

Shiur L'Yom Sheni¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Balak:*** **Numbers 22:2-20**
 Haftarah: **Micah 5:6-11**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Corinthians 1:17-25**

Look, a people has come from Egypt.
Behold, they cover the face of the earth.
 [Numbers 22:5]

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

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

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

The next phase of our ‘great nation discipleship training curriculum involves exposure to the form of folly the world thinks of as *the occult*. The only witchcraft novel we should ever read begins with the phrase: ***Vayar Balak*** – i.e. and Balak ‘saw’. **Numbers 22:2(a)**. That is important. The Holy One wants us to know that *every* occult practice known to man involves *misdirection, illusion, and subterfuge*. The ‘occult’ process always begins with *manipulation of what people see – or think they see; what they hear – or think they hear; what they want – or think they want; and what they feel – or think they feel about it*. The practitioner of the occult presents to his ‘mark’ *an illusion* of knowledge, power, and the ability to manipulate people, situations, and/or affections (the ‘bait’). Once the mark takes the ‘bait’, the occult practitioner employs a series of intriguing props, mystical-sounding rituals, and impressive-sounding chants or orations (the ‘*distraction*’) to draw the mark’s attention toward what he wants him/her/them to focus on (the ‘*play*’). Once the occult practitioner has the mark distracted by the ‘play’, he can easily take whatever he wants from the mark (the ‘*endgame of the con*’) without the mark even noticing he has been duped. Here come two masters of the craft – Balak and Bila’am. While they will be playing and conning each other – as occult practitioner’s do any time they work together - their real ‘mark’ is B’nei Yisrael. Their ‘bait’ is the illusion of supernatural ability to bless or curse at will, without consequence. Their ‘distraction’ is a series of showy altars, bloody ritual sacrifices, and spiritual sounding hocus-pocus. The ‘play’ is the ‘prophetic trance/oracle from the gods’ farce that Bila’am will play to the hilt. What is the *endgame of this*

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intricate con? Both Balak and Bila'am agree: the endgame is to destroy B'nei Yisrael through driving a wedge between them and their Divine Benefactor – the Holy One. They plan to accomplish this not by the 'play', but by seducing them into the most serious varieties of breach of covenant imaginable: sexual perversion, bowing to idols and serving pagan gods, and taking these abominations into the Holy Tabernacle. Watch closely now, and see how expert occult practitioners deceive the nations and wreak havoc on even the elect!

Déjà vu!

We should know how the occult works by now, of course, because this is by no means our first rodeo. Remember the tricks the Serpent used on Chava in the Garden? He started by playing tricks on her eyes. Through the *power of suggestion*, the wily creature led the mother of all living to see a series of illusions. First he so inflamed the appetites of her flesh that she began to see the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as three things it most definitely was not – *i.e.* 'good for food', to be delighted in/fixated on by the eyes, and desirable to make her wise². Then he sprung the trap by making the poor, gullible woman afraid that she was 'missing out' on something wonderful by following the ways of the Creator. In that way, he got her to believe his ridiculous lie that it was the Holy One, not he, who was the conniving manipulator in the Garden!

Secondly, do you remember the mind-games the builders of the tower of Babel played on the multitudes? They started by laying out a vision of a spectacular *city* they could build with bricks – with a tower whose top is in the heavens. If one who practices the occult arts can make you see something that isn't real, he knows, he or she can make you do just about anything that he/she wants you to do.

Thirdly, do you remember the tricks the 'new king of the Egyptians, who knew not Yosef', played on the Hebrews – and probably all the other nations? ***Look [Hebrew hinei], he said: The people of B'nei Yisrael are more numerous and stronger than we!*** Wait ... ***WHAT?*** That is *absurd!* But he *made the world look*; then he *told his people what they should see* – and, under the power of his hypnotic suggestion, they began to see exactly what he told them to see and believe what he told them to believe – *even though what he told them could not have been further from the truth.*

Understanding the Occult – And Why We Must Always Be On Our Guard Against It

² The only kind of 'wisdom' the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil could offer was the Serpent's toxic blend of earthly, sensual, demonic, negative-energy wisdom – *i.e.* 'occult' wisdom; not the pure, peaceable, gentle, humble, merciful, and good wisdom that comes from above. See James 3:13-18.

