LSJS: Covenant & Continuity
Parshat Balak - Love With Boundaries

Rabbi Dr Jeremy Bruce
Jeremy@rabbisacks.org

Numbers 22:8-13

במדבר כ״ב:ח׳-י״ג

(8) He said to them, “Spend the night here, and I shall reply to you as ה׳ may instruct me.” So the Moabite dignitaries stayed with Balaam. (9) God came to Balaam and said, “What do these men want of you?” (10) Balaam said to God, “Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent me this message: (11) Here is a people that came out from Egypt and hides the earth from view. Come now and curse them for me; perhaps I can engage them in battle and drive them off.” (12) But God said to Balaam, “Do not go with them. You must not curse that people, for they are blessed.” (13) Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak’s dignitaries, “Go back to your own country, for ה׳ will not let me go with you.”

(ח) וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם֙ לִ֣ינוּ פֹ֔ה הַלַּ֖יְלָה וַהֲשִׁבֹתִ֣י אֶתְכֶ֑ם דָּבָ֕ר כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר יְדַבֵּ֛ר ה׳ אֵלָ֖י וַיֵּשְׁב֥וּ שָׂרֵי־מוֹאָ֖ב עִם־בִּלְעָֽם׃ (ט) וַיָּבֹ֥א אֱלֹקִ֖ים אֶל־בִּלְעָ֑ם וַיֹּ֣אמֶר מִֽי הָאֲנָשִׁ֥ים הָאֵ֖לֶּה עִמָּֽךְ׃ (י) וַיֹּ֤אמֶר בִּלְעָם֙ אֶל־הָאֱלֹקִ֔ים בָּלָ֗ק בֶּן־צִפֹּר֙ מֶ֣לֶךְ מוֹאָ֔ב שָׁלַ֥ח אֵלָֽי׃ (יא) הִנֵּ֣ה הָעָ֗ם הַיֹּצֵא֙ מִמִּצְרַ֔יִם וַיְכַ֖ס אֶת־עֵ֣ין הָאָ֑רֶץ עַתָּ֤ה לְכָה־קָּבָה־לִּי֙ אֹת֔וֹ אוּלַ֥י אוּכַ֖ל לְהִלָּחֶ֥ם בּ֖וֹ וְגֵרַשְׁתִּֽיו׃ (יב) וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֱלֹקִים֙ אֶל־בִּלְעָ֔ם לֹ֥א תֵלֵ֖ךְ עִמָּהֶ֑ם לֹ֥א תָאֹ֛ר אֶת־הָעָ֖ם כִּ֥י בָר֖וּךְ הֽוּא׃ (יג) וַיָּ֤קָם בִּלְעָם֙ בַּבֹּ֔קֶר וַיֹּ֖אמֶר אֶל־שָׂרֵ֣י בָלָ֑ק לְכ֣וּ אֶל־אַרְצְכֶ֔ם כִּ֥י מֵאֵ֛ן ה׳ לְתִתִּ֥י לַהֲלֹ֖ךְ עִמָּכֶֽם׃

Numbers 22:18-25

במדבר כ״ב:י״ח-כ״ה

(18) Balaam replied to Balak’s officials, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, big or little, contrary to the command of my God 19) ה׳.) So you, too, stay here overnight, and let me find out what else ה׳ may say to me.” (20) That night God came to Balaam and said to him, “If the agents have come to invite you, you may go with them. But whatever I command you, that you shall do.” (21) When he arose in the morning, Balaam saddled his ass and departed with the Moabite dignitaries. (22) But God was incensed at his going; so a messenger of ה׳ took a position in his way as an adversary. He was riding on his she-ass, with his two servants alongside, (23) when the ass caught sight of the messenger of ה׳ standing in the way, with his

