

BALAK 1 - HOLDING ONTO THE SOUL OF KING DAVID

The Torah noted in last weeks Parasha that although Israel had been camping along Moab's eastern border they would not even consider entering Moab's land - because God had told them not to fight against Moab. As Moshe writes in Devarim - God said to me - Do not attack Moab and do not provoke them to fight. 1 It was apparent that Moab did not have sufficient cause to fear an attack from Israel. This fact was surely made aware to Balak - King of Moab. Why then was he and Moab so terrified of Israel? Furthermore - if he did not fear war - what then what his motive in contracting Bil'am to curse Israel? In order to answer these inquiries properly it should be understood that the nations of the world in general derive their spiritual energy via the holy spiritual sparks found in their midst. 2 Balak was aware that he and his people were currently in possession of the Holy Soul of King David and Mashiah which represented a treasure chest of spirituality. With Israel on the march towards the land of Israel - Balak feared that the Soul of King David and that of Mashiah Ben David would be extracted from his control and be given over to Israel. 3 Balak was determined to prevent this takeover and would attempt to retain this spark at all costs. The retention of this Holy Soul was an integral part of Moab's survival. He therefore contracted Bil'am to assist him in preventing this colossal loss by having him exercise a few methods including that of cursing Israel.

BALAK EXPLAINS HIS FEAR AND CONTRACTS BIL'AM

He states his fear of Israel in terms of a nation coming to extract or devour this spark that resides in Balak's possession. A verse reads "Now the Israelite community will lick up everything around us - just as a Bull licks up all vegetation in the field." 4 The Sifte Hakhamim note that the comparison made to a bull was used in that it tears up its food by the roots. 5 It is clear that Balak realized what was at stake. He then asserts that what they are coming to take is not only rightly his but is actually a part of himself. In a verse in the 22nd chapter - he announces concerning this holy soul - that its essence stems from within himself! 6 Balak apparently understood that he was not only the ancestor of King David but was currently in possession of this Holy Soul. R. Y. Horowitz explains that Balak was privy to the great dynasty of King David and how it was to result in the messianic King. He knew that this spiritual force was rooted in himself. 7 In order to prevent the transfer he needed to curse Israel in order to block its passage way from Moab to Israel. If was for this purpose that he hired the prophet Bil'am.

BEATING THE DONKEY THRICE

The soul of King David represents the fourth and final leg of the Kise HaKavod or the spiritual throne upon which rests the Shekhina or the Divine Presence. The first three legs were initially established by our patriarchs Abraham, Yishak and Yaakov. 8 This fourth leg cannot make its ascent if there exists a fault in the upper three. It appears that this first attempt by Bil'am to disrupt the transfer of the holy spark or the fourth leg from Moab to Israel would be to initially damage the upper three legs. We know from the Zohar and the writings of R. HaAri that Bene Yisrael were to firmly establish these legs via what the Torah calls עליה לרגל - An ascent to or for the leg of the throne. 9 R. HaAri teaches that Bil'am via his stick attempted to move the lights of the patriarchs or the three legs from the holy regions above - down towards his donkey 10 which the Zohar (Balak) terms the negative husk. 11 The final letters in the names of the Avot יצחק-אברהם-ישראל are synonymous with the מַקְל- of Bil'am. The Donkey then speaks to Bil'am and references his masters intent to send down the three upper legs of the throne. "Why have you beat me these three legs. 12 The Tanhuma points out the odd locution used of "feet" or legs instead of the more proper "times" - noting that it refers to the pilgrimages of Israel entitled "ascending of the feet". 13 The verse reads that "The Angel of Hashem passed further ahead." 14 The Tanhuma questions why the Angel in standing before the Donkey - sees fit to stop in three places? Rashi responds in the name of a Midrash that he was shown the signs of the patriarchs. 15 Furthermore other Midrashim teach how the Angel positioned himself in the 3 locations - relating each place to one of the patriarchs. 16 This was all part of Divine assistance to arouse the merit of the patriarchs to thwart Bil'am's attempt to corrupt the 3 legs of the throne.

ALTARS AND SACRIFICES

The Midrash points out another scheme of Bil'am was to make use of specifically seven altars. Bil'am said to Balak "Their patriarchs built seven altars - so I arranged it that our altars correspond to all of theirs." 17 Rashi notes that the seven altars represented the patriarchs devotion to Hashem thru sacrifice. 18 According to the Talmud - these seven altars were set up in three different places - and on each altar they offered a bull and a ram. 19 These total 14 in each location for a total of 42 offerings. It appears to me that this was another attempt to corrupt the three legs of the throne set up

by Israel. Making use of the Divine Name of Forty two is known as the method to form pathways to elevate holiness upwards to the higher worlds. These can be divided into the three pathways of the Avot each comprising a different aspect of fourteen. 20 These attempts to damage the upper legs were admittedly unsuccessful. Bil'am confesses when he says "For I view it from mountain peaks" 21 Rashi notes that he was "gazing at their origins and he perceived that they are well founded and powerful like the mountains." 22 The Sifte Hakhamim adds that this refers to the patriarchs. Bil'am admits that he has no power to corrupt the legs of the throne established by the patriarchs. 23

BIL'AM ATTEMPTS TO CURSE - ANTICIPATING DIVINE ANGER

The root of the word berakha - a blessing is associated etymologically with סברכה a fountain. 24 When one is blessed - it means that he is endowed with the Divine flow. Bil'am we know attempted to curse - or in spiritual terms attempted to disrupt the divine flow to Israel. All with the intention that we Israel remain unable to wrestle the Holy Soul of King David and Mashiah from the midst of Moab. Rashi notes that Bil'am knew his curse would only be effective when God so to say was angry. 25 Or spiritually in a state where his desire is to limit the divine flow. The Talmud relates that Bil'am used his knowledge of the exact moment of Divine anger in his attempt to curse Israel. He knew how to ascertain the exact moment as the Torah describes him as a knower of דעת עליון or-דעת עליון the knower of the divine time. The Talmud asks how long does this anger last? And answers - Only a moment. 26 Tosafot wonders what curse can he utter in a moment? They answer - he simply can state כלם-destroy them. In their commentary on this Talmudic narrative -,they detail that when Bil'am uttered כלם- God had reversed the letters - resulting in the word מלך- King. 27 Bil'am also admitted failure here to disrupt the elevation of the Holy Soul as the fourth leg of the throne - now classifying the fourth leg rightly as מלך or that of the King! As the verse states - And their King's acclaim is in its midst. 28 Or in other terms - the fourth leg or holy soul of David will be established by Israel - as King.

FACES THE DESERT

When Bil'am realized that God is truly set on blessing Israel he set his gaze toward the desert. According to the Targum Yonatan he abandoned his previous attempts to curse and focused on recalling the Sin at the Golden Calf. 29 R. HaAri notes that as a result of that transgression - we had caused 3 of the five letters of the divine name אלהי"ם to descend. 30 These three letters אלה are associated with the 3 regalim (holidays). The verse in Shemot describes the descent of the letters 31 when they proclaimed אלהיך ישראל By recalling this sin - Bil'am once again attempted to disrupt the three upper legs of the throne. However, it appears to me that the verse following describes that God did not allow any disruption as it is written The spirit of אלהי"ם or the three letters representing the three legs remained - 32 and from it would emanate new additional blessings from Bil'am.

OUR SERVICE

We are to remind ourselves each day of the kindness of Hashem in transferring the curse of Bil'am into a blessing. The latter being our merit to establish Gods Kingdom on earth through the 4th leg of the Divine Throne. It is specifically during the three regalim that we announce אלה מועדי - not merely that these are the appointed times - but rather "These" are the times to elevate the letters אלה back to the Divine meeting place above. The Mizmor of Sukkot hints 33 to this elevation announcing that אלה אזכרה - The 4th leg which is associated with Shemini Aseret will follow - when we celebrate with Hashem his kingdom being established both above and below. 34 And soon with the coming of Mashiah the transfer of the Holy Soul will be revealed to all.

Shabbat Shalom
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