

## QUESTIONS ON PARASHAT BALAK

**Q-1. (a)** What is the significance of 3 *Parshiot* in a row all containing the letter *koof* – (1) *Parashat Korach*, (2) *Parashat Chukat*, and (3) *Parashat Balak*?  
**(b)** (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 in the recitation of the *shema*? **(c)** Why did the *Moavim* appoint *Balak*, who was a *Midyani*, as their king? **(d)** (1) Why was *Moav* frightened of *Bnei Yisrael* (2 reasons)? (2) Why was their fear described as “an ox licking up the greenery of the field”? **(e)** (1) Why did *Balak* decide that *Bilam*’s cursing *Bnei Yisrael* was how to defeat them? (2) Since *Balak* himself was a great magician, why did he team up with *Bilam*? **(f)** Why was it necessary for *Balak* to team up with *Midyan* (3 reasons)? (*Bamidbar* 22:2-6)

**A-1. (a)** The letter *koof* stands for the word “*kedusha*” (holiness), which indicates that (1) *Korach*, whose name has the 1<sup>st</sup> letter *koof*, had past *kedusha* as a member of *Sheivet Levi*, but he lost his *kedusha* by rebelling, (2) in *Chukat*, which has the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter *koof*, the *para aduma* made someone who was *tamay* to be presently *tahor* and *kadosh*, (3) *Balak*, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> letter *koof*, would, in the future, gain *kedusha* through his offspring, *Rut*, *David haMelech* and *Melech haMashi’ach*, and the lesson of the letter *koof* is that the angels praise *Hashem* as, “*Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh*”, i.e., He is holy in the past, present and future, and we must emulate the *kedusha* of *Hashem* by doing *teshuva* for any past wrongs to bring *kedusha* to our past, serve *Hashem* properly and be *kadosh* in the present and resolve that all of our future actions be infused with *kedusha* (*G. Schorr*). **(b)** (1) (i) 23:22 and 24:8 mention *yetziat Mitzrayim*, and (ii) 24:9 teaches that *Hashem* guards us when we go to sleep (*kara shachav*) and wake up (*me yekimenu*); (2) to prevent, with this lengthy addition, a *torach tzibur* (burden for the congregation) (*Berachot* 12b). **(c)** The *Moavim* were scared of *Bnei Yisrael*, and they believed that they needed *Balak*, who was a war hero and superior magician, to lead them (*Rokeach*). **(d)** (1) (i) *Bnei Yisrael*, who had multiplied miraculously in *Mitzrayim*, were far more numerous than the *Moavim*; (ii) *Hashem* did great miracles for *Bnei Yisrael*; (2) *Moav* knew that *Bnei Yisrael* would not conquer their land, either because *Moshe* had sent them a message, as he had to *Sichon*, or because they heard about *Hashem*’s prohibition on conquering *Moav*, but *Bnei Yisrael* could “lick up their surroundings” by conquering all of the land adjacent to *Moav* and turn the *Moavim* into vassals (*Ramban*). **(e)** (1) Since *Balak* saw that *Sichon* and *Og*, who were much more powerful than the *Moavim*, could not beat *Bnei Yisrael* militarily, and since the *Midyanim* told *Balak* that *Moshe*, who had lived with them, destroyed *Mitzrayim* verbally, by praying to *Hashem*, *Balak* wanted *Bilam*, a magician who knew the proper words and right time to curse *Bnei Yisrael*, to convince *Hashem* to let *Moav* destroy *Bnei Yisrael*; (2) *Balak* had expertise in practical matters, such as where to stand to curse effectively, but only *Bilam* knew the words that could effectively cause the curse to take effect (*Bamidbar Raba*). **(f)** (1) He consulted *Midyan* about *Moshe*, since he wanted to know if a curse by *Bilam* could work; (2) the *Emori* had beaten *Amon* and *Moav* militarily, by using a curse that was delivered by *Bilam*, and *Balak* needed military help from *Midyan* (*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)** (1) In addition to asking *Bilam* to curse *Bnei Yisrael*, why did *Balak* not ask *Bilam* to bless *Moav* to be invulnerable to attacks by *Bnei Yisrael*? (2) How do we know that *Bilam*, while having the power to curse, was unable to bless anyone (2 ways)? **(b)** (1) How was *Bilam* related to *Lavan* (4 views)? (2) Why did *Bilam* hate *Bnei Yisrael*? **(c)** What were *Bilam*’s 3 evil character traits? **(d)** How did *Bilam* suffer during the 10 *makot* in *Mitzrayim*? **(e)** (1) Why did the *Hashem*, who is Omniscient, ask *Bilam*, “who are these men with you?” (2 views)? (2) Why are the messengers first called, (i) “*zikei Moav*” (elders of *Moav* – 22:7)? then, (ii) “*sarei Moav*” (officers of *Moav* – 22:8,14,21)? then, (iii) “*sarei Balak*” (officers of *Balak* – 22:13,35)? and then, (iv) *avdei Balak* (servants of *Balak* – 22:18)? **(f)** Since the elders of *Moav* and *Midyan* went to *Bilam*, why did *Bilam* speak only to the officers of *Balak* (3 views)? **(g)** From whom did *Bilam* (1) get his donkey? (2) gain his power of sorcery? **(h)** (1) Why did the angel wield his sword against *Bilam*? (2) What did the three-fold appearance by the angel signify? **(i)** Why did *Hashem* enable the donkey to speak? **(j)** Which rocks crushed *Bilam*’s foot? (*Bamidbar* 22:9,13,21-29)

