

Balak 5780

BS"D Parashat Balak 5780

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The Power of Fear

Balak, the would-be Hitler of the time, and Bil'am, his Goebbels, can be compared to the proverbial masochist and sadist; that when the masochist begged the sadist to hit him the sadist said "no".

Balak gets trampled at a place called Bamot Ba'al when Bil'am blesses the Jewish nation. But instead of dismissing him in anger and shame, Balak invites the sorcerer to Sedei Tzofim from where he will be able to observe the Jewish nation from a different angle. Bil'am again frustrates Balak by blessing the Jews, who then for the third time asks Bil'am to see the encampment from yet another vantage point at Ba'al Pe'or. Here, once again HaShem uses Bil'am's venomous mouth to bless the chosen nation.

On the premise that these two anti-Semites in the framework of their depravity are still somewhat rational, why did Balak continue with the Bil'am fiasco after his initial failure?

Answer:

Balak was a very shrewd, calculating, and devious goy. At station number one Bil'am instructs Balak to erect seven alters, upon which they offered up 7 bulls and 7 rams. During this ceremony Bil'am raises his arms and goes through several 'magical' contortions which in the past succeeded in bringing

a curse upon his adversaries, but which on this occasion produced only blessings.

Balak quickly concluded that his situation was desperate and decided to make the best of it. At the time, the evil entourage was standing at a vantage point high on the summit of the Moabite mountain range (due east of the city of Bet Lechem on the western side of the Jordan) while the Jewish encampment was down on the Plains of Shitim near the Jordan river. The cursers could see the Jews from their perch on the mountain and the Jews could see the royal entourage high above; but the Jews could not hear what they were saying. Nevertheless, they were able to deduce that something meaningful was happening because of the large number of sacrifices and the strange gyrations of a familiar figure, Bil'am. They concluded that they were being cursed by some spiritual incarnation or bewitchment.

Then fear began to seep into their hearts and minds, and they began questioning HaShem's ability to protect them.

Balak assessed that this was the situation below in the Israelite camp and concluded that if he could not kill the Jews at this time, he would fill them with fear, weaken their self-confidence, and then attack.

So, he took Bil'am to a second and third place where the Jews could see the strange movements of this man and each time the fear would engulf the Jews. After the third time Balak decided that three doses of Bil'am were sufficient to paralyze the Jews and sent the vindictive Bil'am home in disgrace. But not before Bil'am gave Balak a piece of advice. That for the first time in the history of those "civilized" nations they should use their daughters as weapons of war, to entice the Jewish fighters and thereby arouse HaShem's anger, which would lead to a Moabite military victory.

Balak understood that fear is a powerful weapon. It destroys

men and nations, annihilates, and devastates a nation's courage to defend itself and eventually arouses in them the need to flee in panic.

The fact is, that the more intelligent the individual, the more susceptible he is to fear, because of his innate ability to see the dangers lurking right around the corner.

Do Not Falter in Fear

Eighty percent of the Jewish nation refused to leave Egypt with Moshe for fear of what is awaiting them in the treacherous desert, and they died in Egypt.

Goliath put fear into the hearts of the most courageous of Shaul's soldiers, so that not even one Jew was willing to battle it out with the Philistine giant. Until one young man named David appeared without fright and felled the ominous Goliath.

In Devarim (chapter 20) the Torah directs our military officers to announce to the troops lined up before going into battle (Milchemet Reshut):

¹ When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. ² When you are about to go into battle, the Kohen (Mashuach Milchama) shall come forward and address the army. ³ He shall say: Hear, Israel: Today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not panic or be terrified by them. ⁴ For the Lord your God is the one who goes with

you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory (when the Kohen finishes the officers continue) ⁵ The officers shall say to the army: has anyone built a new house and not yet begun to live in it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may begin to live in it. ⁶ Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it. ⁷ Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her. ⁸ Then the officers shall add, is anyone afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his fellow soldiers will not become disheartened too.

I suggest that the essential part of the officers' "pep talk" is the sentence, "Is anyone afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home", because fear is contagious; so better he should remove himself from the battle. And when the officers mention building a home or planting a vineyard or making a pledge to a woman, it is to disguise the real reason a soldier should leave, which is his fear, but could be understood as being in one of the above mentioned reasons, therefore saving anyone who left from embarrassment.

Medinat Yisrael is now on a crossroads of our future: annex or not? And if yes, how much and where? Many of the world's leaders, each in his own manner of speech and threats, seek to instill fear in the hearts of our civilian and military personnel, that to annex would be suicidal.

It is a test by HaShem. Pressure was brought to bear on David ben Gurion not to declare independence in 1948. The US threatened and kept their word that they would place an arms embargo on the nascent State if he declared independence. But Ben Gurion and the majority of the yishuv's heads voted for independence, and now we are 72 years old and standing tall among the leading nations of the world.

Menachem Begin was pressured to call off the air strike to destroy the Iraqi nuclear facility in Bagdad. He did not cave in, but during the long nerve-wracking hours that our planes were over the areas where the Talmud was written, he sat in isolation saying Tehillim. And when all the planes returned safely after completing their precarious mission, the whole nation and the sane part of humanity rejoiced because this man did not falter in fear.

At this time, I turn to our Prime Minister: "Bibi, from the courageous tribe of Levi, turn your face toward history. It is always easier to retreat and to escape into mediocrity and self-delusion; but it takes the character of a Ben Gurion or Menachem Begin and all our forefathers and mothers to push the limits of courage and belief in HaShem ever further.

Do not fear nor tarry! Declare sovereignty over all of Yehuda and Shomron without extending Israeli citizenship to the foreigners and strangers occupying our lands.

HaShem, the Master of history, is holding the celestial quill ready to record for posterity your place in Jewish history – as redeemer or retreator. If you forge ahead, men of belief in HaShem will follow. If you retreat you will walk alone."

Dear friends always remember the three Bs:

B careful, **B** healthy, **B** **HERE**

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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