

In this week's *Parashah*, we read how Bil'am tried unsuccessfully to curse *Bnei Yisrael*. R' Nosson Sternhartz z"l (1780-1845; foremost student of R' Nachman of Breslov z"l) writes: The power of *Bechirah* / free will is so great that a person can use it to draw the Divine spirit down from above and bring holiness into the world, or, G-d forbid, the opposite--*i.e.*, a person can draw some aspect of the Divine spirit upon himself in such a way that he mistakenly believes that he has *Ruach Ha'kodesh* / Divine inspiration and that he sees accurate visions. For example, who was more abominable than the evil Bil'am, may his name be blotted out! Nevertheless, our Sages say that his prophecy appeared, in some respects, to be equal to Moshe Rabbeinu's prophecy.

Therefore, continues R' Nosson, a person must be very cautious. As long as one knows that he is not yet as holy as he could be, he should humble himself and not reach above his station, for many people have reached too high and have stumbled greatly, R' Nosson writes. Rather, one should ask *Hashem* to help him ascend from his current level and assist him in sanctifying himself appropriately. One should use his *Bechirah* to choose to speak to *Hashem* often and at length, with the intention that, in this way, he will merit to subdue any wickedness within oneself completely.

The key, writes R' Nosson, is to use one's ability to speak to *Hashem*, for speech has immense power. Even one who has fallen very low can lift himself up by speaking to *Hashem*. (*Chumash Im Likkutei Halachot* 22:6)

Tefilah

This year, we will iy"H devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. This week, we continue discussing the thirteen types of prayer identified by the *Midrash Rabbah* and *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni*.

R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) writes: "*Tze'akah*" is a (usually) wordless cry emitted by one who feels as if there is such a storm in his heart, due to the enormity of his need, that he cannot articulate his prayer in words. The *Zohar* (*Shmot* 20a) teaches that this form of prayer is the most beloved to *Hashem*, and that one who uses it is never turned away completely empty-handed.

R' Pincus continues: When a person analyzes his situation and realizes that he is desperate, and he articulates his request to *Hashem*, that is "*Shav'ah*" [discussed last week]. This may be compared to someone who is accosted by highwaymen and shouts, "Help!" When a person cannot even form the word "Help," so he screams wordlessly, that is *Tze'akah*. If a person merits, he will understand that life is made up of a series of situations in which we are desperate for *Hashem's* intervention, and he will, from time-to-time, employ this form of prayer.

R' Pincus concludes: *Tze'akah* does not need to be audible; it may remain in the recesses of a person's heart. It does not need to be completely without words; it merely is characterized by the inability to form coherent thoughts. Sometimes, *Tze'akah* results from great pain; other times, it results from a feeling that one has distanced himself from *Hashem* and is unworthy to approach closer. Often, these feelings cause a person to stop praying altogether, but what he really needs instead is *Tze'akah*. (*She'arim B'tefilah* p.41)

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Harav Yechiel Shraga Feivish Halevi Tarshish a"h (16 Tammuz)



The editors of *Hamaayan* extend condolences to our dedicated reader and supporter, Mrs. Dimont, on the passing of her son Chayim a"h.

“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*)

“How good are your tents, Yaakov, your dwelling places, Yisrael!” (24:5)

R' Yisrael Yaakov Algazi z"l (1680-1757; Izmir, Turkey, and Yerushalayim) writes that these words of Bil'am are what *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* refers to when it relates that the gentile nations gathered before Bil'am and asked how they could wage war successfully against *Bnei Yisrael*. Bil'am answered: “Circulate amongst their *Shuls* and *Batei Midrash*/ study halls. If you hear their voices emanating from within, you cannot wage war against them, for their Patriarch Yitzchak promised them (*Bereishit* 27:22), ‘The voice is the voice of Yaakov’--If the voice is the voice of Yaakov, then the hands of Esav will not prevail. But, if Yaakov does not use his voice, then the hands of Esav will prevail!” [Until here from the *Midrash*]

Why? R' Algazi explains: The *Gemara* (*Bava Kamma* 97a) discusses whether a person--call him Reuven--would be liable for damages if he does work using the servant of another person--call him Shimon. If the servant was performing Shimon's work at the time, and Reuven took him away from that to do Reuven's work, then Reuven would be liable for damages. However, if the servant was idle, then Reuven would not be liable for damages. To the contrary, he would have been doing Shimon a favor, because idleness is not good.

