

Session 192  
Balak – The Idols in Our Midst  
21 July 2024

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOMItv1Oi1k>

Ari

Shalom, good to see everybody, it is so good to see all of you. Truly it is. I have to say, you know, the more time that we're in this Fellowship together, the more I feel connected with all of you. Both those of you who I already know, as well as those of you that I don't have the honor personally meeting yet. And I love looking through and seeing your faces and saying..."Oh that's the one who I prayed for this, and that's the one that asked me this question." And by the way, thank you, Ardelle again, for your tireless work in putting together these prayer pamphlets every week. Really, it means the world, it's so important, it's such an important part of what we're doing in bringing us together.

So, as of now, this will be the last Fellowship before we take off for the time that Torah institutions in Israel, and I think most of them around the world, take off for break. And to be honest, I do find myself conflicted about taking this time off because I find that this Fellowship makes me a better person, it improves my Torah learning, my spiritual existence, and it just feels like it's important for me, for us, for the world. For the world, particularly during times like this in which I think these times are so consequential for Jewish history and for world history and for redemption.

On the other hand, there is a reason that we have a Sabbath during the week. Because breaking the routine, and stepping back and reassessing things in an introspective way is critical for healthy, spiritual life. So I've been discussing with Tabitha various ways that we could perhaps stay connected during this time that would be different than the normal Fellowship. It would allow us to keep our connection...you know, the flame alive. And still providing warmth and connection during these times. I would love to hear your thoughts about it. I was thinking maybe we could have a time every week where we come together for a little bit to recite some Psalms together and talk about those Psalms, and maybe just talk to each other, questions, stuff like that, that's what I was thinking. But I'm definitely open for your suggestions on that.

Because these right now, these are times of reflection and growth for the nation of Israel. This coming Tuesday is the fast day of the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, which starts the three weeks of mourning which culminates in the most intense day of mourning and fasting on the Jewish calendar, which is what? The 9<sup>th</sup> of Av. And while some people are eager for these three weeks to end so that we can get back into routine and commence enjoying our summer, there's a certain aversion we should have to that thinking. Rav Kluger points out that these weeks, they're filled with great potential for heightened awareness, for growth, for character refinement and spiritual revitalization.

Sometimes I hear myself saying that with a consciousness and awareness that so many of you in this Fellowship are not Jews. The boxes, the titles, whatever. And I'm like, most Jews are not even on the radar of these three weeks in the Temple, and here I am just laying it on so thick with all of you. But, the truth is the truth. And it wasn't a Jewish Temple, it's a Temple... My house is a House of Prayer for all nations. And all of us are affected by this in a real way. I don't believe you need to be just a Jew to mourn the destruction of the Temple. Anyways, so we want to harness these times for growth and refinement and spiritual revitalization because that is the real goal of all that we're doing here in this Fellowship. And that is what I believe is the real goal of our lives here in this world. Not just to do the motions and say the right words, but to grow and expand our inner spiritual essence during this brief, sojourn that we have on earth. Because anything less than that in my mind is essentially idolatry. And that is why the Temples that we are mourning were destroyed to begin with. Because of the great and foundational sin of idolatry. And when we just perform these actions by rote, and we just mouth the words from a place of habit...which by the way, I'm hereby confessing my guilt in falling victim to this, more often than I would like to admit. But you know, it's true, it is what it is. It's something we have to be aware of.

That's the reason Maimonides says something that I think that the nation of Israel should, especially the observant Orthodox Jews have really internalized, that it's better to say fewer blessings with a full heart than recite the entire corpus of the prayers that we have and get all the words done without really having your heart in it. Because in the end when we abstract and ritualize our relationship with HaShem, then we're not in a true relationship with Him. If anything, we're objectifying and seeking perhaps subconsciously to craft Him in our own image. And I'll talk more about that soon.

Ok. So, what I want to talk about now in this Fellowship, cause I've gone through a lot in the construction and the thought and the assembling of this Fellowship. Sometimes I get so lost that Shaena's like, "You need to just take a walk." Because I'm just so tied up in knots. But there is just one general theme that as I was going into this period of time into this Torah portion and the Haftara, everything we're going through, it feels like everywhere I looked, it was exactly this message, which I encountered that I want to share with you. So before we open to the pages of our Torah portion and look inside, which I'm excited to do, I want to introduce Jeremy who is not live with us...I mean, he's alive, thank God, please God, I hope. I haven't spoken to him in the last hour. But he sent us a message. He couldn't be with us live because he's on the airplane right now and I think that he wants to share with us before his departure a message that I'm excited to share.

And I'll be honest. I wasn't happy about the Gimpel family leaving. They've left now for a number of consecutive summers already and while Shaena and I always brace ourselves for their glaring absence...because in the end of the day, it's really us and them on this mountain. So when they leave, we're now half of the population...less than half because there's eight of

them and there's five of us. I can't believe there's five of us, it's unbelievable. But anyways, we brace ourselves for their glaring absence and we know that we're going to miss them because we always do. But you know there's an idea that absence makes the heart grow fonder and that there's something healthy and positive about these annual breaks that what they do for our friendship. If anything, it just keeps us from taking each other for granted.

