

Initiative: BE A LEADER WITH PURPOSE

Study Packet • Parshat Chukat / Balak

"...In order that they hear, and in order that they learn and fear the Lord, your G-d, and they will observe all the words of this Torah"—Deuteronomy

Dear Leaders,

We often think of Moshiach and the era of Redemption on a global level. Moshiach will usher in an era of unprecedented peace, harmony, and spiritual enlightenment. But on a more personal level, it is a time when the essential goodness of all people will be revealed, and the true potential of each individual will be unleashed, allowing his or her unique talents and abilities to shine.

In this week's study packet, we take a look at the theme of Redemption and how every person's effort can have huge universal ramifications. We focus on some of the questions that we all might have: How can we recognize the divine core within another persona, and, perhaps equally important, within ourselves? When a situation feels so bleak and hopeless, how can we see beyond that? Who am I that I'm responsible to bring Moshiach? And if earlier generations couldn't usher in the redemption, how can I possibly succeed?

Please share your thoughts with us. We love to hear how your study groups are going.

Chana Weisberg,
Editor, TJW

CATALYST

By Tzvi Freeman

The size of the deed is not what matters. It is only a catalyst. One small deed could be enough to ignite a process to change the entire world. One small opening is all that's needed, and the rest will heal itself.

Whatever you do, do it with the conviction that this is the one last fine adjustment, the tipping point for the entire world.

HOW TO BECOME YOUR GREATEST ADVOCATE

By Chana Weisberg

Why is it that just as we are about to reach a long sought-after goal, we falter in those final moments?

Here's one scenario:

You are about to enter a meeting to clinch this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. You've researched all the relevant information and every pertinent detail. You've given yourself pep talks; you stand tall and confident. But just as you take the last strides towards the conference room, your self-doubt rears its ugly voice and you begin to waver . . .

Here's another one:

You've finally built up the courage to challenge the bully who has been tormenting you. You've been encouraged by your closest friends, and you've carefully rehearsed your speech. You know this confrontation is necessary and could establish a more balanced relationship. But just as you approach her, your courage wanes and you make an about face . . .

We first encounter Balak, when the Jewish people were at the threshold of the Promised Land. Just before entering, they were contested by their final enemy: Balak, the Moabite king. He had hired the gentile soothsayer, Baalam, to curse them, but each time Balaam opened his mouth, great blessings emerged.

The word *balak* means "cut off" or "dead" (Ohr Hatorah). It represents those times when we feel dejected or worthless, just as we are about to enter our personal "promised land" and accomplish a vital goal. We feel cut off from our true selves—from that aspect of our souls that provides us with the courage, inspiration, and motivation to complete our mission. We feel enveloped by a curse of negativity that taunts us and prevents us from actualizing our dreams.

In those moments of despair, we need to remember that, just as Balam's curses were turned into the greatest blessings, so, too, can our negative mindset. We can be our own worst enemy or our best ally. We can choose whether to listen to this deadening doubt that cuts us off from our inner potential or to reconnect with our infinite G-dly capabilities.

Balak, as it turned out, was actually the ancestor

of Ruth, the Moabite convert who became the grandmother of King David and the progenitor of Moshiach. The soothsayer that he hired revealed the ultimate blessings that will occur in the Messianic era.

We can view our world as an accursed place of pain and corruption, or we can see beyond the veneer to view these evil episodes as merely futile attempts to cut us off from G-d's vision.

When you feel cut off from your potential, try to focus on your inner redemptive qualities. Transform your negative, accursed self-talk and become your greatest advocate to bring more goodness into your life and the world at large.

Ideas for discussion:

1. What was a time that you felt "cut off" from your potential? How did you overcome it?
2. How did Balak's curses become the greatest blessings for us? How can the "curses" in your life be transformed to something positive?





FACING REALITY

By Yanki Tauber

Sometimes it all seems so hopeless.

Half the world goes to sleep hungry. Today's news may bring one "regional conflict" to the forefront of our attention, even as the other dozen wars rage on, with one group of human beings hacking off the limbs, burning down the villages or pulverizing the shopping centers of another group. And if you're fortunate enough to live in a more civilized part of the world, you can observe the more civilized forms of man's cruelty to man, as people break each other's hearts and trample everything good in themselves underfoot in the rampage for money, power and "self-realization."

You want to do something, but it all seems so hopeless. You can feed a hungry child, yet millions more remain hungry. For every kind word you speak, so many nasty, hurtful, antagonistic words are spoken all over the world. For every good deed you do, so many evil deeds are committed. What can you possibly hope to achieve?

Jacob was nobody's fool. He may have been "a guileless man" (Genesis 25:27), but he could muster enough guile to wrest the birthright and the blessings from Esau and to best the conniving Laban at his own game. He knew how to talk his way out of an assassination attempt, build a fortune from scratch and wrestle with an angel. One can safely say that he knew the world in which he lived.

And the world in which he lived was not a pretty place. 3,500 years ago, people were sacrificing their children to Moloch, and war and pillage were commonplace features of everyday life. Yet Jacob believed that very world to be on the threshold of the messianic era!

In the 33rd chapter of Genesis, the Torah describes Jacob's encounter with Esau. Many years earlier, Jacob had fled to Haran because his brother wished to kill him; now he returns, believing that Esau is ready for a reconciliation. The brothers meet, they even hug and kiss, but Jacob realizes that the day has not yet come in which the sons of Isaac can live together in harmony. So he says to his brother: "Please, go on ahead. I will follow slowly, according to the pace of the work before me and the pace of the children, until I will come to my lord to Seir."

Esau goes, but Jacob never does make it to his brother's mountain kingdom; he settles in Hebron and, more than thirty years later, moves to Egypt, where he spends the final seventeen years of his life. So when,

asks the Midrash, will Jacob make good on his promise to come to Seir? In the days of Moshiach, when, as Obadiah prophesies, "The saviors will ascend the mountain of Zion to judge the mountain of Esau."

In other words, Jacob initiated his encounter with Esau only because he believed that the messianic era was at hand. Had Esau been ready for a true reconciliation, this, in Jacob's view, would have ushered in the state of divine goodness and perfection that is the purpose and end goal of G-d's creation.

There is a lesson in this, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, to each and every one of us. Jacob knew that his particular mission in life was to actualize the enormous positive potential locked within his externally wicked brother. He also knew that the moment he achieved this, the entire world would be transformed for the better.

If you want to create a nuclear explosion, all you need to do is split a single atom. That will set in motion a chain reaction in billions of other atoms, and transform the face of the earth over an area of many square miles.

In the same way, we have each been allotted our own "portion of the world"—the material resources we possess; the talents and capabilities with which we have been endowed; the circle of family members, friends and colleagues with whom we interact and whom we influence. Transforming the nature of reality in our own slice of the world will transform the nature of reality in the entirety of G-d's creation.

Yes, feeding that one child will mitigate the hunger of every hungry child in the world. Saying that one kind word will soften every insult uttered on the face of the earth. Doing that one good deed will nullify all the evil in the universe. Because the world is one, and you are the world.

Ideas for discussion:

1. What do you think is your "portion of the world"—the talents and capabilities that you have been endowed with to create more goodness in our world?
2. Can the action of one single person actually make a difference?

WHO AM I TO BRING MOSHIACH?

By Chaya Sarah Silberberg



Question:

If all the great sages, mystics, and holy people of the past generations were unable to bring Moshiach in their lifetimes, how can we imagine we will be able to make it happen?

Response:

The thing to realize about redemption is that it is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Bringing Moshiach is not the sole responsibility of any one generation; it is the culmination of a collective effort, goodness accumulated throughout the ages. And goodness doesn't disappear.

Also, there is a specific benefit to being in this generation. The Chassidic masters teach that the purpose of creation is to make this world into a dwelling place for G-d. Not the worlds of the angels, not some heavenly realm of souls and spiritual beings—but this earthy, palpable, mundane physical world. In order to bring Moshiach, this is what we need to work on—we've got to bring G-d down to earth.

Let me ask you: Is there any generation that better qualifies as being "down on earth" than ours? For Moshiach to come, the G-dly needs to be revealed in us. In what the Kabbalists call "the lower realms." In fact, the generation before the coming of Moshiach is called the "heel of Moshiach" because the world is at its lowest point since Sinai.

When I was younger, I used to sew needlepoint tapestries. One of the first ones I ever sewed was a picture of a quaint cottage, surrounded with trees and colorful flowers, with a bright blue sky and puffy white, gray, and dark gray clouds. While sewing it, I decided that the grays of the

clouds were too dreary. So I replaced them with bright blue and white. When I finished the picture it didn't look quite right. Those darker, "drearier" colors were necessary to make the picture perfect. Sure, the vital reds and pinks and yellows and bright greens "made" the picture—but without the simple grays, the somber browns, and the unobtrusive blacks, the picture was not complete

Each and every one of us has a crucial role in drawing the divine picture and bringing Moshiach; if you didn't, you would not have been created. Telling ourselves that we have no power, are insignificant, unimportant, and don't matter is simply a product of laziness. On the contrary, the very fact that we are such ordinary people, struggling with the most earthly, mundane matters—that's exactly what qualifies us more than any other generation to bring G-d down to earth. You can't invite Him in unless you live there yourself!

Remember, G-d put us in this position because He believes in us. And if He does, so should we.

Sources

This concept of G-d wanting to dwell in the "lower realms" is fundamental. The source most often cited for this concept is Tanya, chapter 37. However, there he cites the Midrash of Rabbi Tanchuma.

Ideas for discussion:

1. How is our generation uniquely qualified to bring about the redemption?
2. How is the redemption the culmination of a collective effort?

THE CLOCK

From the Chassidic Masters

In one of his travels, chassidic master Rabbi Yisachar Dov Ber of Radoshitz occasioned to stay the night at a wayside inn. In the morning, he sought out the innkeeper.

"The clock," he asked excitedly, "the clock you have hanging in my room — where is it from? Where did you get that wonderful clock?"

"Why," said the surprised innkeeper, "it's quite an ordinary clock. There are hundreds like it hanging in homes throughout the country."

"No, no," insisted Rabbi Yisachar Dov. "This is no ordinary clock. You must find out for me where this clock comes from."

If only to humor his guest, the innkeeper made some inquiries, which yielded the information that this clock once belonged to the famed "Seer of Lublin," Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz. An heir of the "Seer" had been forced by poverty to sell all his possessions, and so the clock passed from owner to owner until it

came to hang in one of the guestrooms of the inn.

"Of course!" exclaimed Rabbi Yisachar Dov upon hearing the clock's history. "This clock could only have belonged to the 'Seer of Lublin.' Only the Seer's clock could mark time in such a manner!

"Your standard clock," he explained to his host, "strikes such a mournful tone. 'Another hour of your life has passed you by,' it says. 'You are now one hour closer to the grave.' But this clock proclaims: 'Another hour of *galut* (exile) has gone by. You are now one hour closer to the coming of Moshiach and the Redemption...'

"All through the night," concluded Rabbi Yisachar Dov, "whenever this clock sounded the hour, I leapt from my bed and danced for joy."

Ideas for discussion:

1. How are you yearning for the Redemption?
2. What practical steps are you taking in your life to prepare our world?

