

# DAYS

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Balak

## Days

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Today's Learning:  
Nach: Tehilim 139-140  
Mishnah: Negaim 11:5-6  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nedarim 41  
Halachah: Mishnah Berurah 619:6-621:1

In this week's parashah, we read how Bilam tried to curse Bnei Yisrael. Pirkei Avot (ch.5) teaches that evil-doers like Bilam do not live out "half their days," as the verse (Tehilim 55:24), "Men of bloodshed and deceit shall not live out half their days." We also find that our Sages refer to old age as "length of days." Sometimes, a tzaddik's life is referred to as "days," while the evil-doer's life is referred to as

"years," as in Mishlei (10:27), "Fear of G-d will add days, while the years of the wicked will be shortened." Why do we speak of "days" rather than "years" when discussing the length of a person's life, especially a tzaddik's life?

R' Menachem Simcha Katz shlita (Brooklyn, N.Y.) explains: The Gemara (Shabbat 153a) instructs man to repent one day before he dies. The Gemara asks: Does a person know when he will die? No! Therefore, concludes the Gemara, one should repent every day.

It follows, R' Katz writes, that the value of a person's years depends on what he did with his days. A person who repents every day gives meaning to his years. At the end of his life, he has "length of days"--a valuable collection of "days." In contrast, the wicked don't use their days to repent; their years are shortened and they lack "days." [Thus, they do not live out "half their days."]

R' Katz adds in the name of the Chafetz Chaim z"l: A person must always imagine that he has only one day left, that whatever mitzvah is before him is the only mitzvah that needs to be done, and that he is the only person in the world. This will push him to perform the mitzvah with zerizut / alacrity. (Simcha L'ish p.13)

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"Bilam said to Balak, 'Build for me here seven altars and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams.' Balak did as Bilam had spoken, and Balak and Bilam offered a bull and a ram on each altar." (23:1-2)

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 105b) teaches: One should always study Torah and perform mitzvot even shelo lishmah / not with the proper intention, because from shelo lishmah one comes to lishmah--for, in the merit of the 42 offerings that Balak offered [seven bulls and seven rams, three times each], he merited that Ruth was his descendant.

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (Maharal of Prague; dies 1609) explains: As a result of Balak's offerings, Bilam blessed Bnei Yisrael. Certainly that was not Balak's intention, yet he was rewarded by having King David, great-grandson of Ruth, be one of his descendants. This teaches that even a good deed performed with the wrong intention pays off. Therefore, one should always study Torah and perform mitzvot even shelo lishmah. (Chiddushei Aggadot)

R' Avraham Bornstein z"l (1838-1910; rabbi, rosh yeshiva and chassidic rebbe in Sochatchov, Poland, and a major halachic authority) writes regarding the concept of "lishmah":

"I have heard some people straying from the intelligent path regarding Torah study and saying that if one studies, develops novel interpretations, and is happy with, and receives enjoyment from, his study, he is not studying lishmah / with the proper intention as much as someone who studies simply, with no enjoyment, only for the mitzvah. [They argue that] one who enjoys studying is doing

so for his own pleasure. This is an obvious error. To the contrary, the essence of the mitzvah of Torah study is rejoicing in one's learning, for only then is the learning assimilated into one's being. If one enjoys Torah study, he will cling to the Torah. The Zohar teaches that both the yetzer ha'tov and the yetzer ha'ra grow through happiness. The yetzer ha'tov grows through the joy of Torah. Now, if it were true that enjoying learning makes it shelo lishmah, then this joy would weaken the mitzvah and dull its light. How would that cause the yetzer ha'tov to grow?! Rather, since the yetzer ha'tov does grow from this, it must be the essence of the mitzvah. I do acknowledge that if one learns, not because it is a mitzvah, but only because he enjoys it, that is called shelo lishmah, just as if one would eat matzah because he likes it and not because it is a mitzvah. Regarding him our Sages said, 'One should always study Torah and perform mitzvot even shelo lishmah / not with the proper intention, because from shelo lishmah one comes to lishmah.' However, if one learns because it is a mitzvah and he enjoys it, that is already lishmah and he is entirely holy." (Eglei Tal: Introduction)

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"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)

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"Behold! the people will arise like a lion cub and raise itself like a lion . . ." (23:24)

Rashi z"l explains Bilam's words: When the Jewish People rise from their sleep in the morning, they show themselves to be strong as a lion cub and a lion to 'snatch' the mitzvot-- to clothe themselves in the talit, to read shema and to lay tefilin.

R' Yitzchak Schmelkes z"l (1828-1905; rabbi of Lvov, Galicia) asks: Rashi's list of mitzvot appears to be out of order, since first we lay tefilin and only then we recite shema. Indeed, our Sages say that a man who recites shema and is not wearing tefilin is equivalent to a false witness!

He answers: The fact that we must lay tefilin before reciting shema reflects that fact that Hashem desires our actual observance of mitzvot more than He desires our feelings, our profession of faith, our love, etc. Moreover, performance of the physical mitzvot is a prerequisite to having a genuine spiritual experience. Thus we read (Vayikra 9:6--at the time of the dedication of the mishkan), "This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you."

Bilam, however, praised himself as someone who knows G-d's thoughts (see Bemidbar 24:16), yet he lived an evil and immoral lifestyle. He believed that man can have a spiritual experience without mitzvot, that reciting shema could come before laying tefilin; hence, Rashi's explanation of Bilam's

words.

R' Schmelkes concludes: In this light we can understand a perplexing midrash which says that the men chosen to fight Midian (see Bemidbar 31:3) had to put on their tefilin shel yad before their tefilin shel rosh. [That is, in any event, the proper way to put on tefilin, but] what does this have to do with Midian? The answer, however, was that this was the battle in which Bilam was killed (Bemidbar 31:8); thus, it was crucial that these warriors put tefilin on their arms, which represent action, before they put tefilin on their heads, which represent thought. (Bet Yitzchak)

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## Next Week in History, Halachah, and Minhag

18 Tammuz: On this date, Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Har Sinai to plead with G-d to forgive Bnei Yisrael for the sin of the Golden Calf. (Rashi to Shmot 18:13)

This date is Purim Candia, commemorating the salvation that occurred to the Jewish community of Candia, Crete in the year 5298 (1538). In that year, the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman I invaded Crete, which was a territory of Venice. While Turkish forces threatened Candia from the outside, the Christian inhabitants of the city accused the Jewish population of harboring spies, and threatened to massacre the entire community. When both threats miraculously passed, R' Capsali declared a yom tov. (Publisher's preface to Meah Shearim by Candia's rabbi, R' Eliyahu Capsali z"l, p.82)

Shabbat during the Three Weeks: There are different customs regarding singing zemirot on the Shabbatot between the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B'Av. Some say that one should lessen his joy during these weeks, while others hold that any display of mourning on Shabbat is prohibited.

20 Tammuz: When the Bet Hamikdash stood, descendants of King David would donate wood on this date to be used in the Temple service. The dates when different families donated wood are listed in the last chapter of Masechet Ta'anit.

On this date in 5714 (1954), R' Avraham Chaim Na'eh z"l passed away. Although R' Na'eh is not nearly as well known as many of the sages who were his contemporaries, his treatise on converting Talmudic weights and measures to modern units of measurement is accepted as authoritative by many poskim / halachic authorities today. For example, the often-cited opinion that one amah equals almost 19 inches (48 centimeters) is his.

24 Tammuz: On this date in 5662 (1902), R' Yaakov Yosef z"l, the first and only Chief Rabbi of New York, passed away.

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics

('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the Hamaayan page.

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