] on the road to Beth-Shemesh. What is the meaning of the word 'vayisharnah'? Said R. Yochanan in the name of R. Meir: They sang praise [root: Sh,Y,R]." Now these cows miraculously uttered songs of praise in the Holy Tongue, yet this wonder is not listed in Pirkei Avos among the miracles that were

created on the first Sabbath eve! The reason for this omission is based on the fact that Bilam's she-donkey's Hebrew language declaration is mentioned explicitly in the Torah, and that verbal communication serves as a general category for any similar recurrence. (Kaftor Voferach- Rabbi Yisroel Avrohom Stein)

"Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey and it said to Bilam . . ." (22:28) **R' Shimon bar Tzemach Duran** z"l (Rashbetz; Spain; 1361-1444) writes: One should have no trouble accepting this, since we see several species of birds that can be taught to speak. He adds: The reason that Hashem showed this to Bilam was to teach him that just as He gives the power of speech to creatures that do not ordinarily speak, so He can take away the freedom to speak from those who usually have it--as He does in our parashah to Bilam. (Magen Avot)

כי-מראש צורים אראנו ומגבעות אשורנו
הן-עם לבדד ישכון ובגוים לא יתחשב

Behold it is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations.

Bilam understood the characteristics of Benai Yisroel. All the while that they are among themselves and separate from the other nations they will dwell in peace, successful and under no one's control. But if they will mix with the other nations Hashem will cause that they have no importance or stature. And in fact we will be laughed at and attacked (Bais Halevi)

"Behold! it is a nation that will dwell in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations"

(23:9) The message of the gentile prophet Bilam, writes **R' Aharon Lewin** z"l hy'd (the "Reisher Rav"; rabbi of Rzeszow, Poland and member of the Polish Senate from the Agudath Israel party who was murdered by the Nazis), is that any attempt by the Jewish People to assimilate into the non-Jewish world must inevitably lead to the former's destruction. If the nation does not dwell in solitude, it will not be reckoned at all because it will ultimately disappear. How can we protect ourselves? R' Lewin writes that one answer is provided by the following enigmatic statement of the

Gemara (Menachot 43b): The verse (Bamidbar 15:39) states: "It shall constitute tzitzit for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them." [Says the Gemara:] See this mitzvah and remember another mitzvah. Which mitzvah? Kilayim! R' Lewin explains: Kilayim is the prohibition against mixing species. For example, the Torah prohibits planting wheat and grapes together. Likewise, the Torah prohibits interbreeding animals of different species (as defined by halachah). The mitzvah of Kilayim reminds us that G-d created each plant and animal with unique characteristics and He intends that each remain unique. Similarly, G-d created separate nations. In particular, He separated Klal Yisrael from the other nations, and He intends that it remain separate. What aid did He give us to remind us of our separateness? He gave us a uniform, i.e., tzitzit. When we see ourselves in that uniform, we will remember our own separateness. (Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun)

No love lost

כי מראש צורים אראנו - להודיעך שנאתו של אותו רשע, שמתוך ברכותיו אתה יודע מחשבותיו. משל למה הדבר דומה? לאדם שבא לקוץ את האילן. מי שאינו בקי, מתחיל קוצץ את הענפים, כל ענף וענף לחוד - ומתייגע. אבל הפקח בדבר מגלה את הרשעים וקוצץ... כך אמר אותו רשע: מה אני מקלל לכל שבט ושבט, הרי אני הולך לרשעים וקוצץ. בא ליגע ברשעים ומצאם קשים, לכך נאמר "כי מראש צורים אראנו" - "מראש צורים" אלו האבות, "מגבעות אשורנו", אלו האמהות. דבר אחר: "כי מראש צורים אראנו" - אמר: אני רואה את ישראל שקדמו לבראשית ברייתו של העולם, משל למלך שהיה מבקש לבנות, והיה חופר ויורד ומבקש לשים היסודות, והיה מוצא בצות של מים, וכן במקומות הרבה לא מצא - עד שחפר במקום אחד ומצא למטה פטרא [סלע]. אמר: כאן אני בונה ונתן היסוד ובה. כך הקב"ה כשהיה מבקש לברוא את העולם, והיה יושב ומתבונן בדור אנוש ובדור המבול. אמר: היאך אני בורא את העולם ורשעים אלה עומדים ומכעיסים אותי? כיון שצפה הקב"ה באברהם אבינו שעתידי לעמוד, אמר: הרי מצאתי פטרא לבנות עליה וליסד את העולם, ולכך קרא את אברהם "צור", שנאמר "הביטו על צור חוצבתם" [ישעיהו נ"א, א'].
[במדבר רבה כ', ט"ז וג"כ ילקוט שמעוני].

