

Neither an Amoni or Moavi may enter the congregation of Hashem... because they did not greet you with bread and water... and because he hired Bilaam... to curse you. (23:4,5)

The Amonite and Moavite nations are forever barred from marrying a Jewish woman – regardless of the sincerity and irreproachable nature of his conversion. Why? The Torah gives two reasons for this discrimination: they did not greet our ancestors with bread and water during their difficult journey through the wilderness; they hired Bilaam to curse the Jews. These reasons beg elucidation. If it is due to their lack of *chesed*, kindness, what qualifies other nations for acceptance as converts? Have we not suffered at their hands throughout the millennia? Furthermore, what connection is there between their lack of kindness and their hiring of Bilaam to curse us?

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, explains that these nations did not only act inappropriately as neighboring nations, but they also failed to act in their own best interests! After the Jewish nation left Egypt amidst great miracles and wonders, every nation of the world trembled with fear, each one scared of what the Jews might do to them. No one was foolish enough to start up with the Jews. This did not seem to bother Amon and Moav. Why were they so obtuse? Indeed, they could have even capitalized on the fact that as descendants of Lot, Avraham *Avinu's* nephew, they were “family” with the Jews. Why would they start up with us?

There can be only one answer, one reason which prevented them from acting— or even thinking rationally— as human beings. It was their implacable hatred for the Jews that did not allow them to think cogently, to act with common sense and to show kindness to a nation traveling in the hot wilderness, and, especially, to a nation which the whole world feared. When one hates, he cannot think. The bread and water indicated how intense their hatred really was. The Torah is not troubled by their lack of character refinement, but rather, by their inhuman hatred towards the Jewish People.

On the other hand, perhaps they were a principled nation. They were not going to act like hypocrites. If they hated someone, then they were incapable of putting on a show and being nice to them. They were not going to be fakers and bring out bread and water to a nation whom they despised. If so, rather than revile them, perhaps we should show them respect. After all, how often does one come across a principled pagan?

The answer to this question is that they were not so principled after all. We have proof positive from the fact that they hired Bilaam to curse us. *Chazal* teach us that Moav was not the first nation to hire Bilaam. Sichon hired Bilaam to curse Moav. Yet, it did not bother them to go to Bilaam who had cursed them and ask him to curse the Jews.

Despite their deep hatred for Bilaam, the Moavites were willing to swallow their pride, to pay homage to Bilaam – all so that he would curse the Jews. They despised Bilaam – but they hated

the Jews even more. They made a major cover-up when they hired Bilaam. No longer did they hate him. He was now their friend and partner. They were quite willing to be the hypocrites if it meant crushing the Jewish People. This is why their converts may not marry a Jewish woman. We may not permit a scion of a nation filled with such animus towards us to join with us in serving Hashem. We would not want them to be greater hypocrites than they already are.