

Parashas Balak Kinder Torah



A Silver Lining

Bilaam tried his hardest to curse the Jewish people. Hashem had told him, "You shall not curse the people, for it is blessed" (Bamidbar 22:12). Yet Bilaam still tried three times to curse us. What happened? Each time, the curse turned into a blessing.

The Shelah draws a fascinating insight from this episode. We are now approaching a period of three weeks called "Bein HaMetzarim" (between the straits). Many calamities have befallen the Jewish people during this time. Yet the Shelah states that no evil descends upon the Jewish nation from Above. Why? Because we are Hashem's children. Just as a father disciplines his son, so too Hashem disciplines us. It is all for our good, to purify us. Just as pure oil produces a clear light. As Dovid HaMelech writes, "I will exalt you Hashem, for You have drawn me up [from a low place]" (Tehillim 30:2). The low place represents the *tsorus* (troubles) that befall us. They are the reason for the exaltation. The curse itself turns into a *bracha* (blessing).

The destruction of the Beis HaMikdash made way for the third Beis HaMikdash to be built in its place. This future Beis HaMikdash will never be destroyed. So too, the fasts of these days, the Seventeenth of Tammuz and the Ninth of Av will be festivals. This is hinted to in the words of Aharon HaKohen, "A festival for Hashem tomorrow!" (Shemos 32:5). He said this at the Chet Ha'egel, which occurred on the eve of the Seventeenth of Tammuz. "Tomorrow," at the end of days, this fast will become a festival. Similarly, the Ninth of Av always falls on the same day of the week as the first day of Pesach. On that day, Israel was redeemed from Mitzraim. And the verse states, "I will show you wonders (in the future redemption) as in the days when you left Mitzraim" (Micah 7:15).

Kinderlach . . .
 This is a time of national mourning for the Jewish people. We express our sadness over the tragedies that have befallen us over the centuries. The Shelah gives us a bright ray of hope. Each event purified us. Each destruction made way for future building. We can take comfort in knowing that the future holds great things in store for us. Destruction that will be building. Fasts that will be festivals. Exile that will be redemption. May it occur speedily in our days, amen!

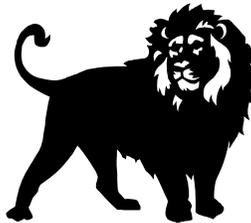
Rise like a Lion

Why were Bilaam's curses so effective? The gemora (Berachos 7a) explains that he knew when Hashem was angry with someone. At that point, he would curse him, and terrible things would happen. Rav Zalman Sorotzkin adds that this is the

meaning of the verse, "How can I curse? Hashem has not cursed. How can I anger? Hashem is not angry" (Bamidbar 23:8). Bilaam could only curse when Hashem was angry. Hashem was not upset, therefore Bilaam was stymied.

When is Hashem not pleased with us? The gemora (Berachos 6b) relates that when He comes to the Beit Kineset and does not find ten (Jews), immediately He is angry. As the verse states, "Why have I come and there is no man? I called and no one answered?" (Yishaya 50:2).

Hashem does not want to be upset with His favorite children. Therefore, He is very kind to us, and fills our hearts with the desire to rise and greet Him in the Beit Kineset. And so Bilaam praised us instead of cursing us. "How good are your tents, Yaakov, your dwelling places, Israel" (Bamidbar 24:5). We are found in our Battei Kinesiot from morning to night, praising Hashem and learning His Torah. As the verse states, "The nation



arises like a lion cub, and raises itself like a lion" (Bamidbar 23:24). Rashi explains that we rise to grab the mitzvos: tallis, Kriyas Shema, and tefillin. "It will not lie down until it consumes its prey" (ibid). We read Kriyas Shema at night on our beds, and leave our souls in Hashem's protection. If an enemy comes to wage war, He defeats them.

Kinderlach . . .
 Our places of prayer and learning are our strongholds. They bring us close to Hashem, which keeps us spiritually and physically strong. Even the wicked Bilaam could see this. Get up like a lion to pray to Hashem! Learn His Torah all day in the Beit HaMedrash. Pray to him before you close your eyes at night. Strengthen yourself and your nation. Be a lion!

Mercy on All His Creatures

Bilaam was very determined to curse the Jewish people. He rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and hit the road. Hashem's wrath flared against him, and He sent an angel to stop him. Three times the angel stood in front of them. The donkey saw him, but Bilaam did not. The donkey turned aside. Bilaam became angry, striking the donkey three times, twice with the reins, and the last time with his staff. Then a startling thing happened. Hashem opened the donkey's mouth and she spoke. "What have I done to you?" (Bamidbar 22:28). Bilaam was

unfazed. Things had gone too far. Hashem uncovered Bilaam's eyes and he saw the angel of Hashem with his sword drawn, standing in the road.

The angel began to rebuke Bilaam. "Why did you strike your donkey these three times?" (Bamidbar 22:32). A shocking statement. "From here we see how great the sin of cruelty to animals truly is," says Rav Zalman Sorotzkin. Bilaam was on his way to uproot an entire nation. Had he succeeded, *chas v'shalom* (G-d forbid), he would have committed the worst crime in history. Yet, he is first criticized for hitting his donkey.

The issue of *tsar baalei chaim* (animal's distress) expresses itself in mitzvos and halachos. If we find a pack animal struggling with its load, we have a mitzvah to unload it (Shemos 23:5). The Sefer HaChinuch explains that this teaches us compassion. The Rambam (Hilchos Rotzeach 13:13) adds that one of the reasons is *tsar baalei chaim*. Certain *melachos* may be performed on Shabbos because of *tsar baalei chaim* (Rambam Hilchos Shabbos 21:9,10. Orach Chaim 305:20). An animal's pain and suffering is something that we must be concerned about.

Kinderlach . . .
 Hashem created a beautiful world teeming with life; thousands upon thousands of creatures, each with its unique purpose. Animals are Hashem's creations, and should be treated as such. We have mitzvos to relieve their pain when they are in *tsar* (distress). How much more so may we not cause them *tsar* ourselves. Compassion is the trademark of a Jew. Have compassion for all of Hashem's creations, large and small. Forger about causing *tsar* baalei chaim.

Parasha Questions:

- How did Bilaam die? (Rashi 22:23)
- What did Bilaam do when he saw the Angel of Hashem? (22:31)
- Name some mitzvos that we perform with dirt. (Rashi 23:10)
- How many altars did Balak build for Bilaam? (23:1, 14, 29)

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