

PHILOTORAH

לה"י

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו שתשלח מהרה רפואה שלמה מן השמים, רפואת הנפש ורפואת הגוף לפצועי המלחמה, ולנפגעי מעשי טרור ואנטישמיות בישראל ובכל מקום שהם - עם שאר חולי ישראל. אמן.

May HaShem protect our soldiers; may He send Refu'ah Sh'leima to the many injured; may He console the bereaved families and all of Israel; may He end these wars with total success and peace for Medinat Yisrael and Klal Yisrael wherever we are.



בלק

ויקם בלעם בפקר
ויזבש את-אתנו

YERUSHALAYIM in/out times for **BALAK**

י"ב תמוז ה'תשפ"ו • June 26-27, '26

 **7:14PM** Plag **6:20PM**  **8:31PM** R' Tam **9:01PM**

Use the Z'MANIM link for other locales

PhiloTorah (312bal) - 1 - all at once file



Kiddush L'vana

Last opportunity for KL this month is Monday night (a.k.a. Leil Sh'lishi), June 29th, the eve of the 15th of Tamuz - until 1:50am (of June 30th).

Shiv'a Asar b'Tamuz

The fast of Shiv'a Asar b'Tamuz is on Thursday, July 2nd, this year.

It begins at ALOT HASHACHAR, dawn - In Jerusalem, 4:10am and ends at TZEIT HAKOCHAVIM, stars-out, 8:20pm.

(You might see different times on different calendars; these times are from the CHAZON SHAMAYIM calendar, which PhiloTorah uses and considers to be the most accurate. Also, the dawn time is based on 72 minutes before sunrise rather than 90 minutes that some calendars use.)

The mishna in Masechet Taanit (4:6) tells us that five calamities occurred to our ancestors on the 17th of Tamuz and five on Tish'a b'Av.

On 17 Tamuz, the (first) Luchot were broken (i.e. the sin of the golden calf), the daily korbanot (morning and afternoon lambs) ceased (prior to the first Churban), the city (Jerusalem) was breached (prior to the destruc-

tion of the second Beit HaMikdash; the breach of Jerusalem the first time was on 9 Tamuz), Apostimus burned the Torah (no certainty who he was or what year this happened), and an idol was placed in the Heichal (main sanctuary of the Beit HaMikdash).

Interesting - and important - to note that of the five calamities listed for Shiv'a Asar b'Tamuz, four of them are related to Churban Beit HaMikdash in some way, and the first - is an event that occurred in the time of Dor HaMidbar, when Bnei Yisrael had just left Egypt.

Doubly interesting is that we can say the same thing about the five calamities associated with Tish'a b'Av - four are connected to the Churban and the first on the list - the Sin of the Spies - belongs to Dor HaMidbar.

While the Three Weeks (a.k.a. Bein HaMeitzarim) is the mourning period for the destructions of the Batei Mikdash, we need also to focus on the 'foundation' calamities which opened the door, so to speak, for other calamities to occur.

It can be said that a building - any building, but especially The Building - that has a flawed foundation, cannot last forever.

Cheit HaEigel and Cheit HaMeraglim indicated the existence of flaws in us - the People of Israel. The only way to

guarantee that the next Beit HaMikdash will be part of the Geula Sh'leima, is to perfect ourselves.

Shiv'a Asar b'Tamuz (and the other fast days) is not just for not eating and drinking.

It is a day for serious introspection and T'shuva. We are promised by HKBH, via the Navi Zechariya, that the fast days associated with the Churban will become Yamim Tovim - as Rabbi Sprecher z"l like to say, with the addition of the letter "e", the fast days will become feast days.

It is up to each of us to do our share in repairing and erasing the causes of the Churban, by the aforementioned T'shuva and the spread of Torah and Mitzvot and Chesed throughout the Jewish World.

Having mentioned Rabbi Sprecher z"l, let me add an insightful point I heard from him.

The fact that with the building of the Third Beit HaMikdash, we will stop fasting and mourning on the four fast days - 17 Tamuz, Tish'a b'Av, Tzom Gedaliya, and Asara b'Tevet, makes sense. But why will those sad, mournful days become Yamim Tovim?

Imagine what would have happened had there not been the sin of the golden calf. Following the great day of Revelation at Sinai, Moshe Rabeinu ascended Har Sinai to spend forty

days and forty nights receiving all of the Torah - what was to be Written and the Oral explanations. Meanwhile, the People of Israel eagerly awaited his return. And when Moshe came down the mountain with the Aseret HaDibrot, imagine the joy the people would have felt. Z'man Matan Torateinu, part two. That day - the 17th of Tamuz - would have been a festive day. The beginning of a life of Torah and Mitzvot.

That is the Yom Tov that will become of Shiv'a Asar b'Tamuz with the building of the Beit HaMikdash, BIMHEIRA V'YAMEINU - AMEIN!

So too for the 9th of Av. Imagine the meraglim returning with glowing reports and speaking enthusiastically of the next step in G-d's plan for us - entry into Eretz Yisrael.

That is the Yom Tov that will become of Tish'a b'Av with the Geula Sh'leima, BIMHEIRA V'YAMEINU - AMEIN!

BALAK

40th of 54 sedras;
7th of 10 in Bamidbar



Written on 177.8 lines (ranks 35th)

2 Parshiyot; 1 closed, 1 open

There are 2 one-parsha sedras (Vayeitzei, Mikeitz), and then this one, on the fewest parshiyot in a sedra list

For perspective, the Torah's average is 8.7 parshiyot per sedra. The sedra with the most parshiyot is Ki Teitzei, with 44.

104 p'sukim - rank 34 (8th Bamidbar)

1455 words - ranks 33 (8th Bamidbar)

5357 letters - rank 35 (8th Bamidbar)

Balak is close to average for the Torah's sedras but is on the small side for the Book of Bamidbar

MITZVOT

Balak is one of 17 sedras in the Torah without mitzvot.

FYI - 9 of them are in B'reishit, 3 in Sh'mot, none in Vayikra, 2 in Bamidbar, and 3 in D'varim.

Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary

[P>] and [S>] indicate start of a parsha p'tucha or s'tuma. X:Y is Perek:Pasuk of the beginning of the parsha; (Z) is the number of p'sukim in the parsha.

Kohen - First Aliya - 11 p'sukim - 22:2-12

[S> 22:2 (95!)] *There are 674 parshiyot in the Torah - 295 open (p'tucha) and 379 closed (s'tuma). There are 5846 p'sukim in the Torah. That's an average of 8.7 p'sukim per parsha. 95 p'sukim is a huge number for a single parsha. FYI, Vayeitzei and Mikeitz are each a single parsha, with 148 and 146 p'sukim respectively. This first of two parshiyot in Balak might be (probably, but needs verification) the third largest parsha in the Torah.*

Balak was a weaker king than his neighbors in the region. Moav was a weaker state compared to its neighbors. The defeat of two others (OG and SICHON) instilled fear in Balak's heart, and he realized that waging a "conventional" war against the Israelites would be futile. His plan (following research of the matter - without access to Google or ChatGPT!) was to enlist Bil'am to curse the People of Israel. This, Balak hoped, would allow him to beat the Israelites and chase them away from his region. To this end, Balak sends a delegation to Bil'am in Midyan. Bil'am invites the envoys to spend the night so that he (Bil'am) can be spoken to by G-d. G-d does "appear" to Bil'am and asks him who these people are. Bil'am tells G-d and G-d warns Bil'am not to go with the delegation, nor to curse the people, because "they are blessed".

SDT: How come Balak, a sworn enemy of Israel, rates having a sedra named after him? We can suggest that Balak was an "honest enemy" of Israel. His antagonism was based on his fear of Israel; his intentions and actions were clear-cut. We have been plagued by many enemies throughout history who have hidden behind a smile, a mask of friendship, or a hand-shake and photo-op, only to try to stab us in the back (or worse). It's "nice" when an enemy is "up front" about it.

SDT: Commentaries point out that Moav and Midyan were bitter enemies. Nonetheless, they put their differences aside and united to fight against Israel. This shows the power of anti-Semitism in this world. See what our enemies are ready to do because they hate us so much.

BUT IT ALSO must teach us another lesson. We too must be prepared to set aside that which divides the Jewish People into fragments, so that we can fight our common enemy with greater strength. This is not to suggest that we must ignore, over-look, or forgive these differences. But we have to know when we should put our religious-secular (and other) battles "on hold", in order to be united against the enemies of the Jewish People. We must all work together - Ashkenazim & S'faradim, National Religious and Charedi, one chasidic

sect and another, one faction within a chasidic sect and the other faction, left and right, religious and secular, to strengthen our position against those who would harm us, take parts of Eretz Yisrael from us, divide our capital... et al.

SDT: Rashi quotes a Midrash that explains why G-d asked Bil'am "who are these men with you?", when He first appeared to him at night. This, says Rashi, was to give Bil'am the false impression that there are times when G-d doesn't know something and needs to ask. Bil'am would then be hopeful that during one of those Divine "lapses", he would be able to "bless" the Jews, even though G-d told him that he may not. The Guardian of Israel has no lapses!

Levi - Second Aliya - 8 p'sukim - 22:13-20

In the morning, Bil'am (reluctantly) dispatches Balak's emissaries with his message of refusal. Balak sends a larger and more prestigious delegation to Bil'am, with offers of great honor and wealth if Bil'am would only agree to Balak's request. Bil'am again refuses, but does invite the new delegation to spend the night. This time G-d 'permits' Bil'am to accompany the Moavites, but warns him not to do anything other than what G-d tells him. (Commentaries draw from this the notion: "In the direction a person is

inclined, there he is lead.” Also like, ”giving him enough rope to hang himself with”.)

