

## ***Parshot #s 39 & 40<sup>1</sup>: Chukat & Balak*** *[Introductory Study]*

READINGS:	<b><i>Torah Chukat:</i></b>	<b>Numbers 19:1–22:1</b>
	<b><i>Haftarah:</i></b>	<b>Judges 11:1-33</b>
	<b><i>B’rit Chadasha:</i></b>	<b>John 3:10-21</b>
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	<b><i>Torah Balak:</i></b>	<b>Numbers 22:2 – 25:9</b>
	<b><i>Haftarah:</i></b>	<b>Micah 5:6 – 6:8</b>
	<b><i>B’rit Chadasha:</i></b>	<b>I Corinthians 1:17-31</b>



***The whole community of B’nei Yisrael set out . . .***  
**[Numbers 20:22(a)]**

**This Week’s Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 11, *Y’rushalayim* [Jerusalem]**

This week we of the *Diaspora*<sup>2</sup> will study two parshot in order to come back into ‘sync’ with those who live in the Land. The reunion is pre-programmed to always take place just in time for us to walk together through the dramatic season we have come to call the ‘*Three Weeks Between the Straits*’. Combining parshot ***Chukat*** and ***Balak*** creates a bit of a challenge, as both are chock full of critical ‘*Wilderness Proving Ground*’ lessons. Take a deep breath – and we will be ‘off’!

***Chukat*** will introduce us to a prophetic ‘time warp’. In the course of that parsha’s two short chapters, huge chunks of *time fly by*. Indeed, almost four decades will

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<sup>2</sup> *Diaspora* literally means ‘*(the) scattering (as seed is sown) abroad*’. The term is generally used to describe all Hebrews who are not presently/yet living in Eretz Yisrael, but who are instead sojourning, or trapped in exile or captivity, or wandering aimlessly having lost their sense of Covenantal purpose, in some place other nation.

pass us by in a heartbeat. What happened in the intervening years? We can only surmise. It would appear that the entire generation that Pharaoh expelled from Egypt the morning after the plague of the firstborn apparently were allowed to die in the Wilderness, just as they requested. After their participation in the Great Rebellion, a little over a year after the Exodus, the inspired narrative of their lives simply halted. In mercy, the Holy One apparently decided to let each Redeemed person who was too fearful, too angry, too emotionally-traumatized, or too pseudo-intellectually distracted to value, hunger for, and follow Him into the Beautiful Land to simply finish their allotted time on earth in the place and manner they chose. He allowed them 38 ½ years of privacy – and a couple of millennia worth of dignity. He never once left them or forsook them – not even for a minute. He kept providing them all with Manna every day. He kept causing all the life-sustaining water they needed to flow into their camp from a rock. He kept protecting them from predators and enemies with the Pillar of Fire and Cloud. Day in and day out He kept offering them guidance and direction, atonement and inspiration, through both [1] His constant abiding Manifest Presence in the *Mish'kan*, and [b] the inspiring example and humble service of Moshe, Y'hoshua, Kalev, Miryam, Aharon, Elezar, Itamar. And, one by one, except for those persons I just mentioned, every single man or woman who experienced the Great Redemption from Egyptian bondage, who witnessed the miracle at the Sea of Reeds, and who personally heard the Voice of the Creator of the Universe speak the Ten Words of Prophetic Destiny over their DNA from atop Mount Sinai, simply finished out their lives, said goodbye to the children and grandchildren who would tell their great story to the world, and died.

### ***Where Will You Let Them Bury You?***

Generations previously, first Ya'akov then Yosef passionately pleaded with his family members: *'please . . . don't let them bury me in Egypt!'* Oh that the descendants who carried Yosef's bones out of the land of the pyramids, to give him the triumphant return to Eretz Yisrael he so longed for, would have had a similar sentiment, and cried out: *"please . . . don't let them bury me in the Wilderness of Paran – where the spirit of Hagar and Yisma'el corrupts everyone it touches!"* But, alas, they did no such thing. Like Avram's father Terach, they had just enough vision to leave a place of bondage, but not enough to take them to the place of fruitfulness to which they were called. They chose to embrace the pseudo-intellectual 'paranas' and the entitlement/victimization mindset of Hagar/Yish'mael's world – and eschewed the glorious role they were offered in the Holy One's Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan.

Each of us who have been called of the Holy One must choose between eating and drinking, living and dying, in *the dark-energy world of the bondwoman and her*

son OR walking with the Holy One into the place, the lifestyle, and the destiny that He has designed for us. We must all choose whether we are content to be casual, easily-distracted ‘believers’ OR will settle for nothing less than being passionate, sold-out ‘followers’. We all must decide whether we want to live our lives as ‘truth-seekers’, ‘pagan heresy busters’, and morality/social-justice-terrorists OR are if we are willing to put in the effort necessary to bear life-nurturing fruit like faithful, inner-circle ‘disciples’. Each of us has to choose how we will be perceived and remembered – as ‘arrogant, judgmental, hyper-emotional pseudo-intellectuals’ or as calm, joyful, peaceful, humble, *wise-as-a serpent but harmless-as-a-dove* servants of God and man. The rest of Torah is about the consequences of each choice.

In this new season may we be empowered to face and overcome every one of the challenges from which the generation that preceded us shied away. As Shaul of Tarsus exhorts us:

*Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.  
Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt,  
that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*

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*Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love,  
in honor giving preference to one another;  
not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Holy One;  
rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;  
distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.  
Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.  
Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.  
Be of the same mind toward one another.  
Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble.  
Do not be wise in your own opinion.  
Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.  
If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

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*Do not be overcome by evil; but overcome evil with good.  
[Colossians 4:5-6; Ephesians 5:15-16; and Romans 12:9-18]*

### ***Welcome to the ‘Critical Choice’ Narratives!***

Parsha *Chukat* resumes the B’nei Yisrael chronicles 38 ½ years after the dramatic events described in parsha *Korach*. In *Chukat*, the ‘new-look’ Community of the Redeemed will finally break free of the dark energy of the land of Hagar and Yish’mael. A *new, hungry generation* will arise and take the place of the easily distracted, offended, outraged, and frightened ones who allowed the cares and stresses of life in the wilderness to overwhelm them and incite them to reject their inheritance in **the** Land. In the Kingdom, allowing oneself to get and stay angry, holding a grudge or offense, caving in to fear, and succumbing to despair are the

surest pathways to irrelevance and expendability. Ah, but that was then – and this is now. Now it is our appointed time for *coming up from the Wilderness* leaning on the arm of our Beloved. We will *walk many, many dusty miles* with our Bridegroom-King. In the course of our travels we will be presented with a number of ‘critical choice’ challenges, all of which are eerily prophetic of those our descendants will face in the ‘latter days’. Imagine that!

