

"And the donkey saw the angel of Hashem... and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field." (22:23) - "And the angel of Hashem stood in a hollow way between the vineyards, a fence (being) on this (side) and a fence (being) on this (side)." (22:24) - "And the angel of Hashem again passed, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left." (22:26)

Horav Chaim Ehrentrau, z.l., points out that the three places at which the angel stood opposite Bilaam, barring his path, symbolize man's three points of digression from freedom towards his ultimate loss of *bechirah*, free-will. In the beginning, the road towards sin appears to be a wide opening, from which it is easy to turn away to the right or left -- or even turn back. This was Bilaam's original situation. He could have returned to his home and redeemed himself.

The sinner who remains adamant, continuing along his path of evil, encounters a narrower path. Although return from this path is conceivable, it is difficult. He is now constricted on both sides, locked into a tight and awkward position. Just as Bilaam was fenced into the narrow path in the vineyards, man must work diligently to perform *teshuvah*, repentance. The path of return still remains accessible.

As the sinner reaches the third rung on the ladder of sin, the situation changes. At this stage one has nowhere to turn, neither to the right nor to the left. The *teshuvah* process is no longer imminent. The sinner has lost his opportunity to choose between right and wrong, since he has been completely overwhelmed by the power of the *yetzer hora*. That Bilaam conceded his own arrogance serves as a lesson for us in our daily battle with the *yetzer hora*.