That being said, I feel a certain heightened sense of concern for their trip right now. It feels like they're going into the lion's den of Jew hatred in Europe right now and I'm just so concerned that something may happen...you guys don't even need to hear me say this, you know my heart, you know where I'm at, you know what I'm going to say. That something may happen in the days and weeks to come which would be so globally destabilizing that the gates shut and that they're stuck over there. So I really begged them not to go. Maybe begged isn't the word, but I definitely made my concerns very clear to them on numerous occasions, right until the border of...this is not in good taste, I'm already harassing them. And then I did it a little bit more, especially over this last Shabbat. I was laying it on thick.

But they were set on their plans, which I guess I can understand. But my comfort is that I know why they're going. That they're going on shlicut, they're emissaries to the nations, particularly to Europe. And they're spreading a message of truth for here in Judea and a message of Torah from Zion and they'll be sharing a message for our times, I know they will. And like Daniel, who was also locked in the lion's den, and he was protected from harm due to his divine appointment...he was an emissary too of the God of Israel. And I pray that they too are protected because of their divine appointments.

So with that, allow me to start with a short blessing.

HaShem, please bless this Fellowship. Bless us to come closer to You, through this Fellowship to come closer to You every day and every moment because that's the reason that we're here. Bless us with listening hearts and humble hearts which are open to receiving and absorbing Your light and Your truth. Bless us and bless our families with health and happiness and abundance in every way. And HaShem, as we know that from You, everything is a blessing. Allow the great abundance of blessings to be poured out upon us to be manifest in a revealed way that we can receive with joy and happiness. Please HaShem, bless the nations of the world to repent and to change course from their ways of darkness and confusion to ways of light and full. To walk in Your ways. Bless the nation of Israel with strength and holiness to fight the great darkness that is being hurled against us by our enemies that seek our destruction. It seems from every direction and every border, from within and from without. Please bless the Gimpel family in their holy journey of teaching Your Torah and spreading Your light. Protect them, prepare their steps, grant them favor in the eyes of all they encounter and bring them back home to Judea safely and soundly. HaShem please bless each and every one of us during this shifting period of the Fellowship as we enter these days of mourning and allow us to internalize

into our hearts what the Temple really meant to Israel and to all of mankind. That when it was destroyed as we read in the book of Lamentations, gone was the joy in our hearts. The only true joy is closeness to You, HaShem, and may the words from Lamentations be just as alive in our hearts today as they were thousands of years ago when they were written. Bring us back to You, HaShem, and we shall return, renew our days of old. Amen.

And with that, I will introduce Jeremy's final departing message to us.

Jeremy

Hey Fellowship. Summer has started, the kids are out of school, and as you can tell, I am in Ben Gurion airport right now. My whole family, aside from maybe my biggest kids, they are in line and our first stop is Rome. Monday night will be the night of the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, where still, 2,000 years later, we fast, we remember, and we pray, and we mourn the destruction of our Temple. And how symbolic that my first event, on my first European speaking tour is in Rome, the place, the origin of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. And so, I find that incredibly meaningful.

And so, our Fellowship is expanding, our light is reaching new places, and I just want to wish you all a beautiful summer, and you should know that right now, there are in the works, we're going to be changing platforms, we're going to be changing our technology, we're going to be upping our production. Ari and I are so committed to bringing a new light from Zion, using this time, this opportune time in world history, we believe a spotlight will be shined, or is being shined on us right now. And so, we need to bring our A game. We need to broadcast the Torah from Zion, and we need to bring a new light to the world. And so, all of you will be in touch and you'll be hearing from us very soon. But we'll see you again in Elul, we'll see you again as we prepare for the new year. But now, it's summer time, so have a wonderful summer, stay safe, and we will see you soon. Shalom.

Ari

So that was good to hear that from him. Was it just me or was his mouth moving in dissonance with his words coming from his mouth? I never know whether...oh, I guess not. It's the internet here in Judea. But anyways, let's dive in because we have a lot, a lot to talk about. And by the way, Tabitha, I'm just catching up on the chats here. A lot of people are looking for Jeremy's itinerary in Europe. If that's possible to share, if we could send that in the next email, that would be really, really great. And thank you all for your blessings for his family and your consolations for me, I love these moments when I can catch up on the chats real time. So thank you for that.

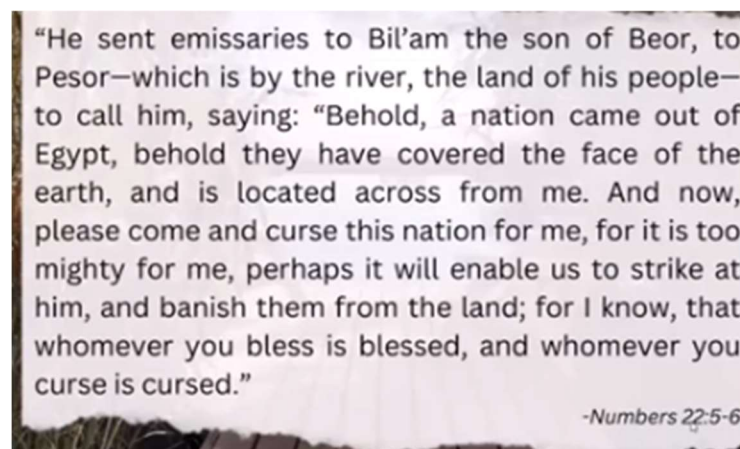
Ok, so let's dive in. The Torah portion begins with a very novel and exciting shift in narrative from the perspective of the dynamic and often really rocky relationship between the nation of

Israel and the God of Israel in the desert, to a different theater altogether, to the theater of the nations in the land that are bracing themselves for Israel's arrival.

