

Menachem Mendel of Horodak

Pri Ha'Eretz

Parshas Balak

Introduction

This discourse by **Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok**, one of the leading students of the Maggid of Mezritch and among the first Chassidic leaders to settle in Eretz Yisrael, explores the inner contrast between Moshe Rabbeinu and Bilaam as opposing expressions of *Daas*—holy consciousness versus corrupted awareness. Through a Chassidic reading of “מה טובו אהליך יעקב”, the Rebbe shows how the Shechinah dwells even when spiritual service varies from person to person. Rather than uniform perfection, it is the honest, individualized fear and awe of each Jew that invites Divine presence. This teaching offers a powerful affirmation that true connection to Hashem is found not in imitation, but in personal, authentic effort.

How goodly are your tents, O Jacob—And Rashi of blessed memory explains: he saw that their openings were not aligned one opposite the other. Also Rashi of blessed memory explains: “your tents” refers to their inhabited state, and “your dwellings” to their desolation.	מה טובו אהליך יעקב, ופירש רש"י ז"ל: ראה שאין פתחייהו מקבלין זה כנגד זה. גם פירש רש"י ז"ל: אהליך בישובו, ומשכנותיה בחרבנו.
And our Sages of blessed memory said on the verse “There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moshe”—but among the nations of the world, one has arisen, and who is he? Bilaam. And in order to explain the matter, our Sages of blessed memory said: the Divine Presence only rests upon one who is wise, mighty, wealthy, etc.—and all of these were in Moshe, who possessed them all.	גם אמרו רז"ל על פסוק: ולא קם נביא עוד כמשה בישראל—אבל באומות העולם קם. ומנו? בלעם. ובכדי לפרש הענין אמרו רז"ל: אין השכינה שורה אלא על מי שהוא חכם גבור עשיר כו', וכולן במשה. שהיה בו כולם.
And it is seemingly difficult: the attribute of might and wealth was lacking in many righteous people upon whom the Divine Presence did rest. Also difficult is the teaching at the beginning of the chapter “Zerizus (alacrity) leads to Zehirus (watchfulness)... the end of the matter is humility, and humility brings one to Divine Inspiration”—from which it appears that the matter depends solely on humility and the progression of character traits listed by the aforementioned chapter.	ולכאורה תימה: הרי מדת הגבורה והעשירות היה חסר לכמה וכמה צדיקים שהשכינה היתה שורה עליהם. גם קשה ממאמר ריש פרק: זריזות מביאה לידי זהירות כו' סוף דבר ענוה, ענוה מביאה לידי ריחוק הקדש—נמצא שהדבר תלוי רק בענוה וסדר המדות שמונה והולך ריש פרק הנ"ל.
But the explanation of the matter, to clarify simply, is based on what our Sages of blessed memory said: “Who is mighty? One who conquers his inclination. Who is wealthy? etc.” And the meaning of “might” is in the heart, not the hand—for the man who is fearful and fainthearted was sent back from battle.	אבל הענין, בכדי לבאר פשוט, הוא על פי מה שאמרו רז"ל: איזהו גבור? הפוכש את יצרו. ואיזהו עשיר? וכו'. ופירוש הגבורה היא בלב ולא ביד, שהאיש הגרא ורף הלבב היה חוזר מעורכי המלחמה.

