

A midrash says that Balaam was unable to curse the Jews because he witnessed the Jewish children studying the law of the torah. The midrash ends saying “those who wish to destroy Israel shall not succeed. Israel will perish when her children cease to study.”

As Balaam looked down on the tribes, they were assembled in an organized manner. Balaam began to understand the reasons for Israel’s strength and why all the attempts to curse them must fail. He had expected to see a disorganized group. But instead he saw a unified people.

The Jews were a unified people because they were bound by a common belief. They were motivated by spiritual ideals, that had roots in the torah and they had forefathers and foremothers to set an example for them. No matter how great the threats have been the Jewish people have refused to let go of their faith in God. Many times we have been called upon to make sacrifices for religious principles, including giving up lives but many never lost faith. This was not always easy to do in the lands where Jews are exiled. Even today the Dalai Lama, leader of the Tibetan people who lives in exile has tried to learn from the Jewish people how to keep the faith when their people are scattered.

A Rabbi named Samson Hirsch believed that Balaam’s own faith in God grew. He also became open to hear and do what God wanted.

Nehama Leibowitz, another Jewish scholar shares Rabbi Hirsch’s view about Balaam. Leibowitz also believes Balaam’s spiritual growth and evolution, lets him achieve “pure prophecy.”

When Balaam saw the people they were sleeping in huts, called Sukkot. My family every year builds a sukkah on our porch. It is something I look forward to every year. I know that Jewish families like mine all over the world are building Sukkot. We assemble in the sukkah and sleep in it until Sukkot (the holiday) is over.

I say the Shema every night. It is very nice to feel that again people all over the world are doing this same tradition. Even when I am away from my parents I try to say it every night. The words of the Shema come directly from the torah.

Being a good student at school and in Hebrew is also important to me. I can keep on learning my whole life and will have a very fulfilled life.

A very special thing for me is coming together as a community and share joy and happiness. Along with sadness and grief. Abraham Heschel said “More than the Jewish people have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people.” My family tries to celebrate Shabbat wherever we are, even when we go camping. It’s a time when we can have a break from everyday and we eat chicken and challah.

My Bat Mitzvah is probably one of the most spiritual and personal experiences I will ever have. It makes me feel connected to the Jewish people and to my community. Just as the children Balaam saw studying, I look forward to continuing to learn and be counted as one of the adults and part of the community, like being called up to the torah and being counted in the minyan.

It is never too late to keep on learning and live a Jewish life. I know that the Jewish people will be here in the future because I will.