

## I Can't, Because I Can't

GUEST CONTRIBUTOR RABBI AVROHOM WEINRIB

[Balak] sent messengers to Bil'am... saying, "Please go and curse these people for me..."

Hashem said to Bil'am, "Do not go with them! You shall not curse the people..."

Balak continued sending officers—more, and higher ranking, than these... They said to [Bil'am], "...Please don't refuse to travel to me, for I will honor you greatly... Please go and curse these people for me."

Bil'am answered... "If Balak were to give me all the silver and gold in his house, I couldn't violate the word of Hashem..." (22:5-18)

The practical difference between these two meanings would be when the stakes were higher. If a person were offered a million dollars to lift the house, his answer would be the same "I can't do it." However, if the person were offered a million dollars to hit someone, well, maybe *now* he could... And if not for a million, maybe he would for ten million or a hundred million.

This was the conversation taking place between Balak and Bil'am.

When Bil'am responded, "I can't, because Hashem won't let me," Balak took this as the second type of "I can't," meaning "I can't do it *under the current terms*... but if the price were right, I would find a way to do it." Therefore Balak sent a second set of messengers and raised the stakes.

Bil'am answered, "You didn't understand what I meant. When I told you that I can't do it, I meant it that it's like asking me to pick up a house—for

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WHY DID BALAK ATTEMPT TO PERSUADE Bil'am again, after his initial refusal? Why did he think the second set of messengers would be more successful than the first? Furthermore, why did Bil'am add his point about Balak giving him a houseful of gold and silver?

*K'hillas Yitzchak* explains that there are two types of "I can't." If someone would tell you to lift a house, your reply would be, "I can't"—meaning "There is no physical way I can do that." However, if someone were to tell you to walk over to a respected person and slap him across the face, your reply would also be "I can't." This "I can't" wouldn't mean "I am physically unable to." It would mean "I can't do it because it is totally unacceptable!"

## The Weapon of History

ALTER RAUBVOGEL

[Balak] sent messengers to Bil'am, son of Be'or... to summon him, saying, "Behold, a nation has come out of Egypt..." (22:5)

BALAK'S MESSENGERS EXPLAINED TO BIL'AM the threat posed by the Children of Israel, and asked Bil'am to curse them.

That evening, Hashem visited Bil'am, and He allowed Bil'am to describe Balak's proposition, which he did—but with a twist:

"Behold, the nation *who is coming* out of Egypt..." (22:11)

Remember that this story took place forty years after the Exodus. Why did Bil'am use the present tense?

Rav Moshe Feinstein (in *Darash Moshe*) explains that Balak's and Bil'am's words reflect the different ways they perceived the Jewish People.

Every people has "creation legends" about how it came to be, but as a rule, nations don't dwell on events which happened before they existed. If they acknowledge that history at all, it's only thought of in a detached way, as part of the distant past.

Knowing this, and knowing that the Children of Israel had only risen to nationhood after leaving Egypt, Balak described the Jewish People the way he imagined they viewed themselves—as if they had put their slavery behind them and written it off as prehistory.

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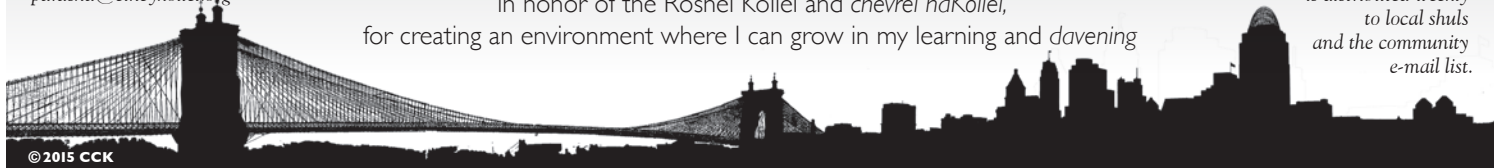
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# At the Kollel

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**Looking for a chavrusa?** See Coordinator Rabbi Chaim Heinemann!  
Chavrusos are available noon–1 PM on weekdays, and 8–9:45 PM Sun.–Thurs.

