

From the top of rocks I see him and from the hills I behold him. (23:9)

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, interprets this *pasuk* as a perspective on history. Just as distances draw together in a panoramic view from a height, so it is with time. From a comprehensive survey of world history over centuries taken from above, events seem close together. When one views these events from the closer perspective of the present, they seem farther from one another. To quote *Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita*, "If one wishes to comprehend an event in history, one cannot look at it in the limited scope of the finite, here and now; rather, one must understand the event as having a place in the historical continuum. A historical occurrence extends itself beyond the isolation of time and space and reaches forth towards the future and back to the past in order to acquire true significance." In other words, a certain event might not be comprehensible to one looking at an occurrence in the present. When he views it from afar, through the distance of time, however, it will seem to fit in and make sense.

Rashi cites the *Midrash* which offers an alternative interpretation. Bilaam proclaimed that he was helpless; he could do nothing to frustrate *Klal Yisrael*, to sway them from the proper path. Bilaam said, "I see them not only as they are now, but I see them from the tops of the rocks, I behold them from the hills. They are anchored; they are firmly pinned down like rocks to their fathers and mothers." Bilaam understood *Klal Yisrael's* secret weapon, their shield against the challenge of assimilation. As *Horav Moshe Swift, zl*, aptly puts it, "*Klal Yisrael* is so firmly entrenched, the foundation of their relationship is so deep, that there is no dynamite in the world that can blow such rocks apart."

Bilaam did advise Balak. He related to him a method to effect *Klal Yisrael's* destruction. They cannot be destroyed by physical means, by conventional warfare. Too many people have attempted to crush us, to destroy us as a nation, to wipe us out as a people. They have failed. They might prevail in one country, only to observe us flourishing anew in another country. We are unlike any other nation. The only way to destroy *Klal Yisrael* is from within, by making us break with the past.

Klal Yisrael settled in Shittim. Bilaam knew that luring the men away from their families, husbands from their wives, fathers from their children, and children from their parents, would break the link, snap the chain, detach them from their secure anchorage. Yes indeed, whenever the past has been something of which we were ashamed, something we sought to conceal, a lifestyle and culture from which we sought severance, Bilaam has triumphed. Let us remember to build the future upon the foundation of the past.