

Chukat - Balak

That night Hashem came to Bilaam and said to him, "If these men have come to invite you, you may go with them. But whatever I command you, that you shall do." When he arose in the morning, Bilaam saddled his ass and departed with the Moabite dignitaries. But Hashem was incensed at his going; so an angel of Hashem placed himself in his way as an adversary...
(Numbers 22:20-22)

In the second part of this week's parsha we learn about the evil designs of Balak the Moabite king and his partner in crime, Bilaam the sorcerer. Bilaam is invited to come to Balak and curse the Jewish people. First he refuses, but after an odd dream-exchange with Hashem, he is seemingly given permission to go along with the dignitaries who were sent to summon him. Strangely enough, Hashem is "incensed at his going", despite the explicit permission He granted Bilaam in the verses prior. What is the explanation of Hashem's confusing treatment of Bilaam?

In explanation, R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev quotes the words of Rashi: *"If these men have come to invite you:" If the call be for you, and you think to take a fee for it.*

R. Levi Yitzchak explains that what Rashi means by "for you" is "for your benefit." Hashem was asking Bilaam: would you take pleasure in following such a call? Or do you have no desire to curse the Jews? After all, if you take no pleasure in such a thing, surely you would not want to do it! Only if the idea of cursing the Jews is pleasant for you should you go.

Bilaam, of course, was delighted at the idea, and took the Divine message he had received as permission to go. This incensed Hashem, and was the catalyst for the punishment Bilaam would ultimately receive.

"Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake."

Napoleon Bonaparte

Shabbat Shalom

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