



**THE GREAT
ATTEMPT
TO MALIGN
THE JEWISH
PEOPLE**

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Balak

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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Balance/Counterbalance: The Power Of Speech vs. the Sword

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1. The Jewish People wanted passage thru Edomite territory.
2. *Moshe*: We were enslaved by the Egyptians & redeemed us when we called out to G-d.
3. *Rashi*: G-d responded due to the blessing we received from our Patriarch Yitzchok and the voice is the voice of *Yaakov*.
4. Edom's response to *Moshe* was: We shall come out with the sword against you.
5. *Rashi*: We also have a blessing from our Patriarch Yitzchok "And you shall live by the sword."
6. *Bilaam* wanted to curse the Jewish People but G-d didn't allow him.
7. *Bilaam* was killed by the sword.
8. *Rashi*: He exchanged his craft for ours so we exchanged ours for his.
9. His craft is "by the sword you shall live"; ours is power of speech – "the voice is of *Yaakov*."
10. "By the sword you shall live" is a classification, not a blessing.
11. Edom came out against the Jews with a strong hand.
12. *Rashi*: "Strong Hand" alludes to the blessing: The hands are the hands of *Esav*.
13. *Midrash*: When the voice is the voice of *Yaakov* the hands are not the hands of *Esav*.
14. *Esav* is the counterbalance to the Jewish People.

When The Megalomaniac Subverts His Will

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1. *Bilaam* rises early to hitch his donkey.
2. G-d responds: Don't think your action is unique—*Avraham*, their forefather, preceded you in this area.
3. *Avraham* rose early to hitch his donkey to the Akeida.
4. He rose to curse the Jews, *Avraham* to do the will of G-d to sacrifice his son.
5. *Chazal*: Hate and Love disrupt protocol.
6. Why did G-d respond to *Bilaam*, which was contrary to G-d's will?
7. *Bilaam* personified evil; he wanted to bring intense prosecution upon the Jews.
8. Though *Bilaam*'s alacrity and zeal were contrary to G-d's will, he demonstrated a level of negation never displayed before in a positive vein.
9. *Avraham* their forefather displayed this characteristic in a more difficult setting.
10. He rose early to sacrifice his son.



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The Exponential Value of the Seemingly Inconsequential

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1. *Bilaam* was commissioned by *Balak* to curse the Jews.
2. He suggested *Balak* build 7 altars to sacrifice a bull and ram on each of them.
3. *Bilaam's* diatribe: He built 7 altars himself, which equaled number of altars of Patriarchs combined.
4. Guide For The Perplexed: The objective of sacrifices is an outlet for one to express his need to serve a Higher Being- G-d.
5. Without this outlet of expression one would serve a deity.
6. *Ramban* vehemently disagrees & rejects *Rambam*.
7. Sacrifices activate-coalesce spiritual forces.
8. Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk: *Ramban* misunderstood *Rambam*.
9. *Rambam* concurs regarding sacrifices brought in the *Mishkan* and Temple.
10. These were brought in locations that had the special effect.
11. *Rambam* refers to sacrifice one brings on his private altar when this was permitted.
12. *Midrash*: The Patriarchs are the location for the Divine Presence.
13. The altar of the Patriarchs was the equivalent of the altar of the Temple.
14. This was not the case with *Bilaam*.