I mean, for portion after portion of the Torah, it's the relationship between Israel and God, that's all we know, that's all we've known. In some ways, it feels like we're in the desert with them in this sort of vortex of sand dunes and Divine tests and pillars of clouds and fire and rebellions and anger and all the drama unfolding, we're like there with them. And then, all of a sudden, there we are. We're listening in to the great mighty feared king of Balak of Moab in absolute panic at the approach of the children of Israel in the desert. And of course, this is comically contrasted to the clearly mistaken projection of the spies who were just so sure that the inhabitants of the Land saw them as mere grasshoppers that they could just crush under their feet. We see here that they could not have been more wrong. More wrong.

And clearly, King Balak of Moab is no fool. He was obviously wiser than the foolish leaders of today in that he realized that the only way to really defeat this blessed nation of wandering Israelites would be by waging a spiritual war against them. I mean, it's something that I think that the nations should realize today. Because by numerical...by just numbers, we shouldn't exist at all. It always shocks me, the ridiculousness of the global media framing Israel as the Goliath and the Palestinians as David. Whereas just look at us right now, we're fighting on every single front, we're fighting Chezbollah and Chamas and Islamic Jihad and the Houthis and Syria and Iran and the leftists and the globalists and we're fighting on every single front, this global jihad but somehow, they frame it that way. I mean it should be clear that the only way to defeat Israel really is a spiritual war against us. A military war alone, at least King Balak of Moab, he realized that they would be destined to lose.

So he sends a message to Bilam, the internationally renowned soothe-sayer, like the sorcerer, the prophet, and eventually he offers him all the wealth of the entire kingdom, if he would only assist in the defeat and the cursing of the Israelites. Let's look inside here.



So he sends delegation after delegation, each more important than the last, each time offering greater honor and greater prestige. And each time Bilam sends them home and says HaShem refuses to let them go. But each time a new one arrives, and while Bilam does tell them to sleep over and he'll ask again. I mean any student of human behavior and motivations knows that

he is waiting and praying to be given the green light to do this thing that he so desires. And you

know a close look at his words reveals exactly that. When he responds to the last delegation, really does expose what makes this Bilam character tick. So let's look inside at verse 18:

Bil'am answered and said to Balak's servants: "Even if Balak would give me silver and gold enough to fill his house, I cannot transgress the word of Hashem my God, by doing anything small or great.

-Numbers 22:18

Now hold on, who said anything about money? Right? If this delegation would show up at my daughter, Dvash's door? She would have said, "Even if Balak were to give me all the ice cream in the world, chocolate and vanilla and even strawberry, enough to fill up this house, I cannot transgress the word of God." Why? Because she's my ice cream

girl.

And Bilam, well he's clearly a money guy. Money is one of his love languages. Money is at least one of the things that makes him tick, which is strange because he's one of the greatest prophets in the history of mankind. And money? That's his thing? I mean, there's so many questions about this guy, but most of them really culminate in this fundamental question which is, how could it be that there's such an evil man, could become such a historic prophet? So for a few moments, let's take a deep dive into who this character, Bilam really was. So one of the principles of Jewish faith is:

Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom Hashem singled out face to face.

-Deuteronomy 34:10

It's part of the prayer that we say in Yigdal. You know we say it every Friday night and some every morning. We say, "Never has there been in Israel a prophet like Moses." The sages teach that the Torah teaches that no prophet arose in Israel like Moses. Because there was indeed another prophet who arose that was like Moses, at his level of prophecy. But he did not arise from

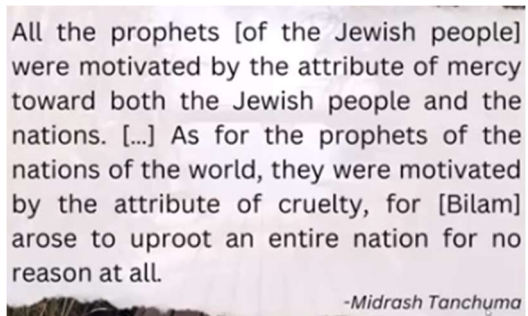
within Israel. He arose from within the nations of the world.

Now this is, of course, concerning and confusing and alarming because we know that Bilam was a corrupt and evil man. How can you even say his name in the same breath, the same sentence as Moshe Rabbeinu, as Moses? And the answer is that the comparison from Moses to Bilam is a comparison with regard to the clarity of the vision of their prophecy. With other prophets, they had a vision and they would describe that vision, which of course leaves room for their own finite human personalities and limitations. And their biases to creep in. However, trace or faint they may be, I mean we're talking about spiritual giants like Isaiah and Ezekiel. But they still had traces...they were human beings. They had traces of ego and personalities which were imprinted on their prophecies. It didn't invalidate them, it just made them their prophecies, it made them theirs, it made them real, it made them human.

But Moshe they say, would receive his prophecy as a translucent prism. We're taught that Moshe's prophecies were so direct that he, himself would often hear the words of HaShem speaking through his very mouth, real time. And so the same was true with Bilam, it was straight from HaShem. The prophecies of Bilam were so clear and so translucent and so direct from HaShem that despite his desire to curse Israel, what emerged from his mouth ended up in our daily prayers, and I sing it with my son every morning as I'm driving him to day care. How beautiful are your tents O Jacob and your dwelling places O Israel. We could talk about just those verses for the rest of the Fellowship. But a lot of discipline went in to just trying to stay focused on the message that I hope and I pray I'm able to convey, that was clear enough in my heart.