(יח) וַיַּ֤עַן בִּלְעָם֙ וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֶל־עַבְדֵ֣י בָלָ֔ק אִם־יִתֶּן־לִ֥י בָלָ֛ק מְלֹ֥א בֵיתוֹ֖ כֶּ֣סֶף וְזָהָ֑ב לֹ֣א אוּכַ֗ל לַעֲבֹר֙ אֶת־פִּ֣י ה׳ אֱלֹקָ֔י לַעֲשׂ֥וֹת קְטַנָּ֖ה אוֹ גְדוֹלָֽה׃ (יט) וְעַתָּ֤ה שְׁבוּ־נָא֙ בָּזֶ֔ה גַּם־אַתֶּ֖ם הַלָּ֑יְלָה וְאֵדְעָ֗ה מַה־יֹּ֤סֶף ה׳ דַּבֵּ֥ר עִמִּֽי׃ (כ) וַיָּבֹ֤א אֱלֹקִים֙ ו אֶל־בִּלְעָ֔ם לַ֖יְלָה וַיֹּ֣אמֶר ל֑וֹ אִם־לִקְרֹ֤א לְךָ֙ בָּ֣אוּ הָאֲנָשִׁ֔ים קוּם־לֵ֥ךְ אִתָּ֖ם וְאַ֣ךְ אֶת־הַדָּבָ֞ר אֲשֶׁר־אֲדַבֵּ֤ר אֵלֶ֙יךָ֙ אֹת֔וֹ תַּעֲשֶׂ֖ה׃ (כא) וַיָּ֤קָם בִּלְעָם֙ בַּבֹּ֔קֶר וַיַּחֲבֹ֖שׁ אֶת־אֲתֹנ֑וֹ וַיֵּ֣לֶךְ עִם־שָׂרֵ֖י מוֹאָֽב׃ (כב) וַיִּחַ֤ר־אַף֙ אֱלֹקִ֔ים כִּֽי־הוֹלֵ֖ךְ הוּא֑ וַיִּתְיַצַּ֤ב מַלְאַךְ֙ ה׳ בַּדֶּ֔רֶךְ לְשָׂטָ֖ן ל֑וֹ וְהוּא֙ רֹכֵ֣ב עַל־אֲתֹנ֔וֹ וּשְׁנֵ֥י נְעָרָ֖יו עִמּֽוֹ׃ (כג) וַתֵּ֤רֶא

הָאָתוֹן אֶת־מַלְאַךְ ה׳ נִצָּב בַּדֶּרֶךְ וְחַרְבּוֹ שְׁלוּפָה בְּיָדוֹ וַתֵּט הָאָתוֹן מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ וַתֵּלֶךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיַּךְ בִּלְעָם אֶת־הָאָתוֹן לְהַטֹתָהּ הַדָּרֶךְ: (כד) וַיַּעֲמֹד מַלְאַךְ ה׳ בְּמִשְׁעוֹל הַכְּרָמִים גֶּדֶר מִזֶּה וְגֶדֶר מִזֶּה: (כה) וַתֵּרֶא הָאָתוֹן אֶת־מַלְאַךְ ה׳ וַתִּלָּחֵץ אֶל־הַקִּיר וַתִּלְחַץ אֶת־רֶגֶל בִּלְעָם אֶל־הַקִּיר וַיֹּסֶף לְהַכֹּתָהּ:

drawn sword in his hand. The ass swerved from the road and went into the fields; and Balaam beat the ass to turn her back onto the road. (24) The messenger of ה׳ then stationed himself in a lane between the vineyards, with a fence on either side. (25) The ass, seeing the messenger of ה׳, pressed herself against the wall and squeezed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he beat her again.

Malbim on Numbers 22:21:1

מלבי"ם על במדבר כ"ב:כ"א:א׳

...There is a difference between the words '*Ito'* and '*Imo*'. Imo implies complete agreement while ito implies physically accompanying them while having different intentions. His intentions were different from their intentions, he went without the intention to cause ill to Israel, he didn't want to do that but he did go with them.

ויקם בלעם בבקר ... (סי' לב) שיש הבדל בין **אתו** ובין **עמו** שעמו מציין השווי, ואתו מורה שאחד הוא העקר, וה׳ הודיע שלא ילך עמם בשווי רק אתם, שיהי' דעתו נפרד מדעתם שהוא לא ילך על הכונה להרע לישראל, והוא לא כן עשה כי הלך עמם,:

Rabbi Sacks C&C Balak 5767 - The Hardest Word to Hear The deepest answer is also the simplest. The hardest word to hear in any language is the word "No". Bilaam had asked God once. God had said No. That should have sufficed. Yet Bilaam asked a second time. In that act lay his fateful weakness of character. He knew that God did not want him to go. Yet he invited the second set of messengers to wait overnight in case God had changed His mind.

