IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU!

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

> *These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi YissocherFrand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 199, Stam Yeinom: Non-Kosher Wines. Good Shabbos!*

If It Can Happen To Bilaam, It Can Happen to Any of Us

In Parshas Balak we find an incident which if we merely stop to think about, it will teach us a tremendous ethical lesson. For me personally, it is one of the scariest mussar teachings that I find in the Torah.

This incident is with a person named Bilaam, who had a tremendous power of speech. Whoever he blessed was blessed; whoever he cursed was cursed. He was a very powerful man -- a person who did not command divisions of armies; but he had an almost magical power of speech.

He is asked to employ this power against the Jews. He knows that G-d does not want him to go, but he decides to go nevertheless. While on the way, what happens to him? His donkey stops, refuses to move, then all of a sudden the donkey opens up his mouth and starts talking to him. Since the history of the world began such a thing never happened -- and never again will happen -- that a donkey should talk to a man.

If one would have any doubts whether what he was doing was right or wrong and all of a sudden while driving along, his car would stop and tell him "Don't go" (and not just one of those recorded voices saying "Your seatbelt isn't buckled...") -- would that not cause the person to at least stopand wonder whether he was doing the right thing?

We may ask this question even about a person who was not perceptive. But Bilaam was a wise person; he was a perceptive person. How would a perceptive person view his donkey talking to him?

He should have said to himself, "My strength is my speech. Who gave me that power? G-d. The proof is that the same G-d who gave me the power of speech, just gave my donkey the power of speech! *"Who gives a mouth to man or Who makes one dumb..."* [Shemos 4:11] Where is my strength

from? There is no bigger miracle of me talking than my donkey talking. It's the same strength of G-d."

What should Bilaam have concluded? That he was not using his power of speech correctly, and he should turn back. Isn't this as clear as day?Isn't the message clear? Shouldn't that make an impression? And yet it didn't.

This is the lesson to be learned -- how blind a person can be! When a person has some type of personal motive -- whether it be money or power or whatever it is -- a person can literally be completely blind. G-d can almost spell it out to him... G-d CAN spell it out to him, but he won't seeit!

That is what is so frightening. It can be as clear as day to the objective observer, but the person on his way to sin can not see what is in front of his own eyes! This is terribly frightening, because if it can happen to Bilaam, it can happen to every one of us! If Bilaam can be blinded, we can be blinded.

This is the tremendous mussar to be derived from the incident of Bilaam: There are none so blind, as those who will not see.

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