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And the matter is: that kindnesses are extensions, like water flowing from a high place to a low one, descending and spreading out until it is no longer visible. But Gevuros (restrictions, strength) are that which stand and limit and place boundaries on the spreading of the kindnesses—so that it is like a vessel that limits and causes the kindness to be revealed to all. Therefore, the main revelation is through Gevuros, as is known.	והענין הוא, כי התפישות הם התפשטות, וכמים הנגרים ממקום גבוה למקום נמוך, ויורד ומתפשט עד שאינו נראה. אבל הגבורות הוא דבר המעמיד ומצמצם, וגבול נתן להתפשטות התפישות, עד שהוא כעין כלי המגביל ומתגלה לעין כל. לכן עקר ההתגלות הוא בגבורות, כידוע.
And likewise, the process of birth cannot occur except through Gevuros, which is revelation. And so too the creation of the world was through Tzimtzum (contraction), as is known, which is the essence of materiality and distance from the Holy One, blessed be He—even though it is known that the Holy One, blessed be He, fills all worlds.	וכן דרך ההולדה אי אפשר רק על ידי גבורות, שהוא הגילוי. וכן היתה בריאת העולם על ידי צמצום, כידוע, ושהוא עקר הגשמיית והריחוק מהשם יתברך—הגם כי ידוע שהשם יתברך ממלא כל עלמין.
But it is not in a revealed state. And behold, one who is a person of stature—a wise or mighty one—whose quality is apparent and revealed within him, it is automatically understood that he is corporeal, for revelation is material. Therefore, one who possesses greatness must return the quality to the place from which it was taken—and that is the Infinite One, blessed be He—through the attribute of humility. Then it is added to him more and more, by returning the thing to its root, as is known from other discourses.	אבל אינו בהתגלות, והנה מי שהוא בעל מעלה—חכם או גבור—שהמעלה נפרת ומתגלה בתוכו, ממילא מובן היותו גשם, כי ההתגלות הוא גשמיית. לכן בעל מעלה צריך להחזיר המעלה אל מקום אשר לקחה משם, והוא אין סוף ברוך הוא, על ידי מדת הענוה. אז נתוסף עליו יותר ויותר בהחזיר הדבר אל שורשו, כידוע משאר דרושים.
Whereas if not, he is separated and coarse, and distant from God. And behold, it is written: “And the man Moshe was very humble, etc.”—for true humility is only for one who is truly of high stature, and he is humble before Him shall he be, as it is said, and [he is] the master of all powers. But someone who is empty and lacking everything is, in any case, lowly among men—what virtue is there in his humility?	משא"כ בל"א הוא נפרד ומגושם ורחוק מה'. והנה כתוב: והאיש משה ענו מאד כו', מפני שאין הענוה אמיתית אלא לבעל מעלה באמת, והוא ענו נגדו יתיה, על האמור, ובעל הכחות כלם. משא"כ מי שהוא ריקן וחסר מכל, בל"א הוא שפל אנשים, ומאי רבותא בענוה.
And likewise, mightiness that is in the heart—to stand, to restrain, and to conquer one's inclination—is not revealed except in someone whose nature is with bad character traits, and he subdues them. But not so with one whose nature is soft and good.	וכן הגבורה שהיא בלב—להיות עומד ומגביל וכובש את יצרו—אינו מתגלה אלא אצל בעל מדות רעות בטבע, והוא כובשם. משא"כ מי שהוא מטבע רך וטוב

