

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Balak

17 Tammuz, 5782/July 16, 2022

Vol. 13 Num. 43 (#544)

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Esther and Craig Guttman and Family in honour of the upcoming yahrtzeit of Sheila Guttman ז"ל י"א תשע"ב

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated in honour of the fourth yahrtzeit (12 Tammuz) of Mr. Murray Zoltak ז"ל י"ב תש"ז, by his loving family

This is the last issue of Toronto Torah for the summer; we expect to return for Parshat Reeh (August 27)

## The Sin of Striking the Donkey

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

"G-d opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Bilaam: "What have I done to you, that you have hit me these three times?... The angel of G-d said to him: "Why did you hit your donkey these three times? Behold, I came out to obstruct you, because your way is contrary to me." (Bamidbar 22:28-32, modified from Metsudah tr.) After the fantastic scene of Bilaam's donkey speaking and upbraiding Bilaam for how he treated her, the angel repeats this critique.

### What did Bilaam do wrong?

The latter half of the rebuke focuses on the problematic nature of Bilaam's quest. Some commentaries assume that the former half depends on the latter; Bilaam is in trouble because of his goal of cursing the Jews. For example, Rabbi Ovadia Seforno writes that the angel criticizes Bilaam for not realizing that the donkey's recalcitrance indicates that the journey is contrary to G-d's will. However, others believe that hitting the donkey was itself the reason for the rebuke.

For example, Rambam (Guide for the Perplexed 3:17) sees this story as the source for the prohibition against causing *tzaar baalei chayim*, paining animals. (Shabbat 128b, Bava Metzia 32b) The purpose of this law is to help people develop proper character traits. "The object of this rule is to make us perfect; that we should not assume cruel habits: and that we should not

uselessly cause pain to others: that, on the contrary, we should be prepared to show pity and mercy to all living creatures, except when necessity demands the contrary." (ibid, Friedlander translation)

### Rabbi Yehudah heChasid's view

Rabbi Yehudah heChasid seems to agree with Rambam's view in certain passages in Sefer Chasidim (see, for example Margoliot ed. #666, Parma ed. #138) However, in his introduction he argues that Bilaam did not violate *tzaar baalei chayim* at all. He writes that one only violates this prohibition if he hits the animal while it struggles under a load. Rabbi Avraham Price (Mishnat Avraham v. 1, p. 5) explains that one only violates *tzaar baalei chayim* when one **unnecessarily** hurts an animal. However, in this case, Bilaam's donkey refused to move. He further explains that this is why the Talmud does not use Bilaam's story as the source of the prohibition, contrary to the implications of the Rambam.

In a third place (Sefer Chasidim Parma #140), Rabbi Yehudah heChasid clarifies his view. The first time that Bilaam struck the animal, he did not sin. However, when his normally faithful animal stopped walking, even after being struck, Bilaam should have realized that something was wrong. Instead of thinking, however, he struck the animal twice more. For that thoughtless cruelty, as well as ingratitude to his faithful

animal, he was punished.

In each of the relevant passages, Sefer Chasidim continues to say that the lessons of kindness and gratitude apply to human beings even more, and the fact that they apply even to an animal highlights their importance.

Taken together, these sources underscore the ways in which the stories of the Torah teach us lessons. While the primary story of Bilaam is one of rebellion against G-d and an attack on the Jewish people, the Torah includes the interactions between Bilaam and his donkey to instruct about how carefully we must think so as to cause nothing, not even an animal, unjustified pain. For Sefer Chasidim, even when one is justified in hurting an animal, failure to minimize the pain and ensure that it is justified is considered sinful. How much more must pause to consider how we treat other people!

Rav Asher Weiss (Minchat Asher Parshat Balak) uses this example to show that the Torah expresses *ratzon haTorah*, the will of the Torah/G-d, which obligates to higher standards than the laws alone do. Exploring the spirit of the laws, as well as the narratives of the Torah, is critical to develop a full worldview where we seek to live as G-d desires, not just as He commands.

[jziring@torontotorah.com](mailto:jziring@torontotorah.com)

### OUR BEIT MIDRASH

#### ROSH BEIT MIDRASH

RABBI MORDECHAI TORCZYNER

#### SGAN ROSH BEIT MIDRASH

RABBI JARED ANSTANDIG, RABBI YEHUDA MANN

#### AVREICHIM

RABBI STEVEN GOTLIB, IDAN RAKOVSKY, RABBI CHAIM METZGER

#### SEDER BOKER DIRECTOR

RABBI MOSHE YERES

#### WOMEN'S BEIT MIDRASH

MRS. SHIRA METZGER

#### ISRAELI CORRESPONDENTS

RABBI ADAM FRIEDMANN, RABBI JONATHAN ZIRING

#### CHAVERIM NATHAN DIENA, CHAVERIM NATHAN DIENA, EITAN MARKUS, ANDER MOSS, DANIEL SHEINIS, NATAN SNOWBELL, ELI WELTMAN

#### CHAVEROT ORLY AZIZA, MAXINE EWASCHUK, MADELEINE FERRIS, BECKY FRIEDMAN, LEA GOLDMAN, TEHILLA HELFENBAUM, CHAYA JUNI, ARIELLA MARKUS, AILEEN MORRIS, HADASSAH NAUENBERG, YEJIDE OMOTOSO, FEIGA WERNER, RIVKA WERNER, KINNERET WITTY



