



THE LIGHT, LIFE & LEGACY OF R' MICHOEL FORSHLAGER ZT"L

Parshas Balak

The Light

In this week's Parsha we find a confusing contradiction about the nature of Bilam, the prophet sent to curse the Jews. On the one hand, he was a great prophet comparable even to Moshe Rabeinu who was noted to be the greatest prophet of all (Sifrei Devarim 35:7). And yet the Zohar says that Bilam's greatness had no value since he praised himself by saying "Spoken by the man who knows God's mind" (Bamidbar 24:16) the Zohar says, "A sign of a person who knows nothing is self-praise. That person is also is also foolish and a sinner" (Zohar 193:2.)

R' Tzadok HaKohen offers an explanation for this contradiction. The most important aspect of wisdom is for it to be absorbed in the heart. When wisdom is absorbed in the heart, the heart leads the person in proper ways. Such a person is called a Chacham Lev - a person with a wise heart. (Divrei Sofrim 15).

For an individual to attain this level, they must first prepare their heart to accept and absorb wisdom, that is accomplished when a person removes the desire to pursue non-spiritual endeavors.

Bilam 'knew God's mind' as is written in the Torah, but only superficially as lip service. He refused to remove himself from material desires, he wanted the knowledge but not the wisdom. For him, knowledge was not seen as holy and elevated, but as a means to elevate his status. This was expounded when Bilam then used his torah knowledge/status to do evil.

When a person learns Torah in a superficial way, the Torah can have a negative effect on him. Chazal say that Torah can either be a Sam Hachaim - a life giving substance, or a Sam Hamaves - a deathly poison.

How does this work? The Torah is a source of tremendous holy energy and when a person is fully committed to the Torah the

energy of Torah gives him life and elevates him to incredibly high levels. And vice versa, when a person learns Torah superficially - with his heart still deeply connected to materialistic desires, the Torah energy gets transformed and channeled to the Sitra Achra - the powers of evil. The person in this case uses the Torah as a way to boost his ego/status and may brag about the amount of torah that he knows, and often times that inflated ego will lead one to pursue unholy endeavors.

Thus, we glean an important lesson from this week's Parsha; Torah must be pursued for its own sake - Lishma, just like a craftsman who is dedicated to improving his craft (Yoma 72b). If a person does not pursue Torah in a deeply dedicated way - even if he knows a lot of Torah - is compared to Bilam who was self-promoting and a sinner. For Bilam, the power of the Torah was transformed into an impure and harmful poison. On the other hand, righteous people who remove themselves from materialistic desires - so that they can obtain the holiness of torah, will in turn find that the torah knowledge makes them humble and holy beyond measure.

Adapted from Toras Michael Parshas Balak 276-279

The Life

Rav Forshlager was a Tzadik who lived his life according to his own ideals. His pursuit of learning was the way he illustrated in this piece of Torah - completely and utterly removed from the materialism of this world.

He grew up in Sochatchov in Poland where living a simple life was very common. He moved to America where the lifestyle involved a relentless pursuit of material wealth and financial success. Faced by this world, he was crushed to notice the skewed value system where Torah took a backseat role for many as materialism emerged front and center. Rabbi Forshlager refused to become a part of this value system and chose instead to solely dedicate himself to a life of Torah study he had seen/experienced in Europe.

In his early years in America, Rabbi Forshlager received financial support from his father. However, his father soon lost his fortune which ultimately meant losing his support. Needing to support his family, Rabbi Forshlager took to teaching Torah to local businessman, so as not to have to deviate from his torah learning. Most of the money earned went to the purchase of more sefarim - at a time when Torah study in America was unfortunately decreasing.

Close friends offered to help him out financially, and yet he refused to accept their support, asserting that he has all that he needs. Rav Avraham Ahron Price, his Talmid and one of the greatest rabbis in Toronto, once related a personal story. "I came into Rav Forshlager's house and saw three floors filled from top

to bottom with sefarim and was able to quickly note the dire poverty that Rabbi Forshlager lived in. I offered to give him money to help alleviate his financial burden, yet when he heard those words, he exclaimed out in laughter, 'You want to give me money? What would I do with that money? I don't have anything to do with my own money. All I need to live off is a few dollars a week' ”.

Rav Forshlager truly prepared himself for Torah study by eschewing all materialistic pursuits. The Torah learnt transformed him into an incredibly holy person who despite his greatness remained outstandingly humble. May we merit to embrace some measure of his great dedication to learning Torah Lishmah - for its own pure sake.

Excerpt from Michael Be'achas, Bergman, B., (2013)

The Legacy

With great honor and joy, we announce the publication of Toras Michoel on Vayikra, Bamidbar, and Devarim. With this volume, the monumental Toras Michoel al Hatorah is complete. We would like to take this opportunity to thank R' Bentzion Bergman for his dedicated work in publishing the seforim. These seforim are a beautiful and accessible collection of divrei torah based on the weekly parsha. Additionally, we would also like to thank the generous individuals who contributed towards the printing - and ultimate success of the seforim. The new seforim should be in stores starting next week.

There are currently several more projects in the works. When Chizuk Emuna - the shul Rabbi Forshlager taught Torah at voted to remove their mechitzah, he wrote a long response about the importance of the holiness in Klal Yisrael. This piece is now being developed for publication. In addition, the acclaimed Hebrew biography Michoel Be'achas, is slated to be re-printed in a new and expanded edition in honor of the Yahrtzeit.

Kever Information

The Address to the kever is:
B'nai Israel cemetery
3701 Southern Ave.
Baltimore, MD 21206.

Rabbi Forshlagers resting place is a place where many thousands of people come to pour their hearts out and find salvation. If you have experienced a personal yeshuah that you would like to



share, please email
 RabbiForshlagerFoundation.com
 or call 845-263-0781. The stories
 will be publicized in the future
 I"yh.



Toras Michoel Now Available in Stores

With gratitude to Hashem we announce that Toras Michoel on Vayikra, Bamidbar and Devarim are now available for purchase everywhere Seforim are sold.



Bathroom Renovation Project

Rav Forshlager's resting place in the Bnai Israel Cemetery in Baltimore has become a destination for thousands of people coming to Daven. People traveling from far distances have long found a challenge in the lack of appropriate restroom facilities. We've been working with the cemetery committee to renovate the bathrooms on site to make them available for the public. If you would like to take a part in this great zechus please contact Pinny Kreizel at Rabbiforshlagerfoundation@gmail.com or at 845-263-0781. Until the bathroom is renovated there will be a portable restroom on site.

Partner

Ohr Michael

A project of the Rabbi Forshlager Foundation
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