

# Vechol Maaminim



A Weekly Leaflet From "Bnei Emunim"

## PARASHAS BALAK

### IN THE PATHWAYS OF FAITH

Divrei Torah About Amen and Tefillah in the Parashah

#### Balak Looked at the War Between Yaakov and Shechem's Sons

**"וירא בלק בן צפור את כל אשר עשה ישראל לאמרי" (כב, ב-ג)**

Why does it say here "and Balak saw" instead of "and Balak heard"? Furthermore, why does it not say "everything that Bnei Yisrael did to the Emorites"?

The **Kli Yakar** explains: Kings of those times regularly kept a book of chronicles on their tables in which all the happenings since the days of their forebears were recorded. That is what it says here: "And Balak saw" in the book of chronicles before him "all that Yisrael did to the Emorites", the way Yaakov [called Yisrael] fought his war against the sons of Shechem, where he and his family were few against an entire nation, and yet, they prevailed. When he saw this, Balak understood that the success of Yaakov and his sons did not come from the might of their hand, but through the power of prayer, as the Gemara says (*Bava Basra* 123a) on the *passuk* (*Bereishis* 49:48): "that I took from the hand of the Emorites with my sword and my bow." *Charbi*, my sword, is *tefillah*, and *Kashti*, my bow, is a *bakashah*, a request." Therefore, he decided to use this same weapon against them, and that is why he summoned Bilam, whose power was in his mouth.

#### Power of the Mouth Is Exclusive to Am Yisrael

**"והרא האתון את מלאך ה' נצב בדרך וחרבו שלופה בידו" (כב, כג)**

"This is what he [the angel] said: The mouth was given to Yaakov, as it says, "the voice is the voice of Yaakov"... and all the other nations live by the sword, and you will switch your craft and come to them with theirs, then I will come to you with yours! That is why it says "and His sword was raised in His Hand." (*Bamidbar Rabba* 20:13)

The source of the *Midrash* is explained in *Eitz Yosef* (*ibid*): Unlike later, (*passuk* 31) where it says "shelufah" without a *vav*, here it is written with a *vav*. The *Midrash* learns from this that the angel intended to say to Bilam, "shelo peh [the mouth is his]" (same letters as *shelufah*) in other words, the power of the mouth belongs to Yaakov and you have no right to use it against him.

#### To Elevate Oneself in Tefillah Like a New Being

**"ויפתח ה' את פי האתון" (כב, כח)**

"He gave her the power to speak, similar to 'Hashem sefasai tiftach' (*Tehillim* 51:17), and all this was so that Bilam should be aroused to do *teshuvah*." (*Sforno*)

The Mashgiach of Mir, **Harav Yeruchem Halevi Levovitz**, ז"ל, asks (*Daas Torah V'eschanan*):

Why is there a comparison here between the request of David Hamelech to Hashem to send him *siyata diShmaya* so that he could stand before him in *tefillah* [*Hashem sefasai tiftach*] and the tremendous miracle of the opening of the mouth of the donkey, which was among the wonders created on Erev Shabbos, *Bein Hashemashos*?

Harav **Chaim Kamil**, Rosh Yeshivas Ofakim, explained: Indeed! According to the *Sforno* we learn that through proper preparation for *tefillah*, a person can effect within himself each day a miracle the likes of getting the donkey to speak—to elevate himself from the level of a person who is not worthy of uttering *tefillah* to a person who is given the power to speak before the King of Kings. That is why the

#### Amen Turns a Curse Into a Blessing

**"ה' אלקיו עמו ותרועת מלך בו" (כג, כא)**

The *sefer Hagan Vederech Moshe* (day 11) says: "And when he makes a *brachah*... he must do so out loud so that his friend can reply amen, and if he does so, then if *challilah*, there is a curse decreed upon him, it is transformed into a *brachah*."

A hint to this can be found in this *passuk*:

It is know that Bilam wanted to curse Klal Yisrael in the short time that Hashem is angry each day. Being that one can only say one word during this time, Bilam wanted to say "*kalem*, destroy them," but Hashem turned it into the word "*melech*" as it says, "*Usruas Melech bo*," (*Avodah Zarah* 4b, and *Tosafos*, beginning with the word *rega*.)

