

## **And We Never Knew!**

ר' ז' פ

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*Parshat Balak*

*Unbeknownst to our hero, the wicked count Carlo was looking down at him from the gallery of the grain silo. A huge metal anvil hung silently, poised to drop sixty-five feet to the granary floor and turn our hero into steak tartare. Just a few more feet and he would be directly under the anvil.*

*Carlo laughed quietly to himself. "This time, my fine friend, you will not escape my clutches."*

*Inch by inch our hero drew closer to his fateful nemesis. Inch by inch. And then he was there, directly under the massive anvil.*

*Count Carlo relished the moment for a few nanoseconds, and then, very gently, he let go of the cord. The anvil, released from its restraints, fell like a stone, like an eager racehorse let loose from the starting gate.*

*Then Baklava, the count's faithful but bumbling butler, said, "Master, you let go of the anvil."*

*"I know I did, you bumbling idiot!" replied the count.*

*"But, Master, the end is tied to your right leg!"*

*"What! You fool! How did that happen?"*

*"I did it, Master," said a beaming Baklava. "I didn't want us to lose the anvil."*

*"Quickly, you idiot," said the count, "grab the rope; perhaps our combined weight will stop the anvil and I won't be pulled to my death!"*

*"That would be nice, Master. But, you know, I'm not so heavy anymore, since I've been going to Weight Watchers."*

*“Don’t argue with me, you bumbling fool!” exclaimed the count. “Just take hold of the rope!”*

*In less time than it takes to say “Sidney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre,” Count Carlo and Baklava grabbed the rope. The anvil was checked in its downward plunge, but it wasn’t going to give up without a struggle. It hoisted the two men right up to the pulley which was set into the granary roof, and there they swung like a couple of trussed chickens, as the anvil came to an abrupt stop eighteen inches above our hero’s head.*

*Our hero could have sworn that he heard something. He looked around, but he saw nothing out of the ordinary. He sighed a diffident sigh and sauntered out of the granary into the morning sunlight, unaware that he had come within just a few inches of losing his life.*

There is something very unusual about the story of Balak. If the Torah had not revealed the episode of Balak’s trying to engage Balaam to curse the Jewish people, we would never have known about it. Most of the events that the Torah records concerning the Israelites could also be known from our having experienced them, but not this. When this story transpires, the Jewish people were well out of earshot. They could only be seen somewhere in the distance – from the top of a hill, across a field, in the wilderness – but never close up. They are, it seems, like extras in their own motion picture. Had it not been for the Torah, we – like the hero of our tale – would never know what a narrow escape we had. The Jewish people walk through this story wholly unaware of Balak’s machinations.

Shabbat Shalom.