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And it is known that the primary purpose of creation was for this material, physical world, even though it is a coarse body—nonetheless, it will be filled with the glory of God. Therefore, all the contractions and Gevuros were also for the sake of the revelation of His Godliness in the lowest realms.	וידוע הוא ששקרא בריאת העולם ה'ה בעבור עולם הגשם הזה החומרי, אף על פי שהוא גוף קשה, אף על פי כן יתה מלא כבוד ה'. לכן כל הצמצומים והגבורות היו גם כן בעבור התגלות אלהותו יתברך בפשלים התחתונים.
And it is thereby implied and understood: one who is deeply embedded in the worst of traits and has overcome his inclination—through him the glory of God is revealed.	וממילא משמע ומוכן: מי שהוא מטבע בתכלית מדות הרעות והתגבר על יצרו—ונגלה כבוד ה'.
This is the ultimate purpose of the creation of the world—that He said, and His will was done—even in the most extreme physicality, and in the fullest revelation possible. And so too, one who possesses the finest good qualities to their utmost and is also humble—this is the ultimate delight before Him, may He be blessed, for it is likewise a revelation of His Divinity, as mentioned.	זהו תכלית בריאת העולם שאמר ונעשה רצונו אפילו בגשם היותר תכלית והתגלות האפשרי בתכלית. וכמו כן מי שהוא בעל מעלות טובות התכלית וענוותן—זהו התכלית הנחת רוח לפניו יתברך, שהוא גם כן התגלות לאלהותו כנזכר.
And all of these were in Moshe Rabbeinu, as is known from the books—that Moshe Rabbeinu was naturally embedded with the worst of traits, and he conquered his traits to the utmost possible good. And he possessed the highest human qualities possible, and he was more humble than any man.	וכולן ה'ה במשה רבינו עליו השלום, כידיע מפי ספרים, שמשה רבינו עליו השלום ה'ה מטבע בתכלית המדות רעות, וכבש את מדותיו לתכלית הטוב האפשרי. וה'ה בעל מעלת האפשרי באדם, וה'ה ענו מכל האדם.
And this is why the Shechinah dwells upon him—for behold, He causes His Divine Presence to rest throughout all the earth and all the lowly, from the very depths up to the heights of heaven.	וזהו שהשכינה שורה עליו, שהרי הוא משרה שכינתו יתברך בכל הארץ ובכל השפלים מתכלית העומק עד שמי רום רום.
And this is their statement, of blessed memory, that the Shechinah does not dwell except upon one who possesses [refined] traits—and he is humble. But for each person according to his own level: according to his greatness and his humility.	וזהו דבריהם זכרונם לברכה: שאין השכינה שורה אלא על בעל המדות, והוא ענו. אבל כל חד לפום דרגיה: לפי גדולתו וענוותנותו.
And we will also understand the sequence and statement at the beginning of the chapter—that humility brings to Ruach HaKodesh (Divine inspiration), and one who is mighty through his might and conquering of his inclination—each and every one according to his own level.	ונבין גם כן סדר ומאמר ריש פרק: שהענוה מביא לידי רוח הקדש, והגבור בגבורתו וכבישת יצרו—כל חד וחד לפום דרגיה.
And behold, it is known that the truth of ethical conduct and fear of God is Yiras HaRomemus (awe of exaltedness), a shamefaced awe. And there are two kinds of awe: one is fear of punishment.	והנה ידוע, כי אמיתת המוסר ויראת ה'—היא יראת הרוממות, יראת בוש. ואית יראה, ואית יראה, שהיא יראת העונש.

