Bamidbar Chapter 22 - Transcript

Shiur Overview

Summary: Bamidbar Chapter 22 — The Story of Balak and Bilaam

Chapter Placement and Structure

Bamidbar chapter 22 actually begins one pasuk too early. The final verse of the previous section describes Bnei Yisrael's travel to Arvot Moav, which belongs with the travel narrative. The real beginning of the Balak story — and of Parshat Balak — starts with Moav's reaction to the people's arrival. This is essentially the story of the "non-war" with Moav.

The story spans three full chapters (22–24), forming one continuous narrative. The chapter divisions are somewhat arbitrary and don't fall at the most natural breaking points. The story divides more naturally into **three parts**:

1. Balak's attempt to hire Bilaam

2. Bilaam's journey to Balak (with the famous donkey episode on the way)

3. Bilaam's progression through three and then four different *mashalim*/prophecies

Each part internally features patterns of doublets and triplets — everything happens in progressions of twos, threes, or fours. The story is remarkably well-constructed, with a full narrative arc, many details, and clear logical progression in each section, unlike the fragmentary episodes that preceded it. It also contains substantial poetry.

Why Does This Story Matter?

The famous question: why does the Torah devote so much space to some foreign king hiring a sorcerer whose curse didn't even work? This seems disproportionate attention to something minor.

The most contextually grounded answer: In the broader narrative of the third leg of the journey — on the threshold of Eretz Yisrael — the question of how surrounding nations respond to Israel is critically important. Sihon and Og were conquered militarily. But what about Moav and Midian? The Torah cares deeply about establishing that **all the peoples on Israel's path were terrified of them**.

This theme traces back to **Shirat Hayam** (Shemot), the fullest epic poem in the Torah, which prophesied: אז נבהלו אלופי אדום אילי מואב יאחזמו רעד נמגו כל ישבי כנען — Edom afraid, Moav afraid, Canaan afraid. The Balak story is the fulfillment of this prophecy regarding Moav.

This also serves to **raise the morale of the people**. Moshe himself was afraid — Hashem had to tell him אל תירא אתו regarding Og. These were powerful kings. The Bilaam story's central message is that these nations had no real power over Israel; their spirit was already broken. Bilaam's curse — whatever a curse means — represents a claim of moral or narrative power over Israel. The story's point is that even this power failed; Bilaam saw Israel's greatness and blessed instead of cursing.

Pesukim 2–6: The Setting and Balak's Fear

Balak ben Tzippor sees what Israel did to the Emori (primarily Sihon). The narrative note identifying Balak as king of Moav comes at the end, in the Torah's characteristic style of providing background information as a side note after the fact.

The significance of Sihon's defeat: the previous chapter's poetry established that Sihon was even more powerful than Moav (אוי לך מואב אבדת עם כמוש... עיר סיחון). If Israel destroyed Sihon, then *kal vachomer* Moav should be terrified.

Moav's fear is described with the word **ויקץ** — translated variously as "disgusted" or "distressed," but meaning something like deeply scared. This deliberately echoes **Pharaoh's fear** at the beginning of Sefer Shemot: ויקצו מפני בני ישראל, and for the same reason — כי רב, because they were many. Moav thus replays the pattern: demographic threat perceived, combined with military strength.

Ziknei Midian appear here — their presence is somewhat puzzling but connects to Midian's later role in the story. Balak tells them using a vivid **poetic metaphor**: this mass of people will devour everything around us as an ox licks up the green of the field — a hungry herd of oxen leaving nothing but brown destruction.

Balak's Plan: Summoning Bilaam

Balak sends messengers to **Bilaam ben Be'or**, who lives at "the river" — probably the Euphrates (Perat), with *Peshor* possibly being a wordplay on *Perat*, or a place name. Bilaam is a famous sorcerer, poet, and prophet.

Balak's message to Bilaam is delivered in a **high register**, almost poetic: a nation has come out of Egypt, they've covered the face/light of the earth, they're sitting right across from me. The imagery echoes the ox metaphor — the earth being covered, consumed. Then comes **ועתה** — which in Torah always means "and therefore" (not chronologically "and now") — come and curse this people.

