

THE Chabad Weekly Vol. 4, # 36

Chabad of North Beverly Hills, 409 Foothill Rd. Beverly Hills, 90210

beverlyhillschabad.com

Rabbi Yosef Shusterman 310-271-9063

We all heard the story related in this week's Torah reading, Balak, about how King Balak summons Balaam to curse the Children of Israel and how G-d transforms the curses in the wicked prophet's mouth into blessings. We read the verses flowing from Balaam's lips, which include some of the most exquisite things ever said about the Jewish people. Beautiful story. But only the Talmud asks: What did Balaam want to say? What were those curses of his that were transformed into blessings?

Well, follows the Talmudic logic, if the curses were transformed into blessings, then the curses would be the diametric opposite of the blessings. If we wish to know what Balaam wanted to say, we should take a closer look at the words he actually mouthed.

What did Balaam bless? That great kings shall arise in Israel, establishing a dynasty that will span generations and never be disrupted; that Israel shall be sovereign in their land forever, the greatest and most powerful in the family of nations, the Divine Presence dwelling in her midst, leading mankind in their quest to know and serve their Maker. So what did Balaam want to say? The exact opposite, of course: that Israel's kings shall fall, her royal dynasty be cut off, her sovereignty cease, the Divine Presence in her Holy Temple depart, her power fail, her leadership fade.

But the Talmud doesn't leave it at that. Pressing its point, it insists: so what happened in the end? The days of David and Solomon saw the fulfillment of Balaam's blessings. But then everything began to fall apart. The people abandoned their G-d, the nation was rent by strife; the Davidic dynasty was dethroned, the Holy Temple destroyed, the proud nation expelled from their land and subjugated and persecuted for centuries.

So in the end Balaam's curses prevailed! G-d transformed them into blessings, but we transformed them back into Balaam's original format. The beautiful story came to a ruinous end.

But there is one blessing which we have retained. "How goodly are your tents O Jacob," proclaimed Balaam from the Heights of Peor. These, says the Talmud, are the houses of prayer and the houses of learning planted in the heart of every Jewish community.

These tents and dwellings have never folded. After two dozen centuries as "children banished from their father's table," we still commune with G-d three times a day in our houses of prayer. Thirty-three centuries after Sinai, the Torah is still studied, expounded and debated in our houses of learning.

To this blessing we have held fast. And this blessing shall restore all the others to us. (By Yanki Tauber - chabadonline.com)

Curse me this people, for he is mightier than me (22:6) The Hebrew phrase, Atzum hu mimeni ("He is mightier than me") also translates, "He is mightier from me." For in truth, the might of the people of Israel is Moshiach, who is descendent of Balak! (Ruth the Moabite, ancestress of King David, is a descendent of Balak). (Shaloh)

And G-d happened upon Balaam (23:4) Regarding G-d's appearances to Moses, the Torah uses the word vayikra ("and He called") which is an expression of closeness and love; whilst to the prophets of the idolatrous nations the word used is vayikar ("and He happened upon") -- an expression that connotes temporality and promiscuity. (Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

The hallmark of evil and unholiness is an attitude of "It just happened." Nothing is coincidental to the Jew; every event is purposeful and significant. (Chassidic Saying)

There shall shoot forth a star out of Jacob (24:17) This means that every Jew has a spark of the soul of Moshiach in his soul. (Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov) chabadonline.com

THE "THREE WEEKS"

This summer, during the months of July and August, comes a very serious time for the Jewish people, when many terrible things happened throughout history. This period is called The "Three Weeks," or Bain HaMetzrim, which means "Between the Straits."

What happened during this time? On the 17th of Tamuz: 1) Moses descended from Mt. Sinai and smashed the two Tablets with the Ten Commandments when he saw the Jews worshipping the Golden Calf; 2) The Romans breached the walls of Jerusalem in 70 c.e.; 3) During the siege of Jerusalem the daily sacrifice was interrupted by Nebuchadnezzar; 4) Apostomus publicly burned a Torah scroll; and 5) An idol was erected in the courtyard of the Holy Temple. On the 9th of Av, both the First and Second Temple were destroyed, bringing terrible suffering upon the Jewish people. (From: *Living with Moshiach-Balak 5758*, www.moshiach.net)

Good Grief

There is nothing as whole as a broken heart. (Chassidic saying)

Depression is not a sin; but what depression does, no sin can do. (Chassidic saying)

Is sad bad? Chassidic teaching differentiates between two types of sorrow: merirut, a constructive grief, and atzvut, a destructive grief. Merirut is the distress of one who not only recognizes his failings but also cares about them; one who agonizes over the wrongs he has committed, over his missed opportunities, over his unrealized potential; one who refuses to become indifferent to what is deficient in himself and his world. Atzvut is the distress of one who has despaired of himself and his fellow man, whose melancholy has drained him of hope and initiative. Merirut is a springboard for self-improvement; atzvut is a bottomless pit.

How does one distinguish between the two? The first is active, the second—passive. The first one weeps, the second's eyes are dry and blank. The first one's mind and heart are in turmoil, the second's are still with apathy and heavy as lead. And what happens when it passes, when they emerge from their respective bouts of grief? The first one springs to action: resolving, planning, taking his first faltering steps to undo the causes of his sorrow. The second one goes to sleep. ([i]. Based on Tanya, ch. 31. - chabadonline.com)

THE BALL SHEM TOV'S AHAVAT YISRAEL (LOVE OF FELLOW JEW) WAS BEYOND IMAGINATION. THE MAGGID SAID: "IF ONLY WE COULD KISS A SEFER-TORAH WITH THE SAME LOVE THAT MY MASTER KISSED THE CHILDREN WHEN HE TOOK THEM TO CHEDER AS A TEACHER'S ASSISTANT!" (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM, TAMMUZ 16)

The reason for the difference between Yomtov and Shabbos is that Yomtov is the idea of joy, in which one must be careful that nothing bad will eventuate. Shabbos, however, is the idea of delight, which is so lofty that nothing bad can come from it. Even the lowest category of Jews, those who are Jews in name only, are elevated on Shabbos to the highest of levels.

- The Rebbe