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Zmanim for שבת

Wesley Hills, NY

6:56 -	פלג המנחה
8:11 -	הדלקת נרות
8:29 -	שקיעה
8:42 -	זק"ש מ"א
9:18 -	זק"ש גר"א
10:32 -	סוף זמן תפילה
8:29 -	שקיעה
9:18 -	צאת הכוכבים
9:40 -	צאת 72

Times courtesy of MyZmanim.com

Did You Know?

The famous curse-turned-blessing of Bilaam, "Ma Tov Ohalecha Yaakov," How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, has two different explanations given by Chazal. In Bava Basra (60a) we find the well-known one, which was that the openings of the tents did not face each other. This meant that people were not looking to see what their neighbors had which could lead to jealousy and strife, nor were they seeking to see what was taking place, which often leads to gossip. In Sanhedrin (105b), however, it says that from his blessings we can understand his curse. Bilaam wanted to curse us that there should not be any synagogues. Instead he was compelled to say Ma Tov.

R' Moshe Feinstein z"l, in Darash Moshe, says that there is no contradiction in the fact that one place it seems to refer to homes while in the other it refers to shuls. Bilaam argued that the Jewish home is so holy that no outside guidance is needed. This, says R' Moshe, is a curse because, in truth, we cannot rely solely on the chinuch at home. We must have a Rabbi, teachers, and good friends in order to make the training in the home last and succeed. HaShem reversed the curse and made it into a blessing, that yeshivos and other institutions should never cease to exist.

Thought of the week:

You cannot plow a field by turning it over in your mind.

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”וירא בלק בן צפור את כל אשר עשה ישראל לאמרי... וישלח מלאכים אל בלעם” (במדבר כ"ב)

“And Balak the son of Tzipor saw all that Yisrael had done to the Emori...And he sent emissaries to Bilaam...”

The Sifsei Chachomim makes the distinction that while everyone in Moav and Midian saw what was happening, only Balak took it to heart. That is why the Torah states that he saw, but not that everyone else saw. In essence, what set Balak apart from the others in his area was the fact that everyone spoke about Klal Yisrael, but nobody did anything about it. He, on the other hand, made every effort to put an end to the perceived threat.

He called Bilaam multiple times in order to persuade him to come. He followed Bilaam's directions time after time to build an altar and bring sacrifices. Instead of being resigned to what was happening, he took great pains to try and avert it. Of course, it was not meant to be, but the Torah tells us the story anyway, and in fact, the Parsha is named after him.

R' Meir'l Premishlaner explains why the parsha is named after Balak. He says that Chazal tell us it is a halacha, “Esav soneh l'Yaakov,” Esau hates Jacob; that the nations of the world have an inborn hatred of the Jewish People. Often however, they try to cover it up and pretend to love us. Balak was honest in his feelings and did not try to hide what he was doing. For that bit of truth, he deserved having a parsha called after him.

Therefore, when we call it Parshas Balak, we are recalling two notable attributes: honesty and willingness to work. These are lessons to be learned from him, even though his actions were based in evil. We might wonder, though, why he failed. Chazal tell us that nothing stands in the way of a person's desire, or as we say today, “Where there's a will, there's a way.” If so, how is it that his plan it backfired so dramatically?

The Kli Yakar comments on the phrase “Balak was the king at that time,” that Balak was only appointed king because it was a time of war. When the posuk says that “Moav was frightened” but not that Balak was, it's because Balak was from another country and he felt the threat was not his business to worry about. However, since they had made him king for that time, he had to keep up appearances, and so he hired Bilaam to show that he was doing what he was supposed to. That is perhaps why his plans failed so miserably. He didn't feel what he was doing was important, he was just going through the motions.

By contrast, at the end of the Parsha, Pinchas saw something and did something not because it was popular, (indeed, many wished to kill him for it) but because it was what needed to be done. For taking action when it was needed, his plans succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. Not only did he remove the abomination from the Jewish camp, but he ended the plague and was gifted with the kehuna, the right to be a close servant of HaKadosh Boruch Hu.

This parsha teaches us the importance of not sitting idly by but of taking action. Further, it teaches us that action done for the right reasons yields miraculous results, while actions taken for the wrong reasons can be disastrous.

At the bris of Elisha ben Avuya, many were invited to enjoy the simcha. While some reveled in the food and drink, R' Eliezer and R' Yehoshua chose to enjoy the simcha of a discussion in Torah. As they learned, a holy flame surrounded them as they brought down the fire of Sinai.

The child's father saw this fire and said, “If this is the power of Torah, I will dedicate my son to it.” He sent him to Yeshiva and his son became one of the most brilliant scholars of his time. He also became a heretic, and known by the name “Acher,” the other one.

His father's great plans for him backfired because his intentions were not that his son become great, but that he be able to do “parlor tricks.” If he had had proper motivations, his son would have achieved even more than he could imagine. Based on Yerushalmi as quoted by Tosfos, Chagiga 15a