



THE LESSON OF BILAM

A MODERN MIRACLE

I once met an outstanding, interesting person. He was my driver. He told me an amazing *ma'aseh*. He got very angry one time. His anger built up over a couple of days, until his blood pressure boiled over and he had a massive heart attack that sent him into a total coma. He was in a coma for three or four months. People were *davening* for him, but his condition was not improving. *Gornisht*. Finally, a *rav*, a very special *rav*, Rav David Ozeri, may he live and be well, came to this fellow's room and *davened* in his room *shacharis*, *minchah*, and *ma'ariv* out loud. After a week of *davening* and saying *Tehillim*, finally he said to the guy, "Steven! It's time to wake up! Do you want to wake up?" And Steven put up a thumb. Then the *rav* asked him, "Do you want to go back to work?" He made a motion with his hand as if to say he wasn't sure about going back to work. He called his family and his family couldn't believe it. "Nah, he didn't come out of the coma," they thought. But the guy *pashut* came out of the coma a few days later! He had to relearn how to walk. He could only walk now. He doesn't know how to run. He's very grateful to Hashem for this miracle. I started watching him afterwards, driving a little more carefully. He was a very kind person. He told me that he wanted to take me wherever I needed to go. He even called me today. He said if any of your children come here, they should call him. "I'm happy to pick them up and take them places." It was nice to meet a *ba'al hanes*. It was an *emese nes*.

This morning I couldn't sleep so I got up at 5 o'clock. I figured I have to prepare the *shiur*. I took out a *chumash*, and I started looking in the *chumash*. I said, "Hashem, You've got to give me a thought. Help me out Hashem!" And there was a *sefer* there from a famous Sefardic *rav* on *chumash*, five volumes. I opened it up. I went through all the pieces on the *parshah* but I couldn't find anything that resonated with me. I didn't think that was what Hashem wanted me to talk about. Finally, I said, "Forget about it. I have to learn a little *gemara*." I opened up a *Kovetz Shiurim* second volume. He has a *kuntres* there called *Divrei Sofrim*. And I noticed a very interesting *vort* in this *kuntres* (אות), related to Bilam. It was like Hashem guided me straight to this piece.¹

BILAM'S MISTAKE

He says in this week's *parshah*, we find that Bilam Harasha was challenged with a great *nisayon*. He was invited to go with some folks to curse Klal Yisrael and make a boatload of money, which was something that he really desired. And what happened? He wakes up in the morning and he tells them, "לא אוכל לעבור את פי ה', I cannot transgress that which Hashem says, even if you give me your whole house full of money!"

Now, to me and to other people, it might sound like Bilam is being *modeh*. Yet *Chazal* call him a *rasha* and a *tipesh*. When his donkey finally opened his mouth, his donkey told him what kind of *tipesh* he is. Bilam Harasha! "Where in the world do you think you're going? Don't you understand? Don't you get it that Hashem doesn't want you to go curse the Jewish people? How many times does He have to tell you that?" *Mamash* amazing! And then what happens? He's faulted, and he's accused.

So Rav Elchonon asks a *pashute kasha*. Bilam said, "I can't go against Hashem, but now Hashem was *maskim* for me to go with you all, so I'm going with you." What's the problem with that? You hear the question? Bilam declared that he can't transgress the word of Hashem and he can't do anything Hashem doesn't let him do, so at first he didn't go. He only went after Hashem finally told him to go. So why was Bilam such a bad person? What did he do so bad? A *gevaldige* question!

Rav Elchonon suggests a *pshat* and I think there lies a tremendous lesson. He introduces us to a *passuk* in *Yirmiyah*. Hashem told the Navi Yirmiyah that the Jews built *bamos*, these places of sacrifice for the *avodah zarah* called the Ba'al, לשורף, to burn, את בניהם באש, their children in fire by offering them up to the Ba'al. Hashem says that this is something אשר לא ציויתי, that I did not command, ולא דברתי, that I did not speak, ולא עלתה על ליבי, and that never entered My mind.

What are these three things? It sounds like the same thing over and over and over? Rav Elchonon says if you take a look in the Targum, the Targum says as follows: אשר לא ציויתי, I didn't *command*: means that this behavior is not in My Torah. ולא דיברתי, I didn't speak: means I never sent a prophet to *transmit* such behavior to the Bnei Yisrael, and ולא עלתה על ליבי: means it never was *My ratzon*.

