



Hukat - Balak



English version

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THE POWER OF THE JEWISH NATION

The commentators deal with the puzzling question of why Moshe lost his chance to bring the Jews into Israel, just because he hit a rock. The Torah says, *וַעֲזַב לֹא-הֶאֱמַנְתָּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָכֵן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת-הַקֶּהֱל הַזֶּה אֶל-הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-נָתַתִּי לָהֶם* *For you have not believed in Me, to sanctify Me to the eyes of the Sons of Israel; therefore, you will not bring this Nation to the Land which I have given them.* (Bamidbar 20;12)

What?! Moshe did not believe in G-d? The Man who spoke to G-d “mouth to mouth” (Bamidbar 12;18), *he* does not believe in G-d? And why does G-d connect Moshe’s punishment to the *nation* entering? And why does G-d stress that Israel is the land that G-d gave to the Jewish Nation, specifically in connection with the punishment of Moshe?

The Ibn Ezra lists a few reasons why Moshe was punished so harshly for hitting the rock to bring out its waters instead of speaking to it. (20;8) The last reason he lists is something from the Kadmonim, the ancient Rabbis according to Sod, the secrets of the Torah. It is because what Moshe told the People *before* hitting the rock. *שמעו נא המורים, Listen now, you rebellious ones.* (Bamidbar 20;10)

The Shem Mishmuel (at the end of Hukat) explains this secret of the Ibn Ezra and the Kadmonim. There is a power that Moshe could have used in order to bring out water from the rock. This power is the unity of Yisrael, Knesset Yisrael. In the merit of Knesset Yisrael, Moshe could have drawn water from the rock, as G-d told Moshe that this was His

intention, *קח את-המטה וקנהל את-העדה, Take the staff and gather the community.* (Bamidbar 20;8) But Moshe got angry, and he rebuked the Jews by referring to them as rebels. By doing this, Moshe separated himself from Knesset Yisrael. Moshe, being the one who accepted the Torah on behalf of the Nation, was like the soul of Knesset Yisrael, and separating himself from them was removing the soul from Knesset Yisrael. Without the merit of Knesset Yisrael, Moshe needed to use a backup, the miracle of hitting the rock.

This power of Knesset Yisrael is the strongest power G-d created in the world. G-d’s kingship is dependent on it; His monarchy is defined through it. *וַיְהִי בִישְׁרֹון מֶלֶךְ בְּהַתְּאֶסֶף רָאשֵׁי לָם יְהוָה שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.* (Devarim 33;5) The last Mishna in Taanit brings the passuk *וְהָרְאִינוּ בְּנֹת צִיּוֹן בְּמִלְכָּה שְׁלָמָה בְּעֶסְרִי הַצָּאֵנָה וְהָרְאִינוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲמֹן בְּיוֹם חֲתֻנָּתוֹ* *Go forth, O daughters of Tzion, and behold the King that peace is His, with the crown with which His mother crowned Him on the day of His wedding* (Shir Hashirim 3; 11) In this aspect, out of fondness, G-d refers to Knesset Yisrael as *אמו*, His Mother, as a nickname for *אומתו*, His Nation, in that He is dependent on His Nation to bring His Kingdom to the world, to be a place for His Presence in the world. He is dependent on Knesset Yisrael to glorify His Name in the world and to make Him King. (Midrash Zutah; also see Rashi Shir Hashirim)

Being a part of Knesset Yisrael is the power behind our prayers. As the Ariza”l says, we should accept upon ourselves to love each and every Jew, before we start our prayers. This prayer of being a part of



Knesset Yisrael is found in many Siddurim before Shacharit prayers. All of our prayers are about praying *for* Knesset Yisrael. All of our prayers are about Knesset Yisrael crowning G-d. Even when we accept G-d's Oneness on ourselves, we do so by saying ה' אלוֹקֵינוּ – our G-d. For a Knesset Yisrael Jew is a much greater Jew than a lone Jew.

When G-d told Moshe that he did something wrong, He was precise in how He said it. *For you have not believed in Me to sanctify Me to the eyes of the Sons of Israel, therefore you will not bring this Nation to the Land which I have given them.* For not utilizing the power of Knesset Yisrael, for not taking the opportunity to sanctify G-d's Name through it, Moshe could not enter Eretz Yisrael. Moshe missed the opportunity to reveal the power of Knesset Yisrael. That even if, as individuals, they were not worthy, but as Knesset Yisrael, Hashem would give them even what they do not deserve. Moshe missed the opportunity to show, to demonstrate that G-d wants His Name to be sanctified through the unity of Knesset Yisrael, even if they are rebels.

What is Knesset Yisrael, anyway? What makes us so strong? When did we officially come into reality as a united people?