God does not change His mind. Therefore Bilaam's delay said something not about God but about himself. He had not accepted the Divine refusal. He wanted to hear the answer "Yes" - and that is indeed what he heard. Not because God wanted him to go, but because God speaks once, and if we refuse to accept what He says, God does not force His will upon us. As the Sages of the Midrash put it: "Man is led down the path he chooses to tread."

The true meaning of God's second reply, "Go with them," is, "If you insist, then I cannot stop you going - but I am angry that you should have asked a second time." God did not change His mind at any point in the proceedings. In scenes 1, 2 and 3, God did not want Bilaam to go. His "Yes" in scene 2 meant "No" - but it was a "No" Bilaam could not hear, was not prepared to hear. When God speaks and we do not listen, He does not intervene to save us from our choices. "Man is led6 down the path he chooses to tread."

Makkot 10b:5

מכות י׳ ב:ה׳

Apropos the path upon which God leads people, the Gemara cites a statement that **Rabba bar Rav Huna says** that **Rav Huna says, and some say** it was a statement that **Rav Huna says** that **Rabbi Elazar says: From the Torah, from the Prophets, and from the Writings** one learns that **along the path a person wishes to proceed, one leads** and assists **him.**

אָמַר רַבָּה בַּר רַב הוּנָא אָמַר רַב הוּנָא, וְאָמְרִי לַהּ אָמַר רַב הוּנָא אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר: מִן הַתּוֹרָה וּמִן הַנְּבִיאִים וּמִן הַכְּתוּבִים – בַּדֶּרֶךְ שֶׁאָדָם רוֹצֶה לֵילֵךְ בָּהּ – מוֹלִיכִין אוֹתוֹ.

Makkot 10b:6

מכות י׳ ב:ו׳

One learns this **from the Torah, as it is written** that initially God said to Balaam with regard to the contingent dispatched by Balak: **“You shall not go with them”** (Numbers 22:12). After Balaam implored Him and indicated his desire to go with them, **it is written: “Arise, go with them”** (Numbers 22:20). One learns this **from the Prophets, as it is written: “I am the Lord your God, Who teaches you for your profit, Who leads you on the path that you go”** (Isaiah 48:17), indicating that along the path that one seeks to go, God will direct him. One learns this **from the Writings, as it is written: “If one seeks the cynics, He will cause him to join the cynics, but to the humble He will give grace”** (Proverbs 3:34), indicating that if one chooses cynicism God will direct him there and if he opts for humility God will grant him grace.

מִן הַתּוֹרָה, דִּכְתִיב: ״לֹא תֵלֵךְ עִמָּהֶם״, וּכְתִיב: ״קוּם לֵךְ אִתָּם״. מִן הַנְּבִיאִים – דִּכְתִיב: ״אֲנִי ה׳ אֱלֹקֶיךָ מְלַמֶּדְךָ לְהוֹעִיל מַדְרִיכְךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ (זוּ) תֵּלֵךְ״. מִן הַכְּתוּבִים – דִּכְתִיב: ״אִם לַלֵּצִים הוּא יָלִיץ וְלַעֲנָוִים יִתֵּן חֵן״.

Leviticus 19:18

ויקרא י״ט:י״ח

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord.

לֹא־תִקֹּם וְלֹא־תִטֹּר֙ אֶת־בְּנֵ֣י עַמֶּ֔ךָ וְאָהַבְתָּ֥ לְרֵעֲךָ֖ כָּמ֑וֹךָ אֲנִ֖י ה׳׃

Leviticus 19:33-34

ויקרא י״ט:ל״ג-ל״ד

(33) When strangers reside with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. (34) The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens; you shall love each one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I ה׳ am your God.

