

D'var Torah:

Balak

Office of The
CHIEF RABBI

Every one of us can make time sacred!



Video transcript: Where do we find the festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot in Parshat Balak?

The parsha tells us that after Bilam had cruelly struck his donkey three times, Hashem opened the mouth of the animal, which said to Bilam,

“Mei Asiti lecha, ki hikitani zeh shalosh regalim?” - “What have I done to you that you have struck me in this wicked way on three occasions?”

Now, the donkey didn't say 'shalosh peamim' which would have been the expected way of saying 'three times', but rather 'shalosh regalim' which is the term that we use for our three Pilgrim Festivals. There is an allusion here to Pesach, Shavuot and Succot, and the midrash tells us that actually from here we see that Bilam hated the Jewish people because he despised us on account of the way that we celebrate our pilgrim festivals. What is the message here?

What did Bilam have against the shalosh regalim: Pesach, Shavuot and Succot? Well, you see, when it comes to Shabbat, it's Hashem

who determines the time of Shabbat, when it starts, when it ends, the fact that it occurs every seventh day, etc. We don't have any say in it. But when it comes to our festivals, in the Torah, Hashem has told us that we determine when we celebrate the festivals. It's for us to work out when Rosh Chodesh is.

That's why in ancient times there was a Beit Din which took the testimony of people who witnessed it. Then there was Hillel, who set a perpetual calendar in motion for us. It's in our hands. That's why in the blessing we recite on our festivals we say, “Baruch atah Hashem ... mekadash **Yisrael** vehazemanim,” - “Blessed are you Hashem ... who sanctifies **Israel** and the times of the year.”

God sanctifies the people of Israel and we sanctify the zemanim, the times. It's in our hands to determine when the yomtovs will be. This brings us to a very powerful point. It means that we, as human beings, have the capacity to make time sacred. We can enable our world to become a holy place thanks to our efforts.

What makes the Jewish people holy is our appreciation of the fact that we can make this world holy. That's something that Bilam realised. That's what he was envious of, and let us therefore celebrate our capacity to make this into a far more sacred world. Shabbat shalom.

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