

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parshat Balak

Community Life

One of the most famous lines in the entire Torah was uttered by Bilaam's mouth in this week's parsha: "Mah tovu o'halecha Yaakov, miskinosecha Yisrael, how beautiful are the tents of Jacob, the dwelling places of Israel (Bamidbar 24:5)." What was he referring to? What did Bilaam see that was so great?

Jewish Encampment

The Talmud (Bava Basra 60a) states that Bilaam was praising the Jews for their private and modest way in which their tents were pitched. Their tent doors each faced away from one another so that each person could maintain their privacy. The Jewish homes were role model quality. Additionally, the Talmud (Sanhendrin 105b) also states that Bilaam's words were really a curse that they should not have synagogues. What is being stated here?

Jewish Stronghold

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l (1895-1986) states that these two ideas are one and the same. Bilaam saw the strength of the Jewish home and stated that this being the case they had no need for public synagogues. Bilaam figured that if the Jews had educational homes then they would not need to have community gatherings. In truth however there are two aspects of proper education, one inside the house and the other outside. It is so important for the child to be educated and shown the meaningful and enjoyable ways of the Torah



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inside the home. It is also important for the child to be in a positive atmosphere of good influences and healthy friends. Education takes place in and out of the home in a safe Torah environment.

Rereading the Verse

I believe that these two points are hinted in the verse itself. "How great are your tents," refers to the private tents (homes) of the Jews, the individualized holy sanctuary. "Your dwelling places," refers to the public synagogues of the Jews. We strive to provide the greatest and warmest atmosphere in both. The Jewish home is a safe and secure place where Jewish souls are nurtured, educated, stimulated and shown the truth and beauty of Torah. The synagogue is a place where one connects with fellow community members and servants of G-d to gain and share inspiration with one another.

Shabbat Shalom!