D'RABANAN RULES

Rav Elchonon says you should know that there are three *chalakim* of Torah. Torah is broken down into three divisions. You have a *chelek* which is called *tzivuyim*, commandments. Hashem spoke them out clearly. "This you shall do, and this you shall not do." There is another *chelek* called *dibur*. Hashem told us through *nevi'im* and *chachamim* as messengers of Hashem to institute and transmit law to the Jewish people. And the third *chelek* is what is called *ratzon Hashem*. Something that does not have a commandment or the word of a *Navi*. But it is the will of Hashem. He says do you know what falls in that class? Under that umbrella fall all the *mitzvos* that the *rabanan* instituted.

¹ אמנם לפי הנ"ל אתי שפיר דבל מה שצונו חכמים אנו יודעין שכן הוא גם רצון ה' ודבר זה לעשות רצונו ית"ש כל באי עולם מצווין ועומדים מתחלת ברייתו ע"ז דכל הנמצאים נבראו לעשות רצון קונם וכל פעל ד' למענהו והא דקטן פטור מכל המצוות הוא ששום שכן הוא רצון ה' לפוטרו אבל שכיון שגזרו חכמים עליו ואנו יודעין שהסכימה דעתן לדעת המקום ב"ה ממילא חייב לעשות כדבריהן שכן הוא רצונו ית'. ובזה אפשר לפרש כונת הכתוב בירמיה י"ט ובנו את במות הבעי לשרף את בניהם באש עלות לבעל אשר לא צויתי ולא דברתי ולא עלתה על ליבי ע"כ ופירושו בתרגום דלא פקדית באוריתי ודלא שלחית ביד עבדיי נבייא ולא רעוא קדמי הני בכתוב הזה מפורש כי יש שלשה חלקי תורה א) הנקרא צווי ב) הנקרא צווי ג) שאין עליו לא צווי ולא דבור אלא רצון ד' בלבד והם כל המצוות דרבנן כנ"ל. ולפני פשוטי המקראות נראה שזה היה עונו של בלעם הרשע דלכאורה אחרי שאמר אם יתן לי בלק מלא ביתו כסף וזהב לא אוכל לעבור את פי ה' מה היא רשעתו אבל באמת אף שידע בלעם היטב כי הליכתו יקלל את ישראל הוא נגד רצון ה' לא חשש גמ' ע"ז כ"ז שלא היה לו צווי מפורש שלא לילך וע"כ אמר לא אוכל לעבור את פי ה' פי דייקא אבל רצון ה' לא היה חשוב בעיניו לעשותו וזהו רשעתו.

Now, this is a tremendous insight Rav Elchonon is telling us. Everybody wants to know, why did Hashem leave things for the *rabanan*, for the rabbis to say? Because Hashem left many things for the rabbis to say and institute, so all of Bilam's friends think they don't have to listen to the rabbis now! Who are rabbis anyway? Rabbis say this *pshat*, and I say my *pshat*.

Let me share with you a beautiful story. Many years ago, a man wearing a white suit showed up in Teshe Yeshivah for *ma'ariv*, on Motzei Shabbos. I thought maybe he was selling ice cream or something. No. He came to *daven ma'ariv*. After *ma'ariv*, I went over to him and said, "*Shalom aleichem* Reb Yid. Who are you?" He told me his name. I said, "What brings you here? I didn't see you all Shabbos." He said, "I'm staying in the hotel down the street." "What are you doing in the hotel?" He said, "There's a Mensa convention." I said, "And what is that?" He said, "Mensa is an organization for geniuses." I said, "Are you a genius?" He said, "I'm a certified genius." Certified. He has a *shtempel*. He's stamped. Purdue genius. I said, "I'd like to introduce you to the head of this school, the head of the *yeshivah*. They call him the *rosh yeshivah*. His name is Rabbi Mordechai Gifter." I said, "He's also a genius, and he appreciates geniuses." Nu. So he was happy to meet him.

