

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Chukat-Balak

Numbers 19:1-25:9

This week's Torah reading consists of two *parshiot*: **Chukat** (Numbers 19:1-22:1) and **Balak** (22:2-25:9).

The Parshah of Chukat ("the decree of") opens with the law of the Red Heifer, which purifies a person from the *tumah* (ritual impurity) engendered by contact with death.

And G-d spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying: This is the chok of the Torah which G-d has commanded.

Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring to you a red heifer without defect, in which there is no blemish, and upon which never came a yoke.

And you shall give her to Elazar the priest, that he may bring her outside the camp, and she shall be slaughtered before him.

And Elazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood towards the front of the Tent of Meeting seven times.

The entire heifer—"her skin, her flesh, her blood, even her dung"—is burnt, together with a piece of cedar wood, and bundle of hyssop, and a scarlet thread. The ashes are then collected.

This is the law: when a man dies in a tent, all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days...

They shall take for the impure person of the ashes of the burnt purification offering, and living water shall be put upon it in a vessel.

And a ritually pure person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the impure person on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall... wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be pure at evening...

This shall be to you an everlasting decree.

And he that sprinkles the water of sprinkling... and he that touches the water of sprinkling shall be unclean until the evening....

Waters of Strife

After 40 years of journeying through the desert, the people of Israel arrive in Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin. Miriam dies and is buried there; "and there was no water for the congregation."

The people complain to Moses and Aaron: "... Why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink."

G-d instructs Moses to "gather the congregation together, you and Aaron your brother; and you shall speak to the rock before their eyes, and it shall give forth its water."

When they are thus gathered, Moses admonishes the people: "Hear now, you rebels! Shall we get you water out of this rock?"

And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock

Commentary

THIS IS THE DECREE (CHOK) OF THE TORAH... (NUMBERS 19:2)

This phrase can be understood in two ways. On one level it means that this—the law of the Red Heifer—is the ultimate "decree", the most supra-rational of all the Torah's precepts. A deeper meaning is that all of Torah is, in essence, divine decree. It is only that with many of the mitzvot, the supra-rational divine will come "clothed" in garments of reason.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

In everything that G-d taught Moses, He would tell him both the manner of contamination and the manner of purification. When G-d came to the laws concerning one who comes in contact with a dead body, Moses said to Him: "Master of the universe! If one is thus contaminated, how may he be purified?" G-d did not answer him. At that moment, the face of Moses turned pale.

When G-d came to the section of the Red Heifer, He said to Moses: "This is its manner of purification." Said Moses to G-d: "Master of the universe! This is a purification?" Said G-d: "Moses, it is a chok, a decree that I have decreed, and no creature can fully comprehend My decrees."

(Midrash Rabbah)

In reference to what did King Solomon say (Ecclesiastes 7:23), "I thought to be wise to it, but it is distant from me"? He said: All of the Torah's commandments I have comprehended. But the chapter of the Red Heifer, though I have examined it, questioned it and searched it out—I thought to be wise to it, but it is distant from me.

(Midrash Rabbah)

Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring to you a red heifer (19:2)

Nine Red Heifers were prepared from the time that the Jewish people were commanded this mitzvah until the Second Temple was destroyed. The first was prepared by Moses, the second by Ezra, and another seven were prepared from Ezra until the Temple's destruction. The tenth Heifer will be prepared by Moshiach, may he speedily be revealed, Amen, may it so be the will of G-d.

(Mishneh Torah)

The Mishneh Torah is a purely legal work. As he explains in his introduction, Maimonides included only the final rulings of Torah law, leaving out the reasoning and deliberations behind them, in order to make it a readily accessible guide to daily life for all. Also in those rare cases in which Maimonides appears to "digress" and interject a philosophical insight or some background information, upon closer examination these always prove to be a statement of law and a practical instruction on daily living.

The same is true of the above quoted passage. At first glance, it appears to be a brief piece of history concerning the Red Heifer, followed by a prayerful appeal to the Almighty to send Moshiach. But Maimonides is demonstrating to us the true definition of "belief in Moshiach." To believe in Moshiach is not just to believe that he will someday come, but to expect his coming on a daily, hourly, and momentary basis. It means that no matter what you are discussing, the subject turns to Moshiach at the slightest provocation. It means that in the midst of arranging the laws of the Red Heifer, a spontaneous plea erupts from the depths of your heart: "May he speedily be revealed, Amen, may it so be the will of G-d!"

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

A RED HEIFER (19:2)

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Numbers 19:1-25:9

twice.

And the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.

G-d speaks to Moses:

"Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation in to the land which I have given them."

These are the Waters of Strife; because the children of Israel strove with G-d, and He was sanctified by them.

The Death of Aaron

Moses sends messengers to the king of Edom, asking permission to pass through his land in order to reach the Land of Canaan. "We will not pass through the fields," he promises, "or through the vineyards, nor will we drink of the water of the well; we will go by the king's highway, we will not turn to the right hand or to the left, until we have passed your borders."

The Edomites refuse, and mass their armies to block Israel's passage. "And Israel turned away from them."

They journey from Kadesh to Hor HaHar ("mount upon a mount"), where G-d says to Moses and Aaron:

Aaron shall be gathered to his people; for he shall not enter into the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against my word at the Waters of Strife.

G-d instructs Moses to take Aaron, and Aaron's son Elazar, up to the top of the mountain. There he should dress Elazar in Aaron's priestly garments, and there Aaron will die.

And when all the congregation saw that Aaron had died, they wept for Aaron, thirty days, all the house of Israel.

The Brass Serpent

Canaanites from Arad in the Negev attack the children of Israel. The Israelite pray for G-d's help and pledge the war spoils to the Sanctuary; and the attackers are defeated and their cities despoiled.

The children of Israel journey on, circumventing the Land of Edom; "and the soul of the people was discouraged along the way."

And the people spoke against G-d, and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, nor is there any water; and our soul loathes this insubstantial food."

And G-d sent venomous serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many people of Israel died.

And the people came to Moses and said: "We have sinned, for we have spoken against G-d, and against you; pray to G-d, that He take away the serpents from us." And Moses prayed for the people.

Commentary

A maids child once dirtied the royal palace. Said the king: "Let his mother come and clean up her child's filth." By the same token, G-d says: "Let the Heifer atone for the deed of the Calf."

(Midrash Tanchuma)

THIS IS THE LAW (TORAH): WHEN A MAN WHO DIES IN A TENT... (19:14)

Resh Lakish said: From where do we learn that words of Torah endure only in he who kills himself for it? Because it says, "This is the Torah: when a man dies in the tent..."

(Talmud, Berachot 63b)

LIVING WATER (19:17)

Water from an ever-flowing spring. Fallacious springs which run dry even once in seven years are disqualified.

(Sifri; Talmud, Parah 8:9)

In other words, a spring which runs dry once in seven years is "fallacious" even when there is water flowing in it.

This is lesson in the meaning of truth: something which exists under certain circumstances but ceases under other is not "true", even when it does exist

(The Chassidic Masters)

THE CLEAN PERSON SHALL SPRINKLE UPON THE UNCLEAN PERSON... AND HE SHALL BE CLEAN AT EVENING... [BUT] HE THAT SPRINKLES THE WATER OF SPRINKLING... SHALL BE UNCLEAN (19:19-21)

All who are involved in the preparation of the Heifer from beginning to the end, become impure, but the Heifer itself purifies the impure! But G-d says: I have made a chok, decreed a decree, and you may not transgress My decrees.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

The fact that the ashes of the Heifer "purify the contaminated and contaminate the pure" carries an important lesson to us in our daily lives: If your fellow has been infected by impurity and corruption, do not hesitate to get involved and do everything within your power to rehabilitate him. If you are concerned that you may become tainted by your contact with him, remember that the Torah commands the Kohen to purify his fellow Jew, even though his own level of purity will be diminished in the process.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION ARRIVED IN THE WILDERNESS OF ZIN IN THE FIRST MONTH (20:1)

The perfect congregation. For the generation decreed to die in the desert had already died out, and these were the ones who were destined to live [and enter the Land].

(Rashi)

All the events and prophesies which the Torah relates [pertaining to the time that the people of Israel were in the desert], are either of the first or of the fortieth year

(Ibn Ezra)

AND MIRIAM DIED THERE (20:1)

Why does the account of Miriam's death follow the [laws of the] Red Heifer? To teach us you that even as the Red Heifer achieves atonement, so does the death of the righteous achieve atonement.

