

*Midrash Rabbah* relates that Bil'am argued to G-d, "Would it not be more fitting for seventy nations to serve you than for only one nation (*Yisrael*) to serve you?" R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chessed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) writes that Bil'am's grandfather Lavan similarly claimed that Yaakov Avinu was preventing *Hashem* from resting His *Shechinah* on the nations. While that conversation is not recorded explicitly in the Torah, it is a tradition that we refer to when we say in the *Pesach Haggadah*, "Lavan attempted to uproot everything," writes R' Charlap. (The statement that Lavan was Bil'am's grandfather is based on a *Midrash*.)

However, continues R' Charlap, both Lavan and Bil'am made a big mistake. In fact, only through the Jewish People can the nations eventually recognize *Hashem's* greatness. The truth of this is demonstrated by the history recorded in the Torah. Lavan "knew" G-d. G-d appeared to Lavan (*Bereishit* 31:24), and Lavan acknowledged and feared Him, saying to Yaakov (31:29), "The *Elokim* of your father addressed me last night." In contrast, Pharaoh said (*Shmot* 5:2), "Who is *Hashem* that I should heed His voice?" What changed in the few generations between Lavan, who recognized G-d, and Pharaoh, who did not? The Jewish People were enslaved. They became "a nation within a nation" (based on *Devarim* 4:34), invisible to mankind as a whole. The result was that *Hashem* was forgotten. (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom* p.37)

## Shabbat

R' Nachman of Breslov z"l (1772-1810; Ukraine) writes in one of his discourses, "One must take great care to be joyous and in good spirits on *Shabbat*." Later in the same discourse he writes, "As a rule, one should act very joyous on the holy *Shabbat*, without demonstrating any sadness or worry. Rather, delight in *Hashem* with all manner of delights, whether food and drink or clothing, to the extent of a person's ability."

(*Likkutei Moharan* II, 17)

R' Erez Moshe Doron *shlita* (Israel) observes: There is a big difference between "being joyous," as R' Nachman instructs in the first excerpt above, and "acting joyous," as he instructs in the second excerpt. "Being joyous" is a state of being that comes from and touches one's inner essence, whereas "acting joyous" implies behaving in a way that a person is not feeling. This understanding is confirmed by R' Nachman's instruction to not demonstrate any sadness or worry, implying that the person does feel sadness and worry but he acts in honor of *Shabbat* as if he does not.

"Being joyous" is not easy, continues R' Doron. But, teaches R' Nachman, one can achieve this by "acting joyous." This is a three-step process, R' Doron explains based on the teaching above: First, do not demonstrate any sadness or worry--"sadness" over the past or "worry" over the future. Second, act very joyous on *Shabbat*, delighting in all manner of delights, whether food and drink or clothing. Then, one who does this will eventually experience true joy and good spirits on *Shabbat*.

In one of his famous parables, R' Nachman tells of a simple shoemaker who always praised the food that his wife served him, even if it was only bread and water. He also took great pride in the shoes he made, though he was not, in fact, a very good shoemaker. He would exclaim, "My dear wife! Look at these beautiful and wondrous shoes!"

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Harav Yechiel Shraga Feivish ben Yitzchak Halevi Tarshish a"h

**“May my soul die the death of the upright . . .” (23:10)**

*Rashi z”l* writes: “Amongst them.” Commentaries explain: Bil’am was praying that he merit to die like the righteous among the Jewish People.

R’ David Bliacher z”l *Hy”d* (*Rosh Yeshiva* of the Bet Yosef-Novardok Yeshiva in Międzyrzec Podlaski, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) writes: This verse is a major reason why Bil’am’s story is recorded in the Torah, for it teaches that even the most obstinate sinner can come around. He explains:

According to *Midrashim*, Bil’am was an advisor to Pharaoh, and he strongly advocated oppressing *Bnei Yisrael*. Even after witnessing the Ten Plagues, Bil’am did not reform; he still wanted to curse *Bnei Yisrael*. How is such obstinacy possible?! Similarly, Pharaoh’s magicians said about the plague of lice (*Shmot* 8:15), “It is a finger of *Elokim!*” How does a person not recognize that a “finger” is attached to a “hand,” and a “hand” is attached to a greater being--in this case, G-d? How did they not surrender immediately?

