

MIXED MULTITUDE OF TROUBLES

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

And Balak son of Tzippor saw all that Israel did to the Amori. Moav were very afraid because the people were many, and they became very agitated because of the Children of Israel. (Bamidbar 22:2)

According to pshat (the simple understanding) of the above verses, we are talking only about the Children of Israel. However, in the Hebrew text, the reference to "the people" is "ha-umm," which, according to tradition, usually refers to the "Erev Rav," the Mixed Multitude that left Egypt with the Jewish people.

If so, that would explain an apparent repetition in the second posuk. The posuk would flow better if it simply said:

Moav was very afraid and agitated because of the Children of Israel.

However, there is a reference both to "the people," and, the "Children of Israel," the first being a source of great fear, and, the second group being a source of great agitation. Furthermore, is it not safe to assume that if the first group was a source of great fear, it would also cause great anxiousness as well?

Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to assume that Balak and Moav were well aware of the fact that the Jewish camp contained two parts, an essential part -- the smaller body of Jewish-born individuals referred to as the "Children of Israel" -- and, a second entity made up of converts to Judaism -- the Erev Rav -- which were very great in number.

There is precedence for this idea:

Paroah noticed these two levels, and with regard to the converts, he said, "Behold! the people of the Children of Israel are many and stronger than us Š" (Shemos 1:9); this referred to the Erev Rav that left with Israel, who were twice the amount of the Jewish people, as our rabbis have taught (Mechilta, Bo, q.v. v'gum Erev Rav alah). They were "the people of B'nei Yisroel," but not B'nei Yisroel themselves, and they were many and more powerful than the rest of the Egyptians called "the people of Paroah.

This was, however, not the case with respect to Israel, as is elucidated from the posuk, "Š and

fighting (sholishim) men upon all of them." (Shemos 14:7); there were thirty (shloshim) Egyptians to every Jew. Concerning B'nei Yisroel themselves they said, "Š they were bothered because of B'nei Yisroel" (Shemos 1:12; that is, like thorns in their eyes; Sotah 11a). It does not say "because of THE PEOPLE of B'nei Yisroel," because their main hatred was directed toward B'nei Yisroel themselves. Therefore Paroah said, "Let us deal wisely with them" (Shemos 1:10), that is, with Israel themselves, which will solve the problem of the converts, the "People of B'nei Yisroel." (Arizal, Sha'arei HaPesukim)

You'll notice that Paroah also had no fear of the numbers of the Jewish people, but, like Moav, was only greatly agitated by them. In fact, like Paroah before him, Balak and Moav do not simply attack "the people" outright, but, deal "wisely" with them, by contracting Bilaam -- one of Paroah's chief advisors back at the time of Jewish enslavement.

By why is everyone so afraid of the Erev Rav, even if they are so numerous? Don't they usually undermine Jewish efforts to live by Torah?

So, Paroah himself answers that question:

"Let us deal wisely with them, in case they increase, and in the event that war occurs that they join our enemy and fight against us and escape the land." (Shemos 1:10)

Who is the "they," and who is the "enemy" that makes Paroah so nervous? Pshat-speaking, "they" are the Jewish people living within the borders of Egypt, and, the "enemy" is any OUTSIDE nation that might attack Egypt in the future. However, according to this deeper explanation of the words, "they" are the EREV RAV, and the "enemy," like has usually been the case throughout ALL of Jewish history, is the JEWISH PEOPLE themselves -- the direct descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, as well as all the "righteous converts" -- as weak as they REALLY may be at the time.

After all, how strong were the Jews of Hitler's (may his name be erased) Germany? How mighty have the Jews EVER been, politically- and militarily-speaking? Yet, we have been, and still are today (like in Iran, for example, and even in the Mid-West of the good ole USA, according to "The New York Times Magazine," in an article about survivalists in the January 1999 issue) viewed as one of the most dangerous "enemies" in the history of the mankind!

Is it not one of the biggest ironies of all time?!

But then again, we can't say this was not foretold:

Rav Chisda and Rabbah the son of Rav Huna both said: Why is it called "Sinai"? Because it is the mountain from which hatred (Hebrew: sinah) came down to the Nations-of-the-World ... (Shabbos 89a)

This, of course, prompts a whole different discussion (which is detailed in "The Big Picture"). However, the question here is what about the Erev Rav -- why did Paroah and Moav fear them? If

anything, they seem to be an easy mark as far as unraveling their connection to anything Jewish?

Well, yes, and no. Paroah wasn't born yesterday, nor was Balak and his people. They knew only too well that, for all of their problem-causing tendencies, they DID convert to Judaism (according to the Arizal), they had traveled with the Jewish people for forty years in the desert, and had witnessed the hand of G-d in all that had occurred for the Jewish people throughout their short history. They HAD been at Mt. Sinai and had experienced Kabbalos HaTorah; something had to be there inside of them.