The words "*kalem*" and "*melech*" are numerically equivalent to amen (with the *kollel*), indicating that replying amen turns the curse into a blessing, as the *Sefer Hagan* writes.

*Ereun Niflaos*, p. 54

opening of the donkey's mouth is compared the request that we ask before davening, "*Hashem sefasai tiftach*."

*Avodas Chaim*, p. 154

#### Kaddish Yasom in the Torah

**"מתת נפשי מות ישרים" (כג, י)**

Harav **Chaim of Friedburg**, the brother of the Maharal of Prague, explains: "My soul should die the death of the righteous." Bilam wanted to die the way Am Yisrael dies, when their sons elevate the soul

after the passing by the recital of *Kaddish Yasom*, after which ten worshipers recite the lofty praise: "*Yehei Shemei Rabba mevorach*."

This is hinted to in the word "*yesharim*," which is an acronym for "*yud*" [10] *yehei Shemei Rabba mevorach*.

*Iggeres Hatiyul*, according to *Tiyul Bapardes*

#### Teshuvah Annuls Decrees

**"לא יש אל ויכזב וכן אדם ויתנחם ההוא אמר ולא יעשה ודבר ולא יקימנה" (כג, ט)**

Harav **Avraham Abba Hertz**, the Maggid of Pressburg, explains by way of a *remez*: "*Lo ish kel vichazev*," the way of the world is that Hashem does not retract His decrees, but if "*uben adam veyisnechan*" a person regrets his wrongs and repents, then Hashem will have mercy on him and tear up the decree, and the words of the *passuk*, "*hahu amar velo yaaseh vediber velo yekimenah*" will be fulfilled.

Alaph Ksav, Vol. II, 860

#### Tekias Shofar: A Special Tefillah for Klal Yisrael

**"ה' אלקיו עמו ותרועת מלך בו" (כג, כא)**

From the words of the *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 32a), it is explained that the phrase "*useruas Melech bo*" refers to the *mitzvah* of *shofar*. Why did Bilam choose to praise them specifically about this *mitzvah*?

Harav **Yitzchak Zev of Brisk** explained: In the *nusach* of *Mussaf* of Rosh Hashanah we say, "*meivin umaazin mabit umakshiv lekol tekiaseinu*." This is a special praise to Hashem Who listens and hears the sounds of our *tekios*. We learn from here that the primary essence of the *mitzvah* of *tekias shofar* is *tefillah* and *bakashah*, but by contrast to regular *tefillah*, which we utter with our lips, this one is recited through the blowing of the *shofar*. As such, we can understand what Bilam was praising: by contrast to the nations of the world who can pray only with their mouths, Am Yisrael is heard by Hashem even when they daven by blowing the *shofar*.

*Birchas Avraham*, Megillah, 18a

#### Respect a Shul - At Least As Much As a Home

**"מה טוב אהלך יעקב משכנותיך ישראל" (כד, ה)**

Harav **Moshe Pollak**, Rav of Bonihad, explained: *Ohel* is one way a *bais medrash* is referred to, as it says (*Bereishis* 25:27) "*V'Yaakov Ish Tam yoshev ohalim*." The *passuk* should be explained like this, "*Mah tov*," how good it would be if "*ohalecha Yaakov*," your shuls and *batei medrash* would be as well tended and beautiful as "*mishkenosecha Yisrael*," the home of each person.

*Vayedaber Moshe*

**"ויהפך ה' אלקיך לך את הקללה לברכה" (דברים כג)**

"When one makes a *brachah*... he must do so out loud so that his friends should reply amen, and if he does so, then if *chas veshalom* there is a curse decreed upon him, it is transformed into a *brachah*."

(*Sefer Hagan Vederech Moshe*, day 11)

We all begin the day reciting *Birchos Hashachar Bechavrusa* so that someone can reply amen. *Yehi ratzon* that this will help turn all the difficult decrees into *brachos*—and let us say amen.



