



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

24 - 30 June, 2018
11 - 17 Tammuz, 5778

Torah:
Numbers 22:2 - 25:9

HAFTARAH:
Micah 5:6 - 6:8

■ TORAH STUDIES

We have many Judaic topics for you to study. We will provide the material and courses. Please write to us for more information.

■ GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH

Aleph offers free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us for more info.

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The Aleph Institute Library, is available to you, thru the institution library. Please ask to see our catalog in the chapel in every institution. You can then ask the librarian to order that book.

ALEPH INSTITUTE

Hyman & Martha Rogal
Center
5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
412-421-0111
Fax: 412-521-5948
www.alephne.org
info@alephne.org

IT IS ALL IN G-D'S HANDS

This week's Torah reading describes a fascinating saga of hatred, curses, involuntary blessings and, on top of all that, a talking donkey. The portion is named after a wicked man, Balak the king of Moab, who had a passionate hatred for the new talk of the town - the Children of Israel. After all that had transpired from the ten plagues and their escape from Egypt to the splitting of the Red Sea and their triumph over the great Egyptian armies, the entire world was buzzing excitedly with the stories being told. Balak couldn't take it. He commissioned Bilaam, a gentile prophet, to use his prophetic powers to curse the Jewish people in hopes that they would become weakened and ultimately be defeated.

Bilaam enlists the help of God in his mission, but God refuses to allow it. Even so, Bilaam saddles up his donkey and sets out on his journey towards the traveling Jewish nation. On his way, God sends His angel to interfere. The angel stands before Bilaam on the trail three separate times but reveals himself only to the donkey, each time causing the donkey to react fearfully. Bilaam became increasingly agitated with his donkey, until finally he became so enraged that he hit it with a rod.

At this point thin-
gs got strange for him. The

donkey turned to look Bilaam right in the eye and, miraculously, began to shout at him! "Why do you hit me so? Have I not been an obedient animal until now?"

At this point the angel reveals himself to Bilaam as well, standing directly in his path, brandishing his sword. One would think that after such supernatural and awesome experiences Bilaam would abort his mission and accept defeat. But this was not to be. Bilaam continued on his way to curse the Jews.

When he finally reached his destination and set up shop overlooking the Jewish camps, he began to recite the curses that he had prepared. But God had other plans. Try as he might, he could not utter the words he had planned. Instead, every time he opened his mouth, out came a stream of blessings for the Jewish people. Bilaam tried again and again, but ultimately he simply ended up blessing the very people he and Balak had hoped to destroy.

Bilaam's failed curses have become somewhat of a beacon of light throughout our history. In fact, here is the only time in the five books of Moses that a reference is made to Moshiaich and the final redemption. Some of his "curses" have even found their place in our daily prayer liturgy. We even begin the daily prayers with a verse from Bilaam, "How goodly are your tents, o Jacob...?" This begs the question, how

Parshat Balak

is it that the words of this evil person, and the man getting him, Balak, have the merit to be inserted into our prayers to God? And not only that, but Balak's name is even immortalized by being established as the name of the Torah Portion!

Or sages explain that one of the strongest lesson that can be learned from this whole saga is that, "many are the thoughts in the heart of man, but the will of God will ultimately stand."

Often times things seem like they're out of control. Sometimes we feel like we are all alone in our lives and in our decision making. But one thing we must always keep in mind, no matter how it seems and no matter how hard someone may try to overcome the will of God, in the end His will will always prevail. That is the note on which we kick off our every day.

In other words, we begin our daily prayers with the involuntary blessings given by an evil man, not in spite of the fact that his intentions were sinister and unholy, but for that very reason. It serves as an early morning reminder and sets the tone in our daily service that, ultimately, it's all in God's hands.

By Rabbi Nissan Aizak

THREE WEEKS BEGIN

The 17th of Tammuz also marks the beginning of The Three Weeks period of

mourning which culminates on the 9th of Av, commemorating the conquest of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Holy Temple and the dispersion of the Jewish people.

Weddings and other joyful events are not held during this period; like mourners, we do not cut our hair, and various pleasurable activities are limited or proscribed. (Consult the Code of Jewish Law (Shulchan Aruch) or a qualified rabbi regarding specific proscriptions).

