

Balak

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Shabbat Shalom! My Torah portion is called Balak. Balak was the king of Moab and he was a worried man. He was worried because 2 kings named Og and Sichon were beaten in battle by the Israelites and Balak didn't want the same thing to happen to him. To solve this problem, Balak sent his servant to ask Balaam to curse the Israelites. Balaam was known as a person that blesses and curses. Balaam was asked to go and curse the Israelites and said no because G-d had told him not to. Then Balak sent fancier messengers who offered him gold and silver and Balaam said yes. Balaam got on his donkey and went to do his job.

According to the Torah, G-d was very disappointed in Balaam for selling out, and he sent an angel armed with a sword to block Balaam's path. Although the donkey saw the angel, Balaam did not. The donkey tried to move out of the way, but Balaam hit the donkey to get her to start walking again. The angel tried to block the donkey three times and three times the donkey got hit. The donkey then asked "Why do you keep hitting me?" Balaam wasn't even surprised that his donkey had talked to him, but he began arguing with the donkey. That's when Balaam realized that the angel was blocking their path. When Balaam saw the angel, he admitted he was wrong. The angel told them they could keep going but warned Balaam about cursing the Israelites and told him to only say what the angel would tell him to say.

Balaam listened carefully and, when he arrived, commanded Balak to build an altar and offer sacrifices to G-d. Balak was very upset that Balaam blessed the Israelites instead of cursing them. Balak then wanted no part of Balaam or his donkey and Balaam left the Israelites predicting an amazing and bright future for them.

There is a lesson that can be learned from this -- making the right decision takes a lot of courage. Just because everyone says to do something, it doesn't always make it right. In a way, Balaam gave into peer pressure in the form of gold, silver, and status. Today, kids might be tempted to smoke or be mean to certain people because they think they are cool. While peer pressure can be a negative thing for some, I believe that kids can and should set positive examples for each other all the time.

There are so many ways that kids can be role models for others. I worked on two Bar-Mitzvah projects this year. Not because I had to but because they both felt right to me.

I participated in a program called Ozreinu, a program where teens, once a month, work with kids that have special needs. In addition, I worked with 2 of my friends and we started a 3 vs. 3 basketball tournament to raise money for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. I was very pleased that we have raised about 400 dollars.

I have enjoyed doing both of these projects because I know that helping others is a mitzvah. I have also learned many things while doing both projects. For example, in Ozreinu I work with people of different ages and different disabilities. But, every single one of these people are regular human beings. They have personalities, interests, and hobbies. Sometimes they just need a buddy. Each month there's a different Jewish theme such as Shabbat, Chanukah, and Passover. I have seen these special needs children learn how to do the activities, understand them, and sometimes beat me in competitive games.

I hope whenever you get a chance, you will take the opportunity to help out in any way possible. Find the ways that match your talents. This has been an excellent experience and I hope to continue to do mitzvot in the future.

I would like to thank many people for making this day possible. First, I would like to thank my sisters. Thank you for putting up with me all the time and even though we fight sometimes I want to let you know that I love both of you. Next, I would like to thank my parents and grandparents who are always there for me. I love all of you so much. Thanks to all of my Hebrew school teachers for giving me the background knowledge about Judaism which has helped me to reach this day. I'd also like to thank Rahel for working so hard to prepare me for this day. I'd like to thank Rabbi Small, Cantor Cohn, and Mrs. Fox for all of their help and support. Thanks to everyone here for making this day so special for me. Please turn to page 894 in the big red book so you can follow along as I chant my Torah portion.