**A-2. (a)** (1) *Balak* knew that *Bilam* had no power to bless anyone, but he flattered *Bilam* by saying that *Bilam* could bless effectively, while knowing that the only power that *Bilam* had was to curse (*Sforno*). (2) (i) *Bilam*, in 23:10, blessed himself, saying, “Let me die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his [*Ya’akov*’s]”, but *Bilam* suffered an ignoble death by the sword at the hands of *Bnei Yisrael*, and he did not merit a portion in *olam haba*; (ii) if *Bilam* had the power to bestow blessings, he would have blessed himself to become rich and respected, instead of seeking wealth and honor from *Balak* (*R. Bechya*). **(b)** (1) *Bilam* was (i) *Lavan*’s son (*Sanhedrin* 105a). (ii) His grandson (*Zohar*). (iii) *Lavan* himself (*Medrash Tanchuma* – *Vayeitzei*). (iv) His *gilgul* (reincarnation) (*Aitz Yosef*). (2) *Bilam* believed that *Ya’akov* caused him to be poor by “robbing” the assets of *Lavan* (*Sanhedrin* 105a). **(c)** (1) An *ayin hara*, evil eye, who craved wealth and tried to destroy *Bnei Yisrael* for money; (2) a *ru’ach gevohah*, an arrogant spirit, which resulted in his being too arrogant to admit that *Hashem* prohibited his going to curse *Bnei Yisrael*; (3) a *nefesh rechava*, an immoral soul, that possessed his own depravity which lead *Bnei Yisrael* to immoral sin (*Avot* 5:22, *Meirin*). **(d)** Before the plague of *barad* (hail), *Moshe* warned the *Mitzrim* to put their servants and livestock indoors to save them from being killed, but *Bilam* did not listen, and his assets were destroyed by the *barad* (*Targum Yonatan* – *Shemot* 9:21). **(e)** (1) *Hashem* (i) opened His talk with *Bilam* gently so as to not startle him (*Medrash Tanchuma*). (ii) gave *Bilam* room to err, i.e., to think that maybe he could curse *Bnei Yisrael* without *Hashem*’s knowledge (*Rashi*). (2) (i) The 1<sup>st</sup> group of messengers were “Elders of *Moav*” (22:7), (ii) whom *Balak* promoted, due to their age, to be “Officers of *Moav*” (22:8). (iii) When *Balak* trusted them with the mission of persuading *Bilam*, he promoted them to “Officers of *Balak*” (22:13), but when they failed, he demoted them back to “Officers of *Moav*” (22:14). (iv) The 2<sup>nd</sup> group of messengers started their careers as “Servants of *Balak*” (22:18), who proved themselves to be leaders and were promoted to “Officers of *Moav*” (22:21), and when they succeeded in convincing *Bilam*, they earned the title, “Officers of *Balak*” (22:35) (*veChur leZahav*). **(f)** (1) When *Bilam* told the *Moavim* and *Midyanim* to spend the night so that he could ask *Hashem* about his going with them, the *Midyanim* lost interest and left (*Rashi*), because they knew, from what *Moshe* told *Yitro*, that *Hashem* protects *Bnei Yisrael* (*Sanhedrin* 105a). (2) Both the *Moavim* and *Midyanim* were there, but *Bilam* mentioned only *Moav* since *Balak*, the *Moavi* king, had sent the *Moavim*, but the *Midyanim* went voluntarily (*ibn Ezra*). (3) The *Midyanim* had gone to meet with *Balak*, but since *Midyan* was on the way when they went to meet *Bilam*, the *Midyanim* decided to go home, and the *Moavim* alone went to *Bilam* (*Ramban*). **(g)** (1) *Yaa’kov* gave *Bilam* the donkey, which had been created on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of Creation (*Avot* 5:8), as a gift, to convince *Bilam* not advise *Pharaoh* to issue evil decrees against *Bnei Yisrael*, but *Bilam* later advised *Pharaoh* to force *Bnei Yisrael* to make bricks without giving them straw (*Shemot* 4:7) (*Medrash Agada*). (2) The angels *Aza* and *Aza’el*, who were cast down from Heaven and lived on the earth, taught *Be’or* and his son *Bilam* magic (*Zohar*). **(h)** (1) *Bnei Yisrael* could not have killed *Bilam* later by the sword had the angel not doomed him by brandishing his sword, since *Bilam*’s power of *tuma* was so great that *Bnei Yisrael* needed special Heavenly assistance to overcome him (*Aderet Eliyahu*). (2) (i) First, the angel appeared in a place with room for *Bilam* to escape on both sides, indicating that if *Bilam* wanted to curse the descendants of *Avraham*, he could curse the offspring of *Hagar* or *Ketura*, but not *Bnei Yisrael*; (ii) the angel then appeared on a path where the *Bilam*’s donkey could escape only on one side, indicating that if *Bilam* wanted to curse the descendants of *Yitzchak*, he could curse the offspring of *Eisav*, but not *Bnei Yisrael*; (iii) then, the angel appeared where *Bilam* could not turn at all, indicating that an attack on the offspring of *Ya’akov* would be futile (*Bamidbar Raba*). **(i)** *Hashem* showed *Bilam* that just as He can make a dumb animal speak, He will put His Will into *Bilam*’s mouth (*Ramban*). **(j)** After *Hashem* warned *Lavan* not to harm *Ya’akov* (*Bereishit* 31:24), *Lavan* and *Ya’akov* made a stone mound symbolizing peace, and when *Bilam* went to curse *Bnei Ya’akov*, he violated this agreement that *bnei Lavan* and *Bnei Ya’akov* shall not harm one another, and these stones crushed *Bilam*’s leg to remind him not to harm *Bnei Yisrael* (*Chizkuni*).

