

# Torah Weekly

14 July – 20 July, 2019  
 11 Tammuz–17 Tammuz, 5779  
 Torah: Numbers 22:2 - 25:9  
 Haftorah: Micah 5:6 - 6:8  
**PARSHAT BALAK**

**Calendars**  
 We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi / Chaplain to contact us.

**Family Programs**  
 Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

**Grape Juice & Matzah**  
 We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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*Keeping Up with the Cohens*  
 “That’s some new kitchen Sandra just had done. State of the art!” “Psst . . . did you see the new car Mark just took delivery of? It’s got every gadget in the book!” Common conversation. Rather routine, everyday talk. They tell of a rep on the road who had broken all records for sales in his company. When asked the secret of his success, he explained that the first thing he said when someone opened the door was, “Did you see what your neighbor Mrs. Jones just got?” That trick never failed him. This was never the Jewish ethic, however. We were taught differently, and our ancient value system is as relevant as ever in contemporary life. Privacy, modesty and discretion are all characteristics our people have cherished since we became a nation.  
 “Balaam raised his eyes, and saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes” (Numbers 24:3). What was so special about the Israelites’ dwelling? Rashi offers one interpretation of the verse, that the doorways of the Israelites’ tents in the wilderness were arranged so that they did not face each other. That way, one person was not able to see into his neighbor’s tent, and their privacy was protected. In fact, this is one of the explanations of Balaam’s famous praise of the Jews, Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov—“How goodly are your tents, O Jacob.” The heathen prophet was extolling the Jews’ virtues in their town planning, whereby they took precautions in safeguarding their modesty and protecting their personal family lives from would-be busybodies and

peeping Toms, otherwise known as yentas and nudniks. Another possible interpretation of “not looking into your neighbor’s tent” might be this: Do not look into your neighbor’s tent to help you decide what you should be doing. Your decisions in life should not be based on what other people are, or are not, doing. Certainly not on what your neighbors have or do not have. Social workers today will painfully testify that family breakdowns are often a result of financial difficulties and the stress that these put on marriages. Many of those stresses are self-imposed. Their clients confessed that they didn’t really need the new kitchen or the new car, but once their friends were moving up in the status stakes, they felt under pressure to maintain their social standing. Whether it is the kitchen, car, vacation, or the latest digital technology, if we allow ourselves to be judged by other people’s criteria, we lay ourselves open to a lot of unnecessary stress. Even a simchah—a wedding or bar mitzvah—can get us into “keeping up with the Cohens” mode, from the seven-layered designer invitation hand-delivered to every guest, down to the posh dinner dance replete with chopped-liver sculptures. Why? All because we are busy looking over our shoulders or peering into the next-door neighbor’s place. The principle even applies to tzedakah. There is an appeal for the shul or a Jewish charity, and how do we respond? “Well, if so-and-so, who is a multimillionaire, only gave \$10,000, then all I should give is \$10!” What difference does it make what someone else gave or didn’t give? You should give what you can, irrespective

of what others gave. How much resentment, bitterness & disappointment we would avoid if we didn’t try to measure ourselves by other people’s standards! We would be much happier people if we looked into ourselves and achieved what we could and should, without drawing comparisons with others. If you want to enjoy the blessing of “goodly tents,” or even just good housekeeping, keep your eyes and your nose in your own tent. Then you will be content, too.

*by Rabbi Yossy Goldman*  
*Why Name a Torah Reading After a Wicked Person?*

**QUESTION:** Dear Rabbi, I was a little shocked that the weekly Torah portion read in the synagogue on the Sabbath was named after the wicked King Balak, who schemed to curse the Jews in the desert. Couldn’t a more fitting name be found for this Torah portion?  
**ANSWER:** That’s quite an interesting question. There are actually 6 Torah portions named after central characters - Noach, Sarah, Jethro, Korach, Balak and Phinehas - and they are all righteous, save Balak. A careful reading of the story will give us some insight into why this portion was named after a wicked man & what messages we can glean for our own spiritual journey. **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. (Numbers, Ch. 22-25). 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: 1) Balaam is transformed by his hatred of the Jewish people into one who does not wish to obey G-d; 2) A donkey talks; 3) The curses are transformed into blessings; 4) A portion of the Jewish people is transformed into sinners of the lowest degree; and 5) 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. (Talmud, Sotah 47a.). 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. (Teaching of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory.) *By Yossi Lew*

**Construction of the Temple** In the 3 weeks of mourning (July 21-August 11), it is Jewish custom to learn the laws of the building of the Temple, which will be rebuilt in Jerusalem with the coming of the Messiah today. The Aleph Institute has available a booklet. Those completing the course & answering a proctored test, will receive a certificate of completion and will be entered into a raffle to receive a color detailed descriptive book of the Temple.

**Reminders!** Please remember to file the paperwork for those wishing to fast on the Fast of 17th Tammuz & the Fast of Tisha B'Av. Fast of Tammuz (July 21) & Fast of Av (August 10-11). The latter is a 24 hr fast day.

Also, please begin working with your Rabbi/Chaplain to ensure the paperwork is being processed for Rosh Hashanah. Order forms are due by August 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**July 15, 2019 - 12 Tammuz, 5779**

**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. 27 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 &, subsequently, to release him completely. The actual release took place on Tammuz 13 & Tammuz 12-13 is celebrated as a "festival of liberation" by the Chabad-Lubavitch community.

**July 18, 2019 - 15 Tammuz, 5779**

**Passing of R. Chayim ben Attar (1743).** Passing of the famed Torah scholar and mystic Rabbi Chayim ben Attar (1696-1743), author of the Ohr HaChayim commentary on the Torah. Born in Morocco, he also lived and taught in Algiers, Italy, Acco and Jerusalem, where he settled a year before his passing. Many stories are told of his holiness and greatness, & of the repeated unsuccessful attempts by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov to reach the Holy Land and meet with him in the belief that together they could bring the Moshiach and the final redemption.

**July 19, 2019 - 16 Tammuz, 5779**

**Golden Calf Made; Hur Killed (1313 BCE).** In the year 2448 from Creation (1313 BCE), Tammuz 16 was the 40th day following the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, and the people of Israel wrongly expected Moses' return from the mountain (he would actually return on the following day). When their leader failed to return, they demanded from Aaron: "Make us a god that shall go before us". Hur (Moses' nephew, the son of Miriam and Caleb) tried to stop them and was killed by the mob. Aaron fashioned a calf of molten gold.

**July 20, 2019 - 17 Tammuz, 5779**

**Moses Breaks Tablets (1313 BCE).** The Talmud (Taanit 28b) lists five tragic events in Jewish history that occurred on Tammuz 17, on account of which a fast was instituted on this day. The 1st of these occurred in 1313 BCE, 40 days after the Giving of the Torah on Sivan 6. Upon descending Mount Sinai and witnessing Israel's worship of the Golden Calf, Moses smashed the Tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments which he was carrying down from the mountain.