



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR
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OU ISRAEL

Rav Elazar Shach, zt"l, the great and saintly *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Yeshivat Ponevitch* in *Bnai Brak*, had a neighbor—a pious *baal habayit* who was not particularly learned—whose sons grew to all be exceptional Torah scholars. Rav Shach himself lived and breathed *Torah* all the time, yet his neighbor's children appeared to surpass his own in their total dedication to *Torah* study. Rav Shach himself commented on what seemed to him at the root of the distinction.

"My neighbor spent a long time at the *Shabbat* table interacting with his children and singing *zemirot*. I, on the other hand, was always very engrossed in working through

a difficult *Rambam* or some other intricate *Torah* passage. One should never underestimate the power of our *Shabbat* tables to fill our children with a spirit of holiness through singing *zemirot* together and speaking *Divrei Torah* together on their level..."

In our sedra this week, we read that *Balak*, the King of *Moav* sent messengers to enlist the assistance of *Bilaam* the prophet to curse the Jewish People. The *pasuk* states:

"*Vayishlach Malachim el Bilam ben B'or Petora asher al Hanahar eretz bnai amo likro lo....*"

"And he sent messengers to *Bilam Ben B'or*, at *Petora* which was on the river in his native land to enlist him...."

At first glance this verse is telling us that *Petora* was the name of the place where *Bilam* was stationed, which was located near the river. However in a famous comment, *Rashi*, based on the *Midrash Tanchuma*, offers a different insight:

Petora: Like a money changer, who sits before a table and people lay out their coins on the table to exchange currency, so too people would come to *Bilam* and lay out their written requests before him to offer his prophetic insights..."

Rabbi Moshe Wolfson, zy'a points out that seemingly based on this *midrash* cited by *Rashi*, *Bilam's* wisdom and prophetic energy occurred while he was seated at this specific table, at this specific location. So too, many of the enemies of the Jewish people have sat around their tables to plot to harm us. In



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every generation there is a *Bilaam* who sits around a table, sometimes surrounded by advisors, to plan how they will terrorize or seek to bring trouble upon *Am Yisrael*.

Each and every *Shabbat* as we sit at our *shabbat* tables we recite the verse from the 23rd psalm- '*taaroch lefanai shulchan, neged tzorerai...*' *Set before me a table in full view of my enemies.*"

Rabbi Wolfson explains that the antidote to each and every *Bilam* who sits around a table to plot to harm the Jewish People, is the way we conduct ourselves when we sit around our tables!

Taaroch lefani shulchan, neged tzorerai- The hospitality, joy, singing, *Torah* learning and unity that we create at our *Shabbat* tables, is the greatest *shmira*, protection from all those who sit at their tables and plot to do us harm.

Similarly the **Lubavitcher Rebbe zy'a** taught:

"The Shabbat itself is a fortress of holiness which encloses and protects the soul..."

Yehi Ratzon, in these troubling times, may each of us be blessed to realize the spiritual fortitude that we can gain through the beauty of *Shabbat Kodesh*.

Shabbat Shalom. ■



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