

Dvar Torah- Balak

The Torah in Parashat Balak tells the famous story of Bilam's journey to Moav, during which the donkey which he rode began speaking to him. Hashem sent an angel to block Bilam's route, and on three occasions, the donkey saw the angel – which remained invisible to Bilam – and was forced to either veer from the road or to stop moving altogether. Each time, Bilam reacted by violently striking the donkey, until finally, after the third time, Hashem empowered the donkey to speak, and it asked Bilam, "What have I done to you, that you have beaten me on three occasions?" (22:28).

The *Midrash Tanchuma*, cited by Rashi, notes the significance of the word "*regalim*" used by the donkey in reference to the three occasions in which it was beaten. This word, the Midrash claims, was intended as a subtle allusion to the *shalosh regalim* – the three pilgrimage festivals (Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot) when all *Benei Yisrael* would assemble in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. The donkey was essentially telling Bilam, in the Midrash's words, "You are seeking to annihilate a nation that celebrates three *regalim* each year!" Many writers and *darshanim* have tried to identify the point of connection between Bilam's violence towards the donkey and the three pilgrimage festivals.

One explanation that has been offered draws upon the contrast between Bilam's impatience, as displayed in this episode, and the festival celebrations in Jerusalem. The obligation of *shalosh regalim* required *Benei Yisrael* to travel far from home and take a significant amount of time off from their regular occupations and affairs. As each festival approached, the entire nation had to put their lives on hold so they could prepare to journey to the *Beit Ha-mikdash* and spend time there to celebrate with Hashem. Bilam, by contrast, lost his temper and his composure when his donkey veered off the road or

crouched for just a few moments. He did not have the patience for even these relatively minor setbacks along his journey to Moav. *Chazal* thus seek to draw our attention to one of the important messages of the *regalim*, the need to occasionally break for our day-to-day routines and the frenzy of daily life to devote ourselves to lofty matters. As opposed to Bilam, who was unable to tolerate even a brief detour, we must be prepared to occasionally steer from our routine without getting flustered. The festivals are thus invoked in this context to take note of Bilam's impatience when he encountered a few "bumps along the road," and to urge us not to follow this example.

The Summer holiday gives us an opportunity to break our routine. To recharge and perhaps even discover our true passions. Make Torah and Tefila a central element of your holiday. With fewer external pressures there is more time for what truly counts.