SDT: Why was Bil'am to be punished for going with Balak's delegation, when G-d permitted him to go? Sort of told him to go. Certainly, a person is held accountable for violations of G-d's commands, but are we also responsible for things which are not specifically prohibited, although it is reasonable to assume that G-d does not want us to do them?

The answer is YES. This is one of the concepts we actually derive from the episode of Bil'am. The Torah gives us a very good idea of what HaShem wants of us. Many sins are spelled out very clearly - in fact, there is a notion of "one will not be punished unless expressly warned"; yet we are warned that G-d will be angry, so to speak, if we do things that we (should) know are contrary to His wishes.

This is something that exists in human relationships too. Parents, for example, expect children to behave a certain way, even without being specifically told. We are not programmed robots; we are human beings with the ability to reason. And G-d (and our parents - remember the Gemara in Kidushin that teaches us that there are three partners in the human being - G-d, one's father and one's mother) wants us to make the right decision in areas He left “open”, so to speak.

In the straight reading of the Chumash, it seems that Bil'am is truly a man of G-d who only wants to do what G-d wants him to do. Tradition describes him differently, as one who knows that he is totally in G-d's control but tries to fight it at every step of the way. He is identified as Bil'am HaRasha. What a blow to Bil'am's ego to be thought of so highly among people, yet to know that G-d is in charge and he (Bil'am) cannot act independently.

Shlishi - Third Aliya - 18 p'sukim - 22:21-38

Bil'am arises early in the morning, saddles his donkey (by himself), and goes with the Moav officers. **(The implication in the pasuk is that Bil'am went with a great deal of enthusiasm to "hopefully" curse the People of Israel. Contrast this with Avraham's enthusiasm on his way to fulfill G-d's command of the Akeida - saddling his own donkey...)** G-d is "angry" with Bil'am for going (even though He permitted it) and sends an angel in an attempt to dissuade him from continuing. The Torah recounts that on three separate occasions - symbolically, it happened in increasingly narrower passages - the donkey sees the angel blocking the way, but Bil'am does not see him. Bil'am strikes the donkey each time, until G-d gives the power of speech to the donkey, who admonishes Bil'am for his actions.

Then G-d permits Bil'am to see the angel and Bil'am acknowledges his sin. He offers to return, but the angel allows him to proceed, with the warning not to say anything "unauthorized".

In Pirkei Avot we are taught that the "mouth of the donkey" was one of ten special items that G-d created in the instant before He rested from creation on the very first Shabbat. One of the lessons from this concept is **SOF MA'ASEH B'MACHSHAVA T'CHILA**, what happens in the end was in G-d's thought at the beginning. We should not think that the "mouth of the Earth" that swallowed Korach & Co. or the talking donkey, or No'ach's rainbow, et al, were "after-thoughts" of G-d. No such thing.

Balak goes out to greet Bil'am, who "warns" Balak that he is powerless to act on his own and must say only what G-d "puts in his mouth". (This is the significance of the "mouth of the donkey" - viz. that it is G-d Who grants the gift of speech; one should not be arrogant about his ability to speak well. In the words of the beautiful prayer of the Shali'ach Tzibur on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, **OCHILA LAKEIL**, the human being thinks thoughts in his heart, but from G-d comes the ability to express them with his mouth and lips... or the lack of the ability.)

SDT: SWORD-WORDS - it is a matter of which side of **WORD** you put the **S**. The favored weapon of the nations of the world is the sword. The "weapon" of Israel is "the power of speech" (prayer, divrei Torah, kind words, etc.). Bil'am arrogantly lays "his weapon" aside and attempts to harm the People of Israel with their (our) weapon. G-d, so to speak, went against Bil'am with his abandoned weapon - the angel's drawn sword. And ultimately, the Torah tells us, Bil'am fell by the sword. - Rashi

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya - 15 p'sukim - 22:39-23:12

Balak makes sacrifices on the occasion, and Bil'am orders seven altars to be built for the special offerings. (All that is done is highly significant - e.g. the Torah records that our Patriarchs offered a total of seven korbanot at various times. Bil'am hoped to "neutralize" the effect of those sacrifices in G-d's eyes by repeatedly offering seven sacrifices of his own - it didn't work.)

After meditation, Bil'am "speaks" about the People of Israel. He does not curse them, but rather beautifully describes the uniqueness of Israel. Balak is upset, but Bil'am reminds him that he (Bil'am) can only transmit that which G-d wants him to.

If we are unique among the nations of the world, it is because of the Torah and our commitment to it, and our 'living' it - not something genetic, nor a mere accident of birth. We must preserve that uniqueness by remaining faithful to HaShem, true to Torah, and distinct from the other nations. And, as Bil'am pointed out, our uniqueness depends upon being different from the other nations (and not wanting to be just like everyone else). We are different when we are different. And that is what we are supposed to be.

Chamishi - 5th Aliya - 14 p'sukim - 23:13-26

Balak takes Bil'am to a different vantage point, in the hopes that he will be able to curse the People this time. Once again, seven altars are built and sacrifices offered. Once again, Bil'am meditates and then utters magnificent descriptions of the Nation of Israel. Balak says his piece and Bil'am again explains his restrictions. (Difficult for someone who is considered the quintessence of arrogance.)

Rashi says that Balak chose Rosh HaPisga as a place from where Bil'am might succeed in cursing the people, because he foresaw that Moshe would die there. Rashi says that Balak knew this about the place but Bil'am didn't - that Balak was the more gifted prophet of the two (sometimes).

Twice we find, And Bil'am said to Balak, build for me "with this" seven altars and prepare for me "with this" seven bulls and seven rams (23:1 and 29). With this, BA'ZEH. We are taught that all the prophets of Israel prophesy with KO (as in KO AMAR HASHEM), except Moshe, who prophesies with ZEH. Bil'am felt that he was on Moshe's level and kept throwing around the ZEH. G-d says to Bil'am, go back to Balak, and thus - KO - you shall speak. Enough with the pretension to ZEH; you say KO. Bil'am gets the message and switches to KO when he speaks to Balak.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya - 17 p'sukim - 23:27-24:13

Balak suggests yet a different vantage point from which to observe Israel; maybe G-d will permit them to be cursed. Bil'am again asks for seven altars to be built, and a bull and a ram to be offered on each. This time, Bil'am does not meditate in his usual manner, expecting similar results, namely that blessings will emerge from him - and he really wants to curse Israel.

SDT: Balak takes Bil'am to Rosh HaP'or. Having seen in a vision that Israel will soon fall at P'or, Balak assumes that the cursing from there would be successful (Rashi).

Targum Onkeles indicates that Bil'am was "reminding" G-d of the Golden Calf, so that He would allow the People

to be cursed. However, when he saw the multitude encamped in such a special manner, he was endowed with "Ru'ach HaKodesh" and he blessed the People of Israel a third time. Balak had "had enough", spoke harshly to Bil'am, and "sent him packing".

We say the words that came from Bil'am's mouth - MA TOVU... Sometimes it takes a non-Jew's observation for us to appreciate something we might not see. Or, we can say that we are not quoting Bil'am, rather we are quoting G-d, since He gave Bil'am those words.

Sh'VII - Seventh Aliya - 21 p'sukim - 24:14-25:9

Before Bil'am takes leave of Balak, Bil'am prophesies about the other nations in the region... which was, in different words, a prophecy that each nation shall eventually perish, as will those who will bring about the earlier nations' destruction.

[P> 25:1 (9)] Bil'am's final advice, his attempts to curse the People having failed, is to entice the People to idolatry and immoral behavior which will turn G-d Himself against them. This plan works, as 24,000 perish in a plague following the immoral and idolatrous worship of Baal Pe'or. Only the bold action of Pinchas b. Elazar b. Aharon HaKohen in defending G-d's honor, stops the devastating plague.

SDT: This final lesson of the sedra must be learned well by us - today. What Balak and Bil'am discovered is that when Israel is in G-d's favor, it will be invincible from outside attack. No nation can succeed against Israel, when we are "on good terms" with G-d. That includes attacks by the sword or by words... If we, however, incur G-d's anger (so to speak), by being unfaithful to Him, by disregarding Torah and mitzvot, then we are extremely vulnerable to our enemies. And they might not even have to actually fight against us (as in terror attacks) - we can, G-d forbid, destroy ourselves (as with road accidents, and other acts of self-destruction). This was true more than 3000 years ago; it is no less true today.

On a certain level, Parshat Balak is extremely simple and straightforward, with an extremely powerful message - because of that simplicity. For 95 p'sukim, we feel the protection of G-d as Balak and Bil'am fail time and again in what almost looks like a comical farce. The Gemara says that Bil'am was in some ways superior to Moshe Rabeinu, that when he was around, G-d Himself was extra vigilant - so to speak - in protecting us. For those 95 p'sukim, we beam with pride at the grudging admiration of a unique nation as expressed by Bil'am.

And then come the last 9 p'sukim of

the sedra. Bil'am went back home. So did Balak. No danger anymore. WHAM! We did it to ourselves. G-d protected us from Bil'am by giving him His words. By not letting him speak on his own. And then we turned around and betrayed G-d. 24,000 fatalities. And the toll would have been greater, except for the bold action of Pinchas. The sedra is shouting its message to us. All we have to do is listen to it.

Last 3 p'sukim are reread for Maftir.

Note that the Pinchas episode is interrupted by the break between sedras. Zimri and Kozbi are not identified yet, G-d's reaction comes next week. Just for now - the plague stopped! The swiftness with which the plague struck is matched by the swift action of Pinchas. For now, that's the point. More next week.

Haftara - 17 p'sukim - Micha 5:6-6:8

Micha's prophecies include the state-of-affairs that finds Israel dispersed among the nations of the world, the promise of the end of war and restoration of Israel to its Land, and the "settling of accounts" between G-d and the other nations, and G-d and Israel. This portion contains a reference to the advice of Balak and Bil'am's response to it - thus the appropriate choice of this portion as the haftara for Parshat Balak.

Note the "credit" to Balak for the advice that caused the failing of Israel as opposed to the implication from the Torah that it was Bil'am's idea.

Note the reference to the leaders of the People as Moshe, Aharon, and MIRIAM.

The haftara ends with the famous encapsulation of our responsibilities to G-d: **What does G-d demand of us, ONLY to behave justly, love chesed, and walk modestly (humbly) before G-d.**

This is the formula for the greatest protection we can have from the Balaks and Bil'ams of the world. And its disregard makes us terribly vulnerable to them. What a contrast between the end of the sedra and the end of the haftara! Again, we have the simple but powerful point. This is how we are supposed to behave (from the haftara). This is how we behaved... and what happened to us (from the sedra).

Lessons from the Torah and from the haftara - as there also should be. We just have to see them and learn them.

On the lighter side: Did you notice that we have had a run of four sedras each of which have a three-letter name? SH'LACH, KORACH, CHUKAT, and BALAK. Furthermore, The letter CHET is in the first three and the letter KUF is in the last three. Significance? Probably none, but interesting. How many other 3-letter named sedras are there? Mikeitz, Emor, B'har, Eikev, R'ei. Nine all together.

Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara
by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler**

Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)

AM K'LAVI YAKUM

BALAK - 17 p'sukim - Micha 5:6-6:8

Does the opening phrase of this week's haftara trouble you? It never bothered me - until I began to consider the seemingly innocent words: V'HAYA SH'EIRIT YA'AKOV - "The remnant of Yaakov shall be, in the midst of the many peoples, like dew from G-d..." Certainly, I was unsure of what that meant, exactly, but it was Micha's words SH'EIRIT YA'AKOV that disturbed me. "The remnant of Yaakov"? To what 'remnant' is the navi referring? And why would it be addressed only to a remnant?

I was again reminded how important it is to ascertain the era during which these prophecies were given in order to understand the message Micha was relaying to his generation. I turned to the recently published book KI KAROV EILECHA by HaRav Ya'akov Meidan to better clarify the nevu'a found in our haftara.

Rav Meidan reveals that Micha spoke his words during the reign of the righteous King Chizkiyahu - a time when the Assyrian hordes invaded

Judea and destroyed most of their cities. Hence, the navi addresses the 'remnant' of Israel, i.e. those who survived the Assyrian onslaught. And yet, although Hashem spared Yerushalayim due to the entreaties of the King, Chizkiyahu had sinned by relying upon an alliance with Egypt for salvation - and not upon HAKADOSH BARUCH HU [see Sefer Yishayahu 31:1-3; 36:4-6].

All of this becomes clear with the closing words of this opening verse where Micha states that the surviving Judean nation will become independent from others "that do not look to anyone nor place their hope in mortals" [5:6]. This promise of an independently powerful Israel continues with the navi's assurance that: "Your hand shall prevail over your foes, and all your enemies shall be cut down!" [5:8] and, even more powerfully: "The remnant of Yaakov shall be among the nations... like a fierce lion among flocks of sheep!" [5:7]

In essence, the haftara's initial p'sukim establish the primary theme of Micha's message. The success of the Jewish nation will depend on Israel's complete reliance upon, and faith in, our Father in Heaven. Chizkiyahu's decision to form an alliance with Egypt, would eventually lead to the collapse of the Judean Kingdom some years later, as subsequent monarchs followed his decision and, in fear of enemy attacks

relied on alliances with neighboring powers.

Micha's message to his generation was a simple one: Belief in G-d must mean faith in Him alone - and not in other 'gods', others' promises or other alliances. This simple truth is found in Moshe's farewell "song" in the declaration:

HASHEM BADAD YANCHENU, V'EIN IMO EIL NEICHOR - "Hashem guides [Israel] alone; with no alien deity alongside [D'varim 33: 12].

In fact, Rav Meidan suggests that there is a meaningful connection of this very message found in our haftara to this week's parasha. He submits that this navi's lesson of independent power is actually echoed in Hashem's prophetic words that He placed in the mouth of Bil'am. (And, I would add, the words are ones especially significant for us in these days). For Bil'am declares: HEIN AM L'VADAD YISHKON - that Israel would be a nation that would dwell alone, and then adds: HEIN AM K'LAVI YAKUM! - "She shall be a nation that rises like a lion!

It is only when we place our faith in - and rely on - the One and Only Divine Being, will we be successful! Only of such a nation can it be said to be an AM K'LAVI YAKUM! ✨



The fun way to go over the weekly sedra with your children, grandchildren, Shabbat guests

CHUKAT

🐮 and one Unexplained

Midbar Tzin, Hor HaHar, into the sea

These are the three phrases that follow VAYAVO'U B'NEI YISRAEL

BALAK



Upper-left is part of one of the very first ParshaPixPuzzles of years ago. BLOCK (sounds like BALAK) in a nest, which makes it BLOCK BEN TZIPOR <-> Globe with a hand covering its eye - Balak said that Israel covered EIN

HAARETZ, the eye of the Earth <> Messengers came to Bil'am with K'SAMIM B'YADAM, hence, the magic trick in the hands <> Bil'am's donkey saw the sword drawn in the angel's hand <> When the donkey talks, she asks why Bil'am has hit her these three REGALIM, three times. Commentaries point out that it doesn't say P'AMIM, but rather uses the word that refers to our cycle of holidays and to the People who observe them. The speech-bubble for the donkey contains the question (mark) about the three festivals <> Chicago Bulls basketball player wearing #7 for the 7 bulls Bil'am ordered Balak to get ready for sacrifice (three times) and football marked with LA and 7 for the 7 rams (three times) offered by Bil'am and Balak <> Clapping hands - stands for Balak's striking his hands together in disgust at Bil'am - VAYISPOK. A unique word in Tanach <> The Xed out snake is also from Bil'am's words, that there is no NACHASH in Yaakov. His meaning is that we do not rely on omens <> A "house full of silver and gold", mentioned twice in the sedra <> Shul with MA TOVU <> ROMACH, the spear that Pinchas used to defend G-d's honor <> Reverse side of a US dollar has a picture of the Great Seal: A pyramid with an all-seeing eye on top. Sometimes called the enlightened eye. Bil'am calls himself the man with SH'TUM HA-AYIN. Living Torah offers

these meanings: enlightened, future-seeing, seeing, open, true-sighted, sleepless, evil, dislocated, blinded <> lion cub Simba is for the cub mentioned in Bil'am's description of the people of Israel (Bamidbar 23:24 & 24:9) <> ET is for ITI, with me. This word occurs 52 times in Tanach and brings to mind the extraterrestrial who wanted to phone home <> The Shofar and crown go together and represent the pasuk, Bamidbar 23:21, in which Bil'am proclaims, "He has not seen iniquity in Yaakov, nor has he seen perverseness in Yisrael; HaShem his God is with him, and the TRUMPET BLAST OF A KING (UTRU'AT MELECH) is among them." <> CHEF-E, as in SHEFI, from 23:3 <> The name of the ZIM shipping company comes from Parshat Balak (Bamidbar 24:24) - "V'TZIM, large ships shall come from the ports of the Kitim, and they will lay waste Assyria and Eber..." <> The haftara begins with V'HAYA SHE'EIRIT (or SHE'EIRIS - hashgacha) <> ox grazing, to match Balak's description of his impression of the multitude of Israel <> R' Eliyahu KiTov. The phrase KI TOV occurs 15 times in the Torah. We'll focus on the combination of VAYAR (and he saw)... KI TOV, that it was good. This cuts our 15 down a bit. In the account of Creation, we find that G-d saw... that it was good - six times. I guess we need to add Chava to the list. With her, the word is VATEIREH, the

woman (Chava) saw that the fruit of the forbidden tree was good looking and looked delicious. The Baker in prison with Yosef saw that Yosef had interpreted the Wine Steward's dream well, KI TOV PATAR. Another woman with VATEIREH, this time Yocheved, who saw that baby Moshe was good, and she hid him... And then it was Bil'am who saw that it was good to bless the people of Israel... Something about the use of KI TOV with Bil'am strikes as an arrogance in light of the repeated use of the term in the Creation account. Also, in Yaakov's blessing to Yissachar (B'reishit 49), the Torah says VAYAR MENUCHA KI TOV... "And he saw that resting was good, and that the land was pleasant." Commentaries variously explain that Yissachar was to favor staying on its land, working it, not into travel and warfare... and was to develop a commitment to Torah learning with their stay-at-home attitude <> a dollar bill and a lamb - that is, BILAAM <> a baseball and a lock is for BALL-LOCK, BALAK <> The CHAYAL CHATICH in the picture is grandson Lavi - LAVI occurs 4 times in the Torah, 2 of which are in Balak <> other fellow is grandson Tal (biting on the first place medal he won in Judo competition) - see the haftara <> The baby at the top of the ParshaPix is in MID-YAWN <> the MEM (of MA TOVU) is at the top of a column in a Sefer Torah <> 128 is the total number of

animals offered as sacrifices by Bil'am and Balak <> Without even a tiny ALEF refers to VAYIKRa, which, as tradition has it, Moshe wrote with a small ALEF at the end, humbly suggesting that he was contacted by G-d with VAYIKOR, less personal and intimate, let us say, than VAYIKRA. Bil'am got VAYIKOR, without even a tiny ALEF. Bob the Builder's Moavite name might have been Balak, since Bil'am repeatedly told him to build altars <> ARBEH & BALAK - Balak described Bnei Yisrael as HINEI CHISA ET EIN HA'ARETZ - they now cover the 'eye of the earth'. Back in Parshat Bo, the ARBEH is described with the same words - V'CHISA ET EIN HAARETZ <> two Unexplaineds

לע"נ
הרב יעקב צבי ב"ר דוד אריה ז"ל
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

The Hardest Word to Hear

BALAK

The story of Bilaam, the pagan prophet, begins with a bewildering set of non-sequiturs. It involves a sequence of events that seems to have no logic.

