

# BALAK: CAN YOU SEE IT?

*by Shlomo Katz*

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**Today's Learning:**  
**Niddah 6:13-14**  
**O.C. 238:1-239:1**  
**Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bechorot 21**  
**Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nedarim 30**

The prophet Bilam says in this week's parashah (24:17), "I shall see him, but not now, I shall look at him, but it is not near." In fact, R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) writes, this statement is one that every person must acknowledge, like it or not. He explains:

Whether he accepts it or not, every person is responsible for the future. Sometimes man tries to throw off this yoke, but it is in vain. By nature, man prepares for tomorrow. It is true that there are some who live according to the dictum, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," but they are in the minority. In general, man worries about and plans for his sustenance in the future.

Man's obligation to think about the future is reflected in the laws of Shabbat. Man is expected to

prepare before Shabbat that which he will eat on Shabbat. In the Gemara's words, "If one did not toil on the eve of Shabbat, what will he eat on Shabbat?" More than that, food that was not made ready before Shabbat is muktzeh; it may not be handled on Shabbat. This teaches that man has no right to eat on Shabbat unless he sees the big picture, unless he has the future in his sights before Shabbat.

The Shabbat for which man must prepare is not only the day that comes at the end of the week. There is also that time in the future that is called, "The day which is all Shabbat." Man must keep his focus and plan for that Shabbat as well. In the words of our Sages, "Some tomorrows come immediately, while some tomorrows are more distant." Only one who prepares for that distant tomorrow, only one who builds for future generations, is living his life properly. (Yemei Zicharon p.185)

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*"Moav became very frightened of the am / people, because it was numerous, and Moav was disgusted in the face of Bnei Yisrael." (22:3)*

R' Nosson Teomim z"l (the Krystynopoler Rav in New York; died 1983) writes: The word "am" usually refers to the Erev Rav, those who attached themselves to the Jewish people at the time of the Exodus. Moav feared them most of all because they imitated the gentiles, behavior that made them a threat to the other nations.

On the other hand, "Bnei Yisrael" refers to those who observe Torah and mitzvot. Only after Moav has reason to fear the Erev Rav will it fear Bnei Yisrael also.

(Bar Pachtei)

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*"Come curse Yaakov for me, come bring anger upon Yisrael."*

*"How can I curse? -- Kel has not cursed. How can I anger? --Hashem is not angry. From the top of rocks I see it [the nation], and from hills do I see it." (23:7-9)*

R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (prominent Hungarian rabbi and rosh yeshiva; died 1928) explains these verses based on two introductions.

First, the names "Yaakov" and "Yisrael" both allude to G-d. The gematria of "Yaakov" is a multiple of the gematria of Hashem's four-letter Name ( $7 \times 26 = 182$ ). The name "Yisrael" contains G-d's Name -

Kel - within it.

Second, the halachah is that when one prays for a person who is ill, one must mention the person's name. The exception is if one is in the presence of the ill person; then his or her name need not be mentioned. (We learn this from Moshe's prayer for Miriam at the end of Parashat Be'ha'alotecha. He said simply: "Please, Hashem, heal her now.") Presumably, writes R' Gruenwald, the same thing applies when one curses. If he is cursing someone who is in front of him, he does not need to mention the person's name. Otherwise, he does need to mention it.

Balak said to Bilam, "Come curse Yaakov for me, come bring anger upon Yisrael." Just curse them from where you are, using their name, and be done with it. However, that would require Bilam to curse Bnei Yisrael by name, and he did not wish to do that. After all, their names, Yaakov and Yisrael, both contain the name of G-d, and one who blasphemes G-d incurs the death penalty. Therefore Bilam said, "How can I curse? -- Kel has not cursed. How can I anger? -- Hashem is not angry." He meant: How can I curse? -- I would have to curse "Kel." How can I anger? -- I would have to anger "Hashem."

What is the solution? If from the top of rocks I see the nation, and from hills do I see it. Then I can curse without using their names.

(Keren Le'David)

*"He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no perversity in Yisrael. Hashem his G-d is with him . . ."*  
(23:21)

Can this be true? Don't our Sages teach that one will be punished if he takes the attitude that "G-d overlooks sins"?

