

Perceptions • Tammuz 16, 5785 • July 12, 2025 • Issue #2104

Balak

The concept of blessing is known far and wide and for who knows how long now? In the Torah, it goes back to the first man, and even before. Both religious and secular people use the term, and both mean that the blessed is successful. It's just that the religious person says that the source of the blessing is God, and the secular person just means that they have been lucky.

In the latter case, it is a borrowed term because the very word in Hebrew alludes to God being the Source of the blessing. *Brochab* is similar to the word *breichab*, which is a flow of water. Like a flow of water, a blessing is a flow of Divine light from God to the recipient of the blessing.

The truth is, no one can exist, not even the bad guys, if Divine light does not flow to them. Even the worst of the worst exists because God keeps them alive with His light. The difference is how the light manifests itself, either cloaked in seemingly natural causes, or in an obviously miraculous way.

Take Yosef *HaTzaddik*, for example. His blessing was so pronounced that even Potiphar acknowledged his special Godly status. Later, Pharaoh elevated him from jail mate to second-in-command over Egypt because of his God-connection. The same thing was true of Yosef's father, Ya'akov, whose blessed status was acknowledged by Lavan, and Yitzchak *Avinu* before him with whom Avimelech made a pact because of his blessed nature. Need we even mention Avraham?

Dedicated in loving memory of

**Shmuel ben Yitzchak
Yaakov, z"l,**

May his *Neshamah* have *aliyah* after *aliyah*, and may he continue to be a *meilitz yosbar* for *Klal Yisroel*, especially during these difficult times.

The Turner Family

In last week's *parsha*, the Jewish people didn't do as well. Edom refused to acknowledge the Jewish nation's special status and was prepared to war against them. Sichon and Og as well, and they did go to battle only to lose because of the Jewish People's blessedness. And this continued through the millennia, even though, as Josephus writes, everyone knew about the special Godly status of the Jewish People, at least in the past.

Which brings us to this week's *parsha*. This is the *parsha* in which Bilaam and Balak conspire to alter the Jewish nation's special status, only to be told by God, nothing doing. "These people are blessed," God warned Bilaam, "and that was not about to change." Trying would only lead to Bilaam's own downfall, and did.

What does that mean? It could mean something as simple as *protectzia*, which means knowing someone (God, in the case of the Jewish People) in a high place (Heaven in this case) who does favors for you when you need them. The only connection needed in this scenario is an emotional one.

The deeper understanding is that the Jewish nation lives in the path of a special flow of Divine light, like being in a spiritual spotlight. As long as you remain in the path of the light, you remain illuminated. Step away from that light, and it can't light you up anymore leaving you vulnerable to the darkness. The light will continue to flow as it has, but you won't be there to receive it.

This is why Bilaam had Balak offer so many sacrifices. His plan had been to knock the Jewish People out of the path of the Divine light by drawing it to the sacrifices they offered to God. He calculated that if he could reduce the light on the Jewish People even just a little, he might be able to slip a curse in there and make good on his commitment to Balak.

Though he was right in theory Bilaam was wrong in practice. The forty-two sacrifices they offered to God were impressive, but not enough to knock the Jewish People out of the flow of Divine light. Consequently, Bilaam's curses turned into blessings, driving Balak mad and Bilaam out of business.

Therefore, Bilaam changed his strategy. If he could not knock the Jewish People from their spiritual pedestal, he decided to let the Jewish people do it on their own. He cunningly drew the Jewish men out of the spiritual safety of their holy environment, exposed them to immodest women, and drew them to sin.

It worked, somewhat. It caused the death of 24,000 men from the tribe of Shimon, and the capital punishment of 176,000. It was only a fraction of the nation, but it also showed other nations how to weaken the Jewish People, and it showed the Jewish People the consequences of stepping outside the blessed light of God.

It's a much different, more blessed life when someone lives in the path of the light. It's when prayers no longer return empty, and success results beyond *natural* expectations. That's what home looks like for a Jew. And this is one home you don't even want to leave, because history has shown us no uncertain terms what happens when we do, starting with this week's *parsha*. It's an especially good lesson to keep in mind as we begin the darkness and vulnerability of the Three Weeks.

Pinchas Winston

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UPCOMING SEMINAR: Unlock the Gates: We are told that the Gates of Prayer are closed. This is a class about opening them up again. You'll never pray the same again. The live presentation will be Tuesday, July 8, 2025, 8:30 p.m. Israel time, b"H. Register [here](#) (even after the date since the class will be recorded).