

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A GUEST APPEARANCE

"...and from there he saw the edge of the people." (22:39)

Unbeknownst to our hero, the wicked count Carlo was looking down at him from the gallery of the grain silo.

The stainless steel claw that replaced Carlo's hand held tightly a rope attached to a huge metal anvil that swung silently sixty-five feet above the granary floor, poised to plummet to the ground and turn our hero into Steak Tataré. Just a few more feet... just a few more feet and he would be directly under the anvil.

"Heh, heh, heh!" whispered Carlo to himself.

"This time, my fine friend, you will not escape my clutches!"

Inch by inch our hero drew closer to his nemesis. And then he was there, directly under the massive vicious anvil!

Count Carlo relished the moment for a few nanoseconds, and then very gently he released the rope from his claw. Freed from its restraints, the anvil fell like a stone, like an eager racehorse loosed from the starting gate.

Next to Count Carlo stood Baklava, his faithful bumbling butler. "Master, you let go of the anvil!" said Baklava. "I know I did you bumbling idiot!" "But Master, the end is tied to your right leg!" "What! You fool! How did that happen?" "I did it, Master," said a beaming Baklava. "I didn't want us to lose the anvil!"

"You... You...! Quickly, grab the rope, you idiot, maybe our combined weights will stop the anvil, and I won't be pulled to my death!"

"That would be nice, O Master... But I'm not so heavy anymore. I've been going to Weight Watchers."

"Don't argue with me, you, you, you, you bumbling Balkan!"

In the time it takes to say 'Sidney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre', Count Carlo and Baklava grabbed the rope. The anvil was suddenly checked in its downward plummet. But it wasn't going to give up without a struggle. It hoisted the two men right up to the pulley that was set into the granary roof and there they swung like a couple of trussed chickens. The anvil came to an abrupt stop about three inches above the head of our hero.

Our hero could have sworn that he heard something. He looked around him. Nothing out of the ordinary here. He sighed his diffident sigh and sauntered out of the granary into the morning sunlight, unaware that he had come within a few inches of his life.

There's something very unusual about the story of Balak. If

the Torah had not revealed the episode of Bilam trying to curse the Jewish People, we would never have known about it. All the other events that the Torah writes concerning the Jewish People could also be known from tradition, but not this week's parsha. When this week's parsha was taking place, the Jewish People were way out of earshot. You could only see them somewhere in the distance. From the top of a hill; across a field; in the wilderness. But we never see them close up. They're like extras in their own movie. Had it not been for the Torah, we would never know what a narrow escape we had. The Jewish People walk through this week's parsha blissfully unaware of the machinations of Balak and Bilam.

At the end of sixth century, the Byzantine Empire completely destroyed the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel. Unbeknownst to the Jews of Babylon, the Byzantines then poised themselves to also make Babylon 'Judenrein'. Before they could implement their plans, however, the Moslem revolt toppled them from power.

Jews played a prominent role in the overthrow of Czarist Russia and in the subsequent Soviet government. Secretly, however, in 1953 Josef Stalin tried unsuccessfully to destroy the Jews in what became known as "The Doctors' Plot." According to one theory, if the "Doctors' Plot" had carried on and reached its climax there would have been a mass expulsion of Soviet Jewry. But these plans died along with Stalin on March 6, 1953.

In the series of Psalms that make up Hallel, there appears the shortest Psalm (117). It speaks of a world in the time of the Mashiach:

"Praise G-d *all nations*; laud Him *all the peoples*; for His kindness to us was overwhelming."

Once, a Russian prince asked Rabbi Itzaleh of Volozhin why *non-Jews* will be expected to praise G-d for His kindness to Israel. Rabbi Itzaleh replied "The princes of the nations constantly plot our annihilation, but our merciful G-d foils your plans. You keep your plots so secret that we Jews don't even realize in how many ways you have tried to harm us and in how many ways G-d has saved us. Only you, the nations of the non-Jewish world, truly see the extent of G-d's kindness to us, and therefore only you can praise Him adequately.

• Source: Based on an idea heard from Rabbi Reuven Subar

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Balak, king of Moav, is in morbid fear of *Bnei Yisrael*. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilam to curse them. First, G-d speaks to Bilam and forbids him to go. But, because Bilam is so insistent, G-d appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a *malach* (emissary from G-d) blocks Bilam's donkey's path. Unable to contain his frustration, Bilam strikes the donkey each time it stops or tries to detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking Bilam why he is hitting her. The *malach* instructs Bilam regarding what he is permitted to say and what he is forbidden to say regarding the Jewish People. When Bilam arrives, King Balak

makes elaborate preparations, hoping that Bilam will succeed in the curse. Three times Bilam attempts to curse and three times blessings issue instead. Balak, seeing that Bilam has failed, sends him home in disgrace.

Bnei Yisrael begin sinning with the Moabite women and worshipping the Moabite idols, and they are punished with a plague. One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a Midianite princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This halts the plague, but not before 24,000 have died.

ISRAEL Forever

NO FEAR OF THE BIG BOMB

Amidst all the current talk about the nuclear threat posed by Iran the need for taking every measure to prevent that terrorist nation from possessing such a dangerous weapon should not be a source of panic for Jews in Eretz Yisrael.

In this week's Torah portion we learn about an ancient enemy who hired a sorcerer who had the power to wreak nuclear-level destruction upon our ancestors by cursing them at the precise moment of the day when Heavenly anger towards His creatures' shortcomings could make such a malediction deadly effective. Why this did not happen is hinted at in the words of the Prophet Micha which are part

of this week's Haftarah: "Remember, my people, what Balak, king of Moab, planned and how Bilam (the sorcerer) responded... that you may know the kindness of G-d." (*Micha* 6:5)

This kindness, say our Talmudic Sages, consisted of G-d completely withholding His anger during the days that Bilam attempted to curse them.

This historical precedent for Heavenly intervention in preventing an enemy from wreaking massive destruction should be a source of comfort for us that we can rely on the kindness of G-d to secure Israel forever.

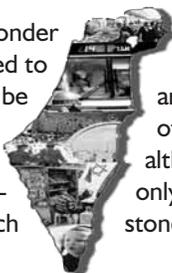
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

STONES OF THE KOTEL

Visitors to the Western Wall never fail to wonder about the source for the stones that were used to build this historic structure. One answer may be the result of a current excavation in Jerusalem's Sanhedria neighborhood.

Diggers of the Israel Antiquities Authority recently discovered an ancient quarry whose stones match



the size of the smallest stones currently visible in the Western Wall. This is the second time in a year that archeologists have discovered quarries from the period of the Second *Beit Hamikdash*. Experts assume that although dozens of quarries have been found in Jerusalem, only these two were probably the source for the Wall's stones.

לע"נ
מרת בי"לא בת ר' דוד ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did Moav consult specifically with Midian regarding their strategy against the Jews?
2. What was Balak's status before becoming Moav's king?
3. Why did G-d grant prophecy to the evil Bilam?
4. Why did Balak think Bilam's curse would work?
5. When did Bilam receive his prophecies?
6. G-d asked Bilam, "Who are these men with you?" What did Bilam deduce from this question?
7. How do we know Bilam hated the Jews more than Balak did?
8. What is evidence of Bilam's arrogance?
9. In what way was the *malach* that opposed Bilam an angel of mercy?
10. How did Bilam die?
11. Why did the *malach* kill Bilam's donkey?
12. Bilam compared his meeting with an angel to someone else's meeting with an angel. Who was the other person and what was the comparison?
13. Bilam told Balak to build seven altars. Why specifically seven?
14. Who in Jewish history seemed fit for a curse, but got a blessing instead?
15. Why are the Jewish People compared to lions?
16. On Bilam's third attempt to curse the Jews, he changed his strategy. What was different?
17. What were Bilam's three main characteristics?
18. What did Bilam see that made him decide not to curse the Jews?
19. What phrase in Bilam's self-description can be translated in two opposite ways, both of which come out meaning the same thing?
20. Bilam told Balak that the Jews' G-d hates what?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 22:4 - Since Moshe grew up in Midian, the Moabites thought the Midianites might know wherein lay Moshe's power.
2. 22:4 - He was a prince of Midian.
3. 22:5 - So the other nations couldn't say, "If we had had prophets, we also would have become righteous."
4. 22:6 - Because Bilam's curse had helped Sichon defeat Moav.
5. 22:8 - Only at night.
6. 22:9 - He mistakenly reasoned that G-d isn't all-knowing.
7. 22:11 - Balak wanted only to drive the Jews from the Land. Bilam sought to exterminate them completely.
8. 22:13 - He implied that G-d wouldn't let him go with the Moabite princes due to their lesser dignity.
9. 22:22 - It mercifully tried to stop Bilam from sinning and destroying himself.
10. 22:23 - He was killed with a sword.
11. 22:33 - So that people shouldn't see it and say, "Here's the donkey that silenced Bilam." G-d is concerned with human dignity.
12. 22:34 - Avraham. Bilam said, "G-d told me to go but later sent an angel to stop me." The same thing happened to Avraham: G-d told Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak but later canceled the command through an angel.
13. 23:4 - Corresponding to the seven altars built by the Avot. Bilam said to G-d, "The Jewish People's ancestors built seven altars, but I alone have built altars equal to all of them."
14. 23:8 - Yaakov, when Yitzchak blessed him.
15. 23:24 - They rise each morning and "strengthen" themselves to do *mitzvot*.
16. 24:1 - He began mentioning the Jewish People's sins, hoping thus to be able to curse them.
17. 24:2 - An evil eye, pride and greed.
18. 24:2 - He saw each tribe dwelling without intermingling. He saw the tents arranged so no one could see into his neighbor's tent.
19. 24:3 - "*Shatum ha'ayin*." It means either "the poked-out eye," implying blindness in one eye; or it means the "the open eye," which means vision but implies blindness in the other eye.
20. 24:14 - Promiscuity.