(Talmud, Mo'ed Kattan 28a)

AND MIRIAM DIED THERE... AND THERE WAS NO WATER FOR THE CONGREGATION (20:1-2)

Three great providers arose for the people of Israel—Moses, Aaron and Miriam—through whom they received three great gifts: the well, the clouds [of glory], and the manna. The well was in the merit of Miriam, the clouds

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Chukat-Balak

Numbers 19:1-25:9

And G-d said to Moses: "Make you a venomous serpent, and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looks upon it, shall live."

And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, and he looked upon the brass serpent, he lived.

The Song of the Well

The people of Israel are now in the final stages of their journey to the Holy Land. They stop at Ovot, Iyei Avarim ("Desolate Passes"), the Zered Brook, the far bank of the Arnon River. Their next encampment is at Be'er ("The Well"), so named after "the well of which G-d spoke to Moses: Gather the people together, and I will give them water." A song was composed to commemorate the Miracle of the Well:

Then Israel sang this song:

Spring up, O well; sing to it
The well that the princes dug out
That the nobles of the people delved
With the scepter, with their staves.

Leaving the desert, they camp at Mattanah ("The Gift"),

Nachaliel ("Heritage of G-d") and Bamot ("The Heights") before arriving at "the plain that is in the country of Moab, atop the cliffs which looks out towards the desert."

War and Conquest

The people of Israel now send messengers to Sichon, king of the Emorites, requesting permission to pass through his land. Sichon gathers his armies and attacks the Israelites. The Emorites are defeated and their land is occupied.

When Og, the King of Bashan, also masses his people against the Israelites, he too, is defeated, and his lands, too, are occupied.

And the children of Israel journeyed; and they camped in the plains of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho.

Balak and Balaam

"And Balak the son of Zippor," begins the 2nd Parshah of this week's reading, which bears the name of the Moabite king, "saw all that Israel had done to the Emori. And Moab was seized with dread because of the children of Israel."

Balak sends the "elders of Midian and the elders of Moab" to the prophet and sorcerer Balaam the son of Beor, with the following message:

Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt; they cover the face of the earth, and they sit opposite me.

Come now therefore, I entreat you, and curse me this people, for he is mightier than me... For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.

Balaam tells them that he'll give his response the next morning, "as G-d shall speak to me." "Do not go with them" says G-d to Balaam

Commentary

in the merit of Aaron, and the manna in the merit of Moses.

When Miriam died, the well was removed, as it says, "And Miriam died there..." and, immediately afterward, "And there was no water for the congregation." The well then resumed in the merit of the other two.

When Aaron died, the clouds of glory were removed, as it says, "And the Canaanite, the King of Arad, heard ...and waged war on Israel." He heard that Aaron died, and thought that he now had license to attack Israel [because the clouds of glory which protected them were gone. The well and the clouds] then resumed in the merit of Moses alone.

(Talmud, Taanit 9a)

A people have various needs, and different types of leaders arise to provide them. Spiritually, too, a nation requires "food", "air" and "water" — wisdom, faith and guidance. Again, different leaders arise to provide these different needs, each according to his or her specialty.

But there may come a time when a leader cannot afford the luxury of "specialization." He may be capable of teaching Torah on the highest level, but there is no one to teach the children alef-bet. He may be suited to raise the most spiritual souls to sublime heights, but there is no one to sustain the simple faith of the common man or to provide guidance on the most commonplace dilemmas of life. In such times, the true leader assumes all these tasks, as Moses did in the closing days of Israel's sojourn in the desert, when the people stood at the threshold of the Promised Land. Miriam and Aaron were no more, and Moses served as shepherd, nurse and guardian of faith in one.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND MIRIAM DIED THERE... AND THERE WAS NO WATER FOR THE CONGREGATION (20:1-2)

A person may ingest the ingredients of life, but these will not vitalize him without the fluids that course through his body. The food swallowed by the stomach, the oxygen drawn in by the lungs, must now be transported through the bodys canals and made to saturate its every cell.

Therein lies the spiritual significance of Miriam's role as Israel's provider of "water". Miriam first appears in the Torah (see Midrashim and commentaries on Exodus 1:15) as a child's nurse: one who distills adult food for the consumption of a child; one who trains and educates a growing human being, filtering the stimuli of an adult world for his maturing mind: who processes the raw materials of life to meet the specific needs of her charges age and phase of development.

Miriam's well is the vital fluid of Israel's spiritual life, the water that inculcates them with the knowledge and identity her brothers provide. The waters of Miriam transport and apply the nutrients of Torah and the abstractions of faith to each individual, on his or her particular level.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

BECAUSE YOU DID NOT BELIEVE IN ME (20:12)

The commentaries offer various explanations as to what Moses (and Aaron's) sin was. Rashi says that it was that he struck the stone instead of only speaking to it, as G-d had instructed. According to Maimonides, it was the fact that he got angry, and said, "Hear now, you rebels."

Nachmanides questions both explanations, pointing out that: a) G-d told Moses to take along his staff, implying that he was supposed to strike the stone (as in Exodus 17:6); b) It does not say here that Moses' words were spoken in anger; whereas on other occasions we find Moses getting angry (cf. Numbers 31:14), and we don't find that he was punished for it; c) the

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Behaalotecha

Numbers 8:1-12:16

that night. "Do not curse the people, for they are blessed."

Balak sends a second delegation of dignitaries "more numerous and more prestigious than these" with promises of even greater rewards. Balaam responds:

"If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of G-d my G-d, to do less or more.

"Now therefore, I ask you, tarry you also here this night, that I may know what G-d will say further to me."

This time G-d permits him to go: "If these men came to call you, rise up, and go with them; but only that word which I shall say to you, so shall you do."

Balaam's Ass

And Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled his ass, and

went with the princes of Moab.

G-d's anger burned that he is going, and an angel of G-d stood in the way as an adversary against him. He was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him.

The ass saw the angel of G-d standing in the way, his sword drawn in his hand, and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field; and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way.

But the angel of G-d stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. When the ass saw the angel of G-d, she pressed herself to the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; and he struck her again.

When the angel further obstructs the way, forcing the animal to complete halt, Balaam strikes her a third time.

And G-d opened the mouth of the ass, and she said to Balaam: "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

And Balaam said to the ass: "Because you have mocked me; I would there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you."

And the ass said to Balaam: "Am not I your ass, upon which you have ridden all your life to this day? Was I ever wont to do so to you?" And he said, "No."

Commentary

verse explicitly says that his sin involved a lack of faith—not disobedience or anger. Nachmanides therefore explains the sin as lying in Moses' declaration, "Shall we get you water out of this rock?" when he should have attributed the miracle solely to G-d.

Chassidic Master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchev sees Maimonides' explanation (that he rebuked the people angrily) and Rashi's explanation (that he struck the rock instead of speaking to it) as two sides of the same coin. If a leader's influence on the community is achieved through harsh words of rebuke, than his relationship with the environment is likewise: he will have to forcefully impose his will on it to get it to serve his people's needs and their mission in life. If, however, he influences his community by lovingly uplifting them to a higher place so that they, on their own, will desire to improve themselves, the world will likewise willingly yield its resources to the furtherance of his goals.

BECAUSE YOU DID NOT BELIEVE IN ME, TO SANCTIFY ME IN THE EYES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL (20:12)

But had not Moses previously said something that was worse than this? For he said (Numbers 11:22): "If flocks and herds be slain for them, will they suffice them? Or if all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, will they suffice them?" Faith surely was wanting there too, and to a greater degree than in the present instance. Why then did G-d not make the decree against him on that occasion?

Let me illustrate. To what may this be compared? To the case of a king who had a friend. Now this friend displayed arrogance towards the king privately, using harsh words. The king, however, did not lose his temper with him. After a time he rose and displayed his arrogance in the presence of his legions, and the king passed sentence of death upon him. So also the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: "The first offence that you committed was a private matter between you and Me. Now, however, that it is done in the presence of the public it is impossible to overlook it." Thus it says: "[Because you did not believe in Me...] in the eyes of the children of Israel."