Balak's Persistence and Bilaam's Willingness to Re-Ask

Balak interprets Bilaam's initial refusal as mere negotiation — he sends more numerous and more dignified princes with promises of unlimited honor and wealth. Bilaam's response about not being able to transgress God's word even for a house full of silver and gold sounds pious, but his next move reveals something: he tells the second delegation to stay overnight so he can check again with God. Just as Balak understood that Bilaam's refusal could be overcome by asking again, Bilaam understood — or hoped — that God's refusal could similarly be overcome by asking again. This parallel between Balak's persistence with Bilaam and Bilaam's persistence with God is structurally important.

Key Observations on Divine Names

A consistent and significant pattern runs through the chapter regarding divine names. Bilaam consistently speaks using the name Hashem (the Tetragrammaton) and even calls God "Hashem my God" (ה' אלהי). Yet when the Torah narrates God actually coming to Bilaam, it uses the name Elokim — "Elokim comes to Bilaam at night." This discrepancy is notable and deliberate.

Additionally, when Bilaam told the messengers that "Hashem refuses to let me go," the messengers reported back to Balak

simply that "Bilaam refuses to come with us" — they translated his theological claim into a personal refusal.

Bilaam's Journey and God's Anger

Although God gave Bilaam permission to go on the second (ויחר אף אלהים כי הולך הוא). asking, God is angry that he is going The simple reading is that this is like a parent whose child asks something five times — eventually the parent says "fine, do it," but that doesn't mean the parent actually wanted it. God said "they came to call you, go," but He didn't truly want Bilaam to go.

A messenger of Hashem (here the text uses the to be a satan to" — **לשטן לו** Tetragrammaton) stands in the way him." Importantly, *satan* in the Torah is a verb, not a noun or a name. It means to oppose, to stand against, to obstruct someone.

The Donkey Episode: Three-Stage Encounter (Pesukim ~22-35)

with his two servants. (אתון) Bilaam rides his female donkey The donkey sees the angel with a drawn sword, but Bilaam does not.

First encounter: The donkey veers off the road into the open field. Bilaam, seeing nothing, strikes the donkey to redirect it.

Second encounter: The angel positions himself on a narrow on both (גדרות) path between two vineyards with stone fences sides. There is an interesting connection here to earlier narratives — Bnei Yisrael's requests to Edom and Sihon promising to stay on the road and not go into fields. Here Bilaam is being forced off the road into fields and vineyards by his donkey. The donkey presses against the wall, crushing Bilaam's foot, and he strikes her again. But she manages to squeeze past the angel.

Third encounter: The angel stands in a place so narrow there is no room to turn right or left — language echoing Sefer Devarim's command not to deviate from the Torah's path right or left. The donkey simply sits down and refuses to move. Now Bilaam's anger flares. The story opened with — ויחר אף בלעם and now mirrors it with Bilaam's (ויחר אף אלהים) God's anger anger, creating a deliberate parallel.

The Talking Donkey

The donkey. (ויפתח ה׳ את פי האתון) God opens the donkey's mouth asks Bilaam: "Why did you hit me three times?" Bilaam responds that she is mocking him and threatens that if he had a sword he would kill her — an ironic statement, since the angel is the one standing there with a sword. The donkey knows about the sword even if Bilaam doesn't.

The donkey then makes a logical argument: "I am your donkey. You have ridden me from always until this day. Have I ever behaved like this before?" The point is powerful — when a reliable, well-behaved animal suddenly acts strangely, the rider should consider that something external is wrong rather an) שור מועד than blaming the animal. This is contrasted with a Bilaam concedes: "No." The .(animal known to be dangerous donkey has won the debate. This is deeply significant — Bilaam, the great man of words, the famous poet and prophet, loses an argument to his own donkey.

