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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת בלק

מה טובו אהלֵיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל. כְּנַחֲלִים נָטְיוּ כְּגִזַּת עַלְי נְהַר וְכוּ'. (במדבר כד, ה-ו)
'How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Yisroel. Stretching out like brooks, like gardens by a river ...' (Bamidbar 24:5-6)

In this week's *Sidrah*, Balak expresses his fear of Klal Yisroel and their military victories, and hires Bilom to curse the Yidden. Hashem thwarts their plans, and despite Bilom's best efforts to the contrary, he is forced to bless them instead.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 105b) examines the praise and blessing that Bilom was compelled to deliver to Klal Yisroel. R' Yochanan explained that from the blessing proclaimed by the wicked Bilom, we can infer what was truly in his heart. He sought to say that the Yidden should not have any *shuls* or *botei midroshim*, but instead, he was forced to say *מה טובו אהלֵיךָ יַעֲקֹב*, *How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov*, which was referring to the places of davening and learning. Similarly, instead of expressing a desire for the *Shechinah* not to rest upon Klal Yisroel, he was compelled to say *מִשְׁכְּנֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל*, *your dwelling places, O Yisroel*, signifying *הַשְּׂרָאָת הַשְּׂכִינָה*. He sought to say: May their kingdom not endure. Instead, he was forced to say: *כְּנַחֲלִים נָטְיוּ*, *they stretch out like streams*, which symbolises Jewish kingship with the kings always anointed by the river. The Gemara continues along these lines, listing the *brachos* of Bilom, which were the opposite of the curses he had intended for Klal Yisroel.

The Gemara (*ibid.*) relates how all of Bilom's blessings eventually turned into the curses he intended, except for his curse regarding the *shuls* and *botei midroshim*. Although Hashem prevented Bilom from uttering the curses he had in mind, those curses eventually happened. Ultimately, Klal Yisroel lost its Beis Hamikdash, its land, its reputation, its kings, and its power. The only exception was Bilom's curse regarding places to learn and daven; these have always survived among Klal Yisroel. The Gemara infers this fact from the *possuk* (*Devorim* 23:6) which states: *וְיִהְיֶה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמְעַ עַל בְּלַעַם, וְיִהְיֶה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמְעַ עַל בְּלַעַם, וְיִהְיֶה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמְעַ עַל בְּלַעַם, וְיִהְיֶה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמְעַ עַל בְּלַעַם*, *But Hashem your G-d refused to listen to Bilom, and Hashem your G-d transformed the curse into blessing for you, because Hashem your G-d loves you*. The *possuk* uses the singular form *קְלָלָה* – curse, instead of *קְלָלוֹת* – curses, which implies that only one curse was permanently transformed. The other utterances, however, eventually came to pass as the intended curse.

The Maharsha questions how Chazal knew that the only "curse" which was totally transformed was that of the eternity of *shuls* and *botei midroshim*. How is this indicated in the *possuk*?¹

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* brings the following explanation from his father, R' Leib *zatzal*, in Meorei Shearim. R' Leib answers this question by examining the wording of the *possuk*, *וְיִהְיֶה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמְעַ*,

¹ The Maharsha himself explains that the statement which refers to the places of davening and learning is referred to as a "single" curse since it was the first one Bilom intended to utter. All the subsequent statements, being second, third and so on, were "plural" in that they were one of many.

and Hashem your G-d transformed **for you**. The words “for you,” indicate that only you – Klal Yisroel – can recognise this blessing. Only Yidden can appreciate the enormous value that can be gained from having *shuls* and *botei midroshim*, and even Bilom was unaware of the magnitude of this blessing. As the Midrash Rabbah (*Vayikra* 3:7) states: If the world's nations were to recognise the wisdom, insight, knowledge and discernment in the Torah, they would love it with absolute love. This would lead them to ignore any difficult consequences that may come from keeping and learning the Torah.

R' Leib further explains by questioning the Gemara above: The *possuk* stated that due to Hashem's love for us, He transformed the curses of Bilom into blessings. If Hashem truly loves us, why was only the expression of *מה טבו אלהיך יעקב* transformed completely from a curse to a blessing? He explains that the answer must lie in the importance of this *brochah*, which can be understood based on Dovid HaMelech's singular request: *אחת שאלתי מאת ה' אותה אבקש, שבתתי בבית ה' כל ימי חיי, לרחות בנעם ה' וכו' One thing I asked of Hashem, that shall I seek: That I dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life; to behold the sweetness of Hashem etc...*

The fact that Hashem's love for us is demonstrated with the assurance of the continued existence and survival of our *shuls* and *botei midroshim*, highlights their importance and criticality in providing us with a meaningful life. Every Yid's *neshamah* recognises and feels that all joy and satisfaction in life depends on our relationship with Hashem, which is achieved through davening and learning. A person may have minimal physical pleasures but still feel content through spiritual pursuits. Conversely, someone who enjoys every material desire but lacks the feelings of closeness to Hashem, typically found through the *shuls* and *botei midroshim*, will feel empty and joyless. Since the blessing of *מה טבו* plays a central role in the life of every Yid, Hashem, with His great love, ensured that these places which bring about *קרבת אלוקים* will endure forever.

By the inauguration of the Mishkan, Moshe and Ahron blessed the entire nation with a *brochah* that represents the above message. Rashi (*Vayikra* 9:23) cites Chazal that they blessed them with the *possuk* (*Tehillim* 90:17): *ויהי נעם ה' אלקינו עלינו, ומעשה ידינו כוננה עלינו, ומעשה ידינו כוננהו: May the pleasantness of Hashem, our G-d, be upon us; the work of our hands establish for us; the work of our hands establish it.* The blessing was that through their work in building the Mishkan, Klal Yisroel should feel the pleasantness that comes from being close to Hashem. Avodas Hashem is the cause for genuine feelings of joy and satisfaction, and Moshe and Ahron were blessing the people that they should have the ability to sense this.

Let us keep in mind that we should appreciate Hashem's love for us through having our *shuls* and *botei midroshim*, as these afford us the experience of coming close to Him. By learning Torah, davening, and performing *mitzvos*, we have the chance to grow and strengthen our connection to Hashem, leading to genuine *simchah* and fulfilment in our lives.

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