

# The Miracle

Category: Balak, Bamidbar

*G-d turns curses into blessings.*

## When G-d Reveals Himself

Last Shabbat, a miracle happened.

Some people think miracles no longer happen; those, they say, took place only in the Temple era in ancient times. But in truth, the Rebbe argued, G-d occasionally reveals Himself and shows an open miracle even in our modern era (Toras Menachem 5745 4:2442). In my opinion, what happened with the former president this week was a clear miracle.

The Rebbe also consistently emphasized that everything that happens should be examined for its connection to Torah; especially a major global event involving a political leader who narrowly escaped death.

So where do we see a similar story in the Torah?

## David's Escape

The Book of Shmuel tells us the story of Shaul and David, the first two kings of Israel.

When the Jewish people first came to the Prophet Shmuel and asked him to appoint a king, he was hesitant, but ultimately G-d commanded him to appoint Shaul—a person who was “head and shoulders taller than the entire nation,” “humble,” and “modest”—that’s who G-d appointed to lead the Jewish people (9:2, 10:22). He was a righteous man, suited for the job. However, things quickly went downhill.

When Shmuel anointed Shaul as king, he instructed him to go to Gilgal and wait seven days, after which Shmuel would arrive, offer sacrifices, and give him instructions.

At that time, the enemies were the Philistines. Upon becoming king, Shaul had immediately rebelled against the Philistines, prompting them to prepare for war against the Israelites, so Shaul called up all the “reserves,” gathering a large army which waited with him at Gilgal for seven days as instructed.

However, on the seventh day, Shmuel did not yet arrive. As the soldiers began to lose patience and disperse, Shaul decided to take matters into his own hands. He ordered the sacrifices to be offered before heading into battle. (This sounds like what happened after October 7th—the army called up three hundred thousand reserves, but they sat there for two weeks before the government gave the order to enter Gaza. Many soldiers complained about the wait).

As soon as Shaul finished the sacrifices, Shmuel showed up. “Why didn’t you wait?” he asked Shaul. His instructions had been very clear—wait for the prophet. Well, Shaul explained that the people were leaving, the Philistines were getting stronger, they had begun approaching Gilgal—and Shmuel hadn’t showed up, so he felt compelled to act.

In response, Shmuel told Shaul that because he did not follow G-d’s command, his kingdom would not endure. G-d would appoint another leader. Shaul’s first test had been to see whether he would succumb to public pressure and worry about the soldiers’ opinions. And because he was influenced by public opinion, Shmuel informed him—so early in his reign—that he had already lost the kingdom.

Who would be appointed instead of him? He very soon got an inkling.

Goliath, a giant Philistine, challenged the Israelite army to send a warrior to fight him; instead of a brutal war, he proposed that the losing side of this one duel would become the servants of the winners. Shaul and the Israelites were terrified; no one was willing to face Goliath. Finally, Shaul announced that whoever defeated Goliath would be greatly rewarded and given the king’s daughter in marriage.

Shaul was familiar with a young man named David. Previously, Shaul had begun to experience dark moods, and his servants had suggested that they bring in a soothing singer to relax him. It was David who was ultimately chosen to play his harp to soothe Shaul, and he was very effective. Now, when David volunteered to fight Goliath, Shaul doubted his abilities. He was young and small; how would he possibly win against the giant?

However, David insisted and, as we know, successfully defeated Goliath.

Something changed as soon as he returned from battle. David became immensely popular; the women sang praises, saying, “Shaul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.” Shaul’s jealousy was sparked, and he suddenly became very hostile to David.

Here comes the important part of the story: “The next day, an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Shaul. David was playing the harp as he usually did, and Shaul had a spear in his hand.”

Suddenly, “Shaul hurled the spear, saying to himself, ‘I’ll pin David to the wall.’ But David eluded him twice” (1 Shmuel 18:10-11). Shaul wanted to kill David, but G-d helped David escape from Shaul’s spear twice. The commentaries point out that Shaul understood the message at that very moment. David’s survival wasn’t a happenstance; it was G-d who was keeping David alive (Ralbag).

