Points to Ponder

Balak 5781

**וַיִּפְתַּ֥ח ה אֶת־פִּ֣י הָֽאָת֑וֹן Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey (22:28)** – On other occasions we have noted the commentaries that are amazed by Bilaam’s obstinance in not noticing that he was speaking to a donkey. Those commentaries castigated Bilaam’s lack of self awareness. **Rav Gifter ztl.** looks at the issue differently. He too, notes the contradiction between the miraculous (the opening of the donkey’s mouth) and the expected. But even someone with the lofty spiritual levels like Bilaam allows himself to allow contradictions to exist in the same person at the same time. If it is true for him it is certainly true for us and makes us responsible not to allow ourselves to be content with such contradictions.

**חָטָ֔אתִי כִּ֚י לֹ֣א יָדַ֔עְתִּי כִּ֥י אַתָּ֛ה נִצָּ֥ב לִקְרָאתִ֖י בַּדָּ֑רֶךְ I sinned because I didn’t know you were standing in front of me (22:34)** - If he didn’t see the Malach so in what way did he sin? The Shelah explains that ignorance is not always an excuse. When one should have known, s/he cannot declare ignorance. **Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski ztl.** added that when there are matters that no special knowledge is required, not using common knowledge thought is punishable. The concept of Ol Malchus Shomayim means that one does not have the liberty to act without thinking and doing so is reckless and careless for which one is liable.

**וַיָּ֥שֶׁת אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּ֖ר פָּנָֽיו And he turned his face toward the desert (24:1) - Rashi** explains that Bilaam planned on highlighting all of Bnei Yisrael’s transgressions here in order to get Hashem angry at us. Hence Bilaam turned to the desert where the Cheit HaEigel would be remembered. **Rav Wolbe ztl.** noted that proper teshuva for a sin should not include deep analysis of the sin because the more one thinks about it the more susceptible s/he becomes to repeating it.

**כָּרַ֨ע שָׁכַ֧ב כַּֽאֲרִ֛י וּכְלָבִ֖יא מִ֣י יְקִימֶ֑נּוּ  They are like a nation that arises like a lioness and raises itself like a lion not lying down until it consumes its prey (24:9) - Rav Ozer Glickman ztl.** noted the description of rising and going to rest and the simile to lions as relevant to our people who need to approach Torah and Mitzvos with a valor as spirituality needs to be earned. Hence the Shulchan Aruch begins with the requirement to arise like a lion to serve Hashem -- Torah elevates life and does not provide an escape from it.

**תָּמֹ֤ת נַפְשִׁי֙ מ֣וֹת יְשָׁרִ֔ים וּתְהִ֥י אַֽחֲרִיתִ֖י כָּמֹֽהוּ Let my death be the death of the Yesharim (22:10)** - Bilaam seeks the death of a Jew since the Jewish life to him is not a hedge of roses. However, the **Chofetz Chaim** notes that there is no ‘kuntz’ to die like a Jew -- the bigger challenge is to live like one.

**אֶרְאֶ֨נּוּ֙ וְלֹ֣א עַתָּ֔ה אֲשׁוּרֶ֖נּוּ וְלֹ֣א קָר֑וֹב I will see him but not now (24:17)** - The Gemara notes that Moshe wrote the 5 Chumashim and Parshas Bilaam. There are many questions as to what Parshas Bilaam refers to. Some suggest it was a lost work. **Rav Schachter Shlita** noted that he thought it was a reference to Nevuas Bilaam and was not a difficulty. After all, Moshe wrote the Ikkarei Emunah and included therein should be a belief in Moshiach. The belief in Moshiach is identified in this Possuk. Hence, the Gemara wants us to know that Moshe Rabbeinu wrote this section of the Torah and was including Bias HaMoshiach in it.

**וַיִּצָּ֥מֶד יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל לְבַ֣עַל פְּע֑וֹר  Baal Peor (25:3) -** How did Bnei Yisrael become addicted to Peor if it was so antithetical to their existence (think Mah Tovu)? How is it that 3000 died in the Cheit Haeigel and 24,000 here? **Rav Amital ztl.** suggested that there is a basic ideological struggle between man’s animalistic tendency and who he really wants to be. Peor represents the natural animalistic sentiment of the human without a sense of Busha. That lifestyle is devoid of Torah -- it is the style of Adam and Chava. Bnei Yisrael are supposed to live Mul Peor -- opposite to this style.

**Haftara**

**כְּטַל֙ מֵאֵ֣ת ה Like dew (Micha 5:6)** - Th remnant of Yaakov is compared to dew. Why dew? **Rav Dovid Feinstein ztl.** explained that this refers to the Jews who survive the persecutions and hatred of the nations. They will be like dew -- the heavenly gift which Hashem provides even when we are undeserving. Even when there is a shortage of rain, the dew continues. Similarly, Am Yisrael will not only survive but will be a Beracha to the host nation like dew that is always a Beracha.