- Delivering a get divorce document to Eretz Yisrael from abroad
- What the delivering agent must say and why
- The credibility of a single witness
- The need for *lishmah* in writing and signing a get
- Three types of get which are invalid by rabbinic law
- Status of cities not in Eretz Yisrael but near its border
- Delivering a get from one hegemony to another
- When the delivering agent is incapable of speaking
- When the divorced wife herself brings the get
- If the delivering agent failed to testify that the get was written in his presence
- Can an agent or witness also serve as judge
- Rabbi Meir's position regarding any deviation from the rabbinic requirements for a get
- When only a portion of the get was written in the presence of the delivering agent
- Whether Babylon is considered like Eretz Yisrael in regard to delivery of a get
- The credentials of Rabbi Eviatar as a reliable authority
- Rabbi Eviatar's explanation of a passage in Tanach and his meeting with the Prophet Eliyahu
- The danger of an atmosphere of fear in the home
- Silence as a weapon against an enemy
- Decrees of mourning for destruction of *Beit Hamikdash*
- Northern boundary of Eretz Yisrael

CAUSE FOR CIVIL WAR

A bloody civil war took place in Eretz Yisrael some three thousand years ago that claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Jews and almost obliterated an entire tribe of Israel.

Some ruffians in the City of Givah in the portion belonging to the Tribe of Binyamin committed an atrocity that alarmed the entire nation, and a demand was made to bring them to justice. The Binyamites resented this as an intrusion on their tribal sovereignty in an era when there was no king to exercise central authority. The result was a war in which both the Binyamites and the rest of the nation suffered heavy losses.

What was the catalyst for this tragedy?

Rabbi Chisda traces the source to the atmosphere of fear that a certain Jew created in his home, which caused his concubine to run away from him when he became upset with her behavior. She eventually became the victim of that atrocity that sparked civil war. The obvious lesson is that one must avoid domestic terror that can lead to such a tragedy and similar ones.

A different lesson is drawn in the Midrash from this civil war. The elders of the nation are blamed for causing it by failing to travel throughout the country to teach people Torah values, an outreach effort that would have prevented the perpetuation of the atrocity and the tragic events that followed.

• Gittin 6b

What the SAGES Say

"If one senses his resources as being very limited he should apply them to charity, even more so when they are plentiful."

• Gittin 7a

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THE KUZARI PRINCIPLE

From: Sandra in Cape Town, South Africa

Dear Rabbi,

Would you please elaborate on what I've heard referred to as "The Kuzari Principle" insofar as it purports to be an historical proof for the Jewish belief in G-d, and how is this proof any more valid for Judaism than for the other monotheistic religions of Christianity or Islam?

