



“My people, please remember what Balak, King of Moav, schemed”

Balak Possessed a Nitzotz of David HaMelech the Future Melech HaMashiach He Requested that HKB”H Take the Seventy Nations in Place of Yisrael

This week’s parsha is parshas Balak. It behooves us to focus on the evil scheme Balak, King of Moav, and Bilam ben Beor planned against Yisrael, and how HKB”H, in His infinite compassion, kindness, and love for Yisrael thwarted their plan. Furthermore, in this week’s Haftarah, Michah HaNavi conveys to Yisrael the following request from HKB”H (Michah 6, 5): **“עמי זכר נא מה יעץ בלק מלך מואב, ומה ענה אותו בלעם”** **My people, please remember what Balak, King of Moav, schemed, and what Bilam son of Beor answered him, from Shittim to Gilgal—so that you may realize the righteous acts of Hashem.**

Thus, the prophet teaches us that there is a mitzvah to remember the entire episode and negotiations between Balak, King of Moav, and the wicked Bilam. Their malicious goal was to annihilate the Jewish people. In the end, however, Hashem protected us from their evil scheme like an impenetrable wall. In the Gemara, Chazal explain the magnitude of Hashem’s righteous acts in this matter (Berachos 7a):

“מאי למען דעת צדקות ה’, אמר רבי אלעזר, אמר להם הקב”ה לישראל, דעו כמה צדקות עשיתי עמכם שלא כעסתי בימי בלעם הרשע, שאלמלי כעסתי לא נשתייר משונאיהם של ישראל שריד ופליט, והיינו דקאמר ליה בלעם לבלק, מה אקוב לא קבה אל ומה אזעום לא זעם ה’, מלמד שכל אותן הימים לא זעם, וכמה זעמו רגע... שנאמר כי רגע באפו חיים ברצונו, ואי בעית אימא מהכא חבי כמעט רגע עד יעבור זעם.”

What is the meaning of: **“So that you may realize the righteous acts of Hashem”?** Rabbi Elazar said: HKB”H said to Yisrael, **“My people, be aware of how many**

righteous acts I performed on your behalf—that I did not display wrath in the days of the wicked Bilam. For had I become angry, no remnant whatsoever would have remained from the enemies of Yisrael (a euphemism for the Jews themselves).” **And this is the implication of that which Bilam said to Balak (Bamidbar 23, 8): “How can I curse? G-d has not cursed. And how can I display anger? Hashem has not displayed anger.”** This teaches us that throughout all those days, He did not become angry. **And how long does his anger last? A moment (“rega”). . . For it is stated (Tehillim 30, 6): “For His anger endures but a moment; His favor extends for a lifetime.”** Or if you prefer, it is derived from here (Yeshayah 26, 20): **“Hide for a moment until anger passes.”**

An Alarming Admonition in the Zohar HaKadosh

We find an alarming passage related to this incident in the Zohar hakadosh (Nasso 134a) that we must all take to heart. The Zohar admonishes us in no uncertain terms that if we neglect to fulfill His request: **“My people, please remember what Balak King of Moav schemed”**—our supplications to HKB”H to recall what has befallen us will be to no avail. Here is a summary of the passage:

Rabbi Yossi said: HKB”H urges Yisrael to remember what Balak plotted. Woe that we scream daily and weep bitterly (Eichah 5, 1): “Remember, Hashem, what has befallen us!” and (Tehillim 137, 7): **“Remember, Hashem,**

the offspring of Edom” (who destroyed Yerushalayim). **Yet, HKB”H does not wish to gratify our requests and look after us, because we fail to heed His request** (regarding Balak). **Hence, we continue to suffer and cry out to Him.**

What malicious plans did Balak and Bilam actually have in mind for Yisrael? In the Gemara, in the Midrash, and in the Zohar hakadosh, Chazal, with their “ruach hakodesh,” suggest many intriguing answers. We will delve into one of their profound explanations including how HKB”H in His righteousness thwarted their evil plot by refraining from getting angry at Yisrael. May Hashem guide us on the path of “emet”!