God Opens Bilaam's Eyes

After opening the donkey's mouth, God now opens Bilaam's eyes (a deliberate parallel — first the animal's mouth, then the prophet's eyes). Bilaam finally sees the angel and bows down. The angel rebukes him: "Why did you hit your donkey three because your path is (לשטן) times? I came to oppose you meaning Bilaam is going — "(כי ירט הדרך לנגדי) against me against God's will.

The angel vindicates the donkey: she saw the angel and correctly went aside. The angel declares that Bilaam deserved death while the donkey deserved to live — a complete inversion of Bilaam's threat to kill the donkey.

The Malach's Rebuke and Bilaam's Response (Pesukim ~32-35)

Bilaam responds with an apology — "I've sinned, I didn't know you were standing against me in the way." Crucially, he is not apologizing to the malach personally for trying to pass through; he understands the malach is a messenger of Hashem and is apologizing to God. He then offers to turn back home entirely: "If this is bad in your eyes, let me return."

The malach's response is surprising: No, continue on your way — but speak only what I tell you to speak. This creates a real paradox: if God wanted him to go, why send the malach to stop him? And if God didn't want him to go, why let him continue? No clean solution is offered, but the episode serves to emphasize how strongly Bilaam wants to go and how he is being "played with" — turned into a mere tool in God's hands. Bilaam said about the donkey "lu yesh cherev b'yadi" (if I had a sword), but ironically Bilaam himself is the one being manipulated and rendered powerless.

Bilaam's Arrival and First Meeting with Balak (Pesukim ~36-40)

Balak hears that Bilaam is coming (messengers must have gone ahead) and goes out to meet him at a city of Moav near the Arnon River — which was the border between Moav and Amon. The phrase "asher biktzeh hagvul" (at the edge of the border) locates this meeting at the frontier.

Balak has complaints: he sent for Bilaam multiple times — why didn't he come sooner? Is it that Balak cannot honor him sufficiently? Bilaam's answer addresses both points: "Look, I came" — so don't say I refused. But coming doesn't mean he can say whatever Balak wants. Whatever God puts in his mouth is what he will speak. He's telling Balak: the issue was never about insufficient honor; it's that Hashem controls what he says.

They proceed to Kiryat Chutzot, where Balak slaughters cattle and sheep (bakar v'tzon) and sends food to Bilaam — a kind of welcoming party. This constitutes the first stage of their meeting: a small argument followed by reconciliation and a feast.

Setup for What Follows

This first meeting sets the stage for the next phase of the story, which will involve three rounds where Balak asks Bilaam to offer sacrifices — not a personal feast but korbanot to Hashem — and each time Bilaam attempts to prophesy, producing the famous blessings of Israel.

Full Transcript

Bamidbar Chapter 22: The Story of Balak and Bilaam — Fear, Power, and the Failed Curse

The Placement and Structure of the Balak Story

So today we're reading Bamidbar chapter 22. As we've seen yesterday, this chapter I think starts in the wrong place. It starts a pasuk before where it should have really started. The previous pasuk was about the travel of the Bnei Yisrael to Arvot Moav. And now we have the real place where this chapter should have started, where the Parsha's Balak starts, is that now we have this full story of what happened when they were in Arvot Moav — really the non-war that happened with Moav.

So there's a very interesting story, very much known both in the Torah itself. There's a famous story in Tanakh, the story of Balak, the king of Moav, hiring Bilaam, the sorcerer, the prophet, the person that knows how to curse and bless — that's definitely something that he knew — to curse the Jewish people. And his curse is not working out, but instead him giving blessings or praises of the people.

A Three-Chapter Narrative Arc

Now this story is very weird. Firstly, it goes through the next two chapters — so again, however split the chapters, for whichever reason decided to split it in this place, I'm not really sure why. It goes through the next, sorry, three chapters until chapter 24. It's one long story. If you were to cut it up, there might be better places to cut it up than where the chapters cut them up. But in any case, I must have said, well, it's too long, I'll just have to cut it somewhere.