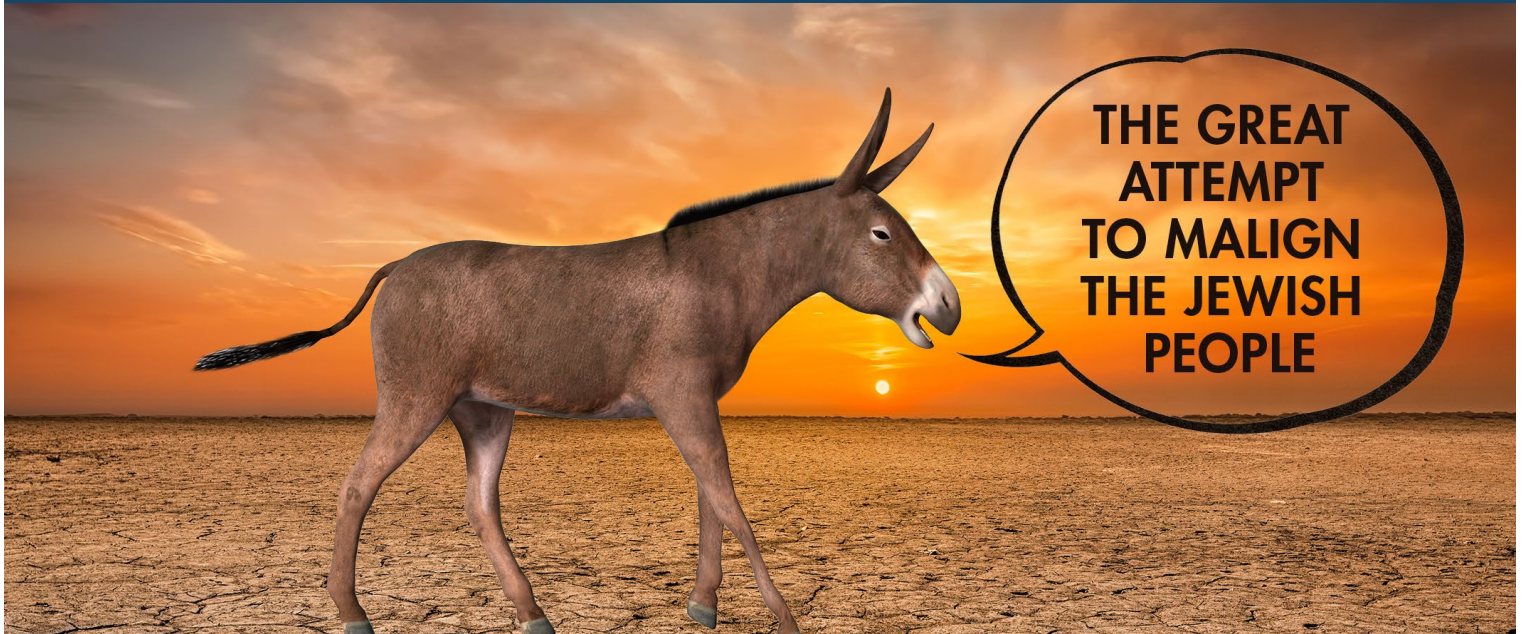
All-Consuming Emotion Trumps All

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1. *Bilaam* hitched his own donkey for travel to curse the Jews.
2. Why would a man of *Bilaam's* renown, a pompous, self centered, megalomaniac, hitch his own donkey?
3. *Avraham* at 137 was told by G-d to bring his beloved son as a burnt offering.
4. He rose early in the morning & hitched his own donkey.
5. A man of *Avraham's* age, wealth, and stature prepared his own donkey?
6. *Midrash*: Intense love disrupts protocol.
7. When one is consumed with intense love or hate, all that exists is negated; all that matters is the objective of the love or hate.
8. One is consumed and subsumed by the objective.
9. To love is greater than to revere.
10. If one is able to achieve an advanced level of love, one will succeed to do the will of G-d because one's personal interests are negated due to the love.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Balak



Appreciating Bilaam's Intense Hatred for the Jewish People

Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers): "A person who has these three characteristics of *Ayin Raah* (Evil Eye), *Ruach Gevoha* (Inflated Spirit/self-centered), and *Nefesh Rechava* (Insatiable Desire) is considered to be a student of *Bilaam* the evil one." If one is bothered by another's good fortune and is arrogant, haughty, and brazen and has an insatiable appetite for material, he is considered a disciple of *Bilaam*.

Torah: "Bilaam arose in the morning and saddled his donkey..."

Rashi citing Chazal: "From here we see "sinah mekalkelis es hashura – hate overrides/disrupts protocol." Although *Bilaam* was a self-centered and egotistical person with an insatiable desire for the material, he nevertheless saddled his own donkey. One would think that a person of *Bilaam's* status, who saw himself worthy of a king's honor, would have had a servant prepare his donkey

for riding. However, because he was driven by intense hate to curse the Jewish people, he did this lowly and mundane chore himself.