(Midrash Rabbah)

BECAUSE YOU DID NOT BELIEVE IN ME (20:12)

[At the burning bush,] Moses said: "But, behold, they will not believe me" (Exodus 4:1). Said G-d to him: They are believers, the sons of believers; you, however, will ultimately fail to believe. They are believers, as it is written, "And the people believed" (ibid. v. 31); the sons of believers, as it is written "And [Abraham] believed" (Genesis 15:6); whereas you will ultimately fail to believe, as it is written: "Because you did not believe Me."

(Talmud, Shabbat 97a)

THESE ARE THE WATERS OF STRIFE (20:13)

Why did Pharaoh decree that all the Hebrew babes be cast into the river? (Exodus 1:22) Because his astrologers foresaw that the savior of Israel will meet his demise by water. They thought that he would be drowned in water; in truth, it was that by the cause of a well of water death was decreed on him.

(Midrash Rabbah)

THESE ARE THE WATERS OF STRIFE (20:13)

It is written (Psalms 66:5): "Come and see the doings of G-d, His awesome plot on the children of man." For G-d had already decreed that none of that generation shall enter the land... But as soon as Moses said to them, "Hear now, you rebels..." G-d said to him: "...therefore you will not bring this congregation into the Land..." Thus, it was "an awesome plot."

(Midrash Tanchuma)

G-d said to Moses: "With what face do you request to enter the Land?" This may be illustrated by a parable. It is like the case of a shepherd who went out to feed the king's flock, and the flock was abducted. When the shepherd sought to enter the royal palace, the king said to him: "If you come in now, what will people say? That it was you who have caused the flock to be carried off!"

So, too, did G-d say to Moses: "Your greatness is that you have taken the 600,000 out of bondage. But you have buried them in the desert and will bring into the land a different generation! This being so, people will think that the generation of the desert have no share in the World to Come! No, better be beside them, and you shall in the time to come enter with them."

Therefore it is written "You shall not bring this congregation..."—rather, you must bring the other, the one that you had taken out of Egypt!

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Numbers 19:1-25:9

Then G-d opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of G-d standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed down his head, and fell on his face.

"Why have you struck your ass these three times?" the angel admonishes Balaam. "Behold, I went out to waylay you, because your path is perverse before me... Had she not turned from me, I would now have slain you, and saved her alive."

"If it is evil in your eyes, I shall return" says a humbled Balaam.

"Go with the men," says the angel. "But only the word that I shall speak to you, that you shall speak."

A People that Dwells Alone

Balak comes to receive Balaam at Moab's border, repeating his promises of honor and glory; Balaam reiterates that, "The word

that G-d places in my mouth, that I will speak."

The next morning, Balak takes him to the Heights of Baal, from which the edge of the Israelite camp is visible. Balaam instructs him to build seven altars, and sacrifice a bull and a ram on each. Balaam then goes off to meditate.

"And G-d happened upon Balaam... and G-d placed a word into Balaam's mouth...." And Balaam begins to speak:

*From Aram does Balak the king of Moab bring me
From the mountains of the east, saying:
Come, curse me Jacob
And come, provoke wrath upon Israel*

How shall I curse, whom G-d has not cursed?
How shall I evoke wrath, against whom G-d has not raged?

For from the top of mountains I see him
from the hills I behold him

It is a people that dwells alone
And is not reckoned among the nations.

*Who can count the dust of Jacob
And number of the seed of Israel?
Let me die the death of the righteous
And let my last end be like his!*

Commentary

(Midrash Rabbah)

WE WILL NOT DRINK OF THE WATER OF THE WELL (20:17)

It should have said, "water of the wells," should it not? Why does it say "the well"? But this is what Moses said: "Although we have with us manna to eat and the Well of Miriam to provide us with water, we shall not drink from it. Instead, we will purchase food and water from you, to benefit you.

Here the Torah teaches you a rule of good conduct: If a man goes to a country that is not his, though he possesses all his requirements, he should not eat of what he has, but should leave over his own and buy from the shopkeeper, so as to benefit him.

(Rashi; Midrash Rabbah)

HOR HAHAR (20:22)

It was a mountain on top of a mountain, like a small apple perched on top of a big one.

(Midrash Rabbah)

TAKE AARON AND ELAZAR HIS SON, AND TAKE UP HOR HAHAR (20:25)

G-d said to Moses: "Do Me a favor and tell Aaron that he is to die, for I am ashamed to tell him."

What did Moses do? He rose early in the morning and went to Aaron, and called to him: "Aaron, my brother!" Aaron came out to him and asked: "Why did you see fit to come so early today?" Said Moses to him: "There was something in the Torah which occupied my mind during the night and which I had difficulty with, so I rose early and came to you." Asked Aaron: "What was this thing?" Said Moses to him: "I do not remember what it was, but I know that it was in the book of Genesis; bring it and let us read from it."

So they took a scroll of the Book of Genesis and read from it. With each chapter and each thing they read, Moses would say: "G-d did well; G-d created well." When they came to the creation of man, Moses said:

"What can be said of man, who brought death into the world!" Said Aaron: "Moses, my brother, can you say that in this matter we do not accept the Divine decree?" ... Said Moses: "And I, who ruled over the ministering angels, and you, who stopped death [with the ketoret], shall we, too, come to this?" ... Immediately Aaron felt his demise in his bones... Said Aaron to him: "My heart is trembles within me, and the terrors of death are befallen me" (Psalms 55:5)."

Said Moses to him: "Are you prepared to die?" Said he: "Yes." Said Moses: "Let us then ascend Hor HaHar." Thereupon the three of them—Moses, Aaron and Elazar—ascended before the eyes of all of Israel...

When they ascended [the mountain], a cave opened up for them...

Said Moses to Aaron: "Enter the cave." He entered, and he saw there a made-up bed and a burning candle. Said Moses to him: "Go up onto the bed." He went up. "Straighten your arms." He straightened them. "Close your mouth." He closed it...

Thereupon the Shechinah (Divine Presence) came down and kissed him.

(At that moment, Moses desired a death such as that. Thus it was later said to him (Deuteronomy 32:50): "And you will die on the mountain... as Aaron your brother died on Hor HaHar"—the death which you coveted.)

G-d said to them: "Go out from here." As soon as they went out, the cave was sealed, and Moses and Elazar descended.

(Yalkut Shimoni; Rashi)

AND ALL THE CONGREGATION SAW THAT AARON HAD DIED (20:29)

When Moses and Elazar descended from the mountain, the people assembled against them and demanded of them: "Where is Aaron?" They answered them: "He is dead." "How could the Angel of Death strike him?" they cried. "He was a man who had withstood the Angel of Death and had restrained him! (As it is written, 'And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed'— Numbers 18:13.) If you bring him back, well and good; if not, we shall stone you!" Thereupon Moses resorted to prayer, and said: "Master of the Universe! Deliver us from suspicion." Straightway the Holy One, blessed be He, opened the cave and showed Aaron to them. Thus the verse states: "And all the congregation saw that Aaron had died..."

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Chukat-Balak

Numbers 19:1-25:9

"What have you done to me!" cries Balak. "I brought you to curse my enemies, and, behold, you have blessed them altogether."

But I can say only that which G-d places in my mouth, replies the prophet.

Bidden to Bless

Balak suggests trying from a different vantage point "From you shall see but the utmost part of them, and shall not see them all. Curse them for me from there."

They go to Sdei Tzofim ("Lookout Field"). Again seven altars are raised and seven bullocks and seven rams are offered, and Balaam ventures out to meditate. Soon he returns with more Divinely-placed words in his mouth.

And he took up his discourse, and said:

Arise, Balak and hear
Hearken to me, you son of Zippor

G-d is not a man, that He should lie
Nor a son of Adam, that He should regret
Has He said, and shall He not do?

Has He spoken, and shall he not fulfill it?

Behold, I am bidden to bless
He has blessed; and I cannot turn it.

*He sees not iniquity in Jacob
And He perceives not trouble in Israel
G-d his G-d is with him
And the trumpet blast of a king is among them...*

*For there is no enchantment in Jacob
And there is no sorcery in Israel
In time it is said to Jacob and to Israel:
"What has G-d wrought?"....*

"If you will not curse them" says Balak, "at least don't bless them!"
Once again Balaam reminds him that he can only say what G-d puts in his mouth.

The Goodly Tents

The king and the prophet make one more attempt, selecting yet a third vantage point from which to look upon the Israelite camp: "The head of Peor, that looks out towards the desert." Again they build seven altars and sacrifice seven bullocks and seven rams.