## Ana Bekoach

After reciting the *Seder Korban Tamid*, the ones who compiled the *siddur* established that we recite the holy *piyut* of *Ana Bekoach*, composed by the Tanna, Rabi Nechunya ben Hakanah (*Shu"t Harashb" a*, Vol. I, 220). There are many great and esoteric secrets hinted to in this *piyut*, and as it is known, its 42 words are a reference to the Shem Hameforash, which has 42 letters, and with whose power the world was created.

The reason it was established to recite it after the *parashah* of the *Tamid* and the other *korbanos* is explained by the author of *Seder Hayom (Sefer Korbanos)* in two ways:

One, because these *parshiyos* do not mention *Birchas Kohanim*, which was recited each morning in the *Bais HaMikdash*, when the Kohanim would bless the nation with the Shem Hameforash of 42 letters, therefore this *tefillah* is recited to hint to this blessing.

The second reason is that this *piyut* is a *tefillah* to Hashem to see our suffering and redeem us from the exile, and there is no better time and place to daven with *kavanah* over the difficulties of the *galus* more than the moments when we mention the service of the *korbanos* that we merited to have when the *Bais HaMikdash* was standing, and our hearts yearn and hope for it to be rebuilt.

## Tatir Tzerurah

In the first line of the *piyut* we ask: '*Ana bekoach gedulas yemincha tatir tzerurah*,' meaning, release Your nation Yisrael from the bonds of the *galus* that they are tied in.

*Maseches Bechoros* (8b) brings down the question of the elders of Athens of Rabi Yehoshua ben Chananya: 'The nature of salt is to preserve meat so that it should not smell. But how can the salt be preserved so that it does not smell?'

As it is known, the questions of the elders of Athens and Rabi Yehoshua ben Chananya's response contain many deep secrets. With this question, Harav Chaim of Volozhin (*Drashos, Rosh Hashanah*) explained that the elders of Athens meant to ask: the suffering of *galus* is intended to cleanse the sins of Am Yisrael, like salt that cleans the meat, but because this suffering in itself causes Am Yisrael to sin, then it is an endless cycle. How can the sins be atoned for if the actual suffering causes sins?

Bearing this in mind, this is what we are asking Hashem: '*Ana bekoach...tatir tzerurah*,' only with Your great strength will You be able to release us from the tight bonds of the *galus* that is so long, and thus our sins multiply and distance us from the *Geulah*. (*Rinas Yitzchak, Kabbalas Shabbos*)

Harav Yitzchak Silber, *zt"l*, related that after World War Two, the Communists clamped down on Torah observant refugees in Russia. In their desire to eradicate every remnant of religion among their subjects, the Communists announced that the workweek would be shortened to six days, but the vacation day would be neither Saturday nor Sunday, of course.

That year, Yom Kippur fell out on the day off. The Jews were overjoyed that they would not have to work on Yom Kippur, but the evil Communists who heard about this quickly dispatched a telegram ordering everyone to report for work normally that day. Anyone who was absent would be fired on the spot. Being fired in those days meant dying of hunger.

A *minyana* of Jews were *moser nefesh* to convene in the shul in Moscow that day; they opted to lose their jobs for *Kavod Shamayim*. Aside from them, the shul was teeming with informers and spies.

With great courage, the Rav, Harav Kalmans, *zt"l*, stood up and delivered his *drashah*, which was really just a short story with a very sharp message: There was a Jew who devotedly raised a little chick, providing for its every need, feeding it, and cleaning it. It grew into a large chicken, but then, it was suddenly stolen from the

coop. The man realized that someone had laid his eyes on the chicken and sought to eat its meat. Therefore, he hurried to the slaughterhouse with the hope of finding his stolen chicken.

When he arrived, he noticed the thief standing with the chicken in his hand a moment before it was slaughtered, and he began to shout: 'Thief, give me back my chicken!' But the thief refused and claimed that this was a chicken that he had raised at home. The two argued until a wise man advised them: let the chicken go free near the yard of the person who claimed it was stolen and see if he goes inside himself.

The rav concluded his speech and said: '*Ana bekoach gedulas yemincha tatir tzerurah*,' Hashem, release the band that is holding your children, and see where they turn to when they are free.