We have heretofore seen a lot of – and experienced firsthand the dark, heavy oppression of - the *Egyptian/Western World's Manifestation* of the Occult Arts. We have seen the gross idolatry, as well as the over-the-top sensuality and sexual perversions that flow therefrom. Remember Pharaoh's 'magicians'? Remember Potifar's wife? But what we saw in Egypt is only one side of the occult's mystical magic coin. Now it is our appointed time, says the Holy One, to get acquainted with the other side of the dark art spectrum – the *Babylonian/Eastern-World's Manifestation* of Occultism, and the idolatry, over-the-top sensuality, and sexual perversions that accompany it.

Buckle your seat belts, Beloved! It seems that we are destined to *play with the big boys one more time!*

Playing With the Big Boys Now – the Sequel

The currency in which practitioners of the occult – whether they follow the Egyptian/Western Mysticism strand or the Babylonian/Eastern Mysticism strand - always traffic, and to which devotees of the occult always respond - is *the flesh*. Those who *live in the flesh* are always vulnerable to the temptations, seductions, deceptions, obsessions, and oppressions of the occult. That is because those who live according to the flesh, being carnality-minded, insist on judging and being judged according to the flesh [John 8:15]. That is why those who live according to the flesh *cannot please the Holy One*. See Romans 8:7-8.

If you do not understand what triggers your flesh, and how your flesh responds to that triggering, you will just keep falling for the tricks used by occult practitioners time and time again. Only if, when, and to the extent that you understand your own flesh, and how susceptible it is to subtle techniques of triggering, deception, and manipulation, can you hope to understand how the occult is so prevalent in the world, why it wreaks so much havoc, and why it absolutely cannot be indulged or tolerated in Kingdom households or communities. Before we jump off full-bore into the text of parsha *Balak*, therefore, it probably behooves us to spend a few moments rehashing some 'occult-manipulation' basics.

Messing With Our Vision; Toying with our Lusts, Our Fears, and Our Vanity; Seducing our Pseudo-Intellects; and Rewriting Our Critical Narratives

The most vulnerable areas of our flesh inclinations that practitioners of the occult target for exploitation include: [a] *self-absorption, self-obsession, and self-importance*; [b] *fear, anger, outrage, malice, and the desire for vengeance-falsely-labeled-as-'justice'*; [c] *pre-existing biases, prejudices, and paranoidias*; [d] *envy, jealousy, covetousness, and greed*; [e] *vanity and pseudo-intellectual*

pride/arrogance; [f] sentimentality, sensuality, romantic fantasy, sexual appetite, self-absorption, and curiosity; [g] superstition and social, political, philosophical, and/or religious indoctrination; and [h] fleshly attractions, lusts, and forbidden desires. Once a ‘mark’ – i.e. a highly-vulnerable person who is all up into one or more of these areas of flesh-obsession – is identified, a practitioner of the occult designs an illusion-matrix for, and begins his/her manipulation of, that ‘mark’. Once the mark’s areas of vulnerability are identified, the occult practitioner then attacks one or more of those areas craftily. Using a seductive serpentine tone, he or she strategically sows a series of [a] subtle verbal and non-verbal suggestions of illicit attitude and/or behavior, [b] optical illusions designed to engender temptation; [c] delusions of possible wealth, popularity, wisdom, greatness or grandeur; [d] unclean thoughts, [e] ivory-tower theorizing, conceptualization, and abstractualization; [f] negative-energy emotions/moods; [g] vain imaginations, [h] false narratives; and [i] accusations/mockings of the Holy One and His Kedusha Protocols.

The more influence in society a particular ‘mark’ focuses has, the more an occult practitioner salivates. To him or her, it is a bit like a game of chess. Most marks are mere pawns to toy with awhile and then cast away; ah, but some marks are real trophies - bishops, knights, queens . . . and kings. When the ‘mark’ is a king, things tend to get very interesting, very quickly.

Introducing Balak - the Prototypical ‘Ideal Mark’ for Occult Manipulation On a Societal if Not Species-Wide Scale

Balak was the perfect ‘mark’. He was, or would soon be king. He had tasted political power – and, like most politician-types - was consumed with lust for more. And he operated under a matrix of bias, prejudice, pride, lust and paranoia to boot. Controlling him would be so easy. He already only saw what he wanted to see and heard only what he wanted to hear; with just a little subtle leading, he could surely be made to interpret all the things his half-open eyes saw and/or his selectively tuned ears heard however a clever controller suggested. Alas, *Balak* is not alone in this regard. The same holds true for all people who choose to let bias, prejudice, pride, and/or paranoia, shape their perspective on the world. Examples from the parsha include *Bila’am*, who will let the combination of his own greed and his Moavi sponsors’ paranoia frame his narrative; *Zimri*, a prince of the tribe of *Sh’mon* [i.e. *Simeon*], who will let the exotic beauty of a Midyani priestess seduce him away from the Holy One, the Covenant, the Torah, and his destiny; and thousands of the elect – *B’nei Yisrael* – who will follow the counsel of *Bila’am* and the way of *Zimri* to their destruction. Ah, Beloved, the occult is definitely nothing to play with.

