

# RED ALERT!

Balak

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## DIVREI TORAH

- Of the 54 Sidrot of Torah, five are named for people. No'ach, because he was righteous. Yitro because he was Moshe's father-in-law and he suggested to Moshe a better judicial system. Korach, because he and many of his followers were Torah scholars. Pinchas, because he rose up to do a strong act of heroism. And Balak! What did Balak do? According to the Talmud (Sotah 47a) because Balak brought 42 sacrifices to Hashem, he earned the right to have a Ruth in his family, making Balak an ancestor of King David and the Mashiach. This is the meaning of the expression MITOCH SHELO LISHMAH, BA LISHMAH: That which is not done for the sake of Heaven will become for the sake of Heaven.

- When the Torah first introduces us to Balak, he is not referred to as the king of Moav. The Brisker Rav (Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, 1871-1935, Brisk, my Rebbe's grandfather) explains that at the beginning of the narrative, Balak was a plain person in Moav. After what Balak saw what Bnei Yisrael did to Sichon and Og, Balak proclaimed to the Moabites to be

afraid of the Jewish nation. He rose up and suggested several ways to prepare for the Jewish invaders. When Moav heard the alarming words of Balak, they elevated him and made him king of Moav. The Moabites felt that the one who could place fear in their hearts could possibly save them from this new threat to their welfare.

- Rashi points out that historically Moav and Midyan were enemies. Because they both hated the Jews so much, they made a peace in order to combine their efforts to harm Bnei Yisrael. We see this at the end of the story just as we see it at the outset of this narrative. Midianites and Moabites sent a joint delegation to Bilaam, showing a joint venture. Then at the end of the narrative, Midianite women joined the effort at Pe'or to mislead Bnei Yisrael into a sexual immoral act of idolatry. It was a princess of Midian who was cavorting with a prince of the tribe of Shimon whom Pinchas killed. The hate for Jews is their joint glue to combine the enemy. And so it is today in the Middle East. Not long ago Iran and Iraq fought a war against each other. Now they join forces to combat Israel. One of many issues do we see common in our foes.

- At the beginning of the story, Hashem told Bilaam that he may not go with the messengers. Then when the next set of messengers appear,

Hashem told Bilaam that he may go with them. And then Bilaam goes, Hashem sends a sword wielding angel to harass Bilaam. What are we missing? According to the Vilna Goan: in the beginning Hashem told Bilaam that he may not go with - IM - them, going with the same mindset. Then Hashem said that he may go with - ET - them, go but you can only say what I want you to say. When Hashem sent an angel to harass them, it was because Bilaam thought he can do some damage to Bnei Yisrael. This is a good explanation, but it does beg us to interpret the fine print, not the way the Torah is normally read. Better we should understand it in a simpler form. Hashem did change His Mind in the matter, and had to frighten Bilaam to do only Hashem's bidding".

- Why a talking donkey? What message is Hashem delivering to Bilaam? Just as Hashem can make a donkey talk, He can make anyone talk. Bilaam, says Hashem, consider yourself My mouthpiece. You are nothing more than a talking animal. You will not possess a mind of your own. You will only say what I want you to say. But Bilaam did score a major success at the end. The advice Bilaam gave Balak in the end did cause a loss of 24,000 men, which was a huge loss! A huge sum. No wonder Bilaam became a marked man among the Jews. In the upcoming war against

Midyan, Bnei Yisrael made it a point to kill Bilaam. And he deserved it.

- The Torah describes that Bilaam saddled his own donkey. So great was his hatred for Am Yisrael. Rashi pointed out that Bilaam was beaten to the punch when Avraham saddled his own donkey when he went to sacrifice Yitzchak. What is the connection between the two stories. Avraham was driven by love, and Bilaam was driven by hate. Avraham was determined to obey Hashem in offering his son as an Olah, but was thwarted. Bilaam was determined to curse Bnei Yisrael, and also was thwarted in his quest. Rashi's words sum it up well. Both hatred and love ruin and alter normal behavior.

- Bilaam (Hashem) states: Behold! It is a nation that will reside in solitude and not be reckoned among the nations (23:9). According to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 105a) Bilaam had hoped that Jews would completely assimilate with other nations and nothing will remain of their religion or identity. But here Bilaam is forced to say that the Jews will remain apart from other countries, distinct and unique, and never be considered among other countries. Keeping the Mitzvot will keep Jews separate. They will never be able to assimilate if they adhere to the laws of the Torah. This has been true in the past and it is very true today. Keeping Mitzvot and

not intermarrying will isolate the Jewish people no matter where they live. The adage is true. It is not that the Jew keeps the Torah; it is the Torah that keeps the Jew.

- MIDRASH. Why did the Moabites seek advice from the Midianite leaders? When the Moabites saw Bnei Yisrael victorious in battle, they sought counsel from the Midianites since Moshe grew up in Midian. They figured that Midian is a good place to find out about Moshe. The Midianite elders said that Moshe's strength is in his mouth. Therefore the Moabites brought out someone whose strength is also in his mouth.

## Questions by RED

### From the Text

1. Of what nation was Balak the king? (22:4)
2. Under what conditions did Hashem allow Bilaam to go with Balak's messengers? (22:20)
3. The donkey talked. What did she say to Bilaam? (22:28)
4. How many animals in total did Balak sacrifice to Hashem? (chapter 23)
5. What line of Bilaam's prophecy is included in our Siddur? (24:5)

### From Rashi

6. Why was Moav frightened of Bnei Yisrael? (22:2)

7. The messengers sent to Bilaam were from Moav and Midian. Only the Moabites stayed over to hear Bilaam's answer. Why did the Midianites leave? (22:8)

8. Bilaam hit the donkey three times. What did this symbolize? (22:28)

9. What advice did Bilaam give Balak to cause Bnei Yisrael to be punished by Hashem? (24:14)

10. When Bnei Yisrael served the idol of Pe'or, Hashem became angry. How did Hashem punish them? (25:3)

### From the Rabbis

11. Bilaam lived near a River. Which River? (Targum)

12. According to the Midrash and Zohar, who was Bilaam's ancestor?

13. Bilaam was not a real prophet. What was he according to Ramban?

### From the Midrash

14. Prior to Balak, seven people erected an altar to offer sacrifices to Hashem. Who were they? (Tanchuma)

### From the Haftara (Micha)

15. What does Hashem really want from us?

### Relationships

- a) Adam - Enosh
- b) Noa - Milka
- c) Nachor - Haran
- d) Terach - Yaakov
- e) Dan - Chushim

## **ANSWERS**

1. Moav
2. That Bilaam can say only what Hashem tells him.
3. "What did I do to you that you hit me three times."
4. 42
5. MA TOVU...
6. Moav paid Sichon and Og to protect them from Bnei Yisrael. Bnei Yisrael easily killed them; so Moav felt frightened.
7. The Midianites decided that if Bilaam stalled, it would indicate that he was a fraud.
8. The Three Pilgrimage Festivals. Did Bilaam think he could curse a nation that had such faith in Hashem that they could leave their farms unprotected to be in Yerushalayim for the Three Festivals.
9. To tempt Bnei Yisrael with sexual immorality, something that Hashem detests.
10. Hashem sent a plague.
11. The Euphrates.
12. Lavan
13. A sorcerer
14. Adam, Abel, No'ach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and Moshe.
15. The performance of justice; the

love of kindness; and to walk humbly (modestly) with Hashem.

16.

- a) Grandfather & grandson
- b) Sisters
- c) Brothers
- d) Great-grandfather & great-grandson
- e) Father & son