



ב"ה

Parshas Chukas-Balak in a Nutshell (Numbers 19:1-25:9)

Moses is taught the laws of the Red Heifer, whose ashes purify a person who has been contaminated by contact with a dead body.

After 40 years of journeying through the desert, the people of Israel arrive in the wilderness of Zin. Miriam dies and the people thirst for water. G-d tells Moses to speak to a rock and command it to give water. Moses gets angry at the rebellious Israelites and strikes the stone. Water issues forth, but Moses is told by G-d that neither he nor Aaron will enter the Promised Land.

Aaron dies at Hor Hahar and is succeeded in the High Priesthood by his son Elazar. Venomous snakes attack the Israelite camp after yet another eruption of discontent in which the people "speak against G-d and Moses"; G-d tells Moses to place a brass serpent upon a high pole, and all who will gaze heavenward will be healed. The people sing a song in honor of the miraculous well that provided the water in the desert. Moses leads the people in battles against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og (who seek to prevent Israel's passage through their territory) and conquers their lands, which lie east of the Jordan.

Balak, the King of Moab, summons the prophet Balaam to curse the people of Israel.

(continued next column)

The root for the word, *chukim*, means "engrave." Engraving involves strenuous labor. This is the first key to our commitment to the Torah. In order to make the Divine potential each of us possesses grow and blossom, an investment of hard work must be made.

-- The Rebbe



On the way, Balaam is berated by his donkey, who sees the angel that G-d sends to block their way before Balaam does. Three times, from three different vantage points, Balaam attempts to pronounce his curses; each time, blessings issue instead. Balaam also prophesies on the end of 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. ❖

Fast of 17 Tammuz

Thurs Fast Begins: 3:36 am

Thurs Fast Ends: 9:05 pm

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Halachic Zmanim

Shabbos, July 1, 2023

Eastern Daylight Savings

Earliest Tallis..... 4:16 AM
Latest Morning Shema 9:11 AM
Earliest Mincha (Gedola) .. 1:39 PM
Plag Hamincha..... 7:02 PM
Earliest Evening Shema 9:06 PM

Anshei Lubavitch Congregation

Rabbi Levi and Leah Neubort

Adult education:

Rabbi Avrohom and Rivky Bergstein

Youth Outreach:

Rabbi Eli and Ruty Steinhauser

Shabbos Schedule

Erev Shabbos – June 30 / Tammuz 11

Candle Lighting 8:14 pm

Mincha 7:30 pm

Shabbos Day – July 1 / Tammuz 12

Shacharis 10:00 am*

Torah Reading 11:00 am

Kiddush 12:10 pm

Mincha 7:45 pm

Pirkei Avos/Rabbi's Drasha ... 8:40 pm

Shabbos Ends 9:23 pm

**Latest morning Shema is now 9:11 AM. Be sure to recite the Shema at or before that time (even if at home).*

Weekday Schedule (not on a holiday):

Minyan

Shacharis (Mon-Fri) 6:15 am

Shacharis (Sunday) 9:00 am

Mincha (Sun-Thurs) 1:45 pm

Maariv (Sun-Thurs) 9:15 pm

Bulletin

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Chassidic Masters

The Mountain that Bilam Stood On

Adapted by Chaim Miller; From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

*I see them from the head of rocks,
I look at them from hills.
It is a nation that will dwell alone,
And will not be reckoned with the nations.*

Numbers 23:9

Classic Questions

What does "I see them from the head of rocks" mean? (v. 23:9)

Rashi: I look at the "head" and beginning of their roots, and I see that they are well-founded and powerful, like these mountains and hills, because of their Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

Ramban: Bilam was simply declaring that he was looking down upon the Jewish people from a high place, as the Torah states explicitly that Balak took Bilam to a high place: "He took him up to Bamos-Ba'al, and from there he saw part of the people" (22:41).

Maharzu: At the literal level, Bilam was standing at the peak of mountains and hills. However, since it seems irrelevant to relate where he was standing, the Midrash taught that the rocks and hills refer to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs (Maharzu on Bamidbar Rabah 20:19).

The Rebbe's Teachings

"Rocks" and "Hills" (v. 9)

At the beginning of the current passage, we read how Balak took

Bilam to a high place where he could look down upon the Jewish people and curse them: "Balak took Bilam and brought him up to Bamos-Ba'al, and from there he saw part of the people" (22:41). Thus, when Bilam later said, "I see them from the head of rocks, I look at them from hills" (v. 9), he simply appears to have been describing how he was standing upon a high point from where he could see the Jewish people, as Ramban writes. Why does Rashi reject this interpretation and offer instead an explanation based on the Midrash, that the "rocks" and "hills" allude to the foundations of the Jewish people, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs? Rashi appears to have disregarded his own declared intention to explain scripture exclusively at the literal level.

