

BALAK: Numbers 22:2-25:9
HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel." (Nu 24:5) This poetic observation of Balaam, Ma Tovu, incorporated in prayer as reference to synagogues and study houses, is basically a tribute to the people's way of living together. "Tents" and "dwellings" are the actual residences of the people. "The openings of their tents, specifies the Talmud, were directed away from those of their neighbors." Encamped as they were in the wilderness, the Israelites kept sacred the privacy and integrity of each person and his home. This concept of "tzniut," discreetness and modesty, nobly demonstrated by Israel's dwelling, fascinated Balaam. In Judasim, "tzniut" (lit. concealment), is a two-fold mode of human behavior and attitude, marked by genuine respect for man's privacy and decency. It is man's "covering," so to speak in order to avoid exposing himself or imposing his affairs on others, and also, to avoid prying on others or intruding upon their privacy. "Tzniut" prevents both showiness and snooping. The beauty of doing a mitzva is in being discreet about it (Derech Eretz Z. 10). The goodness of communal living is in the retaining-and guarding of the sacred domain of each person and his home. This is the lesson of Ma Tovu.

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

HUKKAT-BALAK Numbers 19:1-25:9

HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

ISRAEL AMONG THE NATIONS: Balaam blessed: "There is a people dwelling by itself, not dependent on the nations." (Nu. 23:9) This envisions Israel's self-sufficiency, security and peaceful independence. "By itself" (badad) means living without need for, or fear of, other nations; "not dependent" (lo yit' hashav) means being neither threatened by, nor a treat to, the nations. This idea is reiterated in Moses' blessing: "Thus Israel dwells secure, by itself--on earth of grain and wine, with its skies dripping dew." (33:28). In both verses, balanced and self-sustained independence is described, not isolation, seperatism or vain alloofness. Strong and just, Israel is neither dominated nor dominating: "No nation will overpower Israel; none attacked by Israel." (The Tur, i270-1343).

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

WORD AND SWORD are two contrasting themes in Balaam's drama (Nu. 22): Balaam, a prophet-magician, is hired by the Moabite king Balak to curse Israel, to demolish it with his word. This Master of the Word carries no sword. An angel blocks Balaam's way displaying a drawn sword – in a scene visible not to the master, but to his she-ass. The frightened animal swerves from the road to her master's dismay. For that he hits her with a stick, not with words. When she "opens her mouth," pleading with "words" – Balaam explodes: "If I only had a sword in my hand, I would have killed you."

He who boasts the power to destroy a whole nation with his word, needs a sword for his poor she-ass! Finally, Balaam is killed "by the sword" (31:8): He who "draws" his word, dies by the sword!

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

WORD AND SWORD are contrasted themes in Balaam's story (Nu. 22): Balaam, a prophet-magician, a presumed master of the word, is hired by Balak king of Moab to curse Israel; to demolish the people with the power of his word. But an angel appears, blocking Balaam's way with a drawn sword — all, dramatically, visible only to Balaam's ass. The frightened animal swerves from the road, dismaying its master, who in turn repeatedly hits it with a stick, rather than using the appeal of words. Then, strangely, the ass "opens its mouth" protesting with "words" . . .

Balaam explodes: "If I only had a sword in my hand, I would have killed you!" What an irony! He boasts the power to destroy a whole nation with his word, but needs a sword for his poor ass! Later, Balaam is killed "by the sword" (31:8). He who pretends to live by the word, dies by the sword!