The Lubavitcher Rebbe urged that the Three Weeks should be a time of increased giving of charity and Torah study (in keeping with the verse (Isaiah 1:27), “Zion shall be redeemed by law, and her returnees by charity”), particularly the study of those portions of Torah that deal with the laws and the deeper significance of the Holy Temple.

At Aleph Institute we provide a three week course, which teach the laws of the temple, for more information or to take this course, please write to us (address on reverse side).

A TORAH PORTION FOR BALAK, A WICKED MAN?

Analyzing Balak’s Scheme

Balak, the king of Moab, is terrified of the approaching Jewish nation, so he pleads with Balaam, a prophet, to curse them.

G-d tells Balaam not to curse the Jews, and initially, Balaam is compliant. But eventually, filled with spiteful hatred of the Jews, he insists on going—so G-d gives him the freedom to choose.

But G-d lets Balaam know that He disagrees with this choice. He sends an angel to divert Balaam, but only Balaam’s donkey can perceive the angel. Three times, the angel diverts the donkey, and three times, Balaam strikes the donkey. Finally, the donkey has had enough. Astonishingly, he opens his mouth and complains to Balaam about his treatment! Balaam is finally able to see the angel, but he still doesn’t get the message.

When Balaam arrives at Balak’s palace, he is taken, amid much fanfare, to a place where he can view the Jewish people and curse them. But when he opens his mouth to curse them, blessings flow forth instead! In fact his words contain some of the most beautiful praises of the Jewish people in the Torah.

Balaam then goes on to prophecy about the Messianic era (Numbers 24:17-24): “I see it, but not now; I behold it, but not soon. A star has gone forth from Jacob, and a staff will arise from Israel which will crush the princes of Moab and uproot all the sons of Seth...”

After Balaam’s epic failure to curse the Jews, he suggests a different strategy: Entice the Jewish people to sin with the Moabite women, which will lead them to worship the Baal Peor idol and anger G-d. The plan is successful, and a devastating plague erupts among the people as a result. Pinchas, the grandson of the Aaron, the high priest, rises up and puts a stop to the physical and spiritual carnage. A Transformative Reading

You’re probably still wondering why the portion is

named “Balak.” The above synopsis doesn’t do Balak any credit; he’s still the evil king who tried to curse the Jews and then went on to seduce them, causing a horrific plague. Where’s the redeeming quality?

Let’s review a few key points of the story:

Balaam is transformed by his hatred of the Jewish people into one who does not wish to obey G-d. A donkey talks. The curses are transformed into blessings. A portion of the Jewish people is transformed into sinners of the lowest degree.

The prophecies regarding the Messianic era all describe the ultimate transformation of the world.

This Torah portion embodies the power of transformation. The blessings are so profound because they originated as curses. Their transformation is so absolute that they describe the ultimate transformation of the entire world: the era of Moshiach! Moreover, Balak himself embodies this very transformation. The Talmud relates that the Biblical figure Ruth, who transformed her own life by converting to Judaism and merited to become the great-grandmother of King David, was a direct descendant of Balak. The Moshiach, who will usher in the era of ultimate transformation and redemption, will come from the lineage of King David. And so, the person charged with transforming the Jewish people and the entire world—Moshiach—is a direct descendant of Balak! That’s about the greatest transformation possible.

What’s the message for us? Transforming ourselves and our lives is not easy. And this is especially true when we are dealt a difficulty or a crisis. But it is often the most challenging situations that lead to the greatest gains. When we realize that, instead of submitting to the pressure, we can use it for personal growth and development, we can have the most sublime experience of transformation.

In Jewish History

Monday, 12 Tammuz, 5778 - June 25, 2018

R. Yosef Yitzchak Born (1880)

Tammuz 12 is the birthday the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn of Lubavitch (1880-1950). This is also the day on which he was liberated from exile to the Soviet gulag 47 years later.

Liberation of R. Yosef Yitzchak (1927)

On the 12th of Tammuz of 1927, the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, was officially granted release from his sentence of exile to Kastroma in the interior of Russia.

Twenty-seven days earlier, the Rebbe had been arrested by agents of the GPU and the Yevsektzia (“Jewish Section” of the Communist Party) for his activities to preserve Judaism throughout the Soviet empire and sentenced to death, G-d forbid. International pressure forced the Soviets to commute the sentence to exile and, subsequently, to release him completely. The actual release took place on Tammuz 13, and Tammuz 12-13 is celebrated as a “festival of liberation” by the Chabad-Lubavitch community.