

Bilam's Third Symphony

R' Mordechai Torczyner – torczyner@torontotorah.com

What really bothered Moav?

1. Pirkei Avot 5:10

האומר שלי שלי ושליך שלך הרי זו מדה בינונית. ויש אומרים זו מדת סדום.

“What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours” – This is an intermediate trait. Some say: This is the trait of Sdom.

2. Bamidbar 22:2-4

(ב) וירא בלק בן צפור את כל אשר עשה ישראל לאמרי: (ג) ויגר מואב מפני העם מאד כי רב הוא ויקץ מואב מפני בני ישראל: (ד) ויאמר מואב אל זקני מדין עתה ילחכו הקהל את כל סביבתינו כלחך השור את ירק השדה ובלק בן צפור מלך למואב בעת ההוא:

And Balak son of Tzippor saw all that the Jews had done to the Emorites. And Moav was very afraid before the nation, for it was great, and Moav was disgusted before the children of Israel. And Moav said to the elders of Midian: Now the community will lick up all of our surroundings, as an ox licks up the greens of the field! And Balak son of Tzippor was the king of Moav at the time.

3. Midrash, Ruth Rabbah 1:4

למה נענש אלימלך ע"י שהפיל לבן של ישראל עליהם, לבוליטין שהיה שרוי במדינה והיו בני המדינה סבורין עליו ואומרים שאם יבואו שני בצורת והוא יכול לספק את המדינה עשר שנים מזון, כיון שבאת שנת בצורת יצתה לה שפחתו מעילת בסידיקי וקופתה בידה, והיו בני המדינה אומרים זהו שהיינו בטוחים עליו שאם תבא בצורת הוא יכול לפרנס אותנו עשר שנים, והרי שפחתו עומדת בסידיקי וקופתה בידה, כך אלימלך היה מגדולי המדינה ומפרנסי הדור, וכשבאו שני רעבון אמר עכשיו כל ישראל מסבבין פתחי, זה בקופתו וזה בקופתו, עמד וברח לו מפניהם, הה"ד וילך איש מבית לחם יהודה.

Why was Elimelech punished? He caused the hearts of the Jews to fall... Elimelech was one of the leaders of the nation, the supporters of the generation, and when the famine came he said, ‘Now all of Israel will come to my door, each with his collection box!’ He rose and fled from before them.

4. Devarim 23:4-5

לא יבא עמוני ומואבי בקהל ד' גם דור עשירי לא יבא להם בקהל ד' עד עולם: על דבר אשר לא קדמו אתכם בלחם ובמים בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים ואשר שכר עליך את בלעם בן בעור מפתור ארם נהרים לקללך:

An Ammonite and Moabite shall not enter the Divine community, even the tenth generation shall not enter the Divine community, forever, because they did not greet you with bread and water when you left Egypt, and because they hired Bilam ben B'or, from Pethor Aram Naharayim, to curse you.

Bilam's Third Symphony

5. Bamidbar 24:1-9

(א) וירא בלעם כי טוב בעיני ד' לברך את ישראל ולא הלך כפעם בפעם לקראת נחשים וישת אל המדבר פניו: (ב) וישא בלעם את עיניו וירא את ישראל שכן לשבטיו ותהי עליו רוח אלקים: (ג) וישא משלו ויאמר נאם בלעם בנו בער ונאם הגבר שתם העין: (ד) נאם שמע אמרי קל אשר מחזה שקי יחזה נפל וגלוי עינים: (ה) מה טובו אהליך יעקב משכנתך ישראל: (ו) כנחלים נטיו כגנת עלי נהר כאהלים נטע ד' כארזים עלי מים: (ז) יזל מים מדליו וזרעו במים רבים וירם מאגג מלכו ותנשא מלכתו: (ח) קל מוציאו ממצרים כתועפת ראם לו יאכל גוים צריו ועצמתיהם יגרם והציו ימחץ: (ט) כרע שכב כארי וכלביא מי יקימנו מברכך ברוך וארריך ארוך:

And Bilam saw that it was good in Gd's eyes to bless Israel, and he did not go as he had from time to time, to greet sorcery. He turned his face to the wilderness. And Bilam raised his eyes and saw Israel dwelling in its tribes, and the spirit of Gd was upon him. And he raised his parable and said: The word of Bilam, son of Be'or. The word of the man with the sealed [or 'opened'] eye. The word of the one who hears the statements of Gd, who sees the vision of Gd, who falls and his eyes are open.

How good are your tents, Yaakov, your dwellings, Israel! Extended like streams, like gardens upon a river, like aloes planted by Gd, like cedars upon water. May water flow from his pail, and his seed in great waters, and his king will be elevated above Agag and his monarchy will be lifted up. The Gd who removed him from Egypt, like the elevated horns of the re'em, will consume the nations who are His enemies, will break their bones and pierce them with His arrows [or: 'break his arrows']. He kneels and lies down like a lion; like a lioness, who will raise Him up? Those who bless you are blessed; those who curse you are cursed.

