

## Torah Tidbits – June 30, 2014

This week we read about how King Balak of Moab tried to slow down the migration of the Israelites by hiring Bilam. The contracted laborer did not fulfill the request of King Balak, as God had other plans. Instead of cursing the people of Israel, Bilam blessed them several times.

In the course of one of his blessings, he stated, "There is no searching out the future's secrets within Jacob; there is no fortunetelling among Israel."

There are some broad implications of this statement. The first is that the point of seeking things out is not to predict what will happen later, but to help make what is happening now be better in some fashion. The second is that there is no religious magic. Now, there are all sorts of miraculous things which happen through the centuries of the Biblical story, some of which are even enmeshed in the trappings of magic. [The Israelites learned early that God's performance of a miracle really prove nothing, as the capacity to cause miracles is part of God's nature.]

Magic, as apparently used by religious practitioners is set up in such a way that it implies that God can be coerced, or even controlled. God cannot. God can be cajoled and convinced, which sometimes results in God doing what has been requested, but there is no automatic connection between what we say/do and what God's response appears to be.

I'm fairly sure that while disappointing, it comes as no surprise that prayer itself is not magical either.

So what's the deal with prophecy? Didn't the prophets discuss time and again the horrendous happenings of "that day?"

They most certainly did. However, the prophets did not seek out that job and rarely had a real desire to express what might happen in the future. They said what they did because God gave them the words in such a fashion that they were forced to speak. For God to speak about the future is no big deal.

Another implication is that for us, the future is fluid. We can act in a different manner and thus perhaps change "what will be" into "what might have been." Such a change is the only magic most of us need, after all.