Bilaam's saddling of his own donkey was not a premeditated act. It was simply a reflexive action, which revealed his level of hatred for the Jewish people. At that moment nothing existed other than cursing them to bring about their annihilation. *Bilaam's* focus was so singular that he did not consider his own interests and needs, despite his self-centered and egotistical personality.

Torah regarding the building of the *Mishkan* (Sanctuary): (*Parshas Vayakhel*), "Every man whose heart inspired him (*nisaoh libo*) came; and everyone whose spirit motivated (*nadvah rucho*) him brought the portion of *Hashem*..." We see that there were two categories of people who provided for the building of the *Mishkan*: those who were "motivated by their spirit" – *nadvah rucho* and those who gave with an "inspired heart" – *nisaoh libo*.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: The difference between these two categories of people is that one who has a generous heart and motivated by his heart will give to the “best of his ability” to support the cause which he values. Giving to the best of one’s ability means giving to the point that it does not infringe on one’s own needs. In contrast, the “inspired” person gives beyond his means without taking into consideration the infringement on his own needs, because of the degree of his inspiration.

To the “inspired” person all that matters is the cause that needs to be supported and all other concerns are not even noticed. He is consumed with the cause. The person who is *nisaoh libo* “inspired heart” is at a more advanced level than the person who is “motivated” by his heart. *Bilaam*’s intense hatred for the Jewish people mirrored the mind-set of “*nisaoh libo* – one with an inspired heart” in the most negative sense. He was so consumed with bringing about the destruction of the Jewish people that his own self-interest and existence had no relevance at that moment. He was totally negated to bringing about his objective– destroying the Jewish people.

One could think that *Bilaam*’s level of selflessness to bring about the destruction of the Jewish people would cause prosecution to come upon them. Namely, if one can be so solely focused (to the point of negation) for the negative (indicating that it is within the human capacity), then why are the Jewish people not negated to the same degree for the sake of the service of G-d? G-d responds, “*Avraham* their Forefather preceded you (*Bilaam*) in this vein.” *Avraham* demonstrated the same level of self-negation as *Bilaam* but in the most positive sense. As it is stated, “*Avraham* arose in the morning and saddled his donkey...”

Despite the fact that *Avraham* was a person of renown and a man of great wealth, he selflessly arose early in the morning to saddle his own donkey to carry out the Will of G-d. This was a demonstration of *Avraham*’s unlimited love for G-d. His only focus was to perform the *Akeidah* (binding of *Yitzchak*) – despite the fact that he was commanded to slaughter his own beloved son. *Avraham* had an “inspired heart” in the ultimate sense. The only reason he did not reflect on his own status was because he had the nature of *nisaoh libo*. Had *Avraham* not been inspired to this degree, he would not have been able to go to the *Akeidah* to sacrifice his son *Yitzchak*. The only time a Jew waivers about doing the Will of G-d is if he is at the level of “*nadvah rucho*” he is

only motivated by his heart. However if one lives his life totally dedicated to G-d because he is “inspired,” then nothing will interfere with his service of G-d.

Rambam in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (*The Laws of studying Torah*) discusses the manner in which one acquires the “Crown of Torah” (*Kesser Torah*). “The Crown of Torah is lying in the corner. It is available to every Jew who wishes to partake of it,” and to “The one who is inspired by his heart to acquire the Crown of Torah...”

Rambam citing *Pirkei Avos* which outlines how one must live his life to acquire *Torah*: “This is the way of *Torah* – bread with salt you shall eat, water in measured amounts you shall drink, on the floor you shall sleep, and a life of deprivation you shall live.” *Rambam* chooses the term, “the one who is inspired” by his heart regarding the one who has relevance to acquiring the *Kesser Torah* and to mean that he is addressing the one who is singularly focused to acquire *Torah* at that special level. This person, because of his level of inspiration, does not focus on his physical needs. His amenities are only incidental to his objective. All that exists for this person is the *Torah* itself. According to this understanding, what *Pirkei Avos* prescribes has relevance only to the person who is “inspired” and not to the one who chooses to acquire the Crown of *Torah*.

