

# *Shiur L'Yom Chamishi<sup>1</sup>*

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS:     ***Torah Balak:***                     **Numbers 22:2-38**  
                  ***Haftarah:***                               **Micah 5:6-15**  
                  ***B'rit Chadasha:***                   **I Corinthians 1:17-27**

*Bila'am rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went ...*  
[Numbers 22:20]

Today's *Balak* Meditation is Proverbs 16:1-2;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 12, *Sh'ma Koleinu* [Hear our Cry!]

*Vayar Balak ben-Tzipor* – Then Balak, son of Tzipor, saw/evaluated ... *et kol-asher-asah Yisra'el la-Emori* - all that Israel had done to the Amorites ... *vayagor Moav mipenei ha-am me'od* – and Moav shrunk back in fear before the great nation .... Numbers 22:2-3a.

We are now well into the fourth moon cycle of the Biblical year; that means it is our appointed time of the year to accompany the Holy One on on a Divinely guided exploratory excursion into the dark, destructive world of the occult. We need to know exactly what dark powers we are going to be up against in this world. We need to know that there is nothing harmless, much less fanciful, about those who attempt to manipulate natural and/or supernatural forces for their own – or for some ideology's, ethnicity's, nation's, or warlord's – benefit. We need to be aware that as long as we are in this world we will be opposed by both gifted people and charlatans who are happy to offer – for a hefty fee, of course – to employ curses, magic words, formulas, chants, incantations, spells, imprecations, necromancy, and witchcraft to subvert the Holy One's Grand Plan of redemption and restoration. As happens each year, our tour through the only witchcraft and divination novel we will ever need to read begins with the words: *Vayar Balak* – Then Balak saw. Numbers 22:2(a). And consider the next verb phrase in the text: *Vayagor Moav* – And Moav stopped what they were doing and fearfully huddled. Numbers 22:3(a). With these simple phrases the Torah introduces us to two of the most nefarious characters, and one of the most infamous episodes, of Holy Writ. We will get to that in a moment, but first, let us recall the socialization aspects of the proving ground testing protocols the Holy One processed us through in parsha *Chukat*.

The parsha known as *Balak* [Hebrew בַּלַּק] represents the culmination of the interval in time that I call the 'Season of Prototypical End-Time Antagonists'. In the course of our readings in *Chukat* we came face-to-face with four different prototypical

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antagonists and the minions they had brainwashed into doing their bidding. First came *Esavian prototype*, the king/kingdom of *Edom* [Numbers 20:14-21]. Then we found ourselves attacked by three separate waves of people of the *Chamian prototype* – the Kena’ani king/kingdom of *Arad* [Numbers 21:1-3]; the Emori<sup>2</sup> king/kingdom of *Cheshbon*, under its warlord *Sichon* [Numbers 21:21-26]; and the Emori king/kingdom of *Bashan*, under its warlord *Og* [Numbers 21:33-35].

### ***Our Proving Ground Tests of Socialization – Getting Used to Being the Elephant in Every Pagan Warlord’s Living Room***

The moment we left the new generation’s incubation chamber of Paran, the Holy One started throwing one socialization test at us after another. Four foreign kings have already stepped up and gotten in our faces. They do not like us. They think they are testing our mettle; but the Holy One is using them to test two things that are far more important: our *emunah* and our *shalom*.

#### ***The Challenge of Prophetic Enemy #1: The King of Edom***

The first pagan king to take a stand in opposition to our return to the Covenant Land was a descendant of Esav. The *king of Edom* called forth his armies and made a great show of force – we changed our route to avoid a war. Like our most ancient of antagonists, Nimrod, Esav/Edom is at his essence a *tzayid* – i.e. ‘hunter’<sup>3</sup>. See Genesis 25:7. He sees everything that moves, including people, as *prey* to be stalked, ensnared, dispatched with his arrows and his sword, butchered, then voraciously devoured. See Genesis 26 and 27.

#### ***The Challenge of Prophetic Enemy #2: The Warlord/King of Arad***

Our next test of socialization was an unpleasant encounter with the raiding parties of the Kena’ani warlord/king of *Arad*. *Arad* was a heavily fortified Kena’ani stronghold/city in the north eastern area of the Negev, about 20 miles south of Hebron. *Arad* was the ‘badlands’ hide-out of a group of notorious human traffickers. The name is derived from an ancient verb meaning to *sequester, take by force, hide from view, and isolate from contact with others*; hence, to *stalk, take, kidnap/shanghai, and keep captives, hostages, and/or slaves*<sup>4</sup>. Our contact with these troubling prophetic adversaries began when the warlord/king of Arad

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<sup>2</sup> The Emori hordes [KJV ‘Amorites’] were polytheistic, donkey-raising nomads descended from Cham through Kena’an. They are believed to have emigrated from the Tower of Babel/Shinar Plain area of southern Mesopotamia sometime before 2000 BCE (several centuries before Avram’s migration). Some believe the Emori first settled in a land called ‘Amurru’, on the border between what is now known as Syria and what is now known as Lebanon, before spreading southward toward what are now Israel and Jordan. Of the Emori culture the ancient Sumerians wrote disapprovingly: ‘*The Weapon is his companion. ... (He is one) who knows no submission ... who eats uncooked flesh ... who has no house in his life-time ... who does not bury his dead companion.*’ E. Chiera, *Sumerian Religious Texts, I* (1924); *Sumerian Epics and Myths* (1934), no. 58, rev. col. 4, lines 26-29.

<sup>3</sup> To understand the prophetic import of this aspect of Esavian identity, please consult Jeremiah 16:14-16.

<sup>4</sup> To understand the prophetic import of this aspect of Aradian identity, please consult Isaiah 61:1

targeted the camp of *B'nei Yisrael*, sent raiding parties out to scout us, and managed to take some of us captive. Sound vaguely reminiscent of what the four kings of the north did regarding Lot and his family [see **Genesis 14:8-15**], doesn't it? After praying for their deliverance, and making a vow to the Holy One, an expedition was launched to return these captives back to their families. The Holy One honored the excursion, just as He had done when Avram sought the rescue of Lot and his family. Arad and its surrounding 'badlands' hideouts were then all destroyed, and the terrorist threat posed by the Aradians – not just to us but to all peoples - was effectively neutralized. Now on we go to a far greater socialization challenge – a face-to-face confrontation with the biggest bullies in the neighborhood, the Emori.

**The Challenge of Prophetic Enemy #3:**  
***Sichon, the Emori Warlord/King of Cheshbon***

When we drew near the territory occupied by the Emori - a well-organized nation of anti-social donkey-traders who had set up shop in the area around Cheshbon, in the land of Moab - we tried to handle the interaction diplomatically. We sent emissaries to negotiate passage through the area they had declared to be their little 'autonomous zone'. The Emori met diplomacy with force. Sichon, the warlord/king of this band of Emori, called his minions to take up arms. They came at us with all their might. The Holy One, however, delivered all their warriors into our hand - and placed the entire 'autonomous zone' they had established and terrorized under our authority.

**The Challenge of Prophetic Enemy #4:**  
***Og, the Emori, the King of Bashan***

Immediately after hearing of Sichon's defeat his confederate, Og, the warlord/strongman of the other Emori 'autonomous zone, known as Bashan, raised up an even greater army to try to annihilate us. Og and his powerful forces attacked us with fury and skill; but the same supernatural Defender Who had protected us from all the other bloodthirsty anti-Semites we had met along the way dispatched this army – and its warlord/king – as well.

The Holy One knows that in the dark days that are coming upon the earth we will all see again – and have to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves in relation to – updated versions of all four of these prophetic adversaries. But there is one more warlord/king's onslaught we must face. His name, we will soon discover, is *Balak*.

***The Next Nefarious Character in the Drama: 'Balak'***

Now the only hostile warlord left standing between the Covenant People and entry into the land that the Holy One promised our ancestors would be our inheritance is *Balak*, 'king' of *Moav*. Who is Balak? We have faced a lot of adversaries, and have

learned a lot of hard lessons from them. The serpent and his bag of tricks we now know. Kayin, Lamech, and Cham, and their perverse, narcissistic ways, we have learned to recognize. Nimrod and Pharaoh, and the violent and oppressive tactics they utilize, we understand better than we want to. The dark forces that drive Yish'mael, Esav and Laban, and fuel their explosive tempers, we can smell a mile away. Amalek with his bloody sword we have learned to handle. Yitro with his slick pseudo-intelligence we have learned to ignor. Korach, Datan, and Aviram with their high-sounding anti-Torah rhetoric we have learned to walk away from. The kings of Arad, Cheshbon, and Bashan, with their blatant anti-Semitism, we have found ways to overcome. But who is in the world is *Balak* – and what kind of threat does he pose to us? And how, in the world, are we supposed to survive and overcome his occult weapons and strategies?