First off, we will experience a stunning changing-of-the-guard, as *Miryam and Aharon* both succumb to the desert. We will find out that Moshe, as well, is destined to leave us before we cross the threshold of the Land of Israel in order to establish a Society and Civilization modeled after the Kingdom of Heaven. And then, it is time to face the giants! We have overcome Ish’mael – now we must face Esav! We will quietly escape war with Esav’s descendants. *But we will not escape war altogether*. As soon as we slip past Esav, we will be confronted with a series of local warlords. First we will be attacked by the raiding parties of the ‘king’ of Arad. Then we will be threatened with annihilation by the amassed armies of two Emori warlords. We will *overcome each of these attacks*, and will *catch our first glimpse of the Promised Land*.

Are you ready to emerge from the Wilderness transformed? Are you ready to have a true, Kingdom impact on your world? Grab a firm hold on the corners of the Bridegroom-King’s garment - He has a busy and very challenging week planned for us! But first, let us return to the fear of the Holy One – and delight in His mysteries. We have learned about the transformative power of His *mitzvot* and His *mishpatim*. But do we understand His other ways of revealing His Will to us?

### ***Understanding the Powerful Covenantal Energy Behind our King’s “Chukat”***

***‘Zot chukat ha-torah’*** [i.e. *These are the chukat of Torah . . .*]. With these words from the Mouth of the Holy One Torah exits the realm of narrative and re-enters the realm of mystery. What follows is sort of like the *Mish’kan Discourse* [Exodus 25-32], Part II. Some things, the Holy One wants us to know, are – and are intended to be – beyond our natural understanding. We are called to do more than get comfortable with that reality; we are called to rejoice and revel in it. The mystery of our King is the hidden treasure.

*Chukat*, the name given by the sages to this parsha, is a plural noun form of a Hebrew verb *chakah*<sup>3</sup>. The noun forms of this verb [which include *chuk*, *chok*, *chukah*, and *chukot as well as chukat*] are usually translated into English as “*statute*”, “*ordinance*”, or *custom*. They are more appropriately rendered “*liturgical script*” ,

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<sup>3</sup> *Chakah* – i.e. *chet*, *qof*, *hey* - is Strong’s Hebrew word #2708.

or as ‘a practice or behavior required by one covenant partner of another without explanation, simply as a matter of identification and/or proof/sign of unfaltering commitment’.

Let us contrast a *chuk*, *chok*, or *chukah* with the other, more familiar, forms of Divine Instruction we have heretofore studied. We are familiar with *mitzvot* – i.e. those instructions that our English Bibles call ‘commandments’. We are also familiar with *mishpatim* – those directives that our English Bibles call the ‘Judgments’ or ‘Decrees’ of the Holy One. But we are much less familiar with *chukat*. A ***chukah*** is a distinct type of directive from the Holy One – equal in transforming power to the ***mitzvot*** [instructions for living] and the ***mishpatim*** [judgments as to what the Holy One Himself would do in the course of walking out interpersonal relationships]. A ***chukah*** is *purely relational*. A *chukah* is not aimed at the mind of man but the heart of man. A ***chukah*** is a distinct type of directive from the Holy One – equal in transforming power to the ***mitzvot*** [instructions for living] and the ***mishpatim*** [judgments as to what the Holy One Himself would do in the course of walking out interpersonal relationships]. A ***chukah*** is *purely relational*. A *chukah* is not aimed at the mind of man but the heart of man.

A ***chukah*** is not about explaining or teaching *the Bridegroom’s Priorities* like a *mishpat*. Nor is it about designed to show *visible evidence of our distinct covenant identity* like a *mitzvah*. A ***chukah*** is *simply a response of deep intimacy and unquestioning, childlike faith*. It is something a good friend, respectful servant, or passionate lover does when prompted without needing or even desiring an explanation as to why.

A ***chukah*** is something a bride who is deeply in love with and completely trusts her bridegroom does *simply because her bridegroom asks her to*. A ***chukah*** is something we do *simply because we trust our Bridegroom and believe that if we do exactly what He says, even if we do not understand it, He will cause something to happen in the Heavenly realm* that will accomplish significant Kingdom purposes. Each time we see a ***chukah*** in Scripture, what we should see beyond the words on the page is our Bridegroom-King holding His Hand out to us, smiling at us with tender affection, and saying ‘*Do you trust me?*’ Each *chukah*, you see, provides a *unique test of trust* and of love. Each offers a passageway or portal from the naturally seen and understood, temporal realm of this world, into the hidden but eternal realm of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now let’s put some substance to all this. Examples of instructions in Torah that the Holy One or Moshe specifically refers to as *chukat* include the following:

1. **Exodus 12:17** – *we are to observe the feast of matzah for 7 days each year as a remembrance of when the Holy One brought us out of the land*

*of Mitzrayim;*

2. **Leviticus 23:14** – we are not to eat of the new crop of grain until *the day of firstfruits, when we present the firstfruits portion to the Holy One;*
3. **Leviticus 23:21,31** – *no customary work is to be done on Shavuot or on the Day of Atonement;*
4. **Leviticus 23:41** – *the feast of Sukkot [Tabernacles] is to be observed as directed every year.*
5. **Exodus 27:20-21** – *each of us is to be responsible for providing pure oil for use in the lamps of the menorah day after day;*
6. **Leviticus 24:3** - *the oil in the lamps of the menorah is to be refreshed every morning and evening, forever;*
7. **Exodus 28:43; 29:9** – *Aharon’s family’s wearing of the priestly garments is an ‘ordinance’ forever’*
8. **Leviticus 3:17** - *neither the blood of an animal nor the fat from around the kidneys and the liver of an animal is to be eaten;*
9. **Leviticus 16:29, 31, and 34** – *the Day of Atonement is to be a day of complete rest and receiving and basking in the forgiveness of our sins*
10. **Leviticus 17:7** - *no sacrifices are to be made to demons or foreign gods;*
11. **Numbers 10:8** – *we are to listen for and respond to the message of the silver trumpets of the Holy One;*
12. **Numbers 19:10** – *we are always to mark and solemnly celebrate the transition from a tamei or unclean state to a tahor or ‘clean’ state by immersion in water mixed with the ashes of a red heifer.*

This week, the first *chuk/chok/chukah* directive that our King is going to give us will pertain to the preparation of special water formulation with which the Holy One wants people and things passing from a *tamei* state to a *tahor* state<sup>4</sup> to be sprinkled. In former ‘Beauty Realm’ discourses, we have been given a formulation for fragrant anointing oil and a formulation for incense. Now we will be given a formulation for ‘waters of cleansing’.

