

# PARSHAS BALAK

*by Gedalia Litke*

Pirkei Avos describes the main differences between Bil'am and Avrohom Avinu. Rashi mentions or alludes to Avrohom many, many times in his explanations about Bil'am in our Parsha, usually drawing distinction between the two, and always to Avrohom's advantage.

In addition there is a striking parallel/distinction between Bil'am and Avrohom which can be gleaned from Rashi, pointing yet again to the subtle beauty of every word of Rashi.

The pasuk says that Bil'am had two young men with him (22:22). Rashi says this teaches that an important person "should" take two other people (meaning not just one) along when he travels to serve him; this way if one of them needs to excuse himself the other "can fill in for the person who is temporarily indisposed".

Similar, but different: The pasuk in Parshas Vayera (22:3) says that Avrohom took two young men with him on the way to the Akeida. Rashi says that this teaches that an important person "may not" travel without two other people along to serve him; this way if one of them needs to excuse himself the other "will still be with" the important person.

These differences are explained in many different ways by the M'forshei Rashi. My favorite explanation (see Be'er BaSadeh and Gur Aryeh) is based upon the gemoro in Brachos which says that a talmid chochom may not travel at night alone. Avrohom was a talmid chochom, and therefore he was not permitted to travel alone (as the travel included overnights); he must therefore take two people so that if one must excuse himself the talmid chochom will still be accompanied by the other person. The key is that he not be alone.

Bil'am was important, but not a talmid chochom. For an important person who is not a talmid chochom there is no violation if he goes alone, it is simply proper behavior (derech erez) for him to have someone else along to serve at all times. He takes two people so that if one becomes indisposed the other will still be able to provide the service.

Rashi is explaining that we derive the stricter prohibition about a talmid chochom from Avrohom while we derive the derech erez about a regular important person from Bil'am.