

The Majestic Bride

Supplementary Texts – Ch. 3

“Unexpected Blessings”

Propheting

He took up his parable and said, “Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram, from the mountains of the east [saying], ‘Come, curse Jacob for me and come invoke wrath against Israel.’ How can I curse whom G-d has not cursed, and how can I invoke wrath if the Lord has not been angered? For from their beginning, I see them as mountain peaks, and I behold them as hills; it is a nation that will dwell alone, and will not be reckoned among the nations. Who counted the dust of Jacob or the number of a fourth of [or, of the seed of] Israel? May my soul die the death of the upright and let my end be like his...”

He took up his parable and said, “Arise, Balak, and hear; listen closely to me, son of Zippor. G-d is not a man that He should lie, nor is He a mortal that He should relent. Would He say and not do, speak and not fulfill? I have received [an instruction] to bless, and He has blessed, and I cannot retract it. He does not look at evil in Jacob, and has seen no perversity in Israel; the Lord, his G-d, is with him, and he has the King’s friendship. G-d has brought them out of Egypt with the strength of His loftiness. For there is no divination in Jacob and no soothsaying in Israel. In time it will be said to Jacob and Israel, ‘What has G-d wrought?’ Behold, a people that rises like a lioness and raises itself like a lion. It does not lie down until it eats its prey and drinks the blood of the slain...”

He took up his parable and said, “The word of Balaam the son of Beor and the word of the man with an open eye. The word of the one who hears G-d’s sayings, who sees the vision of the Almighty, fallen yet with open eyes. How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! They extend like streams, like gardens by the river, like aloes which the Lord planted, like cedars by the water. Water will flow from his wells, and his seed shall have abundant water; his king shall be raised over Agag, and his kingship exalted. 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]. 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."

Balak's anger flared against Balaam, and he clapped his hands. Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, but you have blessed them these three times..."

(Numbers 23:7-10, 18-24, 24:3-10)

Curses?

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said to his son: These two people, Rabbi Yonatan ben Asmai and Rabbi Yehuda, son of converts, are men of noble form (i.e., wise and learned individuals); go to them so that they will bless you. He went and found them deep in discussion, raising apparent contradictions between verses...

When Rabbi Yonatan ben Asmai and Rabbi Yehuda noticed Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai's son, they said to him: "What do you want here?" He said to them: "Father told me: 'Go to them so that they should bless you.'" They said to him as follows: "May it be G-d's will that you should sow and not reap, that you should bring in and not take out, that you should take out and not bring in, that your house should be destroyed and your lodging place should be inhabited, that your table should become confused, and that you should not see a new year."

When he came back to his father, he said to him: "Not only did they not bless me, but they even caused me pain with their negative words." His father said to him: "What exactly did they say to you?" He answered: "They said to me such and such." Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said to his son: "These are all blessings, uttered in a cryptic manner, and this is what they meant: When they said that you should sow and not reap they meant that you should bear sons and they should not die. Their statement that you should bring in and not take out means that you should bring in brides for your sons and your sons should not die, which would cause their wives to leave. When they said you should take out and not bring in they meant that you should have daughters and their husbands should not die, which would cause your daughters to return to you.

When they said that your house should be destroyed and your lodging place should be inhabited, this should be interpreted allegorically. As this world is compared to your lodging place, and the World-to-Come is compared to your house (the Sages gave Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai's son a blessing that he

should dwell in his temporary home rather than his permanent home, i.e., he should live a long life)...

When they said that your table should become confused, they meant that you should be blessed with many sons and daughters, so that there will be noise and confusion at your table. When they said that you should not see a new year, they meant your wife should not die and as a result you should not have to marry another woman, about which it says: "When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business; he shall be free at home for one year" (Deuteronomy 24:5).

(Talmud Moed Katan 9a-b)

Weapons

Why did they call him Nachum of Gam Zu? The reason is that with regard to any matter that occurred to him, he would say: "This too is for the good (*gam zu letova*)." Once, the Jews wished to send a gift to the house of the emperor. They said: Who should go and present this gift? Let Nachum of Gam Zu go, as he is accustomed to miracles. They sent with him a chest [sifta] full of jewels and pearls, and he went and spent the night in a certain inn. During the night, these residents of the inn arose and took all of the precious jewels and pearls from the chest, and filled it with earth. The next day, when he saw what had happened, Nachum of Gam Zu said: "This too is for the good."

When he arrived there, at the ruler's palace, they opened the chest and saw that it was filled with earth. The king wished to put all the Jewish emissaries to death. He said: The Jews are mocking me. Nachum of Gam Zu said: "This too is for the good." Elijah the Prophet came and appeared before the ruler as one of his ministers. He said to the ruler: "Perhaps this earth is from the earth of their father Abraham. As when he threw earth, it turned into swords, and when he threw stubble, it turned into arrows, as it is written: 'His sword makes them as the dust, his bow as the driven stubble' (Isaiah 41:2)."

There was one province that the Romans were unable to conquer. They took some of this earth, tested it by throwing it at their enemies, and conquered that province. When the ruler saw that this earth indeed had miraculous powers, his servants entered his treasury and filled Nachum of Gam Zu's chest with precious jewels and pearls and sent him off with great honor.

(Talmud Taanit 21a)

Safety

Rabbi Akiva was walking along the road and came to a certain city. He inquired about lodging and they did not give him any. He said: "Everything that G-d does, He does for the best." He went and slept in a field, and he had with him a rooster, a donkey and a candle. A gust of wind came and extinguished the candle; a cat came and ate the rooster; and a lion came and ate the donkey. He said: "Everything that G-d does, He does for the best." That night, an army came and took the city into captivity. It turned out that Rabbi Akiva alone, who was not in the city and had no lit candle, noisy rooster or donkey to give away his location, was saved. He said to them: "Didn't I tell you? Everything that G-d does, He does for the best."

(Talmud Berachot 61a)

Giving

Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said: "Why are Torah matters likened to a tree, as it is stated: 'It is a tree of life to them who lay hold upon it' (Proverbs 3:18)? This verse comes to tell you that just as a small piece of wood can ignite a large piece, so too, minor Torah scholars can sharpen great Torah scholars and enable them to advance in their studies."

And this is what Rabbi Chanina said: "I have learned much from my teachers and even more from my friends, but from my students I have learned more than from all of them."

(Talmud Taanit 7a)