So . . . what about *you*, Dear One? Are you a good ‘mark’? Do you understand your own areas of fleshly vulnerability? Have you been letting the occult manipulators of your day – be they dressed in in the garb of politics, media, entertainment, education, science, medicine, philosophy, ideology, or religion - 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 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 – *i.e. And 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 11:1³**. *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 wait until you see what allowing others to frame your perspective and use emotionally charged narratives to stir up fear, hate, outrage, and disgust does to a group that dabbles in the occult!

Balak, Son of Tzipor –

³ 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.*’

A Descendant of Lot and His Firstborn Daughter!

Who is *Balak* going to be to us? All we are told about him is that he is *a son of Tzippor*. We will soon discover that he is king over the nation of Moav. As such, he will become the fifth in a series of prophetic foreign kings who have recently stepped forward to challenge the Covenant People's right to exist. One by one each of the four kings that preceded him has strutted onto and then rapidly retreated off of Torah's stage. So far these kings' desperate attempts to intimidate if not annihilate the chosen people of the Living God have proven fruitless. The Covenant lives on – and the Covenant People continue their march to their assigned destiny.

Will Balak, the fifth prophetic king to rise up against us, fare better? He will definitely get more press – and be responsible for a pretty impressive plague. But in the end the People of the Holy One will yet again arise and overcome - and Balak will wind up suffering a fate no less ignominious than that of Sichon and Og. He, like they, will become mere footnotes in world history. So why has the Holy One ordained that we should read – and teach our children - their stories? Because the narratives of the interactions these kings had with our forefathers are prophetic of experiences that we are destined to have with enemies who strut and fret on the world stage in the time of the Great Regathering. So let us not be too quick to move past these 'strategic encounter narratives'. In reading about the historical challenges ancient persons and movements – diabolically empowered by the occult realm - posed to our ancestors - we are being prepared to meet and deal with the very real challenges we and/or our children will face in the future.

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

The first pagan king to 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.

The Challenge of Prophetic Enemy #2: The King of Arad

Then we ran into the king of Kena’ani city of Arad. A human trafficker, he sent raiding parties against us and took some of us hostage. The Holy One’s Strong Right Hand delivered them right back into our hands. And in the course of our rescue of the captives taken by the King of Arad, all the cities of Arad were destroyed.

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

Next we were attacked by the armies of Sichon, the king of the Emori hordes who were occupying Cheshbon. Sichon came at us headlong with all his military might – and the Holy One delivered his army and his land into our authority.

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

Immediately after Sichon’s defeat his confederate, Og, the warlord/strongman of the Emori occupying Bashan, raised up an army to annihilate us. His forces attacked us with fury and skill, only to be met head-on by the same supernatural Defender Who had protected us from the other bloodthirsty anti-Semites we encountered along the way.

Finally the only hostile people group left standing between the Covenant People and entry into the Holy One promised would be our inheritance are the people of *Moav*.

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

The parsha named for Balak is the prophetic story of the Holy One’s dealings with the final anti-Semitic king who will rise up to stand in the way of our Great Destiny. We discussed who Balak was – historically and prophetically - in the Introductory Study for this parsha. Now it is time to stop and try to imagine what the world – and this situation - looked like through his eyes.

The Challenge that Balak Faced

Let’s start our studies for the week by looking at the situation that is shaping up through Balak’s eyes. What he sees encamped in his nation is not just any old bunch of refugees. These strangers have *fire in their eyes*. They march *in perfect*

order, an army majestic with banners.

*The Holy One their God dwells in their midst.
An awe-inspiring pillar of fire and cloud leads them.*

Manna falls for them from Heaven on six out of every seven days. 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 rock pours forth unending supplies of water for them and their livestock to drink. Moreover, when the powerful and blustery king of Edom mustered his army and prepared for battle against Israel and came away without a single scalp. Then when the Kena'ani armies under the command of the king of Arad and Moav's much stronger neighbors 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*. Og and Bashan and the king of Arad - the *toughest guys* in Balak's neighborhood – all three got *crushed like flies* along with their formidable armies of occupation. Edom, it appears, got extremely lucky that the Holy One had another route in mind for Israel than through his land.