Similarly, writes R' Algazi, we are meant to serve *Hashem*. If we are doing so, then *Hashem* will not let anyone else enslave us. However, if we “slack off,” then *Hashem* will allow other nations to remind us that we are supposed to be servants. (*She'erit Yaakov*)

“The words of one who hears the sayings of Kel, and knows the knowledge of the Supreme One . . .” (24:16)

Midrash Rabbah asks rhetorically: “Bil'am did not know what his own donkey was thinking, but he knew what G-d was thinking?!”

R' Yerachmiel Shulman z"l Hy"d (*Menahel Ruchani* of the Bet Yosef-Novardok Yeshiva in Pinsk, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) comments: Before one can attain lofty spiritual levels, one must first know his animalistic self. (*Peninei Ha'chochmah* 1:24)

“Balak son of Tzippor saw all that Yisrael had done to the Emorite.” (22:2)

R' Yosef David Sinzheim z"l (1736-1812; Chief Rabbi of France; author of the Talmud commentary *Yad David*) explains: Balak knew that *Hashem* had promised the territory of the seven Canaanite nations to *Bnei Yisrael*. But, Balak thought that the fulfillment of that promise was contingent on *Bnei Yisrael*'s remaining in Egypt for 400 years. Thus, Balak believed, since *Bnei Yisrael* had left Egypt prematurely, he did not need to fear them.

However, continues R' Sinzheim, when Balak saw that *Bnei Yisrael* defeated the Emorite kings, Sichon and Og, he realized that he had been mistaken; *Bnei Yisrael* were a threat. Therefore, he sent a message to Bil'am (verse 5): “Behold! a people has come out of Egypt”--they came out on their own, before the time appointed by G-d, so I thought they were not a threat. But, “Behold! it has covered the surface of the earth”--a reference to *Bnei Yisrael*'s defeat of Sichon and Og, “and it sits opposite me”--therefore, I, too, am afraid.

In this vein, concludes R' Sinzheim, we can understand what *Hashem* told Bil'am (verse 12): “You shall not curse the people, for it is blessed!” To what blessing was He referring? To the blessing that Yitzchak gave Yaakov (*Bereishit* 28:4): “May He grant you the blessing of Avraham, to you and to your offspring with you, that you may possess the land in which you lived, which *Elokim* gave to Avraham.” *Hashem* meant: Even if Balak's calculation had been correct, *Bnei Yisrael* still would inherit the Land because of Yitzchak's blessing. (*Shlal David*)

“Behold! A people has come out of Egypt.” (22:5)

R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (1843-1917; Yerushalayim) writes: The miracles that *Hashem* performed at the time of the Exodus were well known to all the nations of the world, as we read (*Shmot* 15:14-15), “Nations heard--they were agitated; terror gripped the dwellers of Philistia. Then the chieftains of Edom were confounded, trembling gripped the powers of Moav, all the dwellers of Canaan dissolved.” Nevertheless, Balak attributed the Exodus itself to *Bnei Yisrael*--“A people has come out of Egypt”--because of the popular belief that there are two gods: one who does good and one who does bad. According to that belief, *Hashem* Who performed the Plagues could not also have redeemed *Bnei Yisrael*. Rather, Balak thought, *Hashem* only weakened the Egyptians to the point that *Bnei Yisrael* could leave on their own.

Later, Bil'am acknowledged the fallacy of this belief, and said (23:22), “It is *Kel* Who brought them out of Egypt according to the power of His loftiness.” (*Tiferet Tziyon*)