The first time we came together as a united people was on the day G-d married His People by giving them the Torah at Har Sinai as mentioned in Shir Hashirim above, וַיִּחַן-יְשָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הָהָר, *And Yisrael encamped (singular form) opposite the mountain.* What unifies us is accepting G-d as King, accepting the Torah. This is why Moshe, the one who received the Torah for us, is the soul of Knesset Yisrael. Our oneness is through accepting G-d's monarchy, as we pray on Minha Shabbat, אַתָּה אֶחָד וְשִׁמְךָ אֶחָד וּמִי כַעֲמֵךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד בְּאַרְץ. *You are one, and Your Name is one, and who is like Your Nation Yisrael, One Nation in the Land.*

We are meant to be a diverse nation of 600,000 souls who all share but one goal: Crowning G-d. The oneness of our nation is not that we do not have individuals, but that the individuals are all to

crown G-d as King, through accepting the Torah, through accepting G-d's Will in how to live each and every unique life of our Nation. One of the 48 ways to accept the Torah listed in the Mishna in Avot is, נוֹשֵׂא בַעוֹל עִם חֲבִירוֹ, to carry your friend's "yoke" along with him. Because G-d's Kingdom is dependent on His Nation as a whole crowning Him as king, not on a lone servant.

Although the gentiles have concepts of unity, their brand of unity has nothing to do with the unity of Knesset Yisrael. Parashat Hukat begins with the law, אָדָם כִּי-יָמוּת בְּאֵהָל, *A person, when he will die in a tent, ... all those things and people who are under the same roof become impure, as well.* (19;14) R Shimon Bar Yochai deducts from this passuk, that the deceased gentile bodies do not cause impurity to those who are under the same roof, for they are not called אָדָם, a person. (Yevamot 61a)

In the notorious trial of the Mendel Beilis blood libel, in year 1913, Mendel was under false accusation that he killed a Christian child, and that he needed its blood to bake Matzot. In one of the claims against Mendel, the prosecutor brought this piece of Talmud as proof to his theory that Jews are racists. That Jews only refer to Jews as אָדָם, as people. This would imply, that gentiles are not even אָדָם, not even considered people.

The defendant Oscar Grozenberg, under the direction of R' Maazeh, countered this racial criticism against our Talmud in the following manner. The word Adam is utterly unique: both "man", in singular form, and "man", in plural form, are referred to as אָדָם. This is very different from the other Hebrew word for man, אִישׁ, which, in its plural form, is אַנְשִׁים. But the word אָדָם is different. This is the reason why the Torah used specifically the word אָדָם regarding impurity in the tent with the dead... To teach that only the type of people who see themselves not as singular, but as part of a nation, can be called אָדָם. Only the Jews are that nation, as evidenced by the unity at the time among our people during the Beilis blood libel. We are called אָדָם, because we all have



inside us a part of Adam Harishon's responsibility to crown G-d as King. That is what makes us one.

So how do we become one? How do we tap into the power of Knesset Yisrael?

Here are the Selfie Steps. The self-help steps that make us one. The self-help steps that will bring Mashiach. Amen.

1. Objectivity, not Subjectivity. Looking at the world and how to make it better, not just how you become better. It is not only about you. It is about G-d, His world, and His being King.

2. Feeling pain of other Jews, no matter their level of observance, where they are in the world or what their background is. Visiting the sick, being there for others in their time of pain, stress or difficulty etc. (Please see Rashi Bamidbar 20;25)
3. Putting G-d's Will before our own will. Spirituality over Physicality. Drive for physicality separates us. Spirituality unites us.
4. Loving Jews for no reason at all.
5. Praying for the nation as a whole.

Parashat Balak

IN A DRONE'S EYE VIEW

We read in the Haftarah this week. עָמִי זָכַר-נָא מֶה-יַעֲזָר בְּלִקְךָ מִלְּדָ מוֹאָב וּמֶה-עָנָה אֵתוּ בְּלָעָם בְּיוֹם-בְּעֹזֵר מִן-הַשָּׁשִׁים בְּלִקְךָ מִלְּדָ מוֹאָב וּמֶה-עָנָה אֵתוּ בְּלָעָם בְּיוֹם-בְּעֹזֵר מִן-הַשָּׁשִׁים *My nation, please remember what Balak, King of Moab advised, and what Bilaam, son of Beor, answered him from the Shittim until the Gilgal, in order to know the Righteousness of G-d.* (Micha 6) Our Rabbis learn that Bilaam had a most powerful weapon: the knowledge of the arrival of the split moment when G-d "fumes", each day. If Bilaam would have leveled his accusations against the Jews at that split moment, there would have been very serious ramifications to his claims. But G-d tells us that He did not fume all those days that Bilaam tried to present a case against the Jews (Berachot 7a). And G-d asks us never to forget this.