**The Challenge of Prophetic Enemy #5:**  
***Balak, Warlord/King of Moav***

Balak turns out to be the final anti-Semitic king who rises up to stand in the way of our Great Destiny. Torah doesn't tell us much about him. All we are informed, at the outset at least, is that he is *a son of Tzippor*.

Let us try to take a look at the world through his eyes. What he sees approaching his nation's border is a multitude of people one generation removed from slavery in Egypt. It is clear to him that the hordes approaching his border are not just any old bunch of refugees. They march *in perfect order*, an army *majestic with banners* – and they have *fire in their eyes!* The Holy One their God dwells in their midst. An awe-inspiring pillar of fire and cloud leads them. Some strange, edible substance he has never seen before magically appears on the ground for them six out of every seven mornings. On every seventh day they enter into a state of rest and peace so blessed that their faces seem to shine with the glory of Heaven. Wherever they go a mysterious rock pours forth unending supplies of water for them and their livestock to drink. And no one seems to be able to even stand up to them - much less stop them. When the powerful and blustery king of Edom mustered his army and prepared for battle against Israel, they came away without a single Hebrew scalp. When the highly-dangerous Kena'ani raiding parties from Arad and the mighty armies of the *Emori* [Amorites] made the mistake of attacking these people – they all got wiped out *as if swept away by a great Hand from Heaven*. The Hebrews have now dispatched every single *tough guy* in Balak's neighborhood, *crushing them and their minions like flies*. Edom, it appears, got extremely lucky that the Hebrews' God had another route in mind for Israel than the one that led through his land.

With this sudden change in the balance of power in the region, perhaps Balak saw a power vacuum he could manipulate to his advantage. Perhaps he concluded that

if he just played one or two cards right ... well, the role of supreme ruler that he coveted could be his. Perhaps he figured that with just a little luck he could make a name for himself that would never be forgotten. After all, with all the bad guys of the region taken out, now the only thing standing in the way of his realization of his dreams were the people with fire in their eyes, just approaching his Western frontier.

What, Balak must have wondered, were the intentions of the fire-eye people regarding *Moav*? What did the presence of these descendants of Avraham mean for him and his kingdom? Oh, if Balak had only known the will of the Holy One! Israel was no threat to Moav. The only land the Israelites wanted was the area on the East bank of the Jordan. Israel did not want – much less need – a single thing Moav had to offer. The Holy One provided everything Israelis needed. The fire that burned in the eyes of the these folk was *a single-hearted focus on what lay beyond the Jordan* – the land the Holy One had promised to their ancestors as an eternal heritage. Balak did not see that, though. People like him *never will*. Balak and his ilk will always see Israel only as an enemy to be cursed, a menace that must be eradicated from the face of the earth. People like Balak will never be content to ‘peacefully co-exist’ with the Hebrew people – not for a moment. Such folks will therefore always be looking for an ‘angle’, and ‘advantage’, he can exploit to humiliate her, then destroy her forever.

*Never waste a good crisis*, the spin-masters of today’s world tell us<sup>5</sup>. And that is especially acceptable in the present environment if a little manipulation of a crisis might provide either an opportunity to blame and demonize a political enemy or an excuse to renew talk of wiping Israel off of the map. There are, you see, a lot of people like Balak in the world. And one of the most dastardly of the batch is going to rise up and play Balak, and havoc beyond most people’s imagination, in the latter days. But ultimately he too – along with his false prophet – will epically fail.

### ***Why Does Torah Devote So Much Attention to the Deeds of Seemingly Obscure Villains Like Balak and Bila’am?***

The account of Balak and Bila’am is given prominence in Torah to provide us with a prophetic prototype of the *Mashiach Tachat* [often called the Anti-Messiah<sup>6</sup> or Anti-

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<sup>5</sup> The most famous declarant of this theory was Niccolo’ di Bernardo del Machiavelli, called the ‘father of modern political science’. The concept was later picked up by Rahm Immanuel as America’s economy was reeling in the throes of the economically-devastating American banking/real estate crash of 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Anti-Messiah’ is a transmutation of the Greek word *antichristos*. The prefix ‘anti’ has come to be understood in our culture as something that opposes or is the opposite of. However the prefix also means ‘instead of’ or ‘because of’. The Hebrew phrase at the heart of antichristos is *Mashiach tachat*. The Hebrew word *tachat* means *instead of* or *under*. The first occurrence of a word in Scripture sets the pattern for it’s physical and symbolic meaning. One of the first occurrences is in Genesis 2:21: "**And the**

Christ] who will appear and deceive many at the end-of-days. The account of Bila'am is given to us in order that we can see a prophetic prototype of the Anti-Messiah's '*False Prophet*' who will incite the kings of the earth to make war against the Covenant people. If you want to understand the Anti-Messiah and/or the False Prophet of Revelation, therefore, parsha *Balak* is a really good place to start.

*Balak* only saw what he wanted to see. It was the same for his people – who chose to let paranoia shape their perspective. It eventually turned out to be the same for Bila'am, who will let the combination of his own greed and his Moavi sponsors' paranoia frame his narrative. And it will ultimately turn out to be the same for Zimri, prince of the tribe of *Sh'mon* [KJV '*Simeon*'], who will let the seductive beauty of Kozbi the Midyani priestess turn him away from the Holy One, the Covenant, the Torah, and his destiny.

So ... what about *you*? What are you letting the talking heads of your day seduce you into looking at instead of the Holy One and His Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind and the Restoration of Creation? Who in this fallen world are you presently allowing to frame the narrative through which you *think thoughts, generate and process emotions, make judgments, choose to react to challenging situations, and elect to behave toward people?*

Torah is about to open our eyes to the uncleanness and paranoia that inhere in the

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*Holy One Elohim caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh INSTEAD THEREOF.*" The Holy One replaced whatever He took from the side of Adam with his flesh. Another appropriate definition of this word is found in Genesis 4:25: "*And Adam knew his wife again; and she bore a son, and called his name Shet* [Seth]. *For Elohim has appointed me another seed INSTEAD OF Hevel* [Abel], *whom Kayin* [Cain] *slew.*" The idea is that *Shet* [Seth] 'replaced' *Hevel* [Abel]. The other definition of 'under' is also seen in our concept of an 'understudy'. This is one who stands ready to take the place of a lead actor in a play. There is a significant difference between the pop theology picture of Anti-Christ being *the opposite of* the Messiah, on the one hand, and the Hebraic picture of *Mashiach Tachat* setting himself up *to be like the Messiah* or *to replace the Messiah*, on the other hand. The true Messiah will be *a prophet like unto Moshe*. However the followers of the *Mashiach tachat* will be identified by the fact that they worship a '*christ*' but are **lawless** – *i.e.* devoid of Torah. See **2 Thessalonians 2:6** and compare **Matthew 7:23**. In His Olivet Discourse Yeshua warned His talmidim that many would come in His name and would confess that He (i.e. Yeshua) is the 'Christ', but would deceive many. **Matthew 23:4-5**. How can people who confess that Yeshua is the 'Christ' be deceivers, some may ask? Because while these people confess that Yeshua is the Messiah, they not only are **lawless** (*i.e.* Torah-less) themselves but teach others to be so as well. Yeshua taught that such people were 'the least in the kingdom of Heaven'. See Matthew 5. Yeshua is not speaking of people who claim to be the Messiah themselves, but of those who say things like "*Jesus is Christ*". This, without Torah appreciation and acceptance, is an anti-Messiah spirit because *Messiah by definition teaches His disciples to live by the Torah*. Any tradition that denies the Torah of the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov is, therefore, mischaracterizing the Messiah to the world and promoting a false 'Christ' of their own imagination rather than a Scriptural Messiah.

occult. We have learned how people of the Covenant go astray when their focus is on what is seen; now it is time to learn how people outside the Covenant go astray when they do the same thing.

