

Balak

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Illuy Nishmas Yisroel Ya'akov ben Tzvi, z"l, whose *yahrzeit* is on Tammuz 7 of this week, *b"H*. May his soul have *aliyah* after *aliyah*, and may he always be a *meilitz yoshar* for his family whom loved him dearly and learned from him much, as well all of *Klal Yisroel*

The story of Amalek begins, at least in the Torah, in *Parashas Besballach*. That is where he first attacked the Jewish people and went down in history as the antithesis of the Jewish people and nemesis of God. Like most anti-Semites he did some serious damage, but eventually the Jewish army prevailed, and Amalek was almost completely destroyed.

Who was Amalek? Where did they come from? Why did they go out of their way to attack the Jewish people and earn the wrath of God? The Torah doesn't answer those questions, but the *Gemora* does somewhat:

"What is the reason for [writing the verse], '*And Lotan's sister was Timna*' (*Bereishis* 36:22)? Timna was a royal princess. . . Wanting to become a convert, she went to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, but they did not accept her. So she went and became a concubine to Eliphaz, the son of Eisav, saying, 'I'd rather be a servant to this people than a mistress of another nation.' From her Amalek descended who afflicted the Jewish people. Why? Because they should not have rejected her." (*Sanhedrin* 99b)

Talk about cutting off your nose to spite your face! It's a troubling *gemora* because we can assume that Avraham *Avinu*, who *lived* to make "converts," must have had a pretty good reason to reject Timna into the program. Yitzchak and Ya'akov too. And even if they *had* been mistaken about her, why should her union with Eliphaz result

in the quintessential anti-Semite? If ever there was an example of *Alillus* . . .

You remember *alillus*, right, from last week's *parsha*? That's when God uses a pretext to fulfill a more hidden agenda, like the Jewish people being "*strangers in a land that is not theirs. . . for 400 years*" (*Bereishis* 15:13). Ever since God told Avraham about that we knew it was coming. We just didn't know that the sale of Yosef was Divinely-arranged just to make it happen.

Therefore, it is a safe bet that Amalek was Divinely-destined to live and be Amalek, and that Timna was meant to approach *and* be rejected by the *Avos* so that she would "marry" Eliphaz and give birth to him. But when it comes to God there is always method to the "madness," just as there was in the sale of Yosef. The sale of their brother may have led to the fulfillment of the prophecy of 400 years of exile, but it also built Yosef into the leader he had to become for the rest of the family. However, what did the Timna story add to the historic narrative of the Jewish people?

Shabbos Day

THE ZOHAR EXPLAINS that the combination of the names of Balak and Bilaam provide the letters for two other words: Bavel (Babylonia) and Amalek. This of course is not random *gematria*, but a hint to the spiritual origin of both characters, and how their unholy alliance actualized the reality of Amalek.

It's like taking two inert chemicals and combining them to make an explosive. Balak and Bilaam on their own were bad enough. But together, they could have destroyed the entire Jewish people had God not neutralized them. We thank God to this very day for that great miracle.

But then again, who brought Balak and Bilaam together in the first place if not God Himself? That took a different kind of "miracle":

"But did they not always hate each other, as it says, '*who defeated Midian in the field of Moav*' (*Bereishis* 36:35), when Midian came against Moav in battle? However, because of their mutual fear of the Jewish people they made peace with each other." (*Rashi, Bamidbar* 22:4)

It is somewhat wondrous that two nations that hated each other so much could temporarily bury the hatchet to destroy the Jewish people. But as the verse says, "*This is from God, that which is wondrous in our eyes*" (*Tehillim* 118:23), implying that it had been God who had unified such mortal enemies.

And how did God do it? *Hashgochab Pratis*. It was Divine Providence that made Moav turn first to Balak to be their king, and then to Bilaam to be their savior. Furthermore, both Balak and Bilaam became who they were because of all the Divine Providence that shaped them. All of it was just for their encounter with the Jewish people in this week's *parsha*.

To what end? To shake up the Jewish people to avoid complacency? To give Zimri and his 24,000 followers a chance to blow everything and die in the process? To provide Pinchas with his chance to rise to the occasion and save the day. . . and become Eliyahu *HaNavi* along the way? Yes, yes, and yes. . . and *more*, as in a Plan B. Plan A may have failed miserably, but Plan B had a disastrous impact, resulting in the deaths of 24,000 from the tribe of Shimon by plague, and the 176,000 by capital punishment for idol worship.

