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Reward & Punishment:
(Shmuz #79)
Rabbi Bentzion Shafier

When the Jews left Egypt, the passuk says that they left with the tremendous outstretched hand of Hashem, everyone now knew that this was Hashem's people and all the other nations were filled with fear, even Amalek was quickly destroyed. Towards the end of the Jew's stay in the midbar, Balak recognized that Bnei Yisrael would destroy his nation too, so he went to Bilaam and asked him to curse the klal yisrael, he agreed but under a few conditions. He told him to build 7 altars bring 42 different korbanot. Then Bilaam stood up to curse klal yisrael but Hashem made him bless them.

The Gemara says a person should always be involved in Torah and mitzvos because eventually it will become lishma, and the proof is that the reward of the 42 korbanot that Balak brought was that he was zocheh to have Ruth come from him. Ruth was the daughter of Eglon, the granddaughter of Balak. Apparently, these acts of bringing the korbanot was something that Balak got schar for. But the problem here is, explains the Chovot Halevovot, that if you do a favor for me, according to *your* intentions, I still have an obligation to feel appreciativeness. But lets say you wanted to do me harm, but it came out good, you don't owe the other person anything. So the question is: Balak's intentions were not good at all, why did he get reward for his actions?

Wouldn't it be great if you win the lottery? Yes, it would be, under one condition if you agree that we don't tell anyone. If you think about it, being wealthy often times is a bracha but at a great cost. When a wealthy man walks into shul or goes anymore he has to realize that many times they only come over to him because they see dollar bills and not a human. It's a difficult test to constantly wonder why people approach you. Imagine someone befriends a wealthy man, and they realize later that the person was an insurance salesman trying to get him to buy. The Chovot Halevovot says that if you had bad intentions towards me, I owe you nothing. Balak had bad intentions, yet Chazal tell us that he has to be paid back, why?

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Really, there are two systems: For Humans and humans and humans and Hashem. Hashem looks at what you accomplished, if you did accomplish something, you are rewarded for the good and punished for the bad. Hashem deals with people on a totally different level, Hashem views the intent, action and accomplishment. But this answer requires understanding and perspective. In high school, ask the average student how much pleasure they have. Not much at all. Who has pleasure? Goyim, they could do everything! I am restricted by the Torah, so I can't get full pleasure. A reason why a person thinks that way is because they don't distinguish between *tayva* and enjoyment. Imagine you haven't eaten in 3 days, you are starving, you find a dry peanut butter sandwich that has been sitting in the desert for 6 months, you gulp it down as fast as you can. How much pleasure did you get out of it? You had a lot of passion since you were hungry, but you didn't get any pleasure out of it. Passion and pleasure are two distinct things, often times we mix them up.

The Beis Halevi says you have a guy that wants to be rich, wants to make a million dollars, and he does. Something interesting happens, he finds himself with the money, but without happiness. In his mind, he thinks that the next million will bring him happiness. So he goes after it without a greater drive and passion. Again, he's empty and the cycle repeats over and over (5...10...15). Money doesn't fulfill you, but we chase after it like it will. This is the human personality, and one of the key reasons is because we fail to distinguish between pleasure and passion. On Madison Avenue, they try to sell the sizzle and not the steak. They don't try to sell you the product, they try to sell you everything around it, the experience, the illusion, the mirage, the "sizzle" of the steak. The next time a person tells you they had a great time last night, listen carefully, he HAD a great time, but what does he have now? It's gone! I HAD pleasure but it's gone now. Any pleasure that you have is always gone. A person sets their life for the pursuit of pleasure is bound to fail. There are many pleasures that Hashem put in this world for man as a SIDE BENEFIT FOR LIFE but not for life itself.

This has been a problem since the beginning of history, if Hashem is just how does a wicked man prosper and a righteous man suffer? The Chovot Halevot explains that a "rasha ve tov lo" at some point in their life he did something good, and Hashem is

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the ultimate judge of justice and He needs to pay him back according to what he did. But Hashem wont pay him with the ultimate reward in Olam Habah, but with very cheap currency, but with something you will have today and is gone tomorrow. You had the steak, now its gone. You see a man living the good life, he is consuming his Olam Haba in this world. Chazal often time speak about this. Balak was a rasha, yet Hashem doesn't pay him back in this world, he becomes the grandfather of Ruth and the great-great grandfather of Dovid Hamelech. But why did his actions merit this?

On Tuesday July 24th, 1945. Germany had surrendered but Japan had not. Harry Truman, Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill. The issue they were meeting about was deciding whether to use the atomic bomb or not. The problem was that millions of civilians woule be killed. On the other side, the Japanese side had not yet surrendered. Should we use the bomb or not? For Stalin, there was not much a question he didn't care. But for Truman and Churchill it wasn't a choice also, it was war, this is different. Another issue was the man has always been engaged in killing man, little by little, different implements of war were created. The atom bomb was one bomb which would spell the destruction of a city. With one miscalculation, civilization could be destroyed. Was it too risky to allow this to be used? Who knows who else will use it? At the end, they decided to use it. If you could imagine a man in 1945, prior to Hiroshima and Nagasaka being blown up, and tell him that there was a bomb that could blow up a whole city, he wouldn't believe you. But if you took him to the testing grounds in Nevada, and he saw a crater half a mile wide and a mile long, and you showed them what the bomb did- he would be seeing something that mankind had never seen before.

