



REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES

FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

Evil Eye

“*Vayar Balak ben Tzipor et kol asher asah Yisrael la’Emori* - Balak the son of Zipor saw all that Israel had done to the Emorites.” (Bamidbar 22:2)

Our *parashah* opens with Balak **seeing** the Jewish people as a military threat and he immediately hires Bilam to curse the Jews. Midrash Rabbah (20,2) teaches that it would be better for wicked people to be blind, as their **eyes** bring catastrophe and destruction to the world. Why is ‘seeing’ emphasized here, is it not the whole personality of the wicked evil?

Rav Shach *zt”l* notes that although a wicked person is wholly corrupt, it is precisely through his sight that he connives with plans

to destroy others. Wherever he looks, he sets his eye on the best way to inflict harm. Hence, the Midrash concludes, it would be better if he were blind.

Most fascinating is Balak’s approach. Certainly, Balak had the right to self-defense considering what he perceived as a threat to the security of his nation. But what was his attitude? The Chofetz Chaim *zt”l* notes that if Bilam was known as one whose blessings



Rav Shach zt”l

as well as his curses came to fruition, then Balak could easily have engaged Bilam to bless him with success in a campaign against the Jews. Instead, Balak opted to hire Bilam to curse the Jews in an attempt to destroy

them. Balak was not as much interested in protecting himself, as eradicating *Am Yisrael*. This is the “evil eye” that the Midrash highlights.

The Midrash draws a parallel to a similar scenario in *Sefer Bereisheet*. When the four kings and five kings went to war with each other, their main objective was to capture Lot and to kill Avraham Avinu. It was less a territorial war than a crusade to destroy Nimrod’s arch enemy. Indeed, the *Yalkut Shimoni* comments on the verse, “The few of the righteous are better than the multitude of many wicked men.” (*Tehillim* 37:16) - this was the first war in human history, a war that has foreshadowed many more wars of evil’s

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Rav Yisrael Salanter *zt"l* describes two primary ways for one to achieve superiority. One can either develop himself to become a better person, thereby giving others the opportunity to recognize his deeds and greatness, or he can continuously put others down, disparaging and finding fault in those around him. Clearly, the latter is more interested in the undoing of others over his own success.

History has shown that many have enthusiastically followed Balak's lead, regarding the Jewish people with a jaundiced eye and plotting ways to rid the world of the "Jewish problem." We can counter this by doing our best to build ourselves up rather than putting others down. "Hashem is our Shadow"; how we behave toward others will determine how others behave towards us. ■

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