The Lesson to be Learned From *Bilaam*’s Talking Donkey

Torah: When *Bilaam* was en route to curse the Jewish people, G-d sent an angel to abort his mission. At first, only *Bilaam*’s donkey could see the angel and it halted in its tracks and refused to proceed. “The donkey saw the angel of *Hashem* and crouched beneath *Bilaam*. *Bilaam*’s anger flared and he struck the donkey with the staff. *Hashem* opened the mouth of the donkey and it said to *Bilaam*, ‘What have I done to you...’

Mishna: A number of things came into being on the eve of the *Shabbos* of Creation – one of them was the mouth of *Bilaam*’s donkey. The mouth of the donkey was specifically created for this moment in time – when the donkey spoke to *Bilaam*. Why was it important for G-d to create something specifically for this moment? What was the lesson that *Bilaam* was to draw from this event?

Midrash Tanchumah: G-d opened the mouth of *Bilaam*’s donkey to inform him that one’s mouth and ability to

speaking are under the complete jurisdiction of G-d. The power of speech is not one's own ability but rather it is an ability that is granted and controlled by G-d. Just as G-d gave *Bilaam* the power to speak, so too He gave the donkey the power of speech.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The elders of Moav and *Midian* chose *Bilaam* to be the one to protect them from the Jewish people. They had investigated that the victory of the Jews came about through their leader *Moshe*, whose power rested in his mouth (through the power of his speech). Thus, they needed to find an individual who would counter *Moshe*.

Bilaam was known to be one whose power rested in his mouth with his ability to curse. By enabling the donkey to speak, G-d communicated to *Bilaam* that his ability to speak/curse was not his own but rather from Him. Just as G-d gave the ability to a donkey to speak, He could withdraw *Bilaam's* power of speech. After *Bilaam's* donkey spoke to him, the *Torah* states, "Then *Hashem* uncovered *Bilaam's* eyes and he saw the angel of *Hashem* standing on the road with his sword drawn in his hand..."

Midrash: "*Bilaam* was not blind. Nevertheless, G-d opened his eyes to be able to see the angel to demonstrate to him that although he may believe that his ability to see is his own, it is not. All of one's faculties are under the dominion of G-d." Thus, G-d demonstrated to *Bilaam* that not only is his power of speech G-d-given and not to be taken for granted – but, so too his ability to see and perceive. None of *Bilaam's* special, unusual, abilities could be attributed to himself.

Sforno: G-d granting the ability of the donkey to speak is the equivalent of King *David* beseeching G-d with the statement – "G-d open my lips and allow me to utter Your praises." G-d brought about the miracle of *Bilaam's* donkey in order to allow a man such as *Bilaam* – who at that moment was the epitome of evil – to do *teshuvah* (repent). G-d demonstrated to *Bilaam* that He is able to give the power of speech to a creature that has no relevance to this faculty. Therefore, how much more so does G-d have dominion over the speech of one who has relevance to this ability. The creation of the mouth of the donkey was specifically to give *Bilaam* the opportunity to do *teshuvah*. Because of *Bilaam's* dimension of person, his repentance would have had exceptional value because of his ability to affect existence.

Mishna in *Pirkei Avos*: One of *Bilaam's* negative characteristics was *Ruach Gevoha* (Inflated Spirit/self-centered). He was uniquely arrogant and attributed all of his abilities and accomplishments to himself. By allowing his donkey to speak and opening his eyes to see the angel, G-d demonstrated to *Bilaam* that there is no basis for his arrogance. He was not able to pride himself in his special abilities. All of *Bilaam's* faculties and special abilities were endowed by G-d and thus not attributable to himself in any way. If *Bilaam* had internalized this lesson, he would have been humbled and repented. However, *Bilaam* chose to ignore it. If one were to internalize the fact that every aspect of his existence was granted to him by G-d and is not attributable to nature or chance, one would surely be humbled.

Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: One of the Roman emperors had said to one of the great *rabbis* of the *Mishna*, "It says in your *Torah* that the stars of the heavens cannot be counted; however, I know how many stars there are." Not being able to argue with the Roman Emperor the great *rabbi* asked him, "How many teeth does the Emperor have in his mouth?" The Emperor immediately inserted his finger into his mouth and began counting his teeth.