First, the background. The Israelites are approaching the end of their forty years in the wilderness. Already they

have fought and won wars against Sichon, King of the Amorites and Og, King of Bashan. They have arrived at the plains of Moav - today, southern Jordan at the point where it touches the Dead Sea. Balak, King of Moav is concerned, and he shares his distress with the elders of Midian. The language the Torah uses at this point is precisely reminiscent of the reaction of the Egyptians at the beginning of the book of Sh'mot.

[The Egyptian Pharaoh] said to his people: "Here, the children of Israel are more numerous and powerful than us..." and he was disgusted at the Children of Israel. (Sh'mot 1:9-12)

[Balak, the King of Moav] was very fearful because of the people, because it was numerous, and Moav was disgusted at the Children of Israel. (Bamidbar 22:3)

The strategy Balak adopts is to seek the help of the well-known seer and diviner, Bilaam. Again there is a literary evocation, this time of the words of God to Avraham:

God to Avraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse." (B'reishit 12:3)

Balak to Bilaam: "I know that whoever you bless is blessed and whoever you curse is cursed." (Bamidbar 22:6)

This time the parallel is ironic (indeed the Bilaam story is full of irony). In the

case of Avraham, it was God who blessed. In the case of Bilaam, the power was thought to reside in Bilaam himself. In fact the earlier statement of God to Avraham already prefigures the fate of Moav - one who tries to curse Israel will himself be cursed.

The historical background to the Bilaam narrative is well-attested. Several Egyptian pottery fragments dating from the 2nd millennium BCE have been found containing execration texts - curses - directed against Canaanite cities. It was the custom among pre-Islamic Arabs to hire poets thought to be under Divine influence to compose curses against their enemies. As for Bilaam himself, a significant discovery was made in 1967. A plaster inscription on the wall of a temple at Deir Alla in Jordan was found to make reference to the night vision of a seer called Bilaam - the earliest reference in archaeological sources to a named individual in the Torah. Thus, though the story itself contains elements of parable, it belongs to a definite context in time and place.

The character of Bilaam remains ambiguous, both in the Torah and subsequent Jewish tradition. Was he a diviner (reading omens and signs) or a sorcerer (practising occult arts)? Was he a genuine prophet, or a fraud? Did he assent to the Divine blessings

placed in his mouth, or did he wish to curse Israel? According to some midrashic interpretations he was a great Prophet, equal in stature to Moshe. According to others, he was a pseudo-prophet with an "evil eye" who sought Israel's downfall. What I want to examine here is neither Bilaam nor his blessings, but the preamble to the story, for it is here that one of the deepest problems arises, namely: what did God want Bilaam to do? It is a drama in three scenes.

In the first, emissaries arrive from Moav and Midian. They state their mission. They want Bilaam to curse the Israelites. Bilaam's answer is a model of propriety: Stay the night, he says, while I consult with God. God's answer is unequivocal:

But God said to Bilaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed." (Bamidbar 22:12)

Obediently, Bilaam refuses the emissaries. Balak then redoubles his efforts. Perhaps more distinguished messengers and the promise of significant reward will persuade Bilaam to change his mind? He sends a second set of emissaries and gifts. Bilaam's reply is exemplary:

"Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go

beyond the command of the Lord, my God." (22:18)

However, he adds a fateful rider:

"Now stay here tonight as the others did, and I will find out what else the Lord will tell me." (22:19)

The implication is clear. Bilaam is suggesting that God may change His mind. But this is impossible. That is not what God does. Yet to our surprise, that is what God seems to do:

That night God came to Bilaam and said, "Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you." (22:22)

Problem 1: first God had said, "Do not go." Now He says, "Go."

Problem 2 appears immediately:

Bilaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Bilaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. (22:21-22)

God says, "Go." Bilaam goes. Then God is very angry. Does God change His mind - not once but twice in the course of a single narrative? The mind reels. What is going on here? What is Bilaam supposed to do? What does God want? There is no explanation.

Instead the narrative shifts to the famous scene of Bilaam's donkey - itself a mystery in need of interpretation:

When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Bilaam beat it to get it back on the road.

Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Bilaam's foot against it. So he beat it again.

Then the angel of the Lord moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it lay down under Bilaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff. Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Bilaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"

Bilaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."

The donkey said to Bilaam, "Am I not your own donkey, whom you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?"

"You have not", he said.

Then the Lord opened Bilaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown. (22:23-31)

The commentators offer various ways of resolving the apparent contradictions between God's first and second reply. According to Ramban, God's first statement, "Don't go with them" meant, "Don't curse the Israelites." His second - "Go with them" - meant, "Go but make it clear that you will only say the words I will put in your mouth, even if they are words of blessing." God was angry with Bilaam, not because he went but because he did not tell them of the proviso.

In the nineteenth century, Malbim and R. Zvi Hirsch Mecklenberg suggested a different answer based on close textual analysis. The Hebrew text uses two different words for "with them" in the first and second Divine replies. When God says, "Don't go with them" the Hebrew is IMAHEM. When He later says "Go with them" the corresponding word is ITAM. The two prepositions have subtly different meanings. IMAHEM means "with them mentally as well as physically", going along with their plans. ITAM means "with them physically but not mentally", in other words Bilaam could accompany them

but not share their purpose or intention. God is angry when Bilaam goes, because the text states that he went IM, with - them - in other words, he identified with their mission. This is an ingenious solution. The only difficulty is verse 35, in which the angel of God, having opened Bilaam's eyes, finally tells Bilaam, "Go with the men." According to Malbim and Mecklenberg, this is precisely what God did not want Bilaam to do.

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, and 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 led down the path he chooses to tread." But God was not prepared to let Bilaam proceed as if he had Divine consent. Instead He arranged the most elegant possible demonstration of the difference between true and false prophecy. The false prophet speaks. The true prophet listens. The false prophet tells people what they want to hear. The true prophet tells them what they need to hear. The false prophet believes in his own powers. The true prophet knows that he has no power. The false prophet speaks in his own voice. The true prophet speaks in a voice not his ("I am not a man of words", says Moshe; "I cannot speak for I am a child" says Yirmiyahu).

The episode of Bilaam and talking donkey is pure humour - and, as I have pointed out before, only one thing provokes Divine laughter, namely human pretension. Bilaam had

won renown as the greatest prophet of his day. His fame had spread to Moav and Midian. He was known as the man who held the secrets of blessing and curse. God now proceeds to show Bilaam that when He so chooses, even his donkey is a greater prophet than he. The donkey sees what Bilaam cannot see: the angel standing in the path, barring their way. God humbles the self-important, just as He gives importance to the humble. When human beings think they can dictate what God will say, God laughs. And, on this occasion, so do we.

Some years ago, I was making a television programme for the BBC. The problem I faced was this. I wanted to make a documentary about t'shuva, repentance, but I had to do so in a way that would be intelligible to non-Jews as well as Jews, indeed to those who had no religious belief at all. What example could I choose that would illustrate the point?

I decided that one way of doing so was to look at drug addiction and recovery. Addicts develop behaviours that they know are self-destructive, but that are part of their lifestyle. To break these habits involves immense reserves of will. An addict looking to address these self-destructive behaviours must acknowledge that the life they have led is harmful to them and to others, and needs to

change. That seemed to me a secular equivalent of t'shuva, which could illustrate the message to viewers.

I spent a day in a rehabilitation centre, and it was heartbreaking. The young people there - they were aged between 16 and 18 - all came from broken families. Many of them had suffered abuse. Other than the workers at the centre, they had no networks of support. The staff were exceptional people. Their task was astonishingly difficult. They would succeed in getting the addicts to break the habit for days, weeks at a time, until then they would relapse and the whole process would have to begin again. I began to realise that their patience was little less than a human counterpart of God's patience with us. However many times we fail and have to begin again, God does not lose faith in us, and that gives us strength. Here were people doing God's work.

I asked the head of the centre - a social worker - what it was that she gave the young people to make a difference to their lives and give them the chance to change. I will never forget her answer, because it was one of the most beautiful I ever heard. 'We are probably the first people they have met who care for them unconditionally. And we are the first people in their lives who cared enough to say "No."'

"No" is the hardest word to hear, but it is also often the most important - and the sign that someone cares. That is what Bilaam, humbled, eventually learned and what we, too, must discover if we are to be open to the Voice of God.

Around the Shabbat Table:

- (1) Why is it easier to listen to people who tell us what we want to hear, rather than what we need to hear?
- (2) Thinking back to a time when you received a "no" when you really wanted a "yes", did the refusal help you in some way?
- (3) What is the most graceful way to accept a "no"?

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH

Message from the Haftara

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I Sent Miriam

BALAK

The connections between Parshat Balak and its haftara, the prophecy of Micha, are layered and striking. Bilam's oracles, delivered at Balak's insistence, predict the flourishing and ultimate triumph of the Jewish people. Micha echoes that same

vision, reminding us that it is not human power but, "as ample rains shower upon grass; they will not look to any man, nor place their hopes in humankind" (Micha 5:6): It is God who determines Israel's destiny.