With this sudden change in the balance of power in the region, Balak saw a power vacuum he could manipulate to his advantage. He concluded that if he just played one or two cards right ... well, the role of supreme ruler that he coveted could be his. He figured that with just a little luck he could make a name for himself that would never be forgotten. The only thing standing in the way of his realization of his dreams were the people with fire in their eyes who were presently encamped on his Western frontier.

What, Balak must have wondered, were the intentions of the people 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*? If Balak 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. At that time 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."*

Israel was no threat to Moav. The only land the Israelites wanted was the area on the East bank of the Jordan. The Holy One did not intend for any harm whatever to come to the descendants of Lot. **Deuteronomy 2:9.**

Quite frankly, Israel did not want or need anything Moav had to offer. 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 *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.

Never waste a good crisis, the spin-masters of today’s world tell us⁴. 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.

On the Surface Level – What A Story of Missed Opportunity!

Have you ever *wasted* a wonderful opportunity? More specifically, have you ever been afraid of and reacted negatively against something that would – if you embraced it rather than fought it - be extremely good for you? If your answer is “yes” then parsha *Balak* is going to be extremely meaningful to you. It is the story of a missed opportunity - a knee-jerk negative response to the very thing by which the Holy One offered blessing to an entire ethnic group. The *Moavim* [Moabites] as a nation and the *Midyanim* as an ethnic group are both going to completely ‘blow’ tremendous opportunities to reunite with and receive blessing through the Covenant People of the Holy One. They will conspire against and seduce by deception and mistreat the Bride-to-be of the Holy One – and as a result they will each reap the Bridegroom’s wrath.

Why Does Torah Devote So Much Attention to the Deeds of Balak and Bila’am?

The account of Balak is given to provide us with a prophetic prototype of the *Mashiach Tachat* [often called the Anti-Messiah⁵ or ‘Anti-Christ’] who will appear and

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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 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

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.

***Setting the Stage for the Very Important Lessons the Narratives
of Parsha Balak Are Strategically 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 join forces with 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? Or should they attack them and try to drive them away?

The Divine Writer of Torah actually transports us deep inside ancient Moav to reveal the turmoil that was going on in the hearts of Balak's people.

Vayagor Moav mip'nei ha-am me'od

And the Moabites were very unsettled

ki rav-hu

because the [Israeli] people were so numerous.

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**; cf. **Matthew 7:23**. In the *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.

vayakotz Moav mip'nei b'nei Yisra'el
And Moav loathed the faces 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 their king to decide the proper course of action that the nation should take. The fate of the Moavi hangs in the balance. What was Balak to do?

Balak Chooses His Course

In response to the approach of B'nei Yisrael Balak became agitated. He realized that the arrival of the Holy One's people in his country was *the most significant challenge his administration would ever face*. To combat the threat Balak devised what he thought was a sure-fire *two-part plan* to insure that the Covenant People would stay far from his little kingdom. First of all, Balak decided to hastily form a 'strange bedfellows' type of alliance with an archenemy of Balak's people, namely, the *Midyanim* [Midianites]. Secondly, in conspiracy with Midyani leaders, Balak hatched a plan to deal with the 'Israeli situation' by hiring a well-known seer, *Bila'am*, to curse the strange people who on their border who *delight in the Sabbath* and *sing the songs of Tziyon*.

The common people of Moav and Midyan did not, I suspect, 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 probably did not agree on the model of government, and the role it should play in society. They probably disagreed strongly on how civilization 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 did agree on one thing: that, *under all circumstances, whatever the cost, Israel must be destroyed*.

Ah, 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

All this plotting and scheming of Moav and Midyan is, of course, completely unknown by anyone in the camp of B'nei Yisrael. Moshe and everyone else in the Redeemed Community was totally oblivious, clueless, and 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. He is not ever going to be caught slumbering or sleeping when it

comes to plots against His Bride-to-be. The Holy One has heard every word Balak and the elders of Moav and Midyan have spoken in their secret meetings. He has 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 – albeit secretly - on behalf of His betrothed.

***Whom Will You Curse, Whom Will You Bless,
And Whom Will You Serve?***

Enter Bila'am. The charismatic prophet of Pe'or by the River is at a critical crossroads. He is either going to participate in the plans of His Creator concerning his life and his destiny ... or his name is going to become a byword among the nations in all generations. It is all up to him. There is much potential for good in Bila'am – as there is in every human being. But there is also much fertile ground for mayhem in him. There is a great calling from the Kingdom of Heaven upon Bila'am's life; but alas there is also a tremendous amount of attraction in him toward the dominion of darkness.