The *rabbi* asked the Emperor, "If you are not aware of the number of teeth in your own mouth and you need to count them, how can you possibly know the number of stars in the heavens?" Meaning, one may believe that he has certain abilities and insights, but in reality, he may not even be aware of the reality that is in front of him. Only through this simple lesson of counting one's teeth could one become aware of his own limitation.

Realizing one's limitations and lack of awareness of many things, causes one to be humbled. Every day we beseech *Hashem* to provide us with intellect, health, abundant blessing, and faculties that function properly, etc. One could mistakenly think that our physical existence and our natural ability (or one's success in life) is a result of chance – as people say, "I happen to be lucky..." However, this is not the case – everything is endowed by G-d.

Therefore, the Men of the High Assembly authored the *Amidah* – with the blessings that beseech *Hashem* in all of the areas of our existence in which one could take for granted. This is to make the Jew cognizant that every aspect of his existence is endowed by G-d.

Thus, we must beseech G-d to provide and endow us our basic existence. If one truly internalizes this reality, one would be humbled.

The Significance of the Number of Blessings in the Amidah

Midrash: G-d endowed *Bilaam's* donkey with the power of speech and opened his eyes to be able to see the angel in order to teach *Bilaam* the lesson that all of one's faculties and abilities are endowed by G-d. Therefore, one has no basis to be arrogant or pride himself in his own abilities or faculties because they are not attributable to his own accomplishment; but rather they are a gift from G-d – which is granted or can be retracted according to His prerogative. G-d performed unique miracles for *Bilaam* in order to give him the opportunity to humble himself and thus allow him to do *teshuvah* (repent); however, he chose differently.

When the Men of the Great Assembly authored the *Amidah* (Silent Prayer), they had taken into account every conceivable need that the Jewish people may have (on an individual and communal level). Since everything that one possesses in the physical sense is not something to be taken for granted, but rather an endowment from G-d – one must beseech Him every day to continuously provide His blessing. If one internalizes this reality, he will understand that he is only a beneficiary and not a benefactor.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: When the Men of the Great Assembly initially authored the *Amidah* it contained 18 blessings (this is why it is referred to as the *Shmoneh Esrei* – eighteen). In fact, there are 19 blessings in the *Amidah*. The blessing to obliterate the heretics was added later by the Men of the Great Assembly. What was the basis for them to author a prayer comprised specifically of 18 blessings? How then were they able to add another blessing at a later point in time?

Gemara: The Men of the Great Assembly authored the *Amidah* with 18 blessings because there are 18 vertebrae in the human spinal column. Every blessing of the *Amidah* corresponds to one of the vertebrae. What is the correlation between the spinal column of the human being and the number of blessings on the *Amidah*? The *halacha* dictates that when one bows in the *Amidah* one must bow from the waist to the point that his vertebrae separate. This is the degree to which one must submit to himself to G-d. It is written “One

should bend like a rod and rise like a snake.”

Gemara: “If there are 18 vertebrae in the spinal column then how could the Men of the Great Assembly add a 19th blessing to the *Amidah*?” Although it was necessary to add the blessing that beseeches G-d to protect us from our enemies, it nevertheless required a source/allusion by which it could be added. There is a 19th bone at the base of the spinal columns, which although it is smaller than the other vertebrae, provides an allusion for the 19th blessing of the *Amidah*. Bowing at the waist to the point that one's vertebrae separate is an acknowledgement that one is subservient to G-d to such a degree that everything that one possesses or receives is only a gift from G-d.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: When one stands in the presence of G-d in the *Amidah*, it is the equivalent of having an audience with the King Himself. One must understand and internalize the fact that everything is an endowment of G-d. Thus, one must submit every aspect of his existence (both in a physical and spiritual sense) to G-d.

Torah: In the *Bais HaMikdash* (Temple) the Jews would prostrate themselves completely. Prostration symbolizes total negation – it is as if to say, “I am like dust in Your Presence.” In addition, the *Torah* tells us that when one brought *Bekurim* (new fruits) to the *Bais HaMikdash* one must prostrate himself before G-d after making the declaration of the *Bekurim*. It is only when one goes through the physical process of prostration that one will truly feel beholden to G-d for every aspect of his existence.