I've cut it up into these parts: the part of Bilaam, Balak trying to hire, Balak trying to hire Bilaam; Bilaam's interesting side story on the way to Balak, to the location, to the Arvot Moav, where he wants to curse the people; and the entire progress of Bilaam with the people, where he gets, and he says three, and then fourth, different prophecies about the people and about all the nations in between. So those are the main three parts. That's how I would divide the story into three parts. The chapters, I didn't divide them in the exact place where I would, but that's how I would have divided it.

And each one of these internally is also divided somewhat into three or two. There's always these doublets and triplets in the stories — everything happens three times, or there's a progression of threes, or twos, or fours in the story. There's always a progression how the same kind of thing started. So it's a story very, very, I could say very well constructed — I shouldn't say that about the Torah, some stories are more well constructed and some are less — but more explicitly, more clearly built out, unlike the previous stories where we had very slight parts, and we can imagine that there's some story with this Be'er and so on, which has this whole thing, because this is also a story that has a lot of poetry in it, a lot of meshalim, a lot of music. But here we have the full story, the entire narrative, with many details, with many steps, and each part of the story has a very clear logical progress.

Why Does This Story Matter? The Famous Question

But there's a very famous question that everyone asks when they read this story, which is: why is this interesting? Like some person, some guy, some Balak wanted to curse us and hired Bilaam, turned out he couldn't curse us. It seems to be giving too much attention to something totally minor and unimportant.

The Answer: The Fulfillment of Shirat Hayam's Prophecy

There's various explanations for this, but I think the most simple explanation or the most simple reading of this in this context where we are is, if you remember, as is seen very explicitly in Sefer Devarim where Moshe repeats all his conquests, all his wars that he won, all the battles that he won — Sihon and Og, and Moav, Sihon Melech HaEmori, Og Melech HaBashan. In some sense, all these three main places that they passed now on their way, on the third leg of the story of the book, when they're on the threshold of the land of Israel.

So it seems like Moav is a very important question: what happens to them, are they happy with us, are they not happy, do they agree with us, are they letting us, are they fighting with us? Midian, Moav, these people, they might be connected, as we'll see, Ziknei Midian or someone here. In any case, these people seem to be very important.

And it seems to me that the main point of this story, as it [Vayagar Moav — and Moav was very afraid] **ויגר מואב**, starts from the people, from the army, from Moshe and his people. And that has already been mentioned in Shirat Hayam. Remember, the greatest or the fullest, the fullest epic poem recorded in the Torah is the Shirat Hayam, as we've discussed. Sefer Shemot has in a certain way the more complete or the more, we could say, well edited version of the first part of the story, the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim. The last part here, we see, gets into all these fragmentations and questionable things that we don't understand entirely. But in Sefer Shemot, the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, completed with the great song, the great epic poem of Yetziat Mitzrayim, of Shirat Hayam, known as Shirat Hayam — it's really broader than Shirat Hayam, right? It really talks about the conquest of the people all the way until they get to Eretz Yisrael, until they build the Temple Mount.

And Moav figures prominently there. These are the three people, or two of them we just mentioned: Edom being afraid, Moav being afraid, and then Canaan, which we didn't get to yet in this version of the story. We had the Canaan in Melech Arad, but he obviously wasn't afraid, but he was routed, so it might be why they're starting to be afraid.

Raising the Morale of the People

So this seems to be very important. This seems to be important to tell us that all the people in our way were really very afraid of us, and this is probably also to raise the morale of the people themselves. Moshe, as we've seen in the last, in the end of yesterday's chapter, was afraid, and Hashem tells him, don't be afraid of Og. Obviously he was afraid. These were powerful kings, there were people with a lot of power. So a big part of the story is to say that they do not have power. And in other words, they broke, their spirit was broken even before. There might have been some fight later — there was a fight with Bilaam, with Midian, there was an actual battle — but this important story of Bilaam trying, Bilaam and Balak trying to curse, which is, whatever the meaning of a curse, it obviously expresses a kind of moral or narrative power that they have over us, they could curse us. And the important message of this story is that no, they were afraid, even Bilaam was afraid, or saw the great power, and the great success of the people, and therefore, instead of cursing, he blessed.

So that's, I think, the most general and most, story that makes the most sense of this story in the context.

