

BILAAM... REINCARNATED?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Balak, the son of Tzipor was the king of Moav at that time. He sent messengers to Bilaam, the son of Be'or [who resided in] Petor, by the river of the land of his people. He called for him, saying, "There is a people that left Egypt, which now cover the face of the earth opposite me. I plead with you to come and curse this people for me; they are too mighty for me. Maybe I can be victorious and drive them out of the land. I know that the one you bless is blessed, and the one you curse will be cursed." (Bamidbar 22:2-6)

One could truly make a life study out of this week's parsha. Between the lessons about life in this world, and the many prophecies about the End-of- Days, there is much to be mined from Parashas Balak.

There are themes and there are sub-themes. And, all of them are masterfully interwoven in a way that only God can do, allowing for the story to flow uninterrupted, even though some of it takes place over the course of hundreds of years, adding an additional message: the present is often the past repeating itself on a different plane.

For example, Bilaam was previously Lavan, Ya'akov Avinu's father-in-law, the father of Rachel and Leah. This soul connection is actually hinted to in their names: *BAIS-LAMED-Ayin-Mem* and *LAMED-BAIS-Nun*, which, according to the Arizal, have a primordial origin:

The evil of Hevel's Nefesh is represented by the letters Bais-Lamed, which is the sod of the verse, "*Such judgments, they do not know — Bais- Lamed*" (Tehillim 147:20). For, these two letters refer to the Klipos, and the Bais-Lamed of "Bilaam." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 29)

In other words, there was a part of Hevel that was good, and a part that was evil. The evil part, represented by the *Bais-Lamed* of "Hevel," went to Lavan. Hence, his name incorporated these two letters, revealing the basis of his own evil, just as they did much later on in history, in the name "Bilaam." Eventually, Bilaam reincarnated into Navel — *Nun- BAIS-LAMED* — HaCarmelli, in Dovid HaMelech's time, causing him no end of trouble as well.¹

This makes the confrontation between Bilaam and the Jewish people even more fascinating. For, as the Arizal explains:

The good Nefesh of Hevel was given to Shais, who completely rectified it ... After the Nefesh was completely rectified, it was then possible to rectify the Ruach ... The Ruach reincarnated into Noach HaTzaddik ... Later, the Neshamah reincarnated into Moshe Rabbeinu, since it never contained an element of evil. Thus, it says regarding him, "*She saw that he was good*" (Shemos 2:2), unlike with

respect to the Nefesh and Ruach which had evil mixed into them. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 29)

Therefore, while the evil part of Hevel's Nefesh tried to curse the Jewish people up in the hills beyond the eyeshot of the Jewish people, the Neshamah of Hevel, inside Moshe Rabbeinu, was in the camp below, leading the Jewish people towards Eretz Yisroel. What is the meaning of that? It is also interesting to note that both Moshe Rabbeinu and Bilaam possessed the power speech:

What induced Moav to consult with Midian? When they saw that the Jewish people were victorious in a supernatural way, they said, "The leader of this people grew up in Midian. We will ask them about main characteristic." He told him, "His power lies in his mouth," at which point they said, "Then we must come against him with one whose power lies in his mouth!" (Rashi, Bamidbar 22:4)

For Moshe Rabbeinu, it was the power of prayer. For Bilaam, it was the ability to bless or curse. But, for both of them, their power of speech was rooted in Hevel, as the Arizal explains: Hevel is one who speaks, b'sod the "breath — hevel — of the mouth." Therefore, one who is from the root of Hevel will discourse and speak much ... (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 36)

Hence, though one of the last people we might think of while reading this week's parsha is Hevel, in truth, it is his soul that is very much the basis of what takes place in this week's reading. On a Pshat-level, that may sound strange. However, on the level of Sod, it makes perfect sense:

As a result of the sin of Kayin and Hevel, the Neshamos became mixed together in the Klipos — spiritual impurity — and that this is called, "the mixture of good and evil." From that time onward, the souls have been undergoing a process of "separation" from within the klipos, just as silver is smelted from waste ... Once the separation of all the souls has been completed ... the spiritual "refuse," which is only removed through deeds, will collapse on its own ... For, holiness is the life that results from separating from spiritual impurity, which is called "death." Therefore, they will no longer have any life, and they will disappear like smoke, as it says, "*Death will be absorbed forever*" (Yeshayahu 25:8), once all of the souls are separated out. Thus, taking the first letter of each word (of the verse just stated), they spell the word "Hevel." This is to allude to the fact that only when all of the reincarnations of Hevel are complete, which is Moshe Rabbeinu, who reincarnates in every generation to separate out the souls from amongst the spiritual waste, will Moshiach come, and death will be absorbed forever. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20)

Perhaps, this is why the Jewish people take a back seat in this week's parsha, and Bilaam gets to sit up front. It's not about the "Heh" of Hevel, it's about the Bais-Lamed in Bilaam, and Balak for that matter, that is in serious need of rectification. It's about recovering the Bais- Lamed from the Klipos — Bilaam — which this week's parsha sets up. For, in Parashas Mattos, Bilaam will get his due, at long last, when he is killed by Pinchas for his role in the crisis that occurs at the end of the parsha, with the women of Midian.

However, the fact that Bilaam reincarnated into Navel HaCarmelli, who tried to curse Dovid HaMelech, shows that the work was not completed with the death of Bilaam. Indeed, perhaps it set

up the final confrontation that will cause the Final Redemption, and Yemos HaMoshiach: In the future Moshe himself will reincarnate and return in the last generation, as it says, *"you will die with your fathers and rise up."* However, in the final generation, the "Dor HaMidbar" will also reincarnate with the Erev Rav, and this is what the verse also says, *"this people will rise up."* Hence, there is not a single generation in which Moshe Rabbeinu does not return b'sod, *"The sun rises and the sun sets"* (Koheles 1:5) and, *"One generation goes and another comes"* (Koheles 1:4), in order to rectify that generation. Thus, the Generation of the Desert along with the Erev Rav reincarnate in the final generation, *"like in the days of leaving Egypt"* (Michah 7:15). (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20)

Maybe, this is why the mizbayach — the altar — in the Bais HaMikdosh was 32 amos by 32 amos, the numerical value of Bais-Lamed. It was a way of counteracting the Bais-Lamed of Hevel, which incidentally, is the reverse spelling of Lamed-Bais, which spells "heart." This would imply that Bais-Lamed represents a "backwards" heart. The tikun of Jewish history may not be to eliminate the Bais-Lamed, but to reverse it, as the prophets says: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.* (Yechezkel 36:26) It had been Bilaam's goal to do just the opposite. It must be our goal to help the prophecy come true.²

¹The Arizal goes a step further, saying that Lavan was b'sod the Original Snake (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 29).

² On Succah 52a, the gemora uses this verse to say that Yechezkel called the yetzer hara "stone." This implies that, by working against the yetzer hara and its attempts to cause us to stumble, we help turn our heart back to flesh.

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