When Hashem created Adam Harishon, He told him "look how beautiful this world is that I made, pay attention that you don't destroy my world, you are a partner in my creation". Man is not only the purpose of creation, its state of being is dependant on man, it all matters how man uses it. When Nebuchadnezzar sent Nevuzaradan to destroy the city, he attacked the city, started smashing the wall, and the wall miraculously went down and he marched into Yerushalayim. He had witnessed a miracle, but not only didn't he take the hint, but he destroyed the Temple. He walked into the Beis Hamikdash with a lot of gayva, a bat kol came out and said you grounded up grounded flour, this is a nation

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and a Temple that's already destroyed, you are abaal gayva and a fool, what you think you destroyed you didn't touch. This concept is that when the Jewish Nation are doing what they were supposed to, they were invincible and no one could touch them, but the moment that they stopped, then anyone could. The Gemara says that when the walls of the Beis Hamikdash were destroyed, there was nothing holding them up meaning the only thing that is keeping those walls strong are not the atomic structure and molecules in the walls, that's an illusion. When Hashem created this world he told man its your world, here are the keys, if you use the world the way its supposed to be, it will flourish. If not, it will be destroyed by a wimp like Nevuzaradan.

By kabbalas shabbos it says, "ve'shamru bnei yisrael et hashabbat lasot et hashabbat." But we didn't make the shabbos? Hashem made the world with the purpose of man, if you use the world the way its supposed to be, its your world. If you keep the shabbos, its like you made the shabbos. Balaks intentions at the end of the day were wrong, he wanted to curse the nations, but at the end of the day he did something good. When a goyish king brings sacrifices to Hashem, it is a big Kiddush Hashem. Hashem didn't want to pay him back with temporary gifts in olam hazeh because he did something so beyond it, so Hashem had no choice but to pay him back with an eternal gift. Despite his wrong intentions, he changed the world by doing his actions, part of the world is existing because of him. When we hear that we realize how great our actions are. Everything you do makes a difference. The entire world is often times dependant on our actions in order to exist.

The Nefesh Hachaim says that Hashem created man in His image, Just like Hashem is the borei olam, he made a little borei, a creator of this world and a creator of his own olam haba. When ask people what Olam Habah is, most people are confused, I guess like the tzaddikim get ice cream and the regular guys get oatmeal and the reshaim get stale bread. Often time, this is really the way people perceive it. The Nefesh Hachaim says that everything action you did in this world is paralleled in the world to come, you are building your olam habah with every action you do. Some people will have beautiful palaces, some people will have empty lots and sections. That's the reality but its difficult for us to see, but its difficult for us to see most things in this world. If I told you there are

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millions of molecules going round and round in a table, you wouldn't believe me, but they are there. Hashem created the world with a lot of sophistication and depth, a lot deeper than we can understand and see. We may not think our actions matter, but it's because we cannot see the impact that we have. When a person uses the world properly, he is a creator, creating his Olam Haba.

As you approach Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, you want to use the days properly, think about aveirot and do teshuva. But as you may find, when you get to that day, standing in shul, you start to think what you actually did wrong in the year...you start thinking and it's hard to find. Rav Yisroel Salanter used to stand on Erev Rosh Chodesh Ellul, and pass out when they would announce it. They say that whatever you saw about Rav Yisroel was half of what he was, he was very humble, imagine him standing at the shtender when they announce Rosh Chodesh, after years of passing out, he tries to hold himself back from passing out. But every year he does! Who's greater, you and I, or Rav Yisroel Salanter? How could it be that he passes out and we have a hard time finding our aveirot. Rav Yisroel Salanter understood the gravity of every single action. Because of that, he looked at his year with fear and trepidation because the few things that he did wrong, he actually understood how much impact they had. Most people think like this- granted I'm not a tzaddik, but I'm not a rasha, I'm balanced and OK. That is true on Rosh Hashana, your mitzvos are weighed against your sins. But that is not the judgement when a person leaves this world. Every single action is scrutinized, and he's given a reward beyond understanding, on the good side and on the bad side. A man might be a tzaddik, but the things he did wrong are still there. That concept should bring a person to understand the impact of a single action and the extraordinary opportunity of life, that there is a day to undo aveirot like Yom Kippur. If I understand the gravity of sins and I have a day to get rid of them, that is such an amazing opportunity. It says that Hashem pays back 500:1 for the ratio of good to bad. When you hear about a goy like Balak, he was only paid back because of the effects of his actions and he got a real reward, to become the ancestor of Dovid Hamelech. We see the power of a single action. I could be sweet to my wife when she's in a bad mood, I can say hello to the person next to me. Every opportunity could either build the world or destroy it. What man does, either

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keeps the world in existence or destroys it. You see the opportunity of life, to be a kind and concerned human being. We see what we can accomplish and ultimately what a human being can be.

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