

BALAK 5773

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Parashat Balak is always a welcome relief from the stressful news we read and hear about in the world around us. We go to sleep every night knowing that our neighboring countries, our “cousins”, are constantly planning and plotting to annihilate us in every way possible.

But then we read Parashat Balak. We realize that this kind of planning and plotting is nothing new. Our enemies have tried every mean and way; from nuclear weapon, to chemical weapons and even cursing weapons from the mouth of a Bil’am HaRasha, who indeed, represented such a weapon. But the Shomer Yisrael, HaKadosh Baruch Hu, never slumbers or sleeps, He is our Guardian. The plans of Balak and Bil’am repeatedly fail, although they expended much energy and many animal sacrifices.

The story of Balak and Bil’am is the only episode of our people written in the Torah that has no other witnesses besides the Ribbono Shel Olam. About three million people experienced the Yetziat Mitzrayim [Exodus from Egypt] event, the splitting of the Yam Suf, the falling of the daily Manna, the miraculous “well” that sustained our people with water, but not so the Balak-Bil’am dangers.

Our people were totally unaware of the dangerously threatening words that potentially could have emanated from the mouth of Bil’am. We know what Bil’am tried to do, only because HaShem told Moshe to include it in the Torah. Obviously, G-d wanted us to know what transpired in the country of Mo’av. He wants us to be aware that throughout the course of Jewish history our enemies have plotted and planned to harm us only to be thwarted by Avinu She’bashamayim [our Father in Heaven]

For sure, we have to be vigilant and constantly on guard by utilizing all our resources of intelligence, radar systems, undercover agents and secret services, to know what is transpiring in our enemy camps... But after all is said and done, as long as the One Above is pleased with us, then we can rely upon “*HINEI LO YANUM VELO YISHON SHOMEIR YISRAEL*”” Behold, He Who watches Israel shall neither slumber or sleep” [Tehilim 121]. The Balak –Bil’am parasha assures us that we can continue with our daily lives, sleep peacefully at night, feeling secure that the Shomer Yisrael is there for us.

Gemara Megillah [14a] asks, “Why is Hallel not recited on Purim?” One of the three answers given is, *KRI’ATA ZOH HALLEILA*” that the mere reading of Megillat Esther is tantamount to reciting Hallel. For Hallel means expressing praise and thanks to G-d for the miracle done on our behalf; and Megillat Esther does just that. Hallel is recited

not only for overt and miraculous events, but even for a NES NISTAR, hidden and seemingly natural events. Therefore the Beracha of “*SHE’ASA NISSIM LA’AVOTEINU*” is recited on Purim just as on Chanukah.

Now I ask you, is the miracle that transpired behind the scenes of Mo’av any less miraculous and profound than the events of Purim? I therefore believe that hearing Parashat Balak being read from the Torah is considered equivalent to hearing Hallel recited.

But the Parsha also teaches us, in the very last nine pesukim, that when we do things within our own camp against the Torah that displease G-d, a catastrophe can occur. Not one Jew was harmed by the attempted curses of Bil’am, but twenty-four thousand Jews died as a result of our doing something that angered HaShem. The lesson is simple, we ourselves, not our enemies, could cause our own destruction. The parasha begins with happiness but ends with tragedy. Just as Hallel begins with praises of joy but ends with “Ana HaShem Hoshi’a Na, Ana HaShem Hatz’licha Na”, Please G-d, save us now! Because we don’t know what tomorrow will bring.

This month of Tamuz begins in happiness, many weddings and joyous celebrations, but the month ends in sadness and mourning. But don’t be too upset, because the following month of Av begins in sadness yet ends with great happiness- Shabbat Nachamu.