

BS"D Parashat Balak 5783

Three Questions

One

The parasha relates the episode of Bilam, the arch anti-Semite who was invited by Balak, King of Moav, to use his supernatural powers to curse the Jews who were threatening the Moabite nation. And it became apparent that Bilam hated the Jews even more than the threatened Moabites.

Bilam knows the secret of cursing. The Gemara (Brachot 7a) informs us that there is a split second each day when HaShem, as it would be, shows anger. Bilam was aware of this phenomenon and would synchronize his curses with HaShem's moment of rage.

The Gemara continues:

אמר ר' אלעזר: אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לאלהינו: 'ידעו אתכם – כמה רחמים היו לי אתכם בזמן שלם, כשנמנעתי מלעצור אתכם באותו רגע; ואם לא היה כן, היינו נהרסין על ידי בלעם';

Rabbi Elazar said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Am Yisrael, 'know you – how much compassion I had for you at the time of Bilam, when I refrained from that moment of anger; and if not for that, Bilam would have succeeded in destroying the entire Jewish nation.'"

Question: What motivated HaShem to refrain from His usual "routine" of momentary anger for the sake of Am Yisrael?

Two

Life After Death.

On the unanswerable eternal dilemma: Why did HaShem create this world and all the others before us and those after us?

There are Kabbalists who attempt to answer this question, but as the adage goes, "Every problem has a solution, and every solution creates a problem".

One school of thought claims that the essence of HaShem is goodness (if we can speak of HaShem having an essence) and it is the nature of goodness to share the good with deserving entities.

HaShem, as the epitome, zenith, and apex of goodness, created our souls (neshamot) to rejoice in the pleasure of HaShem's goodness in a spiritual realm compatible with these rewards; in the place we call Gan Eden. And this material world was created to purify our souls with HaShem's mitzvot to determine the degree of spiritual pleasure and goodness that we shall be receiving in the eternal next world.

This also implies that those who do not deserve this good will suffer or return to nothingness, or as in the words of Mark Anthony in his inspirational speech given at the funeral of Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar", "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones".

Now, what is the spiritual reward that awaits a Jew after 120 years?

Three

No human being has ever had all his worldly desires fulfilled, as stated in Midrash Kohelet chapter one:

אִישׁ אֶת כָּל חֲלָמָיו אֲשֶׁר יִחְלֹם בְּיָמָיו וְלֹא יִשְׁבֹּט אֶת אֶחָד מֵחֲלָמָיו וְלֹא יִשְׁבֹּט אֶת אֶחָד מֵחֲלָמָיו

No man has left this world with even half his desires fulfilled.

Every person experiences the lack of some subjective desire. A car owner feels the need for a newer model, while a homeless beggar dreams of a tin roof over his head but doesn't feel the lack of a new car. The Wall Street investor kicks himself for not having invested 50 million dollars in yesterday's hot stock, something which the shamash in your shul does not feel. And that's how it continues from individual to individual, each with his complaints to HaShem for not filling his "urgent" needs.

But despite the universal subjective feelings of deprivation, there is one thing that all people feel a lack of, from the lowest of society to the most prominent who don't know where else to spend their money.

It is the need to feel true absolute sincere love. The opportunity to give total love to another who feels the same about you, true reciprocal love.

The kind that transcends logic, as in the case of Rachel, daughter of the multi-millionaire Ben Kalba Savu'a, who expelled Rachel from the family for marrying the lowly peasant, shepherd named Akiva ben Yosef, later to become – because of her – the illustrious Rabbi Akiva. Or our father

Ya'akov who toiled 14 years under the miserable Lavan for the hand of his daughter, Rachel. Or men who would swim the largest ocean or climb the highest mountain for the love of his or her "beshert" (the one person whom an individual is divinely destined to marry).

The sort of feeling that some new couples share in the period of engagement and some married couples feel when standing under the chuppah. But the sad reality is that these intense feelings are limited in time, after which they turn into something less than passionate love.

Society is overflowing with love songs, love movies and love stories, which only demonstrate the lack of love.

Question: Why does the euphoria of passionate total love dissipate?

The Answer

The above three questions share the same answer.

Shlomo Hamelech in chapter 8 of Shir Hashirim (Song of Songs) speaks of the mutual love between the Creator and Am Yisrael in a metaphor of the unquenchable love and passion that a man and woman can feel for each other. So that whatever the gentile nations would do to us, or give to Am Yisrael in order to break the holy bond that HaShem and our father Avraham and all his future descendants entered into, would be totally rejected:

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאָל אֶת-הָעַמִּים וְהָאֲרָצִים וְהָאֲדָמָה וְהָאֲבָדִים וְהָאֲנָשִׁים וְהָאִשְׁתִּים וְהָיָה אֲנִי וְהָיָה אִשְׁתִּי וְהָיָה אֲנִי וְהָיָה אִשְׁתִּי -
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וְהָיָה אֲנִי וְהָיָה אִשְׁתִּי וְהָיָה אֲנִי וְהָיָה אִשְׁתִּי וְהָיָה אֲנִי וְהָיָה אִשְׁתִּי וְהָיָה אֲנִי וְהָיָה אִשְׁתִּי

וְהָיָה אֲנִי וְהָיָה אִשְׁתִּי וְהָיָה אֲנִי וְהָיָה אִשְׁתִּי וְהָיָה אֲנִי וְהָיָה אִשְׁתִּי וְהָיָה אֲנִי וְהָיָה אִשְׁתִּי -

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*Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm,
for love is strong (absolute) as death, passion fierce as the
grave.*

Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.

*If one offered for love all the wealth of one's house, it
would be utterly scorned.*

Olam Haba is a concept wrapped in a secret, covered in a dilemma and packaged in a mystery.

What can HaShem give to a tzadik for eternity without becoming boring, tedious, and drab?

And its mirror dilemma: What is the punishment for evil doers? What can Hitler and all the former murderers of tens of millions of Jews get in the world to come to equal their demented hatred?

The spiritual reward that HaShem measures out to the souls of the righteous is the profound and enduring feelings of absolute intense love. Feelings which are fleeting in our earthy world because they are totally spiritual in nature and cannot survive in the lowly impure place in this world.

Olam Haba is the never ending overpowering and reciprocal sense of love between the Creator and His chosen Am Yisrael. And conversely, the ultimate punishment for the evil doers are their eternal feelings of rejection, contempt, disgust, loathing, revulsion, abhorrence, repulsion, and abomination.

So, the single answer to the above three questions is:

1- HaShem did not have His moment of rage at the time of Bilam because of Hashem's eternal love for the Children of Yisrael.

2- What awaits a Jew after 120 years is the intense feeling of mutual love with the Creator.

3- The euphoria of total love is the essence of Gan Eden and cannot exist in this material world.

Conclusion: If one wishes to know what has kept the Jewish nation alive for over three thousand years, while great and mighty empires came crashing down? Or our unprecedented return to our ancient homeland? The answer is the eternal love that the Creator has for His greatest creation – Am Yisrael and our unfathomable loyalty to Him.

Before reciting the three verses of the Kohanic blessing, Kohanim say a bracha:

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד
אלהינו יהוה אחד. יהוה אחד יהוה אחד יהוה אחד

Blessed are You HaShem King of the universe who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aharon and commanded us to bless His (HaShem's) nation Yisrael with Love.

The final two words “with love” are usually understood to mean that we Kohanim should utter these blessings not as an unemotional ritual but out of love for our fellow Jews.

But I would add an additional meaning to them: that we Kohanim are blessing the Jewish nation that they should all experience the ultimate love that awaits the Jewish soul in Gan Eden.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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