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, July 10:
HUKKAT-BALAK: Numbers 19:1-25:9
HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

PURITY AND IMPURITY ("tohora" and "tume'a") are recognized categories in Jewish law. For example: Contact with a corpse renders one defiled (ritually impure); immersion in water, undefiled (ritually pure). These states of purity and impurity are not identical with hygienic considerations of physical cleanliness; nor are they based on magical or mythical notions of consecration and taboo, as in the pagan world. They are not inherent qualities of the matter itself but rather expressions of the Divine will. "The corpse does not defile nor does the water purify," said Rabban Yohanan ben Zakai. It is the inscrutable ruling of Torah that determines concepts of "tohora" and "tume'a" by setting concrete behavioral patterns for man, aiming to render his life more distinguished and dignified. "Kedusha," the Hebrew term for holiness, signifies dedication for a purpose. Torah's laws aim to teach man to live a life of holiness: to live with a sense of purpose and meaning.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE FORTITUDE OF ISRAEL in the promised future is portrayed in prophetic imagery by Micah (5:6):

Exist shall the remnant of Jacob,
In the midst of many nations,
Like the dew sent from the Lord,
Like droplets of rain on the greenery;
So they shall depend not on man,
Rely not on people.

“The remnant of Jacob (Israel)” are the entire Jewish people, all who survived their tragic-heroic history and are aspiring for their envisioned-glorious destiny. They shall flourish among the nations, declaims Micah, like the refreshing dew and invigorating raindrops, as a force of vitality and growth, as a source of plenty and blessing. This imagery also points to the idea of national security and independence. To God alone will the people of Israel look for sustenance and help, as they do for dew and rain, not hoping nor yearning for the support and protection of other peoples, neither depending nor relying on their treaties and promises. Total independence, which involves dependency on God alone, is deemed by the prophets to be the key for national strength and greatness.

Candlelight time 8:45 Sabbath ends 9:38

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, July 7:

..HUKKAT-BALAK: Numbers 19:1-25:9

..HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE STAR (Nu. 24:17): "A star darted forth from Jacob!" This vision of Balaam is perceived in Jewish tradition as a messianic projection, the "star" ("kochav") referring to the Messiah and Jacob being the alternate name for Israel—the Jewish people. The parallel, ensuing part of this verse is: "A 'shevat' rose up from Israel!"—"shevet" being either a synonym for star ("shavit"), namely, a meteor; or, a symbol of royalty (sceptre), namely, a ruler. This prophetic verse played a role during the Jewish Revolt (132-135 C.E.) against the Roman rule of Hadrian. The very name of the hero of this revolt, Bar-Kochva (meaning, "the-one-who-is-a-star"), stems from this verse. His real name, as his own letters attest, was Bar-Koseva ("the-one-from-Kosev), referring presumably to his native village. Far from glamour, this name emits a somber sense of frustration and futility ("kosev" means failing). Rabbi Akiva, however, who regarded the emerging hero as "king messiah" and helped and encouraged him, declared him as the "kochav" on star envisioned in Scripture; hence, Bar-Kochva. The revolt failed; but neither the people nor their messianic determination were defeated. And the name of the hero continued to be cherished in Jewish memory with admiration and affection: Bar-Kochva, the Star.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / JULY 14, 2000

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, won in a just war against a threatening enemy, rightfully belong to the victor. Might is not right; occupation does not legalize possession. But territorial gains from a just war, paid for with precious lives, are by Jewish international law – non-returnable. This law is demonstrated in Torah: Advancing east of Jordan, the Israelites respected the territorial integrity of Edom, Moab and Ammon, and bypassed them. These people were hostile, but presented no real threat. Not so the northern kingdoms of Sihon and Og; they attacked Israel and lost. Conquered by Moses, their territories became part of the land of Israel.

MA TOVU (Numbers 24:5): "How good (are) your tents, O Jacob; (how good are) your dwellings, O Israel!"

Balaam's poetic exclamation, incorporated in prayer as a reference to synagogues, is basically a tribute to the residences of the people. The verse in Hebrew uses for "good," a verb (*tovu*), rather than an adjective (*tovim*). The meaning is that these tents/dwellings are constructed to promote goodness. More than merely an aesthetic evaluation, the sages point to the architectural layout of the desert encampment: The openings of the tents did not face one another.