***Waters That Cleanse Us from ‘Wilderness-Acquired Tumah’ –  
Do You Really Need to Ask Why A Protocol For  
That Kind of Cleansing is Necessary?***

As the Holy One did with Creation, we are to start with ordinary water<sup>5</sup>. To ordinary water we are to *add the ashes produced by burning the flesh of a special kind of animal* – a red-colored heifer, on a pyre with chips of cedar wood, with

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<sup>4</sup> For an explanation of the significance of the Hebrew concepts of *tamei* and *t’hor*, see *Monday’s Shiur* of parsha **Tazria** [*The Rabbi’s son’s* commentary on Leviticus 12:1-8]

<sup>5</sup> See Genesis 1:2.

hyssop, and with pieces of cloth stained with scarlet dye.

Try as you might, Beloved, you will not be able to come up with any practical reason why water mixed with ashes provides spiritual cleansing. The sages of the Talmud say Moshe couldn't understand it either. Are you okay with that? Does all this 'water of purification' stuff sound like *hocus-pocus* to you? Does it *bother* you? Does it make you a little *uncomfortable*? Do you wish that the Torah of the Holy One consisted only of the *mitzvot* and the *mishpatim*, which we can understand as rules of dedication and of social justice, and at the manifest wisdom of which we marvel? Do you wish we could somehow *do without* — *you know, edit out*, so to speak -- *the chukat*<sup>6</sup>?

Ah, Beloved, never forget that it is the Holy One's way to *offend the mind in order to reveal the heart*. Remember Na'aman the Syrian? Na'aman did not want to go through what looked to him like the *meaningless process* of bathing in the Jordan. It insulted his intelligence and his cultural sensitivities. But he was afflicted with *tsa'arat*, and he was desperate. When one is DESPERATE, one does things which make no sense, out of pure faith. Down to the Jordan goes Na'aman. And that, Beloved, is what the Holy One's *chukat* are all about. Proud people, people worried about what others may think, do not like *chukat*. They may accept that loving one's neighbor as one's self, and not killing or committing adultery are a good 'code to live by' – but they scoff at such things as the ashes of the red heifer, and the "water of separation". Desperate people, however, *run to the priest to be first in line to get sprinkled*. Which do you think receive the fullness of the blessing of the Holy One?

I do not know about you, Beloved, but I am *unashamedly* desperate. So . . . *I'll race you to the water barrel!*

### *A Two-Parsha Travelogue*

As aforesaid, the 39<sup>th</sup> parsha of Torah will be a 'time travel' parsha. During the course of this parsha the Divine narrator will, 'fast-forward' 38 years or so without so much as a whisper of warning. The parsha opens in the 2nd year after the Exodus; but quickly, with no explanation at all, we find ourselves in the final year of wilderness wandering. The Cloud is moving – who is going, who is staying

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<sup>6</sup> Other instructions of the Holy One which are specifically referred to as *chukot* are described in Exodus 12:17 [*You are to observe the feast of matzah; for in this same day have I brought your hosts out of the land of Mitzrayim: therefore are you to observe this day throughout your generations by chukat (an ordinance) forever*], in Leviticus 23:14 [*You are to eat neither bread, nor roasted grain, nor fresh grain, until [the day of ha-bikkurim, or the firstfruits], until you have made this approach to your God. This is a chukat forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.*] See also Leviticus 23:21,31, Leviticus 23:41, Exodus 27:20-21, Leviticus 24:3, Exodus 28:43; 29:9, Leviticus 3:17, Leviticus 16:29, 31, and 34, Leviticus 17:7; and Numbers 10:8, and Numbers 19:10.

behind?

### ***Goodbye Paran – Hello Tzin!***

The first place the Holy One takes us after we leave the wilderness of Paran will be *midbar-Tzin* – i.e. the *desert of Tzin*. There, Miryam, sister of Moshe and Aharon, our resident prophetess and worshipper, will breathe her last breath. We will bury her.

### ***Water From a Rock – The Sequel!***

After Miryam's death we will inexplicably suffer from a shortage of water for the first since the Holy One opened up the fountain at Refidim [See **Exodus 17:1 ff**]. Streams of living water from the rock at Refidim have followed us – and provided the substance of life for us – everywhere we have gone. Until now, that is. With Miryam's death the streams seem to dry up. And that results in the first outbreak of negativity on this leg of the journey.

Amidst renewed complaints of physical thirst coming from the mouths of the Redeemed, the Holy One will appear on the scene. He will give Moshe some very specific directives about how to make the living waters from the Rock flow freely for the Redeemed Community again. This episode of thirst is not a test not only for the people, you see; it is also a test for Moshe and Aharon. The Bridegroom-King will instruct Moshe to gather the people together before another seemingly lifeless desert rock. Moshe's ***chukah*** from the Holy One at that point will be to simply *speak to* the rock in question. The Holy One has promised to cause fresh waves of living water to issue forth in response to the positive decree that the Holy One has authorized Moshe to make. Alas, Moshe and Aharon will take a wild, self-serving detour from the Holy One's ***chukah***. Once the assembly is in place Moshe's suppressed anger will burst forth. He will not speak to the rock – he will instead go off on the people. He will use the opportunity afforded by the thirst of the people go off on them – ranting and raving and showering them in verbal slime. After drawing everyone's attention to himself and expressing his - not the Holy One's - anger at them, he will deliberately and dramatically *strike the rock* with his rod. He will never *speak a solitary word to the rock* - as the Holy One clearly told him he was to do. Then, to top it all off, he will take for himself and Aharon all the glory for bringing forth water from the rock.

Moshe was given a joyful task to perform, and really, really good news to share; he chose to spread a bad attitude instead. What Moshe was instructed to do was to release a river of sweet, living water from water; what he did instead was let a reservoir of pent-up anger and an attitude of self-righteousness take control of him. He *mixed the release of living water the Holy One had in mind for His People with the venom of the Serpent* with which Moshe had allowed himself to become



infected.

What would you have done in the face of this deliberate and flagrant rebellion by Moshe? Probably not what the Holy One did! Despite Moshe's rebellion, He still caused the rock to give forth water – as if Moshe had done exactly what He had told him to do. He was not about to deny His Beloved People the water they need to drink just because their leader has an anger management and narcissism problem. They will, and drink deeply, of the living water He provides. But though the water will pour forth for the thirsty people, there will yet be consequences for Moshe and Aharon. In a private communication, far from the ears of the masses, Moshe will be told that his presumptive act of striking the rock and claiming the glory for himself and Aharon will result in neither he nor Aharon being allowed to lead the Redeemed Community to their destiny in the Promised Land. Moshe will not be publicly reprimanded; but He will be called to accountability.

***The Curtain Lifts on Our Season of Interaction With  
the Five Prophetic Adversaries/Kingdoms of this Age***

Eventually the Cloud will then lift, and we will renew our travels toward the land of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. The first place the Cloud will lead us will be to the border of the land of **Edom**, i.e. the high country to the East of the Jordan Rift Valley. This land was occupied by the descendants of our famous kinsman Esau. Edom – and controlled by his sensual, materialistic spirit. Edom will only be the first of *five prophetic kingdoms* with which we will have to deal before we get to the Land of our Inheritance.

