

Appendix #1 “Balak, Balaam and the Power of Words”

Numbers 24:1-5

א וַיֵּרָא בְּלָעָם, כִּי טוֹב בְּעֵינָיו יְהוָה לְבָרֵךְ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְלֹא-הִלָּךְ כַּפְּעַם-כַּפְּעַם, לְקַרְאֵת נְחֻשִׁים; וַיִּנְשֹׂת אֶל-הַמִּדְבָּר, פָּנָיו.

1 And when Balaam saw that it pleased God to bless Israel, he went not, as at the other times, to invoke enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness.

ב וַיִּשָּׂא בְּלָעָם אֶת-עֵינָיו, וַיֵּרָא אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל, שֹׁכֵן, לְשִׁבְטָיו; וַתְּהִי עָלָיו, רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים.

2 And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel dwelling tribe by tribe; and the spirit of God came upon him.

ג וַיִּשָּׂא מִשְׁלוֹ, וַיֹּאמֶר: נְאֻם בְּלָעָם בְּנוֹ בְּעֹר, וַנְּאֻם הַגָּבֵר נִשְׁתַּם הָעֵינַן.

3 And he took up his parable, and said: The saying of Balaam the son of Beor, and the saying of the man whose eye is opened;

ד נְאֻם-שֹׁמֵעַ, אֲמַר־י-אֵל: אֲשֶׁר מִחֻזָּה שִׁדְי יִחֻזָּה, נִפֹּל וּגְלוּי עֵינָיִם.

4 The saying of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, fallen down, yet with opened eyes:

ה מֵה-טֹבוֹ אֹהֲלָיְךָ, יַעֲקֹב; מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ, יִשְׂרָאֵל.

5 How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!

Numbers 24:9-10

ט מְבֹרָכֶיךָ בְּרוּךְ, וְאַרְרִיךָ אָרוּר.

9 Blessed be every one that blesses you, and cursed be every one that curses you.

י וַיִּחַר-אַף בְּלֶק אֶל-בְּלָעָם, וַיִּסְפַּק אֶת-כַּפָּיו; וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלֶק אֶל-בְּלָעָם, לָקַב אִיבֵי קְרֹאתֶיךָ, וְהִנֵּה בִּרְכַתְּ בְּרוּךְ, זֶה נִשְׁלַשׁ פְּעָמִים.

10 And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smashed his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam: 'I called you to curse my enemies, and, instead, you have blessed them three times!

1) What does this story about Balaam and Balak teach us about the power of words?

2) Why do you think the line “Mah Tov uohalecha Ya’akov...” was placed at the start of the prayer service?