

Torah Weekly



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Parshas Balak

For the week ending 10 Tamuz 5755 (17 Tamuz 5755)*

7 & 8 July 1995 (14 & 15 July 1995)*

*week ending dates for locations outside of Israel

Summary

Balak, the king of the Moav, is in morbid fear of the *Bnei Yisrael*. He summons a renowned sorcerer named *Bilaam* to

curse them. Hashem appears to *Bilaam* and commands him not to go, but *Bilaam* ignores the warning. While en route, a *malach* (angel, messenger from Hashem) blocks the path of *Bilaam's* donkey. Unable to contain his frustration, *Bilaam* strikes the donkey each time that it stops or wants to make a detour. Miraculously, the donkey begins to speak, asking *Bilaam* why he is hitting her. At this point Hashem allows *Bilaam* to become aware of the *malach*. The *malach* instructs *Bilaam*

what he is permitted to say, and what he is forbidden to say regarding the Jewish People. When *Bilaam* arrives, King *Balak* makes elaborate preparations in the hope that *Bilaam* will succeed in the planned curse. Three times *Bilaam* attempts to curse, and three times a blessing issues instead. *Balak*, seeing that *Bilaam* has failed, sends him home in disgrace. The *Bnei Yisrael* begin sinning with the *Moavi* women, and worshipping the *Moavi* idols, and are therefore punished with a plague.

One of the Jewish leaders brazenly sins with a *Midianite* princess in full view of Moshe and the people. *Pinchas*, a grandson of Aaron, grabs a spear and kills both of the evildoers. This halts the plague, but not before 24,000 have died.

Commentaries

“For I know that whomever...you curse is cursed” (22:6).

There is a mystical concept that Hashem “gets angry” every day (*Avodah Zarah 4a*). This ‘anger’ is the *Midas HaDin*, the Attribute of unyielding justice, with which Hashem judges sinners. Clearly, someone who has transgressed is most vulnerable at that time. The “talent” of *Bilaam* was that he was able to discern the exact second

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in each day when this Attribute is active — when Hashem “gets angry.” *Bilaam* wanted to direct the *Midas HaDin* against the Jewish People by cursing them and calling forth upon them Divine punishment. However, Hashem foiled *Bilaam's* scheme by closing up the *Midas HaDin* and not sitting in judgment. But, necessarily, as there was no *Midas HaDin* at this time, the world received in its place a disproportionate amount of the opposite *midah* — the *Midas HaChesed* — the Attribute of kindness. *Bilaam* realized that due

to the influx of this “excess kindness” the time was propitious to entice the Jewish People to sin through immorality, which is, in essence, unbridled “kindness.” He advised *Balak* accordingly (*Rashi 24:14*) and *Balak* was successful in luring the *Bnei Yisrael* into degrading themselves with the daughters of *Moav*.

“...the angel of Hashem with his sword drawn in his hand” (22:23).

The strength of Israel is in its voice. The voice raised to heaven in prayer; the voice of learning Torah. The eternal dichotomy between *Yisrael* (*Yaakov*) and the gentile nations (*Esav/Rome* and its current cultural heirs) is expressed in the battle between the power of the voice and the power of the hands, and their ultimate expression, the sword. “The voice is the voice of *Yaakov*, but the hands are the hands of *Esav*” (*Bereishis 27:22*). When *Bilaam* wants to curse the Jewish People, usurping the power of the voice, he is warned that his end will be through the sword, the weapon of *Esav*.

(Rashi)

**“And Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey...”
(22:28).**

Of all the differences between Man and the animals, the Torah identifies the essential distinction as the power of speech. Man is called ‘*The Speaker*’ — this is the quality that epitomizes his elevation above the animals. The power of speech is given to Man to elevate the physical world, to inject spirituality into the physical. In the Hebrew language the word for ‘*thing*’ — *davar* — is the same root as *dibur* — ‘*word*’. Speech is the threshold between the world of *things*, the physical world, and the spiritual world. When Man uses his power of speech to add spirituality to the world, then he fulfills his true purpose, elevating both himself and the world with him, but when the power of speech is degraded and befouled, when it is used to curse and denigrate, then Man becomes no more than a talking donkey...

(Heard from Rabbi Nota Schiller)

“May my soul die the death of the upright, and my end be like his” (23:10).

This is the way of the wicked, to want the reward without the effort: *Bilaam* wanted “to die the death of the upright”...he just didn’t want to *live* the life of the righteous...

(Chafetz Chaim, Ksav Sofer)

Haftorah:

Michah 5:6-6:8

“O Man, what is good and what does Hashem seek from you, only to do justice and love kindness, and walk humbly with your G-d” (6:8).

‘to walk humbly with your G-d’ — this refers to the mitzvos of providing for a bride and escorting the dead’ — Rashi.

To perceive the true essence of a person, one must see him both in moments of transcendent joy — *providing for a bride* — and abject sorrow — *escorting the dead*. For in these moments of extremity, the inner qualities are revealed in stark relief. Only then can it be seen whether he can be said “to walk humbly with your G-d”.

(Kochav M’Yaakov)

Pirkei Avos

Perek 6

Teaching the Teacher

“The Torah is acquired through forty-eight requirements ... (46) making his rabbi wise.”

(Avos 6:5-6)

In order for a *talmid* to have a real interest in learning from a rabbi he must respect him as a wise and knowledgeable teacher. He therefore acquires Torah only by “making his rabbi wise” — considering him wise and worth learning from. Another perspective is based on the confession made by one of the Sages that he learned more from his *talmidim* than he did from his teachers and peers. The *talmid* who challenges his rabbi with questions stimulates him and actually makes him wiser. His own stimulation in providing the challenge and the growth he sparks in his rabbi enable the *talmid* to acquire the Torah he seeks.

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