An affiliate of  
Torah MiTzion and YU  
Find Toronto Torah online at  
[tiny.cc/torontotorah](http://tiny.cc/torontotorah)  
We are grateful to  
Continental Press

**Summary**

In the preceding passage, Yeshayahu predicted to King Achaz that Hashem would destroy the invading Assyrians, and a superbly righteous king, descendant of the line of Yishai, would lead Israel in a period of peace and safety. All of this is part of Yeshayahu's attempt to convince Achaz to have faith and not surrender to the Assyrians.

Now, Yeshayahu continues to describe a utopian vision of what Israel will be like. As Hashem took us out of Egypt, so Hashem will again bring us to our land. Hashem will bring us from many lands, including Babylon, Ethiopia, and the four corners of the world. (11:11-12) As Radak reads this, the nations will send us out of exile, parallel to the way the Egyptians sent us from Egypt. [This would be fulfilled with Cyrus, in Ezra 1.]

Yeshayahu also promises that the mutual hostility between the two Jewish kingdoms, Yehudah and Yisrael, will end. Instead of battling ourselves, we will attack and control our foes. (11:13-14) Oddly, Yeshayahu only lists local nations – Philistines, Edom, Moav and Amon. According to the Maharal of Prague, Yeshayahu is emphasizing the na-

tions which are our relatives, who emerged from the line of Avraham and Sarah. (Netzach Yisrael 60; Maharal does not explain the presence of the Philistines in this list)

At that time, Hashem will dry up “the sea of Egypt”, and break it into seven channels for our return; this clearly echoes our departure from Egypt. Indeed, Amos Hakham suggests that this is a source for the midrashic idea that Yam Suf split into channels when we left Egypt. (Daat Mikra to Yeshayahu pg. 138)

Yeshayahu describes our great celebration on that day, proclaiming the wonder of our salvation among the nations. Expressing joy as well as faith, we will thank Hashem, “because You harmed me.” (12:1-6) The Talmud explains that we will recognize that the harm Hashem sent turned out to be good for us. (Niddah 31a)

**Insight**

The last part of this vision describes our song of praise to Hashem, and it includes a sentence that is also part of the traditional Havdalah text, “And you shall draw water with joy from the springs of salvation.” (12:3) What is

the connection between our national redemption and drawing water?

Of course, there is a great water-drawing celebration in the Beit haMikdash on Succot, with tremendous joy. The Talmud (Succah 46b) connects that with our chapter, citing our verse as a basis for the joyous trumpeting during the Succot celebration. But what is the substantive connection between the redemption and water-drawing?

Rashi, Radak and Abarbanel (commentaries to 12:3) suggest that water is a metaphor for Divine inspiration and education. This fits the rabbinic idea that water, in many places in Tanach, alludes to Torah. [See Avodah Zarah 5b and Bava Kama 17a.]

We might also suggest another link: Yeshayahu is pushing King Achaz to change his ways, but change is difficult. Yeshayahu is telling Achaz: I know it's hard. Drawing water is hard, too – but it brings great joy in the end, and your change will also bring great joy in the end. (based on an idea suggested by Rebecca Rotenberg Nadler)

*torczyner@torontotorah.com*

**It Happened in Israel: When Will the Messiah Come?****Rabbi Jared Anstandig**

Next week the “Three Weeks” begin, and we transition into a period of mourning over the loss of the Beit HaMikdash and over our current state of exile. During this time especially it is only natural for us to wonder, “When will all our pain and suffering finally come to an end?” Indeed, in the Talmud Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asks this question of none other than Eliyahu the Prophet. In his response, Eliyahu provides an answer that ought to reverberate in our generation.

**Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi found Eliyahu the prophet, who was standing at the entrance of the burial cave of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai...** Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi **said to Eliyahu: When will the Messiah come?** Eliyahu **said to him: Go ask him.** Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked: **And where is he sitting?** Eliyahu said to him: **At the entrance of the city** (of Rome) ... Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi **went to the Messiah. He said to the Messiah: Greetings to you, my rabbi and my teacher.** The Messiah **said to him: Greetings to you, son of Levi.** Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi **said to him: When will the Master come?** The Messiah **said to him: Today.** Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi then **came to Eliyahu...** Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi **said to Eliyahu: The Messiah lied to me, as he said to me: I am coming today, and he did not come.** Eliyahu **said to him that this is what he said to you:** He said that he will come **“today, if you will listen to His voice”** (Psalms 95:7) (Adapted from the William Davidson Translation, Sanhedrin 98a)

Mashiach can come and redemption can end this very day, provided that we return to G-d and listen to His voice.

