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Sanhedrin Daf 105

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***Bilam***

The *Mishna* had stated that there were four commoners who have no share in the World to Come. They are: Bilam, Doeg, Achitophel, and Geichazi.

The *Gemora* analyzes the name Bilam: Bilam was called that because he was a man without a people (*belo am*). An alternate explanation: Bilam was called that because he confused the people (*bilah am*) of Israel.

The *Gemora* analyzes Bilam’s father’s name: Bilam was the son of Beor. Beor was called that because he copulated with a beast (*beir*).

The *Gemora* cites a *Tanna*: Beor is the same person as Kushan Rishasaim and the same person as Lavan the Aramean. He was called Beor because he copulated with a beast (*beir*); he was called Kushan Rishasaim because he perpetrated two evils upon Israel: one in the days of Yaakov and one in the days when the judges judged. What was his real name? It was Lavan the Aramean.

It is written: *Bilam was the son of Beor*, yet it is also written: *his son was Beor*, implying that Bilam was the father, not the son, of Beor. How can this be explained? Rabbi Yochanan said: Bilam’s father was his “son” in prophecy. This means that he was inferior to Bilam in prophetic powers. The truth is that Beor was Bilam’s biological father.

The *Gemora* notes: It is the wicked gentile Bilam who the *Mishna* states will not enter the World to Come. This

implies that other gentiles, who are not wicked, will be allowed to come there. Whose opinion does our *Mishna* follow? It follows the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua, for it was taught in a *braisa*: Rabbi Eliezer says: It is written: *The wicked will return to the grave, all peoples who are forgetful of God. The wicked will return to the grave*, these are the sinful Jews. *All peoples who are forgetful of God* - these are the gentiles; these are the words of Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Yehoshua said to him: But does the verse say: “*and*” *all people who are forgetful of God*, which would imply that it refers to a second group of people? It only states: *all peoples who are forgetful of God*, without the word “*and*.” Rather, the verse refers to only one group of people, as follows: *The wicked will return to the grave - and who are these wicked persons? All people who are forgetful of God.*

The *Gemora* notes: The wicked one (Bilam) set a sign for himself from where it is derived that he has no share in the World to Come. He said: *May my soul die the death of the upright, and my end will be like his*. He was saying as follows: If I die a natural death, then *my end* will be *like his*, i.e. my fate will be like that of the Jewish People, who are admitted to the World to Come, but if I do not die a natural death, then *Behold, I go to my people*, i.e. it will be an indication that I will join my wicked compatriots in Gehinnom.

It is written: *The elders of Moav and the elders of Midian went..... they came to Bilam and spoke to him the words of Balak*. The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: Midian and Moav had never been at peace with each other. Why did they suddenly join together? This can be explained by a parable



of two watchdogs who were with a flock of sheep, and the dogs were fiercely hostile to each other. A wolf attacked one of the dogs. The other one said: If I do not provide assistance to my fellow, today the wolf will kill him, and tomorrow he will attack me. So the two of them joined together and killed the wolf. Rav Pappa said: This is the meaning of the popular saying: The weasel and the cat made a wedding feast from the fat of an unlucky victim.

It is written: *The officers of Moav stayed with Bilam.* Where did the officers of Midian go? Once Bilam said to the Moabite and Midianite emissaries: *spend the night here and I shall give you a response*, the Midianites said: Is there any father that hates his own son? Of course not!

Rav Nachman said: Impudence prevails even against the opposition of heaven, for at first it is written: *Do not go with them*, and at the end it is written: *Arise, go with them.*

Rav Sheishes said: Impudence is "kingship without a crown," as it is written: *And I am on this day weak and have just been anointed king, and these men, the sons of Tzeruah, are too harsh for me, etc.*

Rabbi Yochanan said: Bilam was lame in one of his feet, as it is written: *He walked limping.* Shimshon was lame in both of his legs, as it is written: *Dan will be a serpent on the highway, slithering along the path, biting a horse's heels.* Bilam was blind in one of his eyes, as it is written: *with the open eye.* He used to perform sorcery with his male organ, as can be derived from the following verses: Here, describing Bilam it is written: *fallen and with uncovered eyes.* And elsewhere it is written: *And Haman was fallen upon the couch etc.*

It was said: Mar Zutra said: Bilam used to perform sorcery with his male organ. Mar the son of Ravina said: Bilam copulated with his she-donkey. The *Gemora* cites the sources for each respective opinion.