Indeed, as the Arizal explains elsewhere, there was something very special deep within the Erev Rav, something deep within their very souls. And, Paroah and Balak were terrified of stirring that up, for, to instigate the Erev Rav in the WRONG direction is cause them to join up with the small and seemingly harmless Children of Israel, and to transform them into a mighty and powerful nation. And that's when all the fun begins for the nations of the world.

Therefore, the first priority of the day for any anti-Semite, be he a major on or minor one, is to "neutralize" the Erev Rav; to turn them against Torah, and to keep them from sympathizing with their "mother ship," B'nei Yisroel.

Who is the Erev Rav today?

It is clear that, just like there is no pure-bred Amaleki today (after so many years of inter-marriage of peoples; Brochos 28a), there is no pure-bred Erev Rav either. However, as the Arizal reveals, the gematria of "erev rav" (ayin-reish-bais, reish-bais, or, 70+200+2+200+2) is equal to "474," the same numerical value of the Hebrew word "da'as" (dalet-ayin-tav, or, 4+70+400; Sha'ar HaPesukim, Parashas Shemos) -- as in, Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah, and this will have to be the topic of the next d'var Torah, b"H.

Shabbos Day:

And he sent messengers to Bilaam son of Beor (Bamidbar 22:5)

One of the first entries in the Zohar on this week's parshah says so much through so little. The Zohar points out that the two names of Balak and Bilaam, when combined (and scrambled), yield two different, but equally familiar words: Amalek and Bavel (Babylonia). Amalek, of course, is THE nation that stands as the polar extreme of the Jewish people, and, Bavel was the location to which the Jewish people were first exiled, and where they met up with the most notorious descendant of Amalek ever: Haman the Evil!

Of Haman it says:

Where is Haman [referred to] in the Torah? "(Hamin) From the tree Š" (Bereishis 3:11). (Chullin 139b)

It's a play on the word "hamin," which is spelled the same way as the name "Haman" (heh-mem-nun), but it works. It works, because, whether this is really true or not doesn't really matter; conceptually, it is 100% accurate: had Adam and Chava not eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil there could have been no Amalek, and therefore, no Haman.

For, the gematria of the word "Amalek" is equal to that for the Hebrew word "doubt": sufek, which equals "240." The single most dramatic consequence of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil against the will of G-d, and the cause of all other ills and evils throughout history, including death itself, was reduced intellectual and spiritual clarity.

As the Torah itself points out, the word "bavel" shares the same conceptual origin:

Therefore, G-d scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth, and they stopped building the city, which is called "Bavel," be-cause that is where G-d confounded [navlah] the language of the whole earth. (Bereishis 11:8-9)

Of all the responses with which G-d could have hit the people of the tower, why did changing and confusing their speech make the top of the list? Only because speaking the same language facilitated expedient construction of the tower and rebellion against G-d? Unlikely.

Rather, as Onkeles points out back at the beginning of man's entrance onto the stage of history (Bereishis 2:7), speech represents man's godliness, and, later, the purpose of the entire Jewish nation (Sanhedrin 99b). Hence, G-d confused their language because they confused the purpose of creation. They were plagued by doubt about G-d and the purpose of creation, and, as a result, plagued mankind with their doubt. This is the deep, inherent, profound, and extremely dangerous connection between Amalek and Bavel, and the offspring of the union of Balak and Bilaam -- whose whole power was in his speech (Rashi, Bamidbar 22:4).

What was their goal? To destroy the Jewish people? Could they do that which the giants they had hired for protection -- Sichon and Og -- could not do? Could they succeed where Paroah and the elite of the Egyptian army failed miserably?

Says the Shem M'Shmuel: Of course not. So, what then were they up to? They certainly looked busy trying to undermine the strength and invulnerability of the Jewish people! They were, but not by destroying them, answers the Shem M'Shmuel, but by creating a situation that would result in at least PART of the Jewish nation not wanting to entire Eretz Yisroel.

Were they successful?

You better believe it, for, because of Balak's and Bilaam's influence, Reuven and Gad later requested to remain on the east of the Jordan river -- for reasons of livelihood, of all things -- and THAT, says the Midrash Rabbah, was the official spiritual beginning of the Babylonian Exile! Which, we can assume, we have never recovered from, and which haunts us to this very day, thanks to Balak and Bilaam.