**Q-3. (a)** (1) Why did *Hashem* give *Bilam* permission to go with the *Moavim* (2 views)? (2) Since *Hashem* gave him permission to go, why was He angry with *Bilam* when he went with the *Moavim* (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)** (1) What is the significance of the words, “*malach* (angel of) *Hashem*” occurring 10 times in 22:22-35)? (2) Which 10 tests from *Hashem* did *Bilam* fail? (*Bamidbar* 22:12-35; 23:1)

**A-3. (a)** (1) (i) Since *Bilam* insisted on going, *Hashem* agreed, since “every man is led in the path he wishes to go” (*Makot* 10b). (ii) *Hashem* did not want *Bilam* to claim later, “*Hashem* did not let me go because He was afraid of my curses” (*Medrash Hagadol*). (2) (i) *Hashem* allowed him to go to get money

from Moav but not curse *Bnei Yisrael*, and He was angry when *Bilam* intended to curse *Bnei Yisrael* (*Rashi*). (ii) *Hashem* wanted *Bilam* to go to carry out His Will, but instead, he went for personal greed (*Sadia Ga'on*). (iii) *Hashem* told *Bilam* to go but not to curse *Bnei Yisrael*, but *Bilam* failed to tell the *Moavim* what *Hashem* said (*Ramban*). (iv) *Hashem* wanted *Bilam* to caution *Moav* not to sin, but instead, *Bilam* wanted to help them (*Sforno*). (b) 2 youths escorted *Bilam* to *Balak*, just as 2 youths escorted *Avraham* (*Bereishit* 22:3) to the *akeida* (*Rashi*). (c) It hints at the 10 trials that *Avraham* passed, and the 10<sup>th</sup> trial was offering a ram in place of *Yitzchak* – *Bilam* hoped that his 7 rams would outweigh the merit of *Avraham's korban* of a single ram (*Rokeach*). (d) (1) It alludes to the 10 tests from *Hashem* that *Bilam* failed, unlike *Avraham* who passed 10 tests from *Hashem*; (2) (i) *Hashem* first told *Bilam* not to go, but he did not obey; (ii) *Hashem* told him not curse *Bnei Yisrael*, but he intended to curse them; (iii) *Bilam* ignored his donkey's leaving the path, (iv) he ignored its pressing his foot against the wall, (v) he ignored its crouching down to stop him, and (vi) he ignored its speaking; (vii) *Bilam* saw the angel, but he did not repent; (viii) he tried "bribing" *Hashem* by offering *korbanot* to Him at altars that he and *Balak* built at *Barnot Ba'al*, (ix) at *Rosh haPisga*, and (x) at *Rosh haPeor* (*Vilna Gaon*).