Bilam described himself as *one who knows the mind of the Supreme One.* Now Bilam did not even know what was on his animal's mind - could he possibly have known what was on the mind of the Supreme One? Of course not!

The *Gemora* explains: What do we mean when we say that he did not know what was on the mind of his animal? The Moabite emissaries said to Bilam: Why did you not ride a horse? He said to them: Usually I ride a horse. However, today I am riding a donkey, because I put my horses in the marshland to graze. Thereupon, the she-donkey said to Bilam in front of the Moabites: *"Am I not your she-donkey?"* "Merely for carrying burdens," Bilam said, trying to cut her off before she could contradict him further. *"That you have ridden on,"* the donkey continued, contradicting Bilam's contention that she was merely a beast of burden. "Only occasionally," Bilam said, implying that ordinarily he did not ride her. *"All your life until this day,"* the donkey went on, contradicting Bilam's contention that he had never ridden her except on rare occasions. "And not only that," she continued, "but at night I perform marital acts with you." [*Bilam was unable to respond to this retort of the donkey.*] Rather, what is the meaning of Bilam's description of himself as *one who knows the mind of the Supreme One*? It means that he knew how to determine the precise moment at which The Holy One, Blessed be He, becomes angry. If Bilam cursed someone at that exact moment, the curse would be effective. And this is the meaning of what the prophet Michah said to Israel: *My people, remember, please, what Balak king of Moav plotted, and what Bilam the son of Beor answered him; [remember the period] from the Shittim to the Gilgal, so that you may realize the benevolences of Hashem.* What is the meaning of *so that you may realize the benevolences of Hashem*? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel: Realize, please, how much compassion I carried out for you in that I did not become angry all those days, in the days of the wicked Bilam when he was looking to curse you, for had I become angry during any of those days, no remnant at all would have remained from the

enemies of Israel (*referring to the Jewish people*). This is the meaning of that which Bilam said to Balak: *How can I curse? God has not cursed, etc. How can I anger? Hashem has not become angry*. This teaches that throughout all those days God did not become angry.

It is written: *God is angered every day*. And how long does His anger last? It is but a moment, as it is written: *for His anger endures but a moment, life results from His favor* etc. Alternatively, the length of His anger is derived from the following verse: *Go, my people, enter your rooms, and close your doors behind you; hide for a moment till anger passes*. This clearly indicates that Hashem's anger does not last longer than a moment.

The *Gemora* asks: And when exactly does that moment of anger occur? The *Gemora* answers: It is during the first three hours of the day, when the comb of the rooster pales. Although it is always pale, at all other times there are red streaks inside it; however, at that time, there are no red streaks in it.

The *Gemora* relates an incident: There was a certain heretic who was in the neighborhood of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, who used to annoy Rabbi Yehoshua. One day, Rabbi Yehoshua took a rooster, tied it by its foot, sat it up, and gazed intently at it. He said: When that moment comes that the rooster's comb pales, I will curse the heretic, for then my curse will be effective. When that moment came, however, Rabbi Yehoshua dozed off. Rabbi Yehoshua thereupon said: One may deduce from here that it is not proper to have another punished on one's account, as it is written: *It is also not good for a righteous person to punish*, which implies that one should not pronounce curses even against heretics.

A *Tanna* taught in the name of Rabbi Meir: At the hour the sun shines in the morning, and the pagan kings place their crowns on their heads and bow to their sun in worship, at that moment Hashem immediately becomes angry.

It is written: *Bilam arose in the morning and saddled his she-donkey*. A *Tanna* taught in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Elozar: Love cancels the limitations imposed by high position, as may be seen by the case of Avraham, as it is written: *Avraham arose in the morning and saddled his donkey*. Hatred, too, cancels the limitations imposed by high position, as may be seen from the case of Bilam, as it is stated: *Bilam arose in the morning and saddled his she-donkey*.

