

Parashas

BALAK

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Balak is the name of the parsha, but it is really about Bilaam. Except for the last few verses, the entire parsha is about him, as if Moshe Rabbeinu and the Jewish People went on vacation for a week. If the point is how God turned Bilaam's curses into blessings to protect the Jewish nation, couldn't that have been done in one aliyah? The amazing and miraculous defeat of Sichon and Og at the end of last week's parsha barely had a few verses.

He's also a confusing personality. He's called "evil," but to listen to him talk about God and His power makes it seem as if he wasn't as bad as all that. Titus challenged God head-on, even stabbing the Paroches in the Temple as if to stab God. Bilaam may have tried to pull the wool over God's eyes, but he never outright challenged God.

Bilaam is a man with a history, a long history. Most of us are. It's just that we don't know our histories beyond our current incarnation, and Bilaam's we do, courtesy of the Arizal and Sha'ar HaGilgulim, his work on reincarnation.

It started with Lavan, Rivkah's brother, Rachel's and Leah's father, and Ya'akov Avinu's father-in-law. How could someone so "black" be so "white"? Several commentators provide various different explanations, but it does remain to be one of the greatest ironies of history. I mean, who names their child "White," especially when the parents themselves are not models of morality.

However, Lavan's name may have less to do with who he was at the time than who he was going to be over time. As the Arizal explains, Lavan, spelled Lamed-Bais-Nun, is the first letter of three different names: Lavan, Bilaam, and Naval, from Dovid HaMelech's time. That's a lot of history from the first incarnation to the final one.

Remember that fence Bilaam's donkey crushed his leg against? Just a fence that happened to be in the right place at the right time? Not according to the Arizal, who explained that the fence was really the mound of stones that Ya'akov and Lavan built as part of their pact to not harm one another at the end of Parashas Vayaitzai. Bilaam was effectively breaking that pact by going past it to curse the Jewish People.

And for cursing the Jewish People, Bilaam reincarnated into a rock. When that tikun was over, he eventually came back as Naval HaCarmelli who, lo and behold, just couldn't break the habit and cursed Dovid HaMelech. Then Naval seemingly had a stroke and died.

A coincidence? Not at all. After hurling his curse at the king of Israel, Naval "recalled" that he had previously reincarnated into a rock to rectify the evil speech of Bilaam but had instead had cursed again. "His heart died within him" when he remembered that he had originally been a rock to become rectified. Therefore, it does not write, "*and he became [a rock],*" but

rather, "*he was a rock,*" past tense.

This is more than fascinating. It tells us, even warns us not to get too caught in the present, as if that is all that is relevant to our current lives. It is not because, undoubtedly, we have all been here before, some many times already, and what we are going through in this lifetime is more than likely to rectify past sins or lackings, as the Arizal explains.

But how can one know for sure? Well, in Naval's time, you could go to a prophet and ask them. Today, we don't have anyone to ask who can actually provide us with a definitive answer, so we really can't know.

But, what we can do is re-evaluate any decisions that might have great impact on our lives. If it is some kind of test, evident by the moral issues it brings up, consider how its ramifications might go beyond your current lifetime.

We're here for specific reasons, and it is not just because our parents were married and had children. Parents only provide the bodies, but it is God Himself Who chooses which soul will go into them. We may not consciously choose our parents, as some would like to believe, but we're not born to them for no reason either.

We may not yet know what that reason is, but if we allow ourselves a little curiosity about it, God may just provide sufficient insight to allow us to make better decisions and more effectively make tikun, if not in this incarnation, then at least the next.

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Series Two of the "Sha'ar HaGilgulim Course" begins this coming week, b"H, on June 22. For more information or to regis-

ter, go to: <https://www.shaarnunproductions.org/Shaar-HaGilgulim-Course.html>.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston