

THE LINGERING EVIL

by Rabbi Label Lam

The children of Israel journeyed and encamped in the plains of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho. Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. Moab became terrified of the people, for they were numerous, and Moab became disgusted because of the children of Israel. **Moab said to the elders of Midian**, "Now this assembly will eat up everything around us, as the ox eats up the greens of the field. Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time. (Bamidbar 22:1-4)

to the elders of Midian: But did they not always hate each other, as it says, "who defeated Midian in the field of Moab" (Gen. 36:35), when Midian came against Moab in battle? However, because of their mutual fear of Israel they made peace with each other... – Rashi

Something is seriously wrong with this picture. Balak, the king of Moab reaches out to his arch enemy Midian to request assistance to defeat their common enemy Israel. There is nothing terribly unusual about that. The old political strategy applied then as it did then, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend". When it comes to survival political expedience supersedes all principles. The old in politics is, "there are no permanent friends, only permanent interests." It makes perfect sense that Bilaam and Balak team up. What is that does not make sense?

If it is survival they seek and that's what drives their partnership, there is an easier solution and it's not a secret. Bilaam himself declares in reference to the Jewish People, "He crouches and lies like a lion and like a lioness; who will dare rouse him? **Those who bless you shall be blessed, and those who curse you shall be cursed.** (Bamidbar 24:9) Bless them! Endorse, promote, encourage, praise the Jewish Nation! In the end he did but it was with an unwilling heart. All that they had to do was to become willful appreciators of the Nation of Israel. It's their desperate opposition that is the cause of their own problem.

Why the big resistance? It is true that on the eve of the Holy Shabbos and at the edge of history, when our destiny is about to be realized, we can expect conflict. However, here, is it really death they dread or is there something else that frightens them more than death, and which triggers their defiance?!

The Talmud tells us that the 2nd Chapter of Tehillim is a direct window, a futuristic vision of the attitudes and schemes of the nations of the world on the heels of the Messianic Era. It begins like this: "Why do the nations congregate and why do the peoples think of worthless plans? Why do the

kings posture themselves and the rulers take council together against HASHEM and His anointed!?" About this prophetic verse Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains more than 150 years ago, that the reason why the nations gather noisily together is specifically to conspire against HASHEM and His anointed.

He writes, ***"They all, consciously or unconsciously, have one common goal, namely to emancipate themselves from the sovereignty of the one supreme principle, that of the dutiful obedience to the moral Law of G-d which came to their awareness through the historical fact of the existence of His people and of His anointed. Only to this law did G-d promise His aid and furtherance. Upon this law did G-d build His world order, and only through the observance of this law can nations attain enduring peace in their domestic and foreign relations. The refusal to swear allegiance to this moral law because of considerations of personal interest, power, fame, and wealth is the reason for the unhealthy internal and external relationships in the lives of the nations. Instead of seeking a cure for this state of affairs upon the only path that leads to the true goal, all the leaders of the lives and activities of the nations are perversely engaged in a fight against this sole principle of salvation. The cure actually lies precisely there where they think they can find the cause for their troubles, while they seek the cure in that which actually only aggravates the lingering evil."***