



BADERECH

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Balak: Key to Redemption

The *gaon* Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap was a fiery *eved Hashem*, a brilliant talmid chacham, *poseik* and Kabbalist. He was the author of numerous volumes of *Sefer Mei Marom*, a sweeping theological work covering the gamut of *machsheves Yisrael* and expansively addressing the cosmic forces expressed in historical realities. A *talmid muvhak* and spiritual heir of Rav Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook, he was a successor to the role of Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav.

As a young man, Rav Charlap spent Shavuot in Yaffo where Rav Kook served as Chief Rabbi. In his memoir, he describes catching a glimpse of the Rav's shining countenance during davening, and witnessing the *dveykus* with which Rav Kook recited "*Akdamos*", trembling and weeping copious tears. Rav Charlap was swept off his feet: "I was moved to the very foundations of my soul. It was clear that the Rav was not only a Torah genius, but also a true *tzadik*. From that moment on, I clung to the Rav with great love in every way, and I became his disciple... I felt that I was being consumed by a Divine flame, all my corporeality evaporated, and my soul, which

became bound up in the soul of my Master, the Rav, rose above the highest worlds."

Rav Charlap was respected across all ideological divides in the Holy City. When the Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood of Yerushalyim was established outside the Old City in 1908, he was appointed as the *marah d'asra* and founded a yeshiva there called Beis Zevul (which is also the name

of the series of his published halachic works).

At an event marking a century since the establishment of the Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood, Rav Shmuel Auerbach shared his childhood memories of Rav Charlap's exalted *tefillos*. His father, the righteous *posek ha-dor*, Rav Shlomo Zalman, would encourage the young boy to witness how Rav Yaakov

Moshe would daven, with intensive focus, slowly and with *kavanah*. "More than seventy years after those *tefillos*, the way the Rav of Shaarei Chesed said 'Shema Yisrael' still echoes in my ears and reverberates in my heart."

מִה־טוֹב אֹהֶלְיָךְ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Mah tovu — how good are your tents, O Yaakov;



Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap zt"l

Your dwellings, O Israel! (24:5)

Mah tovu marks the beginning of our daily davening, and it is also customary to say this *pasuk* when entering a shul or prayer space each morning. Framing our *tefillah* experience with words uttered by Bila'am, a degenerate sorcerer hellbent on awakening supernal stink-eye and cursing the Jewish people, is somewhat disconcerting. Gemara *Berachos*, 12b goes so far as to inform us that Chazal contemplated incorporating Bila'am's words into an even more significant part of our daily prayers, alongside the recitation of the *Shema*.

In *Berachos* 7a, Chazal maintain that Bilaam was *yodeah daas Elyon*, with insight drawn from the dark side. He knew the thoughts of his Creator and had the prophetic ability to pinpoint the precise moment of the day, the exact 1/58,888th of an hour, when one could invoke a Divine curse upon the Jewish People, *chas v'shalom*. He actively sought to exploit this moment to curse Am Yisrael and bring down Hashem's wrath upon us.

However, as Reb Simcha Bunim, the "Lev Simcha", sixth Gerrer Rebbe taught, at that very moment, instead of cursing Bila'am HaRasha actually spoke from his heart and pronounced *Mah tovu...*, extolling the virtues of the nation of Israel. Despite himself, Bilaam had an unexpected moment of sincerity, and issued a heart-felt blessing instead of the precisely scheduled curse. At that split second of vulnerability, his 'prayer' for Am Yisrael's salvation from Balak is what came to fruition.

In *Mei Marom*, his *peirush* on the *siddur* (vol 13, p. 22), Rav Charlap teaches, יש להרגיש / כי עצמיות התיבות של התפילה הם המפתחות "One must feel that in essence the words of

prayer are keys..." These 'keys' unlock the chains that hold us back and grant us access to gates that might otherwise be closed. Rav Charlap adds a cryptic note and personal, parenthetical postscript to this teaching: }ובאור ליום שבעה עשר בתמוז תש"ו ראיתי בחלום הלילה את כבוד קדושת רבינו הרב זכר צדיק וקדוש לברכה ושאלני מה חידשתי הרוחניות, אמרתי לפניו קטע זה.

"On the night of the 17th of Tamuz, 5706 (1946), I saw the honorable, holy Rav, may his memory be for a blessing, in a dream. He asked me, 'What new spiritual insights have you authored?' And I related this teaching to him."

This weekend marks the 17th of Tamuz and the beginning of the days of *Bein HaMeitzarim*, an auspicious moment to redouble our efforts and pour out our hearts in sincere prayer and supplication for our salvation. May we break free from the shackles of exile that continue to restrain us and open all the gates. May we merit that the Jewish People be praised On High, and blessed with redemption and the rebuilding of Hashem's own 'dwelling' on earth, *bim'heirah*.

יְשׁוּעַת ה' כְּהֶרֶף עֵין

'Hashem's salvations can come in the blink of an eye.' (*Midrash Lekach Tov* on *Esther*, 4:17) ■



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