

Wisdom from the Outside the Tent

Who was Balaam the Prophet?

Sifrei Devarim 357:40

"And there shall not arise in Israel again a prophet such as Moses": But among the nations, there did arise. And who was he? Bilam the son of Beor. But there is a difference between the prophecy of Moses and the prophecy of Bilam. Moses did not know who was speaking to him, and Bilam did know, viz. (Bamidbar 24:16) "The speech of the hearer (Bilam) of the words of the Almighty." Moses did not know when He would speak to him until He did so. Bilam did know, viz. "and the knower of the knowledge of the Most High." Moses did not speak with Him unless he was standing, viz. (Devarim 5:28) "And you, here, stand with Me." And Bilam spoke with Him when he was fallen, viz. (Bamidbar 24:4) "The vision of the Almighty shall he see, fallen and his eyes uncovered."

ספרי דברים שני"ז:מ'

ולא קם נביא בישראל כמשה - אבל באומות קם. ואיזה? זה בלעם בן בעור! אלא יש הפרש בין נבואתו של משה לנבואתו של בלעם: משה לא היה יודע מי מדבר עמו, ובלעם היה יודע מי מדבר עמו, שנא' נאם שומע אמרי אל ויודע דעת עליון; משה לא היה יודע מי מדבר עמו עד שנדבר עמו, ובלעם היה יודע אימתי היה מדבר שנא' ויודע דעת עליון; משה לא היה מדבר עמו עד שהוא עומד, שנ' ואתה פה עמוד עמדי, ובלעם היה מדב' עמו כשהוא נופל, שנ' מחזה שדי יחזה נופל וגלוי עינים.

When a Seer Doesn't See

Numbers 22:21-31

(21) When he arose in the morning, Balaam saddled his ass and departed with the Moabite dignitaries. (22) But God was incensed at his going; so an angel of the LORD placed himself in his way as an adversary. He was riding on his she-ass, with his two servants alongside, (23) when the ass caught sight of the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. The ass swerved from the road and went into the fields; and Balaam beat the ass to turn her back onto the road. (24) The angel of

במדבר כ"ב:כ"א-ל"א

(כא) וַיִּקָּם בַּלְעָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׂ אֶת־אֲתוֹנוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ עִם־שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב: (כב) וַיַּחַר־אֲפֹ אֱלֹקִים כִּי־הוֹלֵךְ הוּא וַיִּתְיַצֵּב מִלְאָךְ ה' בַּדֶּרֶךְ לְשֹׁטֵן לוֹ וְהוּא רִכַּב עַל־אֲתוֹנוֹ וּשְׁנֵי נַעֲרָיו עִמּוֹ: (כג) וַתֵּרָא הָאֲתוֹן אֶת־מִלְאָךְ ה' נֹצֵב בַּדֶּרֶךְ וַחֲרָבוֹ שְׁלוֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ וַתֵּט אֶת־הָאֲתוֹן מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ וַתֵּלֶךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיֵּר בַּלְעָם אֶת־הָאֲתוֹן לְהַטִּיחַ הַדֶּרֶךְ: (כד) וַיַּעֲמֵד מִלְאָךְ ה' בְּמִשְׁעוֹל הַכֹּרְמִים גָּדַר מִזֶּה וּגְדַר מִזֶּה: (כה) וַתֵּרָא הָאֲתוֹן אֶת־מִלְאָךְ ה' וַתֵּלַחץ אֶל־הַקִּיר וַתֵּלַחץ אֶת־רֶגְלֵ בַלְעָם אֶל־הַקִּיר וַיִּסֹּף לְהַכְתִּיחַ: (כו) וַיִּוְסֹף מִלְאָךְ־ה' עָבֹר וַיַּעֲמֵד בְּמָקוֹם צָר אֲשֶׁר אֵין־דֶּרֶךְ לְנִטּוֹת יָמִין

the LORD then stationed himself in a lane between the vineyards, with a fence on either side. (25) The ass, seeing the angel of the LORD, pressed herself against the wall and squeezed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he beat her again. (26) Once more the angel of the LORD moved forward and stationed himself on a spot so narrow that there was no room to swerve right or left. (27) When the ass now saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; and Balaam was furious and beat the ass with his stick. (28) Then the LORD opened the ass's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you that you have beaten me these three times?" (29) Balaam said to the ass, "You have made a mockery of me! If I had a sword with me, I'd kill you." (30) The ass said to Balaam, "Look, I am the ass that you have been riding all along until this day! Have I been in the habit of doing thus to you?" And he answered, "No." (31) Then the LORD uncovered Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, his drawn sword in his hand; thereupon he bowed right down to the ground.

