

## Parashat Balak

### Do Our Eyes Have Power to Effect Reality?

#### Developing Optimistic Eyes

Everything in life depends on how you look at reality. I just harvested some strawberries from the garden and prepared them to serve my husband for breakfast. After their required 3 min. soak in veggie wash, they had lost some of their red and sparkling nature. "Sorry, they look so squishy," I apologized. "They look great!" countered my husband. Life becomes much more colorful and enchanting when we develop optimistic eyes. Drinking half-full cups of lemonade is the secret to happiness. "Oh, my friend, it's not what they take away from you that counts. It's what you do with what you have left" (Hubert Humphrey). The new science of epigenetics asserts that our genes are influenced by our attitude. No wonder that people with positive outlooks live longer. The eye is a two-way communicator. It is not only passive receptive, but also active and impacting. Quantum physics proves that things act differently when observed. Just looking at light influences its behavior. It is not only looking, but the way we look at others that has the greatest impact. When we look with compassionate eyes, they become a source of spiritual nourishment. Thus, a mother's loving gaze nurtures her baby no less than the physical nourishment of her milk. The *Meshech Chacmah* explains that Hashem allowed Avraham Avinu to see the entire land of Israel because seeing something ownerless causes the person to possess it. Since no one ever possessed the spiritual body of the Holy Land, it could be acquired through seeing alone. When Avraham gazed at the land of Israel, he conquered it spiritually as an everlasting inheritance for his children. Therefore, it states, "The entire land that you see- I will give it to your children forever" (*Bereishit* 13:15). Avraham's eyes had this power because he had developed a good eye, as it states, "Anyone who has mastered these three traits is of the students of Avraham Avinu, and whoever possesses the opposite three traits is of the disciples of the wicked Bil'am. The students of our father Avraham have a good eye, a meek spirit and a humble soul. The students of the wicked Bil'am have an evil eye, a haughty spirit and a coarse soul..." (*Pirkey Avot* 5:19). Rambam writes that someone with a "good eye" exhibits the characteristic of *הסתפקות/histapkut* – being satisfied with his lot. What he has is enough for him and he doesn't constantly seek more money or material possessions. Therefore, Avraham didn't want to take even a shoelace or a string from the King of Sodom.

#### Bil'am's Evil Eye

Conversely, *ayin hara* (the evil eye) is never content. In his boundless greed, B'ilam was seeking more and more money from Balak (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 22:18). This greedy, grabbing instinct is the source of *ayin hara*, which plays such a pivotal role throughout *Parshat Balak*. It was specifically through his evil eye that B'ilam attempted to curse Israel.

**ספר במדבר פרק כד (ב) וַיִּשָּׂא בַלְעָם אֶת עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל שֹׁכֵן לְשִׁבְטָיו וְנָתַי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים:**  
 "Bil'am lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel dwelling tribe by tribe, and the spirit of G-d was upon him" (*Bamidbar* 24:2).

## Life Lessons from Rebbetzin's Heart

Rashi explains that by lifting up his eyes, Bil'am tried to impose an evil eye upon them. Yet, Hashem protected the Jewish people in the merit of our modesty (keeping our private life hidden from the eye). So why didn't Bil'am just bless Balak? It would seem that either cursing the Jews or blessing the Moabites would result in a victory for Moav. The reason is, that Bil'am's evil eye didn't allow him to bless anyone.

Some men are specially fitted for the transmission of blessings by having acquired a 'good eye.' Others are specially fitted for the transmission of curses, wherever they cast their eyes. Such was Bil'am, who was the fitting instrument of evil. Even when he blessed, his blessing was not confirmed. Yet, all his curses were confirmed, because he had an 'evil eye' (*Zohar, Vayikra 63b*).