מי מנה עפר יעקב ומספר את-רבע ישראל
תמת נפשי מות ישרים ותהי אחריתי כמהו

May my soul die the death of the upright and may my end be like his (23:10). Bilam wanted for himself the same kind of death that is reserved

for Tzadikim. He didn't understand that one must earn the right for that kind of death. It is earned by living the life of the Tzadikim - then you can die the death of Tzadikim. Bilam wanted the reward without the lifelong work that earns it (Chofetz Chaim)

“Who has counted the dust of Yaakov?” (23:10) R' Yosef Shaul Nathanson z"l (1808-1875; rabbi of L'vov, Galicia and leading Halachic authority) writes: Bnei Yisrael are compared many times to the dust or sand of the earth. Just as mankind tramples the earth, but ultimately will be covered by it, so the Jewish People are trampled upon now, but ultimately will rise above all other peoples. (Divrei Shaul)

הנה ברך לקחתי וברך ולא אשיבנה
“Behold! to bless have I received . . .” (23:20) The usual interpretation of Bilam's words is: “I have received a commandment to bless.” **R' Yitzchak ibn Arroyo z"l (Salonika; 16th century)** offers another interpretation: Hashem said to Avraham Avinu (Bereishit 12:3), “I will bless those who bless you.” Thus, Bilam reason: If I bless the Jewish People, I will have received a blessing myself. (Tanchumot Kel)

לא-הביט און ביעקב ולא-ראה עמל בישראל
ה' אלקינו עמו ותרועת מלך בו
“He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no perversity in Yisroel. Hashem his G-d is with him, and the friendship of the King is in him.” (23:21) The commentators translate “teruas melech” as “the friendship of the King”, “teruas” being from the word “rayus” – “friendship”. Rashi explains the verse as Balaam expressing the futility of any attempt to curse Bnei Yisroel, for Hashem does not scrutinize their iniquity nor criticize them for their shortcomings, even when they provoke Him by maliciously violating His word [23:21]. Why would not criticizing a person for his wrongdoing be an expression of friendship? On the contrary, a true friend is not afraid to criticize, for that is the manner in which he expresses his concern for his friend's well-being. In Parshas Kedoshim we find the commandment “ve'ahavta lerayacha kamocha” – “you should love your friend as you love yourself [19:18].”

Translating “rayacha” as “neighbor” is incorrect. Rayacha is derived from the word “rayus” – “friendship”. From this verse we can derive that in the hierarchy of relationships, love is greater than friendship, for we are commanded to love a person who already is our friend: “ve'ahavta lerayacha”. In the last of the Sheva Berachos, the seven blessings established by the Rabbis as part of the wedding ceremony, we thank Hashem for the various levels of relationships which can be attained by the bride and groom. Presumably, we give thanks in ascending order. Here we say “ahava ve'achva shalom verayus” – “love, brotherhood, harmony, and friendship”. The implication is that the relationship of friendship transcends that of love. How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction? In his commentary that introduces Pirkei Avos, the Shmoneh Perakim, the **Rambam** cites Aristotle who defines various levels of friendship. The most common type are friends with whom a person shares experiences. Although he may enjoy their company, a person still maintains a facade, unwilling to present his vulnerabilities to them, for fear that they may use this information against him. Very rarely, do we find a friend in whom we place our complete trust and for whom we are willing to let down our guard and share our insecurities. This only occurs if we sense that this friend is completely dedicated to our growth and his actions are motivated by his concern for our best interests. There is no contradiction between the verse in Parshas Kedoshim and the terminology used at the Sheva Berachos. The verse is teaching us that we should learn to love our friends who fall into the first category. The Rabbis bless the married couple that their relationship should transcend from love to the friendship of the second category. It is difficult to accept criticism graciously, especially when the criticism emanates from an injured party. The reason for this is that we convince ourselves that the criticism is not being levied because the person cares for us, rather because he is an injured party. This is only true of a friend from the first category. However, if the criticism is given by a person who we know to have our best interests at heart, we can accept

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that the rebuke is meant to prevent us from harmful behavior. Rashi's interpretation of the verse is thus: It is because of our “rayus” – friendship with Hashem that He does not criticize us for what we have done to Him. Hashem is willing to overlook the hurt that we cause Him. It is only for the damage which we cause ourselves that Hashem rebukes and punishes us, for Hashem's only agenda is our best interests. (Rabbi Zweig on the Torah)

“He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no perversity in Yisrael. Hashem his G-d is with him . . .” (23:21) Can this be true? Don't our Sages teach that one will be punished if he takes the attitude that “G-d overlooks sins”? **R' Noach Shalom Brazovsky z"l** (the Slonimer Rebbe in Yerushalayim) explains: When will G-d overlook sins? If a person sins because he cannot overcome his yetzer ha'ra, but at the same time that he commits the sin, he is broken within because he dreads the thought of transgressing G-d's Will. This is the meaning of the verse: “He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no perversity in Yisrael.” When? “When Hashem his G-d is with him” at the time he sins. (Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim) The Gemara (Sukkah 52a) says that the yetzer ha'ra appears to the righteous

as a mountain and to the wicked as a thin hair. **R' Yosef Yoizel Horowitz z"l** (1847-1919; the Alter of Novardok) explains: The Gemara (Shabbat 105b) teaches that the yetzer ha'ra entices a person to stray by starting with one small sin. The wicked are those who say, "What's so terrible? This is just a small sin, like a hair!" The righteous, however, have foresight. They see the mountain that this small sin will develop into. (Madregat Ha'adam: Ma'amar Tikkun Ha'middot)

