



THE INSPIRE

BALAK

MAZAL TOVS

BIRTHDAY

Jason Szlezinger Tuesday
Robert Freedman Wednesday
Barbara Tobias Wednesday
Gill White Wednesday
Patricia Schiffman Friday

ANNIVERSARIES

Mr & Mrs Michael & Loretta Goldstone Saturday
Mr & Mrs Jeffrey & Pauline Witzenzfeld Saturday
Mr & Mrs Clive & Susan Wiseman Sunday
Mr & Mrs Bernard & Sandra Irwin Tuesday
Mr & Mrs Douglas & Lesley Adams Thursday

YARTZEIT

Daniel Curtis, father Shlomo Ben Mendel HaKohen Sunday
Brian Piatkus, brother Asher ben Yosef Monday
Paul Sugarman, mother Chava bas Binyomin Wednesday
Elaine Austin, father Yitzchok ben Yitzchok Thursday



**Wishing a hearty Mazal Tov to
Dylan Sugarman on his Barmitzvah**

Daniel & Leanne Sugarman

Paul & Marlene Sugarman

Vince & Doreen Allen

& The whole family

**May we share many more simchas
together in good health.**



TIMES

SHABBAT & SERVICE TIMES

25th June candle lighting
9:03pm
Shabbat end 10:37 pm

Kabbalat Shabbat 7pm
Shabbos morning 9:30am

Sunday 17 Tammuz Fast day
starts 1:02 am
finishes 10:18pm

PARSHAH POINTERS

Balak, the king of Moab, summons the prophet Balaam to curse the people of Israel. On the way, Balaam is berated by his donkey, who sees, before Balaam does, the angel that G-d sends to block their way. Three times, from three different vantage points, Balaam attempts to pronounce his curses; each time, blessings issue forth instead. Balaam also prophesies on the end of the days and the coming of Moshiach.

The people fall prey to the charms of the daughters of Moab, and are enticed to worship the idol Peor.

When a high-ranking Israelite official publicly takes a Midianite princess into a tent, Pinchas kills them both, stopping the plague raging among the people.

A LOVE (FROM) HATE RELATIONSHIP

NAFTALI SILBERBERG

In this week's Parshah, we read about Balak, the king of Moab, who is deathly scared of the Jews who are camped just beyond his nation's border. The Jewish Nation had just effortlessly defeated and conquered the adjoining lands of the two mighty Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, and Balak fears that his nation will be next. So he sends for Balaam, a non-Jewish necromancer and prophet, and contracts him to curse the impending invaders. The plan backfires, for G d transforms Balaam's curses into a cascade of eloquent blessings.

Interestingly, however, Balak's fear was unfounded, and his efforts for naught. For, unbeknownst to him, G d had instructed the Jews not to "distress the Moabites or provoke them to war" (because Moab was promised as an inheritance to the descendants of Lot).

Now, while Balak cannot be faulted for being unaware of this divine edict issued to the Jews, Balaam, a prophet who "heard G d's sayings and perceived the thoughts of the Most High," was surely aware of the Jews' neutrality vis-à-vis the Moabites. Why then didn't he simply advise Balak: "My friend, your tranquility need not be spoiled; the Jews pose no threat to you whatsoever!"?

It is precisely this question which led the biblical commentator Rashi to conclude that "Balaam detested the Jews more than Balak." Balak hated the Jews—but for good reason; in his estimation, they presented a mortal threat to him and his citizens. Balaam, on the other hand, like so many anti-Semites throughout the ages, hated the Jews for no reason at all. It was an essential hate that defied rhyme or reason—a hate that was qualitatively greater than Balak's. And as such, he jumped at the opportunity to curse the Jews, though he knew well that Balak's fear was groundless.

G d did not prevent Balaam from addressing the Jews; He didn't even replace Balaam's planned curses with new blessings. Instead, He "transformed the curse into a blessing." As the Talmud explains, Balaam's blessings are actually the very curses he intended to pronounce—but slightly reworded as to render them blessings.

In this week's Parshah, we read about Balak, the king of Moab, who is deathly scared of the Jews who are camped just beyond his nation's border. The Jewish Nation had just effortlessly defeated and conquered the adjoining lands of the two mighty Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, and Balak fears that his nation will be next. So he sends for Balaam, a non-Jewish necromancer and prophet, and contracts him to curse the impending invaders. The plan backfires, for G d transforms Balaam's curses into a cascade of eloquent blessings.

Interestingly, however, Balak's fear was unfounded, and his efforts for naught. For, unbeknownst to him, G d had instructed the Jews not to "distress the Moabites or provoke them to war" (because Moab was promised as an inheritance to the descendants of Lot).

Now, while Balak cannot be faulted for being unaware of this divine edict issued to the Jews, Balaam, a prophet who "heard G d's sayings and perceived the thoughts of the Most High," was surely aware of the Jews' neutrality vis-à-vis the Moabites. Why then didn't he simply advise Balak: "My friend, your tranquility need not be spoiled; the Jews pose no threat to you whatsoever!"?