The Opening: Balak's Fear and His Plan

Now we will read the story. As we'll see, it's a very structured story. We go through it. So the first story, this is sort of the background, the first part gives us the background, tells us that Balak ben Tzippor, Balak, the son of Tzippor — this is his name — sees. And as a note, as this sort of editorial or narrative note at the end of this part says, Balak is the king of Moav at that time. So that's who, we didn't know, the story sort of just says Balak ben Tzippor, we were supposed to know, so it sort of gives us the information at the end. This is the style of the Torah many times, gives us historical information, the background information, and sort of a side note in the end.

What Balak Saw: The Defeat of Sihon

So Balak ben Tzippor sees what Israel did to Moav, in other words, to Sihon, mostly. Remember, from the previous poetry in the previous chapter, Sihon, there was a famous poem about **אוי לך מואב** ?Sihon being even more powerful than Moav, right Oy lecha Moav avadta am Kemosh — Woe to you] **אבדת עם כמוש** benei] **בני סיחון** ,[Moav, you are destroyed, people of Kemosh and so on. And now Sihon was ,[Sihon — the sons of Sihon destroyed by the people, by Israel, so kal vachomer, obviously, .Moav should be afraid

The Language of Fear: Echoes of Pharaoh

ki rav —] **כי רב** ,So Moav is very afraid, because they're great because they're many, because they're ,[because they're great they're, I don't know how to ,[katz] **קץ** strong, and they're exactly translate this word, something like disgusted, but I don't think that's a very good translation. It means something like very scared. I see someone translating it, very distressed. Of course, this echoes also Pharaoh. Pharaoh had the same vayakutzu mipnei Bnei Yisrael] **ויקוצו מפני בני ישראל** ,kind of fear ,[— and they were distressed because of the children of Israel **כי** ,the beginning of Sefer Shemot, and also for the same reason because they were many of them. So this is like ,[ki rav] **רב** Moav, the great repetition of the fears and threats of the people, that there are many of them, there's a demographic threat, and they're obviously not only demographic, they're .also militarily strong

Moav Consults with Midian: The Ox Metaphor

So Moav tells Ziknei Midian, and there's some questioning, what is Ziknei Midian doing here, but as we'll see later, Midian seems to have definitely been connected to this story, so something is going on here. He tells them, and here also there's a poetic, already a poetic image, a poetic metaphor. He says this people, this community, this great mass, we could translate it, will eat or destroy the vegetation all around us as an ox destroys the green of the field. So an ox goes, eats, and eats everything, he's very hungry, and this, he's imagining the people as some kind of big great herd of oxen, and coming and destroying it, nothing green is left, it all becomes brown and destroyed.

So that's the setting, the stage, similarly to how we had in the beginning of Sefer Shemot. There's the nation, they're becoming great, they're becoming many, they're becoming vayomer el amo — and he] **ויאמר אל עמו** powerful, and there's there's the quote of what the people are ,[said to his people .saying, why they're afraid

Balak Sends for Bilaam: The Messengers and the Message

So now he seems to have a plan, and his plan is, as I said, the first part of the story is, he's going to send messengers to Bilaam ben Be'or, who lives at the river, probably Pesor, the river Perat, or Pesor might be a plain word of Perat. Now I'm thinking Pesor, Perat, in any case, or a place called Pesor. And where he lives, Eretz Bnei Amo, there's some difficulty with these words. In any case, he sends messengers all the way to Bilaam. Bilaam is a famous sorcerer, a famous poet, a famous prophet. He calls him, and he gives him this message.