In the afternoon, towards Neilah, everyone understood the sharp message, and one by one, hundreds of Jews who had just been released from work hurried to the shul in order to at least be able to daven the *tefillas* at the end of the holy day. (*Shabbos Supplement Toldos 5761*)

## Dorshei Yichudcha Kevavas Shamrem

Later in the *tefillah* we ask: '*na gibor, dorshei yechudcha kevavas shamrem*.' In other words, protect those who learn the secrets of Torah in order to be *meyached yehudim* from all pain that may disturb their holy learning. (*Eitz Yosef*)

This request is especially needed for those who delve into the inner works of Torah, as *Chazal* say (*Chagigah* 14b) about the four holy Tannaim who learned *Chochmas Hanistar*, and only one of them emerged safely. Therefore, we ask of them that they should not stray from the true path and should not be harmed as a result of their learning. (Harav Eliezer Moshe Horowitz, *Siddur Hatehillah Vehatiferes*)

There is also a request here for the *chachamim* who disseminate Torah: bless them with money so that they should not be in dire straits, purify them from bad thoughts, and always perform *tzeddakah* with them, and save us for the sake of Your Name.

This reward of '*tzidkasecha tamid gamlem*' is a measure for a measure: just like the *tzaddikim* do not stop learning the holy Torah and serving Hashem for a moment, so too, we ask that HaKadosh Baruch Hu's mercy should be *tamid* on them, and He should not pause for even a moment from caring for all their needs. (*Lechem Rav, Tefillas Minchah*)

## Shaavaseinu Kabel Ushma Tzaakaseinu Yodea Taalumos

By way of nature, a person cannot detail all the difficulties he experiences every day. But when he cries from the depths of his soul, you can hear in this cry an expression of all the suffering he is going through.

That is what we are asking from Hashem: hear our cries, because only You—who knows all secrets—can understand the depths of our despair in this *galus*. (*Lechem Rav, ibid*).

Let us conclude with a question relating to this phrase: There seems to be a contradiction here. If Hashem knows all secrets why do we need to cry to Him? The explanation is: the reason a person may not raise his voice in prayer is because he must believe that Hashem knows even what is in the heart of a person. Therefore, after we ask here '*ushma tzaakaseinu*' we add, '*Yodea taalumos*,' as if to say: the fact that we are screaming because of the suffering in the *galus* does not contradict our firm belief that You know all secrets, and therefore, we ask that You respond to our screams and redeem us. (*Siddur Hatehillah Vehatiferes*)

## The Decree Leads to Salvation

Like tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews, Zelig Leib, a G-d fearing, diligent *bachur* who lived in Satmar, was taken to the notorious Mukatabor labor camps, where he would spend the next few months doing inhumanly harsh labor under the close guard of the Hungarian soldiers.

The camp where Zelig Leib was incarcerated was overseen by a virulently anti-Semitic commander, who never missed an opportunity to abuse and humiliate his inmates. Each morning, after a night of fitful sleeping in the overcrowded conditions, he would announce: 'Everyone up, together!' And they would have to obey him.

If one prisoner preceded the other by even a second, they all had to lie down again and try to carry out the order a second time. But because it was virtually impossible to comply, this could repeat itself up to twenty times until the officer's appetite for cruelty was satiated, until the next time.

Right after the morning "exercise" the prisoners were taken to the shower room, which was nothing more than a big pit in the floor of the forest. One after another they had to enter the pit on one side and emerge on the other. Obviously, during the winter, this was virtually impossible, and many of the prisoners tried to evade this "pleasure" with various excuses.

To conclude the morning routine, the prisoners had to stand for "appel", roll call, and the commander would pass by them with his lists to make sure that not even one person was missing.

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For Zelig Leib, this time was literally a lifesaver. During the few months when the people who washed organized themselves for the roll call, he hurried to a side corner, took out his *tefillin* from a hidden pocket, donned them rapidly, recited the first *parashah* of *Krias Shema*, took them off and hurried to stand beside his friends.