***What Around You Are You Choosing to Look At?***  
***What Around You Are You Choosing to See and NOT SEE?***  
***And How Are You Letting All That Make You Think and Feel?***

***Vayar Balak*** – Then Balak saw. At its essence, Torah is telling us, the *episode* we are about to read is going to be all about *vision*. It is going to be about *what people choose to – and not to - look for and at*. It is about what human brains infected by the poison of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil have been thereby rewired to *see* and *not see*. And it is about how badly it turns out for anyone to focus upon that which we think we see. Parsha *Balak* is about learning to look right past what seems to our natural eyes to be going on, into the shining horizon of the *unseen*. Remember, *emunah* [i.e. faith/faithfulness] is the *evidence of things not seen*. **Hebrews 11:1<sup>7</sup>**. *Emunah* requires – and relies solely upon - *beyond-the-veil perspective*. The majority of the spy delegation sent out from Kadesh Barnea recently projected onto the Kena’ani warriors they encountered in the Land a perspective that B’nei Yisrael was in their eyes as ‘grasshoppers’ in a world of giants. That invented perspective led to fear. Fear when shared led to mass paranoia. Paranoia led to schizophrenia. Schizophrenia led to violence toward the only two sane people remaining in the camp. The result was toxic enough, of course, in the Camp of the Redeemed. But just wait until you see what allowing others to frame your perspective and use verbal images to stir up fear, hate, outrage, and disgust does to a group that dabbles in the occult!

As we study parsha *Balak*, if we but pay attention to the Torah, we will learn one of life’s most valuable lessons: what it is like – and why it is dangerous - *to walk on the ‘dark’ side*. What do I mean by such a provocative statement? I mean that, through carefully reading and meditating upon the narrative of parsha *Balak*, it is the Holy One’s desire that we will actually see, through eyes quickened by the *Ruach HaQodesh*, what actually happens when people choose to align themselves with evil men who oppose the Holy One and rise up against His chosen vessel, the nation of Israel. The ugly truth, you see, is that all of us are potential Balaks and Bila’ams. Let us understand that there is a curiosity about, if not a hunger for, *the dark side* in every single one of us. Yes, Beloved, that means me – and it also means YOU. Let us not think of ourselves more highly than we ought. All of us are potential *self-promoters*. All of us are potential *panderers*. All of us are potential

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<sup>7</sup> See also II Corinthians 4:18 , where Shaul tells us ‘*we focus not on the things that can be seen, but on the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*’



*man-pleasers. All of us are potential half-truth dispensers. All of us are potential false prophets. All of us are potential blind guides. All of us are potential victims of pride, of greed, of self-will, and of folly. All of us are potential enemies of the Holy One and of His People.*

When we look at Bila'am, lest we scoff, and turn up our noses, and take up an air of self-righteousness, and harden our hearts, we absolutely must grasp the essential truth that *there, but for the grace of the Holy One, go you and I.*

Okay ... so, do I now have your *undivided attention*? Good. Class is now in *session*. Let us proceed with our *eyes fully open*, our *hearts fully tender*, and our *minds fully intent* on seeking the wisdom and instruction of the Holy and Compassionate One.

### ***Understanding the Times and the Seasons – And the Threat Posed Every Year at this Time by Sinat Chinam***

A fascinating Hebrew phrase that arises every year in the heat of Summer (in the northern hemisphere, at least), about the time we study parsha *Balak*, is *sinat chinam*. This phrase is usually translated into English as 'baseless hatred'. Literally, however, it means 'rejection of their - *i.e.* someone else's - grace/favor'. This may take a moment to unpack, Beloved, but it will be well worth it. *Sinat chinam*, you see, is the dark force behind the story of Balak and Bila'am. Even more than that, however, *sinat chinam* is the root cause of every interpersonal, cross-cultural, interracial, political, ideological, or international conflict in the world. *Sinat chinam*, say the sages, was the reason the Manifest Presence of the Holy One was withdrawn from the Tabernacle and the Holy Temple, resulting in all the national tragedies we have experienced between the 17th day of Tammuz and the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Av.

Let's start with the basics. Every human being is shown a level of grace/favor – in Hebrew, *chen* - by the Creator. That *chen* is the only reason the person - or anyone, for that matter - is still alive. The Holy One's *chen* is the only reason for any culture or nation to continue to exist. for that matter. *Chen* is evidence that the Holy One still sees the potential for 'good' [Hebrew, *tov* – *i.e.* *beauty, functionality, productivity, and inspirational capacity*] in a person or culture. Think of Noach. Torah tells us that he found 'grace/favor' – *i.e.* *chen* – in the Holy One's sight. Because of that *chen* opening, He and his bloodline/progeny therefore survived the Flood; and no one else did. Think also of the difference between the approaches of Cham on the one hand, and Shem and Yafet on the other, to Noach's over-indulgence in the fruit of the vine. Cham indulged *sinat chinam* toward Noach. He refused to acknowledge the grace of the Holy One on Noach's life. He rejected that grace,



and instead chose to focus on Noach's one night of folly and undignified behavior. Shem and Yafet refused to go down that road. They recognized that, even though he had some significant issues, Noach had areas in his life where grace was operating, so he deserved honor, respect, and covering. They didn't just love and honor their father – they kept their focus on the 'grace'/favor areas of his life.

One of our assigned roles is to see every person - of every bloodline, ethnicity, nationality, and cultural identification - through the lens of the Holy One's grace/favor. We are not to obsess over the areas in people's lives where they are presently behaving badly, talking trash, or acting out; we are to focus our attention instead on the areas where the Holy One is showing those people grace/favor. Those areas are the essential portals through which the Holy One wants to engage - and pour measured doses of inspiration, encouragement, love, mercy, and empowerment into – those people's lives. So, we are either on His side, doing what He is doing – or we are working at cross-purposes with Him.

*Sinat chinam* is a negative energy that flows from bad vision – i.e. not having a 'good eye'. *Sinat chinam* rejects/ignores all areas of other people's lives in which the Holy One is bestowing grace/favor (because He still sees redemptive potential in those areas), and focuses instead on what we see with a critical, judgmental eye - i.e. folly, bad behavior, destructive approaches to situations, etc.

To indulge any thought, feeling, or attitude of *sinat chinam* toward any person, culture, nation, or ethnicity is to do the exact opposite of what our Maker and King calls to do. For people of the Covenant, therefore, *sinat chinam* is to us what the Kryptonite is to Superman. It is our ultimate portal of vulnerability. Every time we indulge *sinat chinam* – and reject the grace/favor of the Holy One on other people's lives - we douse the light and tread down the salt the Holy One has given us. We become useless, if not dangerous; and expendable, if not intolerable.

Beware the extreme danger zone of *sinat chinam*! Be very alert to, and value very highly, the areas of grace/favor that are on other people's lives and other nations' and ethnicities' activities! See all people according to the Spirit, not according to the flesh. Do not judge anyone on the basis of what you see or think you see with your natural eyes or what you hear or think you hear with your natural ears! Do not allow 'baseless hatred' to poison your thoughts, attitudes, conversations, confessions, reactions, focuses, or behaviors.

## ***Setting the Stage for the Very Important Lessons Parsha Balak is Designed to Teach Us***

The second-generation of the people the Divine Bridegroom redeemed from Egypt with a strong Right Arm, with a mighty Hand, and with great miracles is now encamped *en masse* on the plains of Moav, near the East Bank of the Jordan River. This horde of 2 to 3 million people is now *well-organized*, and, after successfully defending a series of defensive wars to fend off savage attacks by the Emori and Kena'ani, it is also *battle-ready*. The camp of the redeemed of the Holy One is indeed a political, religious, economic, and military *force to be reckoned with*. How are the people of Moav to respond to the sudden presence of such a fearsome horde near them? Dare they *ignore* them? Should they *welcome* them? Should they engage in diplomatic talks with their leaders in hopes *making a treaty – or at least a pact of mutual non-aggression - with them?* Should they pack their belongings hastily and *run away from them?* Should they *join forces with them?* Or should they *attack them and try to drive them away?* The Divine writer of Torah transports us across space and time, to places deep inside ancient Moav to reveal the turmoil that was going on inside the homes and hearts of Balak's people.

### ***Vayagor Moav***

*And the Moabites were deathly afraid*

***mip'nei ha-am me'od ki rav-hu***

*because the [Israelite] people were so numerous.*

***vayakotz Moav mip'nei b'nei Yisra'el.***

*And Moav was greatly distressed at the presence of the descendants of Yisrael.*

[Numbers 22:3]

Every resident of Moav had to make a decision as to how he or she would personally respond on an individual basis, of course; but as a nation, they had to look to Balak, their king, to decide the proper course of action which the nation should take as a corporate entity. The fate of his nation hangs in the balance. So, what will Balak do? Pay close attention, Beloved!

