

# SUCH A REBBE!

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

*"How goodly are your tents Yaakov, your dwelling places Israel!" (Bamidbar 24:5)*

Our sages tell us that Bilam's praise of the Jewish People are worthy of consideration to be included in the twice daily SHEMA. One might wonder how that wicked guy almost made "the big time". The answer is that he did not almost make it, he did make it. That is wildly incongruous. How do the words of some misguided wordsmith looking to sell his powers of prophecy for profit make it into the heart of our scriptures? Bilam's descriptions of our people are amongst the most flattering yet true one can find in the whole Torah or anywhere. Why do such great praises emanate from a degenerate like that while the rest of TANACH is replete with hyper-critical comments and reports about our people and our leaders?

Shlomo HaMelech writes, "Indeed good is open rebuke out of hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, while the kisses of an enemy are abundant? (Mishlei 27:5-6) A secret is revealed in these words. Consider the motivation of the one that delivers either a plethora of praise or a stinging rebuke. The Malbim explains that this is manifested in the way loving parents discipline their children. We are meant to understand and appreciate that when a real friend chastises it is out of love and concern. He wants to return his friend to the proper path. The enemy, however, showers his victim with words of affection only to encourage him to act inappropriately or to lull him into a false sense of security the way a calf is fattened for the slaughter. Therefore, rebuke from a friend is better than a multitude of compliments from an antagonist.

The following is excerpted from Yaffa Eliach's Chassidic Tales of the Holocaust: There had been for whatever reason a long standing rivalry that raged between the Chassidim of Munkacs and Belz. In the city of Munkacs there was a Belzer Chassid by the name of Moshe Silber.

There he maintained his oppositional stance which was the cause of many a lively argument. During one of these heated debates the Munkacser Rebbe turned suddenly and lashed out at this Belzer Chassid with a sharp rebuke, "You will die with your Tallis Katan (Tsitsis) on!"

The words penetrated the heart of this Belzer Chassid, Moshe Silber and there they remained. Years passed. World War II engulfed Europe. In April 1944 a brutal deportation Aktion was initiated in Munkacs, and by May 30 the city was pronounced Judenrein (Jew free). The ghetto had been liquidated and all its Jews deported to Auschwitz. Among the deportees was that same Belzer Chassid, Reb Moshe Silber.

Despite the hunger, slave labor, and the constant threat of selections, the Belzer Chassid was sure he was going to survive the war, for in Auschwitz it was impossible and punishable by death to wear a Tallis Katan. Since words spoken by a Tzadik must be fulfilled, the Belzer Chassid was sure that death had no power over him so long as he was not wearing his ritual garment.

Indeed, the Belzer Chassid survived the Auschwitz inferno. Today (she writes, then when the interview took place in 1977), wearing a Talis Katan he resides in Monsey, New York, and although he is not a Munkacser Chassid, he frequently shares his personal experience of the miraculous powers of his former adversary, the Munkacser Rebbe.

After telling his tale, Reb Moshe Silber added as if an afterthought, "A Chassidic Rebbe is like a master diamond cutter. He takes a man and cuts away all the roughness, all the waste. He does it with a tale, a niggun/tune, and lots of wisdom. What you get is a polished stone a Chassid. Only great masters can do it. The Muncacser, he was **such a Rebbe!**" DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](http://Torah.org).