

מתוקים מדבש

*Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah*RABBI GIL STUDENT**Bemachashavah Techilah**

“**N**ever again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom G-d had known face to face” (Devarim 34:10). The Sifrei comments on this verse:

In Israel one has not arisen, but among the nations of the world one has – Bilam ben Be’or. However, there is a difference between the prophecy of Moshe and the prophecy of Bilam. Moshe did not know what was being spoken to him¹ but Bilam did... Moshe would not know when G-d would speak with him until it happened but Bilam would... Moshe would only speak with G-d while standing but Bilam would while even lying down...

This midrash is very hard to comprehend. It seems to state that the wicked Bilam was a higher prophet than Moshe. Not only is this difficult to understand, since one of the Rambam’s 13 fundamental principles of Judaism is that no prophet can be greater than Moshe, but it becomes even more difficult from the rationalist understanding of prophecy. In Rambam’s introduction to Avos – his Shemonah Perakim – Rambam explains the Gemara’s requirement that a prophet must be brave and wealthy (along with wise and modest)

¹ This is the text as many rishonim had it. Our text has “Moshe did not know Who was speaking to him” – “mi” instead of “mah.”

as reflecting character traits. A prophet must perfect his character, and that includes conquering his evil inclinations (i.e. being brave) and being content with whatever he has (i.e. wealthy). Furthermore, one’s

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grasp of prophecy corresponds to one’s perfection of character; a more modest, wise, etc. person acquires a higher level of prophecy than someone less qualified. Yet Chazal describe Bilam as being a wicked man. If so, how could he have achieved a greater prophecy than Moshe? Additionally, the Bible in Yehoshua (13:22) refers to Bilam as a *kosem*, a sorcerer, which implies that he merely told the future through astrology or the like and was not an actual prophet.² Given all this, how can the Sifrei state that Bilam was such a great prophet?

The Ibn Ezra³ writes that Bilam was not really a prophet. He was merely an astrologer who would pretend that he had the ability to curse or bless others when he was really only

² Cf. Bava Basra 15a that Bilam was one of seven “prophets of the nations of the world.”

³ Commentary to Bamidbar 22:28

stating what he knew would occur through his astrological acumen. However, G-d gave him prophecy in the instances mentioned in this week’s *parashah* for the sake of Israel’s honor. If Bilam could know about the nation’s future sins and punishments, and could pretend that his curse caused them, this would be a tremendous embarrassment to the people of Israel. Therefore, G-d spared his people by gracing Bilam with true prophecy and forcing him to recite the blessed future of Israel.⁴

Ramban⁵ explains similarly. Bilam was not a prophet but, for the sake of the Jewish people, was given prophecy. However, the Ramban continues, it was not greater than Moshe’s prophecy. Quite the opposite, and this is the intent of the Sifrei cited above. Moshe’s prophecy was greater than Bilam’s, and the Sifrei gives three examples of this: 1) Moshe did not know in advance about which topics G-d would speak with him about but, rather, was prepared for any topic. Bilam, on the other hand, was only capable of speaking with G-d about one topic. 2) Moshe was on such a high level that he was always prepared

⁴ Cf. Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Bamidbar 22:9. Rashi, in his commentary to Sanhedrin 106a sv. Bilam, writes that Bilam was a prophet but his powers were taken away from him and he became only a sorcerer.

⁵ Commentary to Bamidbar 22:30, 24:1. Cf. Rabbeinu Bachya, ad loc.

for prophecy while Bilam could only speak with G-d at one specific time each day. 3) Moshe was capable of withstanding prophecy even while standing up but Bilam was overcome by the experience and had to be lying down. With this, the Ramban interprets the midrash that seems to place Bilam on a higher level than Moshe as actually doing the exact opposite – placing Bilam well below Moshe.

