

IF IT CAN HAPPEN TO BILAAM, IT CAN HAPPEN TO ANY OF US

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand'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

Parshas Balak contains an incident which teaches a tremendous ethical lesson. I personally find it to be one of the scariest mussar [ethical] teachings in the Torah.

This incident involves 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 had an almost magical power of speech.

Bilaam 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 nonetheless. While on the way, his donkey stops, refuses to move, and then the donkey suddenly opens up his mouth and starts talking to him. A donkey never talked to a man since the beginning of the history of the world, and such a thing will never happen again.

If a person had any doubts about whether what he was doing was right or wrong, and his car suddenly stopped and told 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 stop and wonder whether he was doing the right thing?

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

Bilaam should have thought, "My strength is my speech. Who gave me that power? G-d gave me that power. 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...' [Shmos 4:11] Where is my strength from? My speech is no bigger of a miracle than my donkey talking. It is the same strength from G-d."

What should Bilaam have concluded? He should have concluded that he was not using his power of

speech correctly, and he should turn back. Is this not as clear as day? Is the message not clear? Should it not that make an impression? Yet it did not have any impact.

This is the lesson to be learned: how blind a person can be! When a person has some type of personal motive -- whether it is 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 still will not see it!

That is what is so frightening. Something can be as clear as day to the objective observer, but the person on his way to sin can not see that which 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 as well.

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

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The Halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