Dear Sandra,

This is quite an undertaking to take on in this limited forum, but I'll attempt to outline the idea as follows:

The Jewish claim to truth is based on the idea that G-d revealed Himself to the entire people at Sinai which was an experience so great and so intense and so unanimously experienced by all that it could not have been made up. This imparted in the Jewish people an unswerving commitment to the belief in G-d. Subsequently they may have lapsed into rebelling against His will, but their acceptance of G-d's existence was not questioned.

Compare this to other religions' claim to truth based on the spiritual experiences or insights of one person, or of just a small group of people. This experience cannot be corroborated in any way by others. Of course, the experience may have happened. But the difference is that translating the experience of the individual to a national "belief" is based solely on faith in that individual and accepting his claims despite having no other verification.

Given the advantage of the Jewish claim to truth, namely it being based on the simultaneous experience of an entire people, why don't we find this idea used by any other people in the history of mankind as a basis for their belief?

The answer is that as powerful as a claim as it is if it's true, it's conversely as weak if it's false. Specifically, if someone intended to dupe an entire people into believing something

based on the claim that they all experienced it when in reality they hadn't, no one would accept the claim, simply because they know they didn't experience what was claimed. This is certainly so if this new belief system was limiting and restrictive.

Lest you think that the lie could have been implemented later, that's equally implausible. If an individual tried to convince an entire people to accept the new belief based on the claim that their ancestors had such a national revelation, people would counter, "If our ancestors had such an experience, why are you the only one who knows about it? Surely some of us would have heard something about this revelation that you claim all of our ancestors had!"

Therefore, only if such a national revelation actually happened would either the current or even a future generation accept such a claim. And if it didn't happen, neither the current nor even a future generation would accept it.

Now, Christianity and Islam, for example, consciously drew richly from Judaism as an example for their newly forming religions. And they accept the Torah's claim of national revelation of G-d to Israel at Sinai. The question is why didn't they follow the Jewish example regarding this claim to truth, namely that G-d revealed His "mind-change" to the entire people, heard thunderously by all to the accompaniment of lighting and shofar blasts? The answer is simply because of their recognition that if the claim was accepted by the Jews, it must have basis, as explained above. Conversely, they realized that such a claim could never be accepted in their regard because it just didn't happen. The claim to truth regarding these religions, then, can be based solely on the faith in the claims of individuals. That doesn't mean these claims can't be true. It just means they can't be verified and are therefore only faith as opposed to belief.

Interestingly, both other major western religions accept that G-d revealed His will to the Jews and mankind in the presence of an entire people, but claim He revealed His "change of mind" only to an individual. Now if everyone agrees that G-d deemed it necessary to implement His will through national revelation, how likely is it that He would revoke it through a revelation to one person?

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JUST LISTENING

Question: I am frequently approached by a person with a problem seeking my advice. While I am happy to offer counsel in an area in which I have some training or experience, the problem presented is sometimes of a nature beyond my ability to be anything more than a listener and I am tempted to excuse myself from serving in this capacity. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: First of all, don't reject the possibility of helping even in areas outside your expertise. Very often the person consulting you is faced with a choice between two or more

courses of action and is unable to make a decision as to which he should follow. As an objective listener you may well be in a position to evaluate the choices and offer an opinion as to which is the most likely to succeed.

But even if you cannot offer any form of counsel, it is a great service on your part to just listen. "When one suffers from anxiety," say our Sages, "he should pour out his heart to someone else." The relief you provide for a worried party by simply listening to him is of great value and well justifies the time and patience you dedicate to being a sympathetic audience.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

THE HUMAN SIDE OF ISRAEL

Israel is the world's happiest country. So writes a journalist named Spengler in a recent edition of the "Asia Times". This is based on a comparison between the fertility rate of 35 industrial countries and their suicide rate. Israel is at the top of the list with the highest fertility rate and virtually the lowest suicide rate.

Just to give an idea of how much Israelis value life more

than others the chart in this article reports that the US has a suicide rate of 11 per 100,000 people and Russia 34.3 while Israel's rate is a mere 6.2.

As regards fertility Israel's rate is the highest, twice as much as that of Russia and most European countries.

The author's conclusion is that Israel has a love of life and is therefore the world's happiest country.

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