

GREAT FOR SHARING  
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

PARSHAS  
BALAK

# בשבת

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אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

## KINDNESS AND CRUELTY

The well-known story of Bilaam and Balak play out in this week's *Parshah*, with Bilaam hired by Balak as a spiritual warrior focused on the annihilation of the Jewish nation. Travelling with a retinue to a predetermined meeting place, Bilaam's donkey veers from the path three times, each time earning blows from Bilaam. Finally, after the third incident, Hashem miraculously allows the donkey to speak, and the donkey asks Bilaam what she did wrong to earn his wrath.

In the midst of his response, Hashem opens Bilaam's eyes, and he realizes why the donkey diverged from the road — an angel with a drawn sword stood before him. The donkey had obviously been attempting to walk around the angel.<sup>1</sup>

The very first thing the angel does is challenge Bilaam, "Why did you hit your donkey these three times?" What sort of question is this; the angel knew full well why Bilaam was hitting his donkey. What is the angel asking?<sup>2</sup>

Reb Yehuda Hachassid (1150-1217) writes<sup>3</sup> that Bilaam was asked, "Why are you hitting your donkey, one is not allowed to cause needless pain to animals!"

This *Sefer Chassidim* is simply amazing when one stops to think about it. Bilaam, to put it lightly, was not a nice person. He was solely focused on his own honor and pleasure, and was currently headed to commit the horrendous crime of wiping out an entire nation. There are few evil people in the history of the world who can claim the ability to do so, Bilaam being one of them.

On the way to committing the crime of the millennia, Bilaam is confronted by a messenger of Hashem Himself, who takes him to task for... hitting his donkey!

There is no question that Bilaam would pay dearly for his attempt against *Klal Yisrael*. Nevertheless, it's important to note that *צער בעלי חיים*, needless pain against animals, is improper conduct. And even one such a Bilaam, who clearly didn't care about hurting other people, is expected to know better, and rebuked for his actions.

We have opportunities to show kindness to animals, whether we own them or not. And in doing so, we are teaching ourselves how to be merciful to all of Hashem's creations.

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### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Many of us generally treat animals properly, but there are some areas that we can use to enhance our *Avodas Hashem*.

One idea is to use our interactions as opportunities to come close to Hashem. When feeding an animal, or otherwise interacting properly, one can think about how Hashem created everything in the universe, including this particular animal.

And just like Hashem has mercy on all of His creations, we follow the same path, and act similarly.

In other instances, we can use this thought process to stop ourselves from needlessly pain animals. For example, we might think it great fun to run into a flock of birds that have landed and are standing on the ground.

Yes, it might look fascinating to see them all take flight at once, but is it the right thing to do? Maybe it would be best to let the birds rest and eat.

Sometimes, inaction is just as valuable as action. Allowing animals to continue their regular routine without our intervention can itself be a way of being merciful to animals.

1 *Bamidbar* 22:2-31

2 See *Ohr Hachaim* on *Bamidbar* 22:32, s.v. *ויאמר אליי*

3 *Sefer Chassidim* 646

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**All agree nowadays that the study of Mussar is absolutely necessary, and without this study, we cannot be certain that our Torah and yiras shamayim will remain.**

- Reb Yisroel Meir HaKoehein, Baal "Chofetz Chaim," *Beis Yisroel*, Chap. 9:4

# CHICKEN LITTLE

Although Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer lived a long life, he had never been “a picture of health” and brimming with energy. When he had been in his 20’s, he contracted a debilitating disease that left him quite weak for the remainder of his life. Nevertheless, quite amazingly, he was able not only to lead the Etz Chaim Yeshivah in Yerushalayim for most of the first half of the 20th century, but he led it with tremendous energy and strength.

As he grew older, however, it became increasingly more difficult for him to make the relatively short walk from his home to the yeshivah. Many of his students tried to persuade him to come less often, perhaps giving *shiur* fewer times a week. But Reb Isser Zalman would not hear of it. He loved the yeshiva, loved his *talmidim*, and loved teaching Torah. And he was unwilling to compromise on any of the three. The end result was that he continued to maintain his taxing schedule even when his physical condition made it extremely difficult to do so.

There were various groups of *talmidim* who were privileged to walk him daily after *shiur*. They made certain to take the shortest route from the yeshivah to his home. However, at certain times of the day, Reb Isser Zalman insisted on taking a longer route. Regardless of how much the *talmidim* pressured him to give the reason for this, he refused to provide an explanation — dismissing their inquiries by saying that he simply wanted the exercise. But it just did not make sense. This was a man for whom every second of the day was accountable. Not a moment was wasted. And besides, when he walked he was certainly uncomfortable and most probably in pain every step of the way. Why was he taking the longer route at times? Finally, after his students persisted, he revealed his reason.

“I noticed that at a certain time every day there is a little chicken, one which is easily frightened, that feeds on some bread on that street.” He then looked up at his *talmidim* and sighed, “How can I disturb the serenity of that little chicken?”

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*\*Adapted from “Touched by a Story 3,” by Rabbi Yechiel Spero*

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The fact that Rivkah was willing to give water to Eliezer’s camels, in addition to Eliezer, was a clear indication that Rivkah was destined to be *Yitzchak Avinu’s* wife.<sup>1</sup>
- To see if he would be a good leader, Hashem first tested Moshe with sheep, watching how he would treat them.<sup>2</sup>
- There are three forms of conduct that will certainly be rewarded in this world; honoring one’s parents, honesty in business, and having mercy on all of Hashem’s creations.<sup>3</sup>

1 *Malbim* on *Bereishis* 24:14 s.v. והיה הנערה

2 *Shemos Rabbah* 2:2

3 *Emunos V’Dayos* Essay 5, Chap. 6