We met him in the hall. Rav Gifter was not a youngster then, and he was walking with a walker. I brought him over and I said, "A *gute vach*, Uncle. I would like to introduce you to Mr. So and So. He's from Mensa. He's a genius." Rav Gifter looked at him and raised his eyebrows. He had these thick eyebrows. He looked at him, and said, "Sir, are you a genius?" And he said, "Yes. I'm a genius." He said, "Sir, may I ask you a question?" He said, "Sure." "Do you know of G-d?" "Well, I have my doubts. I have questions." Rav Gifter looked at him with piercing eyes, and he said like this, "Ah! Sir, you're no genius! You're far from a genius! By us, every three-year-old knows of G-d. A *gute vach!*" Bam! You know what he was telling him? You're a *tipesh*. Because you know how to do Rubik's cubes, that makes you a *chacham*?! You're a *chacham* like Bilam. There's *reshaim* and *tipshim*.

Rav Elchonon is teaching us an amazing lesson here. There's an aspect of Torah that's not written clearly. There's an aspect in Torah that is not clearly expressed by the *nevi'im*. But the *rabanan* said it. The *rabanan* tell us what the *ratzon* of Hashem is. And *mechutzafim* are the ones who say, "I don't believe in this. I don't trust these rabbis who say what the *ratzon* of Hashem is."

WHOSE RATZON DO YOU CHOOSE?

That's what the passuk in *Yirmiyah* (19:5) is saying: לא ציוותי ולא דברתי ולא עלתה על ליבי, "they have built shrines to Baal, to put their children to the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I never commanded, never decreed, and which never came to My mind." It's not My *ratzon*. A whole new class of *mitzvah*. This is such a wonderful insight! And Rav Elchonon explains that was the *ta'anah* on Bilam. Yes, I didn't command you. Yes, I didn't give you a prophecy. But did you have a doubt of what the *ratzon* of Hashem was? Did you have any *safek* that Hashem doesn't want you to curse the Jewish people? You think this is possibly the *ratzon* of Hashem? Of course not! But as long as Hashem didn't tell him clearly, he was willing to go forward and ignore the *ratzon* of Hashem! That's a *chutzpah*! For that, you're wicked, and you're a *tipesh*.

In our lives, most people struggle with the *ratzon* of Hashem. You talk to secular people who are not yet *frum*, so they deal with the *mitzvos* of the Torah. The *mitzvos* of Hashem and the prophecies. But then you meet people who are committed to the *mitzvos* of Hashem. They're committed to the *nevius*. They keep the Shabbos. They keep all the *halachos*. But they struggle tremendously with the *ratzon* of Hashem. For example, I was talking to a *chashuve talmid chacham* and I asked him, "Where are you living nowadays?" "We're looking for a place. We don't have a place." I said, "What do you think the *ratzon* of Hashem is?" He looked at me like, what? What kind of question is that? As if to say, who cares? What my wife says, that's what I care about. What do you mean *ratzon* of Hashem? I said, "Are you aware of the fact that אין לך אדם שאין לו מקום, do you know that every person has a place?" Do you know what that means, a place? A designated place. And if he goes out of that place, he's doing the wrong thing.

Do you know what the word *makom* means? What's the *shoresh* of the word? The *shoresh* of the word is *kiyum*, existence, being sustained. A place sustains a person. If you're not in your place, you're not sustained. You're living off of something else and your nourishment, your life energy, is not being derived from this place.

Let's say a person goes to Barbados. Or he says, "My *ratzon* is to go to Cancun, Mexico. I saw so many pictures of Cancun. I decided I'm going there. Not on Pesach, but I'm going there to chill." So he travels down to the white sands of Mexico and buys himself a nice vodka with lemon juice. He's sitting on the beach. Somebody comes to him and says, "Excuse me, are you a religious Jew? Do you think Hashem wants a religious person to be here?" "Get out of here!" the guy responds. "It doesn't say anywhere in the Torah you're not allowed to be on Barbados Beach or in Cancun on the beach." Okay, that's his answer. Do you have any *hava mina* that the *ratzon* of Hashem is that a person should be there? People don't care about the *ratzon* of Hashem.