(לג) וְכִי־יָג֥וּר אִתְּךָ֖ גֵּ֑ר בְּאַרְצְכֶ֔ם לֹ֥א תוֹנ֖וּ אֹתֽוֹ׃ (לד) כְּאֶזְרָ֤ח מִכֶּם֙ יִהְיֶ֣ה לָכֶ֔ם הַגֵּ֥ר ו הַגָּ֖ר אִתְּכֶ֑ם וְאָהַבְתָּ֥ לוֹ֙ כָּמ֔וֹךָ כִּי־גֵרִ֥ים הֱיִיתֶ֖ם בְּאֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרָ֑יִם אֲנִ֖י ה׳ אֱלֹקֵיכֶֽם׃

Rabbi Sacks - C&C Love is Not Enough Acharei Mot -Kedoshim 5778

These two commands define Judaism as a religion of love – not just of God ("with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might"), but of humanity also. That was and is a world-changing idea.

But what calls for deep reflection is where these commands appear. They do so in Parshat Kedoshim in what, to contemporary eyes, must seem one of the strangest passages in the Torah.

Leviticus 19 brings side-by-side laws of seemingly quite different kinds. Some belong to the moral life: don't gossip, don't hate, don't take revenge, don't bear a grudge. Some are about social justice: leave parts of the harvest for the poor; don't pervert justice; don't withhold wages; don't use false weights and measures. Others have a different feel altogether: don't crossbreed livestock; don't plant a field with mixed seeds; don't wear a garment of mixed wool and linen; don't eat fruit of the first three years; don't eat blood; don't practice divination; don't lacerate yourself.

At first glance these laws have nothing to do with one another: some are about conscience, some about politics and economics, and others about purity and taboo. Clearly, though, the Torah is telling us otherwise. They do have something in common. They are all about order, limits, boundaries. They are telling us that reality has a certain underlying structure whose integrity must be honoured. If you hate or take revenge you destroy relationships. If you commit injustice, you undermine the trust on which society depends. If you fail to respect the integrity of nature (different seeds, species, and so on), you take the first step down a path that ends in environmental disaster.

There is an order to the universe, part moral, part political, part ecological. When that order is violated, eventually there is chaos. When that order is observed and preserved, we become co-creators of the sacred harmony and integrated diversity that the Torah calls "holy."

Why then is it specifically in this chapter that the two great commands – love of the neighbour and the stranger – appear? The answer is profound and very far from obvious. Because this is where love belongs – in an ordered universe.

Ramban on Leviticus 19:2

YE SHALL BE HOLY. "Abstain from the forbidden sexual relationships [mentioned in the preceding section] and from [other] sin, because wherever you find [in the Torah] a warning to guard against immorality, you find the mention of 'holiness.'" This is Rashi's

רמב"ן על ויקרא י״ט:ב׳

(ב)**קְדֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ** הֱוּו פְּרוּשִׁים מִן הָעֲרָיוֹת וּמִן הָעֲבֵרָה, שֶׁכָּל מָקוֹם שֶׁאַתָּה מוֹצֵא גָּדֶר עֶרְוָה אַתָּה מוֹצֵא קְדֻשָּׁה, לְשׁוֹן רַשְׁ"י (רש"י על ויקרא י"ט:ב'). אֲבָל בְּתוֹרַת כֹּהֲנִים (פרשה א ב) רָאִיתִי סְתָם, פְּרוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ. וְכֵן שָׁנוּ שָׁם

language... And in my opinion, this abstinence does not refer only to restraint from acts of immorality, as the Rabbi [Rashi] wrote, but it is rather the self-control mentioned throughout the Talmud... a man of desire could consider this to be a permission to be passionately addicted to sexual intercourse with his wife or many wives, and be *among winebibbers, among gluttonous eaters of flesh*, and speak freely all profanities, since this prohibition has not been [expressly] mentioned in the Torah, and thus he will become a sordid person within the permissible realm of the Torah! Therefore, after having listed the matters which He prohibited altogether, Scripture followed them up by a general command that we practice moderation even in matters which are permitted,

