

## QUESTIONS ON PARASHAT BALAK

**Q-1.** (a) (1) Why did *Chazal* want to include most of *Parashat Balak* (*Bamidbar* 22:2-24:25) as part of the daily *mitzvah* to recite the *shema* (2 reasons)? (2) Why did they not include it? (b) What is the significance of 3 *Parshiot* in a row – (1) *Korach*, (2) *Chukat*, and (3) *Balak* – all with the letter *koof*? (c) Why did the *Moavim* appoint *Balak*, a *Midyani*, as their king? (d) Why did *Balak* decide that *Bilam*'s cursing *Bnei Yisrael* was how to defeat them? (e) Why was it necessary for *Balak* to team up with *Midyan* (3 reasons)? (*Bamidbar* 22:4,6)

**A-1.** (a) (1) (i) 23:22 mentions *yetziat Mitzrayim*, and (ii) 24:9 teaches that *Hashem* guards us when we go to sleep and wake up; (2) to prevent a *torach* (burden for the) *tzibur* (*Berachot* 12b). (b) *Koof* stands for *kedusha* (holiness) – (1) *Korach* (*koof* – the 1<sup>st</sup> letter) had past *kedushat levi*, but he lost it by rebelling, (2) in *Chukat* (*koof* – the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter), the *para aduma* made someone *tamei* presently *kadosh*, (3) *Balak* (*koof* – the 3<sup>rd</sup> letter) would, in the future, gain *kedusha* through his offspring, *Rut* and *David haMelech* – we must emulate *Hashem*'s *kedusha* in our past, present and future actions – the angels praise Him as, “*Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh*” – past, present and future (*G. Schorr*). (c) He was a war hero and superior magician (*Rokeach*). (d) *Balak* saw, from *Sichon* and *Og*, he could not beat *Bnei Yisrael* militarily – the *Midyanim* said *Moshe*, who lived with them, destroyed *Mitzrayim* verbally, by praying to *Hashem*. He wanted *Bilam*, a magician knowing the proper words and the right time to curse *Bnei Yisrael*, to convince *Hashem* to let *Moav* destroy them (*Bamidbar Raba*). (e) (1) He consulted *Midyan* about *Moshe* – he wanted to know if *Bilam*'s curse could work; (2) the *Emori* beat *Amon* and *Moav* militarily and with *Bilam*'s curse – *Balak* needed *Midyan*'s military help (*Rashi*). (3) Even if *Moav* could stop *Bnei Yisrael*, *Balak* did not want *Bnei Yisrael* to surround *Moav* by conquering *Midyan* (*Oznayim laTorah*).

**Q-2.** (a) In addition to asking *Bilam* to curse *Bnei Yisrael*, why did *Balak* not ask him to bless *Moav* with victory? (b) (1) How was *Bilam* related to *Lavan* (4 views)? (2) Why did he hate *Bnei Yisrael*? (c) What were his 3 evil character traits? (d) How did he suffer during *Mitzrayim*'s 10 *makot*? (e) Why did the Omniscient *Hashem* ask him, “who are these men with you?” (2 views)? (f) From whom did he (1) get his donkey? (2) gain his power of sorcery? (g) Why did *Hashem* enable the donkey to speak? (h) Which rocks crushed his foot? (*Bamidbar* 22:9,21-29)

**A-2.** (a) He knew that *Bilam* had no power to bless anyone but flattered *Bilam* by saying he could bless, while knowing his only power was to curse (*Sforno*). (b) (1) *Bilam* was (i) his son (*Sanhedrin* 105a). (ii) his grandson (*Zohar*). (iii) *Lavan* himself (*Tanchuma* – *Vayeitzei*). (iv) his *gilgul* (reincarnation) (*Aitz Yosef*). (2) *Bilam* thought that *Ya'akov* made him poor by robbing *Lavan*'s assets (*Sanhedrin* 105a). (c) An (1) evil eye – craved wealth, trying to destroy *Bnei Yisrael* for money; (2) arrogant spirit – too arrogant to admit that *Hashem* banned his going to curse; (3) immoral soul – depravity led *Bnei Yisrael* to immoral sin (*Avot* 5:22, *Meiri*). (d) Before the hail, *Moshe* warned the *Mitzrim* to put their servants and livestock indoors – *Bilam* did not listen, and his assets were destroyed (*Targum Yonatan* – *Shemot* 9:21). (e) *Hashem* (1) opened His talk with *Bilam* gently to not startle him (*Tanchuma*). (2) gave him room to err, thinking he could curse *Bnei Yisrael* without His knowing (*Rashi*). (f) (1) *Yaa'kov* gave *Bilam* the donkey, which was created on the 6<sup>th</sup> day (*Avot* 5:8), as a gift, so he would not advise *Pharaoh* to issue evil decrees against *Bnei Yisrael*, but *Bilam* advised *Pharaoh* to force *Bnei Yisrael* to make bricks without giving straw (*Medrash Agada*). (2) The angels *Aza* and *Aza'el*, cast from heaven, taught *Be'or* and his son *Bilam* magic (*Zohar*). (g) He showed *Bilam* that just as He can make a dumb animal speak, He puts His Will in his mouth (*Ramban*). (h) *Hashem* warned *Lavan* not to harm *Ya'akov* (*Bereishit* 31:24) – they set up a stone mound symbolizing peace – when *Bilam* went to curse *Ya'akov*'s offspring, these stones crushed his leg to remind him not to harm them (*Chizkuni*).

