

JUNE 30, 2014

Parashat Balak

Motivated by Hatred

Balaam the son of Beor (Numbers 22:5)

בלעם בן בעור (במדבר כב:ה)

The Mishnah in Avot (5:19) contrasts Balaam with our forefather Abraham saying, “Anyone who has these three [positive] qualities is counted among the students of Abraham; [one who demonstrates] three other [negative] qualities – he is counted among the students of the wicked Balaam...” Commenting on this contrast, Rabbi Menachem Liebttag writes, “Abraham and Balaam – both were personalities well-known for their unusual spiritual gifts. Yet, whereas Balaam utilized his abilities for his own personal benefit and to the detriment of others, Abraham sanctified himself for the advancement and elevation of the entire human race.”

Like Balaam, who focused his spirituality and passion to harm others, Hamas, rather than building Gaza and improving the lives its citizens, focuses its energy on hatred, anger, and bringing harm to Israel and America.

While some had hoped that its reconciliation pact would force Hamas to moderate its radical positions in a bid for international legitimacy, evidence clearly indicates that Hamas remains committed to its hateful, dangerous radical agenda. Speaking with Al Jazeera last week about the terrorists who kidnapped the three Israeli teenagers Naftali Fraenkel, Gil-Ad Shaer and Eyal Yifrah, Khaled Mashaal, head of Hamas’s political bureau, said, “Blessed be the hands that captured them,” the [Jerusalem Post](#) reported. “I can neither affirm nor deny Hamas’s involvement but I bless those who did it.” Mashaal’s comments come as no surprise, as Israel has [implicated Hamas in the abduction](#), indicating that it had clear evidence linking the kidnapping of the boys to the terrorist organization. Hamas, classified as a terror organization by the United States, remains committed to its longtime goals of the destruction of Israel, supporting holy war and wanton violence, rejecting peace and fomenting anti-Semitism around the world. Responding to Mashaal’s comments, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [said](#), “Mashaal once again made clear that Hamas remains committed to its war against Israel and its war against every Israeli citizen, and coincidentally, against every Jew around the world.” Rather than utilizing an opportunity to benefit the Palestinian people, Hamas has instead focused on its stated goals of hatred, murder and terror. The United States must strongly pressure the Palestinian Authority to rebuff Hamas and abandon the unity government that has bolstered Hamas and precluded the possibility of reaching a comprehensive peace.

Like Balaam, who utilized his talents for destructive purposes, Hamas remains committed to its charter of hatred. The world must rebuff the terrorist organization, and work with parties truly committed to peaceful coexistence. ■

Keeping All Options on the Table

With his sword drawn in his hand (Numbers 22:23)

וחרבו שלופה בידו (במדבר כב:כג)

Ramban (on verse 23) suggests that because angels are spiritual beings without corporeal form, despite the fact that the verse states that Balaam’s ass, “saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his sword drawn in his hand” the donkey didn’t actually see anything. Instead, writes Ramban, “the text hints that because the angel was ready to strike it, it trembled with great fear as if they were coming to slaughter it.” The angel didn’t actually need to draw a

sword, nor make any threat whatsoever. Rather, the angel's readiness to take action generated enough fear to veer the donkey – and Balaam – off of their original course.

The angel's posture and readiness to act created enough fear to alter Balaam's dangerous course. The United States must emulate this posture if it hopes to effectively halt back Iran's nuclear program.

For years, members of the Obama Administration have consistently declared that in regards to Iran's nuclear program, "All options are on the table." President Obama clearly articulated his intentions repeatedly insisting, according to [the Atlantic](#), that the United States "has Israel's back" and that he will order the U.S. military to destroy Iran's nuclear program if economic sanctions fail to compel Tehran to shelve its nuclear ambitions. The President stated specifically that the final potential option is the "military component." America's stated willingness to entertain military engagement, combined with a crippling sanctions regime, compelled Iran to enter into negotiations regarding its nuclear program. For the current, ongoing, negotiations with Iran to successfully motivate the Islamic Republic to abandon its nuclear program, it must also believe that should negotiations fail, American resolve to rid Iran of any nuclear weapons capability remains solid, and all options truly remain on the table.

Without hearing a word from the angel or even seeing his sword, Balaam's donkey innately sensed danger and immediately changed course. Iran will only change its course when it senses that successful negotiations reduce the effects of sanctions and the danger of U.S. military action. ■

Danger at the Edges

And he saw from there the edge of the nation (Numbers 22:41) (וִירָא מִשָּׁם קֶצֶה הָעַם (בַּמְדַּבֵּר כֵּב:מֵא)

Noting that Balaam and Balak offered their sacrifices in view of at least part of the Jewish nation, the Torah highlights the close physical proximity between the Israelite camp and the surrounding nations. Why did Balak stand where he could see the "edge" of the nation? Kli Yakkar (on verse 41) explains that Balak focused on the edges, "Because the edges are more likely to be the recipient of damage." By definition, the edge – or the border – represents the first areas to target in an attack, and therefore serve as logical targets for your adversaries.

Just as Balak and Balaam focused on the edges of the Jewish camp, Israel's adversaries have recently targeted and killed Israeli civilians who ventured towards the edge of Israel's territory.

Early last week, a missile fired from Syria into Israeli territory killed 15-year old Israeli teen Muhammad Karaka, the [Times of Israel](#) reported. Karaka was accompanying his father during his first day of summer vacation while his father worked on a fence Israel is building along its border with Syria. Noting that the missile was a deliberate attack by forces loyal to Syrian President Assad, Israel struck nine targets belonging to the Syrian military. Later in the week, terrorists fired a barrage of rockets from Gaza toward southern Israel. According to [Yisrael Hayom](#), "Two of the rockets were intercepted by an Iron Dome anti-rocket battery in the Ashkelon area." In addition to the threats from Gaza and Syria, Hezbollah continues to present a major threat to Israel from the north. During a recent talk, IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Benny Gantz [said](#) that only a handful of states – which included United States, China, Russia, Israel, France, and the United Kingdom – have more firepower than Hezbollah. As Israel continues to face these and other very real threats, the need for Israel to maintain strong, defensible borders is greater than ever.

Just as Balaam and Balak focused their view on the edge of the nation at its weakest point, Israel's adversaries continue to target Israel's borders for attack, leaving thousands of Israeli citizens in grave danger. ■

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