



The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Bamidbar

Parshat Balak

Tamuz 5781 / June 2021

Finding Our Hidden Blessings and Miracles

By Jonathan Katz



זכרונה לברכה

This dvar Torah is dedicated to the memory of David Steiner, a classmate who tragically passed away this month.

MAY HIS NESHAMAH HAVE AN ALIYAH AND HIS MEMORY BE A BLESSING

At a surface level, *Parshat Balak* appears to portray the all too consistent theme that follows the Jewish people through the desert — Hashem performs a miracle, the Jews defiantly sin, the nation is punished and the cycle repeats.

Balak, the King of Moav, feared the Jewish people and the might of *Hashem*, so he hired *Bilaam*, a prophet or magician of sorts, to travel to the encampment of the Jews and curse them. *Bilaam* makes repeated attempts to follow through on this plot to curse the Jews, but at every turn, he ends up blessing the Jews instead. This is the miracle of the *parsha*.

Then, almost immediately after *Bilaam* failed to execute the plot, the Jews en masse become drawn into the immoral and promiscuous activities of the Moabites. *Rashi* tells us that *Moshe* and the other leaders cried during this period of transgression because of the sheer brazenness of the public sinning, which caused them to lose hope and faith in their own people.

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Finally, *Pinchas* takes action on his own to stop the people from sinning, and the plague that Hashem had sent to the people stopped after 24,000 people had died.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, notes that this cycle of miracle, sin, and punishment is different from most others in the Torah.

The Jewish people were blissfully unaware of *Balak* and his plot. The only ones who knew the

true story of the plot to curse the Jewish people and the miracle that ensued were *Balak*, *Bilaam*, and *Bilaam's* traveling party. With that perspective, the sinning at the end of the *parsha* (while still bad) is not as openly defiant as it first seems — after all, the Jews were unaware of the miracle that Hashem has just done for them.

While deep down we know that we are blessed and that miracles are happening to us every single day, the hidden nature of the miracle in our *parsha* resonates a great deal this year.

We are now getting to a point where the most serious parts of the pandemic are becoming an ever more distant memory. Yet, looking back, we can all point to things that were truly miraculous in hindsight — whether it was a year of safe and healthy schooling for our kids, making it through the pandemic with our health intact, or the strength of our community that kept us bonded together during periods of isolation.

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We should all remember these blessings and hidden miracles as life "gets back to normal" and be cognizant of where they all come from.

Jonathan and Jessica moved to Scarsdale in 2011 with their four month old son. Drawn to the warmth, diversity and "low key" nature of the YIS community. They are active serving on the Board, Reopening, New Member Welcome, and Dinner Committees, etc. They're excited to raise Matthew, Ella, Spencer and Aiden in the neighborhood and look forward to the community continuing to grow and flourish.

Save the date

EXPLAINING THE WORD TORAH

Rabbi Menachem Liebttag will introduce Sefer Devarim

Wednesday • July 14 • 8 PM

Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?

Please contact Steve Smith at stevenjsmith@yahoo.com

The Collective Conversation is a project of the Young Israel of Scarsdale and the YIS Living Torah Fund
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