



Ohr Yerushalayim News

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To Fight The Good Fight

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History might not be your "thing", in which case you will hardly be surprised to discover that there was an actual "Battle of Norfolk", although why anyone would want to defend the place is anyone's guess. If the United Kingdom would be forced to cede any territory at all to the French, Norfolk would probably be up there as a potential offer along with Scunthorpe and Gateshead.

Astonishingly enough, the Battle of Norfolk took place not in mediaeval times but in 1991. "Interesting," you are no doubt thinking. "Not surprising it never made the news." How unkind. However, the reason this particular item of military history might have passed you by was that it took place not in the rolling green pastures of England, but in the undulating dunes of Al Muthanna Province, Iraq. And before you ask, rest assured that there is not a single place in the Middle East called Norfolk.

On February 27th the Iraqis were in a bad way, and they threw whatever they had at the coalition troops in the form of elements from four armoured divisions, four infantry divisions and four armoured brigades. That is a lot of kit. So what did the Coalition forces throw back? A mere four armoured divisions, a field artillery brigade and a cavalry regiment. Ah, but there was a qualitative difference between the opposing sides, if not a quantitative. The Iraqi equipment was no match for the hi-tech weaponry of their opponents. 300 coalition guns softened up the enemy with 14,000 rounds and almost 5000 rockets, destroying 22 Iraqi artillery battalions in the process. Whereas Iraq was fielding anything from T56 to T72 tanks, the coalition had M1A1 Abrams and Challenger main battle tanks that ripped through the Iraqi armour like tin openers on a 2CV, as well as air support from combat helicopters that made firing artillery impractical for the Iraqis; it's tricky to load a gun that has a Hellfire missile or two homing in on it. It was not a fair fight from the word "bang", and the rest is history and a bit of weird geography as well.

So, the moral of this story is that when entering battle make sure you really outgun the enemy if you are planning on winning. There is nothing new about this. You don't have to read Sun-Tzu to know this. Everyone had this figured out from pretty much day one or so.

This begs the question, then, as to what Bolok was thinking of. Surely when faced with a huge enemy force that has brought a whole new level of meaning to the phrase "wholesale destruction" then the last thing you are going to bring in would be a soothsayer or palm reader. At the very least you will want to form a coalition with any potential victim and then arm your force to the teeth and hit the enemy hard when they were sleeping, or during Krias haTorah. So what was this great plan? Cross Bilom's palm with silver and.....well, what exactly?

The truth is that Bolok had a bit of a problem, in that anyone who would have usually pitched into the fight was sick with fear, fear of this vast horde of Jews who not only outnumbered them militarily but outfought anyone they took on in a most spectacular way. It was like the Bnei Yisroel were fighting with fire-and-forget missiles versus WWII field guns, and they had stockpiles of materiel versus a few shells per gun on the other side. They were unstoppable, both in quantity and quality. No-one was prepared to take them on one-on-one, and when Bolok turned to his neighbours, no-one had a plan how to deal with them either. They were literally sick with fear, because when Bnei Yosroel had a fight somewhere, they dealt with everyone in the neighbourhood, not just the nation that initially annoyed them. Today we would say "like a very annoyed bull in a really tight china shop".

Perhaps faced with this utter despair Bolok figured the only thing that will work will be to score some kind of victory, however insignificant, that revealed an Achilles heel of this formidable army. This was literally the last option open to him, and he was not going down without a fight,

שבעה עשר בתמוז (נדחה)

Ta'anis Starts	1.59am
Shacharis	7.00am/8.00am
Mincha / Maariv	7.45pm
Ta'anis Ends	10.14pm

however silly. So, as the Abravanel explains, he told Bilom: "אָרְה לִי אֶת הָעַם הַזֶּה - I might be able to hit them that way. And don't fob me off, because I know את אֲשֶׁר-תִּבְרַךְ מִבְּרַךְ, וְאֲשֶׁר תֵּאָר, יוֹאֵר - you are pretty effective at cursing people."

In order to understand the rest of the sequence of events that took place between Bolok and Bilom, says the Abravanel, we need to understand what was happening to Bilom himself. Initially when Bilom set up shop he was in the stargazing and cursing trade. He used various signs that would portend whatever was the soup-de-jour, depending on who was paying him for what. In this way he was able to supply great news, not-so-great news or outright disasters depending on what the client had ordered and paid for. But now all of a sudden he had been upgraded to something new. From soothsayer and chicken-entrails diviner he literally woke up to being a Novi.