### ***Beware the Unholy Alliance***

Torah tells us that in response to the presence of B'nei Yisrael near him, Balak, the King of Moav became extremely agitated. He turned a blind eye to all the areas of the operation of Divine grace/favor that B'nei Yisrael was being shown – thought there were many such areas, as Bila'am will subsequently point out to him. Balak chose to cave in to *sinat chinam*, and focus only on what he considered 'bad behavior' – the military humiliation of Sichon and Og. Balak accurately concluded that the arrival of the people of the Holy One in his country was *the most significant challenge his kingdom would ever face*. To combat the perceived threat, Balak devised what he thought was a sure-fire *two-part plan* to insure that the

covenant people of the Holy One would stay far from his little kingdom.

The first move Balak made was to hastily form a ‘strange bedfellows’ type of alliance with an arch enemy of Balak’s people, namely, the *Midyanim* [KJV ‘Midianites’] – for the sole purpose of neutralizing the threat he imagined, with a vain imagination, *B’nei Yisrael* posed. Secondly, in combination with the leadership of the Midyani, Balak hatched a plan to hire the well-known seer *Bila’am* to come and curse Israel. The people of the nations of Moav and of Midyan did not, I suspect, ordinarily agree on a whole lot of anything. They certainly did not agree on matters having to do with religion, as each nation had its own *worldview*, its own *pantheon of gods*, and its own form of *priesthood*. They definitely did not agree on how politics or government should work. They probably strongly disagreed on how society should be structured, on what techniques of agriculture should be employed, and on issues of trade and economics. As dissimilar and diametrically opposite as Moav and Midyan were, however, it turned out that they could, and did, agree on one thing. What was that *one thing*? It was simple really. The one thing these two old enemies agreed about was that, under all circumstances, whatever the cost, *Israel must be destroyed*.

Ah, Beloved, we have now come face to face with our first ‘*unholy alliance*’. It will not, by any means, be our last such an encounter.

### ***Unseen Intervention By the Holy One***

Please understand that all this plotting and scheming of Moav and Midyan is completely unknown by Moshe or anyone else in the camp of B’nei Yisrael. They were totally oblivious. Clueless. Blissfully ignorant. But thank Heaven the plottings and schemings of Moav and Midyan were *completely known - down to their most intimate, secret details* - by the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov. *Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? Psalm 2:1.*

The Holy One is, you see, the ultimate loyal, dedicated bridegroom – and He is not ever going to be caught slumbering or sleeping when it comes to plots against His beloved betrothed Bride-to-be. The Holy One has heard every word Balak and the elders of Moav and Midyan have spoken in their secret meetings, and He has also seen both the *irrational fear* in their eyes and the *implacable hatred* that fills their hearts. Unbeknownst to any of the people in the Camp of the Redeemed, therefore, the Divine Bridegroom is about to *intervene* mightily – but secretly - on behalf of His betrothed. The God of Avraham, Yitschak and Ya’akov has plans for this man named Bila’am. Bila’am has a Divinely-ordained purpose and a destiny to fulfill. The question is, will he choose to fulfill that purpose and walk in that destiny ... or will he choose *his own way*.

## ***Whom Will You Curse, Whom will You Bless, Whom will you Serve?***

Bila'am is at a critical crossroads in his life. He is either going to participate in the plans of the Creator of Heaven and Earth concerning his life and his destiny ... or his name will become a byword among the nations in all generations. It is *all up to him*. There is much light in Bila'am. But there is also much darkness in him. There is a great calling from the Kingdom of Heaven upon his life; but alas, there is also a tremendous amount of curiosity in him about the unclean and occult realms.

There are two trees in everyone's spiritual garden, Beloved. When only the voice of the Holy One is speaking, the choice between the fruit of the two trees is easy. But when the Serpent comes calling and chatting, the choices which previously seemed so clear suddenly get called into serious question. The Holy One is not going to strong-arm Bila'am at this critical crossroads. Bila'am, like all of us, will be allowed to *make his own decision* as to the course in life he will *follow for himself* – and, perhaps even more importantly, will *counsel others within his sphere of influence to follow*.

We all have *similar choices* to make. Whom will YOU serve? What *worldview* will YOU adopt? What *priorities* will YOU choose? What *guidelines for living* will YOU follow? Whose honor and glory will YOU promote? Whom will you bless, and whom will you curse? And perhaps even more importantly, what course, in regard to each of these questions, will YOU counsel others to follow.

Much like Balak, Bila'am is going to make a lot of *wrong choices*.

### ***Consorting With the Enemy***

Bila'am's first error was in even *offering his ears to listen to the proposal* of the Holy One's enemies. He actually heard their hideous scheme out, and agreed to consider it. He then compounded the initial error by offering these plotters of iniquity *overnight fellowship* in his home.

***Vayomer aleyhem linu foh ha-laylah v'hashivoti etchem***

*'Spend the night here,' he replied to them*

***davar ka'asher yedaber Adonai***

*'and when the Holy One speaks to me,*

***elay vayeshvu***

*I will give you an answer.'*

It certainly would seem that Bila'am, a renowned seer, should have instantly recognized the enemy delegates for exactly who they were. It would also seem that he should have instantly recognized their '*come, curse this nation*' proposal for

exactly what *it* was. It would, therefore, seem like he should have *sent them on their way* – and then should have set out on a personal journey to meet the ‘people with fire in their eyes’ and seek to become one of them. But that is not what happened. Instead, *the dark side of Bila’am’s personality won out*. He welcomed the men. He listened with rapt attention to their *l’shon ha ra* - and he agreed to consider participating in their scheme.

Hmmm. Is that the Serpent I hear whispering in Bila’am’s ear? Before the poison fruit is ingested, however, the Holy One offers him a chance at redemption.

### ***Bila’am Has a ‘God-Encounter’***

In the course of reading Torah for so long now, we have become closely acquainted with the concept of the ‘God-encounter’. The Books of Genesis and Exodus were chock full of ‘God-encounters’. Probably the most remembered are the multiple God-encounters of *Noach* [Genesis 6-9] and *Avraham* [Genesis 12-22]. But the ‘God-encounter’ thread actually began in the Garden of Eden, when the Holy One took the crowning achievement of His seven days of Creation – the creature He called ‘Adam’ – into His Divine ‘Arms’, drew him close to His Divine ‘Face’, and lovingly breathed into man’s nostrils something which in English versions of the Hebrew scriptures is usually translated as the *breath of life*. **Genesis 2:7**.

In Bila’am’s case, the Holy One begins the process of initiating a ‘God-encounter’ with a *Manifestation of His Presence ... and a question*.

***Vayavo Elohim el-Bila'am vayomer***  
*God [Elohim] appeared to Bila’am and asked,*

***Mi ha-anashim ha-eleh imach***  
*'Who are these men with you?'*

This is, of course, somewhat similar to the Holy One asking Adam “*Where are you?*” in the Garden, and to His asking *Kayin* (Cain) “*Where is your brother Hevel (Abel)?*” The Holy One knows the answer. He inquires merely to start a dialogue with the person involved.

So ... *what question is the Holy One asking YOU, Beloved?* The substance of the question the Holy One asks to start a God-encounter is always a much more weighty question than our human minds want to believe. In Bila’am’s case, the question was ***‘Who are these men with you?’*** The answer the Holy One desired had nothing to do with the names and addresses and/or pedigrees of the men Bila’am was entertaining. The question was designed to elicit from Bila’am *a declaration of his discernment concerning the spiritual essence of the people he had invited into his dwelling*.

We do not, of course, know what Bila'am's prior spiritual activities had consisted of. We know only that he was renowned as a seer, and that it was believed by Balak at least that he had the power and authority on earth to 'bless' or to 'curse' nations. Balak and his Midyani cohorts did not come seeking blessing from him for their nations. They came seeking only the 'dark' side of his gifting. That should have told him volumes about the spiritual essence of the men with whom he was dealing. But the Holy One makes it even clearer, telling Bila'am:

***Lo telech imahem***

*'Do not go with them.*

***lo ta'or et ha-am ki varuch hu.***

*Do not curse the nation [in question], because it is a blessed [nation].'*

[Numbers 22:9-12]

Note that the Holy One speaks to Bila'am, and even carries on conversations with him. In this case, the Holy One gives him two specific instructions, spelling out His will for the seer. First, it is the Holy One's perfect will that Bila'am *not go* to Moav *in the company of these men*. Secondly, it is the Holy One's specific, immutable instruction that Bila'am is *not to curse Israel*.

Bila'am responded only the first instruction.