R' Noach Shalom Brazovsky z"l (the Slonimer Rebbe in Yerushalayim) explains: When will G-d overlook sins? If a person sins because he cannot overcome his yetzer hara, but at the same time that he commits the sin, he is broken within because he dreads the thought of transgressing G-d's Will. This is the meaning of the verse: "He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no perversity in Yisrael." When? "When Hashem his G-d is with him" at the time he sins.

(Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

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*"He has told you, man, what is good, and what Hashem seeks from you - only the performance of*

*justice, the love of kindness, and walking humbly with your G-d." (From the Haftarah; Michah 6:8)*

R' Yissachar Dov Rokeach z"l (the Belzer Rebbe; died 1927) comments: In holy work Noam Elimelech (by R' Elimelech of Lizhensk z"l; died 1787) notes that some people are expert at concealing their good deeds from others, but they themselves are very conscious of their mitzvot. This is not proper. Rather, a person has to serve Hashem such that even he is not aware of his good deeds. This is why our verse does not say, "What Hashem seeks from you [is] walk humbly with your G-d." Instead the prophet says that G-d desires "walking" humbly with G-d. This implies an activity that is engaged in subconsciously.

We read in Yirmiyah (23:24), "Can a man hide in concealments and I, I will not see him?" R' Uri of Strelisk z"l (see page 4) explained this verse as follows: If a man hides in concealments -- even if he is humble -- if he has an "I" -- if he is aware of his own good deeds - then I, G-d, will not see him.

R' Yissachar Dov continues: How can a person attain the level of service that these verses demand? It is by fulfilling the injunction (Tehilim 16:8), "I have set Hashem before me always." If a person always focuses on G-d's greatness, he will not become haughty about his own service of G-d. [He will realize that whatever he does is insufficient compared to how Hashem is entitled to be served.] In this way we can understand the words of R' Moshe Isserles z"l (Poland ; 1525-1572) in his gloss to the first paragraph of the Shulchan Aruch: "I have set Hashem before me always is a major rule of the Torah and of the ways of tzaddikim who walk before G-d." These tzaddikim who walk before G-d are the ones alluded to in our haftarah. How does one attain "walking humbly with your G-d"? By always setting Hashem before him.

(Likkutei Amarim Maharid)

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## R' Uri of Strelisk z"l

R' Uri was born in a village near Janow, Galicia in 1757. Before R' Uri's birth. R' Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch, told our subject's father (whose name was Pinchas) that his son would have a unique soul and would light up the world of Judaism.

In his youth, R' Uri lived in Lvov where he studied Torah assiduously. He also traveled to many of the chassidic leaders of the generation: R' Elimelech of Lizhensk, R' Yaakov Yosef of Ostraha, R' Pinchas of Koretz, R' Mordechai of Neschiz, and R' Zusia of Annopol. However, once R' Uri met R' Shlomo of Karlin, he made that sage his mentor and became his primary disciple.

In 1792, R' Shlomo was murdered, and R' Uri returned to Lvov and began to conduct himself as a chassidic rebbe. At first, his following was small and he was oppressed terribly by the mitnagdim (literally "opponents") of Lvov. Gradually, however, his influence widened.

From Lvov, R' Uri moved to Strelisk, and there his following grew even more. The centerpiece of R' Uri's chassidic movement was prayer with great emotion. His prayer, which followed the nussach of Karlin, was mixed with "roars" and "shouts" and lasted for many hours. It was this behavior that earned R' Uri the title "Saraph" / "fiery angel."

Most of R' Uri's chassidim were extremely poor, and R' Uri's ideology glorified poverty. He particularly objected to rebbes whose fame was based on performing miracles.

Among R' Uri's notable disciples were R' Shalom Rokeach of Belz, R' Zvi Hirsch of Rimanov and R' Isaac of Zhidachov. R' Uri died in 1826 and his son R' Shlomo succeeded him as rebbe. However, he lived for only a few months after his father and was followed in the leadership by R' Yehuda Zvi of Strettin. (Encyclopedia La'chassidut).

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