

Snapshot Torah



GUIDE TO THE WEEKLY PARSHAH

ISSUE 41

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BALAK

7th Tammuz 5774

Kohen - First Aliya:

Chapter 22, verses 2 - 12

- ✚ Balak, king of Moab, heard what Bnai Yisrael did to the Amorites and fears that Moab will be their next target. He assembles the elders from neighbouring Midian, who all agree to ask Balaam (Bilam) the sorcerer / Prophet to go and curse the Israelites so they can be defeated in battle.
- ✚ When a delegation of elders makes their proposition to Balaam, he tells them they must wait until he had spoken to Hashem, before he agrees or not.
- ✚ Hashem speaks to Balaam, ordering him not to curse his people because they are blessed.

Levi - Second Aliya:

Chapter 22, verses 13 - 20

- ✚ Balaam sends the messengers back to Balak, with his decision of no. However Balak is persistent and sends delegation after delegation until Hashem finally consents but warns Balaam to only say what Hashem tells him.

Sh'lishi - Third Aliya:

Chapter 22, verses 21 - 35

- ✚ On the way back to Balak, an angel tries to stop Balaam, Balaam's donkey sees the angel and veers off the path out of its way. Balaam hits the donkey, forcing him to return back to the path but the angel is still standing there so veers off the path once more, this time squashing Balaam's leg against a wall.
- ✚ Balaam strikes the donkey again and continues down the path. This time the angel has blocked the path completely, so the Donkey halts all together and refuses to move.
- ✚ Balaam beats the donkey again, so the donkey starts talking, asking him why Balaam had hit him three times, when all he was doing was protecting him from the angel.
- ✚ Hashem reveals the angel to Balaam, who praises the donkey for saving Balaam's life. Balaam admits his guilt and offers to turn back. The Angel allows Balaam to continue, but reminds him to only recite the words Hashem will ask him to say.

R'VI' - Fourth Aliya:

Chapter 22, verse 36 - Chapter 23, verse 12

- ✚ Balaam explains this to Balak but he refuses to listen. Together they set up seven altars, looking over the Bnai Yisrael's camp. Instead of curses Balaam blesses them by saying 'How good are your tents, Yaacov, your dwelling places, Israel.'

Chamishi - Fifth Aliya:

Chapter 23, verses 13 – 26 and

Shishi - Sixth Aliya:

Chapter 23, verse 27 - Chapter 24, verse 13

- ✚ Balak and Balaam sets up seven altars in two other places, but each time Balaam tried to curse Bnai Yisrael, he showered them with more blessings.
- ✚ Balak is now frustrated, especially when Balaam admits he can only say the words, Hashem puts in his mouth. So Balak sends him back home.

Sh'vi'i - Seventh Aliya:

Chapter 24, verse 14 - Chapter 25, verse 9

- ✚ Bnai Yisrael are dwelling in Shittim. The daughters of Moab and Midyan begin to entice the Jewish men, convincing them to bow down and worship their idol Baal-Peor.
- ✚ A severe plague suddenly ravished the camp, so Moshe orders his judges to kill anyone who practices idolatry.
- ✚ One man brazenly brings a Midianite woman into the presence of Moshe. Pinchas, (Aaron's grandson) takes a spear and stabs them both through the heart simultaneously. Stopping the plague.
- ✚ All told twenty four thousand people had died because of it.

Haftorah – MICAH, Chapter 5 verse 6 to Chapter 6 verse 8

OVERVIEW:

- ✚ The Navi (prophet) Micah prophesies about what will occur after the war of Gog and Magog, the war which precedes the coming of the Moshiach and the Final Redemption.
- ✚ Micah then goes on to rebuke the Jewish people for not observing Hashem's commandments, calling upon witness the "mountains and hills" (a reference to our Patriarchs and Matriarchs) to testify about all the great things Hashem had done for them. For example, taking them out of Egypt etc.
- ✚ In response, the Jewish people claim that they do not know how to serve Hashem properly and ask Micah for guidance. Micah answers them by saying that everything they need is contained in the Torah, but basically they must obey Hashem's demands by performing Mitzvahs and to love your fellow man.

LINK TO SEDRA READING:

- ✚ This week's Haftorah makes mention of the incident of Balak the king of Moab hiring the sorcerer Balaam to curse the Jewish people which is the main focus of this week's Torah reading.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION:

I think it's remarkable to find that one of the most traditional morning blessing recited at synagogues around the world begins with words attributed to Balaam, the enigmatic and self-styled prophet:- Mah Tov: "How lovely are your tents, O Jacob; your dwelling places, O Israel!"

The Mah Tov prayer itself is a mixture of verses from different places in the Tanach, mainly from this week's sedra and Tehilim. The main theme of Mah Tov is to express our appreciation for being able to come together as a Minyan and worship in a Makom Kodesh (holy place). Mah Tov helps us to focus our attitude, readying ourselves before we enter the synagogue to pray before Hashem. This is why we have the custom is to recite Mah Tov as soon as we enter a synagogue or shortly thereafter because it sets you up with the right kind of mind-set on why you are there and to focus on your Davening (praying to Hashem.)

Mah Tov was first uttered by Balaam, who was an outsider of Israel, who nevertheless was awestruck with the glory of the "God of Israel". In the same way, we should seek to apprehend and behold the glory of Hashem and incorporate him in our lives.

Our sage's say that the word "tent" recited by Balaam refers to the inner life of a person, our spiritual Neshama (Soul); expressing how we really feel inside. Whereas the word "dwelling" relates to our outer, physical life which conveys our place or circumstance, which we happen to be facing at any particular time. Together, these inner and the outer assets, mark the quality of our lives. The inner life "tent" is the starting point, since we must first learn to live in peace with ourselves; for which I strongly believe is vital in developing our good Middos (Character traits).

To enable to do this properly, we first have to come to terms and tolerate our own and other peoples shortcomings and show compassion towards their frailties in order to make them strong. This is sometimes referred to as shalom ba'bayis, (peace in the home or of the self). Such inner peace is the greatest of blessings, anyone could wish us with since without it we will cling to pain, fear, and anger, and suffering.

May Hashem grant Balaam's blessing he gave to us, so we can all live together in harmony and peace. Amen.