The most prevalent place that you find this problem is in *shidduchim*. A boy meets a girl. The boy decides the girl has good values but her cheekbones are not high enough. I like that cut of cheekbones. I like a nose that looks more Scandinavian. Her nose looks too Jewish. It's too round. It's not what I want. I told him you *sus*, that's what you are. You horse! Where does it say in the Torah that's a value, a measuring stick for the *ratzon* of Hashem? Do you know why there are so many people today that don't have *shidduchim*? For this exact reason. Because they're not subjugated to the *ratzon* of Hashem at all. He'll marry a girl who is lax in *mitzvos* if her eyes are situated just right where he wants them to be. And if they're blue, ah! It's *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. I've told many people, "Do you think Hashem wants you to marry a woman like this? She's barely committed. She's going in the wrong direction." "But Rabbi, you know how hard it is to get married today? Do you know what it is to get married today? I finally found someone!" I said, "You know the guy who marries the *shikseh* says the same thing. Many people who have married *shiksehs* told me that. They tell me, 'Rabbi, do you know why I married a *shikseh*? They're the only wives that listen to you. They don't give you trouble. They're not JAPS. They're not demanding. They don't ask you for this. They don't ask you for that. They're satisfied with whatever you give them. But the Jewish ones? They just want a bigger car, a bigger house, more vacations, more this, more that. You can't satisfy them.'" What about the *ratzon Hashem*? Oh, that he couldn't care less about.

There's a girl who met a *yeshivah bachur*, a very *chashuveh* girl. She has good, deep conversations with the boy. But she lets him go. I asked her, "What's the reason you let him go?" "You want to know the truth?" she told me. "His shirt was sticking out of his pants." I said, "Completely?" "No, on one side." I said, "Big deal! Whoopee do!" She said, "But this is not the person I can respect." I had to control myself. I just wished her a *refuah sheleimah* and a speedy recovery and I hope she finds her dream someday. It was

a *pelah* to me. Whose *ratzon* was she expressing?

Here is a girl who decides she needs a *bachur* that she can look up to and really respect. Now this girl is very smart. This girl is very accomplished. She's traveled all over. I set her up with a *bachur* who is a *talmid chacham*. A *bachur* who sat and learned. He's a very *geshmake bachur*. He's worldly. But he never traveled. He met this girl, and for every story he told her, she had three in return. Where were you? There? I was there, plus there, plus there. Let me tell you. I met an interesting person. Really? Let me tell you who I met. The guy *pashut* felt like a mouse. She outsmarted him and outshined him. I called her up, and I said, "Please, please. Do you like this guy?" She said, "It's the first guy I like in a long time." I said, "Well, you're losing him. You're losing him fast." She said, "What do I have to do?" I said, "You'd better act stupid, and when he says something say, 'Wow! That is interesting!' And don't come back with your *chachmos* because you're intimidating him. Don't you want to get married?" You think she controlled herself? *Nechtige tag!* She couldn't control herself. The next date the guy said, "Rebbi, I've got to get out of here. You've got to save me. How do I run away from here?" I said, "Run as far as you can go."

People are unbelievable! Is that the *ratzon Hashem* that you should open your mouth however you want? You'll get married, and over the years you'll tell him all your stories. You have to *chap arein* now?! Do you really have to stick it in his face and make him feel not special because he's a *yeshivah bachur* and you have more life experiences and travel behind your belt? That shows no *seichel*.

People are not *rotzeh*. The bottom line is I'm not *rotzeh*.

SHIDDUCHIM, WHERE TO LIVE, HOW TO DRESS

Here is a woman who is forty years old. She's not a baby anymore. Forty years old! And what happened? I told her, "You have to do the *ratzon Hashem*. Not your *ratzon*. The *ratzon* of Hashem." I said, "Call me up the next time a shidduch comes up." Finally, she gets an offer. A *talmid chacham*, a fine fellow. But he has one problem. He has a boatload of kids. His wife died, and he is left with a boatload of kids. I said, "How old is the youngest?" Ten. I said to her, "There are no diapers involved here. At your age, how many kids are you planning on having? Sixteen? If you have one, it will be from the miracles of the generation. What I would do if I were you is get married to him yesterday." Recently, I met somebody who was 55. My heart went out for the person. My heart was broken for the person! Fifty-five and not married! That is a tragedy of tragedies! It's a self-imposed tragedy. A person has to realize if you don't accept the *ratzon* of Hashem, then you're undermining yourself.

I asked a guy, "Where do you live?" He told me he lives far out. I said, "Why would you move out?" "That's what I like." I said, "Is that what Hashem wants? Does Hashem want you to move out? Who told you that's where Hashem wants you to live?" Let's say a person says, "I want to live near my family." I say to them, "Is your family good for you or poison for you? What's the story with your family?" "What do you mean?" I said, "Do your parents encourage you to learn? Do your parents encourage you to grow, or do they discourage you from growing? Do they put dampers on any time you want to grow?" He said, "They're not supportive." I asked him, "Do you think that's where Hashem wants you to live? Do you think Hashem wants you to live next to a family who is putting you down and trying to keep you in the basement and make sure you never become a respectable citizen? Is it possible? No."