The family dwellings reflected moral beauty, for they kept sacred the privacy of each family and the intimacy of every person; each home was veiled in dignity, as a sanctuary. This lifestyle of noble modesty, *tzeniut*, fascinated Balaam and he exclaimed: "*Ma-Tovu* – How beautifully they function!"

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

JEPHTAH'S DAUGHTER (Judges 11:29-40):

The narrative tells of the father's crude vow to "offer to God whatever exits" the door of his home to meet him upon his triumphant return from battle; his shocking agony seeing his one and only daughter coming forth in celebration to greet him (would she usually visit him?); the daughter's helpless surrender ("You opened your mouth to God; now do with me as you have vowed"). But we do not learn the fateful outcome. This is concealed behind a veil of eloquent silence. The account mentions that she "mourned her virginity" and "never knew a man." Is this a hint that she was placed in a monastery for life, rather than executed? Less horrible than literal death, the fate of a secluded, loveless existence, is

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / JUNE 25, 1999

still inexcusable – an innocent victim of a father's savagery and society's apathy.

The story of Balaam (Nu. 22-24) illustrates an ideal way of "conquering" an enemy. Hired by Balaak, king of Moab, to "curse" Israel and pronounce its doom, Balaam is Divinely inspired to "bless" Israel and declare its glories. Initially, a fierce adversary of Israel, he becomes its eloquent admirer. The "enemy" is, thus, truly conquered – not by physical annihilation but by spiritual transformation. The ideal way of conquest is winning respect, building trust, developing understanding, defusing animosity, promoting coexistence. The gains of military force are illusionary; real and ultimate victory is achieved only when "the enemy" becomes an ally.

HUKKAT—BALAK: Numbers 19:1-25:9

HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

ONE CAPTIVE OR MANY: The Canaanite king of Arad in the Negev attacked the advancing Israelites and, according to Scripture (Nu. 21:1), “took some of them captive.” The Hebrew, however, also may be understood, as the Rabbis point out, to refer to only one captive. In Torah’s view every human being counts as the whole universe; therefore, even the capture of a single person is recorded in the Torah with the same severity as if many were captured.

BALAK: Numbers 22:2-25:9

HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE OCCULT is rejected by Torah both in its theory and practice. Balaam, the magician, coming from pagan Mesopotamia to curse the Israelites, realized this unusual quality of the people (Num. 23:23); "There is no magic in Jacob, no sorcery in Israel." "The Israelites merit blessing for they have among them no enchanters, no diviners" (Rashi). Torah teaches that the destiny of man and nation is determined by the ultimate Divine rules of justice and righteousness and not by any supernatural powers, omens, oracles or astrological signs. Jeremiah admonishes the people (10:2): "Adopt not the customs of the nations: Fear not the signs of the skies, fearful of them as the nations may be." Indulgence in the occult detaches man from reality; it aggravates his problems and reduces his ability to face and solve them. The lesson of Balaam's story is the total denunciation of magic, its cursings and blessings. Evil cannot be combated by "cursing" it; nor can the vision of goodness be realized by "blessing" it. The wrong must be removed and the right restored, not by supernaturalism but by human determination and action.

Friday, July 6, 1990

C

YEHUDA

THE STORY OF BALAAM (Numbers 22-24) illustrates an ideal way of “conquering” an enemy. Hired by Balak, King of Moab to “curse” Israel and pronounce its doom, Balaam is divinely inspired to “bless” Israel and declare its glories. Initially a fierce adversary of Israel, he becomes its eloquent admirer. The “enemy” is thus truly conquered – not by physical annihilation, but by spiritual transformation. An everlasting lesson on the ideal way of conquest: winning respect, building trust, developing understanding, defusing animosity, promoting coexistence. The gains of military force are illusionary; real and ultimate victory is achieved only when “the enemy” becomes an ally. Then instead of curses, he utters blessings.

