

On Whose Side?

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

In the poetry that Balaam the Magician declaims about the Children of Israel, he makes the remarkable statement "*Am Levadad Yishkon*", A people that dwells alone, "*U'Bagoyim Lo Yitchashav*" and is not numbered amongst the nations. The word *yitchashav* can mean numbered, counted, regarded, reckoned or valued. What does he mean and intend by this?

A nation unlike the others of its day in terms of its monotheism, its laws, its values, its Torah. Or perhaps unique in its capacity to survive? As for the second part, reckoned amongst the nations, he could mean:

1. we are so small we hardly count
2. we are unique because of our Torah and our religious culture
3. we are special because we have survived longer than any other
4. we are not valued by other nations.

The fact is that all these possibilities are true. We are not taken seriously because we are so small. In fact, this should be grounds for admiration. Instead it is the cause of disdain and envy.

We are disliked because we reject other religions which only infuriates them. We have survived despite all attempts to destroy us. And people dislike us for this. The Left see us as the only cause that unites them in hatred. The United Nations simply picks on Israel above and beyond any other nation and antisemitism remains a disease in the minds of so many human beings.

Was Bilaam cursing us or blessing us? In one way, you might call it a curse and that's why so many Jews try to escape from their Judaism. But at the same time, it is a blessing that we have survived and will.

The Fast of Tammuz and the three weeks leading up to the 9th of Av remind us of our failures. But we need to remember our successes too. Balaam reminds us of that in his famous words *Mah Tovu Ohalecha Yaakov*. Our tents, our families our traditions are good, they have enabled us to survive.