Our prophetic interactions with Edom will begin with Moshe sending messengers on a diplomatic mission to Edom's king to ask permission just to pass through Edom's land. The request will be presented politely and honorably. Pledges will be made that we will not to harm the land in any way. We will even offer to purchase food and drink from the Edomi despite the fact that manna continued to fall from Heaven every day. But Edom will have none of it. The king of Edom deny this request. His people will *rattle their sabers, amass their armies, ratchet up their rhetoric, and threaten genocide* if one Israeli so much as sets foot on Edomi land.

In order to avoid war with our kinsmen of Edom the Holy One will then quickly turn us in another direction. The trip will take longer. But we will learn that *initiating a war over what seems right and fair in our eyes is not ever the Holy One's first or best option.*

***The Community Bids Farewell to Its First High Priest, Aharon***

The Redeemed Community then travel to *Mount Hor*. It is at this mountain that

Aharon will die and be buried. And it is there that Aharon's son Elazar will be called forth to don the garments, receive the anointing, and assume the duties of High Priest for the generation of the Appropriation of the Land. The people will mourn for Aharon at Mount Hor a full 30 days.

### ***When Enemies Bent on Genocide Attack and War Becomes Our Only Option***

Then, continuing to navigate around Edom the Redeemed Community will find itself attacked on two separate occasions by the armies of the *Emori* [Amorites]. This time avoiding war will not be an option. It will be a case of having to take up arms, make a stand, or be destroyed. It is not our Community's "time to die"; it is instead our time *to awaken to our destiny*. The Holy One will therefore deliver the Emori armies into the hands of the Redeemed nation - along with their kings. We will suddenly find ourselves in possession of *sixty cities* filled with Emori wealth.

### ***What's That Up Ahead? Could That Really Be Jericho?***

Finally, by week's end, we will arrive at and set upon camp on the plains of Moav. Now an army majestic with banners with stunning victories under its belt, the Holy One's new warrior generation will finally begin to strike terror in the hearts of the surrounding nations. We will have to wait until next week, and the parsha called ***Balak***, to discover the interesting ways in which those nations choose to respond to our presence.

In the next parsha, *Balak*, Torah's anonymous narrator will relate to us the infamous – and highly prophetic - '*Bila'am episode*'. While the Redeemed Community will be 'in the vicinity of', and the reason for, the events about which we will read in this parsha, neither Moshe, Aharon, nor any of our number are going to be active participants in the bulk of the story. In fact, 'our heroes' will have no reason whatever to even know the events about which we will read are even taking place. Those events will all take place 'behind enemy lines' – beyond the line of sight and without our knowledge of the Redeemed Community.

### ***New Watersheds, New Adversaries***

Before we get too deep in these parshot I need to introduce you to some new players who will appear on the stage of Torah this week. There are six primary ones, namely: The King of Edom, the King of Arad, *Sichon* and *Og* [two kings of the Emori], *Balak*, the King of Moav (Moab), and a very interesting man named *Bila'am*, who we are told hailed from a mysterious place our English Bibles call 'Pethor' [literally translated *P'torah*]. We will get to know these six men very well before the week is over, but let's take a sneak peek, shall we?

### ***Introducing the First Stranger of the ‘Latter Days’ – the King of Edom***

The first new character to which Torah will introduce us this week is an un-named king of the ancient nation called *Edom*. Moshe will speak on behalf of the descendants of Ya’akov; an unnamed dignitary described only as the ‘King of Edom’ will speak on behalf of the descendants of our ancient nemesis Esav. Moshe will send messengers to Edom’s king with a simple request for freedom to pass through his land on our way to Eretz Yisrael. But the ‘King of Edom’ will have nothing to do with it. He will not only flatly refuse the request for safe-passage through his land, he will brazenly threaten violence, backed up with a show of force. Shades of Genesis 27:40-41 and Genesis 32:3! As his Yitzchak proclaimed regarding Esav generations previously, with great sadness: *al-charbeicha tich’yeh* – i.e. *by your sword you will live*.

Some people that you will encounter in life, Beloved, know – and desire - no other way than ‘*by your sword you shall live.*’ May the Holy One prepare you in advance for each encounter you are destined to have with such people! May you be able to discern them for what and who they are – and deal with them according to the Holy One’s wisdom, instead of reacting in the flesh. May you have appropriate levels of pity on them, but never fear them. And may your words and actions be directed by the Most High God.

### ***Introducing Red-Faced Stranger #2 - the King of Arad***

The next latter-day prototype to whom we will be introduced in Torah this week will be the unnamed ‘*King of Arad*’. Arad was a city in the Negev which at the time was occupied by the Kena’ani [Canaanites]. The king of this city heard that the vast nation of Hebrews was passing near the region he considered his ‘turf’, and without either provocation or warning [much less any effort at diplomacy] he ordered a raiding party to attack the Hebrews and take some of them as hostages.

Please understand that some people you will encounter in life know – and desire – no other way than to attack without warning, take something important from you, and then try to negotiate what they want from you from a position of power. May the Holy One prepare you well in advance for all encounters you will have with that kind of people as well. May the ***Ruach*** enable you to discern such people for what and who they are. May He empower you to have pity on such people rather than fear them. And may He teach you respond to them wisely, according to the counsel of the Most High God.

### ***Introducing Sichon and Og, Warlords of the Lawless Emori***

The next two characters to whom we will be introduced by Torah this week will be two kings of the nation of *Emori* [Amorites]. The first such king was *Sichon*, who controlled the area referred to in Deuteronomy as *Cheshbon*, and later known as

Gilead, located between the *Wadi Arnon* and the *Wadi Yabbok* [Jabbok] in the modern-day nation of Jordan. The second such king was Og, whose kingdom was further North in what is now the nation of Syria, just to the Northeast of the Sea of Galilee called Bashan. Og's kingdom consisted of 60 walled and highly-fortified cities. He himself was a giant, the sole descendant of the *Refaim*. His height is not specifically stated, but his bed is described by Torah as 13 feet long.

Sichon and Og are prototypical of powerful people we confront in life do not even know us, yet dislike us intently and desire to destroy us for reasons we do not quite understand.

### ***Introducing Stranger/Adversary #5 - Balak, King of Moav***

The next historical character -- ***Balak***<sup>7</sup> after whom the second parsha ha-shavua is named – was yet another pagan king who saw what our ancestors did when attacked by Sichon and Og. ***Balak*** the Moavi and *Yitro* the Midyani [Moshe's father-in-law] have the distinction of being the only two persons from nations other than Israel after whom a parsha of Torah is named.

So *who is this man Balak* that Torah deems him so important? Why did the sages who 'mapped out' and named the parashot for the annual cycle of readings choose to give him such a prominent position? Why did our forefathers think it was so important that we always remember his name?