There's a lady that I met. I said to her, "Why do you dress like that?" You know what she answered me? "Because I like to." I said, "That's a good reason." "I thought so." I asked her, "But do you think that's what Hashem wants you to do? Have you ever thought, is this what Hashem wants you to do?" It's a very important question, rabbosai.

Here is a *bachur davening* without a hat. What does Hashem want you to do? I saw a shocking thing. Rav Chaim Kanievsky writes that if you don't have a hat or a jacket, don't *daven* with a *minyan*. If you can get a hat and a jacket later, it's better not to *daven* with a *minyan*. I was blown away by that. What?! It's a nice thing, a *yeshivish zach*, you wear a hat and a jacket. But it's a *halachah*? He said it's a *halachah* and you shouldn't *daven* with a *minyan* like that. I was flabbergasted. You go out on the street, out in the world, it's not like that. You know what they tell me? "Hashem better be thankful that I even showed up in *shul* because if you're going to start complaining, you know what? I won't show up." And a lot of people tell me that. "I don't show up anymore because I felt that I was being dissed. I felt I was being rejected and not respected." I told them, "If you don't do the will of Hashem, how can you be respected?"

This is what Bilam's picture was. He said, "If Hashem didn't tell me clearly not to do this, if Hashem didn't send me a clear message, then I will do what I want." Even if he could understand clearly on his own that it's in conflict with the *ratzon* of Hashem, it didn't matter to him. And if a person lives his life this way he'll never succeed in *avodas Hashem*.

SELF-ANALYSIS

I had a *talmid* once who thought he was a cowboy. He was an older person, but he obviously had issues when he was a kid. He liked to come to *shul* in real cowboy boots and with a cowboy hat on Shabbos. I told him once, "Just don't bring the horse in here." I used to always kid around with him. I learned with him a few times a week. He was a serious learner. He was a good guy. But he had this *meshugas*. He said, "What's wrong with it? Everybody is making fun of me." He was *davening* in a modern *shul*. What's wrong with it? What's wrong with this hat? What's the difference between my hat and your hat? Because it's made in Texas instead of Italy. You know how these guys start to *kvetch* the *lomdus*? And my shoes have a little edge on them or a little buckle on them, what's wrong with that? I said to the guy, "Because you're not a cowboy, and cowboys themselves don't come to *shul* dressed this way. When they chase cows, they get dressed like that and when you go to *shul* there's a certain decorum and a *ratzon* of Hashem how you're supposed to behave." "Oh, I don't buy into that." I said, "You really think that this is the *ratzon* of Hashem?" You know what he told me? "I am sure it's the *ratzon* of Hashem because I only do it *lekovod Shabbos*." I said, "You're like the guy who came to *shul* in his pajamas." He said, "I only wear these silk pajamas on Shabbos, *lekovod Shabbos*." I told him, "That's *lekovod Shabbos*? Wonderful, but pajamas are something you wear in your house, in your bedroom. You don't wear it in *shul*. You don't get it." People are just thickheaded.

Now, the first step a person should undertake is to analyze his behavior. Is this what Hashem wants me to do? Does Hashem want me to wear such a funny suit? Does He want me to wear funny shoes? Does He want me to wear this funny shirt? Does He

want me to wear this? You want to know if there is a difference between somebody who is learning in *yeshivah*, with a uniform, and somebody who's learning outside *yeshivah*? Of course there's a difference, a major difference! Night and day difference. If a *yeshivah bachur* comes to a *shiur* with a blue shirt - if a guy in Lakewood would show up in the *kollel* with a blue shirt - they'd laugh him out of town. If he was a *balebus*, they would say, "Good morning." They'd give him respect that he opened a *gemara* after *davening*. There's a certain uniform. If you saw a policeman coming in here with a white suit instead of a blue suit, everybody would laugh. You would ask him if he became the ice cream man. What are you doing? You became a plumber? Are you cleaning the streets now? Why are you wearing a white suit? Policemen wear navy blue, and army people wear green.

