

"An Amonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem... Because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water... and because they hired Bilaam ... to curse you." (23:4,5)

The *Torah* clearly presents two reasons for banning an Amonite or a Moabite from marrying a Jew. *Rashi*, however, cites only their procuring Bilaam to effect our spiritual destruction as grounds for their exclusion. Why does *Rashi* omit their lack of character refinement as motive for barring them from *Klal Yisrael*? *Horav Elyakim Schlesinger, Shlita*, responds to this question by first addressing a similar question regarding the death of Lot's wife.

When Lot and his family were escaping the inferno which destroyed Sodom, his wife disobeyed the command not to look back. Consequently, she was turned into a pillar of salt. *Rashi* explains that her punishment was specific; it was a direct result of her refusal to serve salt, a simple condiment, to her guests. Such a punishment seems overly harsh and inconsistent with the transgression. *Horav Schlesinger* suggests that her insensitive treatment of her guests was not the reason for her death. Every transgression has a specific retribution consistent to the degree of its gravity.

The performance of certain *mitzvos* and various good deeds serve as a safeguard against punishment. Thus, retribution can be averted through the earned merit of *mitzvos*. Lot's wife was destined to perish and be transformed into a pillar of salt because of her violation of the angel's command. Had she had the merit of treating her guests decently by serving them properly, being sensitive to their simple needs, she would have been spared punishment. Her lack of sensitivity to others sealed her fate, but was not the actual rationale for her punishment.

Similarly, the Amonite and Moabite people deserved severe sanctions as a result of their attempts to catalyze the spiritual downfall of our people. Had they shown some human decency when we were in need, they might have been spared. Their continued lack of *menshlichkeit*, character refinement, sealed their ultimate doom.

We may derive from here that one should be meticulous in observing all *mitzvos* regardless of their apparent level of significance. We do not know by virtue of which *mitzvah* or good deed our deserved punishment has been mitigated or even reprieved.