As a Reward for the 42 Korbanos the Wicked Balak Offered He Was Privileged to Have David HaMelech Descend from Him

We will begin by introducing an illuminating passage in the Gemara (Nazir 23b): **”אמר רבי יהודה אמר רב לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ובמצוות אפילו שלא לשמן, שמתוך שלא לשמן בא לשמן, שבשכר מ”ב קרבנות שהקריב בלק הרשע, זכה ויצאה ממנו רות, ואמר רבי יוסי ברבי חנינא. Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: A person should always occupy himself with Torah and mitzvos even not for their own sake (for ulterior motives), because from these acts performed not I’shma, he will eventually do them (learn Torah and perform mitzvos) I’shma. The proof of this is that in reward for the forty-two korbanos that the wicked Balak offered (which were clearly not I’shma), he merited that Ruth descended from him. And Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Chanina said: Ruth was the daughter of the son of Eglon the King of Moav (the grandson of Balak).**

The calculation of 42 korbanos is spelled out for us by Rashi and Tosafos. It states in the Torah that Balak took Bilam to three locations from which to curse Yisrael. At each of these sites, Bilam instructed him to erect seven mizbachot; on each mizbeiach, he sacrificed one bull and one ram for a total of 14 korbanos at each site. Three times fourteen equals forty-two.

Now, Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: **“He merited that Ruth descended from him.”** Rashi comments: **David descended from him, who satiated HKB”H with songs and**

praises. It appears that Rashi wanted to explain why they specified that Ruth descended from Balak rather than David. He does so with a reference to a teaching in the Gemara (B.B. 14b): **”למה נקרא שמה רות, שיצא ממנה דוד שריהו להקב”ה בשירות”**—**why was she named Ruth? Because David descended from her, who satiated HKB”H with songs and praises** (i.e., the psalms in sefer Tehillim; the name Ruth is similar to the Hebrew word for satiate).

Notwithstanding, the statement of Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav is extremely curious. After all, Tosafos (A.Z. 4b) explain that Bilam planned to curse Yisrael at the precise moment that HKB”H gets angry each day by uttering the word **”כלם”—eradicate them.** So, how is it possible to consider the korbanos Balak offered as a mitzvah **not I’shma** that ultimately resulted in something **I’shma**—namely, that David HaMelech descended from him?

The Source for the Obligation to Believe in the Coming of the Mashiach Is the Nevuah HKB”H Compelled the Wicked Bilam to Utter

I believe that we can explain our sages’ enigmatic words—concerning the connection between the 42 korbanos offered by Balak the King of Moav and the fact that David HaMelech descended from him—based on one of the Thirteen Principles of Emunah enumerated by the Rambam in his commentary on the Mishnayos (Sanhedrin, Cheilek). They are so essential to our faith that anyone who denies any of them is considered a heretic. One of the principles is the belief in the coming of the Mashiach, which we express daily: **”אני מאמין באמונה שלימה בביאת המשיח, ואף על פי שיתמהמה עם כל זה אחכה לו בכל יום שיבוא”—I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Mashiach, and even though he may delay, nevertheless I will await his coming daily.**

It is important to point out that the source in the holy Torah for the notion that HKB”H is destined to redeem Yisrael by sending the Melech HaMashiach—a descendant of David HaMelech—is found in this week’s parsha. Here is what we are taught by the Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 11, 1):

In the future, the Melech HaMashiach will arise and restore the Davidic dynasty to its initial sovereignty. He will build the Mikdash and gather the dispersed of Israel.

In his days, the observance of all the statutes will return to their previous state. We will offer korbanos, observe the “shemitah” and “yoveil” years with all of their mitzvot as delineated in the Torah.

Anyone who does not believe in him or does not await his coming, denies not only the legitimacy of the other neviim but also that of the Torah and Moshe Rabeinu. After all, the Torah attests to him, as it states (Devarim 30, 4): “Hashem, your God, will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you. He will again gather you in from among the nations . . . Even if your dispersed will be at the ends of the heavens, Hashem will gather you in from there . . . Hashem, your G-d, will bring you to the land.” These words stated explicitly in the Torah include all the statements made by all the neviim.

Reference (to Mashiach) is also made in the portion of Bilam. There he prophesies about two mashiachs—the first mashiach is David, who saved Yisrael from her oppressors, and the last mashiach, who will arise from his descendants and save Yisrael in the end of days. There, he says (Bamidbar 24, 17): “I see it but not now”—this refers to David; “I perceive it, but it is not near”—this refers to the Melech HaMashiach; “a star emerged from Yaakov”—this refers to David; “and a staff shall rise from Yaakov”—this refers to the Melech HaMashiach; “and he shall smite all the princes of Moav”—this refers to David . . . “and undermine all the children of Sheis”—this refers to the Melech HaMashiach . . . “Edom shall be a conquest”—this refers to David . . . “and Seir shall be a conquest . . .”—this refers to the Melech HaMashiach, as it states (Ovadia 1, 21): “Saviors will ascend from Har Tziyon . . .”

