



Torah Reflections: Conversations on the Weekly Parsha
Parshat Balak 5784: Good and Evil

Integrating Torah into one's life through reflection and conversation can be an incredibly fun and engaging experience. It's a journey of discovery, where ancient wisdom and timeless teachings come to life in our daily experiences. Through reflection, we have the opportunity to dive deep into the rich tapestry of Torah, extracting profound insights and lessons that resonate with our modern lives. The joy lies in the 'aha' moments, those instances when a Torah verse or story suddenly connects with our personal challenges, aspirations, and values. And when we engage in conversations about Torah with others, it becomes an interactive exploration, where diverse perspectives and interpretations enhance our understanding. These dialogues often spark excitement and intellectual curiosity, making the learning process both enjoyable and fulfilling. Torah becomes a vibrant and dynamic part of our lives, offering not just guidance but also a source of endless fascination, connection, and growth.

NOTE: Don't feel obligated to go through every source or answer all the questions—unless you want to. Even one source, or one question will give you plenty of material for discussion and meditation. Enjoy this!

Some thoughts from the parsha

In Bamidbar 24:17-20, we encounter a unique episode where Bilaam, a non-Israelite prophet, offers prophecies about the future of Israel. What strikes me about this passage is how it presents a perspective on our nation's journey from an outsider's viewpoint. Unlike earlier narratives that were lived through by our ancestors—from Adam and Eve in the Garden to the patriarchs and the travail of Israel in Egypt—this moment unfolds on the edge of their encampment, viewed by a prophet with ill intentions.

Bilaam's attempt to curse Israel is thwarted by G-d, turning his curses into blessings instead. His prophecies describe a star rising from Jacob and a scepter emerging from Israel (the messiah), symbols of leadership and dominion over adversaries like Moab and Edom. He also speaks of the ultimate destruction of Amalek, a people who embody evil who are destined for annihilation.

For Noahides, these verses resonate deeply with universal themes of good versus evil and the role of choice in spiritual alignment. Bilaam's abilities mirror the cosmic dualism inherent in creation—where gevurah (severity) and chesed (kindness) coexist in tension but ultimately serve Divine purposes. This dualism reflects the broader human experience of navigating moral choices and striving for righteousness.

The tension between Bilaam's blessings and his malevolent intentions underscores the complexity of Divine providence and human free will. Despite his malicious designs, G-d uses Bilaam as a vessel to bless Israel, demonstrating G-d's ultimate sovereignty over human intentions and events.

The prophecy regarding Amalek reminds us that evil will ultimately be vanquished. It instills hope that goodness and righteousness will prevail in the end. This aligns with the fundamental belief in G-d's justice and the eventual establishment of His unity in the world.



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Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev emphasizes that Bilaam, despite his prophetic abilities, chose a path contrary to goodness. His story serves as a stark reminder of the importance of personal integrity and the power of our choices. Each of us faces moral dilemmas and influences that can sway us from the path of righteousness. Yet, like Israel, we are called to choose goodness and align our lives with G-d's will.

In essence, Bilaam's narrative challenges us to reflect on the dualistic nature of existence, the power of choice in shaping our spiritual destiny, and the hope that goodness will ultimately triumph over evil. It invites us to explore our own moral compass and strive for a closer relationship with G-d, knowing that our choices contribute to the unfolding of Divine Providence in the world.

Now, reflect on the following questions:

1. How does Bilaam's story illustrate the profound consequences of our moral choices and intentions?
2. Reflect on how the concept of dualism (e.g., good/evil) resonates with your understanding of G-d's purpose in creation.
3. Considering Bilaam's blessings to Israel, what does this teach us about G-d's sovereignty over human actions and intentions?
4. In what ways can we maintain personal integrity and align our choices with goodness, even when faced with moral challenges?
5. How does the prophecy against Amalek inspire hope for a world where evil is ultimately vanquished and justice prevails?

Shabbat Shalom!