

***Yad Avraham Institute***  
**Weekly Torah Commentaries Series**  
*The Portion of*

**Balak**

July 10, 2008

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita***

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**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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**New York**  
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**B"H**

## Balak

*Presented by*

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita***

***Dean***

### ***1. G'd's Ways are Just***

The Midrash cites a verse, “**The Rock! – perfect is His work; for all His ways are justice.**” G'd did not want the nations of the world to come with a claim at the end of time, saying ‘You have kept us away from You. You did not provide for us as You did for the Children of Israel.’ What did G'd do? Just as He established kings, wise men, and prophets for the Jewish people, so too did He establish them for the nations of the world. If one compares the kings, wise men, and prophets of the Jewish people with those of the nations, one will see the difference. G'd allowed king Solomon to reign over the entire world. Similarly, G'd allowed Nebuchadnezzar to dominate the world. King Solomon, in his lofty position built the Temple and sang many praises to G'd. Nebuchadnezzar, on the other hand, used his power to destroy the Temple and blaspheme G'd. He had said, ‘I will ascend to the heavens and will be the equivalent of the One above.’ G'd granted wealth to king David. What did he do with this wealth? He purchased the location of the Temple, for His name. Haman also merited enormous wealth; however, he expended it on trying to have a nation annihilated (Jewish people). The greatness that the Jewish people were given, was also given to the nations of the world. Just as the Jewish people had the prophet Moshe, who was able to communicate with G'd whenever he chose to do so, so too did the nations of the world have Bilaam, who was also able to communicate with G'd whenever he chose to do so.”

The Midrash continues, “What is the difference between the prophets of the Jewish people and the prophets of the nations of the world? The prophets of Israel forewarned the nations not to transgress. However the prophets of the nations created breaches to destroy mankind so that it should have no connection with the world to come. The prophets of the Jewish people expressed the Attribute of Mercy, while their prophets expressed cruelty. Bilaam, the prophet of the nations, wanted to uproot and destroy an entire nation. This is the

reason the Torah tells us the story of Bilaam. It is so that one should understand why there is no longer Divinely inspired people (prophets) among the nations of the world. If the power of prophecy would be given to an individual from the nations, it would be used for destruction, as Bilaam had done. Bilaam, being given prophecy, is the reason the nations of the world cannot claim at the end of time that G'd did not grant them the same opportunity as He had the Jewish people.”

The Gemara in Tractate Avoda Zorah tells us that at the end of time G'd will announce to the world, “Whoever has a share in Torah should come and receive his just reward.” All the nations will respond by saying that each of them is deserving for his own contribution to Torah. However, G'd will prove to them that they have basis for their claim. Ultimately, the nations will complain to G'd that He favored the Jewish people over them. G'd will respond and refute their claim. However, because they will feel that they were not treated fairly, G'd will present them with a mitzvah opportunity to allow them to have one last chance to prove that they have no relevance to spirituality/G'd. The Gemara tells us that G'd will give them an “easy” mitzvah, which is the mitzvah of sukkah. However they will bolt from the sukkah and treat it with disdain.

If G'd only gave prophecy to the nations of the world so that they should not have a claim at the end of time, why did He choose to give that ability to person such as Bilaam, who personified evil and corruption? Just as Moshe was unique in his spirituality among the Jewish people, G'd should have chosen Job as the prophet of the nations of the world because he was righteous. As the Midrash tells us that as long as Job was alive, the Jewish people were not able to enter into Canaan because his merit protected the nations of Canaan. If Job would have been their prophet perhaps they would have developed along the proper spiritual path. Why was establishing Bilaam as their prophet sufficient to quell the claim of the nations of the world?

The Gemara in Tractate Zevachim tells us that when G'd was giving the Torah at Sinai to the Jewish people, the earth quaked so violently that the nations of the world believed that the world was coming to an end. They came to Bilaam. They said to him, "G'd is destroying the world." Bilaam responded, "You fools! Do you not realize that G'd is giving His strength/power to the Jewish people (which is the Torah). It is because of this monumental moment that the world is quaking." To this the nations of the world responded, "G'd blesses His people with Shalom." After having their fears alleviated, they returned to their idolatrous and evil ways. Despite the fact that Bilaam, their prophet had given them an understanding of the gravity of the moment, they chose to reject the truth. We see from this that it was not because of Bilaam's evil persona that the nations of the world chose to remain as they were, but rather it was out of their own volition that they did so. Bilaam was only leading them along the path that they had chosen.