For those reading these words in the shadow of the current geopolitical moment, when Israel's worldly alliances and maneuvering feel increasingly uncertain, this reminder carries particular weight.

But an equally resonant message in this haftara can be gleaned from a single verse in which the prophet speaks in God's voice directly to the people of Israel: "I redeemed you from the house of slavery; I sent Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam" (Micha 6:4). Three names; three leaders, set side by side, without hierarchy.

This matters enormously, not only in its ancient context, but in ours. In nearly every generation, debates arise about the role of women in Jewish communal leadership, and those debates often carry the implication that authentic Jewish leadership is primarily, or essentially, male. Micha's verse cuts through these arguments with prophetic directness. It does not distinguish between the leaders it names. God sent all three.

Miriam's path to that standing was unlike that of her brothers, and understanding it deepens the

prophet's claim. The Talmud teaches (Sotah 12a) that Miriam was the first of the three siblings to show signs of leadership, and she did so as a child. When her father Amram, reeling from Par'o's genocidal decrees, concluded that Israelite men should separate from their wives – better, he reasoned, not to bring children into a world of slavery and male offspring to a fate of death – it was his young daughter who stood up to him. She recognized that her father's despair, however understandable, was itself a form of surrender. By speaking out against it, she engineered the circumstances that made Moshe's birth and rescue possible.

At the crossing of the Yam Suf, the Torah designates Miriam as "the prophetess, sister of Aharon" (Sh'mot 15:20), a title that our Sages understood as placing her prophetic gifts on par with Aharon's own. But her leadership took a distinctive form. While Moshe spoke and legislated from the front, Miriam led from within the community. She organized the women in song and dance, creating a shared experience of divine encounter that was participatory rather than hierarchical, welling up from below rather than descending from above.

This quality is crystallized in the symbol most closely associated with her: the well. Our Sages teach (Rashi on Bamidbar 20:2) that throughout

the years of wandering a miraculous well accompanied Israel in the desert on Miriam's merit, its waters sweet and unceasing for as long as she lived. The well is no accident as a symbol. Like Miriam herself, it does not announce itself with declarations or commands. It simply sustains, always present beneath the surface, quietly nourishing those who draw from it. Her very name encodes this quality: mar, bitterness, transformed into mayim, water and life.

In last week's parsha, Chukat, Miriam dies, and the water disappears. What follows is not only a crisis of thirst, but a crisis of leadership. Moshe, who had overcome his struggles with speech to wield it with power, suddenly falters: he strikes the rock instead of speaking to it (Bamidbar 20:11).

It may not be coincidental that this failure comes so closely after Miriam's death. While she lived, her constant, consistent, sustaining presence seems to have enabled something in Moshe himself, a capacity for connection and communication that he could not maintain alone. (I am grateful to my wife, Ruchie, for this insight.)

Micha understands this, and this is why he names all three leaders in one breath. Leadership in the Jewish world has never been, and must never become, the exclusive domain of one

voice, one gender, or one model. There are forms of wisdom and strength that emerge from the lived experience and spiritual gifts of Jewish women, capacities a community cannot afford to sideline. As we seek leaders in this critical moment in our people's history, we must look at the full breadth of our people: men and women alike who carry the courage of Miriam, the vision of Moshe, and the bridging spirit of Aharon.

This, in the end, is where Micha's prophecy calls us. "What the Lord seeks from you: only to do justice, love goodness, and walk modestly with your God" (6:8). To walk toward that vision, we will need all the diversity of spiritual power that we can muster. 🌍

counted at 603,550. Add women and children and we're talking of 2 to 3 million people of B'nei Yisrael.

The people were enslaved. They saw the miraculous Makot and participated in the first Korban Pesach. They witnessed the whole episode of the splitting of the sea. They stood at Har Sinai and experienced Divine Revelation. They ate the manna and drank the miraculous water. And so on and so on and so on.

Except for what we read in the 95-pasuk parsha of the Balak and Bil'am story. While that was happening, the people went about their daily routine in the Midbar, oblivious to the drama occurring on hilltops around their encampment.

The only reason we know what happened is that HaShem included it in the Torah. When Balak-Bil'am was taking place, we had no clue. It is as if HaShem said to Himself (and later told us), "Big threat - I'll take care of this one on My own (and tell them about it later.)"

Immediately after Bil'am and Balak parted ways, we have the last nine p'sukim of Parshat Balak dealing with the immoral and idolatrous behavior with Moavite and Midyanite women and the worship of Baal Pe'or. This, of course, was witnessed by the masses.

I would imagine that the people found out about B&B sometime soon after it



PhiloTorah D'var Torah

Untitled

I haven't figured out what to call this PTDT, so we'll go with this for the moment.

Most everything that occurred from the beginning of Sh'mot - the enslavement and oppression in Egypt - all the way through the Torah until the very end, was witnessed by millions of people. Adult males were

happened. We are talking about events that occurred in the last year of the Wandering.

In next week's sedra, we have G-d's command to fight against Midyan, assumedly they knew the whole story by then.

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What intrigues me is a question that came to mind via a question one of my Zoom-shiur participants asked.

In Parshat Ki Teitzei, among its 74 mitzvot is the prohibition of allowing a male Moavite to marry into K'hal HaShem - LO YAVO AMONI UMOAVI BIK-HAL HASHEM...

A main school of thought among our commentaries is that G-d taught Moshe Rabeinu all the mitzvot of the Torah during the 40 days and 40 nights he spent on Har Sinai following the day of Matan Torah. The question about this particular mitzva - LO YAVO, is that it contains the reason for the command.

AL D'VAR... Because they did not greet you with bread and water on the way when you left Egypt, and because he [the people of Moav] hired Bilaam the son of B'or from P'tora in Aram Naharayim against you, to curse you. (D'varim 23:5)

There are probably differing opinions on this issue, but what sits best with me is that the mitzva was part of the

40 days and 40 nights - but not the reason from the pasuk above.

In my imagination, I can here Moshe asking "Why" when HaShem taught him LO YAVO, and HaShem answering something like - I can't tell you now but you'll know by the time you will teach this mitzva to the People.

This has been less a D'var Torah than the wandering of my mind... **PTDT**

## *Walk through the Parsha*

with **Rabbi David Walk**



**BALAK**

## **Building Spree**

Back in the 60s so many new shuls and temples were being built in America that it was said that we had developed an 'Edifice Complex'. I feel that condition has struck here in Yerushalayim, but they're skyscraper buildings, not places of worship.

Rav Dov Begun, Rosh Yeshiva of Machon Meir, describes our discomfort over all the building going on as part of the IKVEI D'MESHICHEI (footsteps of Mashiach), the birth-pangs of Redemption. He recalls when they were building a new dorm at the Yeshiva, students complained about the noise. Rav Begun told them they were creating a symphony. The building sounds were the drums.

Anyway, it seems like the source of this burning desire to build shuls and yeshivot wherever and whenever we can is most likely connected to this week's Torah reading.

Bilaam, in his blessing spree, gets around to positive comments about the urban planning of our ancestors' encampment in the Midbar. He famously declares: How goodly are thy tents, O Yaakov; and thy sanctuaries, O Yisrael (Bamidbar 24:5). Anyway that's the way I learned it growing up, but JPS renders it thus: How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel. I don't know, it seems to lack the class of the King James version.

Before we attempt to decipher this famous verse, I want to make a short comment about Bilaam himself. We, and the classic commentaries, are truly ambivalent about this apparent charlatan. I feel most comfortable just describing him as a fraud and a swindler (a 'flim flam man', like Harold Hill from the Music Man, like certain heads of state).

However, there is a large school of thought that believes that he truly was a prophet, perhaps approaching the status of Moshe Rabbeinu. It seems that the more mystical the source the more powerful his prophetic powers appear to be. To me, his venality (Blessings for Cash)

seems to disqualify him from the ranks of God's appointed.

Personally, I would suggest that he was very smart with great powers of observation, which endowed him with the ability to make very astute observations about reality that to others seemed miraculous. I think it's similar to certain modern performers who seem to 'know' so much about people in their audience, but really they just notice things the rest of us miss.

Anyway, we are enamored of his declaration about the outstanding qualities of the Jewish settlement. Rashi follows the Midrash and describes how the Jews staggered the tent openings, for modesty purposes, so that no one could inadvertently glance into someone else's tent.

Rav Hirsch beautifully expanded upon this literal meaning of the blessing: How good are your 'houses', how aligned are they with morality and the well-being of the nation, whether as the tents during journeys, or as the permanent dwellings of Israel. The homes of Israel's families are 'as valleys', 'as gardens': like streams of water that bring blessing, and like gardens that are blessed. Each home and family branch passes down the blessings of material success and spiritual and moral goodness to the next generation, like a stream. At the same time, each one is itself a 'garden

of man', blessed with material, intellectual, and moral abundance.

But over the great expanse of Jewish History, we stopped focusing on what Bilaam was actually marveling at. He was inspired by Jewish homes; we morphed those tents and dwelling places into religious institutions.

Here's the Likutei Maharan's (the collection of customs of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov) take: The idea behind 'How goodly are Your tents...' is said about the Mishkan, the Beit HaMikdash, synagogues and study halls of Yisrael. These latter buildings are called BEIT MIKDASH M'AT ('a small Mikdash', from Yechezkel 11:16 as interpreted Megila 29a). The next verse says 'like gardens planted beside the stream'. This means that the verse hints that prayer and Torah study are like an ever flowing river and a fountain which grows ever stronger.