The Rambam seems to contradict himself on this matter. In one place in Moreh Nevuchim,⁶ the Rambam writes that Bilam only had *ruach hakodesh* and not prophecy but, a little earlier in that work,⁷ the Rambam writes that Bilam's speaking with the angel was a prophecy. Furthermore, much later in Moreh Nevuchim,⁸ the Rambam writes that Bilam saw in a prophetic vision and at the very end of Mishneh Torah⁹

⁶ 2:45

⁷ 2:42

⁸ 3:22

⁹ Hilchos Melachim 11:1

the Rambam writes that Bilam prophesied about mashiach.¹⁰ It could be that, according to the Rambam, Bilam was able to raise himself up at those specific moments and, with G-d's assistance (perhaps for the sake of Israel's honor), become temporarily worthy of prophecy. Even though he was not normally a prophet, at those few moments he was capable of achieving the state of prophecy.¹¹

R' Yitzchak Arama,¹² however, was of the view that Bilam was never a prophet. He lacked the prerequisite refinement of character and, therefore, could not physically (or metaphorically) have achieved prophecy. Really, he was nothing more than an astrologer. However, the term prophet

¹⁰ R' Yosef Kafah, in his notes to Moreh Nevuchim 3:22 and Hilchos Melachim 11:1, was disturbed by these contradictions and was of the view that, according to the Rambam, Bilam was not a prophet. However, he had no resolution for the statements to the contrary.

¹¹ Something along these lines was suggested to me long ago by my friend Yisrael Dubitsky.

¹² Akedat Yitzchak, ch. 82. Cf. HaKesav VeHaKabbalah, Devarim 34:10.

was sometimes used by Chazal to refer to someone who was **like** a prophet, as Bilam was. He could determine the future, but through "science" and not through divine communication. Indeed, this intent was hinted to us by Chazal's (Bava Basra 15a) use of the term "prophets of the nations of the world" rather than just "prophets." For them, he was the closest they would get to prophecy. And that, the Akedat Yitzchak explains, is the intent of the Sifrei. Just like the greatest Jewish prophet was Moshe, the greatest gentile prophet-equivalent was Bilam. This, the Akedat Yitzchak tells us, is the importance of the story of Bilam. It teaches us that prophecy is only for those who reach a high level of personal conduct and explains to us why those who do not can never receive prophecy. Bilam was among the greatest of his people and he still could not achieve true prophecy. No one today – Jew or gentile – and, in the times of the Temple when there were still great Jews, no gentiles have the ability to rise above Bilam and acquire prophecy.

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Bakeish Shalom

Many comment on a verse in this week's *haftara*: "He tells you, man: What is good, and what does Hashem expect of you? Only do justice, to love kindness, and to walk modestly with your G-d." (Micha 6:8)

In modern times, much of this attention is because of how grossly this verse was mis-appropriated by the Reform movement as a basis for their abandonment of the *mitzvos*. In contrast, the Gemara understands the three things named in this verse to include all 613 commandments.

R. Simla'i expounded: 613 commandments were told to Moshe, 365 prohibitions, like the number of

the days of the solar [year], and 248 [required] actions, corresponding to the limbs of a person...

Came Micha, and established them on three principles, as it says "He tells you man..." "Do justice" – that is the law. "Love kindness" – that is gemilas chessed [supporting kindness], "Walk modestly" – this is taking out of the dead, and welcoming the bride.

This is a kal vachomer [a fortiori]. If things that are not normally done in private [that is, taking care of the dead, and making happiness with the bride] the Torah obligates us to do modestly; things which are normally

done in private, how much more so! (Makos 24a)

The Gemara's words require some explanation. On the one hand, it indicates that the fundamental principles underlying all 613 *mitzvos* can be found in this verse. On the other hand, it also explains the verse to refer to particulars: the law, *chessed*, taking care of the dead, and throwing weddings for brides. How does this list represent the entire Torah?

The Marhasha¹ explains the *kal vachomer* to mean that the Gemara

¹ Ad loc.

includes all *mitzvos* in its explanation of “walking modestly with G-d”, that all *mitzvos* – even these two, must be performed *lishmah*, for their own sake, with no hope of glory, no ulterior motive. Only in this way do we take the “justice” and “kindness” and instill them into the core of our beings.

The Maharal uses a similar concept to explain the second Mishnah in Pirkei Avos. The Mishnah reads:

Shimon the Righteous was of the survivors of the Great Assembly. He often said, “Upon three things the world stands: on the Torah, on avodah – the service [of G-d], and on gemillus chassadim – acts of loving-kindness.”

The Maharal explains that “you must understand, that all creations depend on man. For they are created for man, and if men do not live up to what they ought to be, behold all is nullified.” The universe stands on these three principles because man does.

Therefore, the G-dly tanna writes that one pillar upon which the universe stands is the Torah, for the pillar completes man so that he can be a finished creation with respect to himself.

After that he says “on avodah”... for from this man can be thought complete and good toward He Who created him – by serving Him.... With regard to the third, it is necessary for man to be complete and good with others, and that is through gemillus chassadim.

You also must understand that these three pillars parallel three things in each man: the mind, the

living soul, and the body. None of them have existence without G-d. The existence of the soul is when it comes close to Hashem by serving Him.... From the perspective of the mind, the man gets his existence through Torah, for it is through the Torah that man attaches himself to G-d. To the body, man gets his existence through gemillus chassadim for the body has no closeness or attachment to Hashem, just that Hashem is kind to all. When man performs kindness G-d is kind to him, and so gives him existence. (Derech HaChaim 1:2)

As the Maharal explains them, the three pillars are the ideals for three different worlds in which man finds himself and the relationships each of

All mitzvos must be performed lishmah, for their own sake. Only in this way do we take the “justice” and “kindness” and instill them into the core of our beings.

those worlds enable us to have. Spiritual man lives in the upper world where he can relate to G-d. Physical man lives in the physical world where he can sense the needs of other people, and shower kindness upon them. The mind lives by itself, however it is equipped with intelligence so that it can learn Torah for perfection of that self.

“Torah” is the means for perfection within the world of our own minds. “Avodah” includes all commandments between spiritual man and G-d, just as “Gemillus Chassadim” includes all *mitzvos* between physical man and fellow man.

Traditionally, the *mitzvos* are divided into two categories, *Bein Adam laMakom* – between man and the Omnipresent, and *Bein Adam laChaveiro* – between man and his fellow man. To these, the *Ba’alei Mussar* add a third: *Bein Adam leAtzmo* – between man and himself. However, R. Yosef Zundel Salanter, as retold by his student Rav Yisrael, describes this third category not so much as a type of *mitzvah*, but rather as the basis of the others, a description of how a *mitzvah* is done: Was it willingly or grudgingly, was it for public recognition or because it is was *mitzvah*. Note that these three categories of *mitzvos* are the very same relationships that the Maharal tells us the world stands upon, and that Rav Yosef Zundel makes the category of Torah, of one’s relationship to oneself, logically prior to the other two.

Perhaps in this light we can better understand the *Maharsha’s* comments on the pasuk in Micha. This pasuk also gives a three-part description of the entire Torah.

What does G-d demand of us? “Do justice” – “Avodah”, serve G-d. “Love chessed”, use your physical senses to serve your fellow man. Justice and kindness, as the Maharal tells us, are tools for serving G-d and man, respectively, for properly utilizing body and soul.

But these two pillars cannot stand on their own. You must also tend to those *mitzvos* that are between you and yourself. You must not only do the *mitzvos*, but do them correctly. *Lishmah*. Do the *mitzvos* with modesty, not as part of a pursuit of glory.

Sefesai Tiftach

REB JONATHAN BAKER

This week, we will discuss Baruch She’amar, the opening quasi-blessing (you’ll see why)

of Pesukei Dezimrah.

Baruch She’amar is printed as two paragraphs, and in fact is two distinct

sections: a series of short praises beginning with “Baruch”, and a

regular long-bracha, opening and closing with Baruch Atah Hashem.

The first section suggests the possibility of responsive reading, perhaps alternating responses between Baruch Hu and Baruch Shemo. The sources disagree. Sefer Yuchasin, describing the installation of the Reish Galusa, the Exilarch of Bavel, holds that it was said responsively. Dr. Seligman Baer, however, holds that the responsive reading was **only** done at the installation of the Reish Galusa, but is simply part of the prayer when said in the morning service. This works well with R' Dovid Zvi Hoffman's model, as we shall see.