Perhaps, Beloved, Balak is not just a man – or even a prototype -- but a spirit. Perhaps we are all, individually and collectively, destined to encounter Balak in the course of our respective journeys. Perhaps the sages – following the lead of the Holy One – want to be very sure that we will be able to recognize, and deal appropriately, with Balak when he comes up on our radar screen.

### ***Who Goes There – Friend or Foe?***

As we have alluded to, Balak is not even a Hebrew. He is the leader of an ethnic group most English-speakers have come to know as the “*Moabites*”. Hebraically, these people are *Moav'im*. This group of people were the descendants of Avraham's nephew, Lot, who traveled with Avraham and Sarai from Ur to Charan, to Kena'an, on to Egypt, and then back to Kena'an.

Lot, of course, split with Avraham over a squabble concerning grazing land. He chose the fertile “cities of the plain” [the Jordan River Valley's “West Bank”], leaving Avraham the mountains and the desert. As you will recall, Lot eventually

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<sup>7</sup> ***Balak*** is, in Hebrew, spelled *beit, lamed, kuf*. According to one Hebrew tradition, ***Balak*** was the ancestor of Ruth (*Sotah* 47a; *Nazir* 23b).

settled in *S'dom* [Sodom], in the midst of its perverse society, and only escaped alive at the time of the destruction because of his relationship with Avraham, who interceded on his behalf (and, therefore, on behalf of his descendants).

After the destruction of S'dom and G'morah, Lot settled in the area to the East of what, in the fallout of fire and brimstone which destroyed those cities, became what we know as the "Dead Sea". Today, the area in which Lot and his daughters settled is called "Jordan"<sup>8</sup>.

As you will remember, in the aftermath of the destruction of S'dom, G'morrah, and the cities of the plain, Lot's oldest daughter seduced him into an incestuous encounter, became pregnant by him, and called the child born of the union 'Moav', meaning 'of/from father'. As the Torah account reveals it:

*The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moav;  
he is the patriarch/progenitor of the Moav of this day.*

[Genesis 19:37]

Moav's descendants thereafter were constantly fighting with the *Emori* [Amorites] and *Ammoni* [Ammonites] for supremacy – and for control of the Eastern bank of the Dead Sea and Jordan Rift Valley. At the time of the historical figure Balak, the Emori were pre-eminent, and the shoreline areas on the East bank of the Jordan and the Dead Sea were Emori-controlled. Moav's descendants had been pushed Eastward, into the less fertile mountainous areas.

### ***The Challenge that Balak Faced***

Let's look at the situation that is shaping up in this week's parsha through Balak's eyes. He sees a great multitude of people, one generation removed from slavery in Egypt, approaching Moav's borders from the South. And this is not just any people. These people have *fire in their eyes*. They march *in perfect order*, an army *majestic with banners*. The Holy One their God dwells in their midst. A pillar of fire and cloud leads them. Manna falls for them from Heaven on six out of every seven days. Rocks pour forth unending supplies of water for them and their livestock to drink.

Moav's much stronger neighbors, the Emori [KJV Amorites] recently made the mistake of attacking these people – and had been wiped out as if swept away by a great Hand from Heaven. Og and Bashan - the tough guys of Balak's

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<sup>8</sup> The country we know today as Jordan is relatively young. After World War I, the British enacted a Mandate creating a country called *Trans-Jordan* to be run, under English supervision and control, by the minority of Arab groups who assisted the allies during the course of the war. The official establishment of the country took place May 15, 1923. The country became independent in 1946, and the name was officially changed to *Jordan*.

neighborhood - have both been crushed like flies.

With this change in the balance of power in the region, Balak appears poised to assume the role of supreme ruler which he has long coveted. Balak suddenly seems ready to burst onto the world scene as a major force. The only thing standing in Balak's way was the people of the Holy One.

What, Balak wondered, were the intentions of these people – the ones with fire in their eyes – regarding *Moav*? What did the presence of this people – the descendants of Avraham their kinsman -mean for *him* and *his kingdom*? Ah, if he had only known the will of the Holy One! This was Moav's opportunity to restore its relationship with the God of Avraham, and walk again in the blessing of Genesis 12:3, when the Holy One told Avraham:

***I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you.  
In you will all of the families of the eretz [earth] be blessed."***

B'nei Yisrael was no threat to Moav. The only land the Israelites threatened was the area controlled by the Emori – the land on the East bank of the Jordan River Valley. The Holy One did not intend for any harm to come to the descendants of Lot. **Deuteronomy 2:9.** Israel did not want anything from Moav. After all, the Holy One provided everything Israel needed. The people of Israel had no designs on Moav's land, its cattle, on its women, or on anything else that Moav claimed as its own. The fire that burned in the eyes of the sons of Israel 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.

But Balak did not see that. And Beloved, *he never will*. Balak will always see Israel only as an enemy to be cursed, a threat to everything he holds dear. He will never be content to 'peacefully co-exist' with her. He will, therefore, always be looking for an 'angle', and 'advantage', that he may destroy her forever.

### ***The Thin Line Between Fear and Hate***

Our text tells us that, catching Balak's paranoia, all Moav became fearful as well. The people of Moav did not see that Israel's presence on their doorstep was their chance to redeem the mistake made by Lot so many generations ago, to rejoin Avraham's seed, and to be restored to the covenant life Lot had known when he sojourned with Avraham and Sarai.

All Moav had to do was embrace Israel and its God as Lot had, in his youth, embraced Avraham and His God. All Moav had to do was prophetically model Zechariah 8:20-23:

*Thus says the Holy One of Hosts: "Many peoples, and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come; and the inhabitants of one shall go to another, saying, 'Let us go speedily to entreat the favor of the Holy One, and to seek the Holy One of Hosts. I will go also.'*

*Thus says the Holy One of Hosts: "In those days, ten men will take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, they will take hold of the skirt of him who is a Yehudi [Jew], saying, 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"*

Not Balak! Balak heard of Israel's approach, and received reports of what had happened to Sichon and Og, and got himself all up in a frenzy.

### ***The Petty Little Kingdoms Men Hold So Dear***

Balak, you see, had *a kingdom*. And if he and his people embraced Israel, and joined the movement of the God of Heaven, Balak's kingdom would be no more. Never underestimate Balak's attachment to the power and prestige of being king. It is, when all is said and done, always the force that drives his actions. Balak chose to strengthen and bolster his kingdom – second-rate and unsatisfying as it was – rather than join the movement of the Holy One, and become one of those with fire in their eyes. As a result, Torah tells us that Balak was filled with something besides fear - something the NIV mistranslates as “dread”. The Hebrew word thus mistranslated is *qus*, meaning not “dread”, but “loathing, hatred”. What we are dealing with in Balak, and in his people, Lot's descendants, and in all those who reject the blessing of the Holy One through Avraham and his descendants, is not just fear, but full-blown *anti-Semitism*.