***vayomer el-sarei Balak lechu el-ar'tzechem***

*... he said to Balak's dignitaries, 'Go home!'*

***ki me'en Adonai letiti l'haloch imachem.***

*The Holy One refuses to let me walk with you.'*

[Numbers 22:13]

Bila'am apparently thought it was all about *the men* that were staying in his dwelling. He realized those men were dangerous. He heard the Holy One say not to go back to Moav WITH THOSE MEN. But the question remains unanswered whether Bila'am will embrace the second instruction – to refuse, no matter who might ultimately come and ask, to curse Israel. You see, Beloved, though Bila'am heard from and conversed with the Holy One, he also, like all of us, had *a weakness*. His particular weakness appears to be a *hunger for the flattery and attention of men*.

Bila'am is by no means alone in this weakness. Like many of us today, he was unwilling to make the God of Israel his '*audience of One*' – *i.e. the only One whose attention, acceptance, and feedback he cared about*. Instead, Bila'am chose to cater to rich and powerful men with neuroses like Balak instead of *sh'ma*-ing the Holy One. He therefore ultimately chose to use the revelation and insights he had received not for the glory of the Holy One, but *for his own ends*. He – and all who are like him - eloquently spout high-sounding religious talk, and attract many



adherents. But because he knows he has ‘sold out’ for the praise and payment of men, his heart comes to hate both the people and the true and just ways of the Holy One; hence, he searches incessantly for ways to undermine them, and silence the true *voice* – and *to hear only what he wants to hear*, so he can *do what he wants to do*.’ For this reason, when a second, more influential delegation comes to entice him to do what the Holy One has specifically told him not to do, saying ***Ki-chabed achabedcha me'od v'chol asher-tomar elay e'eseh*** - *I will give you honor, and will do everything you say to do* - Bila'am finds it an offer he simply cannot refuse. He is so determined to go that the Holy One refuses to over-ride his human will. Like Chava in the garden when confronted by the Serpent, Bila'am tried in vain to make a defense of the word he has heard from the Holy One. He says to the men who wanted him to curse Israel:

***im-yiten-li Balak melo veyto kesef v'zahav***

*'Even if Balak gave me his whole palace full of gold and silver,*

***lo uchal la'avor et-pi Adonai Elohai la'asot ketanah o g'dolah.***

*I would not be able to do anything great or small  
that would violate the word of the Holy One my God.*

Wow – did you catch that? Bila'am is now actually claiming *Yod, hey, vav, hey*, the Holy One, the covenant God of Israel as ‘*my* God’. Oh that Bila'am had *stopped right there*. Oh that Bila'am had then immediately *stood up and shown these men the door*. But that is not what happened. Instead, Bila'am said to the men:

***V'atah shevu na vazeh gam-atem ha-laylah***

*But now, you, too, remain here overnight.*

***v'ede'ah mah-yosef Adonai daber imi.***

*Then I will know what more the Holy One shall declare to me.'*

Big mistake, Bila'am. After all, ***what fellowship can light have with darkness? Can two walk together lest they be agreed?***

### ***Bila'am's Second God-Encounter***

Please notice that in the dealings of the Holy One with men, *one God-encounter almost always leads to another*. It was so with Adam. It was so with Kayin. It was so with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya'akov. The Holy One always offers a second chance. The Holy One wants an on-going relationship, you see, not simply a one-time meeting. So, after Bila'am meets with the enemy's envoy, and agrees to host them for another night, the Holy One *appears to him again*, and *offers him a second chance*, saying:

***lo im-likro lecha ba'u ha-anashim kum lech itam***

*'If the men have come to summon you, set out and go with them.*



***v'ach et ha-davar asher-adaber eleycha oto ta'aseh.***

*But only do exactly as I instruct you.'*

[Numbers 22:20]

Oh that Bila'am **would** indeed do *exactly as the Holy One instructs him*. And oh that WE would do exactly as the Holy One instructs US!

### ***Bila'am – Up Close and Personal***

Through Bila'am, Balak earnestly hoped to neutralize the *Voice*, so that he and his people could effectively utilize the sword, inflicting the “final solution” to the problem of the Hebrews. **Numbers 22:11.**

The more we are seeing of Bila'am, the more dangerous we realize both he and the false prophet of the Anti-Messiah of whom he serves as the prototype truly are. So let's step back and take a look at this man, up close and personal. The name Bila'am, though likely of foreign origin, appears to be related to the Hebrew phrase ***b'lo am*** [of no nation]. Bila'am's nationality is not stated, and he appears to have been a *cross-culturalist* –a prototype of the false prophet of the ‘Man of Lawlessness’ [i.e., the Anti-Messiah] predicted to arise and deceive the inhabitants of the earth in the end of days.

Yeshua's revelatory letter to the called out ones of Pergamos states:

***I have a few things against you,  
because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Bila'am,  
who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel,  
to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit adultery/fornication.  
Repent, or else I will come to you quickly  
and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.  
"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the called out ones.***

[Revelation 2:14-17]

Bila'am certainly can be said, as well, to be the forerunner of the demagogues today who advocate that everyone unite across national and linguistic lines as ‘*citizens of Planet Earth*’ [for instance, under the European Union or the United Nations]. This philosophy, though it disguises itself as wisdom, and masquerades as a spiritual vehicle for ‘*world peace*’, necessarily requires its advocates to rebel against what the Holy One decreed at the Tower of Babel – that mankind would be *scattered and divided*.

Bila'am represents – and foreshadows - the coming ‘one-world’ order and ‘one-world’ religion messengers of false *hope*, false *love*, and false *peace*.

### ***Bila'am – The Quintessential Deceiver***

Bila'am is obviously no cheap charlatan who pulls off deception with smoke,

mirrors and sleight of hand. He is *extremely gifted* spiritually. He obviously hears from the Holy One [among, no doubt, other spiritual sources]. And Beloved, do not kid yourself - Bila'am talks a *really* good talk. Listen to how spiritual he sounds:

*He said to them, "Lodge here this night,  
and I will bring you word again,  
as the Holy One shall speak to me ..."*

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*Bila'am said to Balak,  
"Behold, I have come to you:  
have I now any power at all to speak anything?  
the word that the Holy One puts in my mouth, that shall I speak.*

Ah, yes, Bila'am *talks the talk*. But then again, as we will soon discover, so does his donkey!

### ***The Secret of Discerning True Messengers from the Bila'am-Types***

So how do we tell the difference between a spiritually-gifted person like Bila'am - who talks a good talk but is really out only for himself - and someone who is truly filled with Divine Wisdom and flowing in the Spirit of our Divine Bridegroom? How do we discern between a *divinely-appointed Friend of the Bridegroom* and a *wolf in shepherd's clothing*? By asking the above question, I do not intend to suggest for a moment that a messenger of the Holy One, or any teacher, rabbi, preacher, or evangelist has to be *perfect*. Perfection is by no means a prerequisite to service in the Holy One's kingdom. Quite the contrary, *one cannot serve effectively in this World for any significant period of time unless he or she is fully aware of his or her imperfection*. Moshe, for instance, did his best teaching on the plains of Moav, after his sins toward the Holy One and His Betrothed people were publicly revealed and his sentence [not entering into the Land with the people] was announced and accepted as right and just. Neither do I intend to suggest that either a particular sin or an actual or perceived personality flaw in a messenger of the Holy One disqualifies his or her message. The Holy One can, and sometimes does, put words of true wisdom and stunning revelation in the mouths of even the most dim-witted donkeys and pompous pagans. That is, after all, one of the main messages of parsha *Balak*. Nor do I advocate or condone investigations into teachers', rabbis', or preachers' private lives or pasts. Publicly exposing - or commenting upon - others' sins is *l'shon hara*, and is simply not worthy of the Holy One's people. If the Holy One wants someone's sins publicly exposed - if that will, in a given circumstance, serve some redemptive purpose - He can bring that to pass quite without our help. Ask Miryam. Ask David. All I am saying is that we, as the Holy One's children, not only have a responsibility to 'know His voice', and *sh'ma* it, but also have a responsibility to *lo sh'ma* the 'voice of another' - whether it be the voice of a *hireling* who will not lay down his life for the sheep, or

the voice of a *thief* who comes to steal, kill, and destroy.

