

Parshat Balak

Sea and Land

In this week’s parsha Bilaam prophesizes concerning the times of Moshiach. The present Sicha analyzes the statement that Moshiach will “reign from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the land,” and illustrates how it alludes to one’s personal service towards G-d.

This week’s Torah portion narrates the incident of the prophecies and blessings of Bilaam, who was initially hired by Balak, King of Moav to curse the Jewish people. Many of these prophecies relate to the future times of *Moshiach*.

Of the prophecies that Bilaam relates, is the following:

Text 1

A ruler shall come out of Yaakov, and destroy the remnant of the city.

Bamidbar 24:19

Rashi notes the correlation of the above verse to the King *Moshaich*, who will rule in the future era of the Redemption. Elucidating on the phrase, “and destroy the remnant of the city,” Rashi comments:

Text 2

Of the most prominent [city] of Edom, that is, Rome. He [Bilaam] says this regarding the King *Moshiach*, of whom it says, “and may he reign from sea to sea¹,” “and the house of Esau shall have no survivors².”

Rashi, ibid

Rashi explains that the verse “and may he reign from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the land” alludes to the sovereignty of King *Moshiach*, whose rule is all-inclusive³.

Simply, the expression of reigning from “sea to sea” indicates *Moshiach’s* reign over the entire world. *Moshiach’s* kingdom will be absolute, and this is expressed in the idea that “he will reign from sea to sea and from the river to the end of the land.”

Text 3

From the southern sea which is called the Red Sea, to the northern sea which is the Sea of Okyanus; and from river, which refers to the

the nations, and his rule shall be from the sea to the west and from the river to the ends of the earth.” (Zechariah, 9:10) This idea is brought as well in Rambam, Laws of Kings 11:1.

¹ Tehillim 72:8.

² Ovadiah 1:18.

³ This description of the sovereignty attributed to *Moshiach* is found throughout various other places in the Torah as well. A similar statement is found in the prophecy of Zecharia, which clearly states concerning *Moshiach*, that “he shall speak peace to

river that goes forth from Eden which is the beginning of the east, and until the end of the land which is the end of the west.

Ibn Ezra, Tehillim 72:8

Though this is the rudimentary understanding of the verse, there are various peculiarities in the statement which are not understood:

- A) Why does the verse state that *Moshiach's* reign will be “from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the land,” when the verse could have simply have stated that his reign will be “over the entire land?”
- B) Why does the verse mention that *Moshiach* will reign over the sea, when sovereignty is by definition is over people, who live on the land and not the sea?

Explanation

This question can be understood through prefacing that the time of *Moshiach* is a result of our actions performed throughout history.

Text 4

This culminating fulfillment of the Messianic Era and of the Resurrection of the Dead, which is the revelation of the light of the blessed *En Sof* in this material world, depends on our actions and service throughout the duration of the *galus* (exile).

Tanya, Ch. 37

The time of *Moshiach* is a direct result of our actions. Accordingly it is understood, that

⁴ Talmud, Sota 8b.

because G-d rewards “measure for measure,”⁴ in order to bring about the coming of the Redemption, our actions to need to be similar to the actions of King *Moshiach*—albeit in a microcosmatic way. Meaning to say, that in order for us to merit that *Moshiach* will “reign from sea to sea and from the river to the end of the land,” our conduct too, must be in such a manner.

This idea is enunciated in the Chassidic teaching that is brought by the Rebbe, Rabbi Nochum of Chernobyl:

Text 5

Every individual must rectify and prepare the portion of the corpus of *Moshiach* that is relevant to his soul.

Meor Enayim, Bamidbar 25:12

Each person has within himself part of *Moshiach*, so that when a person rectifies his portion of *Moshiach*, he is not only affecting himself in a personal way, but actually affecting the entire world. When a person reveals the part of his soul that is connected to G-d in a way that transcends the boundaries of reason, he is effectively causing redemption to his soul, which thereby affects the whole universe⁵.

When the verse states concerning *Moshiach* that he will “reign from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the land,” it is not only addressing the global *Moshiach*, but the personal *Moshiach* as well. When a person reigns over all his attributes, he effectively causes that *Moshiach* and the time of Redemption should come.