You have to get your mind to start conforming, to subjugate yourselves to the will of Hashem. And the *rabanan* are the ones who guide us. The *rabanan* are the ones who direct us. You could wear all kinds of shirts when you come to *shul*. Put at least a jacket on top. That's all. Believe me, it's not the end of the world. You can wear a cap on top of your head. Nu, you have to wear a Borsalino hat or something? You can wear a *kasketel*. I don't know if a baseball cap is the *ratzon* of Hashem. I don't think Hashem wants to talk to a guy who is wearing the Dodgers on his head. I don't think Hashem is a Dodgers fan.

That's what a person has to realize. That's the idea. You have to get this idea *klor*, rabbosai: do you conform to the *ratzon* of Hashem? If a person thinks about it, it changes his whole life. It changes his whole perspective. That's the first step. Then you slowly change. You slowly move towards the *ratzon* of Hashem. But if you think you can do your own *ratzon* and be successful, then remember the story of Bilam.

PART 2: HOSTING HASHEM ON SHABBOS (5771)

HONORING SHABBOS

We've been discussing how on Shabbos, there is a unique relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, a unique change to the universe, and a unique change within every single *yid*. With that, we can now understand the concept of being *mechabed* the Shabbos.

There is a special *mitzvah* to honor the Shabbos with food, with drink, and with nice clothing. We know that whenever a person invites a *chashuve* guest into his house, the *derech ha'olam* is to invite them for a meal. You show respect through *achilah veshtiyah*, food and drink. That is the universal custom. Even in America this custom has changed a bit, people go out to have a bite to eat if a *chashuve* guest comes to their house, but in the world, that's how it always was.

So *al achas kamah vekamah*, certainly one must see to it that he honors the *Shechinah* who is coming to us and is resting upon us. On Shabbos Kodesh, a person has to get a sense that he is honoring a *sar chashuv*. You have to be honoring Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

HONORING HASHEM OR HONORING OURSELVES?

Sadly, there are many people today who like simple paper plates because it's easy. They would never treat a *sar chashuv* that way. They would never serve on those simple paper plates if it was a *sheva brachos*, and it was a simple *chassan vekallah* coming to your house. Yet when Hakadosh Baruch Hu comes to our house, we think, "I'm doing it for myself, and I'm happy with paper plates." A wife is surely happy with paper plates. The simple paper plates are *noch besser*. You're happy with simple because it's cheaper, your wife is happy with paper because she doesn't have to clean it. Everybody is happy because our whole premise is that we're doing it for ourselves. "I set the table. I put on the tablecloth. I did something to demonstrate that it's a special day today."

But a person has to know that they're being *mechabed* someone else. And everybody who is a *bar da'as* understands that if a *chashuve mentch* came to your house, you wouldn't pull out simple paper plates because it's easy for you, unless you had no *seichel*. There's a lot of things you wouldn't use because it's not becoming. Now, today, they have very expensive paper throw away plates. Okay. That is considered *chashuv*. You would serve it at a *sheva brachos*. But I'm not sure if you would serve it for a *sar chashuv*.

The approach has to be: "I'm being *mechabed* someone else. It's not for me to get a sense of Shabbos." Many people are under the impression that the *kavod* of Shabbos is for me to get a sense of it's a different day. Many people think that doing special things on Shabbos is for me to kind of psych myself out, so I should imagine it's a special day. That's not the point. The idea is to be *mechabed* someone else, to be *mechabed* Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

DO YOU HONOR HASHEM OR YOURSELF WITH YOUR CLOTHES?

The same idea applies to *bigdei* Shabbos. A *kohen* who was doing the *avodah* in *beis* Hashem wore special *begadim*. On Shabbos, a person has to know he is *omed lifnei* Hashem. There is a *din* of special *begadim* on Shabbos.

You should know, the *malbushim* that a person wears on Shabbos have to be clothes that he would wear for a king because they are *bigdei kodesh*. That is a very important thing. R' Tzadok writes that people mistakenly think that they are *mechabed* themselves because Shabbos has arrived. So then they say, רצונו של אדם זהו כבודו, what I want is my *kavod*. So I'm more comfortable in jeans.

I once knew a fellow who I used to learn with. He used to come to *shul* with a cowboy hat. He liked wearing big Western boots and a cowboy hat. He looked like a *shtikle* clown, but he had this hat special for Shabbos. I asked him, "What is this?" Many people asked him. He said, "This is what I feel good in." I told him, "It's not about you. It's about Hashem." I said, "If the president or the mayor was coming to see you, you wouldn't take these boots out. You wouldn't take this silly hat out." He said, "You know, I paid as much for my hat as you paid for your hat." I told him, "That's pretty silly because you're not *mechabed* anybody with that hat except yourself." That's a very big *yesod* to know.