### ***Understanding the Nature of Anti-Semitism***

What is *anti-Semitism*? It is that which always stirs in those who live by the *sword* (that is, *by their own strength*, like Esav) when in the presence of those who live by ***the voice***. Those who live by the sword hate those who live by ***the voice*** - because they cannot control them and use them for their own purposes. Even if those who live by the sword are allowed, in the Holy One's permissive will, to kill our bodies, however, ***the voice*** remains, is even closer to the Holy One its source than when our bodies were alive, and thus continues to testify against those who live by the sword. And so, the sword is, in reality, impotent against ***the voice*** -- and it knows it. And it hates ***the voice***, because it hates the *Source* of the voice.

Hence, though Balak believes Bila'am has the power to bless as well as curse, note that he does not ask that Bila'am pronounce a blessing in the name of the Holy One on his own people, the Moavi. Instead, he asks that Bila'am *curse Israel*. He cared more that Israel be cursed [if it were possible] than that his own household and his own people be blessed. That is the nature and essence of anti-Semitism.

## ***The Legacy of Lot's Wife***

So, Balak, king of the Moav'im, decided to *fight* the Voice *with* the voice. He dared not attack Israel with the sword, lest his kingdom share the fate of Sichon and Og, his stronger neighbors. He instead decided to call upon a “prophet for hire”. If he can bring in an outside speaker, whom the people will respect as a spiritual authority, to convince his people, and his neighbors, the Midyan'im, that Israel is evil, a threat to be feared, and a people to be hated and avoided at all costs, he can, he believes, keep his little kingdom intact. Everyone in his little kingdom has heard that the great Bila'am, son of Beor, has a mysterious power to bless and to curse. The people will thank Balak for bringing someone who can bless and prophesy over them. They probably haven't had an exciting guest speaker in Moav in a long time. And, even better, if Bila'am can, in the process, be induced to say just a few bad things about Israel, and to call the people of Moav to back up Balak, and stand with him against this threat from those “evil” newcomers with fire in their eyes, more the better.

And so, Balak rejects the Holy One's offer of Himself and His blessing, for himself and for his people, and devises a plan to insure that the movement of the Holy One will stay far, far away, enabling his own little kingdom to not only continue but perhaps even prosper. He makes a shaky alliance with the old arch enemy of his people, Midyan – who, after all, know Israel's leader, Moshe, very well, because Moshe had lived among the Midyani for 40 year. And together they come up with a plan. Here is how Torah puts it:

***V'yishlach mal'achim el-Bila'am ben-Be'or Petorah***

*He sent emissaries to Bila'am son of Beor, to his native land in Petor*

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***V'atah l'cha-na arah-li et ha-am hazeh ki-atsum hu mimeini***

*if you would, come -- curse this nation for me, and we may be able to defeat them*

[Numbers 22:5]

The sword, you see, always looks for an “angle”, a “program”, a “technique” to accomplish its purpose, and keep its leader's “kingdom” going for one more generation. And, alas, there are always plenty of charismatic prophets and preachers ready, willing and able, for just a “love offering”, to spout the popular theology of the house which invites them. And there are always multitudes who sit spellbound and listen to the party line, and pat the Balak of their particular little world on the back one more time, and watch their opportunity to embrace the movement of God pass them by like a ship in the night.

## ***The “Rest of the Story”***

But, lest you think the plan of God was thwarted, consider the “rest of the story.” Generations later, another Jew – a woman with fire in her eyes named Naomi --



would sojourn in Moav. And one of Balak’s descendants, a woman we know as Ruth<sup>9</sup>, would do what Balak and his people did not – embrace the people through whom the Holy One’s blessing is promised and designed to come. And from Ruth, this daughter of Moav, we hear the following words:

*Don't entreat me to leave you, or to return from following after you,  
for where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge;  
your people shall be my people, and your God my God;  
where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried:  
the Holy One do so to me, and more also, if anything but death part you and me.*  
[Ruth 1:16-17]

May the response of Ruth be your response as well, Beloved. It is the pathway to life and peace.

### ***Introducing the ‘Ultimate Prototypical Adversary - Bila’am***

The other ‘main character’ in this week’s final parsha – the counterpart of Balak – is named *Bila’am*. Torah introduced him to us as “*Bila’am, son of Beor*” and tells us that he lives at “*Petor on/by the River*”. Who is this strange and powerful person who can both *bless* and *curse* with the same tongue? According to one prominent Jewish commentary<sup>10</sup> the name *Bila’am* is actually an *acronym*, meant to convey that this mysterious seer from *Petor* is the embodiment of all evil. Stop and let that sink in for a moment or two. Where such a wild idea come from, you ask? According to the commentator in question, the *beit* [‘b’ sound] with which the name *Bila’am* begins references ***Balak***, the Moavi king who hired *Bila’am* to curse Israel, and who later arranged through diplomatic conspiracy with the sheiks of Midyan the seduction of Israel’s young men by Midyani women. According to the same commentator, the *lamed* [‘l’ sound] which is the second letter of the name given to the seer from *Petor* references ***Lavan***, the conniving, deceitful brother of Rivkah, who tricked Ya’akov into 20 years of bondage to him in Charan. Under this same analysis, the *ayin*, the third letter of *Bila’am*’s name [in this case, making an ‘ahh’ vowel sound] represents ***Amelek***, the perpetual enemy of the Holy One and of His covenant people. And, finally, according to this commentator, the *mem* [‘m’ sound] with which the name ‘*Bila’am*’ concludes represents ***Mitzrayim*** [i.e. Egypt], which enslaved Israel, and sanctioned the murder of masses of male infants born to Hebrew women.

According to this line of reasoning, *Bila’am* has been responsible for four separate attempts to destroy the Jewish people. 1) He was the same person as – or at least a descendant of – *Lavan* the Aramean, who abused and tried to enslave Ya’akov

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<sup>9</sup> According to the Gemara (Sotah 47a) Ruth was the daughter of King Eglon, who was a descendant of Balak, king of Moav.

<sup>10</sup> *Targum Yonatan ben Uziel* [31:8].

through enticements of his daughters, Rachel and Leah; 2) He advised Par'oh to torture the Jews in Egypt, and especially to throw their boy babies into the Nile; 3) He incited the wicked Amalek to declare war against the Jews; and 4) Upon Balak's invitation, he came to curse the Jews, then advised Balak to encourage harlotry among the Jews.

Literally, the name "Bila'am" means "*stopper*". A similar word in modern Hebrew is used to describe the brakes on one's automobile. The purpose of Bila'am is to *stop* - to put the brakes on -- the movement of God and of His people.

Bila'am is the epitome of the *Anti-Messiah*. He definitely hears from the Holy One, as we find out in today's aliyah<sup>11</sup>. This fact is interesting, because the Holy One has heretofore reserved most 'God-encounters' to Avraham and his descendants.

