

Points to Ponder
Balak 5778

(A short point from the **Chasam Sofer** who points out that Parshas Balak is the only Parsha whose whole entirety we know from Hashem. No member of Am Yisrael saw or could report on the interactions between Balak and Bilaam or between Bilaam and Hashem. The whole Parsha contains within it, proof of the divine origination of the Torah.)

אם יקרא לך באו האנשים קום לך אתם If the people came to call you then go but know that what I shall place in your mouth, that is what you shall say (22:20) – Rashi says that Hashem was telling him that he would need to speak the word of Hashem exclusively even against his will. Still, we see his desire to proceed. What was he thinking? How did he think he would change Hashem's mind? **Rav Bernard Weinberger ztl.** points out that in each of the instances of prophesy, Bilaam recognizes 2 different aspects of the nation. At times he refers to them as Yisrael, the nation of Hashem who, when facing the other nations stands alone as part of Hashem's army and also as Yaakov – which speaks to the aspect of Yaakov as the Jew among the nations. When the Jew is spread out among the nations, he is ripe for attack – like with Yaakov when living with Lavan. Bilaam thought that if he hinted to this aspect, he would be able to highlight the Jewish weakness. Here is where he failed. Hashem cares for the Jewish nation whether they are Yisrael as a nation living alone or even when they are Yaakov. Hashem turned the curse to a Beracha because he loves us.

ה' את פי האתון Hashem opened the mouth of the Donkey (22:28) – **Rav Chaim Shmuelewitz ztl.** points out that the mouth of the donkey was one of those things created in the final moments before Shabbos of creation. Why was it so important to Hashem that he needed to create this mouth for a private conversation between Bilaam and the donkey? Rav Chaim answers that Hashem created the mouth of the donkey to demonstrate how far one can go in order to keep someone else from doing an Avaira. Still, Bilaam was such a Rasha, he could not see the change in nature and take a lesson from it that could have prevented him from Avaira.

ויעל פר ואיל במזבח He brought a bull and a Ram on the Mizbeiach (23:14) – The Gemara (Sotah 47a) uses this text to teach us the principle of doing things even without the actions being L'Shmaah because from doing them Shelo L'Shma we will come to doing them L'Shma. The proof is the Korbanos of Balak that ultimately became the basis of Mitzvos observed by his future great, great granddaughter Rus. How can one assume that Balak's actions were a pretext for the future? After all, he remained an idol worshipper – what kind of proof comes from him to here? **Rav Elyashiv ztl.** explains that when one does a Mitzva s/he does not merit to do it L'Shma as a result. Rather, the observance of the Mitzva itself is a Maala. Repeated Maalos often lead us to climb and strive to be able to do actions again and again in better and better ways. But it does not guarantee that this will happen – just that it is a possibility. But one who does not do Mitzvos until s/he does them L'Shma, will not get ANY credit in between and possibly will give up before fully trying.

הן עם כלביא יקום וכארי יתנשא When it kneels down and rests like a lion and like a leopard who will wake it up (24:9) – Chazal (Berachos 12b) tell us that they were going to put Parshas Bilaam into Kriyas Shema but were concerned about Tircha D'Tzibura so they did not. Why would they have thought to include Bilaam's curse attempt that went bad? **Rav Dr. Reuven Bulka Shlita** noted that when developing a person's sense of self, reinforcement is helpful. While Shema is the declaration of a person's responsibilities, it is also a means of solidifying one's faith. Knowing the positive feelings of the outsider

who disagrees with you but still holds of you...that is inspiring. If not for Tircha D'Tzibbura it would be a GREAT way to start and end the day.

מכבוד (24:11)- Rav Gershon Edelstein Shlita אמרתי כבוד אכבדך והנה מנערך' **I said I would honor you but Hashem has denied honor from you** cautioned that the desire for honor is indeed, a roadblock for a person who is trying to acquire the Torah. He noted that real Talmidei Chachamim do not think about what their honor is in the eyes of their public. He spoke of his father ztl. who learned by Rav Boruch Ber in Kamenetz and never knew what the Rosh Yeshiva thought of him. As he told it: "Once a man who also used to be in the Yeshivah approached my father, long after he left the Yeshivah, and told him that he was known as one of the top boys in the Yeshivah. My father asked him, "Why did you have to tell me this?" He did not want to know this, as it only gave him a Nisayon of haughtiness! This was the great level of my father! He did not even want to know that he was known as a top boy in the Yeshivah long after he had learned there!" Torah success does not come from the promise of honor – it comes from the diligence to do that which is correct and complete by and for the individual.

מכבוד (24:11) – The Mishna in Avos compares the students of Avraham to the students of Bilaam. Why doesn't it compare Avraham and Bilaam directly? **Rav Schachter Shlita** would often remind us that sometimes it is hard to see the differences in the people themselves as to whether they are proper or Reshaim. However, when one looks at the students, it becomes apparent as to who the teachers are. Rav Schachter would add that the proof is either in the fact that the students mimic the teacher who, behind the façade of Tzidkus reveal their real selves – or—that the teacher is not a good teacher and cannot inspire the students to a proper way of living, either because he, the teacher is not knowledgeable or cannot apply the Torah's teaching to a practical conclusion. Bilaam was recognized for his spirituality but his ability to inspire spirit in the masses was null.

לך איניצך (24:14) – Rashi notes that the intent of Bilaam here is to advise Balak to use the weapon of Zima against the Jewish males as was done with Baal Peor in the next series of possukim. **Rav Elchanan Samet Shlita** points out that the problem with this explanation is that the word "advice" seems to be forced based on the post-facto knowledge that Bilaam advised the solution of the daughters of Moav. It does not make sense in the context of the Possuk nor in the style of prophesy offered here in general. Thus, Rav Samet suggests a different translation for the word Eitza based on **Ramban** who refers to the advice as coming from Hashem which means that the intent of the word is some prophetic announcement – not human advice.

Haftorah: וְהִצַּנְעָה לְכַתְּוֵם אֶל־קִי (Michah 6:8) – Rashi explains that while man wants a person who wronged him to correct him publically, Hashem is ok with a private audience. While Rambam seems to support this idea (Hil. Teshuva 2:5), Raavad explains that if the transgression occurred publicly, the person needs to atone publicly. How is this Hatzneiah? **Rav Yitzchak Sorotzkin Shlita** explains that the difference is whether 3 people know of the sin. Rashi is speaking about a situation where the sin may have occurred in front of others but is not in the public (read in front of three) view. If indeed, one sinned publicly, one would need to atone publicly.