

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Balak	30 June 2018	17 Tammuz 5778	Num. 22:2-25:9	Micha 5:7-6:8	Matt. 21:1-11

This week's Torah portion, Balak, son of Tzipor saw the Israelites overwhelming Amorites and Og, the king of Bashan. Balak became frightened as they were the "least among the nations." (Obad. 1:2) and asked Balaam for his help to curse the Israelites. Balak gathers the leaders of Moav and discussed how they should deal with the children of Yisrael (Israel). The elders, according to Ibn Ezra points out they became elders when they lost their war with Sichon and became tributary to him. After their discussion, they then appointed Balak as their king. (Num. 22:4)

Balak represents the "wild beasts", those who deny Hashem and believe in physical inclination to indulge in their lusts and material pursuits solely for their pleasure. Balaam represents the "evil serpent", who says he is a Hashem fearing person, but uses his wisdom to atheistic reasons and methodologies to distance himself from Hashem.¹ Balak was a wizard who uses nature to perform magic. When he saw Yisrael easily overcoming the Amorites and Og, he knew he had no power over Yisrael who defied nature with their prayers. Balaam, on the other hand was a master sorcerer² and his power was in his mouth.

Balak's discussion with the elders were how to defeat the children of Yisrael. They said, "Their leader, Moshe lived in Midian." They went to and asked Midianites what Moshe's main character was. They told them, "His power is in his mouth." Meaning, Moshe prayed and therefore "the power of prayer." Balak then summoned Balaam who lived north of Midian to counter Moshe's power through his "mouth."

Now, we have studied in the past that there were three advisors to Pharaoh in Egypt during the exile of Jacob's children. Pharaoh was concerned for rapid population increase of Jacob's children in his country, and asked his advisors. Yitro told the Pharaoh to leave them as they were since no threat was made toward Mitzrayim. He was humiliated and chased out of the land. Hashem, later repaid Yitro for protecting His children by becoming father-in-law to Moshe. Iyov (Job) said nothing to Pharaoh to protect Jacob's children. He was later punished for not speaking out in favor of His people. After his *teshuvah* (repentance), he regained all he lost in double including his life.

Balaam advised Pharaoh to make Jacob's children as slaves and to kill Jacob's newborn babies. He joined the Yisraelite's exodus as he saw no future in Mitzrayim. He then went eastward north of Midian when he was asked by Balak to curse the Yisraelites. The sages teach he was a prophet for the nations, and that he was equal to or greater than Moshe as a prophet.

When Hashem created this world, it was divided into light and darkness for every creation. That is why we have day and night, positive and negative, life and death, etc. Many discuss that Satan is evil, and thereby placing him in the same pedestal as Hashem. We know that Hashem created evil (Isa. 45:7) to balance good. The Kabbalah teaches that *Gevurah* (severity) is left side of the body which draws strength, and judgment. Whereas *Chesed* (loving-kindness) which draws love, mercy, and kindness which right side of the body. If we have too much *Gevurah*, then it brings restrictions and harsh judgments which in turn can turn to bitterness, anger, resentment, in other words, all the negative. But if we have too much *Chesed*, it can bring chaos, destruction, uncontrolled emotion, Therefore, we need to balance ourselves with *Da'at* (knowledge) to bring *Gevurah* and *Chesed* to the middle (heart) of the body to strengthen our lives that we may walk in

¹ Rebbe Nachman's Torah, Numbers and Deuteronomy, Parashat Balak, p. 122

² Zohar III, 192a

Hashem's path. We know that Avraham was Chesed; Yitzchak (Isaac) was Gevurah. And their product was Yaakov (Jacob) who was Da'at.

Now, Balak wanted to counter the power of Moshe by hiring Balaam. Moshe, the humblest man was a *tzaddik* (righteous) who sought only after the will of Hashem by studying Torah and bring the light of Torah to everyone. Balaam won't curse Yisraelites because Hashem forbid him so. Yet he did exactly that. Through his confession, we can learn that he was a Torah teacher, but a wicked one which is very dangerous as his teachings can cause the downfall of many people. Therefore, we need to be like Bereans who "received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."³ The Scriptures that the Bereans had was the Torah.