The Poetic Message: A Nation Covering the Earth

He gives him also a poetic message, or a message written in a high register. Tells him what has happened, what is going on. He tells him there's this nation, people, coming out of Egypt, they've covered the color, or the light of the ground, and they're right here, they're sitting next to, across from me. So again, there's the same image of the earth being covered, or the earth being eaten, like an ox eats the grass.

in [ve'atah] **ועתה** ,[ve'atah — and therefore] **ועתה** ,And therefore the Torah always means something like, and thus, and therefore. Doesn't mean and now. I mean, literally means and now, but not like, it's not about a chronological time, it's still —like, and therefore, come and curse

The First Delegation and Bilaam's Initial Response

The Elders of Moab and Midian go with *kesomim* [magical implements] to Bilaam and deliver Balak's message. This is the first delegation. Bilaam answers them: "You have to stay here **ה'** overnight, and I will respond to you as Hashem, as speaks to me." He's saying, "My whole thing is that ,[Hashem] I speak with Hashem, so I can't just answer you. You'll stay here overnight, and I'll tell you what Hashem says." And they .do that

Now, interestingly, Bilaam says "Hashem," but **Elokim** [God] comes to Bilaam according to the Torah. Elokim comes to Bilaam at night. As God acts in the Torah, He always starts off with small talk, asks people questions — although probably He knows everything, but this is the way of Him starting conversations. He says, "Who are these people?"

Bilaam answers: "Oh, Balak ben Tzipor, the King of Moab, sent them to me." He repeats to Him the message: there's this nation that has covered the land, covered the color or the shine of the land, and Balak asks him to curse them — maybe he'll be able to fight with them and banish them from the land. Bilaam changes the verb from *arah* to *kovah*, but apparently that means the same thing.

Now what does Elokim answer? "Bilaam, don't go. Don't go with them. Don't curse the people. They're blessed people. They're My — basically I blessed them — they're blessed people. It's not going to go."

So he got his refusal. He wakes up in the morning and tells Balak's ministers, Balak's messengers, Balak's princes: "Go back to where you came from, go back to your land, because Hashem refuses to let me go with you."

And therefore, that's what they do. They go back to Moab and they tell Balak: "Bilaam refuses to come with us."

The Pattern of Divine Names

It's very interesting that, again, consistently Bilaam talks about Hashem, the Tetragrammaton. But the person who doesn't talk about Hashem is the one actually talking to him — it's Elokim who comes to him. Also, there's a little change: the ministers of Moab come and say "Bilaam doesn't want to go with us," but Bilaam told them "Hashem doesn't want to let me go, refuses to let me." They understood that this is him — they translated his theological refusal into a personal one.

The Second Delegation

Therefore we have the second messenger. Again, Balak isn't impressed by this refusal. He realizes that maybe Bilaam needs to be begged more, so he sends even more honorable, even more dignified princes, and more of them. They come and they respond to his refusal. They say, in the name of Balak: "This is what he says: Do not refuse, do not hold yourself back from coming to me. I'll give you great honor, anything you ask me I'll give you, anything you tell me. Just come and curse these people for me."

And Bilaam responds — because he said he didn't say that it's him refusing, he said that Hashem is refusing — he says: "Look, Balak can give me his whole house full of silver and gold, I will not be able to go against the word of Hashem ,**ה׳** So very important: ".[Hashem Elokai — Hashem my God] **אלהי** Hashem my God. He claims Hashem to be his God, the one ".who speaks to him. "I can't do a big thing, I can't do anything

But — therefore, the answer should be refusal. But he understands that just like Balak understands that if Bilaam refuses he can ask him again, Bilaam understands that if Hashem refuses he can ask Him again. So he says: "Look, stay here again another night, and I'll see what Hashem will add — maybe He will give me some new message."

And now, again, Elokim comes to Bilaam at night and tells him, changes to a new message, a new answer. He says: "If these people came to call you, go with them." So here Hashem already knows — He didn't ask him "who are these people?" He says, "These are the people that came to call you, go. But it's not that you're going to be able to do whatever you want. You're going to have to do the thing that I speak to you."

So that's the second version, the second thing. He speaks to them, and Bilaam wakes up in the morning and takes along his donkey, his female donkey, and goes with them.

So that's what I said: there's the double part. Twice they sent to him, and the second time he agreed and Hashem agreed, but with this condition that he will only be able to say what He spoke. And he goes with them.

The Donkey Episode

Now there's a very interesting long story of what happens on the way.