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And this is what our Sages of blessed memory meant when they said—because sometimes it is impossible to subdue one's inclination with Yiras HaRomemus alone, and one must recall the fear of punishment, even for the great and the righteous, as our Sages of blessed memory said: "If not, let him remember the day of death."	וְש"ד שֶׁהֵבִיאוּ חז"ל, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלְפַעֲמִים אֵי אֶפְשָׁר לְכַפּוֹף אֶת יִצְרוֹ בִּירְאַת הַרֹמֶמּוֹת, וְצָרִיד לְזַכֵּר יְרֵאָת הָעוֹנֵשׁ, אֶפְלוּ גְדוּלִים וְצַדִּיקִים, כְּאֶמְרוּ רַז"ל: וְאִם לֹא—יִזְכּוֹר לֹא יוֹם הַמִּיתָה
And the statement of Rabbi Yochanan: "This is what causes the wealthy to be foolish." And the idea is that everything depends on the time, the place, the strength of the inclination, and its force.	וּמֵאֲמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: דִּין גְּרָמָא דְעִשְׂרֵי אֵי בִיר. וְהֵעֲנִן הוּא, שֶׁהַכֹּל לִפִּי הָעֵת וְהַזְמַן וְהַמָּקוֹם, וְחֹזֶק הַיִּצָּר וְהַתְקַפּוֹ
And even though this fear is not the ultimate [form of awe], nonetheless, in order to turn away from the snares of death and to subdue one's inclination, even this is for the good, and the Shechinah dwells among them.	הַגַּם שְׂאִין יְרָאָה זוֹ תַּכְלִית, אַף עַל פִּי כֵן כְּדֵי לְסוּר מִמּוֹקְשֵׁי מָוֶת וּלְכַפּוֹף אֶת יִצְרוֹ—גַּם זֶה לְטוֹבָה, וְשִׁכִּינָה לְשִׁרְיָהּ בֵּינֵיהֶם
Therefore, no person can align his actions, thoughts, and ways to match the path of another righteous person so as to be like him—for sometimes the guidance and rebuke of that righteous person will not benefit him.	וְלִכְּנֹן אֵי אֶפְשָׁר לְשׁוּם אָדָם לְכַוֵּן מַעֲשָׂיו וּמַחְשַׁבֹתָיו וּדְרָכָיו לְדֶרֶךְ אֵיזָה צַדִּיק, כְּדֵי שִׁיְהִינָה כְּמוֹתוֹ, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלְפַעֲמִים לֹא יוֹעִילוּ לוֹ מוֹסְרֵי אוֹתוֹ צַדִּיק וְהַנְהִיגוֹתָיו
And even for a single person—it is impossible for him to be equal in his behavior, ways, and disciplines from one day to the next. Everything depends on the time—until the fear of God truly enters his heart, and the dread of God's majestic glory is truly upon him, and not just imaginary.	וְאֶפְלוּ אָדָם אֶחָד—אֵי אֶפְשָׁר לִהְיוֹת שׁוֹה בְּעִנְיָנוּ וּדְרָכָיו וּמוֹסְרָיו יוֹם כְּיוֹם. וְהַכֹּל לִפִּי הָעֵת, עַד שֶׁתִּבּוֹא יְרֵאָת ה' בְּלִבּוֹ, וּפְחַד ה' מִהֲדַר גְּאוֹנוֹ כְּאֶמֶת—וְלֹא בְּדַמְיוֹן
For behold, it is written: "And he recoiled with disgust"—like a man who recoils, his hand startled and recoiling backward from fear.	שֶׁהָרִי: וְאֶסְלָדָה בְּחִילָה כְּתִיב, כְּאֵדָם הַסּוֹלֵד יָדוֹ, שֶׁנִּבְהַל וְנִזְדַּקֵּר לְאַחֲרָיו מִפְּנֵי הַפַּחַד
And behold, it is known that Moshe was the Daas (Divine Knowledge) of all Israel—and corresponding to that was Bilaam, the Daas of the klipah (the impure husk), meaning the thought of impurity within the collective of Israel.	וְהִנֵּה יָדוּעַ שֶׁמֹּשֶׁה הִיָּה דַעַת שֶׁל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וּכְנֻגָּד הִיָּה בִּלְעָם—הַדַּעַת שֶׁבְּקִלְפָּה, פִּירוּשׁ שֶׁל מַחְשַׁבַת פְּסוּל שֶׁבְּכָללוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל
And behold, it is brought in the Zohar that the klipah too is necessary in the world—for the punishment of the wicked, as is known. And it is also explained on the verse "Balak son of Tzipor"—why specifically "Tzipor"? See there.	וְהִנֵּה הוּבָא בְּזֵהָר שֶׁהַקְּלִיפָה גַּם כֵּן צָרָה הָעוֹלָם, בְּשִׁבְלֵי עוֹשֵׂי הַרְשָׁעִים כְּפִדּוּעַ. וְכַמּוּבָאֵר גַּם כֵּן עַל פְּסוּק: בָּלָק בֶּן צִפּוֹר—לָמָּה דוֹקָא "צִפּוֹר"? עֵין שָׁם

