

PARSHAS BALAK

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

It is difficult to understand how the two evil men, Balak and Bilaam, could have been so arrogant as to imagine that by their very speech they could obliterate all that the Patriarchs, the Exodus from Egypt and Matan Torah had succeeded in making Yisrael a blessed people. They were evil but not stupid. Furthermore, could they imagine that they could tempt Hashem into changing His blessings of Yisrael?

The Midrash Rabbah tells us that: 'And we will drive them out of the land' means that Balak only wanted to prevent Yisrael from entering Eretz Yisrael, not to wage war and destroy them. He wanted that they should remain in the desert. What did it bother him if they dwelled in that land; after all it was not his possession nor did they in any geo-political way threaten him? However, as long as they were in the desert, they lived a purely spiritual life of Torah and Avodah without reference to matters of this world, ate manna from Heaven, and drank water from the miraculous well of Miriam. Then there would be a separation of the spiritual and the material; to Yisrael, the World to Come and to Balak and the nations of the world only the materialism of this World. Similarly, Bilaam too wanted them to remain in the desert, so that they would be denied even Olam Habah that is for both the body and the nefesh. As the Ramban explains, the purification of body and nefesh necessary for Olam Habah can only come through the mitzvot masiyot, whose primary observation is in Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, the whole Divine Purpose was that they should settle in the land and observe the mitzvot so that the material can become kadosh, as it will be in the future, at the end of days.

Both Balak and Bilaam feared that if Yisrael entered and settled the land, thereby sanctifying the material, they too would be required to do so. The nations of the world will then be required to give up their unrestrained physical lusts and surrender them to kedusha. Both men chose to prefer their material lusts over their subjection to kedusha. However, failure to subject to kedusha will mean that they will be cut off from all the material benefits that are poured from Heaven. As it is written 'And it shall come to pass that who so-ever of the families of the earth that goeth not up to Yerushalyim to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts upon them there shall be no rain' (Zechariah, 14: 16). [The Shem Mi Shmuel uses the nature of the sojourn in the desert as compared to their settlement in Eretz Yisrael, to explain the behavior of the meraglim. As long as they were in the desert living purely spiritual lives, they could achieve the necessary levels of kedusha. However, once they crossed the Jordan they would have to earn their food, clothing and housing through natural means. They did not believe in their own spiritual ability to transform these material things into kodesh, therefore wished to remain in the unnatural world of the desert. They did not believe that they could make

Olam Hazei into Olam Haba.

We should ask why Balak and Bilaam waited for the 40 years since Yisrael left Egypt, to try and do something. This was due to 2 reasons: they relied on Sihon and Og to prevent Yisrael from entering Eretz Yisrael, and they waited for the death of Aharon that they imagined would remove the Divine blessing.

Moshe and Aharon were the brain and heart of Yisrael. Moshe brought down abundant spirituality from on High, understanding of Torah and the sanctification of the seichel. Aharon through the Avodah elevated Yisrael to cleave to their Father in Heaven till even their bodies and nefesh were kedoshim. In his merit they were granted the Ananei Hakavod that encompassed their bodies as well. This is like the sukkah where the whole matter of the human being, even the feet [or for that matter even one's boots], is included in the mitzvah; even when he is asleep. Og, king of the Bashan, and Sihon, king of the Emorites were brothers (Nidah, 61a); they were the converse of the kedusha of the brothers Moshe and Aharon. Og used seichel in a perverted way while in Sihon the materialism constantly grew till the light of kedusha itself was transformed into the material. He was like an untamed and untamed donkey that cannot bear to live in the settled world and so makes his way to the wild spaces of the desert (Rashi, Rosh Hashanah, 3a). His city was cheshbon where calculated cheshbon shel olam. That is necessary but one should not lust after one's material and physical lusts; just as the judge is blinded by the bribe, so lusts blind and prevent the seichel from making a correct cheshbon. Aharon's Avodah enabled the kedusha to elevate the bodies of Yisrael, but his death and the resultant disappearance of the Ananei Hakavod meant that there was nothing preventing the material from overcoming kedusha. However, by virtue of the oath taken by Yisrael to make the material spoils of their war holy to G-d, their materialism was elevated and so they were victorious; neder being nun dar, that is 50 that dwells beyond the 7 days of material creation.

After the defeat of Og and Sihon, Balak and Bilaam sought to once again to try and separate spiritual from materialism, since with the death of Aharon there was no longer anyone to unite them. They thought that together, one with his thought and the other with actions they would be able to overpower the strength of Moshe, since was seichel alone. They did not understand that Moshe actually combined within himself his own merit as well as that of Aharon.

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