

D'var Torah by Rabbi M. Jaroslawicz for Parshas Balak 5775 (2015)

This week's Parshas Balak always challenges our "emunah" -- where we are expected to believe that a donkey spoke to Bilham. We have a difficult time accepting that anything outside of the realm of what we call "natural" could actually have REALLY happened. Our Rabbis anticipated this skepticism, and addressed our doubts by letting us know that this story was "part of nature," and not beyond it.

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (5:8) teaches us that ten things were created Bain Hashmashos, just before nightfall, on the sixth day of creation, Friday. One of the ten things mentioned is the "Pi Ha'ason," the mouth of the donkey, referring to this week's Parsha story. By letting us know that this phenomena was built into the structure of nature, albeit in the last seconds before Shabbos, our Rabbis are reinforcing our understanding of "nature" and making us aware that "Ain Chadash Tachas Hashemesh," there is nothing NEW under the sun. Everything that takes place in the universe has its roots in the original six days of creation.

I, for one, have a much easier time understanding how an animal would strive to elevate itself to talk like a human, than how a human could lower himself to talk like an animal.

Let's take a look at what the donkey actually says to Bilham:

"Meh aseese lecha ki heekesani zeh shalosh regalim [What have I done to you that you have smitten me these three times]?"

Most interesting is the donkey's choice of word. While the word "regalim" could, indeed, mean "times," the more appropriate terminology would have been to say "zeh shalosh PE'AMIM." Why the use of the words "shalosh regalim"? Rashi says that the donkey was telling Bilham, "You are trying to wipe out a nation that celebrates "Shalosh Regalim," three holidays a year...."

The Kotzker Rebbe asks:

"Of all the Mitzvos to which the donkey could have alluded as an example of the commitment of the Jewish people, why choose "shalosh regalim"?"

Answers the Kotzker:

When Balak's entourage approached Bilham with their request to have him curse the Jewish people, Bilham responded by telling them to "spend the night" so that he could communicate with Hashem and see what Hashem wanted him to do. From that response, Rashi teaches us that non-Jewish prophets are only able to receive their prophecy at night, in a dream state.

So, what the donkey was telling Bilham is as follows. You, Bilham, are subservient to time -- as you can only receive prophecy at night. The Jewish people are ABOVE time. They actually SANCTIFY time when they say, "mekadaish Yisroel v'hazmanim" three times a year at their "Shalosh Regalim." How do you, Bilham, have the audacity to try and dominate them?

This praise that the donkey bestowed upon K'lal Yisroel, acknowledging their dominion over time, was imbedded into the universe at the time of creation. It is our destiny to utilize time correctly and to fulfill our purpose.

While "Shalosh Regalim" does, indeed, mean the three holidays, it also means THREE TIMES, as in the simple interpretation of the donkey's statement. Three times a day that we Daven and acknowledge our belief and devotion to Hashem.

Do we need a donkey to remind us to go to Shul?

Have a great Shabbos.