**Insight**

In a comment on this passage, Rashi emphasizes that Mashiach was not sitting at the gate to the physical city of Rome. Rather, he was sitting in Gan Eden, in an area corresponding to the location of Rome. [In truth, the idea that this “Rome” is not the city located in Italy today seems logical, given the apparent short window of time between Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's conversation with Eliyahu in Israel and his conversation with Mashiach.]

In his introduction to Chafetz Chayim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan points to this passage arguing that the timeline of Redemption is entirely up to us. He explains that when the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed, G-d set a particular length to the Exile. Nonetheless, as Eliyahu explains to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, the previously determined length is irrelevant if we deserve redemption earlier. The Chafetz Chayim concludes, “The reason [that redemption has not yet come] is our fault alone, that through our many sins we do not allow G-d to rest His presence in our midst.” [Similarly, see Sanhedrin 98a on the possibility that Mashiach will arrive “at its time” or that G-d will “hasten it.”] G-d is prepared to do what it takes to bring Mashiach and end the exile. The question is: are we?

*janstandig@torontotorah.com*

**Biography**  
**The Baal Shem Tov**  
**Rabbi David Ely Grundland**

Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, more commonly referred to as the Ba'al Shem Tov, was born in Okup, Poland circa 1700. The European Jewish world was in a time of much turmoil, facing many pogroms and having recently endured the false messianism of Shabbtai Tzvi. Shabbtai Tzvi had based many of his teachings on Kabbalistic concepts and, in his wake, many Kabbalists were driven underground, from a fear of a repeat occurrence. It is said that Rabbi Israel's parents were among this group.

Rabbi Israel's father passed away when Rabbi Israel was a young boy, but it is reported that he imparted three primary messages: Hashem is always with you; diligently study Torah, though never presenting yourself as more than a simpleton; and love every single Jew, regardless of who or what he or she is.

After his father's death, Rabbi Israel spent much time in forests. His students report that he learned Torah with hidden Kabbalistic sages, and he was eventually appointed the leader of the "hidden tzaddikim", striving to help others and bettering the world through acts of kindness, though ensuring to never take credit or even be recognized for what he was doing. He worked as an elementary school teacher, and eventually also as a slaughterer.

At the age of 36, Rabbi Israel started to teach and preach publicly, though in a very non-traditional way. Instead of teaching in the classic style, Rabbi Israel would tell many parables and sing songs to inspire the uninspired and downtrodden Jews of his day. One of his primary teachings was regarding the ability of a simple Jew to serve Hashem on a high level, regardless of Torah knowledge. He also publicly taught Kabbalah, describing Kabbalistic "worlds" within the human psyche.

Rabbi Israel developed a large following, including many sages of the day, although he also encountered staunch opposition from the more traditional Torah schools who opposed his methods and teachings. His followers claimed that he was close with Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (a.k.a. Noda B'Yehudah), although they disagreed on many issues.

The Ba'al Shem Tov died in 1760, and all of his known teachings were recorded posthumously by students.

*ravdavidely@gmail.com*

**Torah and Translation**  
**"Our G-d" or "G-d of Our Ancestors"?**  
**Baal Shem Tov al haTorah, Parshat Noach**  
**Translated by Rabbi Steven Gotlib**

טעם למה אנו אומרים אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, כי יש שני סוגי בני אדם המאמינים בד' יתברך, א' שמאמין בהקב"ה מחמת שהולך בדרכי אבותיו הקדמונים, ועם כל זה אמונתו חזקה, והב' הוא מי שבא על האמנת הדת מחמת החקירה.

והחילוק ביניהם הוא, שהסוג הא' יש לו מעלה שאי אפשר לפתות אותו, אף אם יאמרו לו כמה חקירות הסותרות ח"ו, כי אמונתו חזקה מצד קבלת אבותיו, ועוד שלא חקר מעולם, אבל יש לו חסרון שהאמונה אצלו הוא רק מצות אנשים מלומדה, בלי טעם ושכל.

אבל הב' יש לו מעלה, שמחמת שהכיר הבורא יתברך מחמת גודל חקירתו, הוא חזק באמונה שלימה ובאהבה גמורה, אבל גם כן יש לו חסרון, שבקל יכולים לפתותו, ואם יביאו לו ראיות הסותרות חקירותיו, יתפתה ח"ו.

