

NOT FROM YOUR HONEY AND NOT FROM YOUR STING

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #952 – Beer: Is This Bud For You? Good Shabbos!

"G-d said to Bilam, 'You shall not go with them! You shall not invoke curse upon the people, for it is blessed!'" [Bamidbar 22:12]. The Almighty tells Bilam that he cannot go with the Moavite delegation who came to procure his services; he cannot curse the Jewish people – for they are blessed.

Rashi interprets the *pasuk* as a progressive dialog between Bilam and Hashem. When G-d told Bilam that he could not go with the officers of Balak, Bilam said, "Then let me curse them from here." In response, G-d refined His directive to Bilam: Do not curse the people". Following this denial of his second request, Bilam said, "If so, let me at least bless them." To which the Almighty responded, "They do not need your blessing, for they are already blessed." Rashi quotes an analogous dismissive put-down to a bee: "We want neither your honey nor your sting."

This is a strange Rashi. He describes a strange reaction on Bilam's part. What kind of comeback was that from Bilam – Can I give them a blessing? Did our archenemy all of a sudden become a lover of Israel? What was he thinking? Did he really want to bless the Jewish people?

I saw an interesting interpretation in the *sefer Shemen Hatov* by Rabbi Dov Weinberger. At the end of the *parsha*, when Bilam proved to be unsuccessful in giving any of his curses, his final parting shot was to provide Balak with some valuable counsel: "Listen, Balak, I was unsuccessful. However, I hate the Jews as much as you do. I will give you some advice. Their G-d hates promiscuity. It will be worth your while to cause them to stumble in iniquities of licentiousness. Gather the daughters of Midian and have them seduce the Jewish men. You will see this will anger G-d to the extent that a plague will befall the Jews!" And so it was.

So let us ask, why did Bilam expect this plan would work? The Talmud says that throughout the entire period of enslavement not one Jewish woman was unfaithful to her husband. Sexual immorality was certainly not seen as an area of vulnerability for the Jewish nation. How did he suddenly devise such a far-fetched plan? Why did he expect it would be successful? Even more troubling is the question -- why in fact was it successful? How did such a mass lapse into public immorality take place in the holy nation? How did it happen?

The fact is that this came about because of Bilam's "blessing". Someone who receives a *bracha*

must be very careful about who is giving the *bracha*. A *bracha* must be granted "*b'tov ayin*" – with a full heart. The one who bestows the *bracha* needs to give it with the intent that he really wants to help the person being blessed. Chazal describe Bilam as a "*Tzor ayin*" – a mean-spirited, miserly fellow who is only interested in his own welfare, padding his own pocketbook. The *bracha* of such a person is more curse than blessing.

Bilam saw *Klal Yisrael* and commented "How goodly are your tents O Jacob" – the most famous of all his *brachos*. Chazal single out the feature of the tent configuration that impressed him: He saw that the tent openings faced away from each other. He saw the tremendous respect for privacy and modesty (*tznius*) that existed within the Jewish people. He gives them a blessing: "You guys are terrific. You are modest. You are careful about sexual improprieties. You do not check what is going on in your neighbor's tents. You are beautiful." However, this "*bracha*" was mean spirited. It was a sinister blessing. It was designed to raise their level of confidence and complacency to the point where they would think they were immune from the temptation and attractiveness of illicit sexual attraction (*arayos*). Complacency comes before the fall.

When the Jewish men met the daughters of Midian, their normal reaction should have been "We need to stay away from this. We don't know what could happen." However, something went off in their heads that whispered to them, "What do we need to worry about? We are righteous Jews! We are beyond such lowly temptations!" Then what happened? Bilam was successful in raising their level of complacency to the extent that in fact they did stumble and stumble badly.

The *bracha* that Bilam gave, "How goodly are your tents O Jacob" had a sinister part to it. He caused them to stumble in the sin of *arayos*. It is about such situations that Chazal say "Not from your honey and not from your sting". Keep your *brachos*. They are not worth the cost. We do not want your honey and we do not want your sting either.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Balak is provided below:

- # 018 -- Rending Garments on Seeing Yerushalayim
- # 063 -- Inter-marriage
- # 107 -- Rabbonim and Roshei Yeshiva -- Do Sons Inherit?
- # 153 -- Matrilineal Vs Patrilineal Descent in Determining Identity
- # 200 -- Reading Someone's Mail and Other Privacy Issues

- # 335 -- Postponing a Funeral
- # 380 -- Bishul Akum I
- # 424 -- Tircha D'Zibura
- # 468 -- Birchash Hamapil
- # 512 -- Pinchas and Eliyahu Hanavi
- # 556 -- Bishul Akum II
- # 600 -- Ayin Hora
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- # 687 -- Water, Coffee and Tea
- # 731 -- Shkia - 7:02: Mincha 7:00 A Problem?
- # 775 -- Wine At a Shul Kiddush
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- # 994 -- Bilam and His Donkey: A Problem with Tzar Ba'alei #Chaim?
- #1039 -- The Maid Who Made The Cholent
- #1083 -- K'rias Shema Shea'al HaMitah: Why?
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- #1168 -- Torah and Mitzvos for Ulterior Motives: Is it worth it?
- #1211 -- Must You Wait For The Rav to Finish Shmoneh Esrei?

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