## Sunday *Free brunch!*

🖐️🖐️🖐️ **America Runs on Torah**  
(Jewish Law & Parasha)  
Rabbis Dani Schon  
and Yisroel Kaufman.....10 AM  
*Grand Deluxe breakfast served*

## Tuesday

🚺🚻🖐️ **Partners in Torah  
at the Mayerson JCC**  
Rabbi Binyamin Teitelbaum.....8 PM

## Wednesday

🚺🚻🖐️ **Torah Treasures for  
Seniors at the Mayerson JCC**  
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 10:30–11:15 AM

🚺🚻🖐️ **Downtown Lunch-n-Learn  
at Strauss & Troy**  
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 12–1 PM

## Thursday

🖐️🖐️🖐️ **Halacha** (based on the parasha)  
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9:10–10 PM  
*Homemade refreshments served.*

## Minyanim Daylight Time

**Shacharis**  
Sunday .....8:15 AM  
Monday–Friday .....7:20 AM  
Shabbos .....N/A

**Mincha**  
Sunday .....7:45 PM  
Monday–Thursday .....5:45 PM  
Shabbos .....6:30 PM

**Ma'ariv**  
**In the Beis Midrash:**  
Sunday–Wednesday .....9:45 PM  
Thursday .....10 PM  
Shabbos .....N/A

## Every Day

🖐️ **“Dirshu” Gemara Shiur**  
(Maseches B'choros)  
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....  
Sunday 7:15–8:15 AM  
Monday–Friday 5:50–6:45 AM

🖐️🖐️ **Kollel Yisgaber K'ari**  
(amud-a-day of Mishnah B'rurah)  
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....  
Monday–Friday 6:55–7:20 AM

🖐️🖐️ **Kitzur Shuchan Aruch**  
Live video conference!  
Rabbi Dani Schon.....  
Monday–Friday 12:05–12:20 PM

🖐️ **Daf Yomi**  
Rabbi Meir Minster.....  
Sunday–Thursday 8–8:45 PM  
Shabbos (at CZE) 1:00 pre-mincha

🖐️🖐️ **Nightly Halacha Chabura**  
Rabbis Dani Schon  
& Binyamin Teitelbaum .....  
Monday–Thursday 9–9:45 PM

**Chavrusa Learning**  
(private & small groups).....times vary

## I Won't, Because I Can't CONTINUED

all the money in the world, I still can't do it!" He understood that if Hashem didn't want him to do it, his attempt to curse the Children of Israel would be as effective as attempting to lift a house. There was absolutely no way he would be able to do it!

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, of blessed memory, was once called out of the *beis midrash* for an important phone call. As

he was walking out, he stopped short. He told the person who had come to get him that he couldn't go—there was a wall there. The person seemed puzzled, as he didn't see any wall. Rav Moshe explained that there was a person reciting the *Sh'moneh Esrei* right there, and Jewish law forbids us from passing right in front of him. Rav Moshe saw that like a wall, as in "I can't keep walking."

That is the way we should strive to see every law in the Torah. "I can't" commit a sin, because it isn't consistent with what Hashem wants. No matter what the stakes are or how important it is, I cannot go against the will of Hashem!

May we merit to view and see the will of Hashem in this vein and, through that, live every aspect of our lives the way Hashem wants. 🙏

## The Weapon of History CONTINUED

Bil'am, however, had made his career divining the presence of holiness and sin, and he knew better. He realized that the Children of Israel saw themselves, even now, as former slaves, and that Hashem wanted them to preserve their memories of Egypt and the lessons learned from exile and slavery—to keep on living as

if they were newly freed, fresh in the experience of freedom and inspiration.

Bil'am also recognized that this attitude of theirs would be (and still is!) key to their ability to inspire both themselves and the nations around them to rise above their circumstances and grow in holiness and the service of Hashem.

Bil'am saw this as the force behind the existential threat the Children of Israel presented to the idolatrous, hedonistic peoples of Canaan—and he was bold enough to say so, even as he spoke of them before Hashem! 🙏