



The Torah of Life Parshas Balak

The sun descended upon the Sea of Galilee, a cool breeze blowing off the surrounding hills. On one of the slopes one can find the grave of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. We were preparing to enter the structure when we heard a terrible scream: “Oy vey, and you shall love, *oy vey*, Father, Father, Oy.”

It was the voice of the Sanzer Rebbe. He was praying with a great deal of passion. I entered and stood next him, unperturbed, he continued to pray. The memory of that prayer is etched in my mind, it was unique and holy.

When he finished praying we sat down and discussed my students: “Teach your students one thing”, the Rebbe said, “The love of Torah. This will sustain them throughout their lives.”

In our weekly parsha we read of Balaam’s attempts to curse the Nation of Israel. “G-d’s wrath flared because he (Balaam) was going, and an angel of the Lord stationed himself on the road to thwart him, and he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord stationed on the road with his sword drawn in his hand; so the donkey turned aside from the road and went into a field. Balaam beat the donkey to get it back onto the road. The angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyards, with a fence on this side and a fence on that side.”¹

Rashi explains: “the fence refers to one made of stone.” Many have tried to explain Rashi’s meaning. The Midrash explains that the fences on both sides allude to the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments – that Balaam will have no influence on the Israelites.

The Jewish Nation was at a dire spiritual state at the time. Balaam and Balak intended to use curses and witchcraft against them. The Jewish Nation needed Heavenly mercy to protect them.

“The fence was made of stone” – The Jewish Nation has two stone tablets that protect them. The Torah is life to he who abides by it, protecting him from all harm.

The Talmud tells us of the death of King David: “Every Shabbos he would sit and study all day. On the day that his soul was depart, the Angel of death stood before him but could not prevail against him, because learning did not cease from his mouth. ‘What shall I do to him?’ said he. Now, there was a garden before his house; so the Angel of death went, ascended and shook the trees. He [David] went out to see: as he was ascending the ladder, it broke under him. Thereupon he became silent [from his studies] and his soul had repose.”² We hear similar stories about the sages of the Talmud: “Rav Hisda, he (the Angel of Death) could never overcome him as his mouth was never silent from repeating his learning by rote. So he went and settled on the cedar tree of the school house. The tree cracked; Rav Hisda stopped and he overcame him.”³

We learn that when one is filled and surrounded by Torah he is protected from all evil. The Torah protects him in all situations and places.

“How did we survive then?” The Rebbe asked, relating to the Holocaust, “Only in the merit of the Torah. We knew that the Torah is protective. I told a group of friends: I promise you that if we continue to study Torah we are continuing G-d’s presence here, for G-d does not forsaken the Torah even for a moment. The G-d and the Torah are one. G-d is with us and no harm will come to us.”

“One of them did not believe me,” the Rebbe continued, “He did not heed my words. He said that he thought we were staying there. I told him not to talk in such a way. We are here with the Torah and G-d, and no harm will come upon us.”

“We all survived” the Rebbe told, “The Torah saved us from the hell we were in.”

“Only Torah” concluded the Rebbe, “Please tell that to your students: Only Torah, Torah, Torah.”



¹ Bamidbar 22:21-24.

² Tractate Shabbat 30b.

³ Tractate Moed Katan 28b.