It was on a freezing winter day that Zelig Leib evaded washing in the pit, like many others, when he realized he was earlier than usual. He felt a holy urge to tarry a bit longer with his *tefillin* so he could recite the second *parashah* of *Krias Shema* as well.

But when he reached the roll call, most of the people were already in place, and the sadistic commander stared at him like a lion waiting to pounce on his prey.

"Put out your hand!" the officer commanded, and Zelig Leib hastily complied.

The marks of the *retzuos* were clearly visible on his skinny forearm. From the hand, the commander's eyes traveled to the young man's head, which was completely dry, and he said, "Dirty Jews that you are! It's not enough that you don't wash yourselves like humans, you then add insult to injury by wrapping yourselves in straps of animal skins and muttering senselessly all day."

"I have decided to put an end to this," the officer continued. "Therefore I decree that tomorrow morning, you will all bring your *tefillin* to me and I will burn them in front of everyone, and this way I will educate you to act like humans."

"And you," the officer pointed to Zelig Leib who was trembling in fear, "will appear before the camp judge this afternoon and he will rule on the fitting punishment for your actions!"

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You can imagine how distraught Zelig Leib was, not only because of his own impending punishment, or the *tefillin* that he would be losing, but because of the tremendous *chillul Hashem* that such a scene would cause. There were Jewish prisoners who were far from Torah observance, and the site of *tefillin* burning could reduce their faith even further.

In his anguish, he began davening to Hashem to spare him from the evildoers and glorify His Name in this world, so that everyone would see clearly that no bad could come from endangering oneself to don *tefillin* and recite *Krias Shema*.

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A few hours later, Zelig Leib was taken to the judge, as his friends looked on pityingly. He didn't have much of a chance, and they knew that the judge hated Jews even more than the camp commander did.

Still, Zelig Leib's *emunah* did not flag, and as he walked, he murmured *pesukim* of *emunah* and even davened quietly, hoping for Hashem's compassion.

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The young men entered the courtroom and his eyes went dark. By contrast to the regular policy, no lawyer was assigned to defend him, and there seemed to be no chance for him in front of this judge.

The trial began with the knock of the gavel and the judge asked: 'Why was the boy called for trial?'

"Because he was late for roll call this morning," the commander replied confidently.

"Why were you late?" the judge turned to the *bachur*.

"Because I was praying," the latter replied innocently.

Shockingly, the judge accepted these words with understanding and turned angrily to the commander: "Did you think not to let the Jews pray? Prayer is a human need of the first degree and is even anchored in the laws of this country."

"Are there any further accusations against the young man?" the judge asked.

The commander, thoroughly thrown off by the unexpected rebuke, replied, "This boy does not wash like a human being, and even though we have allocated a set time for it, he evades doing so and prefers to remain filthy, and the proof is that his hair was completely dry during morning roll call."

"What do you say to that?" the judge turned to the boy.

"Very simple," he replied. "While I prayed, my hair had time to dry."

The commander tried one more desperate tactic: "Honored judge it is not conceivable that the Jews should be busy senselessly muttering all day long, it's not normal human behavior..."

"That is only," the judge cut him off, "because you do not allow them to pray in an organized fashion. As such I rule that from now on, you give all observant Jews an official time for prayer each morning, afternoon and evening so that they can continue their practices."

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Both the *bachur* and the commander gaped at the judge. They could not understand his most unexpected behavior.

It was apparent that the judge became uneasy by their staring because he couldn't explain his actions either. In his unease, he looked the young *bachur* up and down, as though apologetically, and his eyes rested on... a missing button on his shirt.

At that moment, all the wellsprings of hate inside him burst forth as he cried, "What nerve! To stand before a judge in such a degrading manner! I rule that this young man will lose his breakfast tomorrow because he violated the dignity of this courtroom!"

The *bachur* could hardly contain his sigh of relief, and hastily left the room.

He learned firsthand how great the power of *tefillah* is, and it defies all nature. Just like with Bilam in his time, the curse of the judge turned into a blessing, and the seemingly desperate situation turned out much better than imagined. From that day on all Jews in the camp were allowed to pray openly, with *tefillin*, in spite of the brutal commander.