



Ohr Yerushalayim News

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News This Week

מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to Rabbi and Mrs Y Y Katz on the recent wedding of their grandson Yitzchok Katz (London) to Shani Spitzer from Gateshead

Seeing Beyond

Rafi Black

There is an amazing parallel between the opening of this week's parsha and another parsha we are all familiar with.

This week's parsha begins with the words:

“וירא בלך ... את כל אשר עשה ישראל לאמרי. ויגה... ויקץ מואב מפני בני ישראל”

“Balak ... saw all that Yisroel had done to the Amorites. Moab became terrified ... and became disgusted because of the children of Israel. “

Contrast this to another parsha named after a non-Jewish person, Yisro.

“וישמע יתרו... את כל אשר עשה אלקם למשה ולישראל... ויחד יתרו על כל טובה...ויאמר”

“Yisro...heard all that Hashem had done for Moshe and Yisroel...and he rejoiced and said Blessed is Hashem”

Both Balak and Yisro heard/saw about the goings on with the Bnei Yisroel in the desert. Yisro heard about kiras yam suf and the war with Amalek (Rashi). He was blown away by these nissim. He decided he had to act for the positive and he came to meet the Bnei Yisroel. Yisro proclaimed his belief in Hashem and identified with the Bnei Yisroel and even helped them out by advising Moshe about his daily activities.

Contrast this to Balak, who saw the might of the Bnei Yisroel following their successful battles with Sichon and Og and he became scared. He did not consider any positive way of dealing with the situation. He did not think ‘maybe I can make peace with the Bnei Yisroel’, he went straight into defensive mode and decided ‘we can't let these Jews be successful, they must be annihilated’.

The question is, why the different reactions?

The lashonos of the Torah hint to the reason and provide a powerful lesson. Yisro heard all that “Hashem” had done. Balak saw all that “Yisroel” did. Yisro did not take what he saw on the surface, he looked deeper. He looked at why and how all these miraculous events happened. He realised this was all divine and that Hashem had chosen this nation, to protect them and to do amazing things for them. Yisro said ‘I want to be part of them’.

Balak on the other hand, saw things more superficially. He saw that the Bnei Yisroel were mighty so we said must be scared of them. He did not take a moment to think how this came to be. He did not beyond his shallow perspective and seeing.

We can take a powerful lesson from these differing reactions. How do we react to different things we hear and see about that take place in the world? Do we look for the yad Hashem and become inspired and use these experiences to come closer to Hashem, like Yisro? Or do we close our eyes to the workings of Hashem, pretend he is not involved and disconnect ourselves from Him.

Be more like Yisro when viewing the world. Don't be like Balak. Look for Hashem.

Adapted from a shiur by Rabbi Efreim Goldberg, Senior Rabbi of the Boca Raton Synagogue

BDS, Bilaam Style

Rabbi Pinchas Winston (Torah.org)

How can I curse whom G-d has not cursed, and how can I invoke wrath

שבעה עשר בתמוז

Ta'anis Starts	1.15am
Shacharis	7.00am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	7.20pm
Ta'anis Ends	10.21pm
No Late Maariv	

if G-d has not been angered? (Bamidbar 23:8)

BDS HAS ITS origins in this week's parsha. “Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions” is an Arab-led initiative to force Israel to surrender land that really belongs to the Jews. Balak and Bilaam tried to do the same thing to the Jewish people in their time, to keep them from entering the land that G-d had given to the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov.

Ostensibly, the goal of BDS is to bring Israel to its financial knees, forcing the Jewish nation, for the sake of survival, to surrender land to Arab pirates. As self-righteous as it appears, any “success” BDS has had to date is because it garners support from people who do not like the Jewish people for one reason or another. History and International Law certainly do not support its premise, as anyone interested in the truth would quickly find out.

One could argue that Balak and Bilaam were there first, so why shouldn't they defend “their” land against the invading Jewish army. The answer is, Balak was from Moav, and not one of the seven nations on the conquering list. Bilaam was from Midian, and completely off the agenda for the Jewish people. They had no business interfering with Jewish possession of the Land.