Rabbi Avraham Elkanah Kahana Shapira, born May 20 1913; died September 27 2007 Ashkenazi chief rabbi, he was one of Israel's most divisive religious figures. Israel's Ashkenazi chief rabbi (1983-93), Avraham Shapira who has died, aged 94, was a champion of the settler movement, a revered adjudicator of Jewish law - and one of Israel's most divisive religious figures. Still active into his 90s he won notoriety - even among fellow Orthodox Jews - when he urged soldiers to disobey orders to evacuate the Gaza Strip in 2005. Shapira believed that the territory Israel had won in 1967 was promised by G-d and belonged to Jews in perpetuity. "Surrendering" an inch of sacred turf was tantamount to blasphemy, he felt. While such views are commonplace in rightist circles, Shapira's willingness to defy the army signified a huge breach within Israel's "national religious" camp, especially coming from such an establishment figure. His proteges traditionally encourage military service as a patriotic duty. Given that most NCOs now come from Israel's observant minority, the rabbi's stance seemed all the more corrosive. Shapira invariably warned against violence, and in 1995 he had condemned Yitzhak Rabin's ostensibly religious assassin as a man "without conscience or Jewish morality". Even so, his 2005 edict sparked fears of civil war. One Labour party legislator wanted him tried for incitement to rebellion. In the event only 40 soldiers obeyed his call. The disengagement passed with considerable ideological pantomime and sad tales of personal upheaval, but no serious casualties. None the less, opposition leader Yossi Beilin felt Shapira had misled an entire generation by hinting that divine

intervention may stop the process. When the pullout did happen, it left behind the "biggest spiritual crisis in years". Gaza was not Shapira's first foray into politics. Soon after leaving the chief rabbinate he co-founded the Rabbis' Union for the Complete Land of Israel. Its 500 clerics attacked the Oslo Accords for transferring land to Palestinians - forbidden under Jewish law, they claimed. In 2003 Shapira asked the Knesset to boycott a ceremony honouring the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. American evangelicals, he claimed, were deceiving Jews and Christians into imagining a "common faith shared by both". Shapira inspired thousands as dean of the Mercaz Ha-Rav Kook Yeshiva, one of Israel's largest talmudic academies and the flagship of religious Zionism. He probably wielded more influence in that post than as chief rabbi, as most settlement rabbis are Mercaz graduates. Many national religious Jews, who make up two-thirds of Israel's 12% observant minority, considered Shapira the gadol ha-dor - greatest authority of his generation on Jewish law. Shapira's tenure at Mercaz was not without incident. Rabbi Tzvi Tau, seen as an obvious spiritual heir, resented being bypassed as rosh yeshiva. Eventually Tau left Mercaz in 1997 to form the more philosophically engaged and Bible-focused Yeshivat Har ha-Mor. Shapira preferred students to study Talmud and halakha (Jewish law). The final straw came when Shapira accepted a state-backed diploma programme at Mercaz. He was born in Ottoman-ruled Jerusalem. His parents were of European origin and were Jews with deep roots in the holy city. He studied at Jerusalem's Etz Haim (Tree of Life) and Hebron Yeshivas. As his scholarly reputation grew he associated with leading Talmud sages, Rabbis **Yitzhak Ze'ev Soloveichik, Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein**. Palestine's pre-Zionist Old Yishuv were mostly orthodox Jews who regarded human efforts to rebuild Jewish sovereignty as premature, even heretical. Shapira, however, warmed to the contrary ideas of Palestine's first chief rabbi, Abraham Isaac Kook, and his son, Tzvi Yehuda Kook. Both characterised secular Zionists as unwitting pioneers in an act of divine

providence. Where the father stressed the bonds linking all Jews, Tzvi Yehuda, Shapira's predecessor at Mercaz Ha-Rav, helped turn "national religious" politicians from moderates into assertive messianists after the 1967 six-day war with Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Shapira moved to Mercaz Ha-Rav as a teacher after marrying Penina Ra'anana. In 1956 he was appointed to the Jerusalem supreme rabbinical court and became its head in 1971. As chief rabbi from 1983-93, Shapira pressed a nationalist agenda together with his equally fervent Sephardi (oriental Jewish) opposite number, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu. Though criticised by some for partisanship, he did rule in favour of recognising Ethiopian Beta Yisrael ("falashas") as authentic Jews. And in 1986, despite conservative opposition, he judged that organ transplants were acceptable in halakha. Rabbi Shapira also inspired the hardal trend within Zionism - an acronym that appropriately spells "mustard" in Hebrew and Arabic. Hardal represents formerly "modern orthodox" Jews who have adopted the theological rigour and outward paraphernalia of black-gaberdined ultra-orthodox haredim. Yet where traditional haredim generally shunned the secular state, hardalim championed its promotion - until the Gaza pullback, that is. Four sons survive him, of whom the eldest, **Rabbi Ya'akov**, succeeds him as rosh yeshiva at Mercaz Ha-Rav. (From *The Guardian Sunday* 7 October 2007)

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