The question I have posed, therefore, is really ‘how do we recognize whether what *appears* to be spiritual teaching, or is *cloaked in spiritual language*, is, under the **circumstances, actually the ‘voice of another’ rather than the voice of the Holy One?** *How do we avoid the spiritual deception that is so rampant, and which Messiah told us would only get worse as the end of days approaches.* The first and most critical test, of course, is whether the message the person speaks is consistent with the Torah. *If you want to avoid spiritual deception, the most important thing you can do is study the Scripture for yourself so much that you will recognize when someone takes even the slightest liberty with it.* Study to show yourself approved, a workman that needs not be ashamed. And keep your study *fresh* by conversing over His Word with Him, daily.

***Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips, but meditate on it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it.***

***Then will you prosper in your undertakings, and then will you be successful.***

**[Y’hoshua (Joshua) 1:8]**

That concept is what these studies are about, Beloved. They are not about you, the reader, learning from me, the teacher. They are about you being called and inspired to search out the **real** truth for yourselves in the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings, and the B’rit Chadasha.

Y’hudah [Jude] spoke to us of the deceivers we would encounter:

***... these speak evil of whatever they do not know;  
and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts,  
in these things they corrupt themselves. Woe to them!***

***For they have gone in the way of Kayin, have run greedily in the error of Bila’am for profit,  
and perished in the rebellion of Korach. Apostates Depraved and Doomed,***

***these are dangerous rocks in the path of your ways of chesed;  
they come among you with you without fear, serving only themselves.***

***They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds;***

***late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots;***

***raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame;***

***wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.***

**[Jude 8-13]**

Kefa told us about the similarity in the deceivers we will see in our days to the deceivers referenced in Torah with these words:

***There were also false prophets among the people,***

***even as there will be false teachers among you,***

***who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Holy One who bought them,  
and bring on themselves swift destruction.***

***And many will follow their destructive ways,***

***because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed***

*By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words ....*

**[II Peter 2:1-3]**

Kefa then went on to define the false prophets of the current age for us, exposing them as:

*... those who walk according to the flesh  
longing for and running after things that are tamei<sup>8</sup>, despising authority.*

*They are **presumptuous and self-willed.***

*They are **not afraid to speak blasphemous opinions ...***

*\*\*\**

*... these ... **speak evil of the things they do not understand,***

*\*\*\**

*... having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin,  
enticing unstable souls. They have **a heart trained in covetous practices,**  
and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray,  
**following the way of Bila'am the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness ...***

**[II Peter 2:9-15]**

Kefa warned us also about the methodology of these false prophets:

*... when they **speak great swelling words of emptiness,**  
**they allure through the lusts of the flesh, unbridling desires for that which is forbidden,**  
**in those who have previously fled from the aimless, undisciplined life.***

*... they **promise them liberty ....***

**[II Peter 2:18-19 (a)]**

Kefa was not alone in warning us concerning such persons in our midst. Remember the warning Shaul of Tarsus gave to us regarding spiritual deceivers:

*Now I urge you, brethren,  
note those who cause divisions/dissension and lay out stumbling blocks,  
contrary to the torah teaching<sup>9</sup> which you learned and practice<sup>10</sup>, and avoid them.  
For those who are such do not serve our Lord Y'shua Ha-Maschiach, but their own belly,  
and by smooth words and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the simple.*

**[Romans 16:17-18]**

And remember the 'antidote' to spiritual deception which Shaul taught us:

*... continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of,  
knowing from whom you have learned them,  
and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures,  
which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Yeshua Ha-Maschiach.*

**[II Timothy 3:14-15]**

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<sup>8</sup> The Greek term *miasmos*, used here and usually translated 'uncleanness', refers to that which is spiritually impure – in Hebrew, that which is *tamei* according to Torah.

<sup>9</sup> The Greek word found here in the text is *didachen*, meaning 'teaching'. The Hebrew equivalent of *didachen* is 'torah'. The word commonly used in old English versions to translate the Greek word *didachen* is *doctrine*, but that term has, through centuries of ecclesiastical misuse, assumed a secondary meaning, at odds with Shaul's use of *didachen*.

<sup>10</sup> The Greek word found here in the text is a form of the word *manthano*, meaning to find meaning and value in repetitively doing something one was taught by a parent, sage or elder.

Hence when you hear someone speak/preach/teach, or read something someone has written in a book or on the Internet, you might condition yourself to *ask yourself a series of questions*. You should test what the person is saying, not by whether it fits with the doctrines you have previously been taught by theologians, but *whether the theme the person is spouting meets each of the following four criteria*:

- [a] Is it *clearly revealed in Torah* [here meaning the first five books of the Bible],
- [b] Is it *emphasized by the prophets of the TaNaKh*,
- [c] Is it *present in the Psalms*, AND
- [d] Is it *reiterated in the actions and teachings of Y'shua and in the writings of Yeshua's talmidim*?

If all 4 of these criteria are met by the message, the messenger passes *spiritual deception test no. 1* – i.e, he is following a proven vein of revealed truth as found throughout the Scripture. And that leads to *spiritual deception test no. 2*. Here is some simple truth that will help us all to deal with spiritual deception: *The truth about a man's or woman's character and relationship with the Holy One is revealed not by how well he/she can spout religious talk, nor even by how well he/she can "read your mail" prophetically, but is revealed by how he/she behaves when the simple things of life do not go the way he or she would like.*

In other words, if you want to get a reliable reading on the spirituality of the message of someone who wants you to follow them, to provide finances for them, and to listen to them prophesy, teach, preach, sing, or go on a missionary journey, it's really pretty simple – just watch how they behave on a really bad day, when the pressure is on. The proof is never going to be found in the person's preaching or teaching or prophesying or singing – it is found, instead, in the place where *the rubber hits the road* – in the person's *interpersonal relationships*. The proof of spirituality is found, instead, in *how a person treats his/her family, his or her co-workers, and folks like waiters and store clerks and flight attendants and beggars*.

Here is the test: Does the person in question maintain the same level of spirituality when his/her children misbehave as when he/she speaking to a crowd? Does the person exhibit the same degree of joy, peace, and gentleness when his/her little brother or sister invades his/her 'space' as when he/she is providing counsel or delivering a prepared message? What happens when the person's parents or elders dare to offer him or her words of correction, point out a mistake he/she has made? And, what comes out of the person's mouth if he smashes his thumb with a hammer, or if his wife burns the *challah*, or if a waiter/waitress spills water on his new suit?

The Holy One, you see, could care less how well a man (or woman) can talk, or

sing, or play an instrument, or draw a crowd, or increase attendance, or put on a show. He made people, and knows that people who can do such things are – whether we believe it or not - a dime a dozen. What is truly a treasure to the Holy One is someone whose spirituality and faithfulness to covenant can survive a little *trial by ordeal* – who can ‘*take a licking, and keep on ticking*’. Let’s see how well Bila’am the famous prophet measures up under that standard.

### ***Bila’am’s Trial By Ordeal***

In Bila’am’s case, the Holy One revealed what was in Bila’am’s heart by the simple methodology of sending a menacing angel to cause his donkey to turn aside out of the path, and go off into a field. Hmmmmn. How will the renowned man of prophecy respond to a little unplanned detour along life’s highway? Let’s see what Torah says.

***Vatere ha-aton et-mal'ach Adonai nitsav b'derech***  
*When the donkey saw the Holy One's angel standing in the road*

***v'char'bo shlufah b'yado***  
*with a drawn sword in his hand,*

***vatet ha-aton min ha-derech vatelech b'sadeh***  
*the donkey went aside from the road into the field.*

***vayach Bila'am et ha-aton l'hatotah ha-darech.***  
*Bila'am beat the donkey to get it back on the road.*

[Numbers 22:23]

Note that the prophet only sees what the Holy One allows him to see. In most regards, he is totally blind to what is going on in the spiritual world around him. We are, of course, very little better than Bila’am in this regard. Get used to it. There is still a lot more darkness than there is light, even in the best of us

Bila’am’s first response: *beat the donkey! Not optimal, for sure. But* the Holy One is still showing Bila’am a measure of grace/favor, so what do you say we give Bila’am another chance? At the mouth of two or three witnesses is a thing to be established – isn’t that Torah’s way? So, let’s continue the narrative.

The Holy One’s angel next takes up a position squarely in Bila’am’s path at a place where the road leading to Kena’an passed between two walled vineyards.

