

"And Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am Yosef.' ... and his brothers could not answer him." (45:3)

In the *Midrash*, *Chazal* quote Abba Bardela who said, "*Woe is to us from the day of judgment. Woe is to us from the day of reproach. Bilaam, the wisest of the gentiles, could not stand before the rebuke of his donkey. Yosef was the youngest of the tribes. Yet, his brothers could not stand before him. How much more so, when Hashem will come and reproach everyone according to what he is, will we not be able to tolerate this rebuke.*" This *Chazal* has been the subject of considerable discussion. It has served as the basis for defining the *Torah's* concept of rebuke. There is one point, however, which must be addressed - the added corroboration from Bilaam's dialogue with his donkey. Why does Abba Bardela cite the donkey's rebuke, and why does it precede the proof from Yosef?

Horav Yitzchak Aizik Sher, zl, derives a fascinating lesson from *Chazal*. If we were to think about the narrative concerning Bilaam and his donkey, we would be amazed to note what is occurring. Imagine that while we are traveling on the road, we come across an animal that suddenly begins a conversation with us. The animal begins to point out areas of our behavior that could use some improvement. We would be overwhelmed by this confrontation. This is a miracle! It is a wonder of wonders to have an animal address us with words of *seichal*, common sense, and rebuke us concerning our lax behavior. Yet, we see that Bilaam had this type of confrontation. Not only was he not dumbfounded, but he offered a rejoinder to the donkey and even berated it in the manner that a master would discipline his slave. This all changed the moment the donkey adapted his approach and told Bilaam, "Am I not the donkey that you have ridden on for awhile? Do I deserve such ingratitude from you?" Suddenly, Bilaam's attitude changed and he confessed to his wrongdoing. What happened? Why did he make an about-face and respond like a "*mensch*" to the donkey? The answer is that -- despite his audacity and arrogance -- when he was confronted face to face with the blatant truth, even Bilaam could not deny reality and walk away. He had to respond to the donkey's allegation. No person or power can stand up to the truth and ignore it.

A similar encounter occurred to the brothers of Yosef. They were mighty warriors, devout in their conviction. Above all, they were totally secure in the decision they had rendered concerning their brother, Yosef. Nothing stood in their way. If necessary, they would destroy Egypt if the Egyptians were to refuse to release Binyamin. What happened that made their resolve disintegrate? What shattered their belief in themselves? Two words: "*Ani Yosef; I am Yosef.*" That was all it took to overturn twenty-two years of confidence in the integrity of their decision to destroy Yosef. The instant they were confronted with the truth they knew that their basic belief was erroneous. Is it any wonder that they reacted with such shock, disbelief and fear? This is the added proof from Bilaam. Regardless of how great the opponent, nothing and no one can stand in the way of *emes*!