This was not the only time Shaul tried to kill David. There were three more attempts, but each time, G-d saved him. (David himself had several opportunities to kill Shaul, but refrained from doing so because he believed Shaul was anointed by G-d.)

The point of the story is, it was the hand of G-d that so carefully protected King David.

## **The Curse Turned Blessing**

We find a similar story, regarding the protection of the entire Jewish people, in this week’s Torah portion.

Balak, the king of Moab, was very afraid of the Israelites. He had heard about their victories over the giants Sichon and Og, and he knew that if they couldn’t stand against Israel, Moab certainly had no chance. He instructed his intelligence officers to discover the secret of Moses’ strength in battle, and learned that “his strength is in his mouth” (Rashi on Numbers 22:2). So, he decided to change tactics and hire Balaam, the prophet of the nations, to come and curse Israel.

Balak sent messengers to invite Balaam to Moab to curse Israel, promising him anything he wanted: money, gold, honor—whatever. However, G-d told Balaam

not to go, saying that the Israelites are blessed and do not need his curses or blessings.

Balaam, who was an antisemite of his own, insisted on going. But in the end, not only did Balaam not curse Israel, he blessed them, not once but three times, and then again for a fourth round. In the words of the Midrash, “G-d said, ‘Let Moses, who loves them, rebuke them, and let Balaam, who hates them, bless them!’” (Bereishit Rabbah 1:4). In a split second, what could have been a devastating curse turned into the most beautiful blessings.

## The Blessings

These were not mere obligatory blessings, but some of the most beautiful praises of the Jewish people found in the Torah. For example, the prayer we all know, “*Mah tovu*, How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel” (Numbers 24:5), was said by Balaam. He praised the family life of the Israelites, observing how family is the most important institution among the Jewish people. (You’ll notice this at funerals: the person is never praised for his devotion to his career; he is praised for his devotion to his family, because among Jews, passing the torch of Jewish tradition down the family line is the most important value.)

Even before that, in his first prophecy, he stated that we are “A nation which dwells alone” (Numbers 23:9). He reflected a historical truth that has been proven to be true throughout all generations: The Jewish people cannot assimilate into other nations, regardless of which nation or era it is—they always “dwell alone.”

For example, consider how the world celebrates the beginning of the new year versus how we do. They celebrate with champagne, dancing, and revelry at midnight, whereas for the Jewish people, “Rosh Hashanah” is a sacred day of shofar blowing, prayer, and a festive meal with family.

This distinction is also evident in the cycle of life. When a Jewish baby is born, if it is a boy, there is a brit milah, and if it is a girl, she is given a Jewish name in the synagogue during the Torah reading. It’s a sacred event. A Jewish wedding is entirely unique, with the chuppah, the blessings of betrothal and marriage, and so on. Similarly, in death, Jews cover the body entirely and follow specific burial customs, such as burying specifically in a Jewish cemetery—with many customs

that differ from those around us.

This is a core aspect of being Jewish.

In 1972, Yitzchak Rabin, then the Israeli ambassador to the United States, visited the Rebbe for a private audience to represent the Israeli government on the occasion of the Rebbe's seventieth birthday.

During their meeting, the Rebbe asked Rabin if he felt lonely in Washington. Quoting this same verse, the Rebbe explained that the fact that the Jewish people "dwell alone" is not only a result of antisemitism, or other external factors, but a divine will. G-d wants us to live distinctly different lives from our neighbors, and that will protect us from assimilation.

## **The Transformation**

There is a special prayer we say during the priestly blessing on holidays, known as the "Prayer for the Improvement of a Dream." The Talmud (Berachot 55b) teaches that if someone has a troubling dream, they should come to the synagogue when the priests bless the congregation and recite a short prayer asking that the dream not harm them and, even more, that it turn into something good.

The prayer concludes with the words, "Just as You turned the curse of the wicked Balaam into a blessing, so may You transform all my dreams about myself and all of Israel for the good."

There are many people out there who wish to curse us just like Bilaam. But as you see, G-d knows how to save us, just in the nick of time. Let's hope to see the transformation very soon.