

## And Balak and Bilaam brought up a bull and a ram on each alter. (23:2)

*Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl*, was a master orator. As a *maggid*, he was able to reach thousands with his powerful, animated oratory. The manner in which he presented his ethical lessons, couched in stories to which his listeners could well relate, captivated his audience, impacting them with his critical message and sage advice. Yet, *Rav Sholom* was not happy. He felt that in order to be worthy of lecturing to the masses, he himself should be more “sincere.” There should be no vestige of eminence or haughtiness, no personal interest whatsoever. (This story is related by *Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*. Obviously, *Rav Sholom*’s issue with honor and arrogance is far removed from anything we could imagine. He was a holy person whose entire life was devoted to Torah, *mitzvos* and *Klal Yisrael*. Nonetheless, on his lofty level, he felt insincere.) Perhaps he was missing a drop of *lishmah*, for its own sake (the *mitzvah* of reaching out to fellow Jews). Perhaps he took personal enjoyment from his successful lecturing.

At that time, the *Mashgiach* of Ponevez (and Mir), *Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl*, lived in Yerushalayim. *Rav Sholom* decided that he would share his personal misgivings with *Rav Chatzkel* (as he was lovingly and venerably called). He did. The *Mashgiach* listened, ruminated for a moment, and said, “If there is a question of sincerity, it is not simple...Arrogance is a vile character trait.”

*Rav Sholom* left the *Mashgiach*’s apartment feeling even more morose. He was broken-hearted. Instead of encouraging words, the *Mashgiach* seemed to be even more demanding of him. As he was returning home, his mind deep in thought, *Rav Sholom* chanced upon a distinguished *chasid* of Gur, indeed, an old friend of his. *Rav Sholom* poured out his heart, sharing with him his tale of woe. (While such feelings of insincerity might not bother most of us, *Rav Sholom* was greatly troubled. This gives the reader a glimpse of his impeccable character and devotion to Hashem.) “I thought the *Mashgiach* would hearten me, encourage me to continue my work and not worry. On the contrary, he added to the weight that is already sitting on my heart,” *Rav Sholom* said.

The *chassid* replied, “You are well aware of *Chazal*’s statement (*Sanhedrin* 105b), ‘A person should always engage in the study of Torah, or the performance of a *mitzvah*, even if not for its own sake (i.e. even for ulterior motives), because from learning Torah and performing a *mitzvah* not for its own sake, he will eventually come to learn Torah or perform a *mitzvah* for its own sake (i.e. out of pure motives).’” This concept is substantiated by the reward received by Balak for the forty-two offerings that he offered up to Hashem. He merited to have Rus (matriarch of the Davidic dynasty) descended from him (Rus was a descendant of Eglon, the grandson of Balak). (Simply, *Chazal* teach us that one should not be discouraged if he finds himself learning Torah or performing *mitzvos* for less than pure motives, such as fame and honor. It is part of climbing the ladder of spirituality. One begins with impure motivation, but as he continues to climb, he will notice a deeper attachment to Torah and *mitzvos*, thus purifying his motives.)

The *chassid* continued, “I once heard this *Chazal* explained by one of the *gedolim*, Torah giants, as, even if you might be acting *she’lo lishmah*, for ulterior motives, but, as a result of your words, you cause another Jew to alter the course of his life, to the point that now he will serve Hashem through Torah and *mitzvah* performance – *lishmah*, purely for the sake of the *mitzvah* – then you should continue your work. Therefore, my dear friend, even if you sense that your work contains even a miniscule measure of impurity, do not worry, because you are inspiring thousands to adhere to Hashem’s Torah and *mitzvos*.”

When Balak offered his forty-two offerings, his intention was that, through them, Bilaam would be able to curse *Klal Yisrael*. This was ulterior motive at its nadir. Yet, as *Maharal* explains, these sacrifices ultimately led to the Jewish People being blessed. In reward, he merited to have Rus descend from him. Various goals and objectives motivate one to “act publicly,” be it speaking, writing, carrying out acts of loving kindness, etc. Veritably, it would be wonderful if we could all act *lishmah*, but, even if our motives are “slightly” self-serving, the barometer for appropriateness should be: do our public acts inspire/help others, or are they only for self-aggrandizement? Somewhere in the equation must be an aspect of *lishmah*, or the success factor of the endeavor will be restricted.