

Why Is Evil So Powerful?

Numbers, Ch. 22

4. Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this assembly will eat up everything around us, as the ox eats up the greens of the field. Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time.

5. He sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of his people, to call for him, saying, "A people has come out of Egypt, and behold, they have covered the "eye" of the land, and they are stationed opposite me.

6. So now, please come and curse this people for me, for they are too powerful for me....

20. G-d came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If these men have come to call for you, arise and go with them, but the word I speak to you-that you shall do."

21. In the morning Balaam arose, saddled his she-donkey and went with the Moabite dignitaries.

Chapter 23

4. G-d chanced upon Balaam...

5. The L-rd placed something into Balaam's mouth, and He said, "Return to Balak and say as follows..."

Chapter 24

8. G-d, Who has brought them out of Egypt with the strength of His loftiness He shall consume the nations which are his adversaries, bare their bones and dip His arrows [into their blood].:

9. He crouches and lies like a lion and like a lioness; who will dare rouse him? Those who bless you shall be blessed, and those who curse you shall be cursed.

Moab said to the elders of Midian (22:4)

Rashi

Moab and Midian were erstwhile enemies, as it is written (Genesis 36:35) "...who smote Midian in the field of Moab"; but out of fear of Israel, they made peace between them. And why did Moab seek the advice of Midian? When they saw that Israel was victorious beyond the norm, they thought: "The leader of this people rose to greatness in Midian; we shall ask them what is his measure." Said they: "His power is entirely in his mouth." Said Moab: "We, too, shall bring a person whose power is in his mouth against them."

And G-d came to Balaam at night (22:20)

Rashi

The Divine spirit visited him only at night, as is the case with all the prophets of the nations (Laban, too, received his prophecy in a nocturnal dream, as it says (Genesis 31:24), "And G-d said to Laban the Aramite in a dream at night") -- like a man covertly visiting his concubine.



פרק כב

ד. וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹאָב אֶל זְקֵנֵי מִדְיָן
עֲתָה יִלְחָכוּ הַקְּהָל אֶת כָּל

סביבתינו פלחף השור את ירק השדה ובלק בן צפור
מלף למואב בעת ההוא: ה. וישלח מלאכים אל בלעם
בן בעור פתורה אשר על הנקה ארץ בני עמו לקרא לו
לאמר הנה עם יצא ממצרים הנה כסה את עין הארץ
והוא ישוב ממלי: ו. ועתה לכה נא ארה לי את העם
הזה כי עצום הוא ממני אולי אוכל נפה בו ואגרשנו
מן הארץ פי ידעתי את אשר תברך מברך ואשר תאר
יואר: ...כ. ויבא אלילים אל בלעם לילה ויאמר לו אם
לקרא לך באו האנשים קום לך אתם ואף את הדבר
אשר אדבר אליך אתו תעשה: כא. ויקם בלעם בבקר
ויחבש את אתנו וילף עם שרי מואב:

פרק כג

ד. ויקר אלילים אל בלעם ויאמר אליו את שבעת
המזבחות ערכתי ואצל פר נאיל במזבחת: ה. וישם ה'
דבר בפיו בלעם ויאמר שוב אל בלק וכה תדבר:

פרק כד

ח. אל מוציא ממצרים כתועפת ראם לו יאכל גוים
צרי וועצמתיקה יגרם וחציו ימתן: ט. פרע שכב
בארי וכלביא מי יקימנו מברכך ברוד וארריך ארור:

And Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled his ass (22:21)

Rashi

From here we see how hatred causes a person to break from convention. Balaam had many servants at his disposal; yet in his eagerness to go curse Israel, he saddled his ass himself. Said the Almighty: "Evil one! Their father, Abraham, has already preempted you when, to fulfill My will, he 'rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey' (Genesis 22:3)."

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

The purpose of evil is to provide us with free choice, essential to our mission in life. To be truly a choice, however, it must be an equal choice. Hence the principle that "this opposite the other, G-d made"—evil was construed to be as powerful, as attractive, as compelling as the side of good. But this "equality" between good and evil extends only to the most superficial level of reality. When a person learns to look beyond the surface of things to their inherent purpose, he will see that only the good in the world is real. Good is an existence in its own right, while evil exists merely to provide the tension which imbues the positive acts of man with meaning and significance. Hence, there cannot be anything "original" to evil, which is but a shallow, corrupted refraction of the good in the world. If Balaam was able to transcend the norm with the intensity of his hate, this was only because, centuries earlier, Abraham had done the same out of love of his Creator.

And G-d happened upon Balaam (23:4)

Midrash Rabbah; Rashi

Regarding G-d's appearances to Moses, the Torah uses the word *vayikra* ("and He called"), an expression of closeness and love; to the prophets of the idolatrous nations the word used is *vayikar* ("and He happened upon") -- an expression that connotes temporality and promiscuity.

He crouches and lies like a lion, like a lioness; who will dare rouse him? (24:9)

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

There is a deeper significance to this metaphor. For much of our history we have been in a state of galut -- exiled from our homeland, subjected to alien cultures, "trained" to perform in accordance with the dictates of what "the world" expects. The subjugation may seem real; but it is never real. The lion may crouch in seeming docility, but it has not been conquered. It remains free, and is never far from the seemingly "sudden" assertion of its innate freedom.

SUMMARY

- In order to give man "free choice" which is essential to his mission in life, G-d made His world so that every positive force has its negative counterpart.
- Only the good in the world is real. G-d is the essence of good, and all that derives from G-d is good.
- The face evil presents to us is powerful and compelling. But in essence it is nothing: an illusion that dissipates to nothingness at the mere touch of the goodness within us.
- Even in exile, the Jewish people, like the lion cannot be "owned" and are by nature a free animal that have an innate freedom to fulfill their mission.