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE STORY OF BALAAM (Numbers 22-24) demonstrates an ideal way of “conquering” an enemy. Initially hired by Balak, king of Moab, to pronounce Israel’s doom, Balaam was later inspired by God, seemingly against his own will, to declare Israel’s glories. Prepared to curse, he ultimately blessed. Instead of condemnation, he offered praise. An adversary of Israel, he became its most eloquent admirer. The enemy of Israel – the party of Balaam, the professional mercenary “execrator” hired by the Moabites to destroy Israel – was thus truly conquered. Not by physical annihilation but by spiritual transformation. This is the ideal way of conquest: Winning respect, building trust, developing understanding, subduing animosity and promoting peaceful coexistence.

True, all this was not fully achieved; but the biblical episode points to the ideal: Whatever the gains of military force may be, real and ultimate victory is achieved only when “the enemy becomes an ally”; when instead of curses, he utters blessings.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE STORY OF BALAAM (Nu. 22-24) demonstrates an ideal way of "conquering" an enemy. Hired and prepared to pronounce Israel's doom, Balaam was divinely inspired to declare its glory. Instead of condemnation he offered praise. An adversary of Israel, he became its most eloquent admirer. The enemy—Balaam's party—was thus truly conquered; not by physical annihilation but by spiritual transformation. This is the ideal way of conquest: winning respect, building trust, developing understanding, subduing animosity and promoting friendship. Whatever the gains of military force, real victory is achieved when the enemy becomes an ally; when instead of curses he utters blessings.

Candlelight time 8:46 Sabbath ends 9:39

Scriptural reading for Saturday, July 3:

HUKKAT—BALAK: Numbers 19:1-25:9

HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

Independence Day — Sunday, July 4

Thought of the Week

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

BALAK

July 17, 1992

THE STORY OF BALAAM (Numbers 22-24) demonstrates an ideal way of "conquering" an enemy. Initially hired by Balak king of Moab to pronounce Israel's doom, Balaam was later inspired by God, seemingly against his own will, to declare Israel's glories. Prepared to curse, he ultimately blessed. Instead of condemnation he offered praise. An adversary of Israel, he became its most eloquent admirer. The enemy of Israel -- the party of Balaam, the professional mercenary "execrator" hired by the Moabites to destroy Israel -- was thus truly conquered. How? Not by physical annihilation but by spiritual transformation. This is the ideal way of conquest: Winning respect, building trust, developing understanding, subduing animosity and promoting peaceful coexistence.

True, all this was not fully achieved; but the biblical episode points to the ideal: Whatever the gains of military force may be, real and ultimate victory is achieved only when "the enemy becomes an ally;" when instead of curses he utters blessings.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

“A PEOPLE THAT DWELLS ALONE” (*am le-vadad*: Nu. 23:9) is Balaam’s prophecy on Israel’s place and destiny among the nations. The verse is commonly understood as an acclamation of Israel’s uniqueness among the nations – an entity apart; or of Israel’s security and prosperity: A people that lives by itself in peace, not fearing other nations, and undisturbed by them.

“Dwelling alone” (*badad*; apart) may entail either the blessing of being special, independent, self-sufficient, or the curse of being lonely, secluded, isolated. Balaam initially came to curse; but forced by divine power, he uttered blessings. His verses are forever pregnant with double meanings. Only the people of Israel, by their own choice and resolve, will determine whether their “aleness” will be a curse or a blessing.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

NEWS / JUNE 28, 1996 A-37

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

"A PEOPLE THAT DWELLS ALONE" (Numbers 23:9). This is Balaam's view of Israel. It is mostly understood as referring to Israel's uniqueness among the nations, as an entity apart. The New American Bible (Catholic) comments: "Israel, as the chosen people of God, occupied a unique place among the nations, from which they kept themselves aloof." This comment, however, uses the past tense rather than the present. Plainly understood, Balaam's verse describes Israel's security and prosperity: a people that lives by itself in peace, not fearing other nations and undisturbed by them.

