

*Sivan Rahav-Meir / The Daily Portion, Balak
"Can you tell me something about the Torah portion?"*

* Translation by Yehoshua Siskin (<http://inthelandoftheJews.blogspot.com>)

Irit Halevy, head of the girls' high school Ulpanat Tzvia in Jerusalem, went for an MRI exam this week at Hadassah Hospital. She sat next to another woman - both in blue bathrobes - and chatted with her. This is what she wrote me about what then occurred:

"An older man in a bathrobe joined us while we were waiting. With a shiny bald head and a radiant smile, he looked at us and said: 'First of all, may we all be well. But now I have a question.'

The woman next to me perked up and I took advantage of the pause in our conversation to attend to two hundred WhatsApp messages. And then he asked: 'Does someone here know about Balak? And can she tell me something about him?' I raised my eyes in surprise from my telephone and asked: 'Are you referring to this week's Torah portion?' 'Yes,' he said, 'I am not familiar with the weekly Torah portion so I have made it a practice to find out what the name of it is each week. Wherever I happen to be - on the light rail, in a doctor's waiting room - I ask those around me to tell me what they know about it.'

The woman next to me said: 'I do not know much about it, but I will gladly listen to someone who does.' 'With joy,' I said and started to tell them about this especially magical Torah portion: about Balak's attempt to fight the Nation of Israel with a spiritual weapon - with prayer - and how in this kind of war the Nation of Israel is invincible. I spoke about Bilam's donkey, about prophecy, about honor, about the blessings that Bilam declaimed. In one brief moment, the waiting room was transformed into a Beit Midrash (study hall).

All of us stopped looking at the clock and at our place in line. When the nurse called one of us to come into the doctor's office, her voice sounded a bit strange. It was as if she had no business being there and had no connection to the important event taking place.

Three Jews sitting in bathrobes waiting for an MRI in Jerusalem, experiencing great delight in their group study session, as if there was nothing more normal on earth."

Refuah shleima and Shabbat shalom.

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