

LIKKUTEI SICHOS CHELEK 18 • MATOS 1

# Mindshift

NINE GEMS FROM THE SICHA



## 1. 600 and no more

When describing Bilaam's tactical statement to the Midyanim on how to wage war against the Jewish people, Rashi writes that he said: "Are you greater than the Egyptians who were six hundred elite chariots strong?" (Beshalach, 14:7).

By choosing this specific phrase ("Who were six hundred"), Rashi is making it clear that he is referring only to these six hundred. They represent the "strength" Bilaam was describing, and not "all the chariots of Egypt with officers" mentioned in the same Passuk.

[If Rashi was alluding to the others, he would have written "etc." or would begin his quote from the beginning of the Passuk, as the Sifri (Rashi's primary source in this case) indeed does].

## 2. Try again

Balak thought he can defeat the Jewish people through spiritual means. When Bilaam failed to curse the Jews, as Balak commissioned him to do, he sought to hire others who might be able to do his evil bidding.

### **3. Spiritual Egyptians**

In Bilaam's eyes, what made the six hundred Egyptian chariots "elite" was not their physical strength. Rather, their primary quality was their spiritual status. As Rashi told us previously, the animals of these chariots were contributed by the Egyptians who feared Hashem (and therefore brought their livestock indoors during the plagues of pestilence and hail).

### **4. The Bilaam Doctrine**

There is a fundamental difference between "the advice of Bilaam" and "the word of Billam." (This despite Unkulos translating "word" as "advice").

The advice of Bilaam implies a specific rationale for a military plan of action. In this case: since Hashem despises immorality, the Midyanim should entice the Jewish people toward promiscuousness.

The word of Bilaam, however, alludes to a broader perspective. His ultimate goal is nothing less than the complete destruction of the Jewish people, Chas viShalom.

Bilaam's doctrine is as follows: Not only will the Jewish people not be vanquished through conventional military means (as is evidenced by the utter decimation of Sichon and Og, the regional "invincible paid protectors"), they will also not be defeated on the spiritual battlefield (as is demonstrated by the bitter end of the six hundred chariots of the Egyptians who feared Hashem).

The only way to overpower the Jewish people, says Bilaam, is by causing distance between them and Hashem through grave sins. From this perspective, a war against the Jews and a war against Hashem are one and the same.

## **5. Clear and present danger**

The tactic of weakening the Jewish people by enticing them toward immoral sins was not a one-time attack by the Midyanim. Rather, this is their primary method of waging war against us, each and every time.

In the battle described in our Parsha, the primary “weapon” of the Midyanim was their daughters. They were sent out to entice the Jewish people. This is why Moshe became so upset and addressed his rebuke to the soldiers fighting this battle: “Did you allow all the females to live?”

## **6. Let me tell you a secret**

After failing to curse to Jewish people, Bilaam advises the Midyanim on how they can defeat the Jewish people. Rashi quotes the Medrash: “Come close,” he said. “I will advise you.”

Bilaam tells them to come close because he is about to share a secret with them. As the Talmud records, they devised plans on how to ensnare the Jewish people into sinning. The Midyanim concocted secret ways on how to trick the Jewish people through enticing wines, etc. Had they known of this premeditated strategy, the Jews would have never sinned.

## **7. Slippery slope**

How is it possible that the Jewish people, who were so modest and moral for the entire forty years, should suddenly be so promiscuous? How could tens of thousands of Jews fall prey to such immorality? Having recently experienced miraculous victories, they should have been grateful to Hashem and on their best behavior!

There is a context that led to these grave sins:

First, the Jewish people won monumental victories over Sichon and Og. The spoils of these wars made them exceedingly wealthy. Their first mistake was that

they turned greedy. The Medrash records that the Jewish people belittled their ordinary possessions. They destroyed regular garments and livestock, seeking only the lavish silver and gold.

Once they were of this mindset, we can understand how the Jewish people would end up (in the words of the Talmud) “eating, drinking, partying, and mingling in the market.” Having exposed themselves to this unholy environment, they were now spiritually compromised.

It is within this context that the Jewish people were vulnerable enough to fall prey to Bilaam’s plan. The Midyanim set up shops of fine linen to lure them in, stationed prostitutes in a strategic manner, and served the Jewish people wine to intoxicate them.

Only with this background and through this complex scheme did the Jewish people reach the point of such lewd behavior.

## **8. Not again**

In our Parsha, after the war with Midyan, Moshe sees the Jewish people coming back with much spoils and many captives. For this reason, he warns them not to repeat the mistake they made after the previous battles with Sichon and Og, when their indulgence and greed eventually led them to grave sins.

## **9. Whose war?**

Hashem tells Moshe to take “the vengeance of the Jewish people” against the Midyanim. When Moshe communicates to the people, he urges them to take “the vengeance of Hashem” against the Midyanim.

The Medrash comments: Moshe said to Hashem, “Master of the Universe! If we were uncircumcised or idol worshipers or deniers of the Mitzvos, they would not hate us. The only reason they persecute us is because of the Torah and Mitzvos that you gave us. Therefore, this battle is your battle!”