**Q-3.** (a) Since *Hashem* gave *Bilam* permission to go with the *Moavim*, why was He angry with him when he went with them (4 views)? (b) From where do we learn that a “man of importance” must be escorted by two men when he journeys? (c) Why is the word “*eilim*” (rams – 23:1) spelled with an extra *yud*? (d) Unlike *Avraham* who passed *Hashem*'s 10 tests, which 10 tests did *Bilam* fail? (*Bamidbar* 22:12-35; 23:1)

**A-3.** (a) (1) *Hashem* allowed him to go to get money from *Moav* but not curse *Yisrael* – He was angry when he intended to curse them (*Rashi*). (2) He wanted *Bilam* to go to carry out His Will – instead, he went for personal greed (*Sadia Ga'on*). (3) He told him to go but not curse them – *Bilam* failed to tell the *Moavim* what *Hashem* said (*Ramban*). (4) He wanted *Bilam* to caution *Moav* not to sin – instead, he wanted to help them (*Sforno*). (b) 2 youths escorted *Bilam* to *Balak*, like 2 youths escorted *Avraham* (*Bereishit* 22:3) to the *akeida* (*Rashi*). (c) It hints at the 10 trials *Avraham* passed – the 10<sup>th</sup>, offering a ram instead of *Yitzchak* – *Bilam* hoped his 7 rams would outweigh *Avraham*'s *korban*'s merit (*Rokeach*). (d) (1) *Hashem* told *Bilam* not to go – he did not obey; (2) He told him not curse *Bnei Yisrael* but he intended to curse them; (3) he ignored the donkey's leaving the path, (4) its pressing his foot against the wall, (5) its crouching down to stop him, and (6) its speaking; (7) seeing the angel, he did not repent; (8) he tried “bribing” *Hashem* with altars at *Bamot Ba'al*, (9) *Rosh haPisga*, and (10) *Rosh haPeor* (*Vilna Gaon*).

**Q-4.** (a) When "Balak and Bilam offered a bull and ram on each altar", why does the *Torah* use the singular, "va-ya'a"l"? (b) (1) What was *Balak's* reward for offering 7 bulls and 7 rams in 3 places to *Hashem*? (2) What rule for doing *mitzvot* do we learn from this? (*Bamidbar* 23:1-2,14,29-30)

**A-4.** (a) One with a blemish may not offer a *korban* – *Bilam*, who was lame and had vision in one eye (*Rashi* – 24:3), taught *Balak* to offer the *korbanot* (*Oznayim laTorah*). (b) (1) His offspring were *Rut* and *Malchut Beit David*; (2) one should do a *mitzva* "even not for its own sake (*she-lo lishma*), for from doing [a *mitzvah*] not for its own sake, he will eventually do it for its own sake (*lishma*)". *Balak's korbanot* led to *Bnei Yisrael's* being blessed – a malicious act leading to a positive result is rewarded, with *Balak's* offspring the great *David haMelech* (*Sanhedrin* 105b).

