



Parshas Balak 2019, the process of transformation

This week's Parsha Perspective is also dedicated in honor of the yahrzeit of my grandfather, Yehuda Ben Aaron may his soul be uplifted and his memory a blessing.

Our Parsha tells us the story of Balak and Balaam. Balak, the king of Moav, worried about his upcoming battle with the Jewish people. Moshe and the Jewish nation had just won their wars with the powerful countries of Emor and Bashon. 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.

In response, Balak sent prestigious messengers back to Balaam, promising him great riches in return for his services. Once again, G-d appears to Balaam, but he allows him to go, provided that Balaam only says the words that 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, yet only blessings came out of Balaam's mouth. At this point, Balak despaired of accomplishing his goal and sent Balaam on his way.

A question comes to mind: How is it possible that we have a Parsha named after a person who tried to curse the Jewish people not once, but three times?

The Talmud in Avodah Zarah (17A) relates the story of Elazar ben Durdaiya. He was a person who was sinful and promiscuous his entire life; he would sin just to anger G-d. Once while committing a sin, he was told that he will never be able to return to G-d because of his wickedness.

This statement deeply sadden Elazar ben Durdaiya, so he placed his head between his knees and cried until his soul left his body. At that moment, a heavenly voice cried out: **Elazar ben Durdaiya is destined for a life in the World-to-Come.** The Talmud continues, that when the great Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi heard this story, he said, some people acquire their World-to-Come after many years of hard work. And some acquire it in one moment, like Elazar ben Durdaiya.

We learn from this story, that complete transformation of one's self is always possible. As we see in Sota (47a), Balak did Teshuva and merited that one of his descendants would be Ruth, the ancestor of Dovid HaMelech. This is also one of the reasons that the Torah portions of Chukas and Balak are usually read together. Because Parshas Chukas teaches us that we can always do Teshuva and return to G-d, no matter how far we stray from him.

Parshas Balak shows us a powerful example of transformation, and Teshuva, Balak, who was a wicked man, went from cursing the Jewish people to having Dovid HaMelech as a descendant. Teshuvah does not require time but rather, sincerity. G-d opens up the gates of heaven for a person who is genuine and earnest, a person who is heartfelt and diligent in his service and love of G-d.

In our daily life, it is imperative that we understand, that although most changes in your life will not happen instantly. You must still work toward your goals diligently. Because change can happen in a fraction of a second, and all your hard work will propel you to seize the moment and take advantage of the opportunity before you. Bringing you one step closer to accomplishing your true potential!

"You are always one decision away from a totally different life".

Have a meaningful Shabbos! Rabbi Sholom Yemini