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: A person should always engage in the study of Torah or the performance of a *mitzvah* even if not for its own sake, because from learning Torah and doing a *mitzvah* not for its own sake, he will eventually come to learn Torah or do a *mitzvah* for its own sake. For as a reward for the forty-two offerings that Balak offered up to Hashem, he merited that the convert Rus should be descended from him, as Rabbi Yose bar Huna said: Rus was the daughter of Eglon the grandson of Balak the king of Moav.

Rava said to Rabbah bar Mari: It is written: *May Hashem make the renown of Shlomo greater than your renown and may He exalt his throne higher than your throne*. Now is it appropriate to say such a thing to a king? Rabbah bar Mari said to Rava: You misunderstood the verse; they did not say "*greater than your renown*"; *something of your renown*" is what they said to him. For if you do not say this, then you must translate Shoftim 5:24 in the following manner: *May you be blessed more than the women (minashim), O Yael, wife of Chever the Keinite. May you be blessed more than the women in the tent (minashim ba'ohel)*. Now, who are "the women in the tent"? The Matriarchs: Sara, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah. Now is it appropriate to say that Devorah said of Yael that she should be more blessed than the Matriarchs? Certainly not! Rather, "*something of the blessing bestowed upon the Matriarch's*" is what the verse said. Here too in regard to the verse describing the extent



of Shlomo's renown, "something of your renown" is what they said to Dovid.

The *Gemora* notes that this disagrees with Rav Yosi bar Choni, for Rav Yosi bar Choni said: A man is jealous of everyone except his son and his disciple. [We see from here that a father would want his son to supersede him.]

It is written: *Hashem put a thing (davar) in Bilam's mouth.* What was this thing? Rabbi Eliezer says: It was an angel. Rabbi Yonasan says it was a hook.

Rabbi Yochanan said: From the blessing uttered by that wicked man, you can infer what was in his heart: He wanted to say that the Jews should not have any synagogues or study houses. Instead he was forced to say: *How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov.* He wanted to say: May the Divine Presence not rest upon the Jews. Instead, he was forced to say: *your dwelling places, O Israel.* He wanted to say: May their kingdom not endure. Instead, he was forced to say: *They stretch out like streams.* He wanted to say: May they have no olive orchards or vineyards. Instead he was forced to say: *like gardens by a river.* He wanted to say: May their fragrance not waft. Instead he was forced to say: *like fragrant aloes planted by Hashem.* He wanted to say: May they have no kings of imposing stature. Instead he was forced to say: *like cedars by the water,* renowned for their imposing stature. He wanted to say: May they not have any king who is the son of a king, i.e. a long-lasting dynasty. Instead he was forced to say: *May water flow from his wells,* a metaphor for children issuing from parents, indicating a stable and long-lasting dynasty. He wanted to say: May their kingdom not enjoy dominion over the nations. Instead he was forced to say: *and his seed in abundant waters,* a metaphor for the conquest of many nations. He wanted to say: May their kingdom not be strong. Instead he was forced to say: *may his kingdom be exalted over Agag.* He wanted to say: May their kingdom inspire no fear. Instead he was forced to say: *may his kingdom be imposingly exalted.*

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: All of Bilam's blessings were eventually converted into the curse he had intended, except for the curse regarding synagogues and study houses, as it is written: *And Hashem your God transformed Bilam's curse into a blessing for you, because Hashem your God loved you; the verse says curse, not curses.*