For, as Rav Wolfson (Emunas Itechah, BeHa'alosecha) points out, the word "Yardein" (Jordan), the river the Jewish people had to cross to enter Eretz Yisroel, is made up of two parts: yarad and the letter "nun." The "nun," of course, refers to the "Nun Sha'arei Binah," the famous "Fifty Gates of Understanding," that, apparently, would have descended (yarad) down to the Jewish people upon crossing that river in unity and with undivided commitment to Torah values.

What would that have represented? That would have meant a return to the intellectual and spiritual clarity of Adam before the sin, and, the complete and utter eradication of Amalek and all of his "relatives" -- for good! Which, of course, is what terrified Balak and Bilaam most of all, for, that also meant their final demise, also for good!

So, it is in the best interest and service of the Balaks and Bilaams of history -- even the Jewish ones -- to sow seeds of doubt and confusion in the minds and hearts of Jews, to achieve only one result: to keep at least SOME Jews out of Eretz Yisroel. Indeed, as long as some of the Jewish people remain strongly attached to foreign lands, and even feel morally "justified" in rejecting Eretz Yisroel as THEIR homeland, then, redemption, Moshiach, and world completion remains a distant reality, leaving plenty of room for more confusion and physical and spiritual terrorism.

I don't usually do this, but the following comment is so universal, and I have read it and received it so many times that I can't help but quote it here. It is such a good example of what I have just written about; indeed, it was very much responsible for the direction of this segment of "Perceptions." Here it is:

"Reading 'Perceptions' on this week's parshah (Shlach-Lecha), I get the impression that it is critically important for Jews to live in Eretz Yisroel. Why then are there so many religious Jews in foreign countries not making attempts to make aliyah? Why is this issue not even discussed more in shuls and study groups everywhere (to at least create a desire for and understanding of Eretz Yisroel)? Some people I've shown your article to say that, because Israel today is a "secular" state, we should not feel obligated to be there Š"

Is that what Eretz Yisroel has become to Jews -- an obligation? That's funny Š That's not what the Torah calls her, not Eretz Yisroel, not Torah, or the World-to-Come (Brochos 5a). No, in the Talmud ALL THREE are called "GIFTS," you know, as in something given to you THAT YOU DON'T DESERVE, by someone who cares for you, and believes in benefiting you?

Talk about confusion. Talk about doubt. Talk about JEWISH doubt.

Well, Balak and Bilaam, you may be dead, but your legacy lives on, indeed, flourishes in the mind and heart of the modern Jew. Allow me one more quote, if you will:

"We must find freer, more creative, more inventive means ... I am speaking of a cultural battle ... Israeli historians themselves Š are in the process of reconsidering Zionist myths. We must use the contradiction and dissent that exist in the heart of the Israeli population." (Leading Palestinian author

and activist, Edward Said)

"Israeli population"? Try the bulk of the Jewish people living outside the land all over the world today. And when asked, "Do you think the Israelis will renounce Zionism one day?" Said answered, "Some have begun to speak of it. I think that the most intelligent among them are in the process of realizing that, despite their incredible power, their situation is untenable."

Parashas Balak and Bilaam may end this Shabbos, but, the battle against their influence continues to until this very day, and, it seems, will continue until Moshiach himself comes and strikes them down, once and for all.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Israel camped in Shittim. The people acted immorally with the daughters of Moav, who lured the people to sacrifice to their gods (Bamidbar 25:1-2)

Talk about role reversal! One moment, Bilaam is up in the mountains overlooking the Jewish camp, trying to curse the Jewish people, but forced instead to praise them for their modesty; the next moment the people are acting immorally with the daughters of Moav! How does one fall from "perfection" so fast.

Perhaps we can glean insight into this catastrophe, which happens to plague many societies today and did in the past, from a Mishnah dealing with this issue. The tractate is Kesuvos, which, obviously, deals with a man's marital obligations to his wife (and vice-versa) and family (and which, "coincidentally," contains a large section about the blessing of living in Eretz Yisroel toward the end). The Mishnah teaches:

These are the things that a wife is obligated to perform for her husband Š And even if he brings into the house one hundred helpers, still, she should be compelled to work with wool, because doing nothing leads to promiscuous behavior Š (Mishnah, Kesuvos 59b)

We can assume, and prove from history, that this "principle" does not only apply to married women, but to everyone as well. And, we can also assume that the Mishnah's choice of "working with wool" is merely an example of an activity that keeps a person busy, and away from negative influences (not all trades create situations of modesty). And, perhaps we can make a connection from this Mishnah to the end of our parshah, and reveal the vulnerability of life in a premature Garden of Eden.

Not everyone is cut out for life in the Garden of Eden at this point in history. In fact, just about nobody is, save for a few very, VERY righteous individuals who have divested themselves of the pleasures of This World. As for the rest of us, the struggle does us a lot of good. It refines us, and defines us, and makes us grow and become great.

