

FOUND IN CONTEMPT

by Rabbi Label Lam

How can I curse? G-d has not cursed? How can I anger? G-d is not angry. (Bamidbar 23:8)

Would you like to be loved by G-d? Guaranteed and without much effort!? Wouldn't that be nice?! How do you do it? Let's take a lesson from Bilaam, about what not to do, like those old knife throwing shows with the disclaimer on the screen, "Don't you kids at home try this!"

If it wouldn't have been so tragic it might be comical watching Bilaam and Balak teaming up to curse those that "G-d has not cursed". How can one go against G-d, is this, or any instance? It's the ultimate exercise in futility. Bilaam attempts the impossible. Like a passenger trying to push against the back of the plane to slow it down or reverse the direction so he foolishly hires himself out to curse the Jewish People.

A young man I know very well went out with his wife and a few other young- couples years ago, to eat a slice of pizza together in Brooklyn and attend a lecture by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl. At the end of the first half of his presentation he would open up for questions. Some of the questions were on papers that had been passed to front, perhaps to retain some anonymity or remove inhibitions on the part of the questioner.

This young man had been in a quiet but intense personal war with another Jew and was very much bothered by the episode so he sent forward a question which expressed his frustration and then some. How surprised he was when he heard the Rabbi reading, from amongst the many slips of paper his question, "What if you hate another Jew?" Rabbi Miller paused for a brief moment and answered flatly, "You should know that G-d hates you!" The words entered him like a sword. The rest of the night he was unusually silent and less sociable. People wondered what was bothering him so. It took years for him to reveal the incident even to his wife and to realize the value of that potent encounter with a terrible truth.

Moshe Chaim Lutzato in The Mesilas Yesharim writes words that not only the rest of the world would be well advised to pay heed to but we too, "The Holy One Blessed Be He only loves those who love (the People of) Israel and to the extent that a person grows in his love for (The People of) Israel, so The Holy One Blessed One Be He increases His love for him.

Rabeinu Yona recommends in Shaarei Teshuvah: "When one stands amongst his people and speaks with his friends he should contemplate and understand and take great care that all that escapes his mouth should be to sanctify HASHEM with his words and to speak in favor of His service and to praise His Awesomeness and to compliment those who serve and fear Him. And so he will merit with his private thoughts and the mere expression of his lips without any effort or action a profoundly great merit that reaches all the way to the heavens..."

Unfortunately there are still many today, and they seem to be growing in number and temerity devoting significant energies to following and fulfilling the futile art of their failed mentor Bilaam. We are to be comforted by the knowledge that through their-own condemning words and attitudes they themselves are found in contempt. Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.