The Jewish people at that time had yet to take the land and set up a country. There was nothing yet to boycott, sanction, or divest from. Instead, Balak and Bilaam turned to something even more diabolical: a curse.

It's complicated. First of all, what is this curse business about, and secondly, how can such an EVIL person like Bilaam take advantage of it? The Talmud answers this question:

Our Rabbis taught: G-d is angry every day, but how long does His anger last? A moment. And how long is a moment? One fifty three thousand

The Week Ahead

שבת פרשת בלק

Mincha	7.30pm
Candle Lighting	7.44pm - 7.55pm
Shacharis	9.15am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.10am
Children's Group	10.45am
1st Mincha	2.00pm
2nd Mincha	6.00pm
3rd Mincha	9.28pm
Rov's Shiur	Following
Motzei Shabbos	10.33pm
Sun	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	10.25pm

eight hundred forty eighth of an hour is a moment. No creature could ever precisely fix this moment except Bilaam the wicked, of whom it is written "who knew the knowledge of the Most High"...He knew the exact hour when The Holy One, Blessed Is He, is angry...

Rebi Elazar said: "The Holy One, Blessed Is He, said to the Jewish people, 'O My people, see how many righteous acts I did for you, in that I abstained from anger all those days! Had I been angry, none would have remained or been spared of the Jewish people's enemies.'" This is what Bilaam referred to when he said, "How can I curse whom G-d has not cursed, and how can I invoke wrath if G-d has not been angered?" (Bamidbar 23:8). (Avodah Zarah 4a)

To be clear, G-d does not actually GET angry. He just ACTS that way, with all the "trimmings"...for our sake. When we get angry, it is usually emotionally-induced. We become annoyed, our blood boils, and then we lash out, either to vent, to make our opinion known, our both. It may have little to do with the welfare of the person who has angered us.

G-d's "anger" is different. It is JUSTICE-induced, meaning that it occurs for the sake of truth and justice. Therefore, if someone is a "recipient" of G-d's anger, either DIRECTLY or INDIRECTLY, then it means that JUSTICE has demanded that the person "suffer" in some way. WE may not know why, but G-d does. In OUR world there CAN be "victims." In G-d'S, there are NONE.

Does a curse really have power? Of course not. G-d is the ONLY power in the world. It can't work if HE doesn't MAKE it work. So if a curse is going to be effective in any way, it can only be because G-d has decided to "give" it power, because the subject of the curse deserves its intended consequence.

The only question is, how can such an evil person set such Divine judgment into motion? They have no merit, so why do they get to be G-d's messenger of Divine justice, and "enjoy" the destruction they themselves caused.

It is no merit to be G-d's instrument of justice in this world, unless it is to destroy evil. Wiping out a city of idol worship, like Jericho in Yehoshua's time, was a GREAT merit, and one that had to be earned. But being a punishing "strap" for good people is not a merit, but something for which a person will have to answer for at some point in time.

G-d: Why did you hit Dovid like that?

Shaul: You and I both know that if Dovid was not worthy of being hit, I could never have laid a finger on him!

G-d: Correct. But someone else could have done it. You chose to be someone who could hurt other people, and for that you are punishable. I just gave you the chance to prove that.

Shaul: Oops.

So what G-d was really saying to the Jewish people was, "Even though you were WORTHY of Divine judgment and punishment at the time Bilaam wanted to curse you, and Bilaam was "worthy" of instigating it, I suspended My judgment of you at the time, to render his attempt to curse you ineffective."

Suspended.

Not overlooked completely.

There had been a stay of judgment, but only to give the Jewish people time to do teshuvah and avoid punishment altogether. But as the parsha reveals, we didn't do the teshuvah, and disaster ensued as the result of a different kind of curse initiated by Bilaam: the women of Midian.

In the end, 176,000 Jews became involved in idol worship as a result of Bilaam's "advice," and were killed. Another 24,000 died from the tribe of Shimon because of plague. It made the total 200,000 altogether, which was quite a curse!