It is precisely this question which led the biblical commentator Rashi to conclude that "Balaam detested the Jews more than Balak." Balak hated the Jews—but for good reason; in his estimation, they presented a mortal threat to him and his citizens. Balaam, on the other hand, like so many anti-Semites throughout the ages, hated the Jews for no reason at all. It was essential hate that defied rhyme or reason—hate that was qualitatively greater than Balak's. And as such, he jumped at the opportunity to curse the Jews, though he knew well that Balak's fear was groundless.

Gd did not prevent Balaam from addressing the Jews; He didn't even replace Balaam's planned curses with new blessings. Instead, He "transformed the curse into a blessing." As the Talmud explains, Balaam's blessings are actually the very curses he intended to pronounce—but slightly reworded as to render them blessings.

Transform logical hate (the Balak variety) into love, and the ensuing love will also be of the logical sort; a love based on – and measured according to – the qualities and worth of the beloved. But transform completely baseless and supra-logical hate into love, and the result will be Balaam's exquisite blessings: an effusion of boundless, essential, and infinite love. A love that transcends all logic and reason, the love that Gd harbors for each and every one of His children.

It is no surprise, then, that Balaam's blessings are the vehicle for the prophecy regarding the Messianic redemption: "I see it, but not now; I behold it, but not soon. A star [the Messiah] has gone forth from Jacob, and a staff will arise from Israel... and Israel shall triumph."

For it is then, during the Messianic Era, that G d's essential and limitless love for His people – as expressed by Balaam's blessings – will finally be manifest.



I have cities, but no houses. I have mountains, but no trees. I have water, but no fish. What am I?

Last weeks Answer: Live

JOKE

A woman reported the disappearance of her husband to the police. The officer looked at the guy's photograph, questioned her, and then asked if she wanted to give her husband any message if they found him.

"Yes," she replied. "Please tell him Mother didn't come after all."

RABBI SACKS OBM

Is leadership a set of skills, the ability to summon and command power? Or does it have an essentially moral dimension also? Can a bad man be a good leader, or does his badness compromise his leadership? That is the question raised by the key figure in this week's Parshah, the pagan prophet Balaam.

First, by way of introduction, we have independent evidence that Balaam actually existed. An archeological discovery in 1967, at Deir 'Alla at the junction of the Jordan and Jabbok rivers, uncovered an inscription on the wall of a pagan temple, dated to the eighth century BCE, which makes reference to a seer named Balaam ben Beor, in terms remarkably similar to those of our Parshah. Balaam was a well-known figure in the region.

His skills were clearly impressive. He was a religious virtuoso, a sought-after shaman, magus, spellbinder and miracle worker. Balak says, on the basis of experience or reputation, "I know that whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse is cursed." The rabbinic literature does not call this into question. On the phrase "No prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face," the sages went so far as to say: "In Israel there was no other prophet as great as Moses, but among the nations there was. Who was he? Balaam."

Another midrashic source says that "there was nothing in the world that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not reveal to Balaam, who surpassed even Moses in the wisdom of sorcery." At a technical level, Balaam had all the skills.

Yet the ultimate verdict on Balaam is negative. In chapter 25 we read of the ironic sequel to the episode of the curses/blessings. The Israelites, having been saved by God from the would-be curses of Moab and Midian, suffered a self-inflicted tragedy by allowing themselves to be enticed by the women of the land. God's anger burns against them. Several chapters later (31:16) it emerges that it was Balaam who devised this strategy: "They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the Lord in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the Lord's people." Having failed to curse the Israelites, Balaam eventually succeeded in doing them great harm.

So the picture that emerges from the Jewish sources is of a man with great gifts, a genuine prophet, a man whom the sages compared with Moses himself—yet at the same time a figure of flawed character that eventually led to his downfall and to his reputation as an evildoer, one of those mentioned by the Mishnah as having been denied a share in the world to come.

What was his flaw? There are many speculations, but one suggestion given in the Talmud infers the answer from his name. What is the meaning of Balaam? Answers the Talmud: it means "a man without a people" (belo am).

This is a fine insight. Balaam is a man without loyalties. Balak sent for him, saying: "Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me . . . For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed." Balaam was a prophet for hire. He had supernatural powers. He could bless someone, and that person would succeed. He could curse, and that person would be blighted by misfortune. But there is no hint in any of the reports, biblical or otherwise, that Balaam was a prophet in the moral sense: that he was concerned with justice, desert, the rights and wrongs of those whose lives he affected. Like a contract killer of a later age, Balaam was a loner. His services could be bought. He had skills, and used them to devastating effect. But he had no commitments, no loyalties, no rootedness in humanity. He was the man *belo am*, without a people. Moses was the opposite. God Himself says of him, "He is [supremely] loyal in all My house." However disappointed he was with the Israelites, he never ceased to argue their cause before God. When his initial intervention on their behalf with Pharaoh worsened their condition, he said to God, "O Lord, why do You mistreat Your people? Why did You send me?"