Balak sent (v. 7) the elders who are magicians. Balaam told them to stay the night "as YHVH shall speak to me." (v. 8) The spirit of prophecy can rest upon a prophet either by night or by day. The "night" represents an "arousal from Above," i.e. Hashem wishes it to be so. "Day" represents an "arousal from below," meaning the person makes himself worthy of receiving Divine inspiration. Balaam knowing that he was unworthy to receive by day⁴, told them to "stay the night." Thus, Hashem came at night to Balaam. (v. 9) As previously taught, whenever Hashem called upon Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, or Moshe, He always repeated their names twice. However, in this verse Hashem does not call upon Balaam, rather He came to Balaam without warning or notice.

In verse 6, Balak only wanted to curse (קָלַל, *ta'or*). Balaam uses the word "curse" *ka'va* (קָנָה) in verse 11. The word "curse" are mentioned four times in this chapter; vs. 6, 11, 12, 17. English translation used "curse" for two different words which have different meaning and depth in Hebrew language. In Balak's situation, he just witnessed victories by the Yisraelites against the strongest and the biggest nations. He was frightened and did not want the Yisraelites so close to his border. Therefore, he wanted Balaam to "*ta'or*" the Israelites to stay away from his country. However, Balak's fear was unfounded, and his efforts for naught, even though he did not know, Hashem instructed the Israelites not to "distress the Moabites or provoke them to war", as we know that Moav was promised as an inheritance to the descendants of Lot (Deut. 2:9), as well as Ruth from Moav.

Balaam uses the word "*ka'va*" (v. 6) when he answered Hashem's question. However, Hashem responds, "you shall not *ta'or* (curse) (v. 12) them in line with Balak's desire. The sages teach that we are not to curse someone for the sake of curse. In verse 17, Balak again summons Balaam, but this time he uses the word, "*ka'va*." Only then, Hashem allowed Balaam to leave his home. Now, *Ka'va* means "digestion" which Balaam implied Balak wanted to destroy Israelites completely. While Balak cannot be faulted for being unaware of this divine edict issued to the Israelites, Balaam, a prophet who "heard the words of Elohim, and knew the *da'at* of the Most High" (Num. 24:16) was surely aware of the Israelites' neutrality vis-à-vis the Moabites. Why then didn't he simply advise Balak: "My friend, your tranquility need not be spoiled; they pose no threat to you whatsoever!"

Rashi concludes that "Balaam detested the Israelites more than Balak."⁵ Balak hated the children of Yisrael as they presented a mortal threat to him and his citizens. Balaam, on the other hand, hated them for no reason at all as previously shown in the Book of Exodus as an advisor to the Pharaoh. It was an

³ Acts 17:11, NIV

⁴ Rebbe Nachman's Torah, Numbers and Deuteronomy, Parashat Balak, p. 126

⁵ Rashi on Numbers 22:11

essential hate that defied rhyme or reason, and he jumped at the opportunity to curse them, though he knew well that Balak's fear was groundless.

Hashem tells Balaam not to go with the elders in verses 11-12. Again, there is a word play here. Hashem uses *ta•or* as was the intention of Balak. (v. 6) Therefore, Hashem is telling us that we cannot curse others for the sake of curse.

Hashem allowed Balaam to go with the elders of Moav after Balak decided to *ka•va* in verse 17. As we know, Hashem does not change His Torah but we do as we will see. The circumstances has changed. In the first instance, *ta•or* comes from inner pride which can be corrected. As *ta•or* for the sake of *ta•or* affects the “soul” and Hashem will allow for correction. So, if a person who does not correct inner pride, then one is subject to self-destruction from outer pride.

Whereas, the money is outer pride which is more destructive to the self than the inner pride. It is very hard to correct if one cannot correct and learn from the connection of inner pride. Balaam said, “If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold” (v. 18), then he would change his mind to help Balak.

Therefore the physical material is ultimate curse to oneself in purpose of cursing another to profit oneself in unrighteous manner as the greed is a curse in itself. Hashem must then allow someone to *ka•va* themselves for thinking that they have power to curse in unrighteousness.

Thus Hashem did not prevent Balaam from addressing the Israelites. He didn't even replace Balaam's planned curses with new blessings. Instead, He "transformed the curse into a blessing." (Deut. 23:6) As the Talmud explains,⁶ Balaam's blessings are actually the very curses he intended to pronounce—but slightly reworded as to render them blessings.

