


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday night*..... קדש

Friday 4 July 2014 - 6 Tammuz 5774
Sedra Balak

ANOTHER STEP FORWARD...

ONE OF THE AMAZING FEATURES OF THE RECENT HISTORY of the Jewish people is the success of the movement to strengthen our bonds with our spiritual heritage. Today there is a striking increase of interest in Jewish matters. In locations literally all over the world, there are study groups exploring Jewish tradition. To an increasing extent, men and women are rediscovering aspects of Jewish life which, fifty years ago, many people assumed were a thing of the past, with no relevance in the modern world.

This is a step by step process. Certain Jewish teachings fit our modern style of living and thinking quite easily. Others seem at first a little more difficult. Nonetheless, when you look around the various Jewish communities, you see that observance of even more challenging Mitzvot are gradually increasing. More people are putting on Tefilin in Sweden, or going to the Mikveh in Florida.

Some Jewish teachings concern practical actions. Others concern ideas. One of the Jewish concepts which perhaps needs a little extra effort is expressed in the Sedra¹: belief in and expectation of the Messiah.



In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin
 (Yenta bas Devora) ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772
 Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'

Balaam the heathen prophet was hired by King Balak to curse the Jews. Time and again, G-d forced him to give a blessing. The most famous of these is *MahTovu*, "How good are your tents, Israel"², found at the beginning of the Prayerbook.

Balaam's final statement was a prophecy about the future. "I see it but not now, I can perceive it but it is not near: a star will shoot forth from Jacob..."³.

The Sages understand the 'star' as referring to the Messiah. The Hebrew word for star is *kochab*. Around the year 132, a Jewish leader named Bar Koziva led a rebellion against the Romans. At first it seemed that this would be successful, and that soon the Temple would be rebuilt. Rabbi Akiva declared that this leader was the Messiah. In reference to the word *kochab* in Balaam's prophecy, he took the name Bar Kochba.

Seventy years later there was another great Jewish leader who was considered by some of his disciples to be the potential Messiah. This was Rabbi Judah HaNasi (the Prince). He lived in a tranquil time, and he wrote the Mishnah which became the basic text of Jewish tradition, after the Bible.

In our modern world, how do we conceive the concept of the Redemption? Let us start with the way we think and behave, in a family or a community. We are told that the Jewish people are united together on a fundamental level. Our souls are one; "only the bodies are separate"⁴. Imagine if we *really* could see in this way, and act in accordance with that vision...

Jewish belief is that if we can transform our way of looking at life, this will affect the entire world. We will merit the actual Messiah, who will inspire everyone to live up to the exalted ideal of being a human being, created by G-d. And then, with the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, the Divine Presence will again dwell with us in our world of human beings, as it did in the Garden of Eden⁵.

1. Numbers 22:2-25:9. 2. Num.24:5. 3. Num.24:17. 4. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi's *Tanya*, ch.32. 5. See Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn's *Basi LeGani*, ch.1.

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SEDRA BALAK

TALKING DONKEY

It was a bright, sunny Sunday afternoon. Tony and his sister Lena are strolling through the fun-fare in a massive park near their house. The park is filled with people of all shapes and sizes, milling around the masses of entertainment. There are all sorts of rides, dizzy ones, fast ones and even scary ones.

They had both had a shot at the shooting grounds, bumped and zoomed on the go-carts and were now looking around the various stalls, each with different games but rather similar prizes. 'I wonder what I would do with a teddy bear anyways', said Lena, who was slightly bored. 'Let's go and find something interesting to do'.

'How about that?', asked Tony, pointing towards an enclosed area with a donkey inside. A funny man with a red scarf and green trousers was next to it and a lot of people were standing around looking. 'Looks interesting,' said Lena, 'let's head over there'.

'What is he doing?' Tony asked one of the spectators. 'Shhh!' hissed the man. 'He is talking to the donkey and the donkey is meant to be talking back to him' he whispered. 'But be quiet now, we are all trying to hear'.

Tony and Lena laughed. 'He's just trying to imitate Balaam's donkey' whispered Tony. 'Remind me what happened,' said Lena.

'Balaam is the guy that wanted to curse the Jewish people
This week's Torah portion is all about it...'

'But wasn't there also a man called Balak?', asked Lena.

'Ok ' said Tony, 'Balak was this king of Moab who wanted to harm the Jewish people. So he got a kind of sorcerer called Balaam to come and curse the Jews. He thought that way he could stop them from entering the Land of Israel. As Balaam was riding on his donkey to go to curse them, an angel stood in the way with a fiery sword in his hand.'

'Because G-d didn't want him to go?'

' That's right. The donkey saw the angel and was afraid and stopped moving. But Balaam didn't see the angel and began shouting and hitting the donkey, yelling that it should move. The donkey tried to, but the angel still stood in the way. Balaam was infuriated, and kept hitting it. Suddenly the donkey opened its mouth and began talking!'

'I remember now,' said Lena. 'The donkey asked Balaam if he had ever behaved like this. Balaam said no. Then G-d let Balaam also see the angel, and he was ashamed of hitting the donkey.'

'Yes, that's right. And in the end Balaam couldn't curse the Jews. When he opened his mouth to say the curse, he began blessing the Jews instead!'

'I guess he didn't know that G-d was determined that the Jewish people would get the Land of Israel,' said Lena.

The people around them were still very quiet, trying to hear what the donkey might say. The funny man seemed upset that it wasn't talking.

Lena said, 'Anyway, this poor showman is just trying to imitate a story from the Torah. Let's move on.'

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