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PARASHAT BALAK JULY 19 2019, 16 TAMMUZ 5779



EMET Matters

Parashat Balak: The Hidden Assistance of G-d

by Rabbi Eliyahu Maksumov

The story told in Parashat Balak is truly extraordinary. Balak, the evil king of Moab, joined forces with a villain, the gentile prophet Bilaam to plan the genocide of the Jewish people. Unlike all the other nations who have come against us and have opposed us with weaponry and military strategy, Bilaam came with only one weapon! This weapon was none other than his mouth. Through sorcery and black magic Bilaam was prepared with just a few words to annihilate our men, women and children. What Paroh, Stalin and Hitler desired to do within the course of a few years, Bilaam was prepared to do in

just a few seconds. It is almost as if the man had an atomic bomb in his mouth. G-d stood by our side once more and protected us by foiling Bilaam's plan and caused Bilaam to utter blessings rather than curses. Bilaam knew the precise moment when G-d was angry, and he sought to capitalize on this knowledge by cursing B'nei Yisrael just at that moment, which would have the effect of utter annihilation. G-d, however, in His infinite mercy, altered the usual mechanisms of the spiritual world in order to foil Bilaam's efforts.

What makes this story astonishing is not the fact that we as a nation were persecuted once more and were rescued, but rather that G-d has handpicked it to use as a paradigm of how He steps in to rescue us when we were not even aware of the lurking danger. The entire story of Balak's and Bilaam's scheme was not done out in the open. They hid themselves in a different location overlooking the Israelite camp in an attempt to bestow the curses upon us. Throughout this period, B'nei Yisrael went on with their usual business, eating the manna, praying, studying Torah from Moshe, and so on. Nobody had any idea that the nation's very existence was at stake with no way of defending themselves. This story is unlike any other time where we were prepared for war and had a chance to fight back. Here, the threat was initiated and ended far from the people's view, and they knew nothing about it until G-d had Moshe record the story in the Torah. Only then did Moshe himself and the rest of the nation understand what took place.

Why, then, is this episode told in the Torah? Why does it matter to us that far away there were two evil men who plotted against us and were unsuccessful?

The answer lies by the prophet Micha, in the section chosen as the Haftara for Shabbat Parashat Balak. The prophet admonishes the people to remember Balak's scheme and how Hashem stepped in to thwart it, "Lema'an Da'at Tzidkot Hashem" – "In order that you know the kindnesses of Hashem." We need to know this story so that we can at least begin to understand the extent of G-d's love and care for us. We need to know that Hashem protects us from dangers of which we never become aware. There are many times in our lives when we can see how Hashem stepped in to help us and take care of us, but we must also recognize that for every such instance, there are countless other times when Hashem protects or helps us without our ever knowing it. We

cannot even begin to imagine the number of bacteria and viruses present in the air from which G-d protects us. We have no idea of the criminals and anti-Semites who unsuccessfully conspire against us, without even getting far enough to have the incident reported in the news. And we have no idea how many terrorists in Israel and throughout the world have their efforts thwarted without anyone knowing.



The Passuk in Tehillim describes Hashem as "Oseh Nifla'ot Gedolot Le'vado" – "He performs great wonders by Himself." Clearly, we do not need a verse in the Tanach to tell us that G-d makes miracles "by Himself," without anybody's help. This is self-evident. What this verse is saying, as the Chatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg, 1762-1839) explains, is that G-d often performs miracles alone, without anyone else ever knowing about it. The story of Balak and Bilaam was revealed in order for us to recognize that so often miracles occur on our behalf far away, unbeknownst to us, "Le'vado" – when He is "all Alone," as it were.

The Parasha of Balak therefore stands to reinforce the understanding that Hashem's compassion towards us is far beyond what we can ever see or know. We are not aware of the benevolence Hashem performs for us. May we recognize the limitations of this knowledge and may it lead us to greater appreciation of Hashem's kindness and a renewed sense of commitment to obey His will.



Lessons in Halacha (in accordance with Sefardic custom) By Rabbi Binyamin Yuhanan, EMET's Rabbinic Consultant



Laws of 17th of Tammuz and the Three Weeks

The fast of the 17th of Tammuz was decreed by Chazal (our Sages) to commemorate five calamities that happened on that day in various years:

- 1. Luchot the Tablets of the Ten Commandments were broken by Moshe after the sin of the Golden Calf
- 2. Tamid the continual daily offering ceased in the First Temple
- 3. The walls of Yerushalayim were breached during the Second Temple
- 4. A Sefer Torah was burned by Apostomus, a Roman general
- 5. An idol was placed in the First Temple

Some of the rules of this day, Sunday July 21, 2019, include:

- 1. No eating or drinking from dawn (around 4:00 AM) until night (around 8:45 PM).
- 2. Pregnant women, women that gave birth within the last 24 months, and the sick are exempted from this fast.
- 3. When it coincides with Shabbat, the fast is delayed until Sunday, as it is this year.
- 4. Bathing, annointing, and wearing leather shoes are all permissible.
- 5. A Torah reading, and a special prayer in the Amida (Anenu), are added to the morning Shaharit and afternoon Mincha services.