The many repetitions of the word "Baruch" almost sound sycophantic. Since the aim of tefillah is to work on **ourselves**, rather than to appease G-d, the repetition of Baruch serves rather to focus our concentration on the Source of blessing, on our partnership in sanctifying the world. The morning berachos brought us up from total self-absorption in sheer existence and mobility, to the beginnings of a relationship with G-d. This passage, then, interfaces between the act of blessing expressing partnership, and the act of praise, as we ascend the ladder of holiness.

What do higher beings do? Praise G-d all day! Holy holy holy is the Lord of Hosts! The Kabbalists see the four phases of prayer – Berachos, Zimrah, Shema, Amidah – corresponding to four ascending spiritual worlds. We leave the lowest level, *asiyah*, that which interfaces with physicality, and rise to the first purely spiritual level, *beriyah*. We begin pure praise with an admixture of baruch. Progressions within progressions.

The words hint at many things. *She'amar vehayah ha'olam* comes from Tehillim 33:9, reflecting the Talmudic cognomen *mi she'amar ve'hayah ha'olam*.

Oseh bereishis – the beginning of praise is the beginning of Creation. These two phrases point to Chazal's

creation story, where the world was created with everything *in potentia*, but not brought into full existence until the Sixth Day. The world was created whole, indicated by the Torah's starting with the *beis* of **Bereishis**, rather than an *aleph* signifying a gradual creation. Everything was there, and was started in existence later, through *beis*, and was named by Adam Harishon. Baer sees this via, e.g., Bereishis Rabbah 14, "and all the waters of Bereishis burst forth", rather than "all the waters of the world".

Meracheim al ha'aretz is the the seventh additional beracha for drought.¹ Even *in extremis*, His mercy will flow to us.

R' Dovid Zvi Hoffman sees the first section as an extended meditation on seven attributes of G-d hinted at in grammatical constructions of the Tetragrammaton, the YKVK. Before we praise G-d, we contemplate the implications of His Name.

1. *Amar vehayah ha'olam* – pure existence, creation *yesh me'ayin*. **Hoveh**.
2. *Omer ve'oseh* – He makes His promise become reality. That which will be, becomes that which is. **Yihyeh** → **hoveh**.
3. *Meracheim* – the **attribute of the G-d-name is mercy**, compared with *Elokim's* attribute of Judgment, which arises from *Elokim* meaning leaders, judges.
4. *Meshalem s'char* – grants reward. R' Yehoshua in Mechilta translates YKVK as "**faithful in paying reward**" to those who fear Him and do His mitzvot.
5. *Chai lanetzach* – Eternal, **hayah hoveh yihyeh**, which is implied in the imperfect form *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*. This argues against the clockwork universe – He is and He cares.

¹ Mishnah Ta'anis 2:4

6. *Go'el* – redeems, returns life to the despairing. This ties in with teshuvah: He **redeems** from moral failings, and **delivers** from physical destruction. **Mahveh**.

7. *Baruch Shemo* – the **Proper Name** of G-d, that which sums up the Jewish concept of the ineffable G-d, who yet corresponded with Adam and gave us the Torah, immanent and transcendent, *me-malei vesovev col almin*. Ultimately, He is not His attributes, He is.

Then follows the *birkas hamitzvah* over *Pesukei Dezimrah*. We approach the *Av Harachaman*, distant yet close and merciful; *mehulal befi amo*. Perhaps all existence must praise Him, as the end of *Nishmas* says *shekein chovas kol hayetzurim*, but it is **we** who praise Him, *bemak'halos rivevos amo beis yisrael*; through *shirei David*, author of much of Tehillim; through five phases of *Pesukei Dezimrah* reflected in the 5 nouns ending in *uvizmiros*; *adei ad*, and praises live on even after death, even if we aren't actively praising any more (*Hallel: lo hameisim yehalelu Kah*). We close with *Mehulal batishbachos*, same as the end of *Hallel*, returning to the Braisa's idea that the core of *Pesukei Dezimrah* is the Hallel of Tehillim 145-150.

Baruch She'amar interfaces between Berachos and Tehillah, focusing us on He who is to be praised.

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