### Don't Flaunt Your Assets

A narrow or an evil eye may damage the person it sees. Perhaps through the energy fields surrounding him, it can cause lack of money, discord in the home, difficulty in finding a soul mate, or make a person feel stuck in his life. There are many examples in the Torah, Talmud and halacha, about the importance to protect ourselves from *ayin hara*. The Torah records that when the brothers entered Egypt to get food during the famine, they did so "amongst those going down to Egypt for food." This expression teaches that they blended into the crowd. According to Midrash *Bereishit Rabbah 91:6* quoted by Rashi, Ya'acov instructs each of his sons to enter through a different gate to avoid receiving an *ayin hara*, because they were all beautiful, strong, tall and handsome. Why would that bring about an evil eye? If they came as a group and drew attention to themselves, people could become jealous by seeing a family of able-bodied handsome men. We are all connected spiritually and therefore can affect one another. Rabbi Dessler asked his father, "how is it fair that people suffer because of the jealousies of others?" His father answered him that the person may be partly to blame by carelessly flaunting his possessions and causing jealousy to arise. Each display of wealth, beauty or power can be a jealousy-causing act. This jealousy may cause others to cry out in pain- a cry that rises up to the Heavenly Court (Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, *Michtav Me'elياهو*).

### Protection from Ayin Hara and Negative Energy

Rabbi Yochanan was accustomed to sit at the gates of the women's mikveh. He said, "When the daughters of Israel come up from the mikveh they look at me and have children as handsome as I am." The Rabbis said to him, "Is not the Master afraid of the evil eye?" – He replied, "I come from the seed of Yosef, over whom the evil eye has no power, as it is written, '*Ben porat Yosef, ben porat alei ayin* – Yosef is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine above the eye,'" (*Bereishit 49:22*). Rabbi Abahu said with regard to this verse, "Do not read '*alei ayin*' but '*olei ayin*' (literally, "rising above the eye," i.e., above the power of the evil eye)." Rabbi Yossi in the name of Rabbi Chanina derived [proof that the evil eye has no power over the descendants of Yosef] from this text: "Let them multiply like fish [*ve'yidgu*] in the midst of the earth" (*Bereishit 48:16*). Just as fish [*dagim*] in the sea are covered by water and the evil eye has no power over them, likewise the evil eye has no power over the descendants of Yosef. Furthermore, the evil eye has no power over the eye that did not want to take nourishment from what did not belong to it (*Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 20a*).

## Life Lessons from Rebbetzin's Heart

Rabbi Soloveitchik explained that in contrast to certain people who live their lives based on the comments and perceptions of others, Yosef had confidence in himself, and did not change according to the whims of others. Since Yosef was not “swayed by the crowd,” he was not susceptible to the evil eye. He did not live from that which did not belong to him – therefore, the destructive comments of others had no effect. Taking nourishment from what doesn’t belong to us comes from a feeling of lack in our own lives that makes us become energy suckers. The more we learn to trust in Hashem, and feel His love and personal protection in our lives, the less we need to take nourishment from what doesn’t belong to us. When we develop *Emunah*, that Hashem gives us exactly what we need, we can be happy with our own portion.

### Sending Positive Energy and Blessing through Our Eyes

We cannot just dismiss the power of negative energy as being nonexistent so long as we don’t believe in it. Just as there is light and holiness in the world, so does the opposite exist. It would be foolish not to work on strengthening our immune system in order to protect ourselves against viruses and bacteria. Likewise, we need to strengthen our emunah system in order to protect ourselves from negative spiritual energy. By viewing ourselves through Hashem’s perpetual kind and open eye, and by not looking with desire at what belongs to others, it is possible to rise above the influence of negative energy like Yosef the *Tzaddik*. The human eye is an energy center that can send out either negative or positive energy. Through seeing, a person can affect reality through *ayin hara* (the evil eye), and *ayin tovah* (the good eye) which has an even greater influence (Rav Tzadok of Lublin, *Takanat Hashavin* 6). “A good eye is blessed” since it sends out positive energy. The power of good is always greater than the power of evil. When we work on removing our own negativity, by consciously sending out positive energy to others through our eye, we gain protection from *ayin hara* and engender much blessing in the world.