



Parshas Chukas & Balak 2020, perception is key

The Parsha Perspective is dedicated in memory of Shlomo Ben Edward, may his soul be uplifted and his memory a blessing.

Parshas Balak tells us the story of Balak and Balaam. Balak, the king of Moav, worried about his upcoming battle with the Jewish people. So Balak recruited Balaam, the famous non-Jewish prophet to curse the Jewish people, and hopefully defeat the Jewish nation in battle.

When Balaam was told of Balak's request, G-d appeared to him and said that he is not allowed to curse the Jewish people, for they are blessed. Balaam sent word back to Balak that G-d does not let him curse the Jewish people. So Balak sent prestigious messengers back to Balaam, promising him great riches in return for his services. Once again, G-d appears to Balaam, but this time, G-d allows him to go, provided that he only says the words that G-d tells him to.

At the beginning of Balaam's trip, G-d placed an angel with a giant sword in his path. The donkey saw the angel and did not want to move; however, Balaam, who was oblivious to the angel, started to hit his donkey to travel. The Pasuk tells us (22:28) that the donkey turned to Balaam and said to him, ***"what have I done to you that you hit three times?"*** At that point, G-d revealed the angel to Balaam, who bowed down before the angel asking for forgiveness.

The angel told him to continue on his journey but reminded him that he must only say what G-d tells him to. When Balaam arrived in Moav, he instructed Balak to build seven altars and offer sacrifices to G-d.

But instead of cursing the Jewish people, Balaam showered them with blessings. When Balak got angry that Balaam blessed the Jews, Balaam reminded him that he could only say what G-d tells him.

So Balak takes Balaam to another location, hoping that Balaam can curse the Jews from there. They build more altars and offer sacrifices, and again, G-d tells him a blessing for the Jewish people, which he repeats. The entire process repeats itself a third time, and yet still, only blessings came out of Balaam's mouth. At this point, Balak despaired of accomplishing his goal and sent Balaam on his way.

However, a question comes to mind: The Pasuk writes (22:22) that G-d was enraged that Balaam was traveling to Moav to curse the Jewish people, so He placed an angel wielding a sword in his path. But why did G-d get angry that Balaam decided to go with the messengers? He told him the night before that he is allowed to go to Balak and the land of Moav?

The Ramban explains that the reason that G-d got angry with Balaam was that he did not tell the messengers that he cannot curse the Jewish people. Balaam knew that if he said to them that he is not allowed to curse the Jewish people, the messengers would leave back to Moav along with his dreams of riches and power. Therefore, G-d sent the angel to remind Balaam of the conditions He gave him to go to Balak.

We see that this remainder worked, for when Balaam met Balak, he told him that he could only say what G-d tells him to. As the Pasuk writes,(22:38) *“Balaam said to Balak, now that I have come to you, for I only have the power to say the words that G-d puts into my mouth.”*

However, the Malbim gives a deeper and more powerful explanation. He explains that the reason G-d got angry at Balaam was that despite being told not to curse the Jewish people, his intention with this journey was still to try and curse the Jewish nation. For the true meaning of G-d's second reply, if you insist on going, I will not stop you. However, I am angry that you did not get the hint the first time you asked.

As Rashi writes (22:22) G-d was enraged when He saw how much Balaam yearned and desired to curse the Jewish people.

The Malbim continues that we see this from the fact that G-d changed the word ***“with them”*** when responding to Balaam. The first answer G-d gave to Balaam, He said, (22:12), ***“You are not allowed to go **“Imehem - with them.”***** But the second time G-d answered (22:20) ***“If you feel that you should go, then go **“Itam- with them.”***** The difference between the two is subtle but significant.

The word ***“Imehem”*** means not to go along with them to Moav, as well as their intention of cursing the Jewish nation. But the term ***“Itam”*** means that Balaam could go to Moav, but not along with their plans to curse the Jewish people. Yet, Balaam did not listen, as the Pasuk writes (22:21) that he went ***“Im Sarie Moav - with the messengers of Moav.”*** He wanted to go to Moav with the messengers but also wished to go along with plans to curse the Jewish people.

This is why G-d put an angel in his path and had the donkey speak to him in front of everyone. For G-d wanted both Balaam and the messengers to know, that no matter how hard they try, He will not allow the Jewish nation to be cursed. As Balaam said, (24:9) ***“Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are the ones who curse you.”***

In our daily lives, we must be able to perceive the subtle hints and social cues that are given to us from our friends and family. This ability gives us a direct insight into the true meaning behind their words and actions. It is a skill that is applicable in all aspects of our life and will bring us closer to achieving our goals and accomplishing our potential.

**“One has not only an ability to perceive the world
but an ability to alter one's perception of it;
more simply, one can change things
by the manner in which one looks at them.”**

-Tony Robbins

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*