In fact, elsewhere the Talmud sums up our period of history with the following little saying:

Rav Yitzchak said: If a person tells you, "I tried, but did not succeed," don't believe him; "I did not try, but succeeded," don't believe him; "I tried and succeeded," believe him Š (Megillah 6b)

In the end, the Talmud concludes that this only applies to becoming "sharper" in Torah-learning (i.e., people can succeed in business with little effort and fail though they have made great effort). However, we know from the following:

According to the effort is the reward. (Pirkei Avos 5:22)

-- that success IS the effort made.

To be human is to struggle, though our bodies fight against this with all their might (what a waste of energy!). The greatest promise that technological advancement holds out for most people is the promise of more leisure time, and, indeed, in many ways, it has delivered on that promise.

However, as we learn from the Mishnah, and from the Jews in the desert, more "leisure-time" is not necessarily a good thing. The Jews in the desert had every physical concern taken care of for them by Heaven; all they had to do was sit and learn Torah and keep away from trouble.

But what happens when trouble doesn't keep away from you?!! If you're a busy person with important goals, usually you have no time for it, and the fear of wasting a single moment for trivial matters frightens you into keeping on track. There are too many important matters to take care of to indulge in frivolities and pleasures that don't pay off in the long wrong.

MELAVE MALKAH:

For the Conductor; a song of David. The heavens declare the glory of G-d, and the sky tells of His handiwork. (Tehillim 19:1-2)

The Talmud engages in a fascinating discussion:

Bar Kapara expounded: Great are the works of the righteous, even more so than the creation of Heaven and Earth. For, regarding the creation of Heaven and Earth, it says, "My hand has also laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand spanned the heavens." (Yeshayahu 48:13). However, regarding the acts of the righteous it says, "The place, L-rd, which You have made Your dwelling place, the sanctuary, L-rd, which Your hands have established." (Shemos 15:17).

In other words, says Bar Kapara, with regard to the creation of Heaven and Earth, the verse refers only to a single "hand" of G-d, whereas, with regard to the Temple, the work of man, the posuk refers to "hands," implying a greater creation. However, the Talmud also begs to differ:

A certain Babylonian, Rebi Chiyah, questioned [using the following verse, which says]: And whose

HANDS have formed the dry land. (Tehillim 95:5)?

Thus we see the plural of "hand" is also used with respect to G-d's creations as well. But, the Talmud continues:

However, even though "hands" is read, only "hand" is written [in the actual verse. [True,] but it is [also] written "THEY have formed" (using the plural, implying equal importance of G-d's creating). Rav Nachman son of Yitzchak said, "they formed" refers to His fingers (of one hand, and not two hands), as it is written, "When I see the heavens, the work of Your fingers" (Tehillim 8:4). Objection! [It is written] "The heavens declare the glory of G-d, and the sky tells of His handiwork." (Tehillim 19:2)! This is what it means to convey: What speaks of the work of the righteous? The sky. And, by what means? Through the rains. (Kesuvos 5a)

"When it says, 'His handiwork,' it refers to the work of the righteous, for, their work is called the work of the hands of The Holy One, Blessed is He. Hence, "His handiwork," the work of the righteous, "the sky tells of," because it testifies to creation that the righteous pray for rain, and it rains." (Rashi, q.v. Hachi Ka'amar)

It is always interesting to watch how the Talmud uses very technical verses to make and prove very non-technical points. All verses and proofs aside, how can the work of man, no matter how righteous he be, ever compare to the handiwork of G-d, especially when man himself falls into the category of "G-d's handiwork"?!

No matter, says the Talmud. If G-d Himself is prepared to overlook that fine detail of existence, well, then, why shouldn't we? After all, G-d gives us the impression that we are independent, then provides us with what appears to be free-will, and then projects the reality of stepping back and letting man do his thing. And then, to top it all off, He gives us credit for what we have done well, and takes pleasure in our spiritual successes like a proud parent!

The negative and dangerous side of this reality is that people can take this too seriously, and even turn against G-d. Like a child who tests the limits of his parent's patience, risking punishment to get his way, Bilaam tested the freedom of will that G-d gives to man, to try and curse the Jewish people. G-d was neither proud of His "handiwork" then, nor prepared to allow Bilaam to even use his free-will at all.

As a result, Bilaam went from being one of the most "independent" men in creation, to a complete puppet of G-d, forced to bless the Jewish people completely against his will, in full view of the very people he wanted to impress! Bilaam's failure wasn't limited only to not cursing the Jewish people as hired to do so, but to all of his life.

It is a powerful lesson for all of us: Work with G-d, not against Him; make Him proud of your achievements, and creation will testify to your achievements, in This World, and the next one.

Have a great Shabbos,

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