

Balak saw... all that Yisrael had done to the Emori (22:2). Pinchas saw... and he stood up from amid the assembly. (25:7)

Our *parsha* begins with one *re'iyah*, observation, and closes with another *re'iyah*. Balak opens the *parsha* with *Va'yaar Balak ben Tzipor*, "And Balak *ben* Tzipor saw." Pinchas, heir to the Priestly throne of his grandfather Aharon *HaKohen*, concludes the *parsha* with his *re'iyah*, *Vayaar Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen va'yakom mitoch ha'eidah, va'yikach romach b'yado*, "And Pinchas *ben* Elazar *ben* Aharon *HaKohen* saw, and he stood up from amid the assembly and took a spear in his hand" (25:7). We understand that, whenever the Torah states that someone "saw," it is important to explain what in particular caught his attention. This observation motivated his immediate reaction. A person responds to something which comes into his line of vision. If this "something" is powerful enough to catalyze a reaction, it is necessary to explain what produced that response. Furthermore, clearly, neither was Balak the only person who "saw," nor was Pinchas the only person who witnessed a seditious act of perversion taking place. Pinchas was part of a congregation of people who beheld Zimri's aberrational behavior. Balak was not the only person in the world who had heard about the exodus of *Klal Yisrael* from Egypt. The Splitting of the Red Sea and the consequent drowning of the Egyptians were major world events.

Concerning Pinchas, *Rashi* writes, *Raah maaseh v'nizkar halachah*, "Pinchas saw an action and he immediately remembered the *halachah*." In other words, while everyone in *Klal Yisrael* saw what Pinchas saw, only he remembered the appropriate *halachah* which determines the reaction one should have to such an insurrection. What about Balak's observation characterized it as emanating from the Torah? Was he the only one who saw?

In his *Shemen HaTov*, **Horav Zev Weinberger, Shlita**, quotes *Ramban* who questions the timing of the Torah's mentioning that Balak was king of Moav. Why does the *parsha* not mention his monarchy right at the beginning, when it acknowledges his observation of the Jewish People's prowess in overpowering the Egyptians? It is almost as if the Torah was intimating that, at that point, Balak had not yet become king of Moav. **Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl**, comments that this was truly the case. Originally, Balak was neither a ruler, nor was he in line for the Moavite monarchy. Only once he became a rabid anti-Semite, after he took notice of the Jewish problem and how they dealt with the Egyptians, did people begin to give him respect, to the point that he was declared king over Moav. Did we not see this same scenario in Germany, when a maniacal outcast became chancellor of one of the most powerful European countries – all because of the anti-Semitic diatribe which his mouth spewed forth as a result of his demented mind?

Thus, Balak saw an opportunity to ascend to leadership and power by denigrating the Jews. Balak discovered a way to unify his country through hatred of the Jew. We did nothing to his people; yet, he rose against us for personal reasons. This was his chance to achieve distinction. This is what Balak saw that others did not.

An observation can be misunderstood if one does not possess the proper capabilities for seeing correctly. One who has dirty lenses will invariably see everything through a smudged perspective. Likewise, one whose glasses are tinted blue will see everything through a blue hue. Bilaam's vision was subjectively stigmatized, such that he saw only what he wanted to see. Later in the *parsha*, Bilaam had his famous dialogue with his donkey. The donkey was able to see a Heavenly Angel barring the path. Bilaam could not understand why his donkey had decided to rest. He beat the donkey three separate times. Yet, it still did not move forward.

The donkey asked Bilaam, "What did I do to you that [provoked] you to strike me three times?" *Rashi* notes the donkey's use of the word *regalim*, rather than *pe'amim*, which means times. *Regalim* is a reference to the *Shalosh Regalim*, Three Festivals, during which *Klal Yisrael* is *oleh regel*, goes up in pilgrimage to Yerushalayim. *Rashi* explains the donkey's rebuke: "How can you dare to uproot a nation that celebrates the *Regalim*?" Obviously, *Rashi's* explanation begs elucidation. What connection is there between Bilaam's striking his donkey and our nation's thrice yearly pilgrimage to Yerushalayim?

Rav Weinberger quotes *Chazal's* comment to the *Talmud Chagigah's* explanation of the *pasuk* which deals with *Shalosh Regalim: Shalosh pe'amim ba'shanah yeira'eh kol zechurcha es Pnei Hashem Elokecha*, "Three times a year all your males should appear before Hashem, your G-d" (*Devarim* 16:16)." *Chazal* derive from the word *yeira'eh*, which actually means to be seen – rather than to see – that, *k'derech sheba liros kach ba leiraos*, "As he has come to see, so, too, is he seen (by Hashem)." This means that any Jew, regardless of background and affiliation, is able to experience "seeing" the *Shechinah*. He will be transformed by the experience.

Let us now return to the donkey's comment to Bilaam and explain it in light of *Chazal's* commentary. The donkey was intimating, "You, Bilaam, want to uproot a nation that is worthy of seeing and experiencing the *Shechinah* three times a year. You – who are unable to see a Heavenly Angel standing right in front of your eyes – want to take on a nation that sees the Divine Presence – not once but three times yearly. You – who sees less than your own donkey – want to curse a nation whose gift of vision extends to the supernatural." Basically, the donkey was telling Bilaam, "You are out of your league. Stick to pagans."

Korach had a similar form of myopia, seeing only what he wanted to see. *Chazal* question what possessed him to dispute Moshe and Aharon's leadership. What galvanized him to think that he would emerge triumphant in his quest for power? *Chazal* explain: *eino hitaso*, "His eye misled him." Korach saw a distinguished lineage descending from him. Shmuel *HaNavi* was at the helm of this spiritually distinguished lineage. How could he go wrong? The **Chozeh, zl, m'Lublin**, derives from here that one can err even with *Ruach HaKodesh*, Divine Inspiration. The source of one's vision is no guarantee that he will correctly interpret it.

Pinchas, however, saw – *raah, maaseh, v'nizkar halachah*. He saw a repugnant act and immediately remembered the *halachah*. Pinchas was an *ish halachah*, a man closely attuned to –

and whose entire life was relegated and guided by – *halachah*. Thus, as soon as he saw Zimri's act of hedonistic mutiny, he was immediately aware of the *halachic* response to this action.

How one lives defines his perspective. A Torah Jew always views life through the lens of Torah. Thus, he is able to shape his views and responses to events that occur by applying the Torah's interpretive barometer.