



Sentinels of The Walls

Parshas Balak

Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

Bat David Mordechai V'Zelda Shaindel Sheychu

Rabbi Moshe Niselewitz ob"m was a man of self-dedication and piety. He was very active in establishing Torah educational institutions in East Europe.

One night I heard a knock on my door. Rabbi Moshe was at my door. He had made Aliya and lived in Kiryat Malachi.

He told me excitedly that when he came to Israel he brought with him hundreds of Jewish families who moved with him to the South. He came to me because he was very distraught over the educational options of the youth that have come with him. We thought together, and then I remembered my resourceful friend, Rabbi Yudkeh Palai. He had recently established a new Yeshiva in Ashdod.

We decided to go and see if it was suitable for Rabbi Moshe's youngsters. We arrived in Ashdod at midnight. It was an effort to locate Rabbi Yudkeh, but we were finally successful.

Rabbi Yudkeh immediately agreed to accept the youngsters and began to plan for them. Rabbi Moshe was very moved by his willingness. All he could say was: "You have much merit". We spent the rest of the night planning for over one hundred new students, and at daybreak we left the house joyful and content.

And then it happened. Rabbi Moshe turned to me and said: "Rabbi Grossman, we cannot accept this place for our students". I was bewildered. What happened? We created a fantastic plan all through the night, what has changed?

Providing an answer, he pointed to the building adjacent to the Yeshiva which served as a hotel and said: "How can we have students learning here with such distraction?"

I tried to persuade him, but he was steadfast: "This is not the place; there is no doubt about it". We parted with heavy hearts and a feeling of failure.

On my way back to Migdal Ha'Emek I contemplated Rabbi Moshe's unwavering standpoint. The Yeshiva was just what we were looking for. Where else would we find such a place in the South?

In our weekly Parsha it is written: "How goodly are your tents, O Yaacov, your dwelling places, O Yisrael!"¹

Learning from our Parsha, our Sages teach us in Tractate Baba Basra: "Rabbi Yochanan said: From the verse of the Scripture, "And Bilaam lifted up his eyes and he saw Israel dwelling according to their tribes". This indicates that he saw that the doors of their tents did not exactly face one another, whereupon he exclaimed: Worthy are these that the Divine presence should rest upon them".

The name Yaacov relates to a lower state of spirituality, as opposed to the name Yisrael, which denotes to a higher level of holiness. The word "Yaacov" comes from the Hebrew word "ecev", heal, and the word Yisrael is close to the word "rosh", head. When the Jewish people follow G-d's word they are called "Yisrael".

If so, why is it written: "How goodly are your tents, O Yaacov", which corresponds with a lower spiritual level?

This teaches us that when one is at the level of Yaacov he is faced with trials, but when he overcomes them and binds his wills and desires to G-d's rulings he obtains the lofty level of Yisrael. You become a place for G-d's dwelling, as it stated: "And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst"². Our Sages point to the words "their midst", as in the midst of each and every individual.

King David, in his Psalms, wrote: "Turn away my eyes from seeing vanity; with Your ways sustain me"³. If one averts his eyes from seeing vanity, he will have sustenance in G-d's paths. When someone guards his eyes from all evil, when he refrains from any expression of ugliness, he merits an elevated state of holiness and can sense his holy soul beating within him.

I told myself that this is what Rabbi Moshe Niselewitz wanted. He did not want to create for his students an option for negative exposure. When their eyes are pure and their souls spotless they will merit to blossom in G-d's courts and achieve the state of "your dwelling places, O Yisrael".

Rabbi Moshe's decision seemed so appropriate that I almost decided to drop the idea entirely. The passion in his eyes did not leave me. I saw the cry of the youth through his eyes.

I called Rabbi Moshe and promised we would build a high wall that would keep out any unwanted distractions from his students. He accepted the proposition, and a few days later over hundred new students walked among the new school walls. Many of these students became Torah scholars and communal leaders.

¹ Bamidbar 24,5.

² Shmot 25,8.

³ Tehilim 119, 37.