It is because a person has a part within himself that is similar to a “sea” as well as a part that is

⁵ See Tanya, Igeres HaKodesh 105b.

similar to “land” that the verse uses both of these descriptions, as it is specifically through these two dimensions that we herald in the time of *Moshiach*.

Sea and land

The difference between “sea” and “land” is that the sea alludes to things which are hidden—like the ocean which covers over its inhabitants—and the land refers to entities which are revealed—like the land upon which its creatures are readily apparent.

Similarly so regarding an individual. He as well has these two classifications. “Sea” signifies his personal emotional and mental states, while “land” represents the individual’s action in the world around him.

Concerning the “sea” the verse states, “from sea to sea,” which expresses that there are two internal seas that the person must rule over. The significance of these two seas can be understood from the following verse:

Text 6

And it shall come to pass on that day that spring water shall come forth from Yerushalayim; half of it to the (uppermost) eastern sea, and half of it to the (lowest) western sea...

Zecharia 14:8

This is representative of the two seas that are expressed in the above verse; one is the highest of seas and the other the lowest of seas.

In a person, this expresses the following: The upper sea is the highest of a person’s faculties, which is the ability of creative thought (*chochma*), and the lowest sea is the last of a person’s faculties, the capacity of action. A

person’s personal service is not complete until he has absolute control over *all* his faculties, from the highest until the lowest.

A person’s first step in transforming himself is through changing his intellect. The mind rules the heart and everything else, it is therefore of utmost importance that he transform his mind in a way that it should be completely permeated with holiness.

On the other hand, a person cannot only rule over his heart, but he must as well rule over the “lowest sea,” expressive of action.

All too often there are individuals that understand how to act on an intellectual level, but are unable to follow through in action. Many people have good intentions, feelings and speech, but do not transition into actually changing the way that they act.

The prominence of action is expressed in the following:

Text 7

His son, Shimon, would say: “All my life I have been raised among the wise, and I have found nothing better for the body than silence. The essential thing is not study, but deed. And one who speaks excessively brings on sin.”

Mishna, Avos 1:17

Since action is more essential than study, a person cannot be satisfied with the fact that they rule over their mind and heart, but they must have control over their actions as well.

It is this that the verse articulates in the expression “sea to sea”—that an individual is not redeemed on a personal level until they have reign over their mind *and* their actions.

From the river to the land

As explained above, “sea to sea” is expressive of internal control⁶. Transforming the world outside of the individual is expressed in the second half of the verse in its statement, “from the river to the ends of the land.”

As brought above in the commentary of the *Ibn Ezra*, the river that this verse gives reference to is the river “that goes out from Eden.” Concerning this river the Torah states:

Text 8

And a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it separated and became four heads.

Bereishis 2:10

In a person’s service of G-d this means the following: Man was created to transform the world, as the verse states⁷, “He placed him in the

Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.” The whole world is called a garden⁸ and man’s objective is to maintain the garden. He is tasked with the mission of refining the world to the point that it is readily apparent that the entire universe is truly G-d’s garden.

This is what is expressed in the phrase, “from the river to the ends of the land.” A person is prohibited from separating himself from the world and not caring for the world around him. He must not only focus on his personal service of G-d, saying that he is in his personal “Eden.” Rather, the river must come forth from Eden “to water the garden.” Meaning to say, that a person’s individual service of G-d must effect the world around him in a way that it effects even the “ends of the land.”

Serving G-d in such a way that he transforms himself and the world, brings to the ultimate era during which *Moshiach* will express G-dliness “from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the land.” Not only will *Moshiach* affect the Jewish people, but the whole world, including non-Jews, will be permeated with G-dliness and serve the Almighty under the same banner.

(Based on Likutei Sichos 38, Balak 3, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel. To see other projects and to partner in our work, see: www.Neirot.com.)

⁶ Even the aspect of action is as it relates to personal fulfillment and not the aspect of action to affect the world.

⁷ Bereishis 2:15.

⁸ See Shir HaShirim 5:1.