

# Parenting in the Parsha

## פרשת בלק The Mistake Mistake

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם לֹא תֵלֵךְ עִמָּהֶם לֹא תֹאֵר אֶת-הָעָם כִּי בְרוּךְ הוּא:

But G-d said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not curse that people, for they are blessed."

וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בִּלְעָם לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם-לִקְרָא לְךָ בָּאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים קוּם לְךָ אִתָּם וְאָרְאֵה אֶת-הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר-אֲדַבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ אֵתוֹ תַעֲשֶׂה:  
That night G-d came to Balaam and said to him, "If these men have come to invite you, you may go with them. But whatever I command you, that you shall do."

ד"א אם לקרא לך אם כל כך הם שוטים שבאו לקרוא לך פעם שניה אחרי שאמרתי לך לא תלך עמהם, קום לך אתם ויראו שלא יועיל להם.

If these people are so foolish as to believe that I will change My basic attitude which already expressed to Bilam the first time, go ahead and travel with them, and you will see soon how useless this journey will be.

- Chizkuni

Sometime the best way to help your kids is to not help them

- Kristen Welch

Mistakes, everybody makes them. We all mess up; we all get things wrong; and we all have to suffer the sometimes painful consequences of our missteps. As parents, we feel that an important part of our job is to shield our children from pain, and we do so by helping to keep them from making mistakes. That is a terrible mistake.

Bilam is visited by emissaries from Midian. They attempt to contract him to take out the Jewish people. Bilam consults with G-d who bars him from accepting. The emissaries return. Bilam goes back to Hashem, but this time He tells him he may go. What has changed? The *Chizkuni* explains that absolutely nothing has changed. Hashem simply allowed them and Bilam to make their own mistake and learn from that mistake. It is a beautifully simple, but profoundly deep idea of the *Chizkuni*.

We have all been in the situation where we have witnessed someone about to do something he or she will soon regret. We have also all been in that situation and attempted to prevent the individual from that action, and still watched the person blindly push ahead, ignoring the great wisdom of you who has seen this scene play out before. It is maddening and frustrating to watch a stubborn person run headlong into a grievous error. It is doubly painful when that person is your child who obstinately refuses to heed your wise advice and careens down the path of error and pain. It is also at that time that you need to bite your tongue and allow your child to make his or her own mistake.

Natural consequences are the greatest teacher. When we choose wrong and that choice is followed by clear, immediate, natural consequences, we quickly learn to associate the effect with the cause. The pain of the error is the best instructor. Children need the space and freedom to make their own mistakes. They need the space to be free to take risks and they need the comfort to be OK with getting things wrong. They also need the natural consequences of their actions to serve as their instructor.

Of course, you can tell your child that he is about to make a mistake. But, if he insists on moving forward, don't get angry. Don't scream and yell. Don't even get frustrated. Step aside and let the child make that mistake. If you're correct, he will experience the consequence and he will realize just how wise you were. There are only two circumstances that would warrant your standing your ground and not allowing children to make their own mistakes. The first of those circumstances is where the child's mistake will present a real safety danger to the child or to others. You would not, for example, allow a 16-year-old to drive drunk so that he can learn from the consequences.

The second circumstance in which you will intervene is where the consequence of the action will not be immediate or readily apparent. If the child is about to embark on a mistake that will have long-term negative consequences but will not negatively affect him in the short-run, he will not recognize the error of his action. You would not, for example, allow a child to start smoking and rely on the natural consequences to deter him. Those consequences are too removed and too remote to be effective.

But, if there is no safety risk or long-term consequence, and the child insists on moving forward, let him, and watch him learn his lesson. Create an atmosphere where your children feel safe to take risks and to make mistakes. Avoid long lectures and punishments when the child makes those mistakes and feels the natural consequences. Step aside, let your children learn from their mistakes, and they will be amazed at just how wise you really are.

**Good Shabbos,**

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