אבל מי ששני המדות בידו, אין לו למעלה ממנו, דהיינו שסומך על אבותיו הקדמונים בחוזק, וגם כן באה לו על ידי שחקר בעצמו, זו הוא אמונה שלימה וטובה.

ולזה אנו אומרים אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו. גם יש לפרש בזה הכתוב (תהלים ל"ד) "טעמו וראו כי טוב ד'", "רצה לומר, טעמו [מעצמכם להרגיש הטעם והיינו] מחמת החקירה, וראו לשון ראיית [מה שאתם רואים מאחרים] הנהגה כמו שהנהיגו אבותינו:

The reason that we say [in the Amidah] "our G-d and G-d of our ancestors" is because there are two types of human beings who believe in Hashem, may He be blessed. First are those who believe in the Holy One, Blessed be He because they follow in the ways of their ancestors who came before them. And with all of that, their faith is strong. And the second type are those who come to belief based on their own knowledge and investigation.

And the difference between the two types is that the first type has a level of faith such that it is impossible to seduce him away, even if one tells him many contradictory philosophies, G-d forbid, because his faith is strong due to the acceptance from his ancestors and also that he himself did not ever investigate these matters. However, there is a weakness in this, in that his belief is only that which was taught to him by scholars and is without reason for him.

But the second type has an advantage in that because he recognizes the Creator, may He be blessed, after great investigation, his faith is complete and of total love, but it also comes with a weakness in that one can easily seduce him, and if he is shown proofs which contradict his investigations, he will be seduced, G-d forbid.

But one who has both of these types together, nothing is better, meaning that he relies on his early ancestors powerfully, and it also comes because he investigates himself. This is the faith that is complete and good.

And so we say, "Our G-d and G-d of our ancestors." We may also use this to explain, "Taste and see how good G-d is. (Tehillim 34:9)" That is to say: "taste" [from yourself to feel the taste] because of personal investigation, "and see" the language of seeing [what you glean from others] acting as one's ancestors did.

**COME LEARN WITH US!**

**Click Underlined Lines to Open Zooms. Clickable links also at [www.torontotorah.com/letslearn](http://www.torontotorah.com/letslearn)  
All times ET. Classes are free & open to all, unless otherwise noted.**

*Our Bein haZemanim (summer break) begins this coming week  
and most of our learning opportunities will be off until August 23  
THANK YOU FOR LEARNING WITH US ALL YEAR!*

**Shabbat July 15-16**

**After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT (Gruda Beis Medrash) (men)  
Note: This series continues through the summer**

**Sunday July 17**

**9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men)**

**Wednesday July 20**

**6:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Avodah Zarah, Shaarei Shomayim**

**8:15 PM R' Chaim Metzger, Barriers to Belief, Week 3 of 3, BAYT (Jarvis Freedman Library)  
And on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/chaimmetzger>**

**A special Thank You to our Toronto Torah sponsors!**

**Susan & Fred Birnbaum and Family (2) ∞ Jeffrey, Annette, Zachary and Benjamin Brown  
Archie & Tobey Crandell ∞ The Families of Irwin, Jim and David Diamond  
The Eisen Family ∞ Rabbi Dr. Mervyn & Joyce Fried  
Ralph & Paulette Frisch ∞ Andrew & Marjorie Gann (2)  
Robert & Karyn Goldberger (2) ∞ The Goldman Family (2)  
Allan & Tova Gutenberg (2) ∞ Esther & Craig Guttmann (4)  
Arthur Herzig, and Shira, Atara, Shmuel, Leora and Yosef Herzig ∞ Paul & Chavi Jacobs (3)  
The Family of Mr. Jack Kahn z"l ∞ Dr. Allan Kaplan & Cheryl Reicin and Family  
Miriam & Moishe Kesten ∞ The Grandchildren of Mr. Howard Kleinberg z"l  
Nathan Kirsh (2) ∞ Zeldie & Wayne Kurtz and Zahava & Mordie Shields  
Kathy & Derek Manoim (2) ∞ Mark Mietkiewicz (2)  
Agnes & David Miller (2) ∞ Roy Muster  
Jack Oziel ∞ Moishe & Nicole Posner (2)  
Shloimie & Anne Romberg ∞ Paul & Annie Samuel  
Robbie & Brian Schwartz ∞ Byron & Mimi Shore  
Jeffrey C. Silver (5) ∞ Dan & Karen Valter  
Ruth & Gerald Warner ∞ Larry & Lori Wolynetz  
Rabbi Dr. Moshe & Esty Yeres (4) ∞ Ricky & Dianna Zauderer  
Yocheved & Joe Zeifman ∞ The Loving Family of Mr. Murray Zoltak z"l**

**And we thank the synagogues, schools  
and organizations who partner with us!**

**Mark your calendars for 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM September 11, 2022  
TISHREI IN A DAY returns in-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim!**