And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding according to their tribes; and the spirit of G-d came upon him.

And he took up his discourse, and said...:

*How goodly are your tents, O Jacob
Your dwellings, O Israel!*

*As winding brooks
As gardens by the river's side
As aloes which G-d has planted
As cedars beside the waters.*

Commentary

(Midrash Rabbah)

THEY WEPT FOR AARON... ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL (20:29)

For Aaron, "all the house of Israel"—both men and women—wept; but regarding Moses it is said only that "the sons of Israel" wept for him (Deuteronomy 34:8). For Moses would rebuke them with harsh words. Aaron never said to a man, "You have sinned!" or to a woman, "You have sinned!"... [Instead,] when Aaron would walk along and meet with an iniquitous person, he would greet him, "Shalom!" The next day, when this person desired to commit a transgression, he would say to himself: Woe is to me! How will I show my face afterwards to Aaron, who greets me all the time?" As a result, this person would refrain from the transgression.

If two people quarreled, Aaron would go and sit with one of them and say to him: "My son, have you seen what your friend is doing? He beats his breast and rends his clothes, saying: 'Woe is to me! How can I lift my eyes to see my friend? I am ashamed to show myself to him, for I have done him offence!'" And so he would sit with him, until he removed the jealousy from his heart. Then Aaron would go and sit with the other and say to him: "My son, have you seen what your friend is doing? He beats his breast and rends his clothes, saying: 'Woe is to me! How can I lift my eyes to see my friend? I am ashamed to show myself to him, for I have done him offence!'" And so he would sit with him, until he removed the jealousy from his heart. When the two would meet, they would embrace and kiss each other...

There were thousands in Israel named after Aaron, because were it not for Aaron, they would not have come into the world. For Aaron would

make peace between husband and wife, and they would come back together and call the child by his name.

(Avot d'Rabbi Natan, ch. 12)

AND THE PEOPLE SPOKE AGAINST G-D, AND AGAINST MOSES (21:5)

It is written: "And they believed in G-d, and in Moses His servant" (Exodus 14:31). If they believed even in Moses, they certainly believed in G-d! But this comes to teach us that whoever believes in the shepherd of Israel, it is as though he believes in G-d.

In the same vein, it says, "And the people spoke against G-d, and against Moses." If they spoke even against G-d himself, then certainly they spoke against Moses! But this comes to teach us that whoever speaks against the shepherd of Israel, it is as though he spoke against G-d.

(Mechilta Beshalach; Talmud, Sanhedrin 110a)

AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT IF A SERPENT HAD BITTEN ANY MAN, AND HE LOOKED UPON THE BRASS SERPENT, HE LIVED (21:9)

Now did the serpent kill or did the serpent restore to life? No. But when Israel looked upward and subjected their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were healed; but if they did not, they pined away.

(Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 29a)

AND THE VALLEYS OF ARNON AND THE OUTPOURING OF THE STREAMS... AND FROM THERE TO THE WELL (21:14-16)

This song was sung at the end of the forty years, and the well was given to them at the beginning of the forty years. What is the reason then why it was written here?

This subject must be expounded by reference to what precedes it, viz., "Wherefore it is said in the book of the Wars of G-d: Vaheb is Sufa, and the

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Chukat-Balak

Numbers 19:1-25:9

*He shall pour the water out of his buckets
His seed shall be in many waters
His king shall be higher than Agag
And his kingdom shall be exalted.*

*G-d brought him out of Egypt
He has as it were the strength of a wild ox
He shall eat up the nations his enemies
Shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his
arrows.*

*He couched, he lay down like a lion
And like a great lion; who shall stir him up?
Blessed is he that blesses you,*

And cursed is he that curses you.

"I called you to curse my enemies," cries Balak in anger, "and, behold, you have altogether blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee to your place; I thought to promote you to great honor, but G-d has kept you back from honor."

"Did I not speak also to your messengers," responds Balaam, "which you did send to me, saying: If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of G-d, to do either good or bad of my own mind, but what G-d says, that will I speak?"

The End of Days

"And now," continues Balaam, "I go to my people. Come therefore, and I will advise you what this people shall do to your people in the end of days."

*I see him, but not now
I behold him, but he is not near
There shall shoot forth a star out of Jacob
And a scepter shall rise out of Israel
And shall smite the corners of Moab*

Commentary

valleys of Arnon." This implies that G-d wrought for them signs and miracles in the valleys of Arnon like the miracles that He had wrought for them at the sea of Suf (the Red Sea).

What was the nature of the miracles in the valleys of Arnon? A man could stand on the top of one mountain and speak with his neighbor on the top of the other mountain, yet he would be seven miles away from him! For the road ran down into the valley and ascended. Israel, on their way, had to pass through the midst of the valley. All the nations assembled at that spot, armies without end, and some of them took up positions within the valley. The cliffs above them were riddled with caves. Opposite these caves, in the mountain facing this one, there were numerous rocky projections resembling breasts... The armies entered into the caves, thinking: When Israel come down into the valley, those who are in the valley will confront them, and those who are above will harass them from the caves, and so we shall slay them all.

When, however, Israel reached that spot G-d did not make it necessary for them to descend to the bottom of the valley, but signaled to the mountains, and the projections of the opposite mountain entered into the caves, and all the occupants were killed. Furthermore, the mountains brought their heads close to each other and formed a level road, and it was impossible to tell one mountain from the next.

That valley was the boundary between the Land of Israel and the land of Moab; as it says, "For Arnon is the boundary of Moab, between Moab and the Emorites." The mountain in the land of Moab in which the caves were did not move, while the mountain from the Land of Israel in which were the rocky projections resembling breasts moved and joined the mountain opposite. Why was it the one to move? Because it belonged to the Land of Israel. It may be compared to the case of a handmaid who, on seeing her master's son coming to her, advanced quickly to meet him and welcomed him.

The rocky projections entered into the caves and crushed all the warriors in them. The Well descended into the valley and there it swelled and destroyed all the armies in the same manner as the Red Sea had destroyed the armies [of the Egyptians]. For this reason "Vaheb in Sufa" and "the valleys of Arnon" are placed side by side for comparison.

Israel passed along the top of those mountains and did not know of all the miracles. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: "I will let My children know how many armies I have destroyed on their account." The well descended into the caves and washed out skulls, arms, and legs innumerable. Israel returned in search of the well and saw it coming from the valley full, carrying limbs upon limbs. Israel saw and sang.

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

THEN ISRAEL SANG THIS SONG: SPRING UP, O WELL; SING TO IT (21:17)

Why is Moses not mentioned here? Because he owed his punishment to water, and no man praises his executioner. Why is not the name of G-d mentioned? This may be illustrated by the case of a governor who made a feast for the king. The king asked: "Will my friend be there?" "No," he was told. Said he: "Then I also am not going there." In the same way, G-d said: "Since Moses is not mentioned there, I also will not be mentioned there."

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND MOAB SAID TO THE ELDERS OF MIDIAN (22:4)

Moab and Midian were erstwhile enemies, as it is written (Genesis 36:35) "...who smote Midian in the field of Moab"; but out of fear of Israel, they made peace between them.

And why did Moab seek the advice of Midian? When they saw that Israel was victorious beyond the norm, they thought: "The leader of this people rose to greatness in Midian; we shall ask them what is his measure." Said they: "His power is entirely in his mouth." Said Moab: "We, too, shall bring a person whose power is in his mouth against them."

(Rashi)

CURSE ME THIS PEOPLE, FOR HE IS MIGHTIER THAN ME (22:6)

The Hebrew phrase, Atzum hu mimeni ("He is mightier than me") also translates, "He is mightier from me." For in truth, the might of the people of Israel is Moshiach, who is descendent of Balak! (Ruth the Moabite, ancestress of King David, is a descendent of Balak).

(Shaloh)

AND G-D CAME TO BALAAM AT NIGHT (22:20)

The Divine spirit visited him only at night, as is the case with all the prophets of the nations (Laban, too, received his prophesy in a nocturnal dream, as it

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Chukat-Balak

Numbers 19:1-25:9

And rule over all the children of Seth...
And Israel shall do valiantly...

"And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way."

Promiscuity and Zealotry

Balaam failed to destroy them with curses; but the children of Israel could still bring calamity upon themselves with their deeds, as they now did when "the people began to go astray after the daughters of Moab."

And they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods: and the people ate, and bowed down to their gods.

