**Parshas Balak – ויפתח ה' פי האתון**

**See What You Want to See; Hear What You Want to Hear**

Our summers at TheZone, Oorah’s beautiful, upstate resort, are enhanced by stunning mountain scenery and a variety of delightful, farm and exotic animals that make TheZone their home. I always make a point of stopping by the donkeys on the Shabbos of Parshas Balak, to see if, maybe this time, they might have something to say. It never happened yet.

Bilaam raised his donkey from infancy. Like all other donkeys, it never spoke a word. Yet, when his donkey did speak, Bilaamdidn’t seem surprised. He nonchalantly carried on a conversation, as if it was the most normal, everyday occurrence. R’ Chaim Kanievsky, Shlit”a, suggests that Bilaam wanted to impress Balak’s entourage that accompanied him. That didn’t go so well. The donkey ended up making a fool of Bilaam. R’ Chatzkel Levinshtein, zt”l, says that Bilaam wasn’t shocked, because he didn’t want to be shocked. Bilaam didn’t want to give credence to the notion that higher powers are at work here. Nothing, not even Divine intercession, would deter him from his determined course, to destroy Klall Yisroel. Everything Hashem said and did could be explained away and rationalized, even a talking donkey. It took the terrifying appearance of a towering Malach with a drawn sword, to finally get the Eibishter’s message across.

Some people claim that their Emunah would be strengthened if theywould see a miraculous display of Hashem’s open hand. R’ Chatzkel taught from the example of Bilaam, that it is not so. Ask anyone who saw miracles. They saw, but they don’t want to admit it. They don’t want to have to come to terms with the reality that the Ribono shel Olam doesn’t just run the world. That, in fact, their very lives are in Hashem’s hands. Ask yourself, because you see miracles too. Anyone who is willing to be honest and open-minded, will see the Hand of Hashem all the time. Often enough, the “twists of fate” that manifest in world events, reveal the telltale signature of Divine Intervention. Yet, it is in the ordinary, day-to-day, where we can experience the revelation of HashgachaProtis as well. If we will but see. People do see, but they allow their selves to be jaded and cynical about what they see. We also have the opportunity to be in touch with Divine Revelation with every Mitzvoh we do and every line of Gemara we learn, if we are willing to open our hearts to קדושת התורה והמצוות.

The kids in TheZone see it and hear it. They celebrate keeping Shabbos, many for the first time. They discover Kashrus, making Brochos and Davening. Some have never learned Alef-Bais and they come home, proud that they can now read Loshon HaKodesh. They bring those messages home to their families as well. So many of Oorah’s kids and families have become ardent B’nai Torah and proud Shomrei Torah UMitzvos, because they heard and they listened. The beautiful, lush mountains, the donkeys, the magnificent horses and the entire Zone Menagerie, speak to the kids – ששים ושמחים לעשות רצון קונם. Shabbos speaks to them. Their eyes register the nobility of Tznius. The Midos, Ehrlichkeit and Simchas HaChaim of their dedicated Torah Mates and staff members shout out loud – We love Shabbos! We love Hashem! We are proud to be Yidden.

What is Shabbos saying to you? What message are you getting from your Tefilin and Mezuzos? What registered on your heart today when you said ובטובו הגדול תמיד לא חסר לנו ואל יחסר לנו מזון לעולם ועד?

Amazing, miraculous revelations, on the scale of donkeys talking, come our way all the time. The all-powerful Yad Hashem is reaching out for us, if we will just open our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Have an amazing Shabbos, yk