

## Balak

This week's Sidra relates the events which followed the encamping of the Bnai Yisroel near the borders of the country of Moav. Balak, the King of Moav tried to weaken and destroy the Jews by hiring a well known sorcerer, Bilam, to curse them. Bilam ascended a hill which offered a panoramic view of the encamped Jews, and after performing several pagan sacrifices, waited for the proper inspiration to curse the people. However, as he opened his mouth to spew words of hate, a miracle occurred and Divinely-inspired praises came forth, some of them so beautiful and meaningful that they have been incorporated into our daily *Tefilos*.

In Bilam's blessings we find the phrase, "*Ki Meirosh Tzurim Avenu...*"—"I see him (the Jewish nation) from the peak of flinty rocks..." The commentaries explain that this phrase refers to the rock-solid foundation of the Jewish people, namely, their Forefathers.<sup>1</sup> The prophet Yeshaya, many years later, expressed a similar idea by exclaiming to the Jews, "*Habitu El Tzur Chutzavtem*"—"Look to the rock from which you were hewn" using the word *tzur* for rock.<sup>2</sup> The obvious question comes to mind, why is the word "*Tzur*", which is literally translated as flintstone, used to describe the rock-solid foundation of the Jewish people.

A flintstone has a remarkable property which sets it aside from all other types of stones or rocks. When struck by another stone, it produces sparks which can then be ignited into a roaring flame. Even more remarkable, however, is the fact that a flintstone can be immersed in water, the opposite extreme of fire, and still be capable of producing a flame. No matter how long it remains in the water, hundreds and even thousands of years, if it is taken out and struck, a fiery spark will be faithfully produced.

This is the reason why the word "tzur" is used; for it is this quality of the flintstone which is ascribed to the Jewish people. A Jew can never lose his Jewishness, for he has within him a "*Chelek Elokah Mimaal Mamash*" a *neshama*, a G-dly spark which can never be extinguished.<sup>3</sup> Even if he is submerged for years in a veritable ocean of spiritual harmful influences which tear him away from his Yiddishkeit, the spark of G-dliness can never be drowned or destroyed. With the proper approach, and stimulation, the Divine spark of Jewish Identity will surely be ignited and fanned into a roaring flame.

The above lesson teaches us that any Jew or Jewess, no matter how far away they may seem to be, should not be considered as being lost to Judaism. This gives us the inspiration to continue to spread the light of Torah and Mitzvos and will enable us to see the fulfilment of the prophecy "And the land will be filled with knowledge of G-d like the waters cover the ocean" with the coming of Moshiach Tzidkaynu, speedily in our days.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Bamidbar 23:9, Rashi
2. Isaiah 51:1
3. Tanya Chapter 2, based on Job 31:2