And Israel joined himself to Baal Peor; and the anger of G-d was kindled against Israel.

A plague ensues, which kills 24,000; Moses orders those responsible to be executed. Still, the debauchery and idolatry continue, reaching its peak when,

Behold, a man of the children of Israel came, and brought to his brethren a Midianite woman before the eyes of Moses, and before the eyes of all the congregation of the children of Israel; and they stood weeping before the doorway of the Tent of Meeting.

One man is moved to action.

And Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it. He rose up from among the congregation, and took a spear in his hand.

And he went after the man of Israel into the chamber, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly.

And the plague was halted from the children of Israel.

Commentary

says (Genesis 31:24), "And G-d said to Laban the Aramite in a dream at night") — like a man covertly visiting his concubine.

(Rashi)

AND BALAAM AROSE IN THE MORNING, AND SADDLED HIS ASS (22:21)

From here we see how hatred causes a person to break from convention. Balaam had many servants at his disposal; yet in his eagerness to go curse Israel, he saddled his ass himself. Said the Almighty: "Evil one! Their father, Abraham, has already preempted you when, to fulfill My will, he 'rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey' (Genesis 22:3)."

(Rashi)

In order to place before man the "free choice" that is essential to his mission in life, G-d so ordered His world that every positive force has its negative counterpart. Were there to exist a good element which cannot be put to corrupt use, then man's potential for evil would be disadvantaged and would not present the equal challenge which makes for the choice factor in life. In the words of King Solomon (Ecclesiastes 7:14), "One corresponding to the other, G-d created."

But this "equality" between good and evil extends only to the most superficial level of reality. When a person learns to look beyond the surface of things to their inherent purpose, he will see that only the good in the world is real and substantial. Good is an existence in its own right, while evil exists merely to provide the tension which imbues the positive acts of man with meaning and significance.

Hence, there cannot be anything "original" to evil, which is but a shallow, corrupted refraction of the good in the world. If Balaam was able to transcend the norm with the intensity of his hate, this was only because, centuries earlier, Abraham had done the same out of love of his Creator.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AN ANGEL OF G-D STOOD IN THE WAY... HIS SWORD DRAWN IN HIS HAND (22:22-23)

Could not the angel have breathed on him and taken his life away, that he must draw his sword? ... He could; but he said to Balaam as follows:

"The mouth was given to Jacob, as is written (Genesis 27:22), 'The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' And of Esau it is written, 'By your sword shall you live' (ibid. v. 40)... Yet you exchange your trade and come against Israel with a weapon that is theirs! I, then, will come against you with a weapon that is yours."

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND THE ASS SAW THE ANGEL OF G-D (22:23)

But Balaam did not see it, for G-d has enabled the animal to see more than man. Because man has greater understanding, he would go insane if he were able to see the forces of destruction.

(Rashi)

AND SHE CRUSHED BALAAM'S FOOT AGAINST THE WALL (22:27)

This was the very heap of stones which Laban and Jacob had erected as a testament that "I will not pass over this heap to you, and that you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, for harm" (Genesis 31:52). Balaam, who is Laban, was now violating this covenant by crossing the heap to come curse the descendants Jacob. Therefore the wall was punishing him, for it was the witness for the oath, and it is written (Deuteronomy 17:7): "The hand of the witnesses should be first in [punishing] him."

(Midrash Tanchuma)

AND G-D OPENED THE MOUTH OF THE ASS (22:28)

This was to impress upon Balaam that there is no place for pride over the fact that he has been given the gift of prophesy. If it suits G-d's purposes, even an ass will see angels and make speeches.

(Keli Yakar)

AND [BALAK] WENT OUT TO MEET HIM... ON [MOAB'S] UTMOST BORDER (22:36)

Why did he greet him at the border? He said to him: "These boundaries, which have been established since the days of Noah with the understanding that one nation does not violate the boundaries of the other—these people are coming to uproot! Come and curse them!" And he showed how they broke through and crossed the boundaries of Sichon and Og.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

AND G-D HAPPENED UPON BALAAM (23:4)

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Chukat-Balak

Numbers 19:1-25:9

Regarding G-d's appearances to Moses, the Torah uses the word *vayikra* ("and He called") which is an expression of closeness and love; whilst to the prophets of the idolatrous nations the word used is *vayikar* ("and He happened upon") — an expression that connotes temporality and promiscuity.

(*Midrash Rabbah; Rashi*)

The hallmark of evil and unholiness is an attitude of "It just happened." Nothing is coincidental to the Jew; every event is purposeful and significant.

(*Chassidic Saying*)

AND [BALAAM] SAID TO [G-D]: "I HAVE PREPARED THE SEVEN ALTARS..." (23:7)

It doesn't say, "I have prepared seven altars," but "I have prepared the seven altars." Balaam said to G-d: The ancestors of this people built You seven altars, and I have prepared the equivalent of them all. Abraham built four (Genesis 12:7, 12:8, 13:18 and at Mount Moriah [22:9]); Isaac built one (*ibid.* 26:25); and Jacob built two—on at Shechem (*ibid.* 33:20) and one at Beth-El (*ibid.* 35:7)..

(*Rashi*)

THE DUST OF JACOB (23:10)

Everyone treads upon the dust, but in the end, the dust triumphs over them all... So it is with the Jewish people.

(*Midrash Rabbah*)

HE SEES NOT INIQUITY IN JACOB, AND HE PERCEIVES NOT AMAL ("TROUBLE" OR "TOIL") IN ISRAEL (23:21)

This implies that "Jacob" does experience "trouble" and "toil" (*amal*), though these do not result in his guilt in the eyes of G-d. "Israel" on the other hand, enjoys an existence devoid not only of guilt but also of struggle.

"Jacob" and "Israel" are the two names by which the third Patriarch was called and, by extension, two names for the Jewish people. Each represents a different period in the life of the Patriarch and a different dimension of the life of the people.

Jacob was born grasping the heel of his elder twin, Esau; thus he was named "Jacob" (*Yaakov*, in the Hebrew), which means "at the heel" (Genesis 25:26). Years later, when Jacob disguised himself as Esau to receive the blessings that Isaac intended to give the elder brother, Esau proclaimed: "No wonder he is called Jacob ('cunning')! Twice he has deceived me: he has taken my birthright, and now he has taken my blessings" (*ibid.*, 27:36).

"Jacob" is the Jew still in the thick of the battle of life — a battle in which he is often "at the heel," dealing with the lowlier aspects of his own personality and of his environment. It is also a battle which he must wage with furtiveness and stealth (the second meaning of "Jacob"), for he is in enemy territory and must disguise his true inten-

tions in order to outmaneuver those who attempt to ensnare him.

Threatened by a hostile world, plagued by his own shortcomings and negative inclinations, "Jacob" is defined by the axiomatic condition of man — that "man is born to toil" (Job 5:7) and that human life is an obstacle course of challenges to one's integrity.

In contrast, Israel ("divine master") is the name given to Jacob when he "struggled with the Divine and with men, and prevailed" (Genesis 32:29). "Israel" describes the Jew who has prevailed over his own humanity, cultivating the intrinsic perfection of his soul to the extent that he is immune to all challenges and temptations; who has prevailed over the divine decree that "man is born to toil," achieving a tranquil existence amidst the turbulence of life.

The Jewish people include both "Jacobs" and "Israels", and the life of every individual Jew has its "Jacob" periods and its "Israel" moments. For "there are two types of pleasure before G-d. The first is from the complete abnegation of evil and its transformation from bitterness to sweetness and from darkness to light by the *tzaddikim*. The second [pleasure] is when evil is repelled while it is still at its strongest and mightiest... through the initiative of the 'intermediate man' (*beinoni*)... as in the analogy of physical food, in which there are two types of delicacies that give pleasure: the first being the pleasure derived from sweet and pleasant foods; and the second, from sharp and sour foods, which are spiced and prepared in such a way that they become delicacies that revive the soul" (Tanya ch. 27).

G-d sees no guilt in Jacob. For despite all that Jacob must face, he has been granted the capacity to meet his every detractor. Even if he momentarily succumbs to some internal or external challenge, he never loses his intrinsic goodness and purity, which ultimately asserts itself, no matter how much it has been repressed by the travails of life. But while he might be free of sin, he is never free of toil, of the struggle to maintain his sinless state. For him, the war of life rages ever on, regardless of how many of its battles he has won. And it is the struggle itself that constitutes his mission in life and the pleasure derived from him by his Creator.