The Path That One Chooses to Walk – He Will Be Led

Bilaam, the prophet of the nations of the world, was commissioned by *Balak* to curse the Jewish people to bring about their destruction. G-d initially said to him, “You shall not go with them! You shall not curse the people for they are blessed!”

Torah: G-d allowed *Bilaam* to go with the ministers that were sent by *Balak* saying, “If the men came to summon you, arise and go with them, but only the thing that I speak to you – that shall you do.” G-d permitted *Bilaam* to go on the condition that he follows His command. “*Bilaam* arose in the morning

and saddled his donkey and went with the ministers of Moav. G-d's wrath flared because he (*Bilaam*) was going (with them)..." The verses cited above seem to be contradictory. Initially G-d said to *Bilaam* that if he is summoned (by the ministers) he is permitted to go. However, when *Bilaam* chooses to go with the ministers it ignited G-d's wrath.

Midrash regarding this interchange between G-d and *Bilaam*: "From this we are able learn the principle 'Whatever path one desires to pursue, he will be led along that path (by G-d).'" If one desires to pursue a path – whether it be positive or negative – G-d will assist that person – even if that path is contrary to the Will of G-d. "Initially G-d did not permit *Bilaam* to follow the emissaries that were sent by *Balak* to summon him to curse the Jewish people. However, because *Bilaam* was adamant and steadfast in his desire to go with them, G-d allowed him to go. Nevertheless, it was against the Will of G-d. Thus, it ignited the wrath of G-d." It is because "G-d does not want to destroy the *reshaim* (evil). However if *Bilaam* chose the path that would lead to his own destruction, then G-d allowed it to happen and even assisted him to succeed in that vein."

Mishna in *Pirkei Avos*: "There is no reward (for a *mitzvah*) in this world." Since a *mitzvah* generates reward that has relevance to eternity and the infinite, it is not possible for one to receive the reward of a *mitzvah* within the limitations of physical existence. Since, there is no one who is totally evil, even the *rasha* (evil) performs some good deeds in his life (albeit minimal), for which he is deserving of reward.

Torah: "G-d pays his enemies (in this world) so that they may be destroyed (no claim to the world to come)..." How is it possible for the *rasha* (evil) to receive reward in the physical world for something that is as unlimited as a *mitzvah*? He only receives an infinitesimally small fraction of what the actual reward should be. Seemingly this payment of reward does not conform with posture of G-d that He is "All just and faithful."

However, with the principle stated in the *Midrash* and the *Gemara* (in Tractate *Makkos*) that 'Whatever path one desires to pursue, he will be led along that path (by G-d). we are able to understand why the evil person/*rasha* is not being denied what is rightfully his. Because the *rasha* chooses the path of evil and has no interest in spirituality (or G-dliness), his focus and desire are only to satisfy his material needs. Thus, G-d provides him

with the reward that he desires- a reward in this world. The principle of "Whatever path one desires to pursue, he will be led along that path (by G-d)," not only applies within a negative context but also in a positive one. If one truly desires to be a *tzaddik*, G-d will assist him to succeed and achieve that goal.

It is interesting to note that the ultimate manner to perform a *mitzvah* is *l'shmah* (for its own sake). *Rambam* in his commentary on the *Mishna* at the end of Tractate *Makkos*: One only merits that special place in the world to come when one performs a *mitzvah b'shleimus* (perfectly – for its own sake). Thus, even when one succeeds in the performance of a *mitzvah* and spiritual development (for the sake of G-d), one could mistakenly think that the basis for his success is his own determination, rather than it being attributed to G-d assisting him along the path that he chose to pursue. The only reason one succeeds and advances in the spiritual realm is that G-d provides him with the necessary assistance.

The *rasha* makes the mistake of believing that his success (in the negative) is purely attributed to his own ability. In fact he is only meeting success in his pursuit of evil because G-d is assisting him along the path of destruction – which he chose. Identically, one should not pride himself for succeeding along the proper path of spirituality (*Torah* and *mitzvos*) – because the only basis for that success is because 'whatever path one desires to pursue, he will be led along that path (by G-d).' It is often the case that when one pursues something in the material sense, he does so with a passion, because one truly desires to succeed. If one wonders why he has not succeeded to the degree that he had hoped in his spiritual endeavors, he must ask himself if he truly desires it as much as he would desire something in the material realm.

