

## Table Talk: Parshat Balak

In Parshat Balak we learn about Bilaam, a famous non-Jewish prophet and sorcerer, and his eagerness to accept the job offered to him by Balak, king of Midyan, to curse the Jewish nation. Midyan was nervous that this new nation was out to conquer everyone in its path, and so Balak thought he could stop them by enlisting Bilaam's expertise. The Torah tells us that Bilaam got up in the morning and saddled his donkey before his trip to Midyan. (See chapter 22, verse 21)

Why would such a powerful and world-reknown sorcerer have to saddle his own donkey? Wouldn't he have had some servants or workers who could do that? After all, the Torah tells us that Balak sent many men to accompany him. Surely, the polite thing to do is to saddle up his donkey in the morning for him. And why does the Torah talk about this detail at all – what's the significance of our knowing who exactly saddled the donkey?

Our Rabbis noticed 3 other powerful, wealthy people whom the Torah describes as saddling their own animals in the morning before leaving on an important mission. Do you know who the 3 others are and what they each went on to do that day?

And why, in each case, does the Torah tell us this most mundane, seemingly pointless detail?

First things first: the other three examples are Avraham, the morning of Akeidat Yitzchak; Yosef, as viceroy of Egypt, before going out to greet his father Yakov who was coming to see him after 22 years of separation; Paroh, king of Egypt, when he regretted letting the Jews free and decided to chase the Jews and bring them back.

What's similar in these 4 stories? The Midrash points out that in each case an extremely powerful feeling led these 4 individuals to act in this unexpected, irregular way. Each of them was wealthy with many many servants who provided all of their needs. But in each of these instances they jumped to do it themselves.

Avraham had a strong love for G-d and desire to fulfill the command to bring his son to an alter, Yosef was eager to greet his father and Paroh was anxious to retrieve his free slave labor. And in our case here, Bilaam was flattered to be called upon to stop this seemingly unstoppable new nation. It's the *ahava*, love, or conversely, *sin'ah*, hate, that the rabbis say is *mikalkalet et HaShoorah*, able to change the regular course of nature and anticipated roles that people play.

Each of them was excited, some for good and some for bad, but that feeling led them to do what they'd never usually do. They didn't wait for help, they didn't ask for help – they just did what had to be done!

What passions do you have? Have you ever experienced a situation where you just got so caught up in it that you didn't even think? Could be that it was for good – to save someone or do something praiseworthy OR could be that it was bad – and you just lost yourself in the moment? Discuss.

Bonus: what other word in the case of Avraham shows zeal and excitement? (answer: וַיִּשְׂכַּח, which means woke up early in the morning!) What gets you out of bed early?