

Snapshot Torah



GUIDE TO THE WEEKLY PARSHA

ISSUE 36

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BALAK

17th Tammuz 5775

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'lilshi - 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 find the Story of Balaam very intriguing. It seems that Hashem is indecisive and easily persuaded when responding to Balaam's requests but this couldn't be further from the truth. Balak the king of Moab sends messengers to Balaam, bidding him to go and curse Bnai Yisrael. At first Balaam behaves correctly, asking Hashem's permission before taking on such an endeavour. Not surprisingly Hashem refused, leaving Balaam sending the messengers away to inform Balak that the answer is no.

Undeterred, Balak sent out more envoys, this time laden with gifts to get Balaam to change his mind and once again Balaam appears to do the right thing, asking for Hashem's permission to go. Unpredictably this time Hashem grants his wish and allows him to leave.

Bnai Yisrael were on the brink of entering the land of Israel and being a prophet, equalling the same stature as Moshe, Balaam was handed on a plate a chance to make history. He had the opportunity to demonstrate the power of Hashem against the deception of the Moabites and their neighboring nation's false beliefs of other deities, aiding them in turning away from idolatry and follow in the ways of Hashem, bringing about the commencement of the Messianic Era. ; However Balaam wasted this great opportunity and let Hashem and the whole world down badly.

Balaam believed he could outsmart Hashem and despite the Angel's warning whom he encounters on route to Balak, is persistent and goes from place to place trying to find an angle from which he would be able to twist Hashem's words of blessings into curses, fulfilling Balak's request instead of Hashem's. Even though it backfired on him, with Balaam pronouncing a blessing towards us and not a curse. The damage had been done and as we read towards the end of the Parsha; Balaam's actions and words caused the children of Israel to sin and to suffer a terrible plague as a consequence.

This episode is a classic lesson relating to free will. It's clear to me that there's no way Hashem wanted Bnai Yisrael cursed; but when a person is led on a path that they desire to travel on. Hashem doesn't stop them. We all have choices in our lives; yet whatever path we decide to take, Hashem will be our willing vehicle, guiding us along the way of being successful.

Balaam had many chances to do the right thing but fame and greed took over and he let them all pass him by, ultimately losing everything. The lesson I take from this week's sedra is as follows. We must learn to take up all the opportunities we are offered and use them to make Hashem's true goals, our own.