## 2. *Similar But Not the Same*

The Torah states when Bilaam was on the way to curse the Jewish people, **"G'd's wrath flared because he was going, and an angel of Hashem stood on the road to impede him. Bilaam was riding on his donkey...The donkey saw the angel of Hashem standing on the road with his sword drawn in his hand...."** The Midrash asks, "Why did the angel have a drawn sword in his hand? The angel could have blown upon Bilaam and caused him to die. As we see regarding the destruction of the army of Sancherev. When Sancherev had come upon the Jewish people with millions of troops to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, the verse states, 'The angel of Hashem went forth and had smitten the camp of Ashure. He had blown upon them and they dried-up.' Why did the angel come upon Bilaam with a drawn sword, when he could have simply blown upon him? The angel said to Bilaam, 'The power of the mouth was given to Yaakov. As the verse states, **'The voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Esav.'** It also states regarding the nations of the world, **'By the sword you shall live...'** But you, Bilaam, took hold of the craft of the Jewish people and came upon them with your mouth (to curse them). Therefore, when I come upon you I shall do so with your craft (the sword).' This is the reason the angel came upon Bilaam with a drawn sword."

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that before Balak commissioned Bilaam to curse the Jewish people he had

consulted with the Midianites in order to ascertain the secret power of the leader of the Jewish people. They had told him that the power of their leader lies in his mouth, his verbal expression. They therefore summoned Bilaam to counter Moshe, with his power of expression to curse the Jewish people. However, Balak and the Midianites had no understanding of the essence of Moshe's power.

The effectiveness of Moshe's ability emanated from his unique dimension of spirituality. Moshe had no relevance to evil, as Bilaam had. He was imbued with holiness only to carry out the Will of G'd. The only commonality between Moshe and Bilaam was that both of their expressions emanated from their mouth. Although Bilaam's curse was lethal, as it had proven to be, it had no relevance to his spirituality; but rather, it was rooted in his evilness/physicality. Chazal tell us that when Moshe had killed the Egyptian in Egypt when he was beating a Jew, he had done so through the enunciation of one of the Names of G'd. His killing of the Egyptian, through verbal expression rather than a physical act, was an indication of the spirituality of Moshe. Bilaam was known for his "evil eye." Chazal tell us that when Bilaam initially wanted to bless the Jewish people, G'd had said to him, "Do not bless them. They do not need your blessing." It is as one says to a bee, "We do not need your honey and we do not need your sting." This is because a blessing that emanates from an evil source is the equivalent of a curse.

When the angel appeared to Bilaam with a drawn sword, it was to communicate to him that although he believed that his verbal expression was the equivalent of the verbal expression of the Jewish people, it was not. Bilaam, being a gentile and part of the nations of the world, his power is rooted in the sword, which is physical that has no relevance to the spiritual. Although his curse could bring about dire consequences, it was only emanating from his evil essence, which is part of the physical realm. Despite the fact that the angel had presented the difference between Moshe and Bilaam in a cogent and convincing manner, Bilaam did not grasp or appreciate the difference.

## 3. *Understanding the Connotation of Dust*

The Torah states when Bilaam had gone to bless the Jewish people he said, **"Who has counted the dust of Yaakov or numbered a quarter of Israel?..."** Bilaam did not initially intend to bless the Jewish people, but rather, his evil eye was attempting to find an entry point through which he could curse them. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, "This evil one, through his cunningness and guile

was trying to find a way to bring harm upon the Jewish people. He was trying to find a point of vulnerability. He had initially mentioned the holy Patriarchs, who were the foundation of the Jewish people to impart some level of impurity upon their beginnings. When he realized that he could not, he tried to quantify and measure the Jewish people so that they should be susceptible to his evil eye. (The Jewish people are not permitted to count themselves. When a census must be taken, it is only through the half-silver coin (*machtiz hashekel*)). As Chazal tell us, 'Blessing only comes upon something that is not measured, weighed or counted.' Therefore, the evil one attempted to quantify them in order to undermine their existence. However, he was not able to do so. Thus he said, '**Who has counted the dust of Yaakov...**' The Torah tells us that the Jewish people are compared to dust as it states regarding the blessing that G'd had given to Avraham, our Patriarch, '**Your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth...**' Although this blessing was given to Avraham, it did not come to fruition until Yaakov. This is the reason the verse states, '**...the dust of Yaakov.**'"