Bila'am is apparently uniquely blessed among the pagans of the world. The Holy One ***not only speaks to this man, but actually*** carries on **detailed** conversations with him. But though Bila'am heard from and conversed with the Holy One, he has a weakness for the flattery and admiration of men. He caters to rich and powerful men with neuroses like Balak instead of *sh'ma*-ing the Holy One, and therefore tries to use the revelation and insights he receives 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.*'

And so, Bila'am is off. He saddles up his donkey, takes two servants with him, and heads off toward Moav with the impressive delegation sent to him by Balak. Oh, but Beloved, does Bila'am ever have a surprise waiting for him along the road!

### ***Haftarah Chukat***

This week's first Haftarah reading<sup>12</sup> will come from the 11th chapter of the book of Judges. In this particular Haftarah, we will meet a man named ***Yiftach*** [transliterated in most Bibles as *Jephthah*], who lived in the period of the Judges in the area known as Gilad (Gilead), East of the Jordan River – the precise area where

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<sup>11</sup> The sages opine that the Divine spirit visited Bila'am only at night, as is the case with all the prophets of the nations. Lavan [Rivkah's brother] too, received prophesy in a nocturnal dream. **Genesis 31:24**.

<sup>12</sup> In synagogues there is a tradition to follow the reading of the weekly Torah portion with the reading of a short selection from one of the books of the prophets. Typically, this section, called the 'haftarah' or 'leave-taking' (the idea being that it is a kind of epilogue or coda to the Torah reading) is connected in some thematic way to the Torah portion.

we met the Emori king Sichon.

### ***Yiftach's Humble Beginnings***

Yiftach is the sordid history of a very unlikely hero. The writer of the book of Judges [believed to be Sh'muel (Samuel)], begins the Yiftach chronicle by informing us of Yiftach's ignoble beginnings. He was an illegitimate son born to his father by a prostitute, and brought into the home. His younger half-brothers despised him, and when they were able, they threw him out of his father's home and denied him -- "the son of another woman" -- any share in their father's inheritance.

Cast adrift on his own devices, Yiftach took up with a group of men described as "worthless fellows", and developed a reputation as a 'tough guy', not quite 'good enough' for polite society. Enter the armies of the Ammoni (Ammonites), seeking conquest, stage right.

### ***Yiftach's Strange 'Calling' To Be Israel's Deliverer***

Confronted by a threat from the outside against which they had no means of defense, Yiftach's old tormentors, the men of Gilad (Gilead), become desperate. They approach Yiftach and ask him to lead them in battle, acting something like an old-West 'hired-gun'. Surprisingly enough, Yiftach agreed, and became the leader of the nation.

### ***Yiftach's First Act as 'Deliverer'***

Yiftach's first act as 'Deliverer-Elect' of Israel was not, however, to go out and wage war. For a person placed in a leadership role solely as a 'hired gun', he did something totally out of character. Instead of forming an army and attacking the Ammoni, he *sent a diplomatic mission* to the Ammoni king seeking to negotiate a *peace treaty*. In the diplomatic discussions that followed, Yiftach actually presented some pretty good legal arguments on behalf of his kinsman. He reminds the King of Ammon that the land of Gilad (Gilead) was legitimately occupied by Israel, after being won by Israel in a defensive war. In fact, Yiftach basically taught – or tried to teach – the King of Ammon the last part of parsha ***Chukat***, which, as we will find out later this week, chronicles the story of how, 300 years previously, Israel had been savagely attacked by the Emori (Amorites), had fought back against this attack to avoid genocide, and had been divinely-enabled not only to repel the attackers but also to conquer and possess the attackers' land. Yiftach also persuasively argued that the Ammoni, who declined to participate in that war back then, could have no legitimate claim of right to the hard-won land now.

Yiftach's efforts at diplomacy – just like Israel's today in arguing a similar position - are to no avail. The enemies of the Holy One's people do not, you see, just want

the land we occupy. They want us *dead*. Buying the world a Coke will not stop their hatred, nor fend off their attacks. Giving them land the Holy One has given us is, therefore, not a legitimate pathway to peace with them. It's time we got that fact through our heads once and for all.

### ***Yiftach Prepares to Go to War***

The Ammoni break off discussions and attack with full force, and Yiftach has no choice but to do what he was 'hired' to do, and engage the Ammoni in battle. Before he enters the fray, however, he, like most people, has a little heart-to-heart conversation with God.

Yiftach's little conversation with God is not exactly on a par with the eloquent intercession of *Moshe* or the humble submission of Y'hoshua. The 'son of another woman', denied any inheritance in the land or among the people he is now required to defend, prepares for battle by making a rash vow to God. He declares that, if he is victorious, and returns from the battle, "*whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Holy One's, and I will offer it up for an olah [wholly-consumed burnt offering].*" **Shoftim** (Judges) 11:30-31.

What on earth was Yiftach thinking? He was probably assuming that that the first thing he would see upon his return – if he returned at all from this fight - would be a goat, or sheep, or cow.

Through the delivering power of the Holy One, Yiftach is victorious in battle against the Ammoni. When he returns home to fulfill his vow, he finds to his horror that instead of a goat, a sheep, or a cow, the first one he sees coming to greet him is his daughter, his only child. The end of the story is therefore horribly tragic: "*When he saw her, he rent his clothes, and said, 'alas, my daughter, thou hast brought me very low, and thou hast become the cause of trouble to me, for I have opened my mouth to the Holy One, and I can not go back'. And she said to him, 'my father, if thou hast opened thy mouth to the Holy One, do to me that which has come out of thy mouth' "*

### ***Musings on the Connection Between Yiftach and Moshe***

Moshe and Yiftach, though they lived 300 years apart, both led the people of Israel in a fight over the same piece of real estate – the land of Gilad (Gilead), just East of the Jordan River. The similarity of their struggles provides an obvious connection between the parsha and the haftarah.

Less obvious, however, is the connection between the Yiftach story and the story of Moshe smiting the rock. Let's think about that for a moment. Moshe began his

career as a man of action. He was, like Yiftach, estranged from his family at a young age. The first act Torah tells us Moshe engaged in was to smite and kill someone – the Egyptian taskmaster. Later, at the burning bush, when the Holy One called on Moshe to go to speak to Par'oh, and tell him to let the Holy One's people go, Moshe demurred, claiming not to be a man of words. The Holy One therefore had Moshe rely upon his brother Aharon to act as a spokesman, while Moshe used his staff to inaugurate plagues and signal the beginning of miracles. This all underscored Moshe's persona as a man of action, rather than words.

