Balak 2013

1.

Standing up for what's right

Nachlas Tzvi page 404

"Pinchas son of Elazar son of Aaron the Kohen saw, and he stood up from amid the assembly and took a spear (romach) in his hand." (25, 7)

"וַיַּ֣רְא פִּינְחָ֗ס בֶּן־אֶלְעָזָר֙ בֶּן־אַהֲרֹ֣ן הַכֹּהֵ֔ן וַיָּ֖קָם מִתּ֣וֹךְ הָעֵדָ֑ה וַיִּקַּ֥ח רֹ֖מַח בְּיָדֽוֹ."

Several questions arise. Firstly, why does the word רומח, which is normally spelled with a ו, spelled without a ו? Secondly, are we able to derive any practical lessons from this episode? Thirdly, why wasn't Pinchas afraid that Zimri and Cosbi would retaliate and attempt to kill him in self-defense? Lastly, we find throughout Tanach that when someone tried to kill someone else they made a change (שינוי). For example, Ehud (Shoftim 3, 16) who was a lefty, kept his sword under his right thigh in order that no one would suspect him of having a weapon, a sword in particular. (People typically held their swords in a sheath on their left side.) Ehud successfully entered the palace of Eglon, the king of Moav and killed him. The Jews were then freed. Another example is in Shmuel beis (20, 9-10). That being so, why didn't Pinchas attempt to make a change when killing Zimri and Cosbi? The Gematria (numerical value) of the word רמח equals 248, which corresponds to the 248 positive commandments in the Torah and corresponds to the limbs of the human body. Pinchas believed that with the merit of the 248 Mitzvos, he will be protected from possible harm. This is why the ו is missing; because if there would be a ו then the gematria would be 254.

As a side point; the Shulchan Aruch (siman 61 sif 3) says in Shema there are 245 words. In order to get to 248 words, the Chazzan concludes with Hashem Elokeichem Emes. The Rama says if you say Shema by yourself you say Kel Melech Neeman which completes and equals 248. The Mishna Berurah (sif katan 6) quotes a Midrash and Zohar which says, one who recites Shema according to the Halacha, every limb will take a word and get healed through the recitation of that word. (The Shailos U'tshuvos Ohel Aryeh (chalek alef siman 303) says that since women have 252 limbs, therefore by their saying Kel Melech Naeman they wouldn't get to the proper number. Therefore they shouldn't say it. However, some say because it's a minhag (custom) they should say it anyway.)

Now let's answer the previous questions. The word רומח is without a ו in order that we could have the gematria of 248. Pinchas wasn't afraid of a potential danger since he had the protection of the mitzvos. Pinchas didn't need to make a change either. A change is only needed when a person is trying to be extra cautious and careful. However, Pinchas was already protected, with the 248 mitzvos. Pinchas demonstrated sincere bitachon (belief). The pasuk in Koheles (8, 5) states "He who obeys the commandment will know no evil." / "שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע." The lesson that we can derive from this episode is, not to be lured into lusts and temporary physical desires. If something is halachicaly or hashkafically wrong, one must disagree. This is precisely what Pinchas did.

The Chinuch (mitzvah beis) explains that the mila is a permanent sign on our bodies which distinguishes us from the other nations, just as we are set apart from them in the form of our souls (spiritually) etc. (משרשי מצוה זו, לפי שרצה השם יתברך לקבוע בעם אשר הבדיל להיות נקרא על שמו אות קבוע בגופם, להבדילם משאר העמים בצורת גופם כמו שהם מובדלים מהם בצורת נפשותם, אשר מוצאם ומובאם איננו שוה) This was exactly where Zimri was sinning from. Pinchas wanted to demonstrate that we do want to be a part of this. The Kitzer Shulchan Aruch (siman gimal os beis) writes that we dress, talk and act differently than goyim (non-Jews). This is what Pinchas stood up for. This is especially applicable in the summer time when we lain this parsha. Unfortunately many people dress immodestly. We must strive to keep our thoughts as pure as possible as well.

2.

Why is this parsha called Balak?

Meiyna shel Torah page 104

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. The unfortunate truth is that all goyim (in a certain sense) hate the Jews. The Gemara in Shabbos (89a) asks why the mountain on which we received the Torah is called Har Sinai. The Gemara answers it is the mountain from which hatred descended. The goyim became jealous and began to hate us. (מאי הר סיני? הר שירדה שנאה לאמות העולם עליו.) Rashi explains that they were jealous of us because we received the Torah and they didn't. (This is ironic and an unfair jealousy because all of the nations were originally offered the Torah, but they refused in as stated in the beginning of mesechas Avoda Zara.) **Har Sinai was the beginning of the everlasting antisemitism. The goyim tend to hide this hatred. It's an under the rug antisemitism. Balak differed is this regard; he wasn't as deceitful, he was more proper. He revealed his hatred to everyone.** This is why the parsha is named after him.