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PARSHA

ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Chukas—Balak ✍️ Rabbi Shloimie Neuberger

The Proper Path

The Midrash Tanchuma questions why Hakadosh Baruch Hu would choose to rest his Divine Spirit on a rasha such as Bilam. The Midrash explains that in doing so, Hashem pre-empted the complaints of the nations of the world, who would otherwise claim that had they been granted a Navi such as Moshe, they too would have chosen the correct path.

The appointment of Bilam as a Navi would seemingly render the nations on equal footing with Bnei Yisrael in terms of spiritual potential. A perusal of the Parsha, however, reveals evidence to the contrary. A case in point is the instance where Balak's messengers approach Bilam to request his services. Bilam responds by stating: "Spend the night here." Rashi explains that Bilam was only able to host the Divine Spirit at night, and was thus compelled to wait until morning before he could grant the messengers' request. Moshe, on the other hand, was able to converse with Hashem at any time or location. This apparent disparity between the abilities of the two Nevi'im would seem to lend validity to the defense of the nations: namely, if Bilam's abilities were inferior to those of Moshe, how could they be expected to accomplish as much as Bnei Yisrael? How then could the appointment of Bilam serve as an effective rebuttal to their complaint?

The Mishna in Avos describes three ways in which we can ascertain if a person is a student of Avraham Avinu or Bilam. If one has an Ayin Tova – a good eye, a Ruach Nemoucha – a humble spirit, and a Nefesh Shefala – a meek soul, then he is a student of Avraham Avinu. Conversely, if one has an Ayin Raah – an evil eye, a Ruach

Gavoah – an arrogant spirit, and a Nefesh Rechova – a greedy soul, then he is a student of Bilam.

The Chidushei Harim notes that the first letters of the words Nefesh, Ayin, and Ruach – nun, ayin, and resh-spell "Na'ar" – "child." Every person is born with these components of character. The question, stresses the Chidushei Harim, is how the child applies these character traits. Will one develop these traits to become a student of Avraham Avinu or Bilam? Each individual must grapple with this decision.

This insight can shed light on our question. Bilam, like Moshe, was born with the potential to become a student of Avraham Avinu. Unfortunately, he chose a different path, and eventually personified this other path. He is the rasha who stands in direct opposition to the tzadik Avraham Avinu. Bilam's abilities as a prophet were indeed inferior, but this inequity was solely the result of his poor choices.

Each day we face the challenge of choosing whom we wish to emulate. Are we modeling ourselves after Avraham Avinu, or are our traits of greed, arrogance, and evilness controlling us? May we help one another to reach our goals and to be counted amongst the students of Avraham Avinu, with the greeting of Mashiach speedily in our days!!

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Amein Part one

Rabbi Yisroel Langer

The mishnah in Avos (2:1) says: “Be as scrupulous in the performance of a mitzvah that is minor, as in the performance of a mitzvah that is major, for you do not know the extent of the reward for the various mitzvos.” We see from this mishnah that there are some mitzvos that are perceived to be small and easy to fulfill. Nevertheless, one should not overlook them, as their reward can be greater than some mitzvos that are harder to fulfill. Perhaps one such mitzvah is the mitzvah of answering *Amein* to a bracha or a kaddish. Indeed, Chazal tell us that the gates of Gan Eden are opened for one who has *Kavana* (concentration) when saying “*Amein*” (Shabbos 119b). The gemorah in Berachos (47a) tells us that one who lengthens his *ameins* will be worthy of having his days lengthened. Chazal go so far as to say that the one who answers *amein*, has greater merit than the one who recited the bracha. The Avudraham explains that one who recites a bracha is compared to one who has a document that has not yet been accepted by the courts. One could still add on or take away from it. Once the *amein* is said, the document is considered signed and validated by the courts and can no longer be refuted. Conversely, one who is not careful with saying *amein* can R”L receive terrible punishments. (See Yesod V’shorash Havodah shaar 5 ch.6. see also back of sefer Halichos Shlomo that brings frightening stories about this topic).

Amein is the acronym for *E-L Melech Ne’eman* (A-lmighty faithful King). Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 124:5) rules that one’s recitation of *amein* should not take less time than the time it takes to say the above three words- *E-l Melech Ne’eman*. (see Tosfos Shabbos 119b that says one should think these three words while saying *amein*.) However, one should not overly lengthen his *amein* as this could result in a mispronunciation of the word. (see Maharsha Berachos 47a who gives an additional reason not to overly lengthen one’s *amein*). When pronouncing the word *amein*, care must be taken to pronounce the word properly. The *Aleph* should be pronounced with a *kametz* and not a *patach*. The *mem* should be pronounced with a *tzeirei* and not a *segol*. One must also be careful not to swallow the *nun* at the end of the word.

The *kavana* (intent) of the person answering *amein* is integral and is dependent on the type of bracha he is responding to. When saying *amein* to a bracha of *hodah*, (ex. *Boruch Sheemar, Yishtabach*, brachos made on foods etc.) one’s *kavana* should be that what is being said here is true and I believe in it. If the bracha was a *tefillah* (something is being asked for) such as the middle brachos of Shmoneh Esrei, one should have *kavana* that what is being said is true, and may it be His (Hashem Yisborach)

will that this *bakasha* (request) is answered. (See Biur Halacha 124:6 if this *kavana* should be thought for the first two brachos of Shmoneh Esrei.)

Miscellaneous *amein* issues:

- Just as one’s hands must be clean to recite a bracha, one’s hands must be clean to answer *amein*. (Pri Migadim: Eshel Avraham 432:1)
- An *amein* should not be recited louder than the bracha, unless the person answering has the intention to teach others to say *amein* (M.B. 124:sk 47)
- One must be careful not to answer *amein* until the entire bracha is completed. This halacha is very relevant when a chazzan shlepps out the final words of a bracha. In this case, no *amein* should be said until the chazzan completes the final word. One must also be careful not to wait too long after the bracha is said. If one waited longer than the time it takes to say 3 or 4 words, he may no longer say *amein*. If he heard a bracha with a *tzibur*, he may say *amein* as long as the majority of the people in the minyan are still saying *amein* (M.B. 124 sk 34)
- If one is in the middle of learning Torah, it is a dispute amongst the poskim whether one must say *amein* to a bracha that he hears. The Salmas Chaim (siman 199) says that one must say *amein*, while the Eshel Avraham (215) and Hagaon R’ Shlomo Zalman Auerbach Ztz”l (Halichos Shlomo ch. 9:6) are of the opinion that one is not obligated to answer *amein*, because of the rule that one who is engaged in one mitzvah is exempt from another.
- Although it is not obligatory, it is proper to answer *amein* to any supplication that is said, even if it is not a bracha (ex. Harachamans at the end of bentching). (M.B. 189 sk.5, and 215 sk.9)
- One should answer *amein* to a bracha of a child that has reached the age of chinuch (approximately 6 years old), provided that the bracha was said properly (M.B. 124 sk 47). If the child is below the age of chinuch, Hagaon R’ Shlomo Zalman Auerbach Ztz”l (Halichos Shlomo ch. 22:20) rules that one should only pretend to say *amein*. He should say “*amein*” without enunciating the n of the *amein*. (see Ishei Yisroel ch. 4 footnote 40) One should train his children as early as possible to answer *amein*, for as soon as a child answers *amein* he has a portion in the world to come. (O.C. 124:7)

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