But anyways, he wanted to curse and he's hearing from his navi, he can only imagine the humiliation, the embarrassment, the shame, the ineptitude that he felt as all of these dignitaries and the king of Moab is waiting to hear the curses and he's just blessing them. But that's the degree of clarity of transmission that emerged from Bilam. And so, when it comes to prophecy, he was likened, unimaginably again, to Moshe. You know, they say so that the nations of the world would not be able to lodge a complaint against God, that they did have a prophet from their ranks as well. So they wouldn't be able to say that if they had a prophet from the nations, then somehow things would have been different for them. That's one of the reasons that they say that he had this prophecy, that it was given in this way to Bilam.

So Moshe and Bilam were likened in regards to prophecy. So how was it that this elite prophet on the level of Moses himself was able to be so fundamentally and antithetically different from Moshe when they're on the same level? And I think it came down to his will. Came down to his heart. Came down to how he received this prophecy to begin with. Because you know on the heart level, he was compared in quite a different way to Abraham. I don't know if you know this, Bilam is like one of the most evil people in history and he is compared to Moses and compared to Abraham, likened, and Rav Goldscheider brings this teaching from Rav Kook who contrasts Bilam's heart with not only Abraham's heart, but with the hearts of each and every one of the prophets of Israel. So this is from the Midrash:



All the prophets [of the Jewish people] were motivated by the attribute of mercy toward both the Jewish people and the nations. [...] As for the prophets of the nations of the world, they were motivated by the attribute of cruelty, for [Bilam] arose to uproot an entire nation for no reason at all.

-Midrash Tanchuma

So Bilam's heart wasn't really compared to Abraham's heart at all. In reality, he was contrasted to him. Because Bilam's hatred was so great and his will was at such fundamental odds with the will of the God of heaven and earth that he was channeling, that he actually believed that HaShem would be with him to curse the nation of Israel.

Now we've talked about this in past Fellowships. One of the most prominent, contrasting actions of Bilam and Abraham was their saddling of their donkeys. Who remembers this from

last year, from prior years? Same words are used. What this action of saddling of the donkeys says about each of these characters, pretty much says everything that you need to know.

So let's just take a quick glance backwards at the context. Abraham was commanded by God to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, who is his spiritual heir. He was his only son with his beloved wife, Sarah, the son he had been praying for. And he was asked to sacrifice his son, his message, his future, everything that he knew and understood. Bilam on the other hand, is finally granted what he thought was a green light to go ahead and curse the nation of Israel that he so badly wanted to curse. This would be his ticket to fame and honor, unimaginable wealth and the eradication of the people that he really hated in his heart.

And for both Abraham and Bilam, the Torah tells us that they arose early and saddled their own donkeys. They saddled their own donkeys. That would be like Jeff Bezos filling up his own car with gas. Like he had to be really motivated to go where he's going. You know, saddling their own donkeys for each of them was beneath each of their dignities, as far as wealth and social status was concerned. But that each of them did so conveyed the eagerness in their hearts to do what it was that they were about to do.

And so our sages teach us that regarding Bilam, he shirked the societal and social norms of saddling his donkey in order to go with the nobles of Moab. It says he went with them, not only physically, but really he was united with them in spirit, in their shared goal of cursing Israel. He just totally disregarded his honor, his dignity because as the sages say, hatred prevents thinking straight. Right? Hatred prevents thinking straight. His hatred was just so great that he couldn't wait another moment for a servant to do the dirty work of donkey saddling. He was more than willing to do it himself.

But if it's hatred that prevents thinking straight, then what about Abraham? Why did he wake up so early to saddle his donkey? To fulfill such a terrifying task? Because our sages teach, love prevents thinking straight. Love prevents thinking straight. These are both exact same teachings of the sages of Israel from the Midrash. Ethics of our Fathers, Pirkei Avot, focuses us even more acutely on this difference when it contrasts Abraham with Bilam. So this is from Ethics of our Fathers:



Whoever possesses these three things, he is of the disciples of Abraham, our father; and [whoever possesses] three other things, he is of the disciples of Balaam, the wicked. A good eye, a humble spirit and a moderate appetite he is of the disciples of Abraham, our father. An evil eye, a haughty spirit and a limitless appetite he is of the disciples of Balaam, the wicked.

*-Ethics of our fathers 5:19*

And so, Rav Goldscheider points out that this is the fundamental difference. Abraham had an *ayin tov*, a good eye. And what's a good eye? Not like in sniper school. A good eye is someone who wishes good fortune on others. That's why a lot of people don't post pictures of their children, or things that show their wealth or whatever on social media because they're afraid that people may look at them with an evil eye, with a begrudging eye, with

a resentful eye, with a jealous eye. And then the spiritual forces may come against those people and say, "Do you really deserve that?" They don't want to have the energy of that negativity on them.

So what's a good eye? A good eye is someone who wishes good fortune on others. When they see their neighbor flourishing in any way, even in a way that they themselves may not be experiencing, that they're flourishing. And that they so badly want. They view their neighbor with genuine happiness and blessing. Their eyes broadcast authentic joy at their neighbor's good fortune. More than they may even feel if they themselves were the recipient of such a blessing. That's a good eye.