(*From the teachings of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi*)

HE SEES NOT INIQUITY IN JACOB (23:21)

Three great Chassidic leaders were famous for their *ahavat yisrael* ("love of a fellow Jew"): Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Bardichev, and Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli.

Rabbi Zusha was a living example of the maxim that "Love covers up all iniquities" (Proverbs 10:12). What the ordinary observer would perceive as a glaring deficiency, or even an outright sin, would not "register" in his holy eyes and mind. Rabbi Zusha was simply incapable of seeing anything negative in a fellow Jew.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's *ahavat yisrael* found expression in his incessant efforts as an advocate for the people of Israel. Unlike Rabbi Zusha, he was not blind to their misdeeds and failings; but he never failed to "judge every man to the side of merit" — to find a justification, and even a positive aspect, in their behavior. (A typical story tells of how, upon noticing a wagon driver who was greasing his wheels while reciting his morning prayers, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak lifted his eyes to Heaven and cried: "Master of the Universe! Behold the piety of Your children! Even as they go about their daily affairs, they do not cease to pray to You!")

But the Baal Shem Tov's love ran deeper yet. To him, *ahavat yisrael* was not the refusal to see the deficiencies of a fellow, or even the endeavor to transform them into merits, but an unequivocal love regardless of their spiritual state. He loved the most iniquitous transgressor with the same boundless love with which he loved the greatest *tzaddik*; he loved them as G-d loves them as a father loves his children, regardless of who and what they are.

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Chukat-Balak

Numbers 19:1-25:9

THERE IS NO ENCHANTMENT IN JACOB (23:23)

On the occasion of his bar-mitzvah, Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch (1860-1920) was told by his father:

“Our great-grandfather, the Alter Rebbe (Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, 1745-1812), was bequeathed a smile by his master and teacher, the Maggid of Mezeritch. With this smile, the Rebbe could have won over the world.

“But the Rebbe never made use of this gift. His entire life’s work was to implant penimiyut (‘innerness’ and integrity) within his Chassidim; so he made his case with the ‘internal’ mediums of intellect and feeling, and shunned the use of anything associated with the ‘peripheral’ attributes of the soul.”

(Likkutei Dibburim)

HOW GOODLY ARE YOUR TENTS, O JACOB (24:5)

He saw that they pitch their tents so the doorways should not be opposite each other (respecting each other’s privacy).

(Rashi)

HOW GOODLY ARE YOUR TENTS, O JACOB; YOU DWELLINGS, O ISRAEL (24:5)

Rabbi Yochanan said: From the blessings of that wicked man you may learn his intentions. He wished to curse them that they should have no houses of prayer or houses of study; instead he blessed them with that, saying “How goodly are your tents, O Jacob.” He wished to curse them that the Divine Presence should not dwell amongst them; instead he blessed them with that, saying “Your dwellings (mishkenotecha, which also means ‘Sanctuaries’), O Israel.” He wished to curse them that their kingdom should not endure; instead, “As the winding brooks”; that they might have no olive trees and vineyards — “as gardens by the river’s side”; that their odor might not be fragrant — “as aloes which G-d has planted”; that their kings might not be tall — “as cedars beside the waters”; that they might not have a king the son of a king — “He shall pour the water out of his buckets”; that their kingdom might not rule over other nations — “His seed shall be in many waters”; that their kingdom might not be strong — “his king shall be higher than Agag”; that their kingdom might not be awe-inspiring — “and his kingdom shall be exalted.”

Said Rabbi Abba bar Kahana: In the end, all of them reverted to a curse (with the fall of the house of David and the destruction of the Holy Temple and the Exile), excepting the houses of prayer and the houses of study. Thus it is written (Deuteronomy 23:6), “But the L-rd your G-d turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the L-rd your G-d loved you” — the curse, in the singular, but not the curses...

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 105b)

I CALLED YOU TO CURSE MY ENEMIES, AND, BEHOLD, YOU HAVE BLESSED THEM ALTOGETHER (24:10)

It would have been fitting that the rebukes (in the Book of Deuteronomy) be pronounced by Balaam, and that the blessings (in the Parshah of Balak) be said by Moses... But G-d said: Let Moses, who loves them, rebuke them; and let Balaam, who hates them, bless them.

(Yalkut Shimoni)

The Talmud forbids to name one’s child after a wicked person, quoting

the verse (Proverbs 10:7), “The name of the wicked shall rot.” Yet an entire section of Torah is named after Balak, King of Moab, to whom the Midrash accords the title “who hated [the Jewish people] most of all their enemies.”

For Balak is the Parshah of the future, where evil is transformed to good and curses emerge as blessings. It is in Balak that the most beautiful verses describing the uniqueness of Israel and the specialty of their relationship with the Almighty issue from the vile mouth of Balaam, summoned by Balak to curse the Jewish people. And it is in Balak that the most explicit reference to the era of Moshiach in the Five Books of Moses is found, in the form of a prophesy by the selfsame Balaam.

“Let Moses, who loves them, rebuke them,” said G-d when the people of Israel needed rebuke, for rebuke from a loving heart is many times more effective. “And let Balaam, who hates them, bless them,” for the blessing of an enemy is so much more real than a lover’s praises.

In the Parshah of Balak we enter a Moshiach-like world—a world of “the greater wisdom that comes from folly, and the greater light that comes from darkness” (Ecclesiastes 2:13).

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

THERE SHALL SHOOT FORTH A STAR OUT OF JACOB... (24:17)

The Melech HaMoshiach (“anointed king”) is destined to arise and restore the kingdom of David to its glory of old, to its original sovereignty. He will build the Holy Temple and gather the dispersed of Israel. In his times, all the laws of the Torah will be reinstated as before; the sacrifices will be offered, the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee year instituted as outlined in the Torah.

Whoever does not believe in him or does not anticipate his coming, denies not only the other prophets but also the Torah and Moses. For the Torah testifies about him: “G-d shall return your captivity... He will return and gather you from all the nations amongst whom the L-rd your G-d has scattered you... If your outcasts shall be at the ends of the heavens, from there will the L-rd your G-d gather you, from there He will take you... G-d will bring you to the Land...” (Deuteronomy 30:3-5). These explicit words of the Torah encapsulate all that has been said (concerning Moshiach) by the prophets.

Also in the story of Balaam it is spoken of, and there it is prophesied on the two “anointed ones”: the first Moshiach, which is David, who saved Israel from its enemies; and the last Moshiach, who shall be of his descendants, who will save Israel in the end [of the Exile]. There he says: “I see him, but not now”—this is David; “I behold him, but he is not near”—this is the King Moshiach; “There shall shoot forth a star out of Jacob”—this is David; “And a scepter shall rise out of Israel”—this is the King Moshiach; “And shall smite the corners of Moab”—this is David, as it is written (II Samuel 8:2) “And he smote Moab, and he measured them with a line”; “And rule over all the children of Seth”—this is the King Moshiach, as it is written (Zachariah 9:10), “And his dominion shall be from sea to sea”...

As for the books of the prophets, one need not cite references [to Moshiach], for all the books are full of this...

If there arises a king from the house of David, who studies the Torah and fulfills its precepts... who will prevail upon all of Israel to follow it and repair its breaches, and will wage the battle of G-d — he is presumed to be Moshiach. If he did so and was successful, and he built the Holy Temple on its site and gathered the dispersed of Israel - he is certainly Moshiach. He will correct the entire world to serve G-d together, as is written (Zephaniah 3:9): “For then I shall turn to the nations a pure tongue, that all shall call upon the name of G-d to serve Him as one”...

The sages and the prophets did not crave the era of Moshiach in order to rule over the world... or to eat, drink and rejoice; but only so that they be free for Torah and its wisdom and be rid of any oppressor and disrupter...

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Chukat-Balak

Numbers 19:1-25:9

And at that time there will be no hunger or war, no jealousy or rivalry. For the good will be plentiful, and all delicacies available as dust. The entire occupation of the world will be only to know G-d... Israel will be of great wisdom; they will perceive the esoteric truths and comprehend their Creator's wisdom as is the capacity of man. As it is written (Isaiah 11:9): For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the sea..."

(Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 11-12)

THERE SHALL SHOOT FORTH A STAR OUT OF JACOB (24:17)

This means that every Jew has a spark of the soul of Moshiach in his soul.

