

PRAISES BY AN OUTSIDER

Parshas Bolok

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

The glorification of the Jewish people, profusely expressed in this Sidrah by the non-Jewish prophet Bilaam, is of paramount significance. So vital and intrinsic is it, that there was a consideration to include it in the daily recital of Shema Yisroel (Brochos 12b). Compliments to an individual, or to a nation, possess the vitamins to encourage the efforts to live up to potential achievement. Especially when one feels downcast, the Bilaam testimonial contains the elements to uplift the spirit.

The fact that praises emanate from a non-Jewish prophet does not diminish but rather enhances its meaningfulness. King Solomon disparages one who praises himself "Let a stranger praise you, not your own mouth" (Mishlei 27:2). The same applies to the Jewish people collectively.

One ventures to say, furthermore, that the very bestowal of prophecy upon a non-Jew was for the purpose of these compliments to gain substance, as it comes from an outsider.

The most amazing anecdote in this Parsha is the talking donkey. This, too, one wishes to suggest, is a sublime compliment to the Jewish people. So we can learn from a fascinating observation of the Sar Sholom, Belzer Rebbe, R' Sholom Rokeach z.t.l. in the first chapter of Beraishis.

In Bilaam's journey to the vicinity of the Israelites in order to curse them, an angel appears to block the path. The donkey notices the angel and crouches beneath Bilaam. This angers Bilaam who strikes the donkey with the staff three times. At this stage, Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey, and it complained to Bilaam for striking it Sholosh Regolim (three times). Rashi quotes a Midrash that Sholosh Regolim is a reference to the three festivals. You Bilaam want

to uproot a people who observe the pilgrimage to the Beth Hamikdosh three times a year, on the three festivals.

On these three festivals the Torah promises divine blessings to the Jewish pilgrimage. See Netziv, Haamek Dovor, Devorim 16:16, on not appearing before Hashem empty-handed. "YIREH - YAIROEH" He will also go back home not empty-handed, but filled with divine blessings. This, says the Netziv, is the reference when we pray on festivals "V'hasiainu ... Bestow upon us ... the blessing of the festivals ... as You desired and "promised" to bless us."

These divine blessings on the festivals are most pivotal and basic to the survival of all creation, including the animals.

In Beraishis the Torah records (1:26-28) the creation of Adam and Eve, the blessing to be fruitful and multiply. The Torah continues Hashem's telling Adam and Eve about the fruits they may eat, and the grass, green herbs, food for the animals. After this final food arrangement the Torah says "And Hashem saw all that He had made and behold it was very good." Comments the Sar Sholom of Belz z.t.l., this final arrangement of food for the animals and for man, is the harbinger of the statement about all of creation that it was very good. The greens provide energy to the animal, the animal in turn serves man. Later with Noach, also meat is allowed. Thus the full creation is included in the divine vision that "it was very good". The purpose of it all is for man to serve Hashem, ultimately the observant Jew serving Hashem through his Mitzvoahs. When the Jew comes to the Beth Hamikdosh on the festivals, and receives Hashem's blessing, the animal world, and all creation, are truly blessed.

This may be the profundity in the special creation of the donkey's mouth. It represents the animal world, and all creation, which benefits from the festival blessings. To the Jewish people at the helm of the festival blessing, it is an eloquent compliment.

