

## "I have set up the seven altars." (23:4)

Bilaam emphasizes to Hashem that he had instructed Balak to erect seven altars. *Rashi* explains that Bilaam emphasized the number of altars for a specific reason. By virtue of erecting seven altars, Bilaam sought to negate the combined efforts of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, who had built seven altars through their combined efforts. Bilaam foolishly thought that he could equate his altars to the altars erected by the *Avos*, Patriarchs, by merely constructing the same number of altars.

*Horav D. Feinstein, Shlita*, suggests that perhaps Bilaam attributed a special significance to the number seven. Since *Bnei Yisrael* had seven altars to their credit, he erected the same number of altars in order to prevail over theirs. This is why Bilaam uses the word *shvua*, which indicates a septet, rather than *shivva*, which is simply the number seven.

We may wonder why Bilaam's altars could not prevail over the merit of the Patriarch's altars. We may suggest the following thoughts. Although Bilaam possessed many supernatural powers, he was not capable of overwhelming the strength of the *Avos*. The power generated by a group, especially one representing three generations of devotion to Hashem, is awesome. May this be a lesson for us. When *Klal Yisrael* works together as a unified group, those who dare challenge the Jews will do so to no avail. This was Bilaam's error. It is not sufficient to erect altars. These altars must be imbued with the same devotion and *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, that is reflected by the altars of the *Avos*.

We may suggest another reason for Bilaam's lack of success. Bilaam built the altars solely for one reason, in order to destroy *Klal Yisrael*. One cannot build for the purpose of destruction and hope to succeed. While it may momentarily seem that things are working out in his favor, the negative orientation will not endure. This idea applies to so many instances in which individuals or organizations find excuses for creating new institutions. If one's objectives are noble and true to their stated purpose, they have a legitimate reason for existence. The efforts of those establishments whose goal is destruction and whose foundation is cemented with obsessive loathing, however, will be sabotaged by their own self-hatred. Bilaam's failure should serve as a lesson to us all in our approach to building community and institutions, so that *Klal Yisrael* will prosper and flourish.