Ya'akov was the 'innocent man who dwelled in tents' (B'reishit 25:27). The Rebbe says that Bilaam was referring to those very tents in which Torah and prayer flourish. Bilaam saw the ever growing strength from these humble places of prayer and study.

The Chozeh MiLublin added that the terms 'tents' and 'dwellings' are discussing the protection which must be afforded to the scholars and institutions which spread Torah. We

must spread our cloak of safety just as structures provide protection.

So popular is the connection between our verse and synagogues that (according to Open AI, which warned that there are no official statistics on synagogues world wide) there are around 500 synagogues with the word OHEL in their name (over half of them in Israel). Furthermore, another 150 or so Jewish places of worship contain the word Mishkan in their name (also, more than half in Israel).

Again, I must emphasize that P'SHAT in the verse is a marvelous idea concerning the nurturing nature of Jewish homes. However, over time our tradition has focused on the Midrashic approach that Bilaam's prophecy was so amazing that he foresaw a time (about 1500 years after his time) when we would have synagogues and study halls abounding.

It's true! Batei Knesset and Batei Medrash are critical to the spiritual survival of our people. Equally true is the necessity of our support for these institutions for them to flourish and do their work. It's so melancholy to witness abandoned shuls.

Like many great blessings, they work when we work hard throughout the generations to make them come true. This one from Bilaam is no exception. Support Shuls and places of Torah

study by actually frequenting them. That keeps them vibrant and alive! 🙏

## Rav Kook Torah



by Rabbi Chanan Morrison -  
[www.ravkooktorah.com](http://www.ravkooktorah.com)

## Tents and Dwelling Places

**Summary:** To achieve stable spiritual growth, we need both the 'tents' - the soul's longing for growth - and the 'dwelling places' - to stop and absorb spiritual attainments.

The evil prophet Bilaam wanted to curse the people of Israel, but instead found himself blessing them:

MA TOVU OHALECHA... How goodly are your tents, Yaakov; your dwelling places, Yisrael (Bamidbar 24:5).

Is the repetition in Bilaam's blessing only poetic? Or is there a deeper significance to these two forms of shelter: the "tent" and the "mishkan" (dwelling place)?

### The Journey of the Soul

As we strive to grow spiritually, we make use of two contradictory yet complementary methods.

The first method is our aspiration to constantly improve ourselves. We strive to attain greater wisdom and

enlightenment. We seek to continually refine the emotions and ennoble the spirit.

The second method is the necessity to restrain our striving for spiritual growth, in order to assimilate changes and guard against spiritual lapses. We want to internalize our spiritual and ethical gains, and maintain our current level. This means that we must curb the desire for growth, so that our ambitions do not overextend the soul's natural capacity for change.

The "tent" and the "mishkan" are both forms of temporary shelter. Both relate to the soul's upwards journey. However, they differ in a significant aspect. The "tent" is inherently connected to the state of traveling. It corresponds to the aspiration for constant change and growth. The "mishkan" is also part of the journey, but it is associated with the rests between travels. It is the soul's sense of calm, its rest from the constant movement, for the sake of the overall mission.

Surprisingly, it is the second method that is the loftier of the two. The desire to change reflects a lower-level fear, lest we stagnate and deteriorate. Therefore, the blessing mentions "tents" first, together with the name YAAKOV, the first and embryonic name of the Jewish people.

The need to stop and rest, on the other hand, stems from a higher-level fear, lest we over-shoot the appropriate level for the soul. For this reason, the blessing mentions “mishkan” together with the name YISRAEL, Yaakov’s second and holier name.

In any case, we need both aspects in order to achieve stable spiritual growth. Bilaam’s prophetic blessing praises the balanced union of “How goodly are your tents, Yaakov” – the soul’s longing for change – together with the more restful state of “your dwelling places, Yisrael, restricting growth in order to avoid unchecked advancement, thus enabling the soul to properly absorb all spiritual attainments.

*Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 269-270.  
Adapted from Olat Re’iyah  
vol. 1, pp. 42-43*

## **The Daily Portion - Sivan Rahav Meir**

### **The real school year begins now**

Translation by Yehoshua Siskin

Mazal tov on the new school year which begins this week! According to Rav Yaakov Edelstein, although summer vacation starts now, this is

when kids’ education truly begins:

During the year, the Rav explained, students are in a structured environment. There are classroom rules of conduct, bells and breaks between classes, and homework. But during summer vacation, students set their own schedule.

Rav Edelstein would tell young people that this is an opportunity to be who they really are. Especially when there is no outside structure imposed on them, when there are no teachers or exams, and they can express their true, best selves. They can create their own daily schedule – when to go to sleep and when to wake up, when and how to spend time with parents, siblings, and friends. Most importantly, they can choose the content that will fill their extensive free time. This is not just a taste of what life is like as an adult, but an opportunity to get better acquainted with the person they are meant to be.

So to millions of students: have a successful school year!

Send your friends this link so that they can receive Sivan Rahav-Meir's content too: [tiny.cc/DailyPortion](https://tiny.cc/DailyPortion)



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

**BALAK**

## **Two Views of Bilam**

What majesty and eloquence there is in Bilam's words: MA TOVU OHALECHA YAAKOV, "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob: your dwelling-places, O Israel" (Bamidbar 24:5).

We take this as the ultimate compliment to the Jewish people. We recite it on entering the synagogue. The composers vie with each other to express it musically. It gives us nachas and inspiration.

The strange fact is that Bilam never meant to utter these words at all. He intended to curse Israel, not to bless them.

Nobody was as surprised as Bilam himself when the curse turned to blessing in his mouth. Balak, king of Moav, who had hired Bilam, was disgusted and angry.

The sages were not of one mind in deciding how to regard Bilam. One view saw him as "Bilam HaRasha", Bilam the Wicked; according to another, "There never arose philosophers amongst the nations like Bilam

and Oenomaus of Gedera".

Both hit upon the secrets of the Jew. Their intentions may have been malevolent, but they saw the truth. Bilam recognised two pillars of Judaism - the tent and dwelling-place, i.e. the home and synagogue. Oenomaus added "the school children chirping with their voices".

We can learn from both when it comes to charting a Jewish destiny. Over and above everything else in a Jewish community, the truly crucial elements are homes, synagogues and schools. If they are strong and effective, nothing can stand in the way of Jewish future. -OZ

**Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH**

## **Sedra Highlight**

**- Dr Jacob Solomon**

**BALAK**

Bil'am's method of initiating the Israelites' downfall was to ruin the link between the Almighty and His Chosen People. He attempted to do this twice:

1. By planning to curse Israel. That first time he was unsuccessful, because, "G-d did not wish to listen to Bil'am, but because (He) loved you, He turned the curses into blessings" (D'varim. 23:6).

2. By making it possible for Israel to sin through idol worship and sexual immorality in the incident of Baal Pe'or. After Bil'am had to face Balak's wrath for his failure to curse the Israelites for the third time, he said to Balak, "Come, let me advise you..." The Talmud (Sanhedrin 106a) brings the tradition that the advice was to incite the Israelites to take part in prostitution with the eligible ladies of his kingdom: "Their god hates sexual immorality." The 'passport' to a Moabite woman was participating in the worship of Baal Pe'or (a particularly obnoxious procedure detailed in the Midrash: Sifrei 131). Thus the second time Bil'am did succeed in ruining the links between G-d and the Israelites: twenty-four thousand Israelites died by plague in consequence of the sin of Baal Pe'or.

In his unsuccessful efforts to undermine Israel by cursing them, the Torah mentions Bil'am's name over and over again. In his successful efforts to undermine Israel through initiating the sin of Baal Pe'or, his name is not mentioned even once in the main account. Only much later on, in a different context, does the Torah explicitly connect Bil'am with Baal Pe'or: Moshe said to his military officers, "Did you indeed let every female live? Behold! - They caused Israelites to commit treachery against G-d, by the word of Bil'am, in

the matter of Baal Pe'or, and the plague occurred..." (31:15-16)

Why therefore does Bil'am's connection with Baal Pe'or not appear in the main account?

The Rashbam suggests that the connection actually does occur in Bil'am's final words to Balak where he gives him a piece of advice without elaborating on what the advice was: "Let me advise you..." (24:13) That advice, the Rashbam says, was given in whisper; 'not for publication at this stage'. His sage insight passed on the information that if you want to get the Israelites into G-d's disfavour, don't waste your time trying to curse them, but tempt them with idolatry and forbidden sexual relations.

Perhaps one reason that the advice was not explicit is to teach the following. As long as people are aspiring and doing their best to act correctly, they should trust that G-d is behind them. The second generation of Israelites in the desert had not been involved with the downfalls of the Golden Calf and Spies. Enemies appeared here and there, openly and behind the scenes. Bil'am was the latter: he worked entirely without the Israelites knowledge at the time. His agenda was not the success of Moav, but the fall of Israel. He did his best, but G-d frustrated him.

But once a person or for that matter a

community acts in a way that negates positive values, such as *avoda zara* and *gilui arayot*, they do not need an outsider to undermine them. They are the ones who do the undermining for themselves. Bil'am opened the door, but the offending Israelites walked through it. They didn't have to. But they did. With the consequence of 24,000 dead (25:9).

The situation may be compared to an owner of a jewellery shop that goes home for the night and leaves his business unlocked. Thieves enter in the middle of the night and take out the pearls, diamonds, and rubies. When arrested and on trial, the thieves cannot excuse themselves with "it wasn't us: the owner did not lock the door." Of course it was them. Leaving the door open does not alter the fact that the people entered and stole the valuable jewellery.