Now, it is incumbent upon us to explain why HKB”H saw fit to reveal this emunah in “two mashiachs” (as depicted by the Rambam) specifically through the prophecies imposed on Bilam HaRasha by HKB”H.

Bilam HaRasha Intended to Hasten the Geulah by Inducing the Seventy Nations to Believe in Hashem

I had a wonderful idea. I would like to explain the matter based on a passage in the Midrash that illuminates the entire

episode of Balak’s and Bilam’s evil scheme. The passage focuses on why Bilam instructed Balak to erect specifically seven mizbachot at each of the three sites (Bamidbar Rabbah 20, 18):

The seven altars correspond to the seven altars built by the following seven tzaddikim—Adam, Hevel, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and Moshe. Bilam reasoned that Hashem favored them because of their offerings and service to Him. So, he appealed to Hashem: Wouldn’t it be nicer for you to be served by seventy nations rather than by a single nation? He received the following divine response (Mishlei 17, 1): “Better a dry piece of bread and peace with it than a house full of celebrations that are contentious”—for you wish to introduce contention between Me and Yisrael.

This Midrash provides us with a novel perspective regarding the intent of Balak King of Moav and Bilam harasha. They conspired to annihilate Yisrael in a war to the bitter end. Hence, Bilam asked HKB”H: “Wouldn’t it be better to be served by seventy nations instead of a single nation?!” Furthermore, they have already been guilty of numerous severe transgression—the foremost of which was the “cheit ha’eigel.” This is alluded to in the narrative when “Bilam turns his face toward the midbar” (Bamidbar 14, 1). According to Targum Onkelos, this implies that he called to mind the “eigel” that Yisrael had made in the midbar.

Let us elaborate on the serious accusations made by Bilam harasha. In another Midrash (ibid. 14, 20) related to the passuk (ibid. 7, 89), Chazal equate Bilam’s power of nevuah to that of Moshe Rabeinu: **It was taught in a Baraisa** expounding on the passuk (Devarim 34, 10): “Never again has there arisen in Yisrael a navi like Moshe.” **In Yisrael, there did not arise, but in the nations of world one did arise. This was so that the nations of the world would not have an opportunity to argue, “If we would have had a navi like Moshe, we would have served HKB”H.” And which navi did they have like Moshe? This is Bilam ben Beor.**

From this perspective, we can begin to comprehend Bilam's scheme. He argued that HKB"H gave him a level of nevuah comparable to that of Moshe Rabeinu, **so that the nations of the world would not have an opportunity to argue, "If we would have had a navi like Moshe, we would have served HKB"H."** It was as if Bilam was announcing to Hashem, "Indeed, I have decided to influence all the nations to perform teshuvah, to no longer worship avodah-zarah, but to serve Hashem. For this reason, I have built seven mizbachot emulating the **seven tzaddikim from Adam to Moshe.** So, why should You support Yisrael, **is it not preferable to be served by seventy nations instead of by a single nation?!"**

However, HKB"H, Who is aware of everyone's inner thoughts, recognized Yisrael's true desires and intentions; they wished to serve HKB"H wholeheartedly; they only sinned with the "eigel" due to the influence of the Eirev Rav. Conversely, He knew all too well that Bilam and the seventy nations were still very far away from recognizing and accepting the sovereignty of HKB"H. Hence, HKB"H responded to Bilam: **"Better a dry piece of bread and peace with it than a house full of celebrations that are contentious."**

Through His Sorcery Bilam Foresaw that David HaMelech Was Destined to Descend from Him

Following this line of thought, we will continue to explain in greater depth Bilam's strategy. We will refer to the exposition of the Zohar hakadosh (Balak 184b) on the passuk (Bamidbar 22, 2): **"Balak the son of Tzippor saw etc." Rabbi Shimon said: What vision did he see? He saw a definite, actual vision through the window of chochmah.** So, what was this vision that prompted him to hire Bilam to combat Yisrael?