The Chida adds this "remembrance" to the remembrances that we recite each day, mentioned in the Siddur after Shacharit. "And I am fulfilling the Mitzvah, to remember that Hashem saved our fathers from Balak and Bilaam." (Kaf Ahat 25 9).

The Zohar says something so powerful regarding this. *The reason why G-d does not listen to us, when we beg Him to remember the good we used to have in the times of the Bet HaMikdash זָכַר יִתְנַקֵּל (Eicha 5), and the reason that He does*

not listen to us when we cry out to Him to remember the brutal destructions of the Temples, זָכַר יִתְנַקֵּל לְבָנֵי אֱלֹהִים אֵת יוֹם יִרְשָׁעִים הָאֵמָרִים עָרְוּ עֵרוּ עָד הַיְסוֹד בָּהּ: (Tehillim 137) is because G-d is asking us, begging us, that WE first remember how G-d did not let Bilaam curse the Jewish Nation behind their backs! (Zohar, Behukotay 112)

Why is it so important to remember something that we were not even witness to?! The Exodus, the splitting of the sea, Har Sinai, the Mannah, the Well of Miriam, the Clouds of Glory, the war with Amalek and the other miraculous wars – those were all known to the people. They saw it, they lived it, and they could remember it and pass it on to their descendants. But we know of the episode with Bilaam, only because G-d told it to Moshe! Of all things, why was it so important to remember G-d's having prevented the curse? And why is it that if we do not remember His prevention of that curse, G-d doesn't want to remember the good times of the relationship between Him and His People, and the brutal destructions?

The answer is that the Jews knew nothing about this whole episode of Bilaam's attempt to curse the Jews. It all was completely "behind their backs", and nonetheless, G-d saved them. Without even a



single Jewish prayer, a single Jewish tear! G-d had no problem saving us – even though we had no idea that we were in such hot water – because G-d loves us more than we realize!

The lesson that G-d watches over us even when we are not watching over ourselves is such an important lesson to keep in mind and remember. It is so important, that our Rabbis wanted to incorporate it into the recitation of the Shema – Bilaam's words describing our Nation כָּרַע שֹׁכֵב פָּאָרִי וְכָלִיא מִי יִקְיָמוּ *He crouches, and lies like a lion, and like a lion, who can make him rise?* (Berachot 12b) Bilaam compared the way the Jews go to sleep and how they rise to the way lions go to sleep and awaken. When we go to sleep, we are not afraid, because we know that G-d takes care of the things that we cannot take care of.

This is what happened with the city of Cheshbon. Cheshbon was a metropolis on the border of E Yisrael and in a strategic location. Cheshbon belonged to Moab and it was impossible to conquer. Sihon, king of Emori, hired Bilaam to curse the first Moabite King who ruled over the mighty Cheshbon city. Bilaam's curse was so strong that Sihon was able to conquer Moab and take the city of Cheshbon for his possession. Imagine Sihon's feeling of success!!! But G-d let all of this happen, because He wanted the Jews to be able to capture and take possession of Cheshbon. G-d did not let the Jews fight Moab. So, as long as Cheshbon was in the hands of Moab, the Jews could not fight for it. But now that Cheshbon was owned by Sihon and the Emori, the Jews were allowed to capture it!

Who would ever think of thanking G-d for letting Sihon take Cheshbon from Moab?! But, that is precisely what was needed for the Jewish People to be able to capture Cheshbon. G-d pulled the strings behind the scenes in a way that had long-term ramifications. And He always does.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H

We thank HaShem only for “good” that we can perceive with our senses. Something we feel, see, taste or smell. But what about the good things that “happen”, the good things that Hashem does for us that we do not even know about? How many times has G-d twisted reality behind the scenes to serve your needs, changing the outcome for the better, and you had no inkling that He was changing the script?

Life is filled with the greatest irony. Things that we fear most in life turn out to be not as bad or scary as we assumed, while things to which we paid only a minimum of attention, such as health issues, interpersonal relationships or stress levels actually present the biggest problems that we have to deal with. I asked my friends who are 65 years old or more what they had to say about this irony in life, and they all told me that it is so true. The things that hit us the hardest are the things that we least expected. So many times in life, we find ourselves in a rut over things that are, in fact, completely out of our control. Just when we thought we had things under control...

We would do much better if we were to perceive our reality with a drone's eye view, and accept the fact that there are many things over which we have no control that we are not even aware of. And still, everything is fine. Because even though we are not in control, G-d is always in control. And this is something that G-d begs us to remember.

If only we lived this way, G-d would remember the good Temple days, and G-d would remember all the suffering of our Nation in the days of the destruction of our Temples.

This one thought, that G-d takes care of the things that we are not even aware of, can be the most powerful thought we have as a Nation. It might even bring the Moshiach.



