

VICTORY IS WITH-IN-REACH

by Rabbi Label Lam

How goodly are your tents Yaakov, your dwelling places Israel... (Bamidbar 24:5)

He perceived no iniquity in Jacob and saw no perversity in Israel. HASHEM his G-d is with him and the friendship of the King is in him. (Bamidbar 23:21)

The friendship of the king is in him: His keen observation is upon Israel...This informs that HASHEM is their King and they are His Nation...the way a people rejoice when their king is in their midst... (Malbim)

Israel settled in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of the Moabites. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and prostrated themselves to their gods. Israel became attached to Baal Peor, and the anger of HASHEM flared against Israel. (Bamidbar 25:1-3)

And the people began to commit harlotry: to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab: As a result of Bilaam's advice, as is stated in [the chapter entitled] "Cheilek" (Sanhedrin 106a). (Rahi)

What went so terribly wrong? Bilaam could find no fault in Israel even for a boat load of money and then without notice we have a national crisis- a contagion of immorality and idolatry! What happened?

It is fascinating to take note of something highly unusual in this week's Torah narrative. Since the spotlight of history found Avraham as its protagonist and he became the favored one to guide the world to its destiny, no other personage occupies the attention of the Torah unless it included somehow the Patriarchs or the Matriarchs or the tribes etc.

Now suddenly we are treated to a tragicomedy of errors as Bilaam and Balak bungle an attempt at cursing Israel. The rest of the world, with all its political intrigue might also make interest reporting, but the Torah is not a history book. It is HASHEM's teaching book! They are conspicuous by their purposeful absence.

Why then focus ever so briefly on Bilaam and Balak? We can easily answer that again Israel is still the focal point of their foolish efforts. We are granted a brief glimpse into the hostile mindset and obnoxious ambitions of those around us and how we are shielded even when we are blissfully unaware of the dangers that lurk on the horizon. That's important enough to know but another point

becomes crystal clear in the very end of the episode.

Bilaam was unsuccessful at arousing HASHEM's anger at Israel! However, Bilaam learned something valuable that we should be aware of because of its strategic value. We don't have to bother fighting Bilaam or to answer the Bilaam's of the world. Our sages remind us, "A little bit of light chases away a lot of darkness!" That darkness is expelled at the speed of light! What did Bilaam do? He conspired to corrupt Israel. He helped create the vulnerability he could not find! He caused the People of Israel to invite Divine rage and wrath upon themselves. We thereby became our own worst enemies! We don't have to focus on any of the negativity swirling around us. Our fate is in our hands. Bilaam got it right, "They are a nation that dwells alone!"

Pardon the crude sports analogy but it is just so instructive. This is how we find ourselves in the world! It's the NBA basketball championships- the 7th and final game. The clock has just run out! You have been fouled in the last play and entitled to two foul shots. Your team is down by one. If you make one, the game goes into overtime and there is a second chance to win it. If you make both shots you are crowned champs! If you miss both, you are labeled for all time a chump, a choke- a loser!

The game is in the "away" arena. You are the visiting team! You alone are on the line! The fans are screaming and booing and doing their best to distract you to make you miss. You know what has to be done. You have trained your whole life for this moment and dreamed of this opportunity. You prepare by focusing and remembering all that you have practiced and learned till now. You filter out thereby hostile spirits that fills the building! If you pay even a little bit of attention to them you are lost! If you can block it out and do what you know, **victory is with-in-reach**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.