

# A Mountain of Miracles

Category: Bamidbar, Bamidbar

*Many of Israel's wars seem to take place during Shavuot time. What does it mean?*

Israel is currently fighting two simultaneous battles, one within its borders and one beyond the borders, and we pray for the fulfillment of the verse we read in the Torah last week, "And I will give peace in the land, and you will lie down without being afraid..."

It is interesting to note that wars and 'security situations' in Israel have often occurred during this same time-period, before Shavuot. The most famous among them was the Six Day War, which took place exactly fifty four years ago, when all the Arab states united to wipe Israel off the map.

Another event that took place during this time-period was the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981. That mission, which took place right before Shavuos, was arguably one of the greatest miracles to occur to the Jewish people in the last half-a-century.

At the time, Saddam Hussein fancied himself as the leader of the Arab world, but to be worthy of the title, he needed to be a considerable threat to Israel. Therefore, he made every effort to obtain nuclear capabilities.

With the help of the French, he successfully built a reactor. Israel hindered the construction in a variety of ways, but it seemed clear that he would ultimately be successful in achieving his goal to build a nuclear bomb. Therefore, Israel began making plans to bomb the reactor, once and for all.

They worked on their plan for years. After delays of all sorts, they decided to carry it out on a Sunday, the eve of Shavuos. Eight F-16 fighter jets took off in Israel and flew the hour-and-a-half to Iraq, miraculously avoiding detection by the radar equipment of the enemy countries. Each fighter-plane carried two bombs that weighed one ton each, a total of sixteen bombs, and they totally demolished the reactor. They were there for only ninety seconds, then returned to Israel.

King Hussein of Jordan later related that he had been on his yacht that day and

had recognized the planes flying above him at a very low altitude to avoid radar detection. He was a pilot himself; he immediately understood the implications of the planes and instructed his secretary to contact his airforce and their counterparts in Iraq. In fact, Iraq had stationed an officer in Jordan whose sole job was to keep Iraq informed of sensitive information. But for whatever reason, the message never got through to the right people, and nothing was done.

In addition, Iran had just recently attacked the reactor as part of the Iran-Iraq war, causing the Iraqis to tighten security. Nevertheless, nothing stopped the Israelis from fulfilling their mission.

Right after the attack, the international community condemned Israel in the harshest terms. Even the United States publicly condemned the attack; they were particularly upset that they hadn't been informed of the operation from the outset, despite the fact that American fighter planes had been used in the attack.

The United States had suspected that Israel would do something like that. To prevent that from happening, they installed their own officers on the base where the F-16s were kept. Nonetheless, the air-force had conducted drills with those planes right under the noses of the officers, and they didn't realize. The State Department demanded that Israel be severely punished, but Ronald Reagan just said, "Boys will be boys..."

Ten years later, during the Gulf War in 1991, the then-Defense Secretary Dick Cheney sent a gift to Israel's ambassador in the United States, David Ivri. It was a satellite image of the bombed reactor, with the words, "With thanks and appreciation for the outstanding job...which made our job much easier."

## **Why Sinai**

This week, we begin Chumash Bamidbar. The opening words are, "And G-d spoke to Moses in the Sinai Desert." The Talmud in Tractate Shabbat discussed why the desert is called Sinai; what exactly does the word Sinai mean? After all, the mountain and the surrounding desert had other names, yet the Torah specifically chose to use the name Sinai!

"What is the meaning of Mount Sinai?" the Talmud says, "It is a mountain where miracles happened for the Jewish people." The word Sinai also contains the

letters of the word Nes, miracle, and the name represents the miracles that took place in that area.

“If so, why didn’t they call it Har Nes, Mount Miracles?” the Talmud continues. After all, that would be the most straightforward name! The Talmud therefore provides a new explanation for the name: “It was a mountain where a good omen, *siman*, occurred to the Jews.” It was a place where good things happened.

“But why isn’t it called ‘Simana’?” the Talmud continues. “Rather, why is it called Mount Sinai? It is the mountain through which hatred came down to the nations of the world.” Sinai also resembles the word Sin’ah, hatred; as soon as the Jewish people received the Torah, non-Jews became antagonistic to the Jewish people and antisemitism was born.

Why was that so? Those non-Jews weren’t personally ready to accept the Torah which is full of difficult obligations, so they became very antagonistic to those who were ready to take the spiritual jump.

People have two different types of reactions when seeing individuals who are better than them. An honest and humble person says, “I want to learn from that person, and even if I am not ready to live on his level, I respect him for his dedication.” But other people become enemies of those who are better than them, because it reminds them that their character is lacking.

The people of Israel became more refined and holier when they received the Torah. Some people knew to appreciate it; we call them “righteous among the nations.” Others can’t seem to bear the thought that others are better than them and therefore developed a hatred to Jewish people. (See Purim 5725)

That being the case, it is no surprise that as we prepare for Shavuot, we see a rise in antisemitic feelings, the ‘technical’ reasons notwithstanding. Anti-Semitism was around before those reasons existed and will continue to exist afterwards as well...

## **The Guarantors**

According to Chassidic teachings, there is another message in the saying that “hatred came down to the nations of the world” at Sinai. It means that when we

receive the Torah, we develop a hatred for “worldly,” materialistic things. The Torah helps us realize that there are more important things than chasing materialism in the physical world. In today’s reality, everyone is busy chasing after money. But when a Jew has a weekly or twice weekly session of Torah study, it refines him; he is suddenly no longer so enthusiastic about making another few dollars. It no longer talks to him. He learns to appreciate spiritual matters, and he searches for something higher. Sinai teaches us to hate the worldliness of the world.

The holiday of Shavuot is approaching. On Monday, we will read the Ten Commandments and receive the Torah anew. The Rebbe would often mention that just as we received the Torah for the first time in merit of the guarantors, our children, we need to make sure each year that they are all present at the reading of the Ten Commandments.

In that merit, we will see the fulfillment of the first meaning of Sinai, “miracles.” In all the wars before Shavuot, we witnessed amazing miracles like the Six Day War and the bombing of the Iraqi reactor. So too, may G-d make great miracles once again this year.