There are two trees in everyone's spiritual garden, Dear Reader. 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 that 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 bless? Whom will YOU curse? Whom will YOU serve? What *worldview* will YOU adopt? What *priorities* will YOU embrace? What *guidelines for living* will YOU follow? Whose *honor and glory* will YOU promote? Perhaps even more importantly *what course, in regard to each of these questions, will YOU counsel others to follow*. Bila'am is eventually going to make the wrong choices. Please do not walk in the way of Bila'am.

Entertaining/Consorting With/Conspiring 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 actually *offering these plotters of iniquity overnight fellowship in his home*.

Vayomer aleihem linu foh ha-laylah v'hashivoti etchem
Spend the night here,' he replied to them

davar ka'asher yedaber Adonai elay vayesh'vu

'and when the Holy One speaks to me, I will give you an answer.'

It certainly would seem that Bila'am, renowned seer that he was, 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 alas that is not what happened. Instead the dark side of Bila'am's personality won out. He welcomed the men who plotted evil. He listened with rapt attention to their *lashon ha ra*. And he agreed to consider it. Hmmmn - is that the Serpent I hear whispering in Bila'am's ear '*You will not surely die*'!

Bila'am has touched the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Before the 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?*

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.* In this regard please remember that neither Balak nor his Midyani cohorts came to Bila'am seeking blessing from him for themselves or for their nations. They came seeking only the 'dark' side of Bila'am's gifting. That fact alone should have told Bila'am volumes about the spiritual essence of the men with whom he was dealing. But the Holy One made it even clearer, telling Bila'am in no uncertain terms:

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. He 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'tzeichem

... he said to Balak's dignitaries, 'Go back to your land!'

ki me'en Adonai letiti l'haloch imachem

The Holy One [i.e. the covenant God of Israel] 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.

Even 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 thereby attract many adherents. Because he has ‘sold out’ for the praise and payment of men, however, 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 to silence the true *voice* – and *to hear only what he wants to hear*, so that he can *do what he wants to do*. ‘For this reason when a second, more influential delegation comes to entice Bila’am to do what the Holy One has specifically told him not to do, saying ***Ki-chabed achabeidcha me'od v'chol asher-tomar elay e'eseh*** [i.e. *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 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 veito 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 gedolah

*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 immediately stood up and shown these men the door. But that is not what happened. Instead Bila’am said to the men:

V'atah sheivu 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:

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 eleicha 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! Meanwhile, Bila'am is taking off. He already has his donkey saddled up. Taking two servants with him he is off on the road to Moav, basking in the adulation of the impressive delegation sent to him by a king and the elders of two nations. Like Shaul of Tarsus riding his majestic stallion off to an important date in Damascus he thinks he is finally about to become the man of the hour. And in a sense he is correct. But the Holy One just might have a surprise or two waiting for him along the road!

Questions For Today's Study

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. Write a one to two-page report on Bila'am. Divide the paper into five subtopics:

[A] Where he was from and who he was;

[B] What his name means and how it described him;

[C] What the B'rit Chadasha says about him. [Hint: see *II Peter 2:15-16*; and *Revelation 2:14*];

[D] What was his greatest sin [Hint: see *Numbers 31:14-16*]; and

[E] When and how he died [Hint: see *Numbers 31:2-8*].

3. Bila'am is a fascinating person. His charisma was such that he was looked upon as "the answer" to the presence on earth of people who have a Covenant with 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 Hebrew people. **Numbers 22:11.**

[A] In the first encounter between the Moabite princes and Bila'am what is Balaam's reply to the invitation to go with them and curse the Hebrews?

[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"? What purpose[s] does the Holy One's interaction with such a man serve?

[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? 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".

4. The traditional Haftarah for parsha *Balak* is an excerpt from the book of the prophet *Micah*. In today's opening aliyah Micah is discussing the coming Messianic Kingdom. As we begin our readings Micah is prophetically announcing that restored Israel, under Messiah, will be a world power:

They will rule the land of Ashshur with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in its gates.

He will deliver us from the Ashshur,

When he invades our land, and when he marches within our border.

The remnant of Ya'akov will be in the midst of many peoples,

Like dew from the Holy One, Like showers on the grass,

That don't wait for man, Nor wait for the sons of men.