The key word in Hebrew, *badad* (alone, apart, in seclusion), entails a double meaning: either the curse of loneliness and isolation (as in Lamentations) or the blessings of independence and self-sufficiency.

What did Balaam mean? He came initially to curse, but forced by divine power, he uttered, against his will, words of blessing. His observations on Israel's place and destiny among the nations, including its "badad" existence, are forever pregnant with double meanings. Only the people of Israel, by their own resolve, will determine whether their "badad" will be a curse or a blessing.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

"A PEOPLE THAT DWELLS ALONE" (Nu. 23:9) is Balaam's view of Israel. It is mostly understood as referring to Israel's uniqueness among the nations, as an entity apart. The New American Bible (Catholic, 1970) comments: "Israel, as the chosen people of God, occupied a unique place among the nations, from which they kept themselves aloof." The comment, however, uses the past tense rather than the present. Plainly understood, Balaam's verse describes Israel's security and prosperity: "A people that lives by itself in peace, not fearing other nations and undisturbed by them." The key word in Hebrew *baddad*—meaning alone, apart, in seclusion—may indicate either the blessings of independence and self-sufficiency, or the curses of loneliness and isolation. What did Balaam mean? Only the people's own resolve will determine whether their *baddad* will be a curse or a blessing.

Candlelight time 8:46 Sabbath ends 9:39
Scriptural reading for Saturday, June 25:
BALAK: Numbers 22:2-25:9
HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, July 2:
BALAK: Numbers 22:2-25:9
HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

BALAAAM'S ASS (Nu. 22:22-34), in an odd vision, talked back to him with her mouth while he was on his way to curse Israel with his mouth. This grotesque episode, cast in irony, contrasts two motifs, sword and mouth. Balaam's blindness to see that his aim is affrontive to God is dramatized by an angel, drawing a sword and blocking the way – invisible to him, but not to his ass. Petrified by this apparition, she pushes her rider, Balaam, to the wall and lays down, unmoving. The angel carries a sword, but Balaam, in typical arrogance, does not; he parades his mere mouth as his effective weapon. His crude nature is nonetheless betrayed by his rude reaction to his animal: He hits her repeatedly with his stick, rather than appeal to her nicely with his mouth. To his derision, she opens her mouth. She, like other animals, can gesture and convey feelings gently. Her visible and audible agony is an eloquent plea: "Why hit me? Have I ever mistreated you?" In contrast, Balaam's human retort is brutish: "I wish I'd a sword in my hand; at once I'd kill you!" The ass' mouth makes a mockery of man's pomp and presumption.

BALAK: Numbers 22:2-25:9

HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MA TOVU (Nu. 24:5): "How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel." This poetic observation of Balaam is incorporated in prayer as reference to synagogues and study houses. Basically it is a tribute to the people's way of living together: "Tents" and "dwellings" refer to the actual residences of the people. Encamped as they were in the wilderness, the Israelites kept sacred the individuality and integrity of each person and his home. "Ma Tovv" celebrates the idea of "tzniut" (discreetness), a two-fold mode of human behavior and attitude, marked by genuine respect for man's privacy and decency. Tzniut means "covering" one's self as well as others, preventing both showiness and snooping; being modest and discreet and also avoiding prying on or intruding upon others. The veil of "tzniut" enhances the beauty of human living.

Friday, June 28, 1991

OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

MA TOVU (Nu. 24:5): "How good (*are*) your tents, O Jacob; (*how good are*) your dwellings, O Israe!! This poetic exclamation of Balaam, incorporated in prayer as reference to synagogues, is basically a tribute to the homes of the people. The Hebrew verse uses a verb, *tovu* (for good), rather than an adjective (*tovim*). The meaning is that these tents/dwellings *do* good things, are *constructed* to promote goodness; they are *dynamically* good. More than merely an esthetic evaluation, the verse points to moral virtue. It refers, say the Sages, to the architectural layout of the desert encampment: The openings of the tents did not face one another.