Bil'am is like the owner of the shop, and the B'nei Yisrael were the thieves. As the Israelites fell for the temptation of Baal Pe'or, they could not blame Bil'am for giving in to their own temptations.

And that is the message of Bil'am's absence from the last section of the Parasha. It teaches us that as long as we are positively true to our roots, we should not worry about what others think of us. But once we abandon our principles we can weaken and even destroy ourselves. We ourselves are

to blame; we cannot put the blame on others.

Chukat and Balak are always read on separate Shabbatot in Israel. Outside Israel, as this year, they are combined during the years where Shavuot falls on Friday. Due to Shavuot lasting two days in those locations, the second day's falling on Shabbat means reading the special portion for that day, whereas in Israel the reading is the next regular Parasha. Therefore Israel is one Parasha ahead - until Balak, when Israel splits Chukat and Balak to let us get back into sync.

Why, in such circumstances, are Chukat and Balak joined up, instead of any other combination - for example Shelach and Korach. What is the connection between the two Parshiot?

One possibility is that the stick appears in both Parshiot. In Chukat, Moshe struck the rock with his stick, and was forbidden to enter the Promised Land by Higher Authority in consequence. And in Balak, Bil'am struck his ass with a stick when she strayed from the highway, whereupon G-d 'opened the ass's mouth' (22:28).

When Moshe struck the rock instead of speaking to it as G-d commanded, he failed to 'make G-d holy' (20:12) in the eyes of Israelites. As Rashi puts it, had he spoken to the rock, the Israelites would have learnt the

following lesson. If the rock, which neither speaks nor hears obeys the Word of G-d, then how much more should we do likewise! Therefore, decreed G-d on Moshe: 'You shall not bring (the Israelites)... into the land I [promised to] give them' (20:12). So the stick brought Moshe one spiritual level downwards...

In contrast, Bil'am striking the ass led to something positive - a communication from G-d. In response, he showed a degree of humility when he was prepared to 'return' if it would be 'bad' in G-d's 'eyes' (22:34). And when G-d told him to 'go with the men and say whatever I will tell you to say' (22:34), he did precisely that. Even though it was to cost formidable reputation, personal prestige, and high salary. So the stick brought Bilaam one spiritual level upwards...

The connection may be made with the opening section of Parashat Chukat: 'The kohen shall take a stick made of cedar, hyssop, and a scarlet thread, and throw them into the burning of the cow...' The stick of cedar used in the purification from the defilement from contact with a human corpse is an integral part of that process. As the text shows, it paradoxically 'defiles' the pure (a ritually pure man shall gather the ash of the cow... and is defiled until evening) and 'purifies the defiled' (he shall purify himself with [the ashes of the red cow] on the third day and on the seventh day,

then he will be pure)...

Homiletically the stick reappears twice in Chukat-Balak. In Chukat, it 'defiles the pure' - Moshe striking the rock, and in Balak it 'purifies the defiled' - Bilaam striking the ass...



## **Dvar Torah** by **Rabbi Chanoch Yeres**

to his community at

Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

*Graciously shared with PhiloTorah*

### **BALAK**

"And Balak, son of Tzipor was king of Moav at that time" (Bamidbar 22:4). King Balak is an important character in our Parsha and one of our arch-enemies. However, one question that stands out is with our original acquaintance with Balak. The first Pasuk in the Parsha introduces Balak not as royalty but rather as a concerned citizen.

"Balak saw all that Israel did..."

Why do we first hear about Balak before his rise to fame? Why do we not meet King Balak immediately? There seems to be importance that the Torah relates how "Citizen Balak" sees the multitude of the Israelites and becomes terrified.

Moav took counsel with the elders of Midian about this oncoming threat of Israel. Only now, are we told that

Balak becomes king. Why delay this fact until after the threat is being discussed, as if it was, happenchance.

The Midrash quotes a tradition that Balak was none other than a layman of no significant value. However, once Balak was associated as the one who took note of the Jewish threat and told of the impending economic and social upheaval that Moav faced, he immediately was chosen as their new leader. Midrash quotes a sad proof from the Book of Eicha.

The text is HAYU TZOREHA L'ROSH - "Her enemies came to head." Anyone labeling as their enemy the people of Israel will be coronated as leaders of their peoples. We are witness to a Balak that sees only what Israel did to the Amorites but ignored what the Amorites did to Israel by initiating war, nor to the atrocities committed in Israel by Amalek or Egypt.

We are introduced to real and simple anti-Semitism, hatred of the Jew no matter what.

Balak realizes early on that military attack would not surrender Israel. They would need something supernatural and therefore he ran to Bilaam to curse them.

It was through Bilaam's own experience in challenging Israel that we gain a glimpse of the future nature of Jewish history. It was his efforts in cursing us, which would

lead him to bless us. For a star shall come forth from Yaakov and sovereignty arise in Yisrael. Its enemies that surround will be cut down, while Israel does valiantly.

And the last remnant of Yaakov amid the other nations of the world, will be like the dew from Heaven, reviving moisture on the land in a way that no one could have hoped for, nor any human being anticipated.

This is our answer to anti-Semitism. Those who try to attack us will be the one proclaiming the uniqueness and special character that the Jewish people add to this world. 🕊️

## The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

CHUKAT-BALAK 5785

*Once again, a bit longer than usual, but, hopefully, worthwhile the read.*

On June 13th of last year, Israel launched its now famed "Operation Rising Lion - K'LAVI YAKUM, Israel's military attack against Iran. The phrase was taken directly from Bil-am's prophecy in our Parsha (23:24): HEIN AM K'LAVI YAKUM..., Behold, a people that will rise like a lioness; it will lift itself like a lion." Whoever chose the name of the operation - K'LAVI YAKUM, Rising Lion - we may not know, but the Baal Shem Tov teaches that everything is

by Divine Providence and everything we encounter holds a lesson. As such, it behooves us to investigate this phrase and reflect upon its various meanings. Clearly, on that Thursday night, when the world was asleep, there arose a lion of Jewish might and courage, and proved to the world once again that the nation of Yehoshua, King David and our great Biblical warriors was still very much alive!

There appears to be two very different interpretations of the metaphor K'LAVI YAKUM, and in keeping with the rabbinic maxim of "the language of the Torah is one thing, and that of Chazal something else" (Avoda Zara 58b), both are quite valid. The first is Midrashic, and has been given to a series of different interpretive iterations, each building upon the former. The Midrash reads (Tanchuma Balak 14, Bamidbar Rabba 20:20): "Behold, a people shall rise up as a lion - there is no nation in the world like them. Although they had been asleep to the Torah and the mitzvot, they awoke from their slumber like lions, eagerly recited the Sh'ma, and proclaimed the kingship of the Holy One, blessed be He." Here, Chazal speak of a metaphorical slumber, that is, a period during which Jews neglected the Torah and the mitzvot, but in the end, awakened from their slumber and arose like lions to proclaim the unity of Gd and

crown Him as King.

Rashi (23:24, s.v. HEIN) quotes this text from the Tanchuma, but with significant changes. First, he does not interpret the Israelites' sleep as metaphorical, but as literal. Second, he understands the lion to refer not to the Israelite nation, but to the individual Jew. Third, he conceives the character of the lion in light the Mishna: "Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a gazelle, and mighty [GIBOR] as a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven" (Avot 5:20). Rashi writes: "'Behold, a people shall rise up as a lion - when they awake [OMDIN] from their sleep in the morning, they rise up mightily [MITGAB'RIM] like a lion or regal lion [K'ARI] and eagerly perform the mitzvot: donning the tallit, reciting the Sh'ma, and laying t'filin." In Rashi's adept revision of the Midrash, the subject is not a historical event in which the people of Israel have sinned, repented and returned to monotheism, but rather it is the daily routine of the individual Jew who arises mightily each morning as a lion to perform the mitzvot. Rashi deftly shifts the focus from nation to individual, from national morality to personal morality. Inspired by the Mishna, he employs the verb MITGAB'RIM ("they rise up mightily"). The Jew awakens every day at dawn and as a mighty lion he zealously performs the mitzvot. In the words of

the Maharal, "The mitzvot are acts of valor" (Gur Aryeh, ad loc.).

Clearly influenced by Rashi's skillful personalistic modification of the Midrash, we now come to the M'CHABEIR (R' Yosef Karo), in his opening words to the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 1:1), who transforms Rashi's descriptive account of one's morning conduct into an explicit command: One should be mighty as a lion to arise in the morning for the service of one's Creator! In this codification of what began as a Midrash, the Shulchan Aruch is mandating that the Jew adopt the attributes of the lion in his service of HaShem. Indeed, life according to Torah is one in which a Jew must be MITGABEIR like a lion, acting heroically by subduing his natural inclinations and subjugating them to the Divine mitzva norm.

We now turn to the plain - P'SHAT - meaning of the rising lion-metaphor. Adopted first by Onkelos and later by Ramban and others, the K'LAVI YAKUV imagery is a militaristic one. Balak is told that Israel will defeat the mighty kings of Canaan. But the more general and unmistakable message is: "Do not take the lion at rest as a docile, domestic animal incapable of inflicting harm. Rather, if disturbed or threatened, this beast can rise with ferocious power, attack and crush any challenger. Later (24:9), Bil-am continues this depiction: "He [Israel]

crouched and lay down like a lion, and like an awesome lion, who dare rouse him?" The rising lion represents strength, initiative, readiness, defense. But the crouching lion? That's another kind of power: restraint, dignity, inner peace, stability. Bil-am sees both. He says: "The Jewish people aren't only mighty when they roar. They are majestic even when they are quiet. Even when they're crouching - seemingly asleep - they carry the presence of a lion. Even when they lie still, they are often most dangerous, because they are watching, waiting, and can leap into action at any moment."

