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PARSHAS  
BALAK 5777

RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

## The Secret Power of a Most Delicate Voice

**B**ilam began his mission to annihilate Klal Yisrael. As he travelled from his native Midyan to the land of Mo'av, his donkey veered off the road, entering into a privately owned field. Bilam responded by striking the donkey, trying to manoeuvre her back onto the road.<sup>1</sup>

The *Medrash*<sup>2</sup> comments on this seemingly minor episode of Bilam's journey, "What a *Rasha* Bilam is! He is travelling to murder an entire nation that did not harm him, and yet he strikes his animal so that she won't go into someone else's property!" The *Mefarshim*<sup>3</sup> explain the *Medrash's* criticism of Bilam. Bilam should have caught himself in the irony of his behaviour: Here he was, attempting to curse Klal Yisrael into oblivion using the dark power of a curse - a supernatural task, and yet he couldn't even control a mere animal with physical force! He should have paused at this point and come to the realization that if he was that powerless over his donkey, he surely would not have the power to murder Bnei Yisrael with the force of his speech. Instead, Bilam charged forward with his mission, ignoring the signs of his impending failure.

Who was Bilam? *Rabbenu Bechaye*<sup>4</sup> enumerates many divine signals that were intended to trigger Bilam's thought process into reconsidering his mission. However, he was so fixated on his dream to destroy Klal Yisrael that nothing fazed him. Nothing made him consider that he might not succeed, even the most glaring and bizarre phenomenon of all - when his donkey began to *TALK* to him!<sup>5</sup> It wasn't until Hashem finally allowed Bilam to see the *Malach* blocking the road, that Bilam realized his powerlessness. Yet, despite his maniacal focus, the *Medrash* feels that Bilam could've turned everything around and abandoned his plans, with a bit of reflection. Even a man as evil as Bilam could've reconsidered. Such introspection would've had the power to penetrate his deeply held evil notions - even when other, more miraculous phenomena, could not.

The process of **Hisbonenus** - reflection, self introspection, pondering and analysis, is of critical importance in the life of a Jew. As children and adults, we often find our-

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### *Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step*

*Hisbonenus* can be a challenge at first. How do I find the time? What do I think about? Here are some practical strategies:

1. Carefully search your schedule for a time - slot that is consistently available. Dedicate that time to *Hisbonenus*. This creates routine.
2. Be realistic. Time commitments that are too lengthy or too frequent will end up being abandoned. But...
- 3....Don't allow too much time to elapse between *Hisbonenus* sessions. Long gaps allow the effects of the previous session to wear off.<sup>10</sup>
4. Attach your session to a fixed part of your day. Ex: on a *hisbonenus* day, don't eat dinner until you fulfil your *Hisbonenus* commitment.<sup>11</sup>
5. To get your thoughts flowing, some find it helpful to write. Find a calm place to allow your thoughts to spill out on to the paper.
6. *Chazal* and the *Sifrei Mussar* are replete with the need and benefits of *Hisbonenus*. Study different passages that will deepen your appreciation for this exercise. This may strengthen your inner resolve to stick with your *Hisbonenus* commitment.

10 HaRav Yisrael Salanter zt"l, *Sefer Ohr Yisrael Iggeres 6*

11 HaRav Henach Leibowitz zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yisrael Meir HaKohen "Chofetz Chaim", Queens, USA

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selves in challenging life settings, both from within ourselves and from the individuals or groups around us. We have deep reservoirs of inner strength to help us successfully navigate these situations. First, though, we must develop our capability to hear the inner voice of truth to guide us to what is right. The *Sifrei Mussar* emphasize the great dividends that regular introspection can provide to us. It is the very foundation upon which our entire *Avodas Hashem* is built.<sup>6</sup> From this *Medrash* we can see the powerful effect a delicate voice from within can have.

## Knowing your Voice

(True story name changed)

Binyamin Levy was an impressive and eager law student. Over his summer recess he landed a job as a courtroom clerk to gain experience and put his knowledge of law to practical use. He gained exposure to high profile cases featuring some of the top law firms in Los Angeles. He diligently sent his resume to many law firms trying to secure a job for after the summer. Binyamin was shocked when he received an invitation for an interview at the largest and most prestigious firm in town. It was a dream come true - almost. The interview was a major opportunity and a major pressure. Binyamin contacted the firm to schedule the interview and he began preparing for the big day. One issue, though, gnawed at Binyamin: his yarmulka. This firm was not known for a large Jewish presence. Should he remove his yarmulka for the interview? Throughout school and internships he never even considered removing his yarmulka. Why was it any different now? On the other hand, with such an important interview, and so much on the line, maybe it would just be better to blend in, and not rock the boat. In his heart he felt uneasy about removing his yarmulka. His nerves, however, were begging him to play it safe and not jeopardize this unique chance. After consulting with others, Binyamin decided not to wear his yarmulka to the interview.

On the day of the interview, Binyamin arrived early and did his best to appear calm but not overconfident. The secretary finally called him into the office of one of the senior partners. Binyamin entered the impressive office and took a seat. Almost immediately, the senior partner said, "Mr. Levy, you know we receive an endless amount of resumes. Hundreds. Maybe thousands. Top students from top law schools. Do you know why we wanted to meet you? Not because your credentials are all that much better than the anyone else. I saw you in court this summer, at the big Montgomery case, and I inquired about you. You know why? You were the only one in the whole courthouse wearing a skullcap. That's courageous. That takes leadership. That's what we are here at this firm - leaders. Not followers. This interview is over."

6 R' Yerucham HaLevi

### DID YOU KNOW?

- The Torah and *Nevi'im* constantly obligate us to introspect, to ponder, and to analyse. The Torah goes to great lengths to enhance and encourage Klal Yisrael's ability to reflect on a consistent basis.<sup>7</sup>
- *Hisbonenus* is for everybody. Even great *Tzadikim* and *Talmidei Chachamim* benefit immensely from *Hisbonenus*. Actually, a hallmark of great individuals is that they excel in their ability to be *Misbonen*, to reflect deeply, even on that which appears mundane.<sup>8</sup>
- *Hisbonenus* is a key skill in developing our ability of "*Tziyur*", the ability to mentally visualize the concepts of Torah and *Chazal* in a sophisticated manner – a critical tool in *Ruchniyus* achievement.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Mishnas R' Aharon Al HaTorah* beginning of *Parshas Devarim*, based on *Ramban Ki Seitzei* 24;9. Also, *Chovos Halevavos Shaar Cheshbon HaNefesh* acc. to *Pas Lechem* and *Tov HaLevanon*

<sup>8</sup> HaRav Mordechai Gifter zt"l in a lecture, commenting on *Avos D'Rebbi Nosson* 6; 2. *Sefer Chiddushei HaLev* (HaRav Henach Leibowitz zt"l) *Shemos* 2;11.

<sup>9</sup> *Michtav M'Eliyahu* vol. 5 pgs. 145 – 148



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