Rabban Gamliel the son of *Reb Yehudah HaNassi* in *Pirkei Avos*: "You should make His will like your will so that He should make your will like His will." It is only when one truly desires and is driven to accomplish His Will, then G-d surely will assist him along that path.

Truth Can Only be Perceived Through Humility

Chazal: *Bilaam* who was the prophet of the nations of the world, prophesized at the level of *Moshe Rabbeinu*.

Despite the fact that G-d communicated with *Bilaam* at a similar level as *Moshe*, *Bilaam* was nonetheless a person who did not fully comprehend G-d. One would think that a person who prophesizes at such a level would have the clarity to put life into perspective and thus cause him to pursue a life of piety. Despite *Bilaam's* level of prophecy, he was evil and corrupt.

Mishna in *Pirkei Avos*: "A person who has the three characteristics: *Ayin Tovah* (Good Eye), *Ruach Nemucha* (Humble Spirit), and *Nefesh Shefelah* (satisfied with limited amount of physical) is considered to be a student of *Avraham Avinu*." If a person has *Ayin Tovah*, he is truly happy when he sees his fellow experience good fortune. He is thus not distracted by his fellow's predicament. A person who has *Ruach Nemucha* is humble and not self-absorbed – and thus sees things as they are. A person whose temperament is *Nefesh Shefelah* is one who has no interest in pursuing the physical for its own sake. If one possesses these three characteristics, then he is considered a disciple of *Avraham* our Patriarch.

On the other hand, as we said earlier, the *Mishna* continues, "A person who has the three characteristics of *Ayin Raah* (Evil Eye), *Ruach Gevoha* (Inflated Spirit/arrogant), and *Nefesh Rechava* (Insatiable Desire) is considered to be a student of *Bilaam* the evil one." If a person is pained by another's good fortune and is arrogant, haughty, and brazen and has an insatiable need for the material, he is considered a disciple of *Bilaam*.

Torah: *Bilaam* had said to *Balak*, "Even if *Balak* will give me his houseful of silver and gold..." Although *Bilaam* was a commoner, he desired and believed that he was deserving of the wealth of a king.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: *Avraham* our Patriarch was the first human being to recognize G-d as the Master of the Universe on his own. As the *Torah* tells us, that *Avraham* referred to G-d as, "Adnee (Master)." How was it possible for *Avraham* to recognize G-d's Omnipotence despite the world's devotion and belief

in paganism? The three most humble people that ever lived were – *Avraham*, *Moshe*, and Dovid HaMelech (King *David*). *Avraham* possessed a unique quality of humility that did not exist. He was not self-absorbed to any degree and his focus was completely outside of himself.

The only way one can perceive truth is if his focus is outward rather than inward – to accommodate his own interest and needs. If a person is self-absorbed then his perspective of life revolves around his own interests - to the exclusion of all else. Although G-d, the Creator and Master of the Universe communicated directly to *Bilaam*, he was not able to fully comprehend the gravity of G-d's dimension. This was because he was consumed with his own interest and ego.

Bilaam could not internalize truth at any level. His arrogance, insolence, and pursuit of hedonism did not allow him to see G-d outside of his own need. Self-centeredness and ego can cause one to be oblivious to many realities of life. One who is self-absorbed can be exposed and privy to the greatest source of wisdom and spirituality and remain unaffected.

A doctor had advised his heart patient not to go beyond a half hour's travel from a hospital facility. Despite the doctor's instruction, the patient insisted on going on a cruise that would take him far from any medical facility. He told the doctor, "I want to go despite your warning and I take full responsibility if I die!" How is it possible for a person to behave so irrationally at the risk of losing his life? How could a cruise that lasts only a few days have greater value than living several more years? If the "I" and the "Me" are paramount, then nothing matters at that moment other than satisfying one's own interests and needs.

It was because of *Avraham's* humility that he was able to perceive G-d and the truth despite the fact that he lived in a pagan world. Contrastingly, it was because of *Bilaam's* allconsuming ego that he could not perceive G-d/truth despite his open communication with Him.