Rashi: It's spiritual praise for the Jewish camp

Malbim: It's about present success leading to future success

Netziv: It's about the present and future personal/national success of the Jewish people

24:5-6 Present success of the individual and nation

קב: Two tents of the masses of Yaakov, meaning the tents of women and the tents of men.

משכנות ישראל: 'Mishkan' is the gathering of councils, in two ways. There are gatherings of councils for communal needs in the matters of the world, and there are gatherings of leaders of Israel for Torah.

כנהלים נטוי: He stated the parable, 'They are extended like streams,' regarding the tents of women. It is known that women benefit paupers more directly, with tzedakah and kindness that are compared to a flooding stream. Tzedakah flows, providing benefit to others, and so it is like a stream. The choicest of the kindnesses of the women of Israel is when they bring others to Torah and service of Gd... like a mikvah of purification, bringing the Jewish people to sanctity... This is why the well was given in Miriam's merit, and the well left when she died... Like a stream, even if it is not qualified for immersion because it lacks 40 seah or because it is *zochalin*, many people still benefit from it. Still, it's better if the stream leads to a spring or to a great river, to complete its kashrut, meaning that it leads to sanctity. So the deeds of women in helping a person, even if they are not specifically dedicated toward sanctity, are still good like a stream of tzedakah.

כגנות עלי נהר: This is a parable regarding the tents of the men of Yaakov. That which grows in a garden is not like that which grows in a field; a field is planted with only one or two varieties, as opposed to gardens which have many kinds of seeds. Still, each garden has one central variety, and it's only that small quantities of other varieties are planted around it. So, too, each Jew is filled with the mitzvot of Gd, but each has one special mitzvah in which he is extra careful, as is seen in Mechilta Beshalach 251, "One who performs a single mitzvah, faithfully, is worthy of Divine inspiration," and Yerushalmi Kiddushin 1 explains regarding the mishnah, "One who performs a single mitzvah receives goodness," "This refers to performing a mitzvah with exceptional care."

כאהלים נטע ד': This is a parable for the Mishkan of those who are summoned by the nation of Gd to handle communal needs and generosity. We have already explained... that acts of kindness are compared to spices... and we have explained that even those who are sent on a path of wildness are still an orchard of pomegranates, filled with mitzvot like pomegranates... This is not like the mitzvot of the Torah, which are compared to oil... because oil has no scent of its own, but only absorbs scent from its environment... while spices are not so, but have the same scent regardless of who bears them.

So, too, the [non-chesed] mitzvot of Gd involve no human logic, such that a person will affect them with his own mind, and only Israel, who is instructed in this will be well-spiced with them, but when an idolater performs them they lack any taste or scent. But acts of kindness are pleasant for all. This is why those who involve themselves in communal needs are compared to aloe.

However, there is generosity in the nations of the world, and people understand that, but Jews, uniquely, practice generosity in the name of Gd [נטע ד'].

כארזים עלי מים: This is a parable for the second Mishkan, the gathering for Torah and testimony, and nothing is higher than that. From there, prophets and all possible leaders of Israel are created...

The Torah already compares people to trees, but there are four kinds of trees: One is the thorn, which no one will take, for it is useless. It was created only to harm others; these are the wicked... The second is the bramble, and people take shelter beneath its branches and leaves; these are people who engage in the way of the world. The third is the fruit tree, like people who perform mitzvot and are compared to a fruit... but people do not benefit from the body of the tree, itself. The fourth is the cedar, for which people benefit from the body of the tree, in construction. This is like the people of Torah; the person is purified in all of his travels and ways, even in his normal conversation. Some cedars are better for one person's construction and some for a mast for a ship at sea and so it supports thousands of people; so there is a scholar who is good for those who are around him, near to him, and then there is a scholar who leads his world, like the captain of a ship. This is the meaning of "Like cedars upon the water," that we use them on the water.

24:7-9 Future success of the individual and nation

יזל מים מדליו וזרעו במים רבים: After Gd showed him the praise of His children, He showed Bilam the praise of the generations, from the time they would enter Israel until the time of Mashiach, who should come soon. He did not see the bad days, only the good days, in order to poke his eyes; this was concluded with his fourth vision.

He spoke regarding the generation of the judges, who had wars, in which many Jews were exiled. We know not, but today there are places where Jews have been found, claiming that they have been there since the days of Pilegash b'Givah. Who knows if they might have been exiled when the enemy became mighty in the days of judging the judges?

Bilam witnessed the good in this event, saying, "Water will flow from his pail, and seed in many waters." This is a parable: If a pail filled with water touches great waters, that is called 'seeding.' This is why *hashakah* works to purify water, even though the water remains in the pail and they are not entirely nullified, but rather they are seeded and joined [with the other water].