

FRIENDLY ENEMIES

by Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's parsha offers us the opportunity to meet the unofficial founders of the Human Rights Organizations of our time. Here we see the ancestors of Kathleen Ashton, who is the head foreign affairs person of the European Union, the leaders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the left-leaning anti-Semitic professors of academia the world over, the neo-communist Putin and the rest of the well-meaning, ever protesting "friends" of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

Bilaam is engaging in public prophecy concerning the Jewish people, and all for our own good. He, like his diplomatic descendants of our time, is the one person that really knows what policies we should follow in order to guarantee our long-range future survival and success. Therefore, his words are soothing, beautifully phrased and dripping with friendship and compliments.

But in his heart of hearts Bilaam and certainly Balak mean us no good. They protect terrorism, educate generations to hatred and violence and yet hypocritically cluck in amazement when violence, kidnapping and rocket attacks against Jews continue. On the surface one can find almost no fault in the words of Bilaam.

The Jewish people were and are so enamored by his compliments that our prayer services every morning begin with his statement of how goodly are the tents of Jacob. Jews love and treasure every complement, no matter how patently insincere and begrudgingly given, from non-Jewish sources and persons.

King Solomon in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes cautioned us that it is much more beneficial to hear criticism from a friend than complements from those who do not really like us. Nevertheless, we have always been naïve when it comes to Bilaam and his intellectual and diplomatic descendants.

The Torah itself tells us that the Lord reversed the curses of Bilaam and turned them into blessings. What curses are meant in this statement? We do not read in the Torah of any direct curses or even sharp criticisms aimed at the Jewish people uttered by Bilaam. So why does God have to interfere, to reverse seemingly nonexistent curses? The answer to this is a relatively simple one. The Lord Who not only hears what we say, but more importantly knows what we mean, sees beyond the beauty of the words of Bilaam.

There is a well-known story that I have often related of two women that constantly fought and cursed each other. The rabbi of the community intervened and on Yom Kippur eve forced a reconciliation and extracted a promise that they would only say nice things to each other hereon in.

The women were forced to agree to the rabbi's terms. However, walking home after Yom Kippur services one of the women turned to the other and said: "Blessed may you be, but you know what I mean!"

The Lord fully understood what Bilaam meant with his "blessings" and compliments to Israel. Hence, His intervention and the reversal of the unspoken curses into spoken and eternal blessings and compliments. Not much has changed in the world since the days of Balak and Bilaam. Jews the world over and here live in a hateful and dangerous environment. We would do well to realize that we should be wary not only of those who openly curse us and even of those who claim that they have our best interests in heart when they advise and criticize us.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com