And where does a good eye come from. Rav Kook explains that a good eye does not come from working on one specific character trait, like having a good disposition or not being angry and controlling your temper or stinginess. Those are all individual character traits. Not a good eye. A good eye comes from a deep internalization of an entire world view. An entire perspective on life in which one knows that just as God is infinite and abundant and good, so too are His blessings. And his neighbor's blessings in no ways comes at the expensive of his own. And when you have a good eye, you see the Divine spark within everyone and everything which causes your love for God to spill over to love for all of His creations because there's a spark of Him within each and every one of us. And the love for Him implies a love for them. That's a good eye.

And that's something that Abraham, in his lifelong quest to come to know and love God, worked his entire life with all his being and all of those tests, all of that, was to really result in that good eye. That was what he was refining and acquiring. Abraham worked every moment of his life to achieve the level of consciousness and awareness and godliness that would result in that good eye. Ok, so that's Abraham.

But what about the Moses comparison to Bilam? Well, I think fundamentally it's the same thing. Rav Shalom Rozner explains this comparison between Moshe and Bilam with the following parable.

Two individuals became extremely wealthy. One individual worked hard and built a successful global empire. The other individual was lazy and hardly worked, but won the lottery and got a windfall of cash. There have been many documented cases, Rav Rozner explains, of people rising from rags to riches overnight who later just lost it all. Easy come, easy go. However, the individual who toiled to achieve success appreciates every dollar he earns, every shekel he earned and spends it wisely.

So like Avraham, Moshe worked his entire life harnessing every challenge and every test. Every wound to grow in his faith and refine his character and his humility, to come close to HaShem. But Bilam didn't spend one minute doing any of that. He didn't earn his prophecy, it was just given to him. So he remained the same sort of repulsive, disgusting, resentful, angry little man that he'd always been prior to even receiving the prophecy. His prophecy was superficial, whereas that of Abraham and Moses was earned based on the holy, godly people that they spent their entire lives seeking to become.

Ok, so let's return to the question of how Bilam could have been so blind and delusional to believe that HaShem would actually go with them and allow them to curse the nation of Israel. And I think it's because at the core, he was given this power, high level prophecy on a silver platter without earning it. And because of that, he was able to maintain his horrible character and his self-absorption, which ultimately he believed he would be blessed to fulfill his own will. Which was so completely opposite to that of God's will because he simply projected his inherently pagan and idolatrous world view on everything, on everybody, even on God, Himself. And so he had this high level of pride, he must have been a really tormented person to have the highest level of prophecy, but his core, his essence was so unevolved and crass that that must have been some life to live.

So you see, like we said, Bilam, he didn't want to work for it. The very idea of refining his character and his attributes was so foreign to him that it wasn't even on his radar. Not for a moment did he think that the work of this world is to align his will with God's will by refining his character and supplementing and sacrificing his own selfish, hedonistic, animal impulses to a higher and a holier dimension, which is the desire and teachings of God, Himself. No way! It wasn't on his mind at all. On the contrary, Bilam authentically and self-servingly believed that the goal of his life was to make HIS will into God's will through manipulations and distortions and through bribery and corruption.

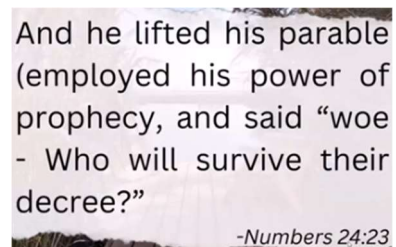
You know, Rav Kook teaches that this is the core motivation, the core impulse of idolatry. That behind idolatry does lie an authentic yearning for closeness to God, but evil and selfishness and these animalistic lusts and impulses and desires reigning in the heart, they prevent Divine light from entering. So rather than to fight that darkness and fight for light and fight that war within you to embrace a higher place, there's no willingness for that. If they won't even entertain the idea of sublimating these self-absorbed hedonistic lusts to God.

Well what idolatry does, is that it takes these base desires and animalistic impulses and elevates them to the highest level of worship. Idolatry takes our greatest vices and makes them into the greatest virtues. Idolatry doesn't bring us closer to God. It makes God in our own pathetic little images that are totally controlled by whatever animalistic impulses are thrust into our essence.

That's why the trend, I know this is probably going to be a little bit controversial, but the trend of converting to Islam is so rampant, I think. Particularly in prisons. For many years now, Islam is the fastest growing religion in U.S. prisons where according to Wikipedia, a full 80% of all religious conversions in prisons, are to Islam. Did you guys know that? Why? Why would that be the case? Well, here's what I think. A criminal shows up in jail. And they're looked down upon in society, and also unsure in their own hearts, they write themselves off as bad people who violated morality and societal norms and they've stolen or killed or raped or whatever it was. And they show up there being considered from both within and without as morally deplorable people.

And in comes Islam telling them that there is a holy place for this violence if they would only direct it toward the infidel. Or women who they deem immodest, or to apostates who deny the faith or to some other strain of Islam. Suthis, or whatever. Then it is an act of saneness or virtue. Right? How convenient. Now they get to go from a deplorable inmate to a revered Iman.

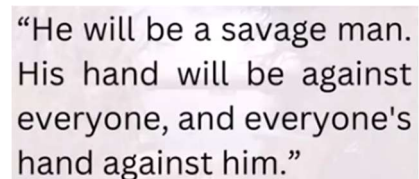
So, we see after the failure of his mission, Bilam is given prophecies about what would transpire in the end of days. And in chapter 24, verse 23 we read:



And he lifted his parable (employed his power of prophecy, and said "woe - Who will survive their decree?"