**Q-4.** (a) Since both "*Balak and Bilam* offered a bull and ram on each altar", why does 23:2 use the singular, "*va-ya'al* (he offered)? (b) (1) What was *Balak's* reward for offering bulls and rams to *Hashem* in 3 places? (2) What rule for performing *mitzvot* do we learn from this? (c) Since *Hashem* told *Bilam* exactly what to say to *Balak*, what does the phrase, "*Hashem* put an utterance in *Bilam's* mouth", add (4 views)? (d) Why did *Bilam* speak of seeing *Bnei Yisrael* "from rocks and hills" (2 views)? (e) What did *Bilam* mean when he said that *Bnei Yisrael* "will not be reckoned among the nations" (2 views)? (f) Why does 23:4 say, "*Elokim* happened upon *Bilam*", while 23:16 says, "*Hashem* happened upon *Bilam*"? (*Bamidbar* 23:1-5,9-16,29-30)

**A-4.** (a) Since one with a physical blemish may not offer a *korban*, *Bilam*, who was lame and had vision in one eye (*Rashi* – 24:3), taught *Balak* how to offer the *korbanot*, since *Bilam*, as a *ba'al moom*, could not offer *korbanot* (*Oznayim laTorah*). (b) (1) His offspring would include (i) the righteous *Rut*, (ii) *Malchut Beit David* and (iii) *Melech haMashiach*; (2) one should perform a *mitzva* "even not for its own sake (*sheh-lo lishma*), because from performing [a *mitzvah*] not for its own sake, he will eventually do it for its own sake (*lishma*)" – *Balak's* repeated offerings of *korbanot*, which were attempted malicious acts in order to destroy *Bnei Yisrael*, led to *Bnei Yisrael's* being blessed, and this positive result was rewarded with *Balak's* righteous offspring (*Sanhedrin* 105b). (c) (1) Although *Hashem* gave *Bilam* the words to say, *Bilam* did not know what those words would be until after he said them; (2) *Hashem* taught *Bilam* the words so that he should review them with his mouth and neither forget nor omit any of them (*Ramban*). (3) An angel spoke through the mouth of *Bilam* (*Medrash Tanchuma*). (4) *Hashem* put a hook in *Bilam's* mouth to control what he said (*Sanhedrin* 105a). (d) (1) *Bilam* saw the origin of *Bnei Yisrael* from the strength of its "rocks", which referred to the *avot*, and "hills", which referred to the *imahot* (*Rashi*). (2) *Balak* brought *Bilam* to the Heights of *Ba'al*, from where *Bilam* saw *Bnei Yisrael* camped in solitude (*Rashi*). (e) (1) When *Hashem* will make His final judgments against the evil of the nations, *Bnei Yisrael* will not be included in this; (2) *Bnei Yisrael* will enjoy the goodness bestowed by the other nations, which will not be deducted from the account of the merits of *Bnei Yisrael* (*Rashi*). (f) Until now, *Bilam* hoped that *Bnei Yisrael* would be judged for their sins by the Attribute of Justice, which is reflected in the Name "*Elokim*", but now, *Bilam* realized that *Bnei Yisrael* would be judged by the Attribute of Mercy, reflected in the Name "*Hashem*" (*Ramban*).

