



TORAH 4 TEENS

BY TEENS NCSY ISRAEL



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PITCHING OUR TENTS

In this week’s fascinating Parsha, Balak, there is a whirlwind of strange prophecies, blessings, curses, and even donkeys! Amidst all this oddity and strangeness, Baalam’s third blessing stands out as one of the most significant Pesukim and blessings from the Torah, a verse recited daily by every Jew:

כ"ד:ה' מַה־טֹבוֹ אֶהְיֶיךָ יִצְחָק
מִשְׁכַּנְתֶּיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

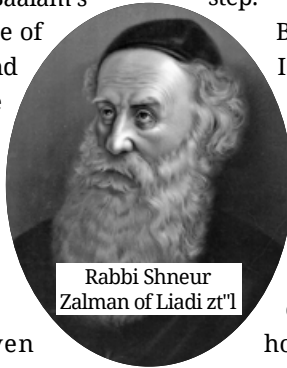
24:5 How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!

With such importance given by Chazal, placing this Pasuk before Pesukei Dezimra, we are compelled to delve deeper and uncover the reason behind its prominence.

For starters, Rashi cites the Gemara in Bava Batra to teach that Baalam observed how the entrances of the tents were not facing each other. This arrangement fostered privacy and embraced modesty among the people.

Rav Yisroel of Ruzhin explains that each

of us has the ability to choose the direction in which we open our tents. Shir Hashirim Rabba teaches that Hashem tells us if we make a tiny hole the size of a needle, He will enlarge it to the size of a grand hall. In other words, if we put forth even a small effort to move forward and open ourselves up in the right direction, Hashem will help and guide us along that path. The key is to take the first step.



Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi zt"l

But how do we take that first step? In which direction should we open our tents?

The Alter Rebbe of Chabad, Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, famously explains that the word מה (“what”) represents the concept of Bitul, or nullification. Instead of asking why or how, the question becomes what or for whom, shifting focus away from oneself and toward nullifying oneself to Hashem or to another Jew. When a person does this, they move in the direction of ‘Tovu-goodness’. These are the tents of Yaakov and the dwelling places of Yisrael. May we merit to nullify ourselves for others and may Hashem open for us a new dwelling place speedily with the rebuilding of the third Beit Hamikdash.



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and this year one detail in the parsha especially stood out for me.

The majority of the parsha focuses on Balak and Bilam's attempts to curse Bnei Yisrael. Balak is terrified of the Jewish people and believes that the only way to defeat them is by cursing them. Again and again, Bilam tries to curse them, yet Hashem turns every curse into a blessing. Throughout the entire story, Hashem is protecting His people at every step.

What I found so remarkable is that from a simple reading of the text, it sounds as though Bnei Yisrael have no idea any of this is happening. They continue with their daily lives, completely unaware of the danger surrounding them and of the protection they are receiving from Hashem.

Then, almost immediately after these incredible acts of Hashem's protection, the

Torah tells us that many members of Bnei Yisrael became involved in serious sins with the daughters of Moav and the worship of Baal Peor. It's hard to ignore the irony: while Hashem is protecting them from a threat they cannot even see, they are acting in ways that are the opposite of what He wants from them.

I think there is an important lesson here. We might tend to think that Hashem is only looking out for us when we are doing everything right, but Parshat Balak teaches us otherwise. Even when we make mistakes or fall short of who we should be, Hashem continues to guide, protect, and care for us in ways we may never even know about.

Like Bnei Yisrael in the Midbar, we do not always see what Hashem is doing behind the scenes. But that does not mean He is not there looking out for us — always. ■



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