

OUR ACHILLES' HEEL

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Bilaam's advice to Balak that the way to defeat Israel was through weakening its moral fiber and not necessarily by war and public curses was shrewd and telling and effective. The enemies of Israel in the desert - the Canaanites, Amalek, Sichon and the Emorites, and Og the king of Bashan - all tried war against the Jewish nation and were ultimately defeated. Balak tries to destroy Israel through Bilaam's mouth - a public relations, media blitz to demonize the Jews. God foils this plan and Bilaam's mouth spouts blessings and compliments upon Israel. There seems no way to really overcome the members of the Jewish people. They are great warriors and the Lord is on their side. But they have an achilles heel that God will not come to protect. They are capable of self-destruction in a major way. And that weakness lies in the temptations of foreign cultures, of a sophisticated idolatry, in a way of sexually immoral lifestyle and illicit behavior. The women of Moav and Midian seduce many of the Jews - especially the tribe of Shimon - into accepting their culture and their mores as a quid pro quo for their bodies. The tribe of Shimon is decimated by a plague that befalls them shortly thereafter. The tribe of Shimon is permanently crippled in Jewish history by this failure of moral will. And, at least temporarily, Bilaam and Balak smirk over their consequences of Jewish self-destruction.

In our time the Jewish people have survived, Holocaust, war, terror, persecution and unending hatred and bigotry. We have been subjected to a withering and unrepentant badly biased and skewed media portrayal of ourselves and of the State of Israel particularly. Everyone loves to curse us - the EU, the UN, CNN, BBC and the rest of the world's sanctimoniously hypocritical "good guys." But the Lord apparently does not read the editorial page of the New York Times and therefore even this unending bombardment of negativity has in reality had little effect upon us and our situation. However, the seduction of Western culture, of the modern licentiousness of body and spirit, of assimilation and marrying the daughters of Midian and Moav, has weakened us. It has made us smaller in number and weaker in resolve and spirit. Adopting universalistic values that change constantly over basic Jewish values and traditions has crippled us in our struggle to survive and prosper. This behavior and attitude, fostered by secular Jewry, and to a great extent, non-Orthodox Jewish leaders as well, has destroyed our self-identity and self-worth. We are no longer unique and special, with a Godly mission to fulfill but we are like everyone else. And that is our weakness that if not recognized and corrected can lead to disaster and sadness.

Shabat Shalom.

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