God's Anger Despite Permission

Elokim is angry — [Vayichar af — And the anger flared] **ויחר אף** that he's going. So although He gave him permission, obviously what we see here — and I think that's the simple reading — not everything, sometimes, you know, like your child asks you something five times, and after, you say "Okay, do it," it doesn't mean he really wanted to do that. In the same way, Hashem said, "Okay, they want to go, you go with them," .it doesn't mean He really wanted it. And He's upset

Hashem,] **ה׳** And a messenger of Hashem — so here we have leSatan lo] **לשטן לו** comes on the way — [the Tetragrammaton to be someone that bothers him, to be ,[— to be a satan to him .someone that stops him, to be against him

Now Bilaam is riding on his donkey with his two servants. The *aton* [female donkey] now sees the *malach* [angel] standing in the way with his sword stretched out in his hand. So the *aton* has some kind of vision — of course, very mysterious, what does this mean even — but the *aton* sees the *malach*. And this *malach* obviously has some kind of miraculous vision, some kind of thing that you could see, but Bilaam didn't see at first. And now the *aton* saw it, and therefore goes off the way and goes into the field.

The Three Encounters

Now Bilaam doesn't see the *malach*, so he just sees his *aton* going off the way, and he hits it to get it back.

Now the *malach* — so again, we have this three-time, three-time structure. The second time, the *malach* goes in the way between two vineyards. This is interesting, because this also connects very much with the stories that we discussed earlier, with the request that Bnei Yisrael had to Edom, and then to Moab, and then to Sichon, that they would go in the right way, they're not going to go in the fields. And here Bilaam is sort of being forced to go into the fields or into the vineyards by this *aton*. I don't know what the connection is, but I'm noticing.

But now he goes in this kind of way, so there's different ways. There's a way that's between open fields, but now there's a way between two vineyards, and these both vineyards apparently have two fences, or *gederim* [stone fences], between them. And therefore there's not a lot of place to move to the side.

So the *aton* sees again the *malach*, so she pushes herself into the wall. And Bilaam, who's riding on it, his foot, which is on the side of the *aton*, is getting squashed into the wall, so he hits it again. But okay, there's still — she passed by the *malach*, that's basically what happened. Although there was a small space, she passed by.

Third time, the *malach* comes and he stands in a place where there's nowhere to move anywhere at all. It's an even more narrow path. There's nowhere to go right or left — interesting language, right? This is language in Sefer Devarim and later, don't go away from the way of the Torah right or left.

And the *aton* sees the *malach* a third time. So what does she do? She doesn't continue. She just sits down and she refuses to move.

Vayichar af Bilaam —] **ויחר אף בלעם** .And now Bilaam is upset **ויחר** It's the start of the story with .[And Bilaam's anger flared and he ,[Vayichar af Elokim — God's anger flared] **אף אלהים** "?hits the *aton*. "What's going on with you

The Donkey Speaks

Vayiftach] **ויפתח ה׳ את פי האתון** ,Now suddenly, at this stage Hashem et pi ha'aton — Hashem opened the mouth of the And again, something very weird, very interesting. .[donkey The *aton* speaks to Bilaam, and the *aton* tells Bilaam: ."Why did you hit me? Three times

And Bilaam says, "What do you mean? You're making fun of me. If I'd have had a sword, I would have killed you." Of course, remember the *malach* is the one that's standing with a sword, and the *aton* is thinking, "You have a sword? You might be talking about a sword, but I had a sword."

And the *aton* answers Bilaam. She says: "Well, I'm your *aton*. You've ridden on me from always until this day. Have I ever done something like this to you?" In other words, she's saying: when you see an *aton* suddenly misbehaving, suddenly not cooperating, you should think, maybe there's something wrong. It's not like, you know, we have a *shor mu'ad* [an ox known to gore], right? We know that this animal doesn't listen. This is a good animal. It's been serving him well all this time.

So he says no. In other words, the *aton* won. Bilaam — the great, right, the great man of words, he knows how to have

words and things for everything — here, his donkey has won a debate with him, a conversation with him.