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeini said in the name of Rabbi Yonasan: What is the meaning of that which is written: *the wounds inflicted by a friend are trustworthy, while the kisses of an enemy are the reverse?* Better was the curse with which Achiyah the Shilonite cursed Israel than the blessing with which the wicked Bilam blessed them. Achiyah the Shilonite cursed them with the metaphor of a reed, as it is stated: *And Hashem will smite Israel like the reed that sways in the water,* etc. Just as this reed stands in a watery place, and its stalk regenerate when it is cut, and its roots are numerous; and even if all the winds of the world come and blow upon it, they cannot budge it from its place, rather, it merely sways to and fro with them; and as soon as the winds subside, the reed again stands upright in its place. So too the Jewish People will "sway" under the blows of its enemies, but will not be destroyed. Rather, it will revive and flourish again as soon as the storm of oppression passes. However, the wicked Bilam blessed them with the metaphor of a cedar. Just as this cedar tree does not stand in a watery place, and its roots are few, and its trunk does not regenerate once it is cut off; and even if all the ordinary winds of the world come and blow upon it, they cannot budge from its place, but when the powerful south wind blows upon it, it immediately uproots it and overturns it. So too the Jewish nation will, according to Bilam's blessing, not be easily brought down, but should the blow be sufficiently powerful, they will never recover. Moreover, the reed merited to have pens drawn from its ranks to be used to write scrolls of the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. (105a – 106a)

#### INSIGHTS TO THE DAF



## DAILY MASHAL

It is difficult to understand the opinion of Rabbah bar Mari, who maintains that it would have been improper for Dovid's courtiers to say to Dovid that the renown of Shlomo would be greater than the renown of Dovid. It is said that Elisha requested that a double portion of Eliyahu's spirit pass on Elisha, and Eliyahu granted this request. Moshe leaned both of his hands on Yehoshua, thereby conferring a full measure of his own prophetic powers upon his successor. It is evident from Scripture that a man is not jealous of his son and his disciple. Why should we assume that Dovid was jealous of Shlomo attaining being more renowned than him?

Rabbi Yonasan Eibschitz<sup>1</sup> writes that Elisha dared request from Eliyahu that a double portion of Eliyahu's spirit pass on to Elisha, because Elisha compared himself to a midget sitting on the shoulders of a giant. The midget can only see far because of the height of the giant. Similarly, Elisha's prophecy was only due to the Divine Spirit that rested upon Eliyahu.

This idea that the next generation draws its strength from the previous generation applies to a disciple who benefits from his teacher's wisdom or prophecy. Regarding a blessing, however, Rabbah bar Mari felt that it is improper for one to bless the son that he will be greater than his father, or that the disciple will be greater than the teacher. This is not a matter of jealousy, but an issue of respect. According to the words of Rabbi Yonasan Eibschitz, it would follow that the next generation has to demonstrate great respect for the previous generation, as the previous generation is the source for the future generation's greatness.

One must wonder why Hashem chose to rest His spirit on Bilam, who was depraved and wicked. Rashi<sup>2</sup> quotes the Medrash<sup>3</sup> that states that Hashem rested His spirit on Bilam for the honor of the Jewish People. Although the Jews were the recipients of Bilam's blessings, it would seem that the blessings should have come from a different source other than the wicked Bilam.

Let us understand the purpose of Bilam blessing the Jewish People. The Ohr Hachaim<sup>4</sup> writes that Bilam's blessings were analogous to what the Gemara<sup>5</sup> states concerning the good angel and prosecuting angel who escort a Jew home on Friday night. If the house is peaceful, then the good angel declares, "So it shall be next week," and the prosecuting angel must respond by saying "Amen." Similarly, Bilam, the archenemy of the Jewish People, was forced against his will to bless the Jewish People. Based on this perspective, it follows that the biggest prosecutor of all should bless the Jewish People. Only Bilam, in his wickedness and depravity, was considered "worthy" of involuntarily blessing the Jewish People.

This idea carries with it an important message regarding our conduct towards our Jewish brethren. We should never play the role of prosecutor, as our greatest enemy was forced to bless the Jewish People. Certainly we, who are instructed to love our friend like ourselves, should only seek the good of our brethren.

<sup>1</sup> Yaaros Devash Volume I Derush 16

<sup>2</sup> Bamidbar 23:4; see also Ramban 22:31

<sup>3</sup> Breishis Rabbah 52:5

<sup>4</sup> Bamidbar 23:24; See also Rama Mipanno Maamar Tzivos Hashem 1

<sup>5</sup> Shabbos 119b