Balak 2014

1.

Bullies

Nachlas Tzvi page 397

(Balak, Moav's king, sent messengers to tell Bilaam) "So now – please come and curse this people for me, for it is too powerful for me; perhaps I will be able to strike it and drive it away from the land. For I know that whomever you bless is blessed and whomever you curse is accursed." (22, 6)

"וְעַתָּה֩ לְכָה־נָּ֨א אָרָה־לִּ֜י אֶת־הָעָ֣ם הַזֶּ֗ה כִּ֤י עָצוּם֙ הוּא֙ מִמֶּ֔נִּי אוּלַ֥י אוּכַ֖ל נַכֶּה־בּ֑וֹ וַאֲגָרְשֶׁ֣נּוּ מִן־הָאָ֔רֶץ כִּ֣י יָדַ֔עְתִּי אֵ֚ת אֲשֶׁר־תְּבָרֵ֣ךְ מְבֹרָ֔ךְ וַאֲשֶׁ֥ר תָּאֹ֖ר יוּאָֽר׃"

Why did Balak first say "perhaps" which demonstrated he was doubtful, and then he said "I know" which implies that he was certain? Why did Balak ask Bilaam to curse the Jews and not to bless Moav? Meaning, there are two potential ways that Moav could have been victorious; either they are blessed or the Jews are cursed. So why did Balak specifically want the Jews to be cursed rather than Moav being blessed? He quotes a beautiful idea from the sefer called Vayidabar Moshe. Rashi explains that Moav was already previously cursed by Bilaam. As a result of this curse, Moav lost the war against Sichon. At that time, Balak 'knew' that Moav was cursed. How did Balak know this? Maybe Moav was never cursed, and the only reason why Sichon prevailed was because Sichon was blessed? Sichon definitely wasn't blessed, because "whomever you bless is blessed", therefore Sichon should have prevailed when they fought the Jews. As we know they were defeated by the Jews. Therefore it must be that Sichon wasn't blessed and this is why they lost when they fought the Jews. Thus, it must be that Moav was cursed. The pasuk states "whomever you curse is accursed." Therefore since Moav was cursed by Bilaam, it was impossible for any blessing, even from Bilaam to be effective. The curse of Bilaam is so powerful that it is everlasting. The only potential way that Moav would be able to defeat the Jews would be to get the Jews at the same low level as themselves. Therefore Balak "knew" Moav was cursed. Since Balak "knew" that if Bilaam cursed Israel, Israel and Moav will be on the same level, then "maybe" Balak will be able to prevail against the Jews.

I heard the following from Rabbi Gedaliah Oppen when I was approximately fifteen years old. What is the reason why kids tend to unfortunately bully other kids? There is an interesting psychological reason for this. The bully wants to raise himself to a higher level in the eyes of others. He can do one of two things; either he can personally improve his ways, or he can put others down, which is easier. This is precisely what Moav attempted to do.

2.

Hashem's anger

Kemotzei Shlal Rav page 316

"God's wrath flared because he (Bilaam) was going." (22, 22)

"ויחר אף אלֹהים כי הולֵך הוא."

The Yabetz (Rabbi Yaakov Emden ben Tzvi) says he heard the following explanation from his father. The Gemara in Berachos (7a) relates that Hashem never got upset in the days of Bilaam. If Hashem would have gotten upset, the Jews would have been completely annihilated (because of Bilaam's powerful curse.). How can we explain this Gemara that states that Hashem never got upset, after the fact that there is an explicit pasuk that says that Hashem did get upset? The pasuk itself answers this question. The pasuk informs us that Bilaam "was going". At the moment when Bilaam was on the way, Hashem got upset. When one is in a walking position they are unable to curse others because they aren't able to concentrate as well. When one is in a stationary position, for example, sitting down they are able to focus a lot better. The same applies to learning; the difficult Torah topics one should learn when sitting. The same applies to davening shemonah esray. The Shulchan Aruch (siman 94) discusses if someone is riding on a horse, they should descend and be in a stationary standing position when davening shemonah esray. Similarly, if one was walking they should stop when davening shemonah esray. (This refers to a curse of the stature and power of Bilaam. Nowadays however, one surely has the ability to curse people when they are walking.) In order for Bilaam to curse the Jews, serious focus was needed. The aforementioned Gemara relates that no one was able to calculate the moment that Hashem gets angry except for Bilaam. Therefore Hashem was able to get upset when Bilaam was traveling because Bilaam wasn't able to curse the Jews then.