



July 11-12, 2025 טז תמוז תשפ"ה

Candle Lighting 8:09 PM

**Parashat Balak**—Numbers 22:2—25:9

Stone—p 856

Hertz—p 668

Etz Hayim—p 894

**Haftarah**—Micah 5:6—6:8

Stone—p 1189

Hertz—p 682

Etz Hayim—p 915

**Kiddush** following services  
is sponsored by the congregation

**Shabbat** ends 9:08 PM

## TRADITIONAL CONGREGATION

Rabbi Seth D Gordon - Rabbi.Gordon@yahoo.com

Marian S. Gordon, Executive Director -  
traditionalcong@gmail.com

## WEEKDAY AND SHABBAT SERVICES

Sunday - 8:30 AM

Tuesday - 6:30 PM

**Shabbat** - 9:30 AM

## Board of Directors:

Governance Committee:

Florence Schachter, Chair

Marty Levy, Vice-Chair

Ken Bohm, Ellis Frohman, Ron Green, Dina Rinder

Ellis Frohman, Financial Vice President

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Ron Green, Fundraising Vice President

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Past Presidents: Kenneth H. Bohm, Phil Brick

Members at Large:

Maureen Brodsky

Stanley Estrin

Bill Gold

Gary Golden

Stan Greenberg

Jack Heller

Sid Levin

Ari Levy

Carol Max

Florence Schachter

*We welcome new members!*

If you or someone you know would like to receive  
membership information,  
please contact our office at 314-576-5230  
or traditionalcong@gmail.com

## On This Week's Torah Portion - Balak

There is an old saying that what makes God laugh is seeing our plans for the future. Man plans and God laughs. However, if Tanach is our guide, we might think that what makes God laugh is human delusions of grandeur. When observed from heaven, the ultimate absurdity is when humans start thinking of themselves as Godlike.

This explains the curious episode of Bilam's talking donkey. This is not a fanciful tale, nor simply a miracle. It arose because of the way the people of Moav and Midian thought of Bilam – and perhaps, by extension, the way he thought of himself. Balak, the Moabite king, together with the leaders of the Midianites, sent a group to Bilam asking him to curse the Israelites. Their behaviour was influenced by the pagan understanding of the holy man: a wonder-worker who has access to supernatural powers. The Torah's view is precisely the opposite. It is God who blesses and curses, not human beings. The idea that you can hire a holy man to curse someone essentially presupposes that God can be bribed, which is ludicrous.

And so God tells Bilam not to go. King Balak sends a second group with a more tempting offer for Bilan. This time God tells Bilam to go with them but to say only what He instructs him to say. The next morning Bilam sets out to go with the Moabites, but the text now states that God was "angry" with him for going. That is when the episode of the donkey takes place.

The donkey sees an angel barring the way. It turns aside into a field but Bilam hits it and forces it back to the path. The angel is still barring the way and the donkey veers into a wall, squashing Bilam's foot. Bilam hits it again, but finally it lies down and refuses to move. That is when the donkey begins to speak. Bilam then looks up and sees the angel, who had been hitherto invisible to him.

The story of the talking donkey is an instance of Divine laughter. Here was a man reputed to be a maestro of supernatural forces. People thought he had the power to bless or curse whomever he chose. God, the Torah tells us, is not like that at all. God had two messages: one for the Moabites and Midianites, another for Bilam himself. He showed the Moabites and Midianites that Israel is not cursed but blessed. The more you attempt to curse them, the more they will be blessed and you yourself will be cursed. But God had a different message for Bilam himself, and it was very blunt. If you think you can control God, then, says God, I will show you that I can turn a donkey into a prophet and a prophet into a donkey. Your animal will see angels to which you yourself are blind.

Pride always leads to downfall eventually. In a world in which rulers engaged in endless projects of self-aggrandisement, Israel alone produced a literature in which they attributed their successes to God and their failures to themselves. Far from making them weak, this made them extraordinarily strong. So it is with us as individuals. Pagan prophets like Bilam had not yet learned the lesson we must all one day learn: that what matters is not that God does what we want, but that we do what He wants. God laughs at those who think they have godlike powers. The opposite is true. The smaller we see ourselves, the greater we become.

***Shabbat shalom,***  
**Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l**

## **PRAYER**

Parent of the strong and the weak,  
Before You even the strongest are weak.

*God of all wisdom and knowledge,  
Before You even the wisest is a speechless child;*

You fill the heavens with Your majesty,  
And yet reveal Yourself in a lowly bush.

*Fill us with pride,  
Which will keep us from self-humiliation,  
But purge us of the pride  
Which leads to self-exaltation.*

Remind us that we are only human,  
So that we may be most human.

*Keep us mindful of our littleness  
So that we may strive for true greatness.*

Help us to see how dependant we are  
Upon You and upon one another.

*May we fulfill the teaching of Your prophet;  
To do justice, to love mercy,  
And to walk unobtrusively with our God*

**Unknown**

## **THOUGHT FOR THE MOMENT OF SILENCE**

No mind is thoroughly well-organized that is deficient in a sense of humor.

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge**