

D'var Torah: Parashat Balak

by Eli Shebson - Wednesday, June 27, 2018

<https://chiefrabbi.org/all-media/dvar-torah-parashat-balak-5/>

In this week's D'var Torah for Balak, the Chief Rabbi explains why the home is the cornerstone of Jewish life.

Did you know that every column of the Torah starts with the same letter? It is the letter Vav, which means "and". Vav, of course, is also a word in Hebrew, meaning a "hook". And that is what the Vav, at beginning of every column, is there to convey.

The entire Torah is linked or 'hooked' up, to show that the Torah is one single unit, given by Hashem, through Moshe, to our people for all time.

As is the case with all good rules, there are some exceptions. In fact, five altogether and the best known of them is at the top of one of our columns in this week's Parasha of Balak: "Ma Tovv Ohalecha Yaakov, Mishkonatecha Yisrael," starting with the letter Mem. - "How wonderful are your tents of Yaakov, your dwelling places O Yisrael."

Bil'am, the heathen prophet, wanted to curse our people. But standing on the top of a mountain he looked down at the camp of Israel, he was so deeply moved and impressed to see that none of the entrances of the tents faced any others, in order to guarantee the privacy and the modesty of the people.

You will see that in one verse, reference is made both to 'Yaakov' and 'Yisrael' who were the same person. Traditionally, we understand that when Yaakov is used to represent the Jewish people it refers to the individual Jew within the nation. When Yisrael is used, it refers to the entire nation.

Now we can understand this verse of "Ma Tovv OhalechaYaakov." The "Ohel" of Yaakov, the tent of Jacob represents the Jewish home, where every single, individual Jew lives. This is a headline feature of Jewish life and everything flows from it.

The "Mishkan Yisrael" - The dwelling place of Israel - that represents the shul and the Beit Midrash, where people study. Notice which one comes first, it is the home before the communal centre. That is why the first thing we say when coming into a shul is this verse of "Ma Tovv."

Isn't it ironic that on coming into a shul the first thing we do is to pay tribute to the Jewish home, the "Ohel of Yaakov?" It is because we recognise that while shul, school, community centre and youth facilities and so on, are all so very crucial to the survival of the Jewish people, there is nothing as important as the traditional Jewish home and family unit.

Therefore this exception to our rule, relating to the commencement of columns, comes to teach us that the crucial importance of the Jewish home is the headline of the ongoing story of Jewish survival.

Shabbat Shalom.

PDF generated by Kalin's PDF Creation Station