

It is not unusual to maneuver for your own best interests. If you do so, try and consider how your request will affect the general public or other members of your workplace, organization, or family. Look beyond your own interests and put yourself in other people's shoes. See things from their point of view. This will bring peace and harmony and yield a better outcome, in general, than that which might be brought about by the selfish interests of any individual member of the group. In the end, everyone will be better off. (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Bevdia)

We both agreed; the Boss wanted us at that wedding.

Bilam was a very unusual person. He was a real prophet, but at the same time he was willing to help destroy the Jewish People. He tried to curse the Israelites and failed. He also tried to harm them by the use of his eyes. His plan was to use his eyes to invoke Hashem's strict justice against the Jewish People. Even in this he didn't succeed. Having a bad eye towards others hurts them, but having a good eye can bless and help them.

Rabbi Raymond Beyda quoted Rabbi Yisrael of Salant zt”l. He used to say that Hashem gave a person two eyes, one with which to see another’s good attributes and the other to view one’s own shortcomings. Unfortunately, too many of us reverse his advice. We see our strengths and become conceited while we always see another’s weaknesses.

We should always enjoy seeing other Jews and try to bring to mind feelings of love. A true story was told about a great Rabbi, the Machnovka Rebbe zt”l. He was imprisoned many years by the Communists. When he was freed, he returned to his *Bet Midrash*. Upon reaching his seat, he turned it around to face the people, even though Hasidic Rebbes generally face the Eastern wall of the shul. One of the Hasidim asked the Rebbe why he wasn’t facing the wall as he usually did.

“For so many years,” responded the Rebbe, “I didn’t see a Jew. Now that I have been freed, *Baruch Hashem*, I want to be able to look at Jews!”

Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Reuven Semah

## The “Cool” of Inspiration

”וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם לְאַתּוֹן כִּי הִתְעַלְלָתָּ בִּי”

“Bilam said to the donkey, ‘Because you have ridiculed me.’” (*Bemidbar* 22:29)

Bilam’s was not an ordinary donkey. Hashem created this donkey during the six days of Creation, as it says (*Abot* 5:8), “The mouth of the donkey was among the ten things created during twilight on *Ereb Shabbat*.” During the week of Creation, Hashem destined Bilam’s donkey for this miraculous moment when it would speak. Yet even when the donkey spoke to him, Bilam remained unmoved. Instead, he debated with his donkey and insisted on respect, saying, “You have ridiculed me!”

Bilam’s arrogance is mind-boggling. When Hashem asked him, “Who are these people with you?” Bilam responded, “Balak son of Sipor, king of Moab, sent for me,” insinuating that although Hashem deemed him unworthy, kings greatly esteemed him. One would assume that on experiencing a revelation of Hashem or His angels, a person would fall to the ground, overcome with awe. Bilam, however, remained unaffected, stony-hearted, even when Hashem Himself spoke directly to him.

We are confronted here with a frightening reality. A person who follows his natural desires, sinning without compunction, will become a slave to his drives. He will become so desensitized to holiness that, even when witnessing open miracles, he will lose the capacity to be inspired. Just as the primordial serpent lost its sense of taste, so that all food tasted like dust, the evil person’s potential to be inspired is lost. This is his punishment: the inability to feel any stirring of inspiration toward *teshuvah*.

Similarly, when, after working with dedication and honesty for fourteen years, Ya’akov rebuked Laban, describing how he had slavishly worked for Laban day and night for fourteen years, while Laban changed the terms of his employment ten times. Laban responded coldly (*Beresheet* 31:43), “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flock is my flock, and all that you see is mine.” Laban was totally unaffected by Ya’akov’s heartrending rebuke and remained as cold as ice.

Such is the lot of the wicked. A person whose sole goal is to fulfill his physical and emotional desires, is punished by losing all sensitivity to inspiration.

The *Rambam* (*Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah* chapter 2) states that love and fear of G-d are the byproduct of inspiration.

Bearing this in mind, we should be greatly concerned when we find ourselves fulfilling *misvot* by rote, rarely inspired by love or fear of Hashem. We pray without feeling. We recite *berachot* without true gratitude or praise. Why aren’t we overwhelmed with fear when mentioning G-d’s Name? Is it possible that we have become “Bilamized”? Have we, too, lost the ability to be inspired? (Rav Schwab on the *Chumash*)

## Hidden Message

”מִהֵטְבוֹ אֹהֲלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל”

“How goodly are your tents Ya’akov, your dwelling places Yisrael.” (*Bemidbar* 24:5)

In his third and final attempt to curse the Jewish People, Bilam sought to place *ayin hara*, an evil eye, on them. However, after looking at the nation from a nearby mountain, he saw that the entrances of each of their tents faced a different direction so that no one could gaze into the tent of his neighbor. Because of this level of modesty among the Jewish People, Bilam received Divine inspiration to bless the Jewish People instead of cursing them.

On this, we can ask two simple questions: Why did Bilam specifically attempt to place *ayin hara* on the people now, and how did the modesty of the Jewish People prevent him from succeeding?

The *Taz* answers that until the Jewish People sinned with the Golden Calf, no nation was able to see them because they were completely covered by the Clouds of Glory as they travelled through the desert. However, following their sin, the Clouds of Glory were removed from them, and for the first time, the Jewish People were exposed to the eyes of the other nations.

Therefore, since Bilam saw that they were no longer concealed, he decided that the time was right to place an *ayin hara* on them, which specifically rests on things which are not hidden.

However, the reason why his *ayin hara* did not work on the Jewish People was because of their modesty, which by its very nature involves keeping something concealed. So when Bilam saw that the Jewish People, despite losing the Clouds of Glory, were still very much ‘concealed’ – due to their extreme modesty, he was unable to cast upon them any *ayin hara*. (Short Vort)

## From My Point of View

Parents will testify that you can’t make everyone happy. The home is as political as the halls of any government building. If one child merits a special reward, it is sure to arouse jealous complaints from his or her siblings. If Mom would like to treat the kids to a special day of entertainment, you can be sure that what will excite Jacob will leave Ruthie with a long face. People just seem to see things from their own point of view.

When the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) went into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, he said a special prayer on behalf of the welfare of the community. In this once-a-year opportunity to approach Hashem on behalf of his brethren, the *Kohen* said, “And please do not fulfill the request of the travelers.” Why not? Because travelers pray for the weather to be moderate and dry so that the roads are easy to pass and their trip is comfortable. However, these ideal travel conditions are not beneficial to the farmers