

Balak 2016

1.

Why is this parsha called Balak?

Parparos L'Torah page 171

Many times the best questions are the simple and obvious questions. **Why is this parsha called Balak as opposed to Bilaam?** Balak is an enemy of the Jewish nation, whereas Balak at least ending up blessing the Jews. **Why should a parsha be named after a wicked anti-Semite, who sought to eliminate the Jewish people (God forbid)?** There are 54 parshas. Five of these 54 parshas are named after people. It makes sense why parshas Noach is named after Noach since he was a righteous and important person. Parshas Yisro as well; Yisro was the father in law of Moshe Rabbenu. Parshas Pinchas is also easy to understand since he publically sanctified Hashem's name and stood up for what is correct. Parshas Korach is also easy to understand; since he was a talmid chacham. What about parshas Balak? The Gemara in Sota (47a) states that the reward for the many korbanos that Balak brought was Rus emerging from him. Dovid and Shalomo Hamelech descended from Rus. **So therefore, since Dovid and Shalomo were essentially born because of Balak, therefore a parsha in the Torah is named after Balak.** Similarly, the sefer Eturai Torah (page 138) quotes the Berchas Avraham who offers this answer as well.

The Gutnick Chumash (page 178) quotes the Zohar (chalek beis page 161a) who says 'Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.' (אסתכל בה באורייתא וברא עלמא.) The Torah is the blueprint for the entire world; even the lowest and most debased aspects of the world are included in the Torah. Thus, **a whole parsha of the Torah is called Balak in order to demonstrate that the existence of even the most wicked inhabitants of the world are included in the Torah's overall plan for this world.**

Let's elaborate on this important concept. The Gemara in Shabbos (77b) states that everything that Hashem created wasn't created in vain. (אמר רב יהודה אמר רב כל מה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא בעולמו לא) (ברא דבר אחד לבטלה וכו.) The Marsha explains that even the seemingly small and insignificant creatures have a purpose. Similarly, the Mishna in Avos (4, 3) instructs us not to be scornful of any person, and do not be disdainful of anything, for there is no person without his hour, and you have nothing without its place. (הוא היה אומר (בן עזאי) אל תהי בז לכל אדם ואל תהי מפליג לכל דבר שאין לך אדם) (שאיין לו שעה ואין לך דבר שאין לו מקום.) The Rambam explains that it is impossible that one will not have at least one time in his life that he will affect something. Similarly, the Gemara in Tanis (20) relates a story. The end of the story is someone telling someone else 'you think I'm unattractive? Go and complain to Hashem.' Hashem creates everything and everyone for a reason. The Otzer Hamidrashim (alfa beta dben sira page 74) relates that there were actually several creations that Dovid Hamelech was unsure about. Dovid wondered why Hashem created spiders. Hashem responded 'do you doubt spiders? There will come a time when you will need spiders.' When Dovid was hiding from Shaul in a cave in Ein Gedi, Hashem sent a spider. This spider wove a web near the entrance to the cave. When Shaul came to the entrance of that cave, he concluded (incorrectly) that no one was there. He thought that since the spider web is completely intact it

must be that no one is in this cave. Later on, when Dovid exited the cave and saw the spider web, he thanked Hashem. He also said now I understand why spiders were created.

2.

Why did Hashem enable a donkey to miraculously speak?

For what reason did Hashem find it necessary to make a neis (miracle) to allow a donkey to speak?

The Ramban (22, 23) explains that this neis was done in order to show Bilaam that Hashem has the ability to make whoever he wants to talk and whoever He wants to be mute. Hashem could also place words in their mouths to do His will. Similarly, the Rabbenu B'chaya (22, 28) explains that this neis of the donkey opening up its mouth is above the realm of nature. This neis was done out of respect of the Jewish people. Hashem changed the order of nature by means of this donkey speaking. This was done in order to allude to the concept that even an animal understands that Bilaam shouldn't curse the Jewish people. The Seforno (22, 28) as well explains that Hashem permitted the donkey to talk in order that Bilaam would repent. The Seforno differs from the Ramban and Rabbenu B'chaya in the following regard; **according to the Ramban and Rabbenu B'chaya the neis of the donkey speaking was for the benefit of the Jewish people. Conversely, according to the Seforno the neis of the donkey speaking was for the benefit of Bilaam. The reason why Hashem was concerned about the welfare of Bilaam is as follows; Bilaam was a man of great spiritual powers which were sadly mischanneled, but nonetheless, it would have been tragic for such a person to be destroyed despite the fact that such great potential was squandered.**