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And behold, Bilaam—who represents the collective Daas of the klipah—once he saw that their openings were not aligned one with the other (meaning, the fears of each person were not matched with his fellow), rather each according to his own level: the great according to his greatness, the small according to his level, fearing punishment.	וְהִנֵּה בַלְעָם, שֶׁהוּא כָּלִילֹת הַדַּעַת דְּקָלִיפָה, כִּינּוּן שְׂרָאָה שְׂאִין פִּתְחֵיהֶן מְכֻנְיִין זֶה מִזֶּה—פִּירוּשׁ: שְׂאִין הִירָאוֹת שֶׁל כָּל אֶחָד מְכֻנְיִים לַחֲבֵרוֹ, אֲלֵא כָּל חַד לְפִימ דְּרָגִיָּה דִּילִיָּה—הַגְּדוֹל לְפִי גְּדוֹל, וְהַקָּטָן לְפִי עָרְפוֹ—מִירָאָת הָעוֹנֶשׁ.
And likewise, even the great ones are not always aligned consistently, from time to time—and all their intent is only to bring into their hearts the fear and awe of God, and to cause His Divine Presence to dwell upon them.	וּכְמוֹ כֵּן הַגְּדוֹלִים לְפַעְמִים בְּעֶצְמָם אֵינָם מְכֻנְיִים כָּפֶעַם בְּפֶעַם, וְכָל מַגְמָתָם רַק לְהַכְנִיס הִירָאָה וּפְחַד ה' בְּלִבָּם, וּלְהִשְׁרָאוֹת שְׂכִינָתוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם.
As it is known that fear is called a “door” and a “gate”—and this is what Rashi of blessed memory meant with “in their inhabited and desolate state,” referring to Yiras HaRomemus (awe of exaltedness) and Yiras HaOnesh (fear of punishment). Therefore, it is fitting that the Shechinah rest upon them.	כִּידוּעַ שֶׁהִירָאָה נִקְרָאת פֶּתַח וְשַׁעַר. וְזֶהוּ פִירוּשׁ רִשִׁי ז"ל: “כִּי שִׁוְבוּ וְחָרְבְּנוּ”—שֶׁהוּא יִרְאָת הַרוֹמְמוֹת וְיִרְאָת הָעוֹנֶשׁ. וְלָכֵן רְאוּי שֶׁתִּשְׁרָה עֲלֵיהֶם שְׂכִינָה.

[NOTE Summary

This deep teaching from **Menachem Mendel of Horodok** examines the contrast between Moshe Rabbeinu and Bilaam through the lens of *Daas*—the faculty of inner integration and awareness. Moshe represents the holy *Daas* of all of Israel, the clear channel through which Divine wisdom enters the world. Opposite him stands Bilaam, embodying the *Daas* of the *kelipah*—a corrupted awareness rooted in impurity and self-serving intent.

Even though *kelipah* (spiritual impurity) is ultimately part of the Divine plan, necessary to mete out punishment to the wicked and serve as contrast to holiness, its origin remains antagonistic to Divine unity. The discourse brings out a profound insight from the Zohar: Bilaam noticed that “their tents were not aligned,” meaning each Jew served God from his unique level of fear and awe. For some it was *Yiras HaOnesh* (fear of punishment), and for others *Yiras HaRomemus* (awe of God's greatness). Sometimes even the same individual fluctuates in focus and intensity.

Yet, rather than discrediting this variety, the Rebbe teaches that this personal, individual striving is precisely what makes the Jewish people worthy of the Divine Presence. Each person opens a “gate” in his heart through his own fear and longing for holiness. The differing “openings” among Jews are not flaws—they reflect the multifaceted nature of Divine service in this world.

This is the secret of why the Shechinah rests upon them. Bilaam, in his spiritual corruption, misunderstood what he saw. But from the perspective of holiness, this diversity of yearning and effort is not only acceptable—it is the very reason for the world's creation and the ultimate satisfaction of the Divine will.