The remnant of Ya'akov will be among the nations,

in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the animals of the forest -

like a young lion among the flocks of sheep;

Who, if he goes through, treads down and tears in pieces,

and there is no one to deliver. Let your hand be lifted up above your adversaries,

and let all of your enemies be cut off.

[Micah 5:6-10]

But Micah prophesies that the "dominion" of Israel over its neighbors and adversaries will not be enforced by military might:

It will happen in that day," says the Holy One,

That I will cut off your horses out of the midst of you, and will destroy your chariots.

I will cut off the cities of your land, and will tear down all your strongholds.

[Micah 5: 11]

[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. 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 teaching is established by I Corinthians 1:10-19, as follows:

*Now I beg you, brothers, through the name of our Lord,
Yeshua the Messiah, that you all speak the same thing
and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfected together
in the same mind and in the same judgment.
For 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."
Is Messiah divided? Was Sha'ul crucified for you?
Or were you immersed into the name of Sha'ul?*

*I thank God that I immersed none of you, except Crispus and Gaius,
so that no one should say that I had immersed you into my own name.
(I also immersed the household of Stefanus;
besides them, I don't know whether I immersed any other.)
For Messiah sent me not to immerse, but to preach the Good News – not in wisdom of words,
so that the execution stake of Messiah wouldn't be made void.
For the message of the execution stake is foolishness to those who are dying,
but to us who are saved it is the power of God.
For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
I will bring the discernment of the discerning to nothing⁶."*

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

⁶ Shaul is paraphrasing Isaiah 29:10 and 14. In its context the passage reads as follows: “*For the Holy One has poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes: the prophets [nevi'im] and your rulers [roshim], the seers [chozim] has he covered.*” ... *The Holy One said ‘Because this people draw near [to me], and with their mouth and with their lips to honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear of me is a mitzvah of men which has been taught [them]; therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men [Hebrew, chakamin] shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men [Hebrew, biynat] shall be hid.*” The verb root of the noun “Wise Men” – *chakamin*, is *chet, kaf, mem sofit, chakam*, Strong’s Hebrew word #2449, meaning *to be cunning, shrewd, saavy, skilful*. The verb root of the noun “Prudent Men” is *beit, yod, nun sofit, biyn*, Strong’s Hebrew word #995, meaning “*to understand, discern, perceive – or make sense of things*”.

*Where is the wise man⁷? Where is the scholar⁸?
Where is the philosopher of this world?
Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

*For seeing that in the wisdom of God,
the world through its wisdom didn't know God,
it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching⁹
to save those who aman¹⁰.*

*For Y'hudim ask for signs, Yevanim seek after wisdom,
but we preach Messiah crucified¹¹;
a stumbling block to Y'hudim, and foolishness to Yevanim,
but to those who are called, both Y'hudim and Yevanim,
Messiah is the power of God and the wisdom of God.
Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men,
and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

[I Corinthians 1:20-25]

[A] What problem has led Shaul to write this letter?

[B] In verse 19 Shaul quotes one of the *Nevi'im* [prophets] of the TaNaKh. Which *Navi* of the TaNaKh 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 can not 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 does he say is the weakness of the Jewish people?

[G] How does Shaul identify the "weakness" of people who surrender to a Greek mindset and worldview?

[H] What is it about the message of the atoning death of the Messiah that 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 those with a Greek mindset and worldview?

[J] How does the atoning death of Messiah demonstrate the power of the Holy One?

⁷ Since this refers back to Isaiah 27:14 we know Shaul is thinking "*chakamin*".

⁸ Since this refers back to Isaiah 27:14 we know Shaul is thinking "*biynat*".

⁹ The Greek word is *kerugma* [pronounced *kay'-roog-mah*], Strong's Greek word #2782. The word is first found in the gospels in Matthew 12:41, where it describes what *Yonah* [Jonah] did in Nineveh. As you will recall he did not expound doctrine or sermonize. He proclaimed merely: "*Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.*" He did not explain or teach. He did not make the message "visitor friendly". He merely proclaimed the message the Holy One wanted him to convey and let that message speak for itself.

¹⁰ As demonstrated in Nineveh, to "believe" is not to intellectually accept a statement as true, but to totally restructure one's life in light of the truth. See **Jonah 3:5-10**.

¹¹ The same way Jonah declared, without explanation, "*Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.*" **Jonah 3:4**.

[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 16:1-7

*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.*

*By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for.
By the fear of the Holy One men depart from evil.*

*When a man's ways please the Holy One,
He makes even his enemies to be at shalom with him.*