



Snapshot Torah



GUIDE TO THE WEEKLY PARSHA

ISSUE 41

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BALAK

17th Tammuz 5776

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.

GEMATRIA LINKED TO THE SEDRA:

- Balaam blessed Bnai Yisrael that they will dwell in solitude. ישן לבד עם חן Hayn am l'vadad yishkon.
- The numerical value of this phrase 420 is the same as משיח בימי M'shiach Moshiah (During the days of the Moshiach. Inferring to when we will be finally left alone, undisturbed by our enemies.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION:

One of the main images in Parsha Balak is that of Balaam's talking donkey. Throughout the whole Tanach there has only been one other time when an animal has spoken. It occurred back in the Garden of Eden where a serpent seduced Adam and Chava to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. The main similarities between these two instances when an animal spoke, are both related to curses. The outcome of the conversation between the snake and Chava was a four-fold curse on Adam, Chava, the serpent, and the earth. The conversation between Balaam and his donkey in our Parsha also occurs in context of a curse. However, what I find intriguing is the similarity in the structure of the dialogue between animal and man in both cases. The Snake and Donkey addresses the human first, then the human responds to which the animal responds back. Let's delve a bit further into what these two episodes represent and what we can glean from them regarding our own challenges in life.

Regarding Balaam's donkey, the Torah notes that Hashem had to open its mouth for words to come out; stressing that this was a miracle. Whereas. In reference to the primordial snake in the Garden of Eden, it seems that no such miracle was required—The serpent just simply spoke. This infers that the origin and effect of the snake's words is more commonplace in our experience than the origin and effect of the donkey's words. Speech is the defining human faculty which separates us from all animals. So when an animal is granted the power of speech it was in order to personify in a caricature-like image to express a particular notion which matches the same character trait to whom they are talking to and the way they naturally think and speak themselves.

There's no doubt that the snake represents a specific archetypal assault on our innate faith in Hashem and our ability to act according to His will. Yet conceptually, the donkey like the serpent represents a specific type of assault on our innate faith too. The strategy used by the snake was opportunism. The argument basically boiling down to, "If you eat from this forbidden fruit, you will become like Hashem. Except what the snake fails to mention, is the fact there will be consequences that can never be reconciled or fixed, if you do. Just like in life **'If only I read the small print first before committing myself'**

Turning to the donkey's words we find that they were meant to justify its actions. The donkey's short speech is basically an apology. Although never stated explicitly, the donkey is justifying itself by explaining that everything it did which at the time angered you (Balaam), I did for your sake—in this case saving him from Ignoring one of Hashem's angels. Meaning a donkey's genetic makeup is always to serve faithfully without questioning their master. The Donkey was stating the obvious "I've always been loyal to you. Balaam in the past, so, why would you think I'll stop now."

Interestingly these two conversations are diametrically opposite to one another. Opportunism represented by the snake, causes a person to subconsciously accept the argument that "the end justifies the means." The snake seduces with the possibility of becoming a god and overcoming nature, seducing a person into doing something that they know is wrong is easy because they think they are being offered a once in a lifetime opportunity which would be lost if you don't act now. (in Chava's case, to be like Hashem). while the donkey debates the merits of accepting the fact that nature cannot be controlled as it is constant. Which is why we should be abiding and following in the footsteps of Hashem without question or trying to second guess him. An encounter with a spiritual guide is no less surprising than a speaking snake or donkey. But, they are no different than the snake or the donkey, in that their ultimate purpose is to test the sincerity and earnestness. The lesson here is that in order to meet, confront and to be able to overcome our personal challenges in life, we must simply and earnestly devote ourselves to the Torah's teachings and to the performance of *mitzvot* because just like the donkey in this week's sedra, that is what our genetic make-up is too. Serving Hashem unconditionally.