In Agra D'Kallah, the brilliant author of the Bnei Yissaschar suggests an explanation. The King of Moav foresaw that the holy nitzotz of David HaMelech, who would descend from Ruth, was concealed within him. Therefore, he tried all sorts of maneuvers to prevent that holy spark from getting away from him. Here is a loose translation and synopsis of his sacred words:

A nation's existence and life-force derive from the holy sparks (nitzotzot) that are buried within its midst. Once Yisrael extracts those sparks (of kedushah), that nation will be a lifeless corpse and cease to exist. As we have explained many times, this is what happened to Mitzrayim. The holier and more valuable the "nitzotz," the greater the fear of it being taken away, and the greater the effort they exert to conceal it and bury it within the depths of their tumah. Now, the essential life-force of Moav stemmed from the holy "nitzotz" of the neshamah of David and his descendants buried within their klipah. For this reason, Yisrael was commanded not to instigate a war with Moav until the time designated to reveal that holy spark; that would also mark the end of the realm of Moav. Now, seeing as that "nitzotz" was the spark of the dynasty of the kings of Yisrael, it was most certainly buried in whoever was the King of Moav at any given time.

Accordingly, the Agra D'Kallah interprets the pesukim at the beginning of this week's parsha: **"וירא בלק בן ציפור"—Balak the son of Tzippor saw** with his tremendous powers of tumah that the holy "nitzotz" of David HaMelech was concealed within the nation of Moav and within him personally, since he was the King of Moav. **"ויגר מואב מפני העם מאד"—Moav was very frightened of the people**—they feared that Yisrael would take the holy "nitzotz" of David HaMelech away from them—the "nitzotz" that kept them alive. **"כירב הוא"—because it was invaluable**—they knew that they could not continue to exist without it; therefore, they went to great lengths to conceal it and safeguard it.

The Agra D'Kallah concludes his sacred remarks by extolling the virtues and wonders of Hashem—that Eglon the grandfather of Ruth would descend from Balak, that the line of Yishai would descend from her, that Hashem foiled their scheme, and the plan of Hashem would always win out. It is truly one of the wonders of divine supervision that the neshamah of David HaMelech emerged specifically from the klipah and the forces of evil and tumah.

Balak and Bilam Hoped to Prevent the Revelation of Mashiach ben David by Drawing the Seventy Nations Closer to HKB”H

Continuing along this sublime path, we know that the Melech HaMashiach is a descendant of David HaMelech. In the words of the Gemara (Succah 52a): *”משיח בן דוד שעתיד להגלות במהרה בימינו”*—**Mashiach descended from David, who is destined to appear speedily in our days.** Furthermore, according to a teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Lech Lecha 82b), David HaMelech himself is destined to be the Melech HaMashiach. Thus, **David HaMelech lives on for all eternity; and even in the times of the Melech HaMashiach, he will be king. For, we have learned that the Melech HaMashiach, whether he is from the living, his name is David, and whether he is from the dead who have been resurrected, his name will be David.**

Understood in this light, the strategy that Bilam harasha proposed to Balak King of Moav is easier to comprehend. Since the Melech HaMashiach is destined to descend from David HaMelech and defeat all the nations of the world including Moav and Midyan, their aim was to prevent the emergence of David HaMelech. Using the power of the holy nitzotz of David HaMelech they possessed, they figured that they could hasten the arrival of the geulah by returning all of the seventy nations to the service of HKB”H. They believed that if that occurred, HKB”H would no longer require or desire the sovereignty of Yisrael. This is what the wicked Bilam implied when he said to HKB”H: **“Wouldn’t it be nicer for you to be served by seventy nations rather than by a single nation?!”**

Accordingly, I would like to suggest a reason for Bilam instructing Balak to offer 42 korbanos to HKB”H. In Likutei Torah (Masei), our illustrious teacher, the Arizal, explains why Yisrael travelled 42 journeys in the midbar, which correspond to the 42-letter name of *”אנא בכח”*.