***Vatere ha-aton et-mal'ach Adonai vatilachetz el-hakir***  
*When the donkey saw the Holy One's angel, it edged over to the side,*



***vatilchatz et-regel Bila'am el-hakir***  
*smashing Bila'am's foot against the wall*<sup>11</sup>.

***vayosef l'ha-kotah.***  
*And [Bila'am] beat it (the donkey) even more.*  
[Numbers 22:24-25]

Bila'am's second response: *Beat the donkey again – harder this time.* Well, everybody can have a bad day. How about giving him one more chance, Holy One? No problem. Grace still abounds. So read on:

***Vayosef mal'ach-Adonai avor***  
*The Holy One's angel continued ahead [of Bila'am],*  
***vaya'amod b'makom tzar asher eyn-derech lin'tot yamin us'mol.***  
*and he stood in a narrow place, where there was no room to turn right or left.*

***Vatere ha-aton et-mal'ach Adonai***  
*When the donkey saw the Holy One's angel,*  
***Vatirbatz tachat Bila'am vayichar-af***  
*it lay down [refusing to budge] for Bila'am.*

***Bila'am vayach et ha-aton b'makel.***  
*Bila'am lost his temper, and beat the donkey with a stick.*  
[Numbers 22:26-27]

Bila'am's third response: *Blow a fuse, get a stick ... and beat the donkey one more time, with feeling!* What's that someone said: The ultimate act of arrogance is to do the same thing, over and over, and expect a different result. I wonder if that could be true. Meanwhile, grace still abounds; but an intervention is obviously going to be necessary to activate that grace.

### ***Enter: The Voice***

Note that Bila'am is a prophet. He is supposed to speak with the voice of the Holy One. But right now he is too busy being angry - and beating his donkey - to hear the Voice. The Voice, however, will be heard. If Bila'am will not speak it, the Holy One will find *another witness*. In this case, the 'other witness' is going to turn out to be *the very donkey* upon whom Bila'am was taking out his rage. In the midst of the thrashing Bila'am was administering, the Holy One gave the donkey the power of speech. The donkey opened its mouth, and the voice which came out

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<sup>11</sup> According to a Hebrew legend found in Midrash Tanchuma, the 'wall' against which Bila'am's foot was crushed was the heap of stones which Lavan and Ya'akov had erected when they made their covenant of peace, and Lavan said "***I will not pass over this heap to you, and that you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, for harm.***" (Genesis 31:52). The point is that Bila'am, who is considered by the sages to be like and/or a descendant of Lavan, was now violating this covenant by crossing the heap to come curse Ya'ako's descendents. Therefore the 'wall', or heap of stones, was punishing him, as it is written (Deuteronomy 17:7): "*The hand of the witnesses should be first in [punishing] him.*"



asked Bila'am: ***Meh-asiti lecha ki hikitani zeh sh'losh regalim*** – i.e. *What have I done to you that you beat me these three times?* **Numbers 22:28.**

Alas, when the miraculous occurs and the Holy One supernaturally opens the mouth of the donkey and causes intelligible words to pour forth, Bila'am chooses not to acknowledge the grace operating in the donkey's life, but decides instead to *curse the donkey*:

*Bila'am said to the donkey, How dare you make a fool out of me!<sup>12</sup>  
If I had a sword in my hand right now, I would kill you!*

**[Numbers 22:29]**

Bila'am's fourth response: *Ignore the miracle, blame the donkey - and threaten to slay him with a sword! Whom will you curse, Bila'am - and whom will you bless?*

Ah, so there it is. The man who puts on a fancy suit and prophesies with the best of them - who everyone *thinks* lives by the Voice, it is revealed, when the chips are down, actually lives by *the sword*. "*If I had a sword in my hand right now ...*" he says. Now we understand perfectly what side Bila'am is on. Thank goodness it is the angel of the Holy One who had the sword instead!

### ***A Conversation With A Donkey***

We are all familiar with 'fairy tales', in which animals are given voice. The three bears. The three little pigs. The tortoise and the hare. Need I go on? Have you ever wondered, though, what animals would say if they really *could* talk? Torah is no 'fairy tale'. In Torah, ordinarily it is humans who speak, while animals merely ... well, you know, they *make animal sounds*. Not since the Garden has a creature spoken with a human voice. Then, it was the Serpent. As I recall, nothing he had to say was particularly worth listening to. Maybe letting animals talk is not such a good idea. But then along comes *Bila'am's donkey*. Let's listen closely to the things that the donkey has to say when the Holy One, in grace/favor, gave him the power of speech:

***Meh-asiti lecha ki hikitani zeh shalosh regalim.***

*"What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"*

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***halo anochi atonecha asher-rachavta alay***

*"Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden,*

***me'odcha ad ha-yom hazeh ha-hasken***

*ever since I became yours, to this day?"*

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<sup>12</sup> Note that Bila'am's first worry is about *being made a fool of*. His concern is not The Holy One's will, but his own reputation and standing, and how others will think of him. His worry is a loss of status in the eyes of men. This is FEAR OF MAN in its most insidious form. And he who fears man does not truly fear the Holy One – however well he 'talks the talk'.

### *hiskanti l'asot lecha koh*

*Was I ever disposed to do to you [the kind of thing of which you accuse me]?"*

[Numbers 22:28,30]

Notice that all this donkey does with the gift of speech is to *ask questions*. She does not *threaten Bila'am*. She does not *respond in anger*. She *makes no accusations*. She *offers no opinion or counsel*. She *does not preach or pontificate or prophesy*. And yet, she is every bit *as eloquent as any speaker I have ever heard*. Oh, the power of asking *the right question at the right time*.

### ***A Very Real Revelation About the Way of Bila'am***

The Holy One knows exactly how to reveal every man's heart. It doesn't take a talking donkey in most of our cases – given a fair chance, we usually fill the role of the talking donkey quite nicely ourselves, without much help from the Holy One or anyone else. It also does not ordinarily, in most of our cases, take an angel wielding a sword in our direction to reveal our weaknesses. The wagging tongues of friends and neighbors perform that function very effectively indeed.

Do you truly want to fulfill your Divine destiny to live the *sh'ma* lifestyle, speaking our Divine Bridegroom's words as you lie down and as you rise up, as you sit in your homes and as you walk by the way? Then you must learn, Beloved, to *reserve your respect and allegiance for those who, however "gifted", do not lose their shalom, patience, and gentleness* when:

*[a] their kids misbehave in public,*

*[b] their lawnmower won't start no matter what they try,*

*[c] someone challenges one of their doctrines, or the validity of their "ministry";*

*[d] the last flight home gets canceled and they get stuck in Podunk, Iowa,*

*[e] the waitress spills the iced tea in their lap,*

*[f] they are the one randomly sampled for an airport security pat down,*

*[g] the hammer hits their thumb for the fourth time in 5 minutes, or*

*[h] the water or electricity goes out.*

Again, the point is not that an isolated flaring of the temper or a tendency toward selfishness disqualifies a person's message. It doesn't. If it did, no human could ever speak on the Holy One's behalf. Look at Moshe. The point is that if we are ever to fulfill our destiny as the Holy One's *k'dosh'im*, and avoid chasing after religious activities that appeal to the eyes and the flesh, we must *grow up a little*. We have to keep our focus on the Holy One, and on Torah-grounded truth.

We must learn not to sit awestruck when we run into someone who can preach a sermon that makes us want to cry, or witness on the street to strangers he or she will never see again 'til the cows come home'. We must learn not to get so excited

over “worship leaders” who ignite the crowd with flashy vocals set against perfectly played licks on the keyboard or guitar. We must not be dazzled by charismatic personalities. We must learn – at long last - to search for substance, and be satisfied with nothing less.

In determining who to get close to, and walk alongside, we must ***learn to watch not what people do on stage, when they are playing to an audience, but what happens to people when the rubber hits the road.*** You see, Beloved, almost anyone with a minimum of talent can put on a good show for a few hours a week. Only someone intimate with the Holy One, however, can faithfully, consistently live out a covenant relationship with God in real life situations, day after day, year after year, in good times and in bad, and in sickness as well as in health.

Act justly. Love mercy. And walk humbly before the Holy One your God. And do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.

### ***Where Angels Fear to Tread***

Okay. The Holy One’s point has been made. Bila’am is – we are - walking where angels fear to tread. It is time to sweep away the darkness, and make the spiritual reality of what has been going on around us perfectly clear. It is time for Bila’am – and the Bila’am in all of us - to put down our puny little donkey-beating sticks, shut our foul, self-righteous mouths, and ‘come to Papa’.