The *passuk*, וכבודו, you have to honor the Shabbos. And the *gemara* (Shabbos 113a) says, שלא יהא מלבושך של שבת כמלבושך של חול, a person has to be *meshaneh* his *malbush* and the way he walks and the way he goes and the way he eats. It's not for

himself. It's to be *me'orer*, to make himself aware and to demonstrate that he acknowledges that he is doing it for the Ribono Shel Olam, for someone else.²

HONORING OTHERS BENEFITS OURSELVES

If you do that, you will be *matzliach* to extract the *toeles* that lies within the Shabbos because according to the amount of *kavod* that a person is *mechabed* someone, to the degree of *kavod* you give someone, you receive from that someone. Let me explain to you what that means.

Let's say a person goes to an *adam gadol* and he is *mechabed* that *adam gadol* tremendously and he feels unbelievable *kavod* to the *adam gadol*. That person's meeting with the *adam gadol* will be the most memorable meeting of his life. The more *kavod* you have and the more preparation you have for that person, the greater the *hashpaa* you will get from that person. It's like a *rebbe*. When a person is *mechabed* his *rebbe*, he is *mekabel* much more from his *rebbe* than when he is not so *mechabed* his *rebbe*.

I could tell you about myself. When I started learning by my *rebbe*, I was all full of awe. I can tell you things he said 35 years ago. I remember them like today. Do you know why? Because I approached him with awe. But today, I have great respect for him, but I look at him more humanely. So even though now he'll share with me many more secrets that he wouldn't have told me then, if I don't write them down, they don't sear into my *kishkes* the same way they did in the past. I don't receive that *hashpaa* I received back then.

I remember the time I went to the Steipler, zt"l. I thought it was going to be *Har Sinai mamash*. I remember every detail of the place. It made a tremendous *hashpaa* on me. I remember going to the *alter* Satmar Rebbe, zt"l. I remember going into his house and I remember waiting in line. They weren't being *gores* me and my brother because we were punks, we were young, but I remember sneaking into his bedroom and lying on his bed. And I remember, I got lots of *hashpaa* from that visit. I remember standing next to him, watching him *daven minchah*. I remember everything about his *minchah*. I remember everything about his bed, about his room, about his silver *negel vasser*. The place was *malchus mamash*. It had a tremendous *hashpaa* on me. The next time I went, I was already older. It was already different. It wasn't the same *matzav*. It wasn't the same *hashpaa* anymore.

So the more a person is *mechabed* his Shabbos, the more he is *mechabed a zach*, the more he is *mushpa* from it and the more he receives from that *zach*.

This is the same concept of why we don't do work on Shabbos. The idea of not doing work on Shabbos is not simply that we should get our minds off of *naarishkeit* and be able to focus on the ways of Hashem, or to remind ourselves that Hashem is the boss and that we don't have any *kochi ve'otzem yadi*. No. Those are definitely good reasons, but the main reason why we do this – is to have an awareness that we're in the presence of Hashem.

IF AN ADAM GADOL COMES TO YOUR HOUSE

I had *anashim chashuvim* come to my house several times. And at that point, my life stopped. I remember once we were *zocheh* to have the mashgiach from Lakewood, R' Matisyahu Salomon, come here. I remember I was so excited that I convinced my *shvigger* that the bedroom set is not *lefi kavodo*. So we bought a whole new bedroom set *lekvod* him. Then I said the mattresses have to be changed. You can't be *mechabed* such a *yid* with such mattresses. We painted the room. We put lamps and clocks in the room. And it's still called R' Matisyahu's room. That's how we refer to it. I went to his house. His house is very *pashut*. But it didn't make a difference. I remember that the days before he came, my agenda was cleared. I was busy. I was thinking the whole time, "What can I get him? I have to get a small refrigerator for him. Maybe he wants drinks, maybe he wants this." I tried to think about what drinks he wants, what drinks he likes. I remember being into it. It was a tremendous experience for me.

You know why? Because I knew somebody very *chashuv* was coming to my house, so everything was freed up. I couldn't do the normal, regular things.

