

Points to Ponder
Balak 5775

Parshas Balak – The Gemara notes that Moshe wrote his sefer and Parshas Bilaam. Why is Parshas Bilaam singled out as distinct from the rest of the Torah? **Rav Schachter Shlita** often quoted the Brisker Rav who notes that in regard to the prophesy of Moshe among Jews he was matchless. However, as far as Bilaam was concerned, he was on the level of Moshe. One cannot learn Halachos from other Neviim but one might learn that he can learn Halachos from Bilaam. That's why the Torah tells us that when Bilaam delivered his Nevuah it did not have the status of Torah. Once Hashem repeated it to Moshe then it took on the status of Torah and we were able to derive Halachos from it.

Don't curse the nation for they are blessed (22:13) - **Rashi** comments that Bilaam sought to bless the nation when he saw that Hashem wasn't going to allow him to curse it. Hashem told him that his blessing was also not welcome – like the bee about whom we declare – not your honey nor your stinger. Why would Bilaam offer to bless the people? **Rav Moshe Wolfson Shlita** suggests that Bilaam and Lavan are the same person (See Targum Yonasan). Rivka too, was an Akarah in order to prevent people saying that Lavan's beracha brought her fertility. Bilaam figured that if he would bless the people, Hashem would hold off fulfilling the blessing in order to prevent its association with a Rasha like him. So in essence, even the blessing offer was a potential curse.

If Balak will give me a full house filled with gold and silver I still cannot violate the word of Hashem (22:18) – **Rav Chaim Shmuellevitz ztl.** points out that Bilaam represents the complex personality of good and evil mixed together. The fact is that most of us are a combination of good traits and talents with the desire to use them in a meaningful way and occasional desires and motivations that are less positive. Our job on this earth is to utilize our talents to observe the word of Hashem and at the same time to diminish the desire (or at least overcome it) to take our talents and use them for negative purposes.

And it was in the morning that Balak took Bilaam and brought him to the Heights of Baal and from there he saw the edge of the nation (22:41) – Why did Balak show Bilaam the nation? Why not have Bilaam curse him from home? The Ramban explains that a person is deeply affected by what he sees. Balak knew that the success the curse would have, would depend on what Bilaam sees. **Rav Wolbe ztl.** adds that we find a similar sentiment when Moshe went atop the mountain to daven for the Jews in their war with Amalek. There too, Ramban points out the power of the Tefillah that comes when someone sees something. Rav Wolbe adds that even when we cannot see directly, we have the ability to picture something in our mind's eye which enhances our experience and emunah in the event.

And Hashem opened the donkey's mouth (22:28) – The Mishna includes that donkey's mouth among those things that were created Erev Shabbos. (The **Ibn Ezra** entertains the debate as to whether the donkey actually spoke.) Why would Hashem create a mouth for a donkey to speak to Bilaam and why would he report the story to us? What difference does it make? **Rav**

Yonasan Sacks Shlita offered a thought based on the comments of the **Haggadas Chachmei Yirushalayim** who explain the reason why the goyim praise Hashem Kee Gavar **Aleinu** Chasdo – is that there are things that we do not know – but they do – that we are saved from. The awareness of Hashgachas Hashem on the occasions that we merit to see it is reason to know that it is there even when we don't.

At this point it should be said to Jacob and Yisrael what has Hashem wrought (23:23) – Rav Ovadiah Yosef ztl. explained this possuk and Nevuah by pointing out that Bilaam was perplexed as to what the secret of the success of this nation was so that he could exploit it. However, he could not discover it. This was no surprise to Rav Ovadiah who chose to explain the possuk with a story – about the education minister Lillenthal who was the education minister under Czar Nicholas. He was unsuccessful at getting the Jews to enter the secular gymnasiums instead of attending the Chadarim. He discovered that the people were not willing to break the ruling of the Rabbis including **Rav Itzele of Volozhin** and Rav Shalom of Lubavitch. The minister summoned them to the palace and in the midst of ranting at them yelled: “I do not understand, I am offering your people EVERYTHING – a future, a way to get ahead, a way to find the culture. Why do they not want this? If they do not want this, what is the point of being a Jew?” Immediately he noticed Rav Itzele smiling and challenged him on it. Rav Itzele answered: “That is exactly what YOUR Navi says – “at the point they will say to Yaakov and Yisrael what did Hashem do in making a Jew? “ He added that the next possuk notes that when that happens, the world better watch out because as a nation the nation can rise like a lion that does not rest until they get their prey and destroy the enemy that is out to question their right to exist.

And, behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought to his brothers a Midianite woman in the sight of Moshe, and in the sight of all the congregation of the people of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the Tent of Meeting. (Bemidbar 25:1-6) –

The **midrash** speaks poorly of Moshe's crying here. In fact it is because of this crying and inaction that the Midrash says no one knows where he is buried. Why is this seen as a punishment and for what is Moshe being punished? **Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ztl.** suggests that when one is Nitzatzeil it means that he does not seize the opportunity in front of him to sanctify Hashem's name. We need to strive in our service of God to maximize those opportunities that are presented to us, and not to be lazy and let them pass us by. We need to strive for the best in all areas of the service of God, whether in the study of Torah, in prayer or in our interpersonal relations. And we must recognize that failing to do so is not merely a lack of righteousness, but rather is a shortcoming in our service of God, one that we need to correct. That which is possible for us to fulfill is binding upon us.

Haftorah: And walking humbly with Hashem (Micha 6:8) – Often people confuse the idea of Tzniyus with that of actions. The **Alter of Kelm** explains that Tzniyus is about a way of living a life wherein one does not flaunt ANY aspect of his or her being (spirituality, physical attributes, talents, etc) as that would imply that the person was accepting it as HIS. The real aspect of Hatzneia Leches is an awareness that whatever we hold onto, really belongs to Hashem.