The answer, writes R’ Bliacher, is that man is prone to err unless he makes a conscious effort to recognize the truth. For example, Pharaoh’s magicians were able to replicate some of the plagues that Moshe brought about, but did they stop to ask themselves: Can we also terminate the plague as Moshe can? No, they did not! Why? Because only a person who makes a conscious effort to extricate himself from following the path of human nature will ever recognize the truth. And that, neither the magicians nor Bil’am made the effort to do.

It was to teach this lesson that *Hashem* dragged out the Exodus by bringing ten plagues. Surely one plague would have sufficed if *Hashem* had so willed! Nevertheless, *Hashem* wants to teach us this lesson about human nature, so He prolonged the process. It is for this same reason that the Torah relates in detail the obstinacy of Bil’am and the fact that, in the end, he did make the necessary effort to see the truth. (*Divrei Binah U’mussar* p.100)

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Once, his wife questioned this behavior, noting that other shoemakers’ shoes sell for double what his sell for! He responded, “They produce what they produce and earn what they earn, and I produce what I produce and earn what I earn. Why should we speak of others? Are we lacking anything that we need?”

The shoemaker’s wife’s perspective may have been more realistic, observes R’ Doron, but it could never bring happiness. In contrast, the shoemaker accepted his limitations and was truly happy. (Presumably, there was nothing practical that he could do to improve his situation.)

R’ Doron concludes: It is not enough to think happy thoughts. Like the shoemaker in R’ Nachman’s parable, one must enunciate those thoughts and speak about the things that one has in his life that can him happy.

(*Malchut* p.33)

**“Balak son of Zippor saw all that *Yisrael* had done to the *Emori*. Moav became very frightened of the People, because it was numerous (literally, ‘because he was great’) . . .” (22:2-3)**

R’ Yosef z”l (1601-1696; “*Darshan* of Posen”) asks: Should not the verse say, “Because they were numerous?”

He explains: At the end of last week’s *Parashah*, *Bnei Yisrael* fought and killed Og, king of Bashan. That is why Moav was afraid: it saw what *Yisrael* had done to the *Emori* and it was frightened because of *Yisrael*, because he--Og--was great, yet *Yisrael* had defeated him. (*Yad Yosef*)



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

R’ Yaakov Moshe Charlap z”l (see front page) writes: Cursed are the wicked nations who self-righteously condemn the Jewish People. When Balak said, “A people has come out of Egypt,” he meant: The Jewish People must have left Egypt on their own, for G-d said they would be in a foreign land for 400 years, yet they were in Egypt for only 210 years. Therefore, said Balak, *Bnei Yisrael* are rebelling against G-d’s Will, and surely He will agree to curse them.

R’ Charlap continues: Bil’am meant the same thing when he said (23:19), “G-d is not a man that He should be deceitful, nor a human that He should relent. Would He say and not do, or speak and not uphold it?” Bil’am meant: If G-d said the *Bnei Yisrael* would be exiled for 400 years, surely He will enforce His word. Therefore, He surely will agree to curse *Bnei Yisrael*. (Our Sages offer several explanations for why *Bnei Yisrael* did not need to remain in Egypt for 400 years. One of them is that the count began from the birth of Yitzchak, for he too lived in a land where he was considered an intruder.)

Ultimately, however, Bil’am had to admit (23:22), “It is G-d Who brought them out of Egypt . . .” (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom* p. 109)



**“*Elokim* came to Bil’am at night and said to him, ‘If the men came to summon you, arise and go with them . . .’ *Elokim*’s wrath flared because he was going . . .” (22:20, 22)**

R’ Shlomo Alkabetz z”l (1505-1584; author of the Friday night hymn *Lecha Dodi*, among other works) asks: if *Hashem* told Bil’am to go, why was He angry?

He answers: In order for a prophet to prophecy, he must first meditate in solitude. *Hashem* told Bil’am, “Go with them.” He did not want Bil’am to be alone. However, Bil’am did not obey; he went to meditate. Therefore, *Hashem*’s wrath flared because he was going, *i.e.*, alone.

(*Perushei U’derushei R’ Shlomo Alkabetz*)