Just as dust cannot be counted, measured, or quantified to any degree, so too the Jewish people cannot. If in fact the blessing was given to Avraham, why was it not fulfilled until Yaakov? Although Avraham only had fathered Yitzchak, which is one individual, the Torah tells us that Yaakov descended to Egypt with seventy individuals. Relative to an infinite and unquantifiable number, Yaakov had no greater relevance to "dust" than Avraham. If so, why did the blessing only manifest itself with Yaakov?

Anything that exists is quantifiable. In contrast, G'd is and His Wisdom are unquantifiable. The Torah, being G'd's Wisdom is unlimited and infinite. Although all of the Patriarchs were uniquely spiritual, Yaakov was the only Patriarch that embodied and personified the Torah. As the verse refers to him, "**The perfect man, who dwelt in the tent (of Torah).**" Therefore, the blessing that G'd had given to Avraham manifested itself only with Yaakov because he was the Patriarch that had relevance to the infinite. This is the reason Chazal tell us that Yaakov was the most special of the Patriarchs.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that there are three instances in which one is permitted to alter the truth. One of those circumstances is, if one is asked, "Is it true that you have studied so many tractates?" One is permitted to alter the truth in order not reveal the extent of his Torah knowledge. The Commentators explain that it is because of modesty/humility that one is permitted to answer in this manner. However, with the understanding

that Torah is something that is unlimited and not quantifiable, if one were to quantify his Torah knowledge by answering the question truthfully, it would impact negatively upon the spiritual value of his Torah. Although one has in fact studied a specific and measurable amount of Torah, the innate value of that is unlimited. Thus, by quantifying it, one would put limitation upon something that is not limited— thereby diminishing the truthfulness of its essence. Therefore, one is permitted to alter the truth.

The Torah states, "If you toil in My Torah you will merit all blessing." What does "toil" connote? It is one's unlimited dedication to the study of Torah itself. One can only merit the Torah and its blessing when one's involvement in the unlimited is itself at an unlimited level. With this we can understand the Gemara in Tractate Megillah which states, "If you have toiled and come upon it (Torah), you can believe it. If you did not toil and came upon it, do not believe it." One can only come upon Torah, which is infinite, if one is selflessly committed to it. Therefore, only the one who truly toils can come upon its truth.

#### ***4. One Should Not Trivialize Even the Most Deficient Mitzvah***

The Torah tells us that Bilaam, the evil one, wanted to curse the Jewish people. However, despite his desire and efforts, G'd did not allow him to do so. Ultimately rather than cursing them, Bilaam blessed them. One of the many attempts that Bilaam had made was that he told Balak to build a number of altars and bring sacrifices to G'd. Bilaam had thought that perhaps in the merit of Balak's offerings, he would be allowed to curse the Jewish people. Balak's intent was not to acknowledge, serve and revere G'd but rather it was a means to bring a curse upon the Jewish people.

The Gemara in Tractate Nazir states, "It is worthwhile to engage in Torah and mitzvos even if it is without a pure intent (*shelo l'shema*). This is because if one engages in a mitzvah without a proper intent it will lead him to perform it with a pure intent (*l'shema*). In the merit of the 42 offerings which were brought by Balak, the evil one, he merited that Ruth the Moabite should be his descendant (although he had done the mitzvah with the intent to curse the Jewish people) ..." Ruth the Moabite was the grandmother of King David from whom Moshiach will descend.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos cites a verse which states, “You should bring desolation upon the land...” The Gemara tells us that one should not read the word in the verse as “shamos- desolation” but rather it should be read as “sheimos- names.” From here, we learn “*shma k’gorim*” that the name that one possesses determines one’s destiny. The Gemara continues, “The reason Ruth (Rus) was given such a name was because she was destined to have a grandson who would sate G’d with song and praise (*yeraveh HaKadosh Baruch v’shiros v’tishbachos*).” Within the name “Ruth” lies the spiritual potential of King David who would author the book of Tehillim.

