

Parshat Balak (תשי"ב): Magical Power of Prayer

Rabbi Chananya Berzon

לא הביט אָן ביעקב ולא ראה עִמָּל בִּישְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹקָיו עִמּוֹ וְתִרְוַעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ (במדבר כ"ג: א)
He does not look at evil in Jacob, and has seen no perversity in Israel; the Lord, his G-d, is with him, and he has the King's friendship (Balak 23:21)

The Rav explains that here the word *Teruah* takes on the meaning of “friendship.” In his prophecy, Bilam sees the unique relationship between Am Yisroel and Hakadosh Baruch Hu -- one of friendship. In His relationship to the rest of the entire universe, Hashem is expressed by cosmic dominion; however, Hashem's Kingdom amongst the People of Israel is permeated with intimacy and closeness.

Rav Hirsch sees this statement of Bilam in a different manner. Rav Hirsch speaks about the Jewish nation acknowledging Hakadosh Baruch Hu as their King, and discusses how the entire internal realm of the Nation of Israel is filled with His homage -- that is to say, at its core Klal Yisroel is a nation that acknowledges Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Haamek Davar, the Netziv, elucidates on the concept of a tzaddik in Klal Yisroel, explaining that the tzaddik in Klal Yisroel is not one who constantly does miracles. What amazed Bilam and Balak in what they saw in Klal Yisroel was not miracles; instead, Bilam and Balak recognized the concept of הצרה בעת הצרה -- the impact of a tzaddik's tefillah at the time of a hardship. The action of the tzaddik praying, and its resulting effect, is not a miracle! That is the way the Kingdom of Heaven works vis-à-vis Klal Yisroel! שתועיל תפילה -- tefillah will always help. Haamek Davar interprets the word “ותרועת” from the posuk, and explains that the “sound the trumpets” is tefillah!

The Rambam, the Shulchan Aruch, and other works of halacha seem to have the same understanding as Haamek Davar -- that is, that the sounding of the trumpets is a reference to tefillah. For example, Rambam in Hilchot Ta'aniyot 1:1 writes:

מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה מִן הַתּוֹרָה לְזַעַק וּלְהַרְיֵעַ בְּהַצּוֹצְרוֹת עַל כָּל צָרָה שֶׁתְּבוֹא עַל הַצִּבּוֹר ... כְּלוּמַר כָּל דָּבָר שֶׁיֵּצֵא לְכֶם כְּגוֹן בְּצָרָת וּדְבָר וְאַרְבֵּה וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָהֶן זֶעֲקוּ עֲלֵיהֶן וְהַרְיֵעוּ

It is a positive Torah commandment to call out and to sound the trumpets for each tragedy that befalls the Jewish community. As if to say, anything you have a problem with ... [that comes from natural destructive issues] ... call out to [Hakadosh Baruch Hu], sound the Shofar!

What is unique about the tefillah of a Jew? The *Teruat Melech*! We have needs; we are in צרה. First we turn to the King, this is what is known as the *teruat melech*. The Rav writes that Hashem is not “just” the King of the world, He is **our** G-d; one with whom we have a personal relationship, and He has a friendship with us.

It is with that foundation that we turn to Hashem regarding the needs we have and for help with the challenges that we face. That is the way G-d, as King, runs the world. Turn to Him in prayer, acknowledge that He is the King, and accordingly we have a special friendship with Him. Then we understand that He is the מלך עוזר ומושיע ומגן!