ב ל ע מ
ע מ ל ק

Balaam written in Hebrew is בלעם and Amalek is עמלק as seen on the left. If we take first two letters from Balaam ב.ל and take two letters from Amalek ע.מ, we get Balaam. We then take last two letters from each name, we get Amalek. Therefore, we now know that Balaam is Amalek whom Hashem says, Amalek “will perish forever.” (Num. 24:20)

Amalek was the son of Eliphaz and the concubine Timna. Timna was a Horite and sister of Lotan. Amalek appears in the genealogy of Esau (Genesis 36:12; 1 Chronicles 1:36) who was the chief of an Edomite tribe (Genesis 36:16). Amalek is described as the "chief of Amalek" in Genesis 36:16. The Amalekites lived in the land called Moab, in what the Romans called Arabia Petraea (Moab and the desert of Sinai), a region depopulated in the fourteenth century BC and then occupied by Edomites.⁷

Balaam tried to curse the Israelites three times which corresponds to the three Temples. But each time, Hashem placed a blessing in his mouth. Since Balaam foresaw that the First and Second Temple would be destroyed, he tried to apply a curse to the Third Temple.⁸ Therefore, Hashem caused him to begin his third blessing with, “How goodly are your tents, O Ya’akov...” (Num. 24:5)

⁶ BT, Sanhedrin 105a

⁷ Wikipedia, Amalek

⁸ Rebbe Nachman's Torah, Numbers and Deuteronomy, Balak, p. 138

The haftarah begins with the remnant of Ya'kov in the midst of many nations. Abarbanel notes that these are the enemies described as “the nation which neither you nor your *ahvot* (fathers) have known” (Deut. 28:36), and “a nation of fierce countenance that shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favor to the young.” (Deut. 28:50). They are Edom and Yishmael, respectively.

Upon the return of Messiah who comes as the King will rule over all nations as “a lion among the beasts of the forest. “Your hand shall be lifted up” as in a victory from the outward attacks of the enemies and from the adversaries who has a deep-rooted hatred and wishes evil to you. (Micah 5:8)



Micah then prophesied what would become of enemies of Ya'kov in verses 10-15. Before we go any further, we need to study history of Gog and Magog.

Magog is the second son of Yapheth, son of Noach. (Gen. 10:2, 1 Chron. 1:5) The Greeks later identified Magogites as Scythians (the north of the Black Sea in the middle of the Caucasus and Mesopotamia from the years 630 to 600 BC) or Tartars. The Scythians were known for their bows and for battling mainly on horseback. They were merciless, brutal, and barbaric to the nations they invaded. The Magogites includes the Slav, the Mongols, Finns, Swedes, and even Irish Celts also claimed that they are the descendants of Yapheth, although others suggest they are descendants of Gomer.

Magogites were forced out from Anatolia in 584 BC and went back to the North of Caucasus. But while in the Middle East, they moved towards the central Asia, to the land of the ancient Mongols, Mongolia. The term Mongol is thought to have derived from the name Magog. It is said they ended up in southern Russia. Scythians are a large percentage of the population in Russia today.

Ezekiel 38:2 describes Gog from the land of Magog as a nation of mighty horsemen from the far north. (Eze. 38:15) and the enemies of Hashem. Whereas, in Revelation 20:8, it was written that Gog and Magog “to gather them together to battle” the camp of the Yisraelite *kidushim* (Holy Israel). But “fire came from YHVH out of the *shamayim* (heaven) and devoured them. (Rev. 20:9) Gog means “mountain”, and Magog means “overtopping” or “covering.” Thus, there would be so many enemies that they will “cover whole mountain.”

According to Malbim, Ezekiel chapter 38 refers to the first war, and chapter 39 as the second. And Zechariah chapter 14 refers to the third war. The wars will take place during Sukkot⁹. Therefore, the chapter from Zechariah is read as a haftarah on the first day of Sukkot, and Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 are read during

⁹ Tur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 490

Shabbos Chol HaMoed. The commentators use various methods to identify the nations of Gog's country and his allies. Rambam says this is wrong to speculate as no human beings nor prophets can fully understand the meaning of Hashem's prophecies. Instead, he suggests that we will comprehend as the events unfold, and continued speculation does not lead to fear of Heaven.¹⁰

¹⁰ The Milstein Edition, Ezekiel, p. 209