THE BLESSING WAS A CURSE
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz – JULY 7, 2017

1. This week is Parashat Balak
2. Contains the story of Baalam a sorcerer hired by the King of Moad (Balak) to curse the Jewish people. He agrees on the condition that he will only say the words that G-d puts in his mouth.
3. Each time he tries to curse he instead is forced to offer a blessing.
4. Third time he says the famous verse Mah Tovu:
    a. מה טבו אהליך יעקב משכנתיך ישראל - *how beautiful are your tents of Jacob, your dwelling places, oh Israel.*
5. This past week with the developments in Israel around the Kotel and Conversion Bill I have been wondering if perhaps Balaam's words were indeed a curse after all?
    a. *Why are the words **tents** and **dwellings** Ohalecha and Mishkanotech in the plural?*
    b. Where is the great beauty in everyone making their own private space – wouldn't it be a greater blessing if it was one big tent, if we all dwelled together?
6. Rashi says: that the beauty here is that Bilaam has observed Israel's camp from three directions and he sees that their windows do not face each other. Israel's private spaces are indeed private. People do not peer into their neighbour's tent.
    a. But too much privacy leads to a lack of social responsibility. The positive peer pressure which comes with having to live along side your neighbors as a good neighbor.
7. When we moved into our new home it has a fence that was truly falling down. For the first few months had had neither the time, good weather or resources to replace it. But it was an eye sore – so I tore it down.

a. For 3 months we had no fence – you know what happened?
    i. Our neighbors came into our yard.
        1. To chat
        2. To borrow a ladder
        3. To jump on our trampoline
    ii. About 6 weeks ago I built a fence
        1. It's a beautiful ceder fence
        2. The Robert Frist poem ran through my head the whole time "Good fences make good neighbors"
            a. He was wrong – they only make good fences.
            b.

8. My problem with the Kotel Compromise – which has been put on hold by the Israeli government goes back long before the agreement which took 3 years to negotiate and decades more to even bring to the table. Is that it is just building more walls between us, more fences that block out what we don't want to see or deal with or object too.
    a. Why can't pray together as Jews?
    b. Why do we find it necessary to bifurcate and subdivide again and again and again in order to block out that which we don't like – rather than learn to live with our differences. To live together.
    c. We need doors and windows, not walls and fences
        i. Between Israelis
        ii. Between Jews
        iii. Between people of different faiths, backgrounds, politics
        iv. Between each other
9. I see it everywhere and so do you
    a. We curate our news and our music
    b. It used to be that families watched TV together, each tolerating the others shows. Now we are each

on our own screens in our own rooms and with PVRs we are watching on our own time.

c. In Judaism we have so many flavors of synagogues, so many nuanced organizations for this or that cause.

i. Look at what is happening with Federations across the continent. Campaigns are dwindling (ours is bucking that trend), but philanthropy is growing. We are still giving but we are micro targeting our tzedakkah. I'll give to this, but not to that.

ii. Maybe it is better for tzedakkah – but I don't think it is so good for the Jewish people.

10. White Horse

a. 25 Jews

b. They get along

c. They have no walls only open arms

11. Same was true in Visalia a community of 100 Jewish families.
12. Same is true here – sometimes
    a. like when Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks spoke
13. But it needs to be true in our