(שמיני פרק יב ג), "וְהִתְקַדִּשְׁתֶּם וִהְיִיתֶם קְדֹשִׁים כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אָנִי", כְּשֵׁם שֶׁאֲנִי קָדוֹשׁ כָּךְ אַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ קְדוֹשִׁים, כְּשֵׁם שֶׁאֲנִי פָּרוּשׁ כָּךְ אַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ פְּרוּשִׁים. וּלְפִי דַּעְתִּי אֵין הַפְּרִישׁוּת הַזּוֹ לִפְרֹשׁ מִן הָעֲרָיוֹת כְּדִבְרֵי הָרַב, אֲבָל הַפְּרִישׁוּת הִיא הַמֻּזְכֶּרֶת בְּכָל מָקוֹם בַּתַּלְמוּד שֶׁבְּעָלֶיהָ נִקְרָאִים "פְּרוּשִׁים". וְטַעְנָן כִּי הַתּוֹרָה הִזְהִירָה בָּעֲרָיוֹת וּבַמַּאֲכָלִים הָאֲסוּרִים, וְהִתִּירָה הַבִּיאָה אִישׁ בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וַאֲכִילַת הַבָּשָׂר וְהַיַּיִן. א"כ יִמְצָא בַּעַל הַתַּאֲוָה מָקוֹם לִהְיוֹת שָׁטוּף בְּזִמַּת אִשְׁתּוֹ אוֹ נָשָׁיו הָרַבּוֹת, וְלִהְיוֹת בְּסִבְאֵי יַיִן בְּזוֹלְלֵי בָּשָׂר לָמוֹ, וִידַבֵּר כִּרְצוֹנוֹ בְּכָל הַנְּבָלוֹת, שֶׁלֹּא הֻזְכַּר אִסּוּר זֶה בַּתּוֹרָה, וְהִנֵּה יִהְיֶה נָבָל בִּרְשׁוּת הַתּוֹרָה. לְפִיכָךְ בָּא הַכָּתוּב אַחֲרֵי שֶׁפֵּרֵט הָאֲסוּרִים שֶׁאָסַר אוֹתָם לְגַמְרֵי, וְצִוָּה בְּדָבָר כְּלָלִי - שֶׁנִּהְיֶה פְּרוּשִׁים מִן הַמֻּתָּרוֹת:

Gabor Mate - In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts p.278

Some children grow up with the illusion that love is indistinguishable from permissiveness, that to be loved means never to be disappointed or frustrated. But children need, and secretly crave, limits. Loving discipline communicates to the child: 'You matter so much to me that I will guide you, even when it's uncomfortable.' And as children mature, we allow them to fail, to struggle, and to find their own way — not because we stop loving them, but because we love them enough to let them grow.

Erich Fromm - The Art of Loving

p. 19

In contrast to symbiotic union, mature love is union under the condition of preserving one's integrity , one's individuality. Love is an active power in man; a power which breaks through the walls which separate man from his fellow men, which unites him with others; love makes him overcome the sense of isolation and separateness, yet it permits him to be himself to retain his integrity. In love the paradox occurs that two beings become one and yet remain two.

p.24

But not only in love does giving mean receiving . The teacher is taught by his students, the actor is stimulated by his audience, the psychoanalyst is cured by his patient - provided they do not treat each other as objects, but are related to each other genuinely and productively.

It is hardly necessary to stress the fact that the ability to love as an act of giving depends on the character development of the person. It presupposes the attainment of a predominantly

productive orientation; in this orientation the person has overcome dependency, narcissistic impotence and a wish to exploit others, or to hoard, and has acquired faith in his own human powers, courage to rely on his power in the attainment of his goals.

p.100

The practice of any art has certain general requirements, quite regardless of whether we deal with the art of carpentry, medicine, or the art of love. First of all, the practice of an area requires discipline. I shall never be good at anything if I do not do it in a disciplined way; anything I do only if " I am in the mood" may be a nice or amusing hobby, but I shall never become a master in that art. But the problem is not only that of discipline in the practice of the particular art (say practicing every day a certain amount of hours) but it is that of discipline in one's whole life. One might think that nothing is easier to learn for modern man than discipline. Does he not spend eight hours a day in the most disciplined way at a job which is strictly routinized? The fact, however, is that modern man has exceedingly little self-discipline outside of the sphere of work. When he does not work, he wants to be lazy, to slouch, or to use a nicer word to "relax". This very wish for laziness is largely a reaction against the routinization of life