**Q-5.** (a) Why did *Bilam* call his father, "*Bilam's* son"? (b) To what did *Bilam* 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*"? (d) About whom did *Bilam* prophesy, saying, (1) "I see him, but not now"? (2) "I behold him, but it is not near"? (3) "a star shall stride from *Ya'akov*"? (4) "a scepter-bearer shall rise from *Yisrael*"; (5) "and shall pierce the extremities of *Moav*"; (6) "and break down all of the sons of *Shei'*"? (7) "and *Edom* shall be [his] possession"? (8) "and *Se'ir* shall be [his] possession"? (e) (1) Since all of the curses that *Bilam* would have spoken against *Bnei Yisrael* would have been ineffective, why did *Hashem* prevent *Bilam* from uttering them (2 views)? (2) What happened to all of the curses that *Bilam* tried to utter but was unable to articulate? (*Bamidbar* 24:3,5,7,17-18)

**A-5.** (a) He boasted that he was a greater sorcerer than his father, *Be'or*, was (*Rashi*). (b) (1) *Bilam* (i) saw the encamped tents of *Bnei Yisrael*, and he praised their family privacy, since the entrances of their tent were not aligned opposite each other; (ii) prophesied the existence of *Mishkan Shiloh* ("*oha-lecha*") and the *Beit haMikdash* ("*mishkeno-techa*") (*Rashi*). (iii) Saw prophetically and praised the *batei keneisiot* (houses of prayer, i.e., "*oha-lecha*") and *batei medrashot* (halls of *Torah* learning, i.e., "*mishkeno-techa*") of *Bnei Yisrael* (*Rokeach*). (c) It is a prophecy that the *Melech Shaul* will defeat the king of *Amaleik*, *Agag* (*Rashi*). (d) (1) *Dovid haMelech*; (2) *Melech haMashi'ach*; (3) *Dovid haMelech*; (4) *Melech haMashi'ach*; (5) *Dovid haMelech*; (6) *Melech haMashi'ach*; (7) *Dovid haMelech*; (8) *Melech haMashi'ach* (*Rambam* – *Hilchot Melachim* 11:1). (e) (1) (i) *Bilam's* uttering the curses could have become a *chilul Hashem*, since later tragedies, such as the plague on *Bnei Yisrael* for worshipping at *Ba'al Peor*, could have been attributed wrongly to the effectiveness of the curses by *Bilam* (*R. Bechaya*). (ii) All of the nations were waiting for *Bilam* to utter curses before attacking *Bnei Yisrael*, and when they saw that *Bilam* was unable to curse *Bnei Yisrael*, it caused them to tremble and to not attack *Bnei Yisrael*, which was a great *kidush Hashem* (*Abarbanel*). (2) All of the evil that *Bilam* entertained in his heart were realized during the *galut* of *Bnei Yisrael* as a result of the sins of *Bnei Yisrael*, except the verse that related to *Bnei Yisrael's* losing all of their *Batei Knesiot* and *Batei Midrashot* (*Sanhedrin* 106a).