This tefilah is attributed to the divine Tanna, Rabbi Nechuniah ben HaKannah, and is formulated based on the name of 42 letters. We recite it daily in Shacharis in the

portion of the korbanos. It is divided into seven names of six letters, which are formed by the first letters of the words on each line, as follows:

א'נא ב'כח ג'דולת ו'מינך ת'תיר צ'רורה
 ק'בל ר'נת ע'מך ש'גבנו ט'הרנו ג'זרא
 נ'א ג'בור ד'ורשי י'חודך כ'כבת ש'מורם
 ב'רכם ט'הרם ר'חמי צ'דקתך ת'מיד ג'מלם
 ח'סין ק'דוש ב'רוכ ט'וכך נ'הל ע'דתך
 י'חיד ג'אה ל'עמך ב'נה ז'וכרי ק'דושתך
 ש'ועתנו ק'בל ו'שמע צ'עקתנו י'ודע ת'עלומות

The first letters of the first line spell the name *אבג-ג-ית”ץ* ;
 the first letters of the second line spell the name *קר-ע-שט”ן* ;
 the first letters of the third line spell the name *נגד-ד-יכ”ש* ;
 the first letters of the fourth line spell the name *בבט”ר-צת”ג* ;
 the first letters of the fifth line spell the name *חזק-ב-טנ”ע* ;
 the first letters of the sixth line spell the name *יגל-ל-פז”ק* ;
 the first letters of the seventh line spell the name *שק”ו-צי”ת*.

The Arizal teaches us that the name of 42 letters possessed the power to elevate the sparks of kedushah that were scattered throughout the midbar. Thus, by means of the 42 journeys, Bnei Yisrael successfully elevated and rectified all of those sparks of kedushah and then merited entering Eretz Yisrael.

This explains why Bilam advised Balak to offer 42 korbanos corresponding to the name of 42 letters. He believed that in the merit of the nitzotz of David HaMelech inside him—the future Melech HaMashiach—he would be able to elevate all the sparks of kedushah from the seventy nations of the world. They would perform teshuvah and accept upon themselves the sovereignty of HKB”H. As a result, the holy nitzotz of David HaMelech would never have to leave him. From this perspective, Balak offering 42 korbanos to draw the seventy nations back to HKB”H was a type of mitzvah. Clearly, however, it was **“lo l’shma,”** since his real intent was to prevent Yisrael from wiping out all of Moav at the time of the geulah.

Nevertheless, this is indeed confounding. After all, Balak did offer 42 korbanos, albeit lo-l’shma, to retain the holy

nitzotz of David HaMelech. Yet, it was specifically this holy nitzotz that helped Balak and inspired him to offer these korbanos—corresponding to the name of 42 letters—so that it (David HaMelech) could escape from the klipah of Balak and become the King of Yisrael. In that capacity, he would subjugate all the nations of the world—especially at the time of the geulah as the Melech HaMashiach.

We now have cause to rejoice! We have shed some light on the profound but enigmatic teaching of Chazal: **לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ומצוות אפילו שלא לשמן, שמתוך שלא לשמן בא לשמן, שבשכר מ"ב קרבנות שהקריב בלק הרשע זכה ויצאה ממנו רות**. Let us explain this in keeping with our current discussion. **“From that which was done lo-I’shma”**—the 42 korbanos offered by the negative, impure klipah of Balak—something **I’shma** transpired. The holy nitzotz of David HaMelech within Balak urged him to offer these korbanos, so that he would ultimately come to life through Moav as a descendant of Ruth the Moabitess. As we know, this is what happened; David HaMelech emerged from his confinement inside the darkness of the klipah of Balak into the light of kedushah of Yisrael.

At this point, we can better appreciate the teaching of the Rambam that from the nevuah Bilam was compelled to prophesy by HKB”H, we learn about our obligation to believe in the coming of the mashiach. As he expounded: **“I see it but not now”—this refers to David; “I perceive it, but it is not near”—this refers to the Melech HaMashiach**. He is teaching us that despite his conniving and trickery, Bilam failed to draw the seventy nations closer to HKB”H and thereby hasten the geulah. Hence, he himself admits: **“I see it but not now” . . . “I perceive it, but it is not near”—that the time of the geulah had not yet arrived**. Then, Bilam’s nevuah continues: **“A star emerged from Yaakov”—this refers to David; “and a staff shall rise from Yaakov”—this refers to the Melech HaMashiach; “and he shall smite all the princes of Moav”—this refers to David . . . “and undermine all the children of Sheis”—this refers to the Melech HaMashiach . . . “Edom shall be a conquest”—this refers to David . . . “and Seir shall be a conquest . . .”—this refers to the Melech HaMashiach, as it states (Ovadiah 1, 21): “Saviors will ascend from Har Tziyon . . .”** May we be privileged to witness this very soon, in our times! Amen.



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