

Balak - בַּלָּק

Shechina in the Supermarket

Toras Avigdor

Adapted from the teachings
of Rav Avigdor Miller z"l

Junior

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Thursday afternoon, Rubin's Grocery

Yitzy slowly pushed the shopping cart down the crowded aisle, as Totty politely tried to squeeze between the other shoppers to reach items on the shelves. Yitzy didn't usually enjoy shopping – it just made him hungry for all the nosh that he couldn't have – but today they were accompanied by his cousin Pinny who was visiting from New Mexico. It was nice to have someone his age to talk to while they shopped.

"I feel bad that we dragged you to Rubin's," Yitzy said to Pinny. "I like going to Shop-Rite much more - the aisles there are humongous and it's not crowded with people doing their Shabbos shopping. It feels like the whole Boro Park is here! I feel bad that we took you to the crowded store."

"You feel bad?!" exclaimed Pinny. "I was just gonna tell you how cool it is to see so many Jews in one store. I think it's amazing! I never saw so many Jews in one place since we flew into New York for the Siyum Hashas. Look at all of the frum Jews!"

"Look at all of the heimish food! Challah in a grocery store? In Santa Fe, you can't even buy

Challah, we have to bake it ourselves! And we can't just walk into a store to buy Kosher wine for kiddush - we have to order it by the case."

"You like this?!" said Yitzy, his eyes almost popping out of his head.

"Like it?!" laughed Pinny. "I love it!"

"I guess for you it's different. But here in New York we're used to seeing frum Jews. It gets annoying to have to shop in a crowded store with narrow aisles packed with people. See that mother by the snack bags with like a hundred children! Why couldn't she just leave them at home – they're so noisy!"

Pinny was shocked to hear such words. "Yitzy, I can't believe what you're saying! Don't you read the Toras Avigdor booklet that your father mails to us every week?"

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“Not really. The words are too big and there are no pictures. If they would make Toras Avigdor comics, that would be different.” said Yitzy. “But I try to read the junior – or at least I look at the picture.”

“Well, you really should read last year’s Parshas Balak. You’d begin to appreciate what it means to see frum Jews. You might even look forward to shopping in a store where there are traffic jams in the aisles.”

“We still see frum Jews at Shop Rite,” Yitzy protested, as Totty tried to maneuver the shopping cart between three boys who were arguing about whether to buy ketchup potato chips or the red-hot ones for a Shabbos treat. “Just not as many as here.”

“But that’s exactly it,” said Pinny. “Rabbi Miller said that one of the most important things we learn from Bilaam’s nevuah is; what Hashem thinks about when He sees so many Jews. When Bilaam climbed a mountain and saw the whole Am Yisroel crowded together in one place, he said, **מִי מְנַה עֶפְרַיִם יַעֲקֹב** – “Who is counting the Am Yisroel; there are so many of them” “You know who counts them?” Bilaam asked. Hashem counts them!

“That doesn’t make sense,” said Yitzy. “Hashem doesn’t have to count. He knows exactly how many Jews there are without counting.”

“Exactly,” said Pinny. “He doesn’t count because He needs to know the number of Jews. He counts just because He loves counting us. You remember when you showed me your Hashomrim cards collection last night? You remember how you were counting, one, two, three, four, all the way till 169? You already knew you had 169 cards before you counted. You even told me. So why were you counting? Because you love those

cards! When you have something that you love, you love to count them again and again.”

That’s why Hashem is always counting us. Bilaam said, ‘He’s always counting the Am Yisroel because He loves Jews – and He loves us even more when we’re big numbers crowded together!’”

Yitzy meanwhile tried to help pull out a large watermelon from the pile and the other ten watermelons came crashing down onto the floor. “Boruch Hashem, we’re not in Shop Rite,” he thought to himself as all the frum Jews in the aisle helped him pick them up.

“Pinny’s right! said Yitzy’s father. “I always told you that we should shop at Rubin’s because better our money go to Mr. Rubin who does mitzvos with his money than to Shop Rite. But Pinny is pointing out an equally important reason. Hashem loves Jewish traffic jams in grocery stores so much that He’s looking down and counting every single one of us!

“Because we’re not just shoppers; we’re servants of Hashem! We’re all dressed like frum Jews, we’re all buying kosher food, and we’re all preparing for the Shabbos seudos! This place is jam-packed with servants of Hashem and that’s the holiest of places!”

Yitzy listened and looked around. Suddenly he wasn’t feeling annoyed by all of the people reaching over his cart to grab cholent beans from the shelf. This wasn’t just a crowded store to him anymore. It was the place Hashem is looking down at and counting: “That’s one Jew that I love. And another one. And another one...”

Have a Wonderful Shabbos !



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