

## Behold! The people coming out of Egypt has covered the surface of the earth. Now go and curse it for me. (22:11)

In *Parashas Balak*, we are introduced to a new type of enemy, and, consequently, a battle which is of a completely different nature. Our standard classical enemies, such as Egypt, Amalek and others which followed them, came out to annihilate or persecute us with soldiers, weapons, and a battle plan. Balak and Bilaam did no such thing. Theirs was a battle waged on spiritual terrain, a battle between: the forces of *tumah*, spiritual defilement, and *taharah*, spiritual purity. It was the base, immoral Bilaam, a degenerate of epic proportions, who was hired by Balak, an evil misfit in his own merit, to take down the Jews, to curse and mislead them. The ultimate objective was to destroy the *Am Hashem*, the nation of G-d.

We were unable to fight back, because we were unaware of the enemy. The events and developments described in *Parashas Balak* were unbeknownst to Moshe *Rabbeinu* and *Klal Yisrael*. Thus, they could neither fight back, nor pray to Hashem for salvation. Hashem spared them by turning Bilaam's curse into a blessing. This demonstrates Hashem's abiding love for us. Despite our lack of input, He saw to it that the evil machinations of Balak and Bilaam not only did not achieve fruition, but rather, they became a source of blessing.

This serves as a lesson for us. We are surrounded by a world of enemies, although many of us convince ourselves that we are at peace with the world. Just because the swords are not drawn, the official decrees not overt, the enemies are still there. It is only out of Hashem's love for us that we continue to exist. Therefore, it behooves us to thank and praise the Almighty for everything He does on our behalf.

In his *Teshuvos*, responsa, the **Chasam Sofer** presents us with an incredible insight. I take the liberty of paraphrasing from his *teshuvah*. "I would like to point out that no single event recorded in the Torah was not attested to by *Klal Yisrael's* personal participation. We witnessed it all – except the episode of Bilaam. The Egyptian exile, with its ensuing persecution of our nation, followed by the Heavenly plagues which devastated the country, were witnessed by millions of Jews. The drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, which was split for the Jews, took place before the eyes of six hundred thousand men over the age of twenty. We know that it is true, because 600,000 men do not lie to their children.

Likewise, Amalek's war with our nation was no secret, having occurred when it did before the eyes of the nation. The *Chasam Sofer* quotes *Ramban*, in *Sefer Drashos HaRamban*, where he writes that everything which occurred in *Sefer Bereishis* – such as the Creation of the Universe, the episode with the serpent in *Gan Eden*, Adam and Chavah – was all witnessed by those involved. Adam *HaRishon* saw himself alone in the world. He understood that he was Hashem's first human creation. He saw and experienced the wonders of *Gan Eden* and witnessed his own expulsion. Adam spoke directly with Shem *ben* Noach, who was the *Rebbe* of Yaakov *Avinu*. When Shem

died, Yaakov was fifty years old, and he was able to receive from him all the events of world history that preceded them: The Flood and the Dispersion. This historical narrative was transmitted from Yaakov to his children. Levi taught Amram, who, in turn, taught his sons, Moshe and Aharon. This holds true for every generation: Every father teaches his son about the events of the past, based on the transmission which he received from his father. It is as if the events transpired before our very own eyes. They are irrefutable, undeniable. This idea applies, as well, to all of the stories and events described in the Torah.

Likewise, the details and procedures for performing the *mitzvos* were all clearly delineated. If someone were to attempt to usurp the teachings of Moshe *Rabbeinu* by wearing *Tefillin* in a different way than the one prescribed by Moshe – he would be stoned. The people would contend that we have a *mesorah*, tradition, heralding back to *Har Sinai*, accompanied by Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Yehoshua *bin* Nun and the Elders and Prophets after him. Nothing was concocted. Everything was real, seen through the eyes of the Jews. No one could deviate from the protocols practiced every day before the Elders and Prophets of every generation. Everything that we do today has remained dedicated to the *mesorah* that has been transmitted throughout the generations. This is a *mesorah* in which our forebears, our transmitters, played an active and participating role.

We now come to the “punch line.” We witnessed all of the events recorded in the Torah with our own eyes, except for one: the episode of Bilaam. How do we know what took place between Bilaam and Balak, what their evil intentions were? How do we know why Bilaam visited Balak, who sent for him, who brought him? Who knew that he built altars, attempted to curse the Jews, only to have his curses reversed into blessings? How did the people know? How did Moshe know? The answer to all of these questions is that these events were recorded from the Mouth of Hashem. Hashem taught it all to Moshe. This is no different than any other aspect of Torah.

The *Chasam Sofer*, thus, explains the underlying message conveyed by the *Navi Michah* (which is read in the *Haftarah*, *Michah* 6:5). *Ami, z'chor na man yaatz*, “My people, please remember what Balak, King of Moav, schemed, and what Bilaam *ben* Beor answered him, from Shittim to Gilgag – in order to recognize the benevolence from Hashem.” The *Navi* teaches us that it is a *mitzvah* to remember the episode of Bilaam, the negotiations that ensued between Balak and Bilaam. We must recall Balak’s treachery and Bilaam’s scheme to turn us away from Hashem. Why? Because, as the *Chasam Sofer* says, it is Torah. Indeed, if an individual believes in the entire Torah and its *mitzvos*, but questions the veracity of the Bilaam incident, he demonstrates that he does not believe in Hashem, Our G-d.

With the above in mind, **Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita**, explains the uniqueness of the salvation which Hashem provided during the Balak/Bilaam debacle. The other miracles which Hashem wrought for us followed our supplication, our passionate and sincere entreaty, subsequent to the persecution and suffering which we sustained at the hands of our oppressors, the Egyptians. Likewise, Amalek was an enemy that was not unbeknownst to us. We saw him attacking and we responded with prayer to Hashem. The fact that Hashem listened to our prayers is not a novel idea.

It is natural for a loving Father to respond favorably to his child's painful plea.

With regards to Balak/Bilaam, it was an altogether different battle. *Klal Yisrael* was unaware of their nefarious intentions to spiritually harm us. It was not a physical battle as evinced by Egypt and Amalek; it was a spiritual war, to turn us against Hashem. Despite our ignorance of the enemy, Hashem, nonetheless, came to our rescue, by revealing His love for us. How little we know of the many challenges to our faith and person from which Hashem spares us. We should take the story of Balak/Bilaam as a lesson in remembering that, if we are safe, it is only because Hashem provides the safeguards.