

He sent messengers to Bilaam ben Beor to Pesor. (22:5)

The *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* (5:22) distinguishes between the *talmidim*, disciples, of Bilaam *ha'rasha*, and those of Avraham *Avinu*. The three character traits which are the hallmarks of Avraham's students are: *ayin tovah*, a good eye, *ruach nemuchah*, lowly, humble spirit; and *nefesh shefalah*, a meek soul. *Ayin tovah* is listed first – and rightfully so – because it plays a leading role in defining one's character. *Rabbeinu Yonah* explains *ayin tovah* as generosity of spirit, a *middah* of the kindhearted person who goes out of his way to perform good deeds, to shower his benevolence on others. He cites Avraham *Avinu's* behavior in welcoming the three Heavenly Angels, who appeared in the guise of Arab travelers, to his tent. Avraham went to slaughter three heads of cattle and prepare a tongue for each one. While this is certainly an impressive display of human kindness, is this all that he did? Avraham's home was known for its open doors that welcomed anyone who visited. People came from far and wide and were treated impressively. What was so special about the three tongues that seems to capture such attention?

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, differentiates between two forms of *chesed*, or rather, two types of *baalei chesed*, individuals who perform acts of lovingkindness. There is the average, common *baal chesed*, an individual, who, when presented with a situation that calls for a “kindness response,” will act accordingly, rise to the occasion and execute the kindness. A person requires a meal – he gives him a meal; he needs a place to sleep – he provides him with a place to rest his weary body. He is in dire financial straits – he will find some way to alleviate his predicament. He will act appropriately – when needed – no more and no less. This is the typical *baal chesed*.

The *baal chesed* whose acts of kindness are motivated by his *ayin tovah* not only seeks to provide what the subject of his kindness needs, but he also ensures that he has the best of whatever he requires. He treats him as if he were treating himself. The *ayin tovah* asks: What would I do if it were I who was in need? Avraham could have filled the stomachs of the travelers with meat, or they could have all shared one tongue. He did not have to slaughter three head of cattle, so that each one would have his own tongue. Avraham, however, was doing more than addressing their “needs”; he was addressing their “wants.”

Perhaps we can present it from the following perspective: *ayin tovah* does not merely mean “a good eye”; rather, it implies an “eye for good.” The *baal chesed* seeks opportunities and venues in which he can do good. Avraham *Avinu* personified the *ayin tovah*, the generosity of spirit whereby he treated his guests in the same manner that he himself would like to be treated.

We now understand the depth of Bilaam's evil – in contrast with Avraham's good. Bilaam could not tolerate another person's good fortune. He resented giving away what he had earned. He could not tolerate others who had, even though it had no bearing on his own personal possessions or position.

How we provide others with relief, sustenance, both financial and material, makes a world of

difference. One's attitude as he executes acts of lovingkindness speaks volumes about his real intentions. Is he acting for public acclaim, to satisfy his feelings of guilt, or is he truly a benevolent person who has an "eye for the good" and wants to do whatever he can – and more? Avraham went looking for people to welcome; he sought out travelers and provided them with what he thought they needed.

I think there is another lesson to be derived from *Chazal's* choice of words. They state that those who possess the three abovementioned positive character traits are disciples of Avraham, while those who possess the three negative character traits are students of Bilaam. Students follow their mentor's practices – his actions, mannerisms, philosophical thoughts. Since when does a student adapt his mentor's character traits? Apparently, one who is mentored by a powerful personality adopts his mentor's character traits. Avraham *Avinu's talmidim* became humble, meek, satisfied with what they had, while Bilaam's students were arrogant, base, power hungry. A true teacher molds his students into his own personality. We do not just become scholars; we become people of the caliber of our *rebbeim*. A *rebbe* does not just make a robot; he replicates himself in his *talmidim*.