Maharzu argues that the issue of where Bilam was standing is an irrelevant, redundant detail, which demands Midrashic interpretation.

However, it could be argued that Bilam's position on a high mountain where he could see all the Jewish people is relevant at the literal level, as it reconciles a contradiction between two other verses. Before Bilam's first parable, the Torah states that he was situated in Bamos-Ba'al, where "he saw part of the people" (22:41).

Yet, after Bilam proceeded to bless, rather than curse the Jewish people, Balak suggested, "Come with me to another place from where you will see them. You will only see a part of them, but not all of them" (23:13), indicating that on the first occasion Bilam had indeed seen all of the Jewish people.

Thus, there appears to be a need to take this verse ("I see them from the head of rocks, I look at them from hills") literally, for with these words the reader discovers that Bilam had reached a summit where he did actually see all of the Jewish people.

So the question stands: Why does Rashi cite a Midrashic explanation, rather than the literal interpretation suggested by Ramban?

The Explanation

The Torah describes Bilam's first discourse as a "parable" (v. 7), indicating that it is metaphoric in nature. However, on reading Bilam's first parable, Rashi was troubled that it seems to be totally devoid of metaphor or imagery. Verses 7-8 are a straightforward introduction to explain why Bilam blessed the Jewish people, the latter part of verse 9 is a blessing for the Jewish people to "rest alone," and verse 10 describes the large size of the Jewish people, without the use of allegory or metaphor. Thus, the only section of Bilam's words which could actually constitute a "parable" are the words, "I see them from the head of rocks, I look at them from hills." Therefore, Rashi explains that this was a metaphor for the strength of the Jewish people: "They are well-founded and powerful, like these mountains and hills." ❖

(Based on Likutei Sichos vol. 28, p. 165ff.)

17 Tammuz

The fast of the 17th of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, known as Shivah Asar B'Tammuz, is the start of a three-week mourning period for the destruction of Jerusalem and the two Holy Temples.

The fast actually commemorates five tragic events that occurred on this date:

1. Moses broke the tablets when he saw the Jewish people worshipping the Golden Calf.
2. During the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, the Jews were forced to cease offering the daily sacrifices due to the lack of sheep.
3. Apostomos burned the holy Torah.
4. An idol was placed in the Holy Temple.
5. The walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Romans, in 69 CE, after a lengthy siege. (Three weeks later, after the Jews put up a valiant struggle, the Romans destroyed the second Holy Temple on the 9th of Av.)

The Jerusalem Talmud maintains that this is also the date when the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem on their way to destroying the first Temple.

Laws & Customs

Healthy adults—bar- or bat-mitzvah age and older—abstain from eating or drinking between dawn and nightfall. [Click here for exact times in your location.](#)

Pregnant and nursing women may not have to fast. Someone who is ill should consult with a rabbi. Even those exempt from fasting, such as ill people or children, shouldn't indulge in delicacies or sweets.

It is permitted to wake up early before the fast begins and eat, provided that prior to going to sleep one had in mind to do so.

During the morning prayers we recite selichot (penitential prayers), printed in the back of the prayerbook. The "long Avinu Malkeinu" is recited during the morning and afternoon prayers.

The Torah is read during the morning and afternoon prayers. The reading—the same for both morning and afternoon—is Exodus 32:11–14 and 34:1–10, which discusses the aftermath of the Golden Calf incident, how Moses successfully interceded on the Israelites' behalf and attained forgiveness for their sin. After the afternoon Torah reading, the special fast-day haftarah, Isaiah 55:6–56:8, is read.

During the Amidah prayer of the afternoon service (Minchah), those who are fasting add the paragraph Aneinu in the Shema Koleinu blessing. (It is also added in the cantor's repetition of the Amidah in both the morning and afternoon services, as its own blessing between the blessings of Re'eh and Refa'einu.) Additionally, the priestly blessing is also added in the repetition of the Amidah in the afternoon service. If the 17th of Tammuz falls on Shabbat, the fast is postponed until Sunday.

Abstaining from food and drink is the external element of a fast day. On a deeper level, a fast day is an auspicious day, a day when G-d is accessible, waiting for us to repent.