The Keli Yakar (22, 28) explains that the donkey was telling Bilaam that he is similar to donkeys. Meaning, just as it isn't the nature for donkey's to talk, but nevertheless Hashem enabled this to occur. So too, Hashem only allowed you to have prophecy out of respect for the Jews, in order that the other nations will not say that it's unfair that we didn't have any prophets. The Otzer Chaim (pages 123-124) explains the interpretation of this Keli Yakar. **Bilaam shouldn't have haughtiness because of his prophecy. Why? Even a donkey can talk and see angels; for the sake of the Jewish people. So too, Bilaam was only given prophecy for the sake of the Jewish people.**

The Beis Aron (page 193) offers a completely different reason why Hashem enabled this donkey to speak. The donkey of Bilaam was giving mussar (rebuke) to Bilaam. **Our ability to speak and communicate with detail, distinguishes us from other animals.** As the pasuk states (Berashis 2, 7) "And Hashem formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being." Onkelos comments that this pasuk refers to our ability to speak. **Bilaam elevated himself and his speech to the extent that he was able to prophesize, he surely should have used his speech and prophecy for only good purposes. The problem was that he negatively used his prophecy; to curse. Hashem therefore allowed the donkey to speak in order to demonstrate to Bilaam that if you are going to speak in this inappropriate way then also an animal can do this. Not only did this donkey speak, but he verbally prevailed against his owner Bilaam as stated in the Gemara in Avoda Zara (4b).**

The Bamidbar Raba (20, 14) relates Hashem decreed that animals are unable to speak, because if they were able to speak then no one would be able to handle it. Let's use Bilaam and his donkey as an example. Bilaam was the smartest of the smart (see mesechas Berachos (7a)) and his donkey wasn't (donkey's aren't a smart animal as stated in mesechas Shabbos (112b)), and even so his donkey verbally prevailed. Bilaam was unable to handle his donkey.

The question arises; what is so different about the speech of donkey's compared to the speech of humans? The Steipler (Berchas Peretz page 60) explains that **if animals were able to speak then everything that they would say would be truthful. The reason for this is as follow; they aren't smart enough to lie. Their mind isn't sophisticated enough. We wouldn't be able to handle the complete and sincere truthfulness of their statements.** This is the explanation of the Berashis Raba (parshas Vayigash); woe to us on the day of judgment! Woe to us on the day of rebuke! Bilaam couldn't even handle the rebuke of his donkey. (אוי לנו מיום הדין אוי לנו מיום (התוכחה, בלעם חכם של אומות העולם לא היה יכול לעמוד בפני תוכחתה של אתונו וכו') There is a similarity between the words of the donkey and the words we will hear on the day of judgment; they are truthful.

-Another question arises. This is not the first time or the last time that an animal spoke. There are many places throughout different Gemaras and Medrashim where we are informed that animals have spoken. The Chumash in the beginning of Berashis relates the snake speaking. This being so, **why specifically with this donkey does the Torah make such a big deal about an animal that spoke?** The Talelei Oros (page 118) explains based on Rashi. The angel that was sent was the angel of mercy. This angel wanted to prevent Bilaam from sinning. That being so, **this neis of the donkey speaking was out of the mercy of Hashem in order to prevent Bilaam from sinning. Therefore, explains the Satmer Rebbe, specifically by Bilaam's donkey the pasuk publicizes the ability of an animal to speak. The neis of the snake speaking was actually negative because the snake caused others to sin, therefore the pasuk doesn't publicize this.**