As the 40 years in the desert came to an end and the second-generation of those the Holy One redeemed from Egypt prepared to enter the land of Israel, the Holy One's instruction to Moshe to take the staff but merely SPEAK to (as opposed to STRIKE) the rock can be viewed a kind of final test for Moshe. Moshe was, thereby, challenged to transcend his persona as a man of action, and accept, at long last, the role of a speaker, who achieves not by hitting, but by being a *man of the voice*. Moshe failed, and was, as a consequence, denied the right to enter the land.

It is worth noting that the same word *va'yach* - "and he smote" - is used back at the beginning of his career, to describe Moshe's action when Moshe killed the Egyptian, as well as in our parsha, when Moshe does to the rock the same thing as he did to the Egyptian. Moshe was called to be a man of words; but he rejected that calling, and chose instead to be a man of action. And it cost him.

Yiftach's story contains a similar – but reversed - tension between speech and action. Yiftach refused to be typecast as a simple strong-man, and sought after diplomacy first, and only resorted to military engagement as a last resort. When the Ammoni refused to listen to his diplomacy, Yiftach was forced to be what everyone wants him to be; a man of action and violence. In a fascinating twist on the Moshe chronicle, Yiftach's personal tragedy came about not through anything he did [as a man of action], but through something he *said* - his vow to offer the first thing to come out of his door to the Holy One.

To every thing there is a season. There is a time for words, and there is a time of violent action. The key to success is to distinguish *which is which*.

### ***Haftarah Balak***

The traditional Haftarah for parsha ***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)]. His message was as follows:

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

[2] Both kingdoms have resisted prophetic calls to *t'shuvah*;

[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 did NOT mean the Holy One's covenant with Avraham, Yitschak and Ya'akov, or His Sinaitic betrothal covenant, with Israel, was 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 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.

### ***The Apostolic Messages Corresponding to Parsha Chukat***

The apostolic message I have selected to go with ***Chukat*** is the ***pasuk*** [i.e. passage, context-providing verses] that surrounds John 3:16. The true test of fidelity to the Holy One and His Word is not, we will discover this week, whether one can memorize and quote John 3:16. The true test is whether one can understand and interpret John 3:16 *in light of the context of the entire Bible, and in light of all the covenants and interactions the Holy One has established.*

In the passage that we will read along with parsha Chukat, *we will find* Yeshua our Messiah having a fascinating conversation with a member of one of the leading Jewish men in the days of Roman occupation. A member of the virtually powerless Sanhedrin<sup>13</sup>, Nicodemus had come to inquire of the Rabbi secretly, by night<sup>14</sup>. This same man would later spoke to his cohorts at the Sanhedrin in Yeshua's behalf [John 7:50-51], and would, along with one of those cohorts - Yosef of Arimethea - actually participate in Yeshua's burial [John 19:38-40].

The man will be introduced to us as: *a man of the P'rushim [Pharisees], named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.* Yeshua will refer to him as: *. . . the teacher of*

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<sup>13</sup> In those days the Romans were in full control of Eretz Yisrael, and the Sanhedrin had no real binding legal authority. All members of the Sanhedrin – be they Pharisees or Sadducees - could do was to engage in debate amongst themselves over issues of importance to the subjugated Hebrew population, then try as best they could to lobby with their Roman overlords regarding a mutually-beneficial resolution or statement of policy relating to those issues. Ultimately the Roman oligarchs and emperors made all the decisions except in regard to matters deemed purely religious in nature.

<sup>14</sup> Nicodemus, a Pharisee sect, is identified by Yochanan, the author of this narrative, as both a "leader of the Jews" (3:1) and "a teacher of Israel" (3:10)..

***Yisra'el.*** We will discover, however, that in the Holy One's kingdom, *teachers* must be *learners* – and *doers* - as well. And to be learners and doers, they must – absolutely must – as must we all, be *begotten from above*.

We will, you see, learn this week about the controversial subject of the 'new birth' – not from the stilted perspective of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian evangelists, but in Hebraic simplicity, from the Master Himself. We will read and come to understand John 3:16 *in context*, rather than as a Christian memory verse and evangelistic slogan. And we will thereby, the Holy One willing, learn the basic spiritual principles underlying the physical phenomena we know as 'light' and 'darkness', 'death' and 'life'.

If we are ready to sh'ma and receive it, the passage we will study from Yochanan's book will teach us the difference between being merely a man [or woman] who talks a talk, and one who actually *walks a walk consistent with one's talk*. There is, you see, very little, if any, room in the Holy One's Divine plan for *academicians* – people who think and study and talk about abstract principles. The Holy One's divine plan is for one's Torah to come out, and be manifest to the world, 'where the rubber hits the road' – in the daily affairs and struggles of life – not in high-sounding sermons or political discourse.

When Nicodemus came to Yeshua by night, he came as a theologian, an academician, and as a political figure. He was a very influential person - a member of the Great Sanhedrin, which met daily in Jerusalem to consider allegations of violations of Torah that took place in all the Jewish communities in the known world at that time. If you were to analogize Nicodemus to someone today in the government of the United States, he would probably be a Justice of the United States Supreme Court. He had, in order to attain to this position, studied Torah as a code of law, and could undoubtedly speak eloquently about it – and the Holy One – *from a standpoint of abstract principle*. He knew very well how to use Torah in political discourse, to advance the interests of his party [the ***P'rushim*** (Pharisees).] But the Master quickly taught Nicodemus that such a level of knowledge of the Torah, and such a usage, of Torah was neither what Torah is all about nor what the kingdom of the Holy One consists of.

### ***The Apostolic Readings Corresponding to Parsha Balak***

The apostolic teaching 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, as follows:

***It has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers,***

*by those who are from Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.*

***Now I mean this, that each one of you says,  
"I follow Sha'ul," "I follow Apollos," "I follow Kefa,"  
and, "I follow Messiah."***

The problem that led Shaul to write this letter is clearly stated to be the existence of divisions within the community of faith in Corinth – particularly divisions based upon [a] the personality of certain charismatic leaders, and [b] the different worldviews – and respective areas of spiritual blindness – of Jews and gentiles.

Now that this context is established we can proceed to today's assigned aliyah. Shaul begins with some rhetorical questions:

***Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar?  
Where is the philosopher of this world?  
Hasn't the Holy One made foolish the wisdom of this world?***

It will be very interesting indeed to see what Shaul has to teach us about how we should deal with these things.

*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***

***Amidah Prayer Focus for The Week  
Petition # 11: Yerushalayim***

***V'lirushalayim irecha b'rachamim t'shuv***  
*And unto Jerusalem, your City, return in compassion*

***v'tishkon b'tokah ka-asher d'varto***  
*and take your rest within it, as you have declared*

***ub'nei asah b'karav b'yomeinu bin'yan olam***  
*May you rebuild it soon in our day, an eternal structure*

***V'chisai Dovid m'herah l'tokah tachin***  
*And speedily re-establish the kingdom of David*

***B'ruch atah Adonai Bonei Y'rushalayim***  
*Blessed are You, O Holy One - builder of Jerusalem*