The sages explain: "Every generation for which the Temple is not rebuilt, it is as though the Temple was destroyed for that generation." A fast day is not only a sad day, but an opportune day. It's a day when we are empowered to fix the cause of that destruction, so that our long exile will be ended and we will find ourselves living in messianic times; may that be very soon. ❖

From Our Sages – Chukas-Balak

This is the decree (chok) of the Torah . . . (Numbers 19:2)

This phrase can be understood in two ways. On one level it means that this — the law of the red heifer — is the ultimate “decree,” the most supra-rational of all the Torah’s precepts. A deeper meaning is that all of Torah is, in essence, a divine decree. It is only that with many of the mitzvot, the supra-rational divine will comes “clothed” in garments of reason.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring to you a red heifer (Numbers 19:2)

Nine red heifers were prepared from the time that the Jewish people were commanded this mitzvah until the Second Temple was destroyed. The first was prepared by Moses, the second by Ezra, and another seven were prepared from Ezra until the Temple’s destruction. The tenth heifer will be prepared by Moshiach, may he speedily be revealed, Amen, may it be the will of G-d.

(Mishneh Torah)

The clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean person . . . and he shall be clean at evening. . . [But] he who sprinkles the water of sprinkling . . . shall be unclean (Numbers 19:19-21)

All who are involved in the preparation of the heifer, from beginning to the end, become impure, but the heifer itself purifies the impure! But G-d says: I have made a chok, decreed a decree, and you may not transgress My decrees.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

The fact that the ashes of the heifer “purify the contaminated and contaminate the pure” carries an important lesson to us in our daily lives: If your fellow has been infected by impurity and corruption, do not hesitate to get involved and do everything within your power to rehabilitate him. If you are concerned that you may become tainted by your contact with him, remember that the Torah commands the kohen to purify his fellow Jew, even though his own level of purity will be diminished in the process.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Balaam arose in the morning and saddled his donkey (Numbers 22:21)

From here we see how hatred causes a person to break from convention. Balaam had many servants at his disposal; yet in his eagerness to go curse Israel, he saddled his donkey himself. Said the Almighty: “Evil one! Their father Abraham has already preempted you when, to fulfill My will, he ‘rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey’ (Genesis 22:3).”

(Rashi)

In order to place before man the “free choice” that is essential to his mission in life, G-d so ordered His world that every positive force has its negative counterpart. Were there to exist a good element which cannot be put to corrupt use, then man’s potential for evil would be disadvantaged and would not present the equal challenge which makes for the choice factor in life. In the words of King Solomon (Ecclesiastes 7:14), “One corresponding to the other, G-d created.”

But this “equality” between good and evil extends only to the most superficial level of reality. When a person learns to look beyond the surface of things to their inherent purpose, he will see that only the good in the world is real and substantial. Good is an existence in its own right, while evil exists merely to provide the tension which imbues the positive acts of man with meaning and significance.

Hence there cannot be anything “original” to evil, which is but a shallow, corrupted refraction of the good in the world. If Balaam was able to transcend the norm with the intensity of his hate, this was only because, centuries earlier, Abraham had done the same out of love of his Creator.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe) ❖

Haftorah for Chukas-Balak in a nutshell

Micah 5:6-6:8

This week's haftorah makes mention of the incident of Balak the king of Moab hiring the sorcerer Balaam to curse the Jewish people — the main topic of this week's Torah reading.

The prophet Micah prophesies about what will occur after the war of Gog and Magog, the war which precedes the coming of the Messiah and the Final Redemption.

"And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples — like dew sent by G-d, like torrents of rain upon vegetation that does not hope for any man and does not wait for the sons of men." The prophet describes how G-d will remove the idols and sorcerers and how He will destroy the Jews' enemies.

The prophet Micah then goes on to rebuke the Jewish people for not observing G-d's commandments, calling as witness the "mountains and hills" — a reference to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs — and reminding them of the great things G-d had done for them. He took them out of Egypt and replaced the curses that Balaam son of Beor wanted to utter against them with blessings.

The Jewish people respond by saying that they do not know how to serve G-d and ask for guidance. The prophet reminds them of the Torah, and that all they need to do is contained within it: "He has told you, O man, what is good, and what G-d demands of you: but to do justice, love kindness, and walk discreetly with your G-d." ❖



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Marc S. Berman, Esq.

Attorney-at-Law

140 E. Ridgewood Ave.

Suite 415

Paramus, NJ 07652

Telephone: **(201) 797-4411**

msb@bermanlawoffice.com

www.bermanlawoffice.com

17-10 River Road, Suite 2C

Fair Lawn, NJ 07410

שבת שלום גוט שבת!



Good Shabbos to all!

Have an easy and meaningful Thursday fast.