**Q-5.** (a) Why did *Bilam* call his father "*Bilam's son*"? (b) To what did he refer when he said, (1) "How good are 'oha-lecha' (your tents), *Ya'akov*, 'mishkeno-techa' (your dwelling places), *Yisrael!*" (3 views)? (c) "his king shall be exalted over *Agag*"? (*Bamidbar* 24:3,5,7)

**A-5.** (a) He boasted he was a greater sorcerer than his father, *Be'or* (*Rashi*). (b) (1) *Bilam* (i) seeing *Bnei Yisrael's* encamped tents, praised their family privacy – the entrances were not aligned opposite each other; (ii) prophesized *Mishkan Shiloh* ("*oha-lecha*") and the *Beit haMikdash* ("*mishkeno-techa*") (*Rashi*). (iii) Saw prophetically and praised *Bnei Yisrael's batei keneisiot* (houses of prayer – "*oha-lecha*") and *batei medrashot* (halls of *Torah* learning – "*mishkeno-techa*") (*Rokeach*). (c) It is a prophesy that King *Shaul* will defeat *Amaleik's* king *Agag* (*Rashi*).

**Q-6.** (a) Why does the *Torah* tell us that *Bnei Yisrael* ate before worshipping *Ba'al Peor*? (b) Why did the "man of *Bnei Yisrael*" [*Zimri*] bring "the *Midyani* woman" [*Cosby*] in the sight of *Moshe* and *Bnei Yisrael* (2 explanations)? (c) (1) Which 12 miracles did *Hashem* do for *Pinchas* when he killed *Zimri* and *Cosby*? (2) Which 3 gifts did the *kohanim* merit because *Pinchas* killed *Zimri* and *Cosby*? (*Bamidbar* 25:2,6)

**A-6.** (a) Those eating *mun* did not need to relieve themselves, but to worship *Ba'al Peor*, one had to relieve himself in front of the idol – the *Midyanit* women fed *Bnei Yisrael* regular food to worship *Ba'al Peor* (*Sanhedrin* 60b). (b) (1) *Zimri* lusted after a *Midyanit* woman – *Cosby* – and wanted *Moshe* to allow relations with her, like *Moshe* married a *Midyanit*, *Tzipora* (*Rokeach*). (2) *Zimri* pretended to prevent *Bnei Yisrael* from worshipping *Ba'al Peor* – he wanted consent for the men to fulfill their desires in *Bnei Yisrael's* camp away from *Ba'al Peor* (*Sotah* 22b). (c) (1) (i) *Pinchas* was allowed, as a *kana-i* (zealot), to kill *Zimri* and *Cosby* only while they did an immoral act – they miraculously did not draw apart as *Pinchas* approached; (ii) *Zimri* and *Cosby* were speechless, unable to call out to *Sheivet Shimon* for protection; (iii) when *Pinchas's* spear passed through them, they remained locked together; (iv) the handle and blade did not separate when he rammed them through; (v) when he dragged them outside, an angel lifted the tent, enabling him to emerge upright; (vi) *Hashem* gave him strength to hold them up on his spear while walking through the camp; (vii) he twirled them around in front of *Zimri's* relatives – they could not harm him; (viii) the spear hardened, not breaking under their combined weight; (ix) the spear elongated so neither body slipped off; (x) *Hashem* caused *Cosby's* body to remain underneath, as they were positioned when *Pinchas* killed them; (xi) they stayed alive while he carried them – he did not become *tamei*; (xii) none of their blood touched *Pinchas* (*Sanhedrin* 82b). (2) A *korban's* (i) *zeroa* – forearm, for *Pinchas's* raising his arm to defend *Hashem's* honor; (ii) *lechayim* – cheeks, for praying for the plague to stop; (iii) *keiva* – stomach, for piercing *Zimri's* and *Cosby's* stomachs (*Sefer haChinuch* – *Mitzvah* 506).

**Q-7.** In the *haftara*, the *Navi* says that *Bnei Yisrael* should "know *Hashem's* '*tzidkot*' (benevolences)" by remembering "what *Balak* king of *Moav* plotted and what *Bilam ben Be'or* answered" – to what "*tzidkot*" does the *Navi* refer (2 views)? (*Michah* 6:5)

**A-7.** (a) *Bilam* could curse *Bnei Yisrael*, as *Balak* plotted, since each day, there is a *rega* (an instant – 1/58,888<sup>th</sup> of an hour (1/16<sup>th</sup> of a second)) when *Hashem* is angry. *Bilam's da'at elyon* (knowledge of the Supreme), enabled him to determine the *rega* to invoke His anger – had He been angry, no trace of *Bnei Yisrael* would remain – His *tzidkot* were that He did not get angry when *Bilam* tried to curse them (*Berachot* 7a). (b) *Bilam* could speak only when *Hashem* put words in his mouth – His *tzidkot* foiled *Balak's* plot and forced *Bilam's* blessing of *Bnei Yisrael* (*ibn Ezra*).