All was not sweetness and Belgian handcrafted chocolates, however, because now he faced the stark reality that everything from this point forward was limited by whatever visions Hashem was prepared to send him, and the numbers for the next Moabite lottery was clearly not on the cards. Oh yes, up until now he could pretty much deliver what he wanted whenever the fancy took him, within some limitations. Now however he was tuned into the Ultimate Channel (if that was the business you were in), but it came with a whopping drawback - it was not his to choose when he would receive divine messages, nor their content.

So Bilom was constantly telling Bolok, "Look here your Maj, I can only do what Hashem tell me to do, when He tells me so." Bolok was constantly

The Week Ahead

שבת פרשת בלק	
Candle Lighting	7.40 - 7.55pm
Mincha	7.30pm
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.12am
1st Mincha	2.00pm
2nd Mincha	6.00pm
3rd Mincha	9.21pm
Rov's Shiur	following
Maariv & Motzei Shabbos	10.26pm
Sunday	See Above
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	7.45pm
Late Maariv	10.15pm

yelling at him: "Cut out all the porkies and get on with the job. Listen, do you want another fiver? Here, have my whole wallet and the black Amex card, but just do something. Anything!" They were pretty much at loggerheads, with Bilom pleading nevuah and Bolok convinced that the erstwhile soothsayer was haggling for a better fee.

Moav and Midyon's diplomatic missions set off to Bilom, armed with "kesomim". Now, either these were to prevent Bilom from begging off due to a lack of equipment, or in fact they were going to be used by the Midyonite entourage as a third option. As it is, the Abravanel argues that it is implausible to suggest that Bolok – a Moabite king – would have sent Midyonite messengers, and therefore he interprets the verses that the Midyonite mission went on its way to wherever, and the Moabite entourage went to Bilom, which explains why only they stayed the night. He does, however, quote the Ramban as a further possibility that the way home for the Midyonim was via Bilom's town, and they did not intend to spend the night there in the first place, but to simply pass through.

Here the Abravanel puts a novel twist on the Tanchuma Rashi quotes. When the mission turned up, they had decided on a sign in order to divine the mission's success. If Bilom accepted the mission then there was a good chance he could get the job done, but if he said anything else then they will assume he's not going to be able to perform or there is some other issue at hand. But what caused them to come up with this plan? Surely they were pretty convinced he could deliver the goods. At least Bolok seemed to hinge a great deal of his plan on Bilom's abilities, so why all the doubt?

What was happening was that everyone had heard the new advertising campaign Bilom had put out explaining his new status as a novi. Out with the kishuf, in with the nevius, so the Midyonim were a little concerned. Has he switched his allegiance to some new meshuggas? Who was the Hashem that Bilom was so keen on anyway? When they arrived there, Bilom said: "Sleep the night here, because Hashem only appears to his neviim at night." They thought, nu, maybe we will get to see this Hashem as well, so we might as well stay.

When Hashem did appear to Bilom, He says to him: "Who are these people here?" The obvious question Bilom should have had was: "If You are omnipotent, you should have a pretty good idea of who these people are. In which case, maybe You are making more of Yourself than really is the case."

But Bilom does nothing of the sort. Why not?

What one has to appreciate here is that this is not the first time Hashem has spoken in such a manner. When Odom and Chavoh were hiding after they heard Hashem "strolling" in the garden, they realised that He was communicating to them an opportunity to do teshuvah. Hashem could have confronted them and accused them outright, and they would have been forced to hang their heads like naughty children, but this was not what Hashem wanted out of them. He wanted them to appreciate the enormity of their crime through their own confession. Likewise with Cayin.

Here Hashem was asking Bilom not "who are these people", but something akin to me asking a son of mine: "What are these biscuits under your pillow?" I know, and my son knows I know, and I know my son knows I know, that they are biscuits. What I want to know is what they are doing there since they had been purchased for my pleasure alone!

In much the same way Hashem was confronting Bilom with the fact that he had allowed these people into his home.

Now what Bilom should have done was informed the delegation that Hashem will never allow him to curse the Bnei Yisroel, but he was wangling for the possibility that Hashem might just change His mind, so he simply said: "Hashem does not allow me to go with you."