In their interrelation to each other, the family dwellings of the people reflected moral beauty. For they kept sacred the privacy of each family and the intimacy of every person; each home was veiled in dignity, as a sanctuary. This lifestyle of noble modesty, *tzeniut*, fascinated Balaam and he exclaimed: *Ma-Tovu* – How beautifully they function!

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

JUNE 21, 1994 A.E.

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

MA TOVU (Nu. 24:5):

How good your tents, O Jacob;

Your dwellings, O Israel!

Balaam's poetic exclamation in praise of the people's habitats is incorporated in Jewish prayer as reference to the "goodness" of Israel's houses of worship. In context, however, it is a tribute to the homes of the people. The Hebrew for "good" (*tovu*) appears in the original as an active verb, meaning: How perfectly well do the people's domiciles (tents/dwellings) operate; how well they are situated!

This is more than an aesthetic evaluation. According to our Sages, Balaam refers to the architectural layout of the desert encampment: The doors of their homes did not face each other. Thus, the people kept sacred their privacy; each home was veiled in dignity, as a sanctuary. This lifestyle of noble modesty (*tzneuit*) fascinated Balaam and he exclaimed with praise, "*Ma-Tovu* – How beautiful!"

"A people that dwells alone" (Numbers 23:9) is Balaam's view of Israel. It is commonly understood as referring to Israel's uniqueness among the nations, as an entity apart. The New American Bible (Catholic) comments: "Israel, as the chosen people of God, occupied a unique place among the nations, from which they kept themselves aloof." This comment, however, uses the past tense rather than the present. Balaam's verse, by contrast, describes Israel's security and prosperity; a people that lives by itself in peace, not fearing other nations and undisturbed by them.

The key word in Hebrew, *badad*, means alone, apart, in seclusion; the word may indicate either the blessings of independence and self-sufficiency, or the curse of loneliness and isolation.

What did Balaam mean? Initially, he came to curse, but forced by Divine power, he uttered, against his will, words of blessings. Only the people of Israel, by their own resolve, will determine whether their aloneness (*badad*) will be a curse or blessing.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

MA TOVU (Nu. 24:5): "How good your tents, O Jacob; your dwellings, O Israel!" This verse is now incorporated in Jewish prayer as reference to the synagogues. Originally, however, it was said by Balaam in praise of all the residences of the people: A tribute to the beautiful way they were arranged in the Sinai encampment, respecting, according to the Sages, each person's privacy. Although they were wandering as a group, the people nonetheless kept sacred the privacy and dignity of each family and individual. Each Israelite home was veiled in sanctity as a temple. This lifestyle of modesty (*"tzeniut"*) fascinated Balaam, and he exclaimed "*Ma-Tovu!* -- how beautiful all your homes!

Thought of the Week

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

BALAK

June 28, 1991

MA TOVU (Nu. 24:5): "How good [are] your tents, O Jacob; [how good are] your dwellings, O Israel!" This poetic exclamation of Balaam, incorporated in prayer as reference to synagogues, is basically a tribute to the residential homes of the people. The verse in Hebrew uses for "good" a verb (*tovu*), rather than an adjective (*tovim*). The meaning is that these tents/dwellings **do** good things, are **constructed** to promote goodness; they are **dynamically** good. More than merely an esthetic evaluation, the verse points to moral virtue. It refers, say the Sages, to the architectural layout of the desert encampment: The openings of the tents did not face one another.

In their interrelation to each other, the family dwellings of the people reflected moral beauty. For they kept sacred the privacy of each family and the intimacy of every person; each home was veiled in dignity, as a sanctuary. This lifestyle of noble modesty, *tzeniut*, fascinated Balaam and he exclaimed: *Ma-Tovu* -- How beautifully they function!