And it didn't end there. In fact, their original plan had really been to hold off the final redemption. They knew, as did Amalek, that once redemption happens, evil will be gone for good. With only a partial redemption, not only does evil still exist, it *must* exist. So the real success came later when the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and the half-tribe of Menashe chose to stay outside of *Eretz Yisroel*, and push off the final redemption for millennia to come.

It may have been Balak and Bilaam who engineered that, but it was the Amalek within them that made it work. More specifically, it was the union of Timna and Eliphaz, and we need to know why.

Seudas Shlishis

IT'S KIND OF like milk and meat, or wool and linen. On their own, milk and meat are no problem. Wearing wool *or* linen is perfectly fine. It's the combination of the two that creates the prohibition. Not every mixture is a safe combination, and some can even be deadly.

The combination of Timna and Eliphaz was one such example of the latter. In fact, Timna was not only the concubine of Eliphaz, she was also his illegitimate daughter from an adulterous relationship with the wife of Seir. That certainly makes it more understandable why the *Avos* rejected her, despite their conversion program at that time.

It is one thing to be a *mamzer*, as Timna technically was. But as a "gentile"—it was still before Mt. Sinai—*mamzeress*, she could have lived a relatively "normal" life. It was not like being a Jewish *mamzer*, who can only marry another Jewish *mamzer*.

In those days, most people probably wouldn't have cared about her spiritual status. When she went ahead and had a child from her own corrupt father however, that was a choice she herself had made and the spiritual perversion was compounded and resulted in an embodiment of it, Amalek. This made him the very antithesis of the Jewish people.

As the *Midrash* reveals and *Rasbi* brings down, Bilaam not only rode his donkey for transportation, it was also his female companion, a tremendous *Amalekian* perversion. Balak had his own Amalekian tendencies, which is why he had no problem prostituting his own women to trap the Jewish people in sin. And when these two perversions of man came together, they compounded the spiritual distortion, like Timna had done when she chose to become Eliphaz's concubine.

This is why Amalek will always show up on the scene, just before the Jewish people are going to accept another level of Torah. What makes a *ba'al teshuvah* stronger in some respects than a person who has been righteous all their life is that they know, firsthand, the evil that Torah fights against, of which Torah is the opposite. Amalek epitomizes spiritual impurity, but Torah is the basis of *kedushah*.

As the expression goes, "there is nothing worse than a reformed sinner" because that is what they are, someone who previously sinned and left it behind. It tends to make them more vigilant against sin everywhere (which is why others often find them annoying). This is why Amalek was destined to be an integral part of Jewish history, regardless of what the *Avos* did, until *Moshiach* comes.

Ain Od Milvado, Part 56

I LEARNED A lot from Yisroel Ya'akov *ben Tzvi, z"l*, whose *yahrzeit* is this week, *b"H*, and not just because he was my father, but because he was also my employer.

It didn't happen often, but we had times when things were tense in the office, which I managed. It could have been a downturn in the economy, which is felt first and usually hardest in the building industry, of which we were a part. Or it could have been a client who had a temper tantrum and sued us because that is what people do in the business world to get what they want.

Whatever the reason, there were times when I felt like panicking, and it was my father, *z"l*, who was usually the calm one and reminded that God would take care of us. And He always did. I don't think I ever saw my father panic once while working with him, which has had a calming effect on me to this very day, over 10 years since his passing.

Somehow, despite his upbringing and all that he had to go through to reach the level of success he did in his profession, *ain od Milvado* was part of his daily outlook on life, whether he realized it or not. Problems for him really were just solutions waiting to be discovered, challenges ready to be met. And as he told me many times over the years, he was able to do so because God always helped him out.

I'm better at dealing with panic these days than I was in my younger years, partly because I am old enough now to recall how many times God has bailed me out too, sometimes literally at the last second. After a while, you feel immature for not hanging in and waiting for Him to do so, even as time seems to be running out.

But the other part of my growth in *ain od Milvado* has to do with, what I gained from my father over the many years together, for which I am eternally grateful. Some of it came through long philosophical discussions about life, and some just through osmosis. For all I know, he's still helping me grow in the right direction from above to reach even higher levels of *ain od Milvado*. One thing is for certain and worth remembering: it is amazing how much a parent's attitude towards trust in God can spill over to their children.