To Bolok, this was simply Bilom negotiating his compensation package. The Aravanel points out that a doctor might not be inclined to see a patient either because he does not feel he will be paid properly, or the patient will fail to follow the doctor's instructions fully. Unsuccessful patients are bad for business. In order to reassure Bilom, Bolok replied to him: "אלי אעשה כי-כבד אכבדך מאד, וכל אשר תאמר – don't worry about the money, I will pay you in full and overtime as well. And everything will work out OK, because I will do exactly what you say. So you are covered on both counts".

At this point Bilom lost his cool and yelled: "Even if Bolok filled his palace with gold and silver and paid me that, I cannot go, not for a small job or a big one!" What was he so annoyed about? Bilom realised that his oh-so-expensive ad campaign had failed miserably because Bolok

was not convinced he really had upgraded to novi status. This really upset Bilom because it was an affront on his dignity and an insult to his marketing group.

Mind you, what exactly did he mean by a "small" or "big" job? Says the Abravanel, Bilom could have made a pretty good lawyer because he read everything really carefully. When Hashem said to him: "You may not go with them, you may not curse them", Bilom realised that there were two issues at hand here; going with them was one, and that was a pretty small issue, and the other was cursing the Bnei Yisroel, which was a major offence.

This was in reply to Bolok who said: "אל-נא תמנע מהלך אלי" – at least just go with me; there is no need to perform any cursing although should you happen to get the urge....."

Not willing to forfeit a potentially lucrative gig, Bilom asks the second delegation to hang around the night, after all who knows? He might just get lucky.

When Hashem appears to Bilom that night and say something a little mysterious: "אם-לקרא לך באו האנשים, קום לך אתם – if they have come to invite you, you may go with them." Hadn't Hashem told him previously that there is no way he will succeed in cursing the Bnei Yisroel? Why go anywhere then?

Here again the Abravanel has a moshol that we find pretty familiar today. Should a doctor (today we would probably use a lawyer in this moshol, but it works anyway as is so I'm going with the flow) be summoned to an out-of-town patient he will ask for two fees: one for the travel and the other for the treatment, and present one bill for both fees.

This explains why Hashem does not actually change His mind at all, but sticks to what was said in the first vision. Initially Bilom states that he was going with these men to curse the Bnei Yisroel. Hashem says: well, if that's the plan, no dice. The second time round Bilom had received an invitation to at least just turn up. Well, that's a different matter altogether. Business is business.

There was a caveat, of course. Hashem told Bilom that he could only do or not do what Hashem says. This made him utterly useless, something which he failed to mention to the messengers. Bilom was determined to collect a fee no matter what.

Now of course we know the end of the story, and Bilom fails - unlike his donkey who has a starring role.

Given all this, we need to ask: nu, all very interesting, but why is this story in the Torah? Since when does the Torah do history? If the Torah is teaching history, then how come so many stories were not included? Obviously the Torah is not a history book. It's purpose in retelling any historical event has nothing to do with history, the proof being that even within the events themselves the Torah omits anything that is not germane to a given message contained within a historical context.

So, in this case the message is not about the strategic capabilities of Bnei Yisroel, their weapons systems or their head count. It is explaining how Bnei Yisroel managed to conquer enemies who were militarily superior to them in every way. Whose armies? Canaan. They were giants: i.e. very huge people who looked like they were Spartans on steroids for breakfast, lunch, supper and elevenses as well as four o'clock tea, who snacked on nails and joined the army right out of nappies. It was a warrior culture steeped in brutality and violence, and they outnumbered Bnei Yisroel and could easily outfight them. After all, a bunch of body builders versus some accountants, doctors and rabbonim – let's face it, the odds are pretty poor.

Hashem wanted the Canaanites softened up to the point of simply giving up, so he used Bilom as his foil. Of Bilom, everyone had heard about his new novi status via his advertising campaign and expected him to have super-powers now. Bolok had amassed a sizeable army. Despite all this, they failed miserably.

This was all in response to the report of the Meraglim, who claimed that the Canaanites were unconquerable. So when Yehoshua sent spies to Canaan, Rochov informed them that the army had lost its will to fight in the face of the Ivri victories.

All of this is there to teach us a simple lesson. Hezbollah have amassed 100,000 missiles on the Northern border of Israel. One could easily lose hope and give up now, and claim there is no way even 100 Iron Domes could stop all those missiles (which is true), but that's the wrong attitude. Hashem is the one who turns the tide of war, not Hezbollah. Israel has to field the best army it can, fight the best fight it can, and then leave the rest to Hashem.

Up until now, He has not disappointed us; if anything, the reverse is true.