-Numbers 24:23

he will be a para adam. Genesis chapter 16:



"He will be a savage man. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him."

-Genesis 16:12

Ish, being the noun, and navon, wise is the adjective which comes second. Right? Adam ra, a man who is wicked. Adam is a man and ra is wicked. And that's why our sages teach Yishmael is not called an Adam para, a man who is savage. He's called a para adam. The noun is the

And so Rav Asher Weiss says that this mysterious prophecy, you know "whose decree?" Who will survive "whose decree?" That this mysterious prophecy is referring to the nation of Israel in the end of days surviving the harsh decrees of Yishmael in which our blood will be spilled like water. And we alone will not have the power to stop it. In describing Yishmael, the Torah tells us that

So as you may have heard in the Hebrew, the exact words that are used there are para adam. A savage man, that's how it's sort of translated. But if you point out, you know Rav Weiss points out and the sages point out, this is not a new idea, that in the actual Hebrew, the noun always appears before the adjective. An example would be an ish navon, a wise man.

word savage. The adjective is the word man. Because he is not a man who is savage, he is a manifestation of savagery, itself, which is incarnated in the form of man. Yishmael rejoices at the cries of innocent children and babies being tortured. He thrives in an environment of death and destruction.

The famous Chofetz Chaim said that this nature of Yishmael is inherent and eternal. And that in the end of days, even if all the nations were to attempt to curb his viciousness and refine his lusts, they would fail. And his students teach that he painfully groaned and said, "Who knows what cruelty those savages would inflict on the children of Israel in the end of days?" You know, we've seen this phenomenon again and again over the past 1,300 years, most recently on October 7<sup>th</sup> where we saw hundreds of GoPro videos of Chamas terrorists. Thousands of first hand testimonies, all of which show that the more vicious the violence, the greater the elation, the more horrific the brutality of baby murderer and dismemberment and rape, the greater the unbridled joy. It was clearly an act of worship in which the greater the evil and sickness and twistedness, the more exalted the sacrifice to their god.

You know it's well known, I don't know if you've heard of the very famous, she's famous in Israel in Israel, in modern Israeli history as the author of the famous beautiful song, Yerushalyim shel z'hav. Jerusalem of Gold. Her name is Naomi Shemer. She said, "The Arabs like their murder hot, humid and steamy. And if the Arabs ever have the freedom to fulfill themselves, we will miss the good, sterile gasses of the Germans. How right she was. You know, no wonder the Arab descendants of Yishmael cleaved to Islam in droves. For what better than to embrace a faith that glorified their vicious nature, more than one that would deny it or demand that they control it or sublimate it or harness it for good in any way. Because there are some ways that that can be harnessed and controlled. There is something that could be done there if they were to fight the good fight against their nature. But they don't want that. They went for Islam.

And that my friends is why I...I don't know if this is going to be controversial or not, or even if I should share it, but I'm just sort of, you know, slow of consciousness here, that's why I humbly disagree with...many sages of Israel, you know, who I'm not a fraction of, but that said that the God of Israel and the God of Islam are the same God. Have you guys thought about this? Have you heard about this? A lot of Jews say that you know, about Muslims like, "We're worshipping the same God in the end of the day." Why? Why do they say that? Because we both worship one God? Because it's one God, it's the same God? So what? What does that mean? I simply don't see it and I don't believe it.

You know, a pagan human sacrificing moon god that glorifies the greatest, most vicious evil imaginable, doesn't deserve to be mentioned in the same breath as the name of the God of Israel. And claiming that we worship the same God merely because we profess faith that there is only one God, doesn't spark truth in my heart. Not at all. And I'm willing to be corrected and I'm open to the fact that I'm wrong here, I'm just a guy. This is my intuitive sense because a lot

of Jews, especially Jews in Israel, who talk to Arabs, I've done it myself, too at different times. Where you'll say like...you know they'll say, "How are you?" You'll say, "Wonderful, bless Allah's name." You know, a lot of Jews do that, a lot of rabbis do that, a lot, a lot. Because they also you know, Arabs sometimes say, "Baruch HaShem." They say HaShem. So it seems like we're sort of meeting each other there. But the more time that goes by, I won't do it, I won't say it, it doesn't feel right to me. And so I'm open to hear what all of you say, but so there's that.

There's this idea and I did see that connection between Bilam and his creation of his own impulses into values and virtues and Islam. But you know, I think we're running out of time here, but I would request your blessing that I keep going a little bit further. Because if you think that I might be coming down unnecessarily hard on Arabs or Islam, it's only fair to share Bilam's theological commonalities with replacement theology Christianity as well. Ok, now this could be very controversial and if I offend anyone, I'm sorry, but you want me to tell the truth, you want me to say what's on my heart. Even if I'm wrong, and I could totally be wrong. But I'm just saying what is, what is alive within me.

Now again, Rav Tarragon actually planted the seeds here, but I was thinking about it in different ways already and so I'm sort of going to run with it. The sages teach that Bilam didn't only believe that he could manipulate God by catching Him at the microsecond in which His anger flared. That's what the sages say he was trying to do. That was able, he had a unique power and ability to see when the Divine anger flared and he was going to catch God right then. Such a manipulation, such a witch-crafty perspective on things. But he also believed in essentially replacement theology. Because clearly he was a prophet with eyes in his head, who saw the exodus from Egypt, who saw the miraculous guidance through the desert and knew about Mt. Sinai, he couldn't argue the fact that Israel was God's chosen people. Key word...WAS.