When Shabbos comes, it has to be the same way, *rabosai*. That is the *avodah* of preparing for Shabbos. You don't start right before Shabbos. You start Wednesday, you start Thursday. Shamai started Sunday. Hillel said, you don't need to start Sunday, but it's better to (Beizah 16a).³

Many times, I imagine what I would do if my *rebbe* came to visit me. I would clean the house better than before Pesach. I would kasher everything. Shabbos comes. You have to think, what can you do for Shabbos? And if you don't do this and you don't think about this, you are missing out. This is the idea.

So let's do this *avodah*. When you go home tonight, try to think that the reason why things are different is because Hashem is coming as a guest. I'm hosting a very *chashuve* guest called Shabbos. Where is he? Inside of me. Shabbos is inside of me. Shabbos is in the air. Shabbos is all around. And if we'll do that, then this Shabbos will mean something to us. But if I view Shabbos as a burden because I'm not interested in Shabbos, and I'm under the impression that I'm supposed to have a good time on Shabbos, then I begin to make my own plans. I'm going to sleep the whole Shabbos. I'm going to eat the whole Shabbos. I'm going to read books on Shabbos, I'm going to have big bull sessions on Shabbos. So some *bachurim* decide to have beer parties. Some people could drink *schnapps*. Some people make special *kiddushim*.

But it's not for Shabbos. It's all for themselves. That's the idea. If you do it for yourself, you're doing the wrong thing. You are supposed to do what you do for the *kavod* of our special guest called Shabbos. And if we do that, we'll be *zocheh* to the tremendous *brachos* of Shabbos, tremendous *hashpaos* of Shabbos, and we'll have a very elevated Shabbos.

² "וכבודו מעשות דרכיך". "וכבודו" - שלא יהא מלבושך של שבת כמלבושך של חול, וכי הא דרבי יוסון קרי למאניה "מכבודתי". "מעשות דרכיך" - שלא יהא הילוךך של שבת ההילוךך של חול. "ממצוא חפצך" - חפצך אסורין, חפצי שמים מותרין. "ודבר דבר" - שלא יהא דבורך של שבת כדבורך של חול. דבור אסור, הרחוק - מותר (תוס' ד"ה שלא יהא דבורך של שבת כדבורך של חול - פי' בקונטרס כגון מקח וממכר [וחשבונות] ואין נראה לר"ת דהא כבר נפקא ממצוא חפצך אלא אומר ר"ת כדאמר בויקרא רבה (פ' לד) ר"ש בן יוחי הוה ליה אימא סבתא דהות מישתיא סגי אמר לה אימא שבתא הוא שתקא משמע שאין כל כך לדבר בשבת כמו בחול ובירושל' אמר' בטורח התירו בשאלת שלום בשבת)

³ תניא: אמרו עליו על שמאי הזקן, כל ימיו היה אוכל לכבוד שבת. מצא בהמה נאה, אומר: זו לשבת. מצא אקרת נאה הימנה - מניס את השנייה ואוכל את הראשונה. אבל הלל הזקן - מדה אקרת הימנה לו, שקל מעשיו לשם שמים, שנאמר: "ברוך ה' יום יום", תניא גמי הכי, בית שמאי אומרים: מחד שביק לשבתי, ובית הלל אומרים: "ברוך ה' יום יום".

IN CONCLUSION

We learn from Bilam Harasha that it's not enough to follow 'guidelines' of the Torah based on what the letter of the law is. A Yid also needs to think about what is the ratzon of Hashem in every particular situation and try to fulfill ratzon Hashem. How do we see this? Bilam Harasha decided it was acceptable to curse the Yidden since Hashem hadn't specifically told him he may not go. If he would have asked himself, "Is this the ratzon Hashem?" the answer would have been a glaring no. Nevertheless, Bilam decided to follow his own rules. Rav Elchonon identifies three areas in Torah: tzivuyim - commandments from Hashem, dibbur - direct messages - via the neviim and chachamim, and, ratzon Hashem - via the rabanan. Sometimes, people have trouble accepting the third category and they say, "Why should I listen to the rabanan? Who says he is more correct than I am? I'll choose to follow my own rules." Unfortunately, that is one way in which we show that we would rather follow our own ratzon than the ratzon of Hashem. It is a road that leads only to disaster and distancing ourselves from true avodas Hashem. This week I will (bli neder) look out for guidance that the rabanan are telling us, especially if I have a personal way of doing things, and find one way that I can incorporate ratzon Hashem in my life for a better avodas Hashem.