

Parashas Balak

The Merit of Yaakov Avinu

וירא בלק בן צפור את כל אשר עשה ישראל לאמרי

Balak son of Zippor saw all that Yisrael had done to the Emorite (22:2).

ויגר מואב מפני העם מאד כי רב הוא ויקץ מואב מפני בני ישראל

Moav feared the nation greatly because it was numerous, and Moav was disgusted on account of the Children of Yisrael (22:3).

In the first verse above the Torah refers to the Jews as *ישראל*, *Yisrael*, but in the second verse it refers to them as *בני ישראל*, *the Children of Yisrael*. What is the significance of these two titles?

This can be explained on the basis of *Ramban's* comment on why Yaakov Avinu described Eretz Yisrael as a land אשר לקחתי מיד האמרי בחרבי ובקשתי, *which I have taken from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow (Bereishis 48:22)*. Noting the past tense of the words "I have taken," *Ramban* explains that already during his lifetime, more than two hundred years before the Jews entered Eretz Yisrael, Yaakov conquered the Land on a spiritual level, by waving his sword and shooting arrows toward it. After Yaakov subdued the Canaanites spiritually, it was easy for his descendants to do so physically after the Exodus.

Accordingly, we understand the two descriptions of the Jewish people. When Balak saw what "*Yisrael* had done to the Emorite," it does not mean that he *saw* the physical conquest of Sichon and Og. Rather, it means figuratively that he *understood*, that *Yisrael* — our forefather Yaakov — must have been behind the Jewish victory over the Emorite kings. They were the mightiest kings of the region, and other nations sought their protection, yet the Jews had managed to defeat them without a single casualty. It

In Memory of
R' Yakov ben R' Shmuel Yosef
and R' Shimon ben R' Moshe ע"ה

could only be that these kings had already been defeated on a spiritual level, and that the Jews had simply completed the task on the practical level. He therefore dreaded the advance of the “*Children of Yisrael.*” Having recognized that their victory over the Emorites was not due to their military prowess, but rather the product of Yaakov’s symbolic conquest of the Land, he was concerned that his army would be no match for the Jews, as his own defeat might have already been accomplished by Yaakov.

On the basis of this, we can resolve a number of difficulties with the second verse above:

The Torah indicates that Moav experienced two distinct sentiments with regard to the Jews: they *feared* them and they were *disgusted* on account of them. What is the idea behind each of these sentiments? Also when discussing Moav’s fear, the Torah refers to the Jews as “the nation,” but when discussing how Moav was disgusted on account of them, the Torah calls them “the Children of Yisrael.” Why the difference? Finally, the Torah says that Moav feared the Jewish nation “because it was numerous,” but it doesn’t give a reason to explain why Moav was disgusted! Is no reason necessary?

On basis of the above, these difficulties disappear. Moav *feared* the Jews on the practical level, because they were so *numerous* that they could overwhelm the much smaller Moavite army. With regard to this concern, though, there was a solution: Moav could form an alliance with another nation, and together achieve victory. But, as the verse continues, Moav was “disgusted, on account of the Children of Yisrael,” meaning, on account of the *descendants of Yaakov*, who would be coming with the merit of their forefather, who had spiritually conquered the Moavites just as he had conquered the Emorites. They were therefore disgusted with *themselves*, as they realized that they had no prospects for victory. No alliance could help them overcome the spiritual defeat they

In Memory of
R’ Yakov ben R’ Shmuel Yosef
and R’ Shimon ben R’ Moshe “ע”

had already suffered. Thus, the words “on account of the Children of Yisrael” are indeed the *reason* for their disgust. The Moavites were disgusted with their own prospects, because they would be fighting against the descendants of Yisrael.

In response to their fear of the Jews’ might and Yaakov’s merit, the Moavites took two actions. On the mundane level, they formed a military alliance with Midian. In addition they engaged the services of Bilaam, whose spiritual powers, they hoped, would nullify the merit of Yaakov (*Chasam Sofer al HaTorah*, p. 113 א ד"ה וירא).

In Memory of
R' Yakov ben R' Shmuel Yosef
and R' Shimon ben R' Moshe ע"ה