The three weeks between 17th of Tammuz and 9th of Av, July 20 - August 11, (Bein Hametzarim) are days of mourning for the tragedies that befell the Jewish people during these times.

- 1. One should refrain from dangerous activities during this period. These include swimming in the ocean or a river, hiking alone, kayaking, fighting, etc.
- 2. Weddings are not performed, although for Sefardim they are permitted until the beginning of Av.
- 3. We refrain from listening to music, both live and recorded. However, music is permissible for Sefardim at a Seudat Mitzva (celebration of Brit Milah, wedding, Bar Mitzvah, Sheva Berachot).
- 4. It is customary to abstain from reciting the Shehecheyanu blessing on weekdays, and therefore, we do not taste new fruit nor wear new garments, except on Shabbat.
- 5. According to Ashkenazim haircuts are forbidden starting the 17th of Tammuz, but Sefardim begin the prohibition on the 1st of Av.

Spotlight On EMET

Emet Young Professionals Event with Charlie Harary

Emet's Young Professional's division recently hosted an inspiring evening with world-renowned speaker Charlie Harary. This event was part of a series of networking and educational events that are geared towards men and women in their '20s who have graduated college and are pursuing their careers. Attendees enjoyed sushi and a wine tasting. The highlight was the address by Mr. Harary on the topic of "Unlocking Greatness." He engaged the crowd with his authentic, motivational style. He shared many amusing and touching anecdotes all with the lesson of personal growth. The overall message to the audience was to not get too comfortable and limit themselves in reaching their full potential in life and in Judaism. He said the choice is "comfort or greatness," and he encouraged everyone to challenge themselves and reach for greatness.

"These events are an amazing touch point between the Emet staff and alumni. It's always incredible to see students we met as 18-year-old college freshmen, who are now successful professionals, eager to learn and grow spiritually," said Rabbi Reuven Kigel, Emet Campus Director. "Charlie had the crowd spell-bound as he challenged them to be the best version of themselves."

The Young Professionals events have been spearheaded by Arthur Ilyayev, an entrepreneur who runs an online diamond business and has recognized a need for programming of this kind. "I realized there is a big void in our community after college for people to connect and learn about Judaism along with others who share their level of religious observance and are building their careers," he said. "When I met with the Emet team, they shared my vision and together we are planning more exciting lectures, networking opportunities and Shabbatons, so people can continue to grow in Judaism."

The next Young Professionals event will take place in August.









Spotlight On EMET

Young Couples Shabbaton in Far Rockaway

Shabbat with Emet is always an uplifting spiritual experience, and the community of Far Rockaway welcomed the latest Young Couples Shabbaton. Led by Rabbi and Mrs. Musheyev, Rabbi and Mrs. Muskat and Mr. and Mrs. Kozuch, the couples were comprised of former Emet Fellowship students at various stages of marriage. The newest couple had only been married for a little over a week and there were also families with young children. The participants were personally invited because they all have grown in Judaism through Emet, and some have been part of the Emet family for 10 years.

Upon arrival, guests were presented with a lovely welcome basket that included a customized Havdalah set and matchbox; a transliterated copy of the Sefardi candle lighting and kiddush prayers and articles of interest. The Shabbat program featured many meaningful elements. The group davened together in the Sefardi minyan at the White Shul and separated into smaller groups of 3-4 couples for Shabbat dinner and lunch at different families in the community. They came together on Shabbat afternoon for an Oneg Shabbat where Rabbi YY Rubenstein gave a lecture on "Discovering Who You Really Are." For the Seuda Shlishit meal, there were separate programs for the women and men. The women heard from Rebbetzin Tehila Jaeger at her home on "Women's Unique Power of Speech." Rabbi Nissim Musheyev spoke to the men at his home about "Shabbat: Disconnect in Order to Connect." The Shabbat experience culminated with a musical Havdalah with Rabbi Moshe Greene on guitar at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron and Ellen Wolfson.

"At Emet, students are students for life. We maintain relationships with our alumni as they marry and build their own Jewish families," said Mrs. Rivka Muskat, Associate Director. "As our students grow in Judaism, it is essential for them to have opportunities to experience Shabbat beyond their own homes. Every Shabbat they spend with observant families fills in the landscape and their 'personal picture' of Shabbat is thereby immensely enriched."







Our Programs

Weekly Campus Activity

- » St. Johns University Fellowship
- » Stony Brook University Fellowship
- » Baruch College Fellowship
- » Queens College Fellowship
- » Forest Hills Cross-Campus Evening Fellowship
- > EMET Arizona Division
- Queensborough Lunch & Learn
- » St. John's University Lunch & Learn
- » 30+ Shabbatons Annually

Advanced Level Programming

- » Step It Up for Higher Level Girls (Weekly)
- » Torat Emet for Higher Level Boys (Weekly)
- » Ateret Emet Seminary

Educational Trips

- » Poland/Prague Experience
- » Israel Trips & Learning Opportunities
- » Women's Miami Trips
- » Men's Arizona Trips

Community & More

- » Young Professionals' Lectures
- » Shabbat at the Delmans
- » Mother-Daughter Events
- » Alumni & Student Retreats
- » Couples Programming & Lectures
- » One-On-One Learning & Counseling