Bilaam's Eyes Are Opened

And now Hashem opens Bilaam's eyes. So first He opened the *aton's* mouth, now He opens Bilaam's eyes. And he sees the *malach* with his sword. So now Bilaam obviously understands what's going on. And what you do when you see a *malach* is you bow down to him.

And the *malach* tells Bilaam: "Why did you hit your *aton* three times?" He says, "It was me. I've come here to be something that stands in your way, because this way is against I think that's .[ki yarat haderech legdi] **כי ירט הדרך לנגדי** — "me what it means, something like that: you're going against my will. So he's speaking in the name of Hashem here. You're going against Hashem's will, and I've come in some way to .stop you

"And the *aton* saw me, so at least she went to the side from me. Therefore, maybe she went from me — she was right, you're the one that's wrong. Now that you see that it was me, that she was respecting me in some sense, going to the side, I should have killed you and let her live."

In other words, you're saying that she should be killed for not going in the way? You should

The Malach's Rebuke and Bilaam's Apology

You're going against the malach. She's at least respecting the malach. And what does Bilaam say? Sorry, I've sinned. I didn't know that you're the one standing against me in the way. And of course, he understands that this malach is a messenger of Hashem. He's not apologizing to the malach for trying to go through him. He's apologizing to Hashem who sent the malach.

And now he understands that Hashem doesn't want him to go and he tells him: If this is bad in your eyes, let me go back. I'm going to return home.

The Malach's Surprising Response

And what does the malach of Hashem say? No, no problem. You don't have to go back home. You can stay here. You can continue on your way. But again, only the thing that I've spoken to you, that's what you will speak. And Bilaam continues on his way.

So this is a very interesting story. If he does want, then why did he send the malach to stop him? Something very weird. And I can't give a solution for this. But I think this part of the story is to show or to emphasize how strongly Bilaam does want to go. So don't think that Bilaam was just going to give up. He does want to go. And he's forced. He's sort of being played with. Like Bilaam said to the donkey, Bilaam is the one being played with and becoming just a tool in the hands of this malach, in the hands of Hashem.

Bilaam's Arrival and First Meeting with Balak

Okay, so that's where I would stop the chapter. I'm going to continue a little bit. So we see the beginning of him coming to Balak. And we'll stop more or less with this chapter. So we'll have to start this again tomorrow because this is a really weird start.

Balak Goes Out to Meet Bilaam

So Balak hears that Bilaam came, that messengers must have went ahead and told him Bilaam is on the way. And he goes to meet him in a city called Ir Moav [city of Moav] next to the Arnon in **asher biktzeh hagvul** [which is at the edge of the border], in this river called Arnon, which we've discussed. Arnon was the border of Moav and Ammon.

Balak's Complaints and Bilaam's Response

And now Balak, Balak again has ta'anos [complaints]. He's not happy with Bilaam and he speaks to him. He tells him, I've sent for you many times. Why didn't you come? Is it because I cannot respect you? I cannot honor you?

And Bilaam answers it. Look, I came. So firstly, like why tell me you can't come? I didn't want to come, I came. But now, does that mean that I can speak anything? I can't speak anything. Whatever Elokim, Hashem, our God will put in my mouth, that's what I will speak.

So he's sort of answering the two things. It's not you, it's not you that can't respect me enough, that can't honor me enough. It's not that I can't come. It's Hashem who is controlling me. I will only speak what he gives me in his mouth.

The Welcoming Feast at Kiryat Chutzot

So they come to a place called Kiryat Chutzot. Balak slaughters **bakar v'tzon** [cattle and sheep], sheep from the herd, and sends Bilaam food. So they make a sort of a party. And in the morning, so that was like the first meeting.

Setting the Stage for What Follows

So let's stop here. This is the first meeting. So there's like the stage. Balak comes to Bilaam and there's the first stage of the meeting where they have a sort of a small argument. But they reconcile. They make a little party.

And then we're going to have the next, again, three times where each time Balak asks Bilaam to slaughter, not a party for himself, but for Hashem, for korbanot [sacrifices]. And each time, according to that, tries to prophesy. And then we have what happens.