(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

AND ISRAEL DWELLED IN SHITTIM. AND THE PEOPLE BEGAN TO GO ASTRAY AFTER THE DAUGHTERS OF MOAB (25:1)

Some fountains rear strong men and some weaklings, some handsome men and some ugly men, some chaste men and some men who are steeped in lewdness. The fountain of Shittim promoted harlotry and it was the one that watered Sodom... Because this fountain was cursed, G-d will in the future cause it to dry up and then renew it, as it is written (Joel 4:18): "And a fountain shall come forth of the house of G-d, and shall water the valley of Shittim." Not since the days of Abraham had any Jew broken loose in whoredom; but as soon as they came to Shittim and drank its waters they succumbed to whoredom.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND THE PEOPLE BEGAN TO GO ASTRAY AFTER THE DAUGHTERS OF MOAB (25:1)

Balaam advised Balak to ensnare the children of Israel with them. He said to him: "Their G-d hates promiscuity, and they are very partial to linen. Come, and I will advise you what to do. Erect for them tents enclosed by hangings, and place in them harlots, old women without, young women within, to sell them linen garments."

So he erected curtained tents from the snowy mountain (Hermon) as far as Beth ha-Yeshimoth, and placed harlots in them — old women on the outside, young women within. And when an Israelite ate, drank, and was merry, and issued forth for a stroll in the market place, the old woman would say to him, "Do you desire linen garments?" The old woman offered it at its current value, but the young one for less. This happened two or three times. After that she would say to him, "You are now like one of the family; sit down and choose for yourself." Gourds of Ammonite wine lay near her, and at that time Ammonite and heathen wine had not yet been forbidden. Said she to him: "Would you like to drink a glass of wine?" Having drunk, his passion was inflamed and he exclaimed to her, "Yield to me!" Thereupon she brought forth an idol from her bosom and said to him, "Worship this."

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 106a)

AND THE PEOPLE BEGAN TO GO ASTRAY AFTER THE DAUGHTERS OF MOAB (25:1)

How do we know that one who causes a man to sin is even worse than one

who kills him? ... Two nations advanced against Israel with the sword, and two with transgression. The Egyptians and the Edomites advanced against them with the sword, as is proven by the texts, "The enemy said: I will pursue, I will overtake... I will draw my sword" (Exodus 15: 9), "And Edom said unto him: You shall not pass through me, lest I come out with the sword against you" (Numbers 20:18). Two advanced against them with transgression, namely the Moabites and the Ammonites. Of those who had advanced against them with the sword it is written, "You shall not abhor an Edomite... You shall not abhor an Egyptian" (Deuteronomy 23:8). Of those, however, who had advanced against them with transgression, endeavoring to make Israel sin, it says, "An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of G-d... Even to the tenth generation shall none of them enter... for ever" (ibid. v. 4).

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND ISRAEL JOINED HIMSELF TO BAAL PE'OR (25:3)

At first they entered unobtrusively, but in the end they came in joined like a yoke of oxen.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND ISRAEL JOINED HIMSELF TO BAAL PEOR (25:3)

There was once a gentile woman who was very ill, who vowed: If this woman recovers from her illness, she will go and worship every idol in the world. She recovered, and proceeded to worship every idol in the world. When she came to Peor, she asked its priests: How is this one worshipped? Said they to her: One eats greens and drinks beer, and then one defecates before the idol. Said she: I'd rather that this woman return to her illness than worship an idol in such a manner.

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 64a)

BEHOLD, A MAN OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL CAME, AND BROUGHT... A MIDIANITE WOMAN BEFORE THE EYES OF MOSES, AND BEFORE THE EYES OF ALL THE CONGREGATION OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL; AND THEY STOOD WEEPING (25:6)

The woman said to him: "I shall give myself to none but Moses, for so my father Balak bade me, not to yield to any one but to Moses your master, because my father is a king." Said he to her: "Behold, I am as great as he is! I shall bring you out before their eyes!" He seized her by her plait and brought her to Moses. He said to him: "O son of Amram! Is this woman permitted or forbidden?" He answered him: "She is forbidden to you." Said Zimri to him: "The woman whom you married was a Midianite!" Thereupon Moses felt powerless and the law slipped from his mind.

All Israel wailed aloud, as for it says, "And they stood weeping." Why were they weeping? Because they became powerless at that moment. This may be illustrated by a parable. It is like the case of a king's daughter who, having adorned herself for the purpose of entering the bridal chamber and sitting in a palanquin, was discovered misconducting herself with a stranger, and so her father and her relatives lost heart. It was the same with Israel. At the end of forty years they camped by the Jordan to cross over into the Land of Israel... and there they gave way to harlotry. The courage of Moses failed him as did that of the righteous ones with him.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND PINCHAS SAW (25:7)

He saw what was happening and remembered the law, and said to Moses, "O great-uncle! Did you not teach us this on your descent from Mount Sinai: He who cohabits with a heathen woman is punished by zealots?" Moses replied. "He who reads the letter, let him be the agent."

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 82b)

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THE CALF'S MOTHER

Certainly the most esoteric chapter in the Torah are the laws of the “Red Heifer” (*Parah Adumah*), commanded by G-d to Moses (Numbers 19) as an antidote to the state of ritual impurity engendered by contact with death. The Midrash describes how King Solomon, “the wisest of men,” was baffled by it; and how Moses, the very vehicle of G-d’s communication of His Torah to man, turned pale upon encountering the prospect of contamination by death, and found utterly incomprehensible the process of its rectification, crying out to G-d: “Master of the universe! This is a purification?!”

It’s not just that the law of the Red Heifer cannot be logically explained; indeed, there exists an entire category of mitzvot, called *chukim* (“decrees”), whose defining criteria is that they transcend human understanding. What’s unique about the Red Heifer is that while the other *chukim* at least follow an internal logic of their own, the laws of the Red Heifer are fraught with paradox and inconsistency. To cite but several of numerous examples:

a) The ashes of the Red Heifer remove the most severe of all impurities; yet those involved in its preparation become ritually impure themselves.

b) The Red Heifer must be completely red (as few as two hairs of a different color disqualify it)—a color which has connotations of sin and deficiency in Torah and Torah law; yet it must also be “perfect, without blemish.”

c) The Torah commands that it be slaughtered outside the holy city of Jerusalem (in contrast with other *korbanot*, which must be slaughtered in the courtyard of the Holy Temple). On the other hand, it must be slaughtered within the sight of the Holy Temple and its blood is sprinkled “toward the Holy of Holies”; according to one opinion, it must be slaughtered by the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) himself, wearing the “white garments” reserved for the Yom

Kippur service in the Holy of Holies.

d) The two components of the purifying mixture—ashes and spring water—represent two contradictory forces: fire, which represents the power of ascent, and water, which embodies the quality of “settling down” and saturation.

Thus the laws of the Red Heifer are introduced by the Torah with the word “This is the *chok* of the Torah”, as if to say: this is the Torah’s ultimate *chok*, the mitzvah that most vividly demonstrates the supra-rationality of its divine commandments.

The Mystery of Death

Indeed, explains the Lubavitcher Rebbe (in a talk delivered upon the conclusion of the *sheloshim* (30-day mourning period) after his wife), the most incomprehensible of human experiences—the phenomenon of death—can be sublimated only with the most incomprehensible of divine mitzvot, the ashes and water of the Red Heifer.

Physically and biologically, death makes perfect sense (indeed, it is the phenomenon of life that defies explanation). Yet we all—even a man such as Moses—find death utterly incomprehensible, utterly devastating to our sense of reality. Despite all the “evidence” to the contrary, something deep inside us insists that life is the natural, axiomatic state of the human being, and that its cessation is a violation of the most basic law of existence.

For such, in truth, is the fundamental nature of man. True, the human body is physical flesh, and as such, shares the dissolutive nature of all things physical. But it is animated by a soul that is a “spark of the Divine” and fortified with the eternity and indestructibility of its Source. In essence, human life is eternal.

Indeed, the first man was created to live forever. But then he violated the Divine will, thereby distancing himself from his Source and introducing the phenomenon of death into the human experience.

Our Sages tell us that when the Children of Israel stood at Sinai to receive the Torah from G-d, they were restored to the original perfection in which man was first created. The Torah reinstated the original, unadulterated bond between G-d and man, so that man was once more granted “freedom from the Angel of Death.”

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But this time, too, the state of perfect connection to G-d was short-lived. Forty days after the people of Israel stood at Sinai, they transgressed the divine decree "You shall have no other gods before Me" by worshipping a calf of gold. The pestilence of death, introduced into the world by Adam's sin and banished at Sinai, was reintroduced by the sin of the Golden Calf.

This explains the connection between the Red Heifer and the Golden Calf expressed in the Midrashic parable:

A maid's child once dirtied the royal palace. Said the king: "Let his mother come and clean up her child's filth." By the same token, G-d says: "Let the Heifer atone for the deed of the Calf"

(Midrash Tanchuma, Chukat 8).

In our post-Calf world, the imperfection in our relationship with G-d finds its most noxious expression in the phenomenon of death. Contact with death thus spawns the most severe form of spiritual impurity, which can be mitigated only by the mother of the Golden Calf, the most supra-rational of the divine decrees—the Red Heifer.

This was G-d's reply to Moses' cry, *Master of the universe! This is a purification?!* "Moses," G-d said, "it is a *chok*, a decree that I have decreed." Certain things are so overwhelming to My creations that they can only be overcome by submitting to an absolute command from an absolute authority. I have therefore commanded laws to instruct you what to do when your lives are touched by death. These are supra-rational, even irrational laws, for only such laws can facilitate your recovery. It is only by force of an utterly incomprehensible divine decree that you can recover from such utter devastation to a living being's self-definition.

Ultimately, however, there will come the day when the original bond between man and G-d will once more be restored. This time, our prophets promise, it will be immune to disruption by sin, since G-d will "slaughter the inclination for evil" in the heart of

man and "remove the spirit of impurity from the earth," with the result that "death shall cease forever."

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
www.therebbe.org; adapted by Yanki Tauber
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LIFE WITHOUT BUMPS

There can be no order, no program, no achievement, without priorities. Life, as we envision and try to live it, consists of important and less important things, primary and secondary goals, severe and less severe setbacks. Reason, our compass in our journey through life, is the capacity to make these distinctions, to determine what must give way before what and what should be reciprocated with what.

Priorities and gradations also exist among the divinely-mandated laws of the Torah. The Torah commands "You shall not kill," but it also differentiates between premeditated murder (punishable by death), murder resulting from negligent behavior (punishable by exile), no-fault murder (which carries no penalty), and killing in self-defense (permissible and a duty). It commands to aid a fellow in need, but it also delineates eight levels of charity, advises to whom one should give and in what order, and sets the mandatory, ideal, and maximum percentages of one's income to be contributed. It commands the Jew to rest on Shabbat, but it also differentiates between various categories of work and the severity of their violation of the day of rest. It distinguishes between civil and moral laws, between active and non-active transgressions, between laws that apply to a specific time and place and laws that have no such prerequisites, and so on.

There is, however, a certain category of mitzvot that defies such rational structuring. Generally speaking, the 613 mitzvot of the Torah fall into three categories: a) *mishpatim* (judgments or "laws"), which the Talmud defines as laws that the human mind would have conceived on its own, even if the Torah had not commanded them (e.g. the prohibitions against murder and robbery); b) *eidot* (testimonials)-laws whose function and utility are understandable, although we might not have formulated them ourselves (Shabbat, the festivals, tefillin, etc.); c) supra-rational mitzvot, called *chukim* (decrees).

Prime examples of a *chok* are the laws of *tumah*

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v'taharah, ritual purity and impurity. It is not only that these laws cannot be explained by human reason, but that they defy the organization and priority structure which characterize the logical mishpat and the rational eid. If a person touches an impure object, he is rendered ritually impure: it makes no difference whether this contact was deliberate, unintentional, or even against his will. Nor is the type of contact consequential--the same degree of impurity is effected whether he grazed it with his fingernail or he ate it.

In other words, the chok introduces an element of absoluteness into our lives, an area in which there are no major and minor things, no primary and secondary levels of involvement. A domain in which life is not divisible into ends and means, but constitutes an integral, singular fulfillment of its Creator's will.

In truth, every mitzvah is a chok, an unequivocal expression of divine will. It is only that many mitzvot come encloded in garments of varying rationality, for G-d desired that they be integrated into our rationally structured lives. But then there are those mitzvot that reach us unencumbered by finite garments, free of all that quantifies, qualifies and classifies their divine essence.

We need structure and priorities -- it's the only way we know to lead constructive lives. But we also need those moments and experiences that bring us in touch with the underlying integrity of life. Moments that impart to us the recognition that, in the final analysis, our every deed and endeavor is of equal, ultimate significance.

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; www.therebbe.org, adapted by Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com

A TALE OF TWO BIRDS OF PARADISE

Many wonderful things were said in praise of the Jewish people by our own holy prophets and sages. Yet, every morning, we begin our prayers with the words of the evil prophet Balaam, a man who would have cursed the nation for gold and silver, had G-d only allowed. Some explanation is needed. And so, we have this story, which I heard from my teacher, Rabbi Elimelech Zwiebel:

In another dimension of time, in a world beyond ours, is a forest filled with magnificent creatures. Of all the creatures there, the birds are the most spectacular, and of all the birds, the tzidikel bird is more beautiful than them all. And of all the tzidikel birds, one stands out with dazzling beauty, beyond anything words can describe.

Every morning in this splendorous forest, the creatures gather before sunrise about the tree of the tzidikel bird. As the sun reaches the tops of the trees, its rays shine down through the canopy and the tzidikel opens its wings in full glory. A panorama of colors glisten and sparkle in its feathers, dancing in the sunlight like so many magical stars and fairies to entertain the bird's delighted audience. Each morning is a more glorious spectacle than the day before. Each morning all the creatures ahhh and ooh in wonder.

All this occurred every day within that dimension of time, until, one year, a new bird came to the forest. Soon enough, the creatures began to gather at the roost of this new bird each morning, leaving the tzidikel all but alone.

"Is she then more glorious than I?" demanded the tzidikel of her few remaining faithful. "How could this be? There are no colors left in the universe that I do not possess!"

"But she," her faithful muttered, their heads hanging from shame, "she has no colors. She is black."

The fury of the tzidikel knew no bounds. She was the perfection of the art of beauty, and if black was to be beautiful, then there was no beauty at all. In rage, she tore herself from her branch and flew to see her rival.

There stood the creatures of the forest in silent wonder. Perhaps it was the oils of the black bird's feathers that refracted the light of the sun as a prism into so many rainbows. Perhaps it was the mystery of her absolute blackness, or the contrast she held

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against the bright morning sky. All that could be said is that it was an intangible beauty, not of something that could be painted, or described or known in any way. It was beauty as indefinable as black is dark.

“Is she then more glorious than I?!” screamed the tzidikel from her perch above the crowd.

“We cannot tell,” the animals explained, trembling. “For it is no longer dawn.”

“Very well then,” cried the tzidikel. “We will have a contest at dawn! But who will be the judge?”

No creature dared volunteer for such a task. And neither could the two birds themselves come to a consensus. So it was decided that the two would appear at dawn at a position known only to them and the first creature to appear would adjudicate their contest.

All night they prepared their feathers and rehearsed their movements, all night at their secret post in the forest. And as the sun began to rise, they ruffled their feathers and then with a dramatic swoosh spread them wide in the most glorious scene ever to come to the most glorious of forests. Yet there was no witness to that scene, none but the two birds themselves.

Until, from behind the bushes below, a sound was heard that almost toppled the tzidikel from her tree in horror. It was the grunt of a wild boar.

Covered in mud and smelling of its own excrement, the boar appeared, and yes, even he was delighted with the beauty that encountered him. And the two birds, surrendered to the fate of their contest, both spread their feathers and turned elegantly, displaying their pride to the pig below.

He grunted, he snorted, he coughed. He asked for a replay again and again. And after an hour or so, he finally set forth his verdict: The black bird was the most beautiful of them all.

“If so,” cried the tzidikel, “my beauty is not beau-

ty. There is no place left for me.” And she flew away from the forest, never to be heard of again.

The tzidikel is the light G-d brings into His creation. Through miracles, through *tzaddikim*, through righteous acts that have no tint of personal motives. The black bird is the darkness. But when the darkness is turned to beauty, it is a beauty so great that light is dim and impotent before it.

As for the pig, it is this lowly world, the world of action, which the Creator Himself has declared the final judge of truth and beauty.

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