

INSIGHTS from the SEDRA

Insights from the Sedra is a project of the Scholar's Kollel of Great Neck. It aims to provide several questions and answers about the Sedra, culled from various commentaries, including the following: Baal Haturim, Darash Moshe, Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky, Torah Treasures by Dov Furer, Wellsprings of Torah by Alexander Friedman, and Kol Dodi by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Great Torah Lights by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman, Something To Say by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, The Vilna Gaon, Growth Through Torah by Zelig Pliskin and The Call of the Torah.

Introduction

Of the 54 *parshiyot* of the Torah, five bear the names of people: *Noach*, *Yitro*, *Korach*, *Balak* and *Pinchas*. *Noach* was considered a *tzaddik* in his generation; *Yitro* merited a special chapter in the Torah due to his precious advice to *Moshe*. Of *Korach* and his assembly, the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 110) tells us that they were great in Torah. *Pinchas* sanctified Hashem's name. But why *Balak*, who wished to terminate *Bnei Yisrael's* sojourn, merit a *parsha* in his name?

The Talmud (*Sota* 47) tells us that in the merit of 42 sacrifices that *Balak*, king of *Moav*, brought, he merited the progeny of *Ruth* who brought forth *Dovid HaMelch* and *Shlomo HaMelech*. The merit of these renowned offspring, the great kings of Israel, justified the eternalizing of this gentile king who did not hide his intense hatred for Israel. (Torah Gems)

ויאמר מדין אל זקני מדין עתה ילחכו הקהל

"And Moav said to the elders of Midian, now will this multitude lick up..." (22:4)

Moav purposely did not refer to *Bnei Yisrael* as an *am* – nation, because they still did not have a land of their own which in their mind was a prerequisite for nationhood. They regarded *Bnei Yisrael* as a *kahal* – a community united by some unknown factor. (Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch)

ויאמר אלקים אל בלעם לא תלך עמהם

"And Hashem said to Bilam, you shall not go with them..." (22:12)

There is a seeming contradiction since later in v. 20, we find Hashem commands *Bilam* to go with them and yet the Torah states that "*Hashem's anger was kindled because Bilam went.*"

There is a difference between *אתו* – alongside him and *עמו* – with him. The word *עם* means going along not only in act but in thought and deed, whereas the word *אתו* means going alongside but not with the same intentions or thoughts. At first Hashem said, "You shall not go with them," meaning you shall not join them in their desire to curse *Bnei Yisrael*. But when *Bilam* insisted on going, Hashem said go alongside them, but not with them, along the same path but not with the same intentions. But this wicked heathen, *Bilam*, went with the princes of *Moav* and as *Rashi* states, "*his heart was similar to their hearts.*" (Torah Gems)

ויפתח ה' את פי האתון

“Hashem opened the mouth of the she-donkey...” (22:28)

This was to bring it home forcibly to *Bilam* that he had no cause to consider himself great because he had been endowed with prophetic wisdom. Why, even the donkey, which certainly would not be considered fit to look upon an angel, or to speak, was enabled to do both because it was for the good of *Bnei Yisrael*. *Bilam* was no more fit to be a prophet than the donkey and was given the gift of prophecy only in order that *Bnei Yisrael* might benefit thereby. (Kli Yakar)

ויפתח ה' את פי האתון ותאמר לבלעם מה עשיתי לך כי הכיתני זה שלש רגלים

“Hashem opened the mouth of the she-donkey and she said to Bilam, ‘What have I done to you that you have struck me three times...’” (22:28)

What is special about the *mitzvah* of *aliyah l'regel*? There are other nations of the world that are willing to be close to Hashem just like *Bnei Yisrael*. However, the other nations of the world are not prepared to give up the pleasures of this world. Three times a year, *Klal Yisrael* leave all of their wealth and worldly possessions behind and travel to *Yerushalayim* to become close with Hashem. The *midrash* says that the *shalosh regalim* are in the merit of the three *avot*. The *Maharal* writes that the three things that world stands on – Torah, *avodah* and *gemilut chasadim* – correspond to the *shalosh regalim*. *Shavuot* corresponds to Torah, *Pesach* to *avodah* and *Sukkot* to *gemilut chasadim*. (Shem MiShmuel)

ונאם הגבר שתם העין

“And the saying of the man whose eye is opened...” (24:3)

The Sages explain that *Bilam* was blind in one eye. They point out that every human being needs two eyes; ones to perceive the greatness of the Creator, and the other to behold his own humbleness and insignificance.

Bilam knew of the greatness of G-d as the verse states, “and he knows the knowledge of the Most High” (24:16), but he could not see his own insignificance and was therefore arrogant. It was clear to the Sages that *Bilam* must have been blind in one eye. (Rishfei Esh)

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