וּשְׂמֹאוֹל: (כז) וַיִּתְּרָא הָאֱתוֹן אֶת־מִלְאָךְ ה' וַתִּרְבֹּץ תַּחַת בְּלִעָם וַיַּחֲרֶאֱף בְּלִעָם וַיִּרְא אֶת־הָאֱתוֹן בַּמִּקֵּל: (כח) וַיִּפְתַּח ה' אֶת־פִּי הָאֱתוֹן וַתֹּאמֶר לְבִלְעָם מִה־עָשִׂיתִי לָךְ כִּי הִכִּיתַנִּי זֶה שְׁלֹשׁ רַגְלִים: (כט) וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִעָם לְאֱתוֹן כִּי הִתְעַלְלַת בִּי לוֹ יִשְׁחָרֵב בְּיָדִי כִּי עָתָה הִרְגִּיתִי: (ל) וַתֹּאמֶר הָאֱתוֹן אֶל־בְּלִעָם הֲלוֹא אֲנֹכִי אֲתוֹנְךָ אֲשֶׁר־רִכַּבְתָּ עָלַי מֵעוֹדְךָ עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הֲהִסְכַּן הִסְכַּנְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת לָךְ כֹּה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא: (לא) וַיִּגַּל ה' אֶת־עֵינֵי בְּלִעָם וַיִּרְא אֶת־מִלְאָךְ ה' נֹצֵב בְּדַרְךָ וְחָרְבוֹ שְׁלֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ וַיִּקַּד וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְאַפָּיו:

An Outside Perspective

Numbers 24:1-9

(1) Now Balaam, seeing that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, did not, as on previous occasions, go in search of omens, but turned his face toward the wilderness. (2) As Balaam looked up and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the spirit of God came upon him. (3) Taking up his theme, he said: Word of Balaam son of Beor, Word of the man whose eye is true, (4) Word of him who hears God's speech, Who beholds visions from the Almighty, Prostrate, but with eyes unveiled: (5) **How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O**

במדבר כ"ד:א'-ט'

(א) וַיִּרְא בְּלִעָם כִּי טוֹב בְּעֵינָי ה' לְבָרְךָ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־הֵלֵךְ כְּפָעַם־בְּפָעַם לִקְרֹאת נְחֹשִׁים וַיִּשֶׁת אֶל־הַמַּדְבָּר פָּנָיו: (ב) וַיִּשָּׂא בְּלִעָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֹׁכֵן לְשִׁבְטָיו וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹקִים: (ג) וַיִּשָּׂא מְשָׁלוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר נֹאֵם בְּלִעָם בְּנֹו בְעֹר וּנְאֻם הַגִּבֹּר שְׁתֵּם הָעֵין: (ד) נְאֻם שְׁמַע אַמְרֵי־אֵל אֲשֶׁר מִחֲזֵה שִׂדִּי יִחְזֶה נֶפֶל וּגְלוֹי עֵינָיִם: (ה) מִה־טֹבוֹ אֱהַלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל: (ו) כְּנֹחָלִים נְטִיוֹ כְּגִנַּת עָלֵי נְהַר כְּאֱהָלִים נְטֹעֵ ה' כְּאַרְזִים עָלֵי־מַיִם: (ז) יִזְל־מַיִם מִדְּלָיו וְזָרְעוּ בְּמַיִם רַבִּים וַיֵּרֶם מֵאֲגַג מִלְכּוֹ וַתִּנְשֵׂא מַלְכָּתוֹ: (ח) אֵל

Israel! (6) Like palm-groves that stretch out, Like gardens beside a river, Like aloes planted by the LORD, Like cedars beside the water; (7) Their boughs drip with moisture, Their roots have abundant water. Their king shall rise above Agag, Their kingdom shall be exalted. (8) God who freed them from Egypt Is for them like the horns of the wild ox. They shall devour enemy nations, Crush their bones, And smash their arrows. (9) They crouch, they lie down like a lion, Like the king of beasts; who dare rouse them? Blessed are they who bless you, Accursed they who curse you!

מוֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם כְּתוּעַפּוֹת רָאִים לֹא יֵאָכֵל גּוֹיִם
צָרְיוֹ וְעֲצַמְתֵיהֶם יִגְרֵם וְחֲצִיו יִמְחֹץ: (ט) כָּלֵע
שָׁכַב כְּאֵרִי וְכִלְבִּיא מִי יְקִיֵּמֵנוּ מִבְּרִכְיָךְ בְּרוּךְ
וְאֲרִיךְ אַרְוֵר:

Discussion Questions:

- How does the idea that Balaam could be as great as Moshe sit with you? Should we be learning from other nations? Should we be recognizing their leaders (political, faith-based, etc.) as worthy of learning from?
- How do we recognize our blind spots (or even recognize *when* we have blind spots)?
- In what ways is an outsider's perspective helpful or harmful to us? Does it change the way we view ourselves?