

JULY 7, 2008

## Parashat Balak

### The Threat of Jewish Existence

**Vayakatz Moav... – “And Moav was overcome with dread” (Numbers 22:3)**

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Parashat Balak chronicles the efforts exerted by the King of Moav, Balak, to overcome the threat posed by the Jewish people moving towards the Land of Israel. This seemingly obvious threat is really not that dire. In fact as we learn later in Deuteronomy (2:9) it doesn't even exist. The Torah teaches that God forbade the Jewish people from entering into battle with Moav, “for I will not give you of his land for a possession; because I have given [it] unto the children of Lot for a possession.” Ramban concludes that Moses must also have explicitly sent messages to the King of Moav requesting permission to travel through Moabite lands, and declared the Jewish people's peaceful intentions, just as he did with the Kingdom of Sichon. So why does Moav express such great fear? Ramban suggests that Balak fears not military conquest, but the prospect of a powerful Jewish nation. Says Ramban, “for this reason he said to the elders of Midian, even if they will not attack our lands, they will lick through their numbers our surroundings, ‘as the Ox licks the grass of the field’ (see 22:4)...and they will make us into subservient and taxed states.”

Ramban's explanation teaches us a powerful lesson about Israel's challenges in the Middle East today. Just as Balak made the mistake of manufacturing a Jewish threat to give credence to his fight against the Jewish nation, so too today, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad uses these same tactics to incite his country against the Jewish state.

While Israel works towards peace in the region, a hostile Iranian regime continues to invent excuses as to why Israel is a threat, and at the same time seeks the capability to destroy the Jewish state. During a recent ceremony marking the 19th anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's death, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said, “I must announce that the Zionist regime (Israel), with a 60-year record of genocide, plunder, invasion and betrayal is about to die and will soon be erased from the geographical scene.” In light of such comments Israel correctly views Iran's nuclear program as its most serious strategic challenge and a direct threat to the continued existence of the Jewish state. As Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, stated, “Iran constitutes a real threat to peace in the region and to vital American interests...Not because I say so—the Americans say so, the British, the Germans and the French say so as well.” In the face of such threats, Israel must take a “worst-case” view of Iran's progress toward acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. For this reason we must continue to do all we can to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. For more on how you can take action to thwart the Iranian nuclear program click [here](#).

Iran continues to repeat Balak's mistake. By threatening the Jewish state and pursuing her nuclear ambition she has incurred the wrath of the international community and economic sanctions. Iran still has time avoid further sanctions, but only by abandoning her nuclear weapons program. ■

### Self-Destructive Mentality

**L'cha na ara lee et ha'am hazeh – “Please curse for me this nation” (Numbers 22:6)**

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When Balak asks Bilam to come and curse the Jewish people, he consistently refers to his appeal as a personal request. “Please curse for me.” (Verse 6) “Come curse them for me.” (Verse 11) “Curse for me this people.” (Verse

17) Why does Balak include himself in his request to curse the Jewish nation? Rosh, (Rabbeinu Asher ben Yechiel) in his commentary on the Torah explains Balak's request in light of a blessing that Isaac gave to the children of Jacob. In that blessing, Jacob tells his son, "Cursed be everyone that curses you." (Genesis 27:29) In the context of that blessing Balak realizes that whoever curses Jacob's children will become the victim of that very same curse. Nonetheless, he asks Bilam to curse the Jewish people with the full knowledge that whatever calamity befalls the Jews awaits him and his nation as well. For this reason he refers to the curse in the first person, satisfied to suffer a terrible fate as long as the Jewish people suffer with him.

Recently we again witnessed the horrible ideology of submission to a terrible fate in order to harm the Jewish people. Today this philosophy is manifested among fanatics who believe in an ideology of death being more sacred than life.

Shortly before noon on July 2, three people were killed and over 50 wounded in a suicidal terror attack in Jerusalem. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported, that while driving a bulldozer on Jaffa Road between the Central Bus Station and the Mahane Yehuda market, "a terrorist plowed into two public buses carrying passengers, overturning one of them. He crushed a number of cars with their drivers still in them, and targeted several pedestrians chasing them down and running them over. Among his innocent victims was an infant, who was injured in the attack and taken to hospital. Eyewitnesses told police that in her last moments, the murdered mother saved her baby by throwing the child out the car window just before the bulldozer crushed her to death. The reign of terror in downtown Jerusalem only ended when police climbed onto the rampaging vehicle, and shot and killed the terrorist." In his murderous rampage the terrorist was willing to sacrifice his own life to destroy the lives of innocent civilians.

This cowardly act is a reflection of the self-destructive ideology of Balak and must be condemned loudly by all those who seek a better life for the Palestinians and peace in the region. ■

## **Working Together for Common Goals**

### **Vayomer Moav el ziknei Midian – "And Moav said to the elders of Midian" (Numbers 22:4)**

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Rashi, from Genesis 36:35, notes that Moav and Midian were bitter enemies, engaged in an ongoing battle against each other. Yet, "due to their fear of Israel, they made peace amongst each-other." The Midrash (Tanchuma 3) adds: "To what can this be compared? To two dogs fighting with one-another, and a wolf comes and attacks one of them. The other says, if I do not help him, today he will kill [my enemy] and tomorrow he will turn on me. For this reason Moav and Midian join forces." Rashi and the Midrash teach a powerful lesson: that bitter enemies can join together in their hatred of a mutual enemy.

Again today we see this concept of adversaries coming together to fight against the Jewish people. While Sunni and Shia Muslims have clashed for centuries, Hamas, a Sunni movement, and Hizballah, a Shiite organization, actually offer each other tangible military support in their battle against Israel. In fact, the United Kingdom recently placed the military wing of Hizballah on its list of banned terrorist groups for a number of activities including, "Hizballah training Palestinian terrorists working for Hamas and Islamic Jihad," the Daily Telegraph reported.

However, the very same verse can serve as an inspiration for peaceful coexistence. "Recently a new trend has started: Israeli companies and branches of multinational companies in Israel are outsourcing work to Palestinians," the website Israel21c reported. "We realized that instead of fighting each other and throwing bombs we needed to work together," said Jonathan Levy, a general manager for the chip manufacturer Winbond, in Israel. Murad Tahboub, the managing director of Asal Technologies, in Ramallah said, "If people have good jobs, if their kids are getting an education, if there is good medical treatment and retirement plans, then they would not think radically, and would try to improve what they have. Hiring Palestinian engineers," Tahboub concludes, "is an investment in peace."

If bitter enemies can band together to fight a mutual threat, then they can certainly apply the identical lesson of Rashi in a positive direction, and work together for the sake of peace. ■