When the Israelites made the golden calf and God threatened to destroy the people and begin again with Moses, he said, "Now, if You would, please forgive their sin. If not, then blot me out from the book that You have written." When the people, demoralized by the report of the spies, wanted to return to Egypt, and God's anger burned against them, he said, "With Your great love, forgive the sin of this nation, just as You have forgiven them from [the time they left] Egypt until now."

When God threatened punishment during the Korach rebellion, Moses prayed, "Will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?" Even when his own sister, Miriam, spoke badly about him and was punished by leprosy, Moses prayed to God on her behalf: "Please, God, heal her now. Moses never ceased to pray for his people, however much they had sinned, however audacious the prayer, however much he was putting his own relationship with God at risk. Knowing their faults, he remained utterly loyal to them.

The Hebrew word *emunah* is usually translated as "faith," and that is what it came to mean in the Middle Ages. But in biblical Hebrew it is better translated as "faithfulness, reliability, loyalty." It means not walking away from the other party when times are tough. It is a key covenantal virtue.

There are people with great gifts, intellectual and sometimes even spiritual, who nonetheless fail to achieve what they might have done. They lack the basic moral qualities of integrity, honesty, humility, and above all, loyalty. What they do, they do brilliantly. But often they do the wrong things. Conscious of their unusual endowments, they tend to look down on others. They give way to pride, arrogance, and a belief that they can somehow get away with great crimes. Balaam is the classic example, and the fact that he planned to entice the Israelites into sin even after he knew that God was on their side is a measure of how the greatest can sometimes fall to become the lowest of the low.

Those who are loyal to other people find that other people are loyal to them. Those who are disloyal are eventually distrusted, and lose whatever authority they might once have had. Leadership without loyalty is not leadership.

Skills alone cannot substitute for the moral qualities that make people follow those who demonstrate them. We follow those we trust, because they have acted so as to earn our trust. That was what made Moses the great leader Balaam might have been but never was. Always be loyal to the people you lead.

A businessman, whose affairs had gone downhill, came to see his rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heshel of Apta.¹ His daughter was of marriageable age, he explained, and he could not see how he would come up with the dowry needed to marry her off.

The rebbe asked him how much money he had on him.

“My pockets are practically empty,” the man replied. “I only have one coin left.”

“Go home,” the rebbe advised, “and accept the first business proposition which presents itself to you. Through it, you will obtain the means to marry off your daughter.”

The man headed home, wondering how he would possibly procure such a sum with only a single coin to invest.

On his way, he stopped at an inn where he happened to observe a group of diamond merchants discussing business. One turned to him and asked, “Why are you looking at us? Would you like to buy a diamond?”

Remembering that the rebbe had told him to accept the first business proposal he received, he said yes. When the merchant asked how much the man was able to spend, he proffered his single coin, which was all he had. The diamond merchant began to laugh. “With one coin, he thinks he can buy a diamond!”

“You know what,” he said, “I do have something I can sell you for that amount. I can sell you my olam habah—my place in the World to Come—for a ruble.”

A contract was written up, and all the assembled merchants had a good laugh.

When the diamond merchant arrived home and told his wife the humorous story his wife was less than pleased. “Why would I remain married to someone without a place in the World to Come?!” she fumed. “Who will I be with there?”

“If you have no olam habah, divorce me,” she said. “If you wish to remain married, go right back to that man and reclaim your olam habah.”

So he went back to the inn where he found the destitute chassid.

“I’ll give you back your coin if you give me back the contract,” he offered. “Let’s arrange a refund.”

The chassid refused.

“OK, I’ll give you more than what you paid, just give me back my portion in the World to Come!”

Still the chassid refused.

“How much do you want?”

“One thousand coins,” the man finally replied, based on the rebbe’s promise that this transaction would procure the funds he needed for his daughter’s wedding. He explained as much to the desperate merchant standing in front of him.

The merchant tried bargaining, but to no avail. The chassid stuck to his guns. The sum was delivered and the contract annulled, restoring the merchant’s share in the World to Come.

A while later, the merchant’s wife came to see the Rebbe of Apta.

“Is it true that my husband’s olam habah was worth one thousand coins?! Was such a great share of olam habah awaiting him? Or was it worth the single coin it was originally bought for?”

The rebbe responded using her phrasing: “When your husband sold it, his olam habah was truly only worth one coin. But, when he bought it back through giving the other man the money he needed to marry off his daughter, his olam habah absolutely became worth one thousand coins—if not more.”

How much is our olam habah worth? What can we do to increase it? Do we follow the instructions of our sages, even when it doesn’t necessarily seem sensible to us at the moment? Do we possess full trust that the outcome will be as good as we are assured?

FOOD 4 THOUGHT

“Jacob! Your tents are so good!” (Balak 24:5)

Bilam was the most powerful shaman of all time. King Balak paid him handsomely to lay his curses on the Jewish people.

But when Bilam observed the Jewish people and saw that the openings of their tents did not face one another...

...meaning that they weren’t prodding into each other’s private lives, and neither were they putting their own lives on public display...

...then Bilam realized this was not a people he could curse.

Because when a society values and protects the inner life of its individuals it protects itself. It is a healthy, whole organism. The Divine Presence breathes within it. No illness can conquer it, no intruder can penetrate its borders.