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message: "Don't go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at you to get your attention!" *Hashem* whispers in our souls and speaks to our hearts. Sometimes when we don't have time to listen, He has to throw a brick at us. It's our choice to listen or not.

TORAH GEMS

וירא בלק בן צפור את כל אשר עשה ישראל וכו' (כב-ב)

There are only four other *parshiyos*, aside from Balak, in the entire *Torah* that are named after individuals: Noach, Yisro, Korach and Pinchos. In one way or another, they all have some similar trait which allowed them to be worthy to merit such a great honor. They were all great men of distinction; *tzaddikim* (Noach, Pinchos), righteous converts (Yisro), and even Korach was once deemed a holy man from *Shevet Levi* before his spiritual downfall. All except Balak. With what merit did this wicked King of Moav entertain the honor of having a *parsha* in the *Torah* named after him?

There is one exceptional trait about Balak, **R' Pinchos Hoffman Shlit'a** points out, that was rather significant. The *gemara* (סוטה מז.) states: *"As a reward for the forty-two sacrifices that Balak, King of Moav, brought, he merited to have Rus - and eventually Dovid and Shlomo Hamelech - come out from him."* Quite an amazing *gemara*, indeed! Balak went out of his way to hire a prophet to curse *Bnei Yisroel*, followed his every request down to the last detail in the hope that he will defeat the Jews, and never gave up hope until the very last that all the chanting and sacrifices of Bilaam would work. Yet, for this he is rewarded?!

The answer is yes! Balak spared no expense in his respect for the Almighty, spending untold amounts to purchase 42 animals worthy of sacrifice, paying for the Lord's prophet, Bilaam, and all his inane requests. In the end, the result of all his money spent was a grand קידוש שם שמים - *Sanctification of the Heavenly Name*. Although unintentional, Balak bought, paid for and was responsible for the elevation of *Klal Yisroel* in the eyes of the world, and was rewarded with a *parsha* bearing his name.

וַיֵּשֶׁא בַלְעָם אֶת עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל שֹׁכֵן לַשֶּׁבֶט וַיִּתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹקִים וְגו' (כד-ב)

After numerous attempts, Bilaam finally gave up. Rashi writes: "*(Bilaam) saw each tribe settled on its own and not intermingling; he saw the openings of each (family's) tent misaligned with the neighbor's so that one should not infringe upon the tent of another he felt then in his heart not to curse them.*" We, as Jews, understand the concept of *tznius* - modesty, and family purity, so it is no wonder to us that our ancestors behaved in this fine manner. But what would a shameful degenerate like Bilaam garner from such a sight, that impressed him so much so to the point of changing his wicked tune, of his own volition?

The great **R' Boruch'l of Mezhibuz ZT"L** responds with an esoteric explanation, citing the oft-quoted words of *Chazal*: פתחו לי פתח כחודו של מחט - *Open up for Me (with teshuva) an opening the size of a pin-head, and I will open for you an opening as wide as that of a banquet hall.* Hashem wants us to make even a minor effort and He will do the rest to show His love for *Klal Yisroel*.

This, then, is the meaning of Rashi's words, "*He saw that their openings were misaligned*" - this is a reference to the "פֶּתַח" - "*Opening*" that exists between *Hashem* and His chosen nation. Unfortunately, our openings remain small and distant, however, *Hashem* is always ready to enlarge His opening to allow us to return to the proper fold. When Bilaam saw this misalignment but still realized that through it all, the opening that *Hashem* creates for His people is as wide as the day is bright, he understood that there was no purpose to his evil curses, as *Hashem* would protect His people.

על עשה, ונמצא שבעת ההוא נותניו ג"כ שכר מצוה בהאי עלמא על קיום עשה עיי"ש. ולכן טובה גדולה היא לישראל מה שהקב"ה זועם בכל יום בבוקר, כי עיי"ז מקבלין שכר מצוה בעוה"ז. ויוצא מזה דבימי בלעם כשלא כעס הקב"ה, נחסר מישראל שכר מצוה בעוה"ז. וזה היה כוונת בלעם הרשע, דאם יכעוס השי"ת בימים ההם, אז יהא לו מקום לקלל ח"ו, ואם לא יכעוס כדי להצילם מקללה אז ישתכר שלא יקבלו הם

מעשה אבות סימן לבנים

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי מֶלֶאךָ ה' הִנֵּה אֲנִי יֹצֵאתִי לְשֹׁטֶן כִּי יִרְט הַדֶּרֶךְ לִנְגִדִי וְגו' (כב-לב)

When Bilaam, the evil prophet, was offered the chance to effectuate the downfall of the Jewish People, he jumped at the chance. Knowing, however, that he was powerless without the consent of the Almighty, he feigned piety in the eyes of the Moavite King's messengers, all the while conspiring to find a way to make it happen. *Hashem*, though, was explicit in his warning to Bilaam not to go along with the evil plot and leave His beloved nation alone. Warning after warning was ignored and Bilaam gladly rode on, unheeding the words of *Hashem*.

For us, the signals and caution bells of impending trouble are everywhere and we need to stop and listen. A telling story of serendipity involved a young and successful executive who, after becoming wildly wealthy and self-important, subsequently attained a pompous and arrogant attitude. He was once driving down a busy neighborhood street, going a bit too fast in his new fancy Jaguar. He was watching for kids darting out from between parked cars and slowed down when he thought he saw something. As his car passed, no children appeared. Instead, a brick smashed into the car's side door! He slammed on the brakes and backed up to the spot where the brick had been thrown.

The angry driver then jumped out of the car, grabbed the nearest kid and pushed him up against a parked car shouting, "What was that all about and who do you think you are? Just what is going on here? That's a new car and that brick you threw is going to cost a lot of money." He was shaking with fury.

The young boy was apologetic. "Please, mister ... please, I'm sorry but I didn't know what else to do," he pleaded. "I threw the brick at your car because no one else would stop ..." With tears dripping down his face and off his chin, the youth pointed to a spot just around a parked car. "It's my brother," he said. Lying in a crumpled heap, a disfigured boy roiled around in obvious pain and frustration. "He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can't lift him up." Now sobbing, the boy asked, "Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He's hurt and he's too heavy for me!"

Stunned beyond words, his haughty facade melting away entirely, the shocked driver tried to swallow the rapidly swelling lump in his throat. He hurriedly ran over and lifted the handicapped boy back into the wheelchair, then took out a linen handkerchief and dabbed at the fresh scrapes and cuts. A quick look and an appreciative grunt, told him everything was going to be okay.

"Thank you and may you be blessed," the grateful child told the stranger. Too shook up for words, the man simply watched the boy push his wheelchair-bound brother down the sidewalk toward their home.

It was a long, slow walk back to the Jaguar. The damage was very noticeable, but the driver never bothered to repair the dented side door. He kept the dent there to remind himself constantly of the Heavenly