There are a lot of "enemies" of the Jewish people out there, most of them quite scary. But what ought to make them scary is not the power to hurt they project to the world, because they really have none. In the words of the famous Rebi Chanina ben Dosa, "It is not snakes that kill, but sin" (Brochos 33a). This is why Bilaam had the Jewish people sin first, in order to "cause" G-d to do to them what Bilaam had been hired to carry out.

But once the judgment was done, and Divine justice had been carried out, it was time to make Bilaam pay for his role in it. He got to pick up his "paycheck" for his role in the disaster at Shittim, but was executed shortly after before he could "cash it."

Forever a Donkey

Rabbi Naftali Reich (Torah.org)

How is it possible for a pompous fool to have the gift of prophecy, to communicate directly with Hashem? This question immediately springs to mind as we read the amazing story of Bilaam in this week's parshah. Bilaam had immense powers. He could marshal awesome cosmic forces to serve his designs. He could foresee the future all the way to Messianic times. And yet he seems to have been an evil, moneygrubbing buffoon ridiculed by his own donkey. How could this be?

Our Sages tell us that Bilaam did not earn his gift of prophecy through any merit of his own. Rather, it was because Hashem did not want the gentiles to have any excuses for their rejection of the Torah. He did not want them to say, "We are not to blame. The Jewish people had Moses as their prophet, but we had no one." Therefore, Hashem gave them a prophet of comparable power in the corrupt person of Bilaam.

But the question still remains: True, Bilaam did not attain prophecy because of his fine character and spiritual qualities. Nonetheless, shouldn't the very experience of communicating with Hashem have wrought fundamental changes in his character? How could he remain such a silly fool after perceiving the grandest prophetic visions?

Furthermore, when Hashem sent the angel to dissuade him from his sinister plans, why was it necessary for the angel to address him through the mouth of his donkey? Why didn't the angel speak to him directly?

The commentators point out that the word used to describe the initiation of contact between Hashem and Bilaam is almost identical to the word describing the initiation of contact between Hashem and Moses, and yet they are worlds apart. "Vayekar Elokim el Bilaam," the Torah (23:3) states. "And the Lord chanced upon Bilaam." It was like a chance encounter, brusque, businesslike, distasteful. Not so with Moses. "Vayikra el Moshe," the Torah (Leviticus 1:1) declares. "And He called to Moses." Hashem calls out to him with excitement and awaits him with anticipation, so to speak.

The difference in spelling between the words vayekar and vayikra is one aleph, and in the Torah that aleph appears in reduced size. Here lies the key to the difference between Moses and Bilaam.

It is possible for two people to have the same experience, and yet, one will be deeply affected while the other remains indifferent. Everything depends on the mindset. Moses was the quintessential humble man. The tiny aleph symbolizes the insignificance of his ani, his ego, and this humility and submission to the Creator gave him the receptiveness and clarity of vision to attain true greatness.

Bilaam, on the other hand, was a pompous, arrogant and selfish fool, and this overwhelming self-absorption clouded his vision and stunted his spiritual growth. For all his wondrous prophetic powers, he remained forever a fool. This was the message of the talking donkey. "Do not think your prophetic ability makes you exalted," Hashem was saying to him. "Behold, your donkey is also speaking, yet he remains forever a donkey." A country bumpkin once asked a great sage how to go about meeting Eliyahu Hanavi.

"According to a Kabbalistic teaching," said the sage, "if you remain silent for forty days you merit meeting the prophet."

The man clamped his mouth shut, and for the next forty days, to the immense frustration of his family, he went about his everyday business without uttering a word. The forty days passed, however, without any supernatural visitations., and the man complained to the sage.

"And what did you do during these forty days besides being silent?" asked the sage. "Did you study Torah? Did you devote time to prayer and introspection?"

The man squinted at the sage and shook his head. "I did what I always do," he said.

"Look out there," said the sage, pointing to the window. "Do you see that donkey? He hasn't spoken a word for forty days either."

In our own lives, we all experience moments of unusual transcendence from time to time, moments of intense inspiration that have the power to uplift our souls and effect in us lasting spiritual changes. But it does not happen by itself. If we can find within ourselves the spiritual strength to be receptive, if we can rise above the distractions of our mundane existence and connect with the vast eternal truths of the universe, we can discover a joy and serenity we never thought existed.