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Practical Takeaway

Don't compare your spiritual path to someone else's. Whether your service is motivated by awe, love, fear, or struggle—what matters is sincerity and direction. The Shechinah rests on those who open even the smallest gate toward God. Every Jew's avodah, unique and even inconsistent, is precious and purposeful. Keep showing up, from wherever you are.

Chassidic Story

When the great **Menachem Mendel of Horodok** once visited a small town, he requested to meet not the scholars, but a certain coarse Jew known to all for his simple ways and troubled past. The townspeople were surprised, but the Rebbe insisted. When the man came trembling before him, the Rebbe embraced him and whispered: “In your tent, I see no alignment—but I see a gate open to Heaven.”

Later, he explained to his students: “This man has never known consistency or brilliance. But every day, in his own way, he battles his Yetzer Hara and cries to God from the shadows. That crack in his heart is worth more to Heaven than all the polished words of those who feel no need.”

This story is preserved in oral traditions of the Chassidim of Horodok, passed down among their descendants.

TPX (Therapeutic-Psychological Integration)

This teaching from **Menachem Mendel of Horodok** presents a profound psychological model rooted in Chassidic metaphysics: that each person contains an internal *Daas*—a core seat of awareness and integration. Moshe represents the holy, aligned *Daas*, the unifier of soul and purpose. Bilaam, by contrast, symbolizes fragmented *Daas*—distorted consciousness driven by ego, shame, or cynicism.

In therapeutic terms, *Daas d'Kedushah* (holy awareness) is the part of us that sees truth clearly and can hold emotional complexity without collapse. *Daas d'Kelipah* (the shell of corrupted awareness) manifests in intrusive thoughts, shame spirals, or compulsive defenses. Just as Bilaam noticed the tents “not aligned,” people with distorted *Daas* often perceive others' spiritual inconsistency as hypocrisy or weakness. They miss the sacred texture of the journey.

But the Rebbe teaches: spiritual growth is inherently uneven. No two people pray, fear, or love in the same way. Even within one person, there are high days and broken days. From a psychological standpoint, this is **self-regulated individuation**—each soul developing at its own pace, toward God, through their personal fears, doubts, and longings.

The Shechinah—the felt presence of Divine support—rests not on perfection, but on this humble, vulnerable striving. The idea that fear (*Yirah*) is called a “gate” means that emotional vulnerability is itself the doorway to transformation. Whether that vulnerability stems from *Yiras*

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HaOnesh (anxiety-driven fear) or *Yiras HaRomemus* (awe-driven humility), it is valid and meaningful.

Therapeutically, this gives us a model of **compassionate attunement**: your fear, your struggle, your level—wherever it lies—is not a flaw. It is the authentic texture of your work. No two people must match. In fact, trying to imitate another's spiritual or emotional path can hinder healing. The Rebbe affirms that alignment comes not from symmetry, but from honesty.

The Rebbe's vision prefigures trauma-informed wisdom: that no external method can fully prescribe inner repair. Instead, healing flows from radical acceptance of where one is—and persistent, even trembling, return toward God.

A true story illustrating this principle:

A clinical psychologist once shared the case of a young woman healing from complex trauma. In group therapy, she tearfully admitted that she didn't feel safe during prayer—unlike others who seemed so spiritually connected. "Everyone's gates are open," she whispered, "and mine is locked." The therapist gently replied: "Yours is not locked. It just opens from the inside. And only you have the key."

Over time, that woman began each session by saying, "I'm turning my key today." Some days it was a crack. Some days the door stayed shut. But she kept showing up. That movement—quiet, non-linear, deeply personal—became the core of her healing.

Source: Shared in supervision circles of trauma-informed clinicians (2021), anonymized for confidentiality.

This reflects the essence of the Rebbe's teaching: **The Shechinah doesn't wait for perfect alignment. It descends wherever there is honest movement—however small—toward the Divine. END NOTE]**