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MA TOVU (Nu. 24:5):

*How good your tents, O Jacob;
Your dwellings, O Israel!*

Balaam's poetic exclamation, now incorporated in prayer as reference to synagogues, is basically a tribute to the residences of the people. The Hebrew *tovu* (instead of *tovim*, for "good"), is a verb rather than an adjective. More than just an esthetic evaluation, marveling how fine the tents are, Balaam praises their dynamic function. He refers, say the Sages, to the architectural layout of the desert encampment: The openings of the tents did not face each other. In their interrelation, the family dwellings of the people reflected *moral* beauty. For they kept sacred the privacy of each family and the intimacy of every person. Each home was veiled in dignity—a sanctuary. This lifestyle of noble modesty fascinated Balaam and inspired his exclamation: *Ma-Tovu!*--How morally beautiful are the tents of Israel!

Candlelight time 8:45 Sabbath ends 9:38

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, July 7:

BALAK: Numbers 22:2-25:9

HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

July 6, 1984

MA TOVU (Nu. 24:5):

How good your tents, O Jacob;

Your dwellings, O Israel!

This poetic exclamation of Balaam, incorporated in prayer as reference to synagogues, is basically a tribute to the residential homes of the people. The title "good" appears in the original as a verb, tovu, meaning: How perfectly good do, or interact, those tents!

This is more than an esthetic evaluation. In their architectural layout, in their interrelation, the tents reflected moral beauty. The openings of their dwellings, say the Sages, did not face each other. Encamped in the desert, the Israelites kept sacred the privacy of each person and each family; every home was veiled in dignity, as a sanctuary. This lifestyle of modesty, of tziniut, fascinated Balaam to exclaim: Ma-Tovu -- How beautiful!

File: BALAK.CJN

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MICAH'S THREE BASIC PRECEPTS OF JUDAISM (6:8) are: to act with justice (*mishpat*); to treat others with loving-kindness (*hesed*), and to serve God with modesty (*zeniut*). Justice in Judaism means more than a concern for abstract "rightness;" it includes a sense of compassion and care for people. *Mishpat* implies protectiveness, aiming to rescue the oppressed from the grip of the oppressor. To act justly means more than to follow the strict measure of the law; it means to be sensitive to the pains and needs of others. Loving-kindness complements, not contradicts, the precept of justice. *Hesed* implies more than a mere attitude or feeling of "love;" it includes behavior, concrete deeds of helping and supporting others. The third precept "to walk humbly with your God" is a protest against all forms of ostentatious religion, extravagant and vainglorious modes of worship. Man's relation to his God is essentially personal, private and discreet. It must remain hidden under the veil of modesty.

Candlelight time 8:43 Sabbath ends 9:36

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, July 11:

BALAK: Numbers 22:2-25:9

HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

"TO ACT JUSTLY, TO LOVE KINDLY, AND TO WALK MODESTLY with your God" is Micah's summation of Judaism's teachings in three spheres (6:8): political, social and religious. The first encompasses the broadest circle of man's relation to his political order: "uphold justice!" The second applies to a more limited scope of relatives and friends, people with whom man comes in close contact: "relate to them with compassion and tenderness, with loving-kindness!" The third deals with the most intimate and personal relation of the individual with his God: "Walking with" – or worshipping – Him. The means and ways of worship as well as the inner disposition of the worshipper must be governed by "hazne'a" – discreetness and privacy. In Judaism the religious expression is enhanced by modesty and marred by showiness. Confession of failures (viduy), for example, is done privately and whisperingly; none but God is to hear and know. The religious experience – one's emotional involvement with God, like any other love affair, is a very private, intimate matter. It thrives under the protective wings of discreetness and is spoiled by undue display and boasting. Although prayer is to be recited openly and publically, still it remains, in essence, worship of the heart. The dignified houses of worship must be marked by the beauty of modesty and not the extravagance of exhibition.

Scriptural reading for Saturday, July 22:
BALAK: Numbers 22:2-25:9
HAFTARAH: Micah 5:6-6:8