It is interesting to note that as a consequence of Balak bringing the 42 offerings, although it was with a sinister intent (*shelo l’shma*), he merited to be the forbearer of Ruth, who was the forbearer of King David – establishing the Davidic line through which Moshiach will descend. We see that even a mitzvah that is performed at the most deficient level is able to generate a merit/blessing that has monumental and far-reaching ramifications. King David would have come into being regardless of Balak’s actions; however, the question is who will be his forbearer. The Gemara states a principle that “merit comes to those who are meritorious and tragedy comes through those who are undeserving.” Balak is considered meritorious because of the 42 offerings that he had brought.

Although Balak’s intent was not proper, he is deserving of all that merit resulted from the chain of events that evolved from his actions. As we see in the Mishna in Tractate Bava Metziah. The Mishna tells us that one has the obligation to return a lost article of his own father before returning the lost article of a stranger because one must be beholden to his parent for bringing him into existence. Only because the parent fathered the child does all opportunity that presents itself in the life of the child have any value. The Mishna continues to say that one has the obligation to return the lost article of his spiritual mentor (*rabo*) before returning that of his father. This is because one must be more beholden to his rebbe/mentor for giving him a share in the world to come, which is eternal.

If such far-reaching merit came upon one who performed a mitzvah with a sinister intent, how much merit will one have when one performs a mitzvah with a pure intent? One should not minimize the seemingly most trivial mitzvah because even its value cannot be understood and appreciated.

## 5. *Forgiveness- An Expression of Compassion* (From Chukas)

The Jewish people were sustained in the desert for forty years by the Manna. It was a food that was absorbed into their inner organs. There was no bodily waste. In the fortieth year, the Jewish people complained saying, “**Why did you bring us up from Egypt to die in the Desert, for there is no food and no water, and our soul is disgusted with the insubstantial food (Manna)? G’d sent the fiery serpents against the Jewish people and they bit the people...The people came to Moshe and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against Hashem and against you! Pray to Hashem that He remove from us the serpent. Moshe prayed for the people.’**” Why does the Torah need to inform us that Moshe acquiesced to their request? It would seem obvious that he would have responded to their request.

Rashi cites the Midrash that explains, “It is from here that we learn that when an individual asks to be forgiven, one should not be cruel (*achzari*) and withhold forgiveness.” When Moshe prayed on behalf of the Jewish people, it was an indication that he had forgiven them for speaking against him. Not acquiescing to a sincere request is an indication of one’s insensitivity to the other person’s need – which is cruelty.

Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuva that if the nature of one’s sin is between man and G’d, then teshuvah (repentance) alone is sufficient to being about atonement. However if the nature of one’s sin is between man and his fellow, then in addition to teshuvah one must ask forgiveness from his fellow. If he does not forgive him then not even Yom Kippur will atone for that person. Rambam states that in order to be forgiven, “One should bring three acquaintances of the one from whom he is asking forgiveness and have them ask their colleague to forgive. If he is unwilling, then one should bring a second and third group of acquaintances to ask for forgiveness. If he remains adamant and is not willing to forgive, then he does not need to be forgiven by that individual. He is fully atoned. The one who did not offer his forgiveness is considered the sinner. It is forbidden for one to be cruel (*achzori*) and not be appeased...” If one recognizes the wrong he has done and asks to be forgiven, there is an obligation to forgive. If it is withheld, this is considered cruelty.

Rambam explains that a characteristic of a Jew is to be compassionate. Therefore, withholding forgiveness is antithetical to Jewish behavior. If one is obstinate and not

willing to forgive, one must recognize that his failing is in the areas of compassion. However, if a Jew is willing to forgive, although the sinner does not deserve to be forgiven, it can be considered a flaw. As Rambam writes that any characteristic, even one that is positive, if it is applied without a valid reason it is considered to be negative because the motive behind it was not valid.

#### **YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE**

##### **Monday Through Friday**

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Derech Hashem
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Chulin
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

##### **Special Weekday Classes**

###### ***Monday***

11:30 – 12:30pm **Talmud: Megilah**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street

###### ***Tuesday***

12:10 - 1:10pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**  
Location: Yad Avraham

###### ***Wednesday***

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Megilah**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
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1:00—2:00 pm **Daas Tevunos**  
Location: Yad Avraham

###### ***Thursday***

11:00 –12:00pm **Duties of The Heart**  
Location: Yad Avraham  
12:30 – 1:30 pm **Talmud: Megilah** Sunrise Capital 641  
Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL)