

## The Ultimate Cheerleader | Dvar Torah Balak

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*“And he said to them: 'Lodge here this night, and I will bring you back word, as the LORD may speak to me'; and the princes of Moab abode with Bilaam. 9 And G-D came to Balaam, and said: 'What men are these with you?' 10 And Bilaam said to G-D: 'Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent to me...'” - Numbers 22:8-10*

Balak hires Bilaam to curse the Israelites so that Balak would beat them in battle. In addition to being a sought after sorcerer, Bilaam was a prophet. When we meet Bilaam he consults with G-D about this business opportunity. Their conversation indicates that Bilaam had quite a high level of prophecy and regularly spoke with G-D.

Our Sages explain that Bilaam was a great prophet and he was a necessary piece in G-D's infinite plan. In order to rebut a possible argument by the Nations of the World that they too would have been as righteous as the Israelites if they had their own prophet as great as Moses, G-D gave them Bilaam.

The problem is that according to many commentaries Bilaam was a terrible person. Following his failed attempt to curse the Israelites he suggested a much less esoteric plan and far more practical. Bilaam advised Balak to send the maidens of Midian to seduce the Israelites. Only a wicked person would concoct such a disgusting plan. But if Bilaam was so evil, why was he the prophet chosen by G-D as the prophet of the Nations of the World? It hardly seems fair. The Nations of the World will simply demand a righteous prophet.

Further, assuming he was a wicked man the rest of the story is quite perplexing. Bilaam is rebuffed by an Angel of G-D and his donkey tries to convince him to reconsider his decision to curse the Israelites. Why is G-D sending Bilaam so many messages and giving him so many opportunities to turn around? Bilaam is a bad guy! Bad guys don't get this kind of treatment

from G-D! They are left to their own choices and they must live with the consequences.

It seems that these questions might answer one another.

G-D had high hopes for Bilaam. He was supposed to be a great prophet. He was supposed to be almost as great as Moses. That was the Divine Plan.

Bilaam had all the tools to be just a notch below Moses. He was given incredible talents and abilities. G-D expected Bilaam to use these gifts properly. Bilaam was supposed to teach and inspire the Nations of the World. That was to be his role. Unfortunately he did not.

It's not a question on G-D why the prophet of the Nations of the World was not a righteous person. It was Bilaam's own fault. It was his choices that made him the person who he was.

This also explains the rest of the story. G-D was so hopeful, *k'vyachol*, that Bilaam would prove to be the prophet he was meant to be. The entire purpose of Bilaam's purpose as a prophet was to be answer to the possible complaint of the Nations of the World that they had prophet like Moses. G-D so badly wished, *k'vyachol*, that Bilaam would be that prophet. G-D went to great lengths to help Bilaam be that man.

G-D tried to dissuade Bilaam from joining Balak's emissaries. G-D places an angel of G-D in Bilaam's path. G-D opened the mouth of a donkey to talk some sense into Bilaam. All these efforts were to preserve Bilaam's purity in the hope that he could be the prophet the Nations of the World needed.

Unfortunately it did not work out the way G-D planned. Bilaam was undeterred and fell into the depths of the spiritual abyss. G-D does not control Bilaam's righteousness. Only Bilaam can control that. As much as G-D, *k'vyachol*, would have loved for Bilaam to be like Moses, it was not within G-D's control to make that happen.

Seeing this sliver of G-D is profoundly inspiring. The Bilaam saga shows us a G-D who is cheering us from the sidelines. Ours is a G-D who so badly wants us to succeed, *k'vyachol*. G-D was rooting for Bilaam and G-D is rooting for us.

Life presents us with challenges and we can find ourselves frustrated by our failures. We might question whether we can fulfill our mission in life. It can be a lonely world.

The story of how interested G-D was in Bilaam's success is so reassuring and comforting to us today. G-D wanted Bilaam to vanquish his demons and prevail in his challenges. G-D does the same for us. Like a father rooting for his child at a Little League game, the Bilaam saga tells us that G-D wants us to win and G-D wants us to be heroes in our personal battles.

More than the narrative of the failed curses of Bilaam, we learn from the story something very profound that impacts our relationship with G-D. We see what it means to live in a world with a caring, loving G-D. We see what it means to have a relationship with G-D. It means that we can count on our biggest Fan cheering us on and motivating us to succeed.

Our job description as parents, teachers, and role models is to emulate the way G-D interacts with us. There are people who turn to us for love and support. We must make sure that they know that we are following the lead of G-D and we are permanently in their corner cheering them on. Children especially need to know that we are there for them no matter what. We cannot live their lives for them but they must feel our love and care so that they can meet life's challenges with the confidence to know that no matter what their parents are their rock to lean upon for strength.

Similarly in our personal relationships, we must cheer for one another. Another person's success must be viewed as our success. When we stand behind one another and hope for the best for everyone around us, we too are emulating G-D. We also reap the rewards of living in the loving, caring society of our dreams. - Good Shabbos