The Ohr HaChayim (23:24, s.v. HEIN) unpacks this lion-metaphor even further, giving it an almost uncanny relevance to our current events. First, he asks: why is the Jewish people compared to a lioness? He explains that unlike most who require extended training before becoming powerful warriors, the lioness rises immediately and performs wonders. The same is true of the Jewish people. While others may need years or even centuries to become effective, the Jewish spirit can awaken instantly and strike with profound force, far beyond what one might expect from a first attempt. Second, he notes that lions grow stronger with age. Similarly, despite enduring countless persecutions and exhausting battles, the Jewish people do not

tire or despair. Instead, they continue to rise, not weaker but stronger, more determined and valiant with each challenge. And third, the Ohr HaChayim writes that the nations tremble with disproportionate fear before the Jewish people whose small size masks their inner prowess, not just military strength, but a spiritual and moral force, magnified by HaShem's providential protectiveness.

In examining these two very different understandings of the rising lion-metaphor, it is more than just interesting to note that many of our commentators - including Rashi - elect to mention both interpretations. We therefore would like to suggest that both are not only correct, but complimentary and mutually reinforcing. The prophecy is declaring that when the allegiance of the Jewish people to HaShem is loyal and unwavering in both belief and deed - when they dutifully rise every day to observe His Word, then they will be an unconquerable 'lion' on the battlefield as well. And so, while it may be that during our long years Exile, our great sages creatively developed a spiritual exegesis of the prophecy of Bil-am, now, with the independence of the sovereign State of Israel, why can we not build upon that foundational doctrine of Torah obedience and activate the original p'shat interpretation of the elected prophet

of the gentiles?!

If "Operation Rising Lion" can teach us anything, it is precisely the critical importance of cojoining the "lion" of Torah with the "lion" of the sword. The Melech HaMashiach, in Rambam's presentation (Hilchot M'lachim 12:1,4) will, of course, be unconditionally committed to the entirety of Torah, and it will be he who will also valiantly fight the battles against our enemies, ushering in the great redemptive era we all so long for. Could it be that perhaps, what we are seeing in our day is a prelude to that glorious epoch?! May we only be so worthy.

Let us conclude with this true story whose message of hope is clear.

The great Rav and posek of Kovno, Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, was once confronted by a Russian anti-Semite who contemptuously challenged the Rav: "You are a lowly people who serve no purpose; the world would be better off without you and the problems you cause. What contribution to humanity justifies your existence?" Rav Yitzchak Elchanan did not flinch. Instead of feeling threatened or upset, the great Rav was filled with joy. Those present were confused. Smiling, he responded by quoting our pasuk: "'At that time, it will be said to Yaakov and Yisrael...' At that time when our enemies question our right to exist

and say about us, MA PAAL KEIL, 'For what reason did Gd bother to create you', it means that the rest of Bil-am's words will be fulfilled as well: "Behold, the people will rise in like a lioness and raise itself like a lion!"

Once again, unabashed anti-semitism has become the 'acceptable' norm around the globe. We face enemies who do not simply disagree with us; they call into question our very right to exist. Yet, even with the great losses and tragedies we have suffered through, we are witness to, and part of, a wondrous awakening of nishmat Yisrael, Jewish identity, pride and strength: The lion of Torah hand-in-hand with a generation of lion-warriors, setting a magnificent example of religious and national idealism. Our soldiers, in the Beit Midrash and in the theater of war, in their valor and sacrifice are a sacred inspiration for us all. 🙌

"bless" B'nei Yisrael. Here's Bamidbar 23:4 (in Parshat Balak) -

וַיִּקַּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-בְּלָעַם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו  
אֶת-שִׁבְעַת הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת עָרַכְתִּי  
וְאָעַל פָּר וְאֵיל בַּמִּזְבֵּיחוֹ:

*God appeared to Bil'-am. He [Bil-am'] said to Him: I have set up seven altars,' and I have sacrificed a bull and ram as a burnt offering on each altar."*

Bil'am and Balak did this more than once, with the goal of gaining God's okay for them to 'bless' the People of Israel.

What is our greatest protection for those who seek to harm us - physically or spiritually? Take a look at Bamidbar 15:40 - a pasuk and concept which we are well acquainted.

לְבַמְעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתַי  
וְהִייתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים לֵאלֹהֵיכֶם:

*You will thus remember and keep all My commandments, and be holy to your God.*

There is no stronger protection that B'nei Yisrael as a people and each of us as members of Klal Yisrael, can have than Torah and Mitzvot.

These two p'sukim are GMs at 3707.

And let's add a GM with AT-BASH, which for our Balak pasuk is 5636. Only one pasuk in all of Tanach has a regular Gimatriya of 5636, D'varim 26:3 (in Parshat Ki Tavo) -



## BALAK

**GM** Bil-am and Balak are working hard to get Bil-am to be able to

וּבָאתָ אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בַּיָּמִים  
הַהֵם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו הַגִּדְתִּי הַיּוֹם  
כִּי־הָיָה אֵלֶיךָ כִּי־בָאתִי אֶל־הָאָרֶץ  
אֲשֶׁר נָשַׁבַע יְהוָה לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ לָתֶת לָנוּ:

*And you shall come to the kohen who will be [serving] in those days, and say to him, "I declare this day to HaShem, your God, that I have come to the land which HaShem swore to our forefathers to give us."*

The mitzva of Bikurim is the epitome of the Mitzvot of the Land, and also serves as our vaccine against the threats of our enemies.

*USFUNEI T'MUNEI CHOL is the title of my book of Gimatriya Matches - IY"H and BE"H. The title translates to Hidden in the Sand. That's how I feel about my Gimatriya searches. Like walking along the beach with a metal detector. Beep-beep-beep. Lean down and find something. Usually, nothing of note. But sometimes you find something special.*

## RED ALERT!

### BALAK

*by Rabbi Eddie Davis (RED)  
of the Young Israel of Hollywood -  
Ft. Lauderdale (Florida)*

*Ed. note: Rabbi Davis submitted his RED ALERT for Chukat-Balak; I put here the Balak parts.*

### DIVREI TORAH

• A side incident occurs in the Bilaam story when Bilaam's donkey speaks

to his master. The Torah gives play to a minor occurrence. In Pirkei Avot, our Sages give the story more attention when it states that this donkey was created right before Shabbat during the first week of Creation. Is it such a big deal, especially when seemingly no one witnessed the event? The Rambam wrote that it never happened. It was a dream that Bilaam had while traveling. What's wrong with a minor miracle to spice up the story. More important is to note the message that we see here. Hashem was telling Bilaam that your power was in your mouth, whether it is in the form of a blessing or a curse. Big deal. Hashem can place words in anybody's mouth, both a human or an animal. Back in B'reishit, Rashi's states that Hashem created the human with the power of speech and reason. He can put that ability anywhere. Hashem was saying to Bilaam: You are not special!

• The Abravanel asked the question: If Hashem blesses Bnei Yisrael and then Bilaam curses them, whose words are mightier, Hashem or Bilaam? Bilaam's words are meaningless in the eyes of the world. So who really cares what Bilaam has to say! But Bilaam's words are not meaningless. They would impress the non-Jewish world. They would impress the entire world. By Hashem forcing Bilaam to bless the Jewish people, that will influence the world to pay attention to Bnei Yisrael.

This was the intention in Hashem's plan as they now were on the eve of conquering Canaan and turning it into a true productive, and magnificent country. Look at what the State of Israel has been able to accomplish with an ancient piece of swampland. This is Hashem's work in our day!

- MIDRASH. Bilaam stated that Israel will dwell alone. Balak said to Bilaam: If you cannot curse them when they are by themselves, maybe we can mix them up with other nations, you will be able to curse them. That's when Bilaam said that they will not mix with other people.

## Questions by RED

### From the text

4. How many sacrifices to Hashem did Balak ultimately offer?
5. What part of Bilaam's blessing of Bnei Yisrael do we say in our prayers? (24:5)

### From Rashi

8. Balak was the king of Moav, but he wasn't a Moabite. Where was he from? (22:4)
9. Why did Hashem give Bilaam, a non-Jew, prophecy? (22:5)
10. Who hated the Jews more, Bilaam or Balak? (22:11)

### From the Rabbis

12. What verse of Bilaam's is recited

as one of the verses in the Shofarot section of Musaf on Rosh HaShana? (23:21)

13. The Moabite and Midianite women involved the Jewish men in immoral acts. How did they differ in their approach? (Alshich)

### Midrash

14. Balak offered many animals as sacrifices to Hashem. What reward did he receive for this?

### Haftara - Micha

15. What three leaders did Hashem supply Bnei Yisrael during their journey in the desert?

### Relationships

- a) Avraham- Nachor
- b) Eisav - Ada
- c) Yaakov - Yehudit
- d) No'ach - Aram
- e) Amram - Yitzhar

### ANSWERS

4. Forty-two (3x14)
5. MAH TOVU... How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov...
8. He was from Midyan.
9. In order not to give the non-Jewish world the opportunity to proclaim: Had we be given prophets from Hashem, we would have been loyal and good people.
10. Bilaam.

12. LO HIBIT AVEN B'YAAKOV...

UTRU'AT MELECH BO.

13. The Moabites women approached the regular Jewish men. The Midianite women went after the national leaders.

14. He was an ancestor (through Ruth) of King David and the Mashiach.

15. Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam.

16.

### **Relationships**

a) Brothers

b) Husband & Wife

c) Brother-in-Law & Sister-in-Law

d) Grandfather & Grandson

e) Brothers