**Q-6.** (a) Why does 25:2 tell us that *Bnei Yisrael* ate before worshipping *Ba'al Peor*? (b) Why did the "man of *Bnei Yisrael*" [*Zimri*] bring "the *Midyanit* woman" in the sight of *Moshe* and *Bnei Yisrael* (2 views)? (c) How do we know that a *kana'i* (zealot) may kill a man and woman who were publicly engaging in immorality only while they are engaged in the act of immorality, not after? (d) When *Pinchas* killed *Zimri* and *Cosby*, (1) what 12 miracles did *Hashem* perform? (2) which 3 gifts did the *kohanim* merit because *Pinchas* killed *Zimri* and *Cosby*? (*Bamidbar* 25:2,6-8)

**A-6.** (a) Since those people who ate *mun* did not need to relieve themselves, and since, to worship *Ba'al Peor*, one had to relieve himself in front of the idol, the *Midyanit* women fed *Bnei Yisrael* regular food so that they could worship *Ba'al Peor* in the prescribed manner (*Sanhedrin* 60b). (b) (1) *Zimri* lusted after a *Midyanit* woman named *Cosby*, and he wanted *Moshe* to allow him to have relations with her, just like *Moshe* had married a *Midyanit*, *Tzipora* (*Rokeach*). (2) *Zimri* pretended that he was preventing *Bnei Yisrael* from worshipping *Ba'al Peor*, since he wanted *Moshe's* consent for the men to fulfill their desires in the camp of *Bnei Yisrael*, away from *Ba'al Peor* (*Sotah* 22b). (c) *Pinchas*, as a *kana'i*, killed *Zimri* and *Cosby* only while they were engaged in the immoral act, and he did not wait until they were finished (*Rambam* – *Hilchot Isurei Bi'ah* 12:5). (d) (1) (i) *Pinchas* was able to kill *Zimri* and *Cosby* while they were engaging in the immoral act, since they miraculously did not draw apart as *Pinchas* approached; (ii) *Zimri* and *Cosby* were speechless, unable to call out to *Zimri's* *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 *Pinchas* dragged them outside, an angel lifted the tent, enabling him to emerge upright; (vi) *Hashem* gave *Pinchas* the strength to hold *Zimri* and *Cosby* on his spear while he walked through the camp; (vii) when *Pinchas* twirled them around in front of the relatives of *Zimri*, they were unable to harm him; (viii) the spear hardened, and it did not break under their combined weight; (ix) the spear elongated so that 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 *Pinchas* carried them, so that *Pinchas* did not become *tamay*; (xii) none of their blood touched *Pinchas* (*Sanhedrin* 82b). (2) A *korban's* (i) *zeroa* (forearm), in reward for *Pinchas's* raising his arm to defend the honor of *Hashem*; (ii) *lechayim* (cheeks), in reward for his praying to end the plague; (iii) *keiva* (stomach), in reward for piercing the stomachs of *Zimri* and *Cosby* (*Sefer haChinuch* – *Mitzvah* 506).

**Q-7.** In the *haftara*, when the *Navi* says that *Bnei Yisrael* should "know the '*tzidkot*' (benevolences) of *Hashem*" 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 have cursed *Bnei Yisrael*, as *Balak* plotted, since each day, there is a *rega* (an instant, which is equal to 1/58,888<sup>th</sup> of an hour (1/16<sup>th</sup> of a second)) when *Hashem* is angry, and the *da'at Elyon* (knowledge of the Supreme) of *Bilam*, enabled him to determine the *rega* during which to invoke the anger of *Hashem*, and had He become angry, no trace of *Bnei Yisrael* would have remained, but the *tzidkot* of *Hashem* were that He did not get angry when *Bilam* tried to curse them (*Berachot* 7a). (b) Since *Bilam* could speak only those words that *Hashem* put in his mouth, the *tzidkot* of *Hashem* foiled the plot of *Balak* and forced *Bilam* to respond with blessings of *Bnei Yisrael* (*ibn Ezra*).