Bilam's...I think his great theological mistake was that he believed that the sinful, rebellions of Israel, from the golden calf to the episode of the spies were just so heinous that God had rejected them outright and they were now subject to the flow of normal nations in history and predations of nations and that whoever really attacked them and defeated them, he believed would be doing God a favor by finishing off His people who He summarily and decisively just despised and rejected. That's how I think Bilam saw the nation of Israel.

And why did he believe this? Because due to his haughtiness and his arrogance, he never sought to truly know or authentically understand God. He never sought to develop a sincere relationship with Him. He just saw that he had this gift of the highest level, clearest prophecy. How can he capitalize on that? You know, he simply projected his values and his interests and his priorities upon God. And interacted with HaShem from that place. You know Bilam liked money and bribery. Well, then Balak should offer hundreds, thousands of the choicest cattle to God and bribe him. That's what the currency was, that's what money was. It would work for Bilam, so it would work for God.

And just as Bilam couldn't fathom real love for God, real love for anybody but himself, he couldn't fathom a God that could authentically love a nation so much that despite their sinfulness and rebellions, His love for them would never waver. He couldn't imagine such a God. He couldn't imagine...it was the replacement of, it was the error of replacement theology. That's what Bilam had right there. And it continues to live on in the Christian replacement theology world today. And that was a great part of his undoing.

And I'm specifically not saying Christianity today. Because I don't believe that. And even though, they may on paper...I don't really care about the theological professions. What I care about is how the deepest beliefs in one's heart manifest themselves. And I see...and I just saw at the Republican National Convention that prayers were said for the hostages of Israel. Prayers were said for Israel. They were talking about God, they have a heart for Israel. To me that shows that even if they may be lost on a theological level, in the idea of replacement theology, in an actual, real belief, faith level in their hearts, they know the truth. And that causes them to side with Israel and the Jewish people. Not only on a theological, but just on an intuitively true, goodness, light level.

But there are many in the world that are not that. You know, I really learn so much from you guys. I learn so much from all of you. So many of you reach out to me and you share your journeys that brought you to the Fellowship, your journeys within the Fellowship. And I appreciate them a lot and I'm strengthened by your stories and I'm inspired by them. And I'd like to believe that if I were in your place and I was raised in your families, with your religious backgrounds, that I would have the same faith and courage that so many of you have on our journeys. But for many of you, even whose faces I'm looking at right now, I doubt that I would have the courage that you have.

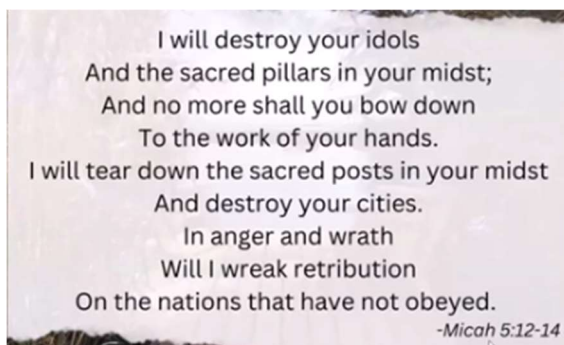
But you know, an interesting thing that I've noticed about your testimonies, many of you, is that you mention as a turning point in your journey, when you started studying Torah. Which, at the beginning, I didn't really understand it. I sort of just wrote it off because there's so many interesting things you were talking about, being said. But I didn't understand it. In my mind, all Christians believed in the Divine authorship of the Torah. But they didn't call it the Torah, they called it the Old Testament, which was sort of, you know, relinquished. Which was left behind because of replacement theology.

But I've come to understand that the difference between the Old Testament and the Torah, is not just semantics. But it is the difference, literally between heaven and earth. And I really want to hear all your feedback on this, I would love to hear it. But from my understanding, where I'm at right now, although both terms are referring to the five books of Moses, the term Old Testament implies that it's somehow an antiquated, irrelevant, outdated document that was done away with thousands of years ago when the Jewish people were rejected and exiled and their Temple was destroyed or whatever point in Jewish history, one would think, "Ok, that

is definitely the sign that God is done with the nation of Israel.” And so, that’s what I guess, for different people it would be different times. But the word Old Testament became very real.

Whereas the word Torah comes from the word tora, which means teaching. It’s a living teaching. A teaching for all generations. It is not old and antiquated and displaced. It is alive, it is the tree of life. The difference between the Old Testament and the Torah, therefore, in my mind, is no different in the most literal way, than the difference between Bilam and Moshe. Between Bilam and Moses.

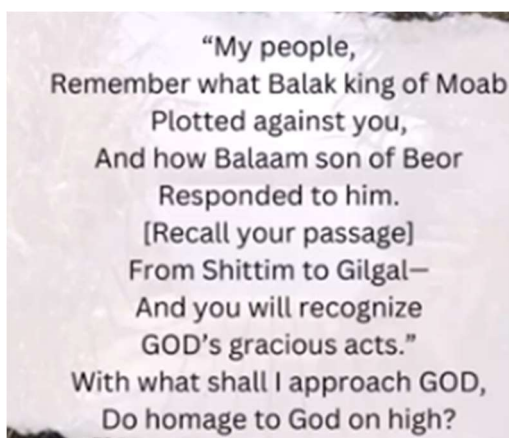
And that’s why I think that the Torah portion, I think the Torah portion went so perfectly with the portion from the prophets for this week’s reading. Because it was just the...what I read there in the book of Micah, it was the perfect conclusion to the critical message that I think we’ve been talking about in this portion. Because in the end of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6 of Micah, the prophet proclaims what will happen in the end of days. Not even sure I pulled out all the right, perfect verses here. But it’s worth reading:



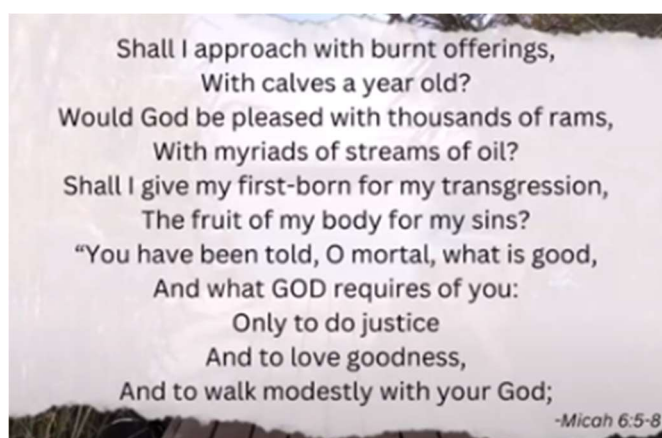
I will destroy your idols  
And the sacred pillars in your midst;  
And no more shall you bow down  
To the work of your hands.  
I will tear down the sacred posts in your midst  
And destroy your cities.  
In anger and wrath  
Will I wreak retribution  
On the nations that have not obeyed.  
-Micah 5:12-14

So we see that the self-serving, idolatrous beliefs will be destroyed and the nations who embrace them and enshrine them and in many ways created them, they’re going to be judged for it.

But the Haftarah ends with three verses which I believe could not be more perfect in encapsulating this message:



“My people,  
Remember what Balak king of Moab  
Plotted against you,  
And how Balaam son of Beor  
Responded to him.  
[Recall your passage]  
From Shittim to Gilgal—  
And you will recognize  
GOD’s gracious acts.”  
With what shall I approach GOD,  
Do homage to God on high?



Shall I approach with burnt offerings,  
With calves a year old?  
Would God be pleased with thousands of rams,  
With myriads of streams of oil?  
Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,  
The fruit of my body for my sins?  
“You have been told, O mortal, what is good,  
And what GOD requires of you:  
Only to do justice  
And to love goodness,  
And to walk modestly with your God;  
-Micah 6:5-8

There's something that I find comforting about the universality of those words. Because sometimes I say to myself, "What about pagan child sacrificers in the depths of who have never seen Christianity, Judaism...how is that fair? And I think that the answer is, that Torah aside, everything aside, God has put within us a soul, a spark of Him, and within that there is perhaps a very faint, but very real moral compass of the knowledge of what is good and what is evil. You don't need to be a biblical scholar for it. And therefore, what is good is achievable by everybody.

I think one of the things HaShem is telling us, at least the way I understood this here, is that we shouldn't be so quick to judge the idolatrous nations of the world. For even we can fall prey to the sinful trap of ritualizing our worship and bribing God with burnt offerings just as Bilam did. You know, and in these words I actually believe that HaShem is telling us that there's no short cut here. That the only true way for us to have a real and sincere and authentic relationship with Him is through real work, the work of Abraham and the work of Moses and the work of the Torah, the work of harnessing every experience of our lives, particularly the most painful and the most challenging to grow in our faith and our trust of HaShem. To refine our character and improve our attributes through the study of Torah, the humble study of Torah, not coming in with our, "We know exactly what this means, and we know how it is, and we know and we know and we know." A humble heart, to study God's word with humility.

You know, by studying the living Word, the words of the Living God of Israel, which is the Torah. For what does He want more of us than anything? What does He want of us? He wants us to become the godly people, the godly individuals, and the godly nation who channel His light into the world through doing justice and loving goodness and walking modestly with Him every day of our lives. That's why the Jews here in Judea are walking around with broken hearts and hearts of pain. But nonetheless, the recognition that everything that has happened to us, that is happening to us, is happening not to us, but is happening for us.

And that my friends is why I so dearly love this Fellowship. Because ultimately the theological differences that we may have, I don't think ultimately, on the deepest level that they matter at all. Because it's our hearts that HaShem is looking at. And if the product of our journey is that we're seeking with all of our hearts to live lives of justice and goodness and modesty, well then we know that we're walking on the right path. We know that we're not losing the forest in the trees. We know that even though we may be separating our dishes and keeping the minutia of every single mitzvah...that's great. But if we're screaming, losing our tempers and being vicious and oppressing the weak and the orphan, then we have totally lost the whole picture and we've made it all into idolatry.

Ok, my friends, so with that, let me bless all of you and all of us that we should merit to serve HaShem with hearts of humility and hearts of love and we should be worthy to see the scattering of falsehood, the destruction of evil and the end to the very root of idolatry, speedily



and in our days. And may our eyes merit to see the great revelation of goodness and of light and of godliness in the world. Not only before our eyes may we witness this, but may it be through our hands.

So for the final blessing, allow me to bless you with the benediction, with the blessing of the High Priest and his descendants as they blessed us throughout history. And of course you know I am not a descendant of Aaron, but I am of the nation of Israel. And we are an Am kohanim and a goy kadosh. We are a nation of priests who has the great honor and privilege of blessing the entire world.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

May God bless and protect you. May He shine His light and His countenance upon you and may He give you peace. Amen