***Vayegal Adonai et-eyney Bila'am***

*Then the Holy One opened Bila'am's eyes,*

***vayar et-mal'ach Adonai nitzav b'derech***

*and he saw the Angel of the Holy One standing in the way*

***v'charbo shlufah b'yado***

*with His drawn sword in His hand;*

***vayikod vayishtachu l'apav***

*and he [Bila'am] bowed his head, and fell flat on his face.*

***Vayomer elav mal'ach Adonai***

*And the Angel of the Holy One said to him,*

***al-mah hikita et-atoneicha zeh shalosh regalim***

*"Why have you struck your donkey these three times?"*

***hineh anochi yatzati l'satan***

*For behold, I have come out to stand against you as an adversary,*

***ki-yarat ha-derech l'negdi.***

*because your way is perverse before Me.*

***Vatir'ani ha-aton vatet lefanai zeh shalosh regalim***

*The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times.*

***ulay natetah mipanai***

*If she had not turned aside from Me,*

***ki atah gam-otchah ha-ragti v'otah hecheyeyti.***

*surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live."*

The mighty Bila'am is now totally humbled. He who is supposed to *see all* - saw nothing. He who was supposed to *know all* - did not even know enough to realize he was inches away from death. What will the neighbors think?

All the starch has finally gone out of Bila'am - for now. Hence we read:

***Vayomer Bila'am el-mal'ach Adonai Chatati***

*And Bila'am said to the Angel of the Holy One, "I have sinned,*

***ki lo yadati ki atah nitsavz likrati b'darech***

*for I did not know You stood in the way against me.*

***v'atah im-ra b'eyneycha ashuvah li.***

*Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back."*

That's better, Bila'am. Amazingly, there is still an area of your life in which the grace/favor of the Holy One is operating. If you'll just keep an attitude of humility like that, you'll be amazed – indeed, generations of scholars will be stunned - at how much insight you will receive from the Holy One. And the wisest among them will give glory and honor for it *to the Holy One* - and *not to you*. If you can accept that, Bila'am, you may *sally forth*.

***Then the Angel of the Holy One said to Bila'am, "Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak."***

If the Holy One can empower a donkey to talk, He can just as easily make an arrogant self-centered con-man like Bila'am with an evil eye speak truth despite himself.

### ***Questions for Today's Shiur***

1. Let's start by researching the characters in this parsha:

[A] Look up the Hebrew word *Balak* and its root in Strong's and write the definitions you find there.

[B] How Balak "live up to" his name?

2. Bila'am is a fascinating person. His charisma was such that he was looked upon as "the answer" to the supernatural presence of the Holy One. Through him, Balak hoped to neutralize the voice, so that he could effectively utilize the sword, inflicting the "final solution" to the problem of the Jews. **Numbers 22:11.**

[A] In the first encounter between the Moabite princes and Balaam, what is

Balaam's reply?

[B] How do you explain the fact that the Holy One speaks and reveals His counsel to Bila'am, who is clearly "not of the people"?

[C] What does the fact that the Holy One spoke to Balaam and revealed His counsel to him tell you about the Holy One?

[D] In verse 20, what did the Holy One instruct Bila'am to do?

[E] Why, in verse 22, was the Holy One angry with Bila'am? Can you explain?

[F] What three things did Balaam's donkey do that led Bila'am to beat him?

[G] How did Bila'am react when he finally saw the Angel of the Holy One?

[H] Do you think Bila'am's repentance was genuine?

[I] What were the Angel's instructions to Bila'am?

[J] What "religious" activity did Bila'am have Balak engage in?

[K] Summarize the first "oracle" of Bila'am.

[L] What do you think it means for the Holy One's people to be "a people who live apart, and do not consider themselves one of the nations"?

3. The traditional Haftarah for *Balak* is an excerpt from the book of the prophet Micah. Micah prophesied about the same time as Yeshayahu [Isaiah] and *Hoshea* [Hosea] – somewhere between 750 and 686 BCE. This was time of the Divided Kingdom. His prophecies were directed toward both the Northern Kingdom [Israel, whose capital was *Shomron* (Samaria)] and the Southern Kingdom [Y'hudah, whose capital was *Y'rushalayim* (Jerusalem)]. The basic points of his message were as follows:

[1] Both kingdoms *are corrupt*, having departed from the Holy One and His Torah;

[2] Both kingdoms *have resisted prophetic calls to teshuvah*;

[3] Therefore, by decree of the Holy One both kingdoms were going to *fall to foreign invaders*;

[4] Foreign invaders would *devastate the land, kill many, and take a remnant into [a] captivity and then [b] Diaspora*;

[5] This, however, should **not** be interpreted to mean that either the Holy One's covenant with Avraham, Yitschak and Ya'akov, or His Sinaitic betrothal covenant, with Israel, is over. After the Holy One's "purging" of the remnant of Israel and Y'hudah was complete, the Holy One would raise up Messiah to regather the "outcasts of Israel" to the Promised Land, rebuild Jerusalem, and reunite Israel and Y'hudah under Messianic Rule – which would, in turn, usher in a period of never before experienced peace, security, and prosperity, and result in the adoption of the Holy One's Torah by all nations and peoples of the earth.

[A] In what time period did Micah live and prophesy?

[B] What was going on in the world [as it concerned the Holy One's people] during that era?

[C] What does the name Micah mean?

[D] What are the main themes of the Book of Micah?

[E] In order to get “in context” for this week’s Haftarah parsha, read Micah 5:1-5, and make a list of the things which are prophesied in those verses.

[F] At the beginning of today’s Haftarah psukim, who is Micah talking about?

[G] To what animal is the “remnant of Ya'akov” likened in these verses?

[H] To what two phenomena of nature is the “remnant of Ya'akov” likened in these verses?

[I] Look up the word “remnant” in Strong’s. Write the Hebrew word and its meaning.

[J] Beginning in verse 10, the Holy One speaks of “that day”. To whom will the things mentioned in verses 10 and 11 happen?

[K] List the four things the Holy One promises to do in verses 10 and 11.

5. Also in this haftarah, the Holy One instructs His people regarding spiritual witchcraft (such as that which Balak was practicing in today’s aliyah by hiring a renowned ‘prophet’ to shore up his *kingdom*).

[A] What instructions did the Holy One give *in the Torah* regarding what was to be done with prophets/seers? [Cite the book, chapter, and verse, and describe the Holy One’s instruction].

[B] Why do you think the Holy One is so seriously against fortunetellers, mediums, and the like?

[C] What instructions did the Holy One give in the Torah regarding what was to be done with the engraved images and altars of the Kena’anim (much like the totem poles of the American Indians? [Cite the book, chapter, and verse, and describe the Holy One’s instruction].

[D] Why does the Holy One say He will destroy the cities where His people are living? Is this for their own good? If so, how is it for their good? [Hint: read the verse in the full context of chapter 5].

6. The apostolic teaching I have selected to coordinate with parsha *Balak* is from the opening chapter of Shaul of Tarsus’ first letter to the followers of Yeshua living in the *Diaspora* city of Corinth. The context for this apostolic teaching is established by I Corinthians 1:10-19,

[A] What problem at Corinth does Shaul say led him to write this letter?

[B] In verse 19, Shaul, as usual, quotes one of the *nevi'im* [prophets]. Which *navi* does he quote, and in what chapter and verse of that prophet’s book is the quotation found?

[C] What does Shaul say the Holy One has done to the wisdom of the world?

[D] In verse 21, how does Shaul say the Holy One cannot be known?

- [E] How does Shaul say the Holy One has chosen to make Himself known?  
[F] According to Shaul, each nation has a “weakness” that distracts it from hearing the Holy One. What is the weakness of the Jews?  
[G] According to Shaul, what is the “weakness” of the Greeks?  
[H] What is it about the message of the atoning death of the Messiah which offends and confounds those with the “weakness” of the Jews?  
[I] What is it about the message of the atoning death of the Messiah which offends and confounds those with the “weakness” of the Greeks?  
[J] How does the atoning death of Messiah demonstrate the power of the Holy One?  
[K] How does the atoning death of Messiah demonstrate the wisdom of the Holy One?

*May you know the Holy One, and hear His voice,  
and not be distracted by the flattery of men,  
by the allure of public ministry, nor by the excitement of religious activity.  
May you love His People, and quietly fulfill His Will.*

### ***The Rabbi's son***

### ***Meditation for Today's Study*** **Proverbs 16:1-5**

*The plans of the heart belong to man,  
But the answer of the tongue is from the Holy One.  
All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes;  
But the Holy One weighs the motives.*

*Commit your deeds to the Holy One, And your plans shall succeed.  
The Holy One has made everything for its own end –  
Yes, even the wicked for the day of evil.*

*Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Holy One:  
They shall assuredly not be unpunished.*