

Neither an Amoni nor a Moavi may enter the congregation of Hashem... because they did not greet you with bread and water... and because he hired Bilaam ben Be'or... to curse you. (23:4,5)

An Amoni or Moavi, even after he has fully converted to Judaism, is forever barred from marrying a Jewish woman. The reason for this exclusion: A) They did not greet us nicely when we were journeying towards *Eretz Yisrael*; B) They hired Bilaam to curse us. Their lack of *chesed*, acting kindly, appears to be more of a character flaw than a sin. Clearly, such a moral stain should disappear over time. We have been persecuted, hounded and murdered by so many nations. Yet, their character flaws do not seem to present a hindrance to their acceptance as converts. Why are Amon and Moav held to such a "high" standard that prevents us from accepting them as converts? Furthermore, what connection exists between their lack of kindness to us and their having hired Bilaam to curse us?

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, responds to the first question concerning these nations lack of kindness. First of all, giving bread and water to the Jews would have been an act of self-preservation for them. The Jewish People had succeeded in vanquishing all their enemies. Any nation that stood in their way became history. If these nations would have had an ounce of common sense, they would have bent over backwards to serve the Jews. Yet, they refrained from doing so. Why? Hatred. They harbored an animus so intense that they were prepared to die, rather than supply the Jews with bread and water.

It was not their lack of *chesed* which deemed them unacceptable as Jewish converts; rather, it was their intense loathing of the Jewish People, with an implacable hatred that was revealed when they refused to help the Jews in their time of need. Their hatred was so acute that it superseded man's innate desire for self-preservation. This is not natural. This is much more – and far deeper – than a character flaw. This is an indication of an abnormality in their DNA. We can do without such additions to the fold.

On the other hand, we should say something in their defense. The *Rosh Yeshivah* observes that at least they were a people of principle. They refused to act contrary to their feelings. If they hated us, they would absolutely not feed us – even if it might cost them their lives. To them, a life without principles was of no value. If they hated someone, they would do absolutely nothing to ameliorate their hatred by acting kindly. One does not act kindly towards someone whom he hates.

This defense of Amon and Moav conjures up a question: their internal struggle with hypocrisy would last only until they became Jewish. Once they converted, they could no longer hate Jews. No more contradictions. So, why not allow them to convert? This is where reason number two, hiring Bilaam to curse the Jews, comes into play. It shows that they had no principles. Not only

were they filled with hatred towards the Jews, they were thoroughly flawed inside and out – with no principles to speak of.

Moav was not the first nation to hire Bilaam to curse their enemy. Sichon hired Bilaam to curse his enemy: Moav. Yes, Moav was the subject of Bilaam's cursing – and he fared very well. Moav was defeated by Sichon. They had every reason to despise Bilaam. As people of "principle," they should have abandoned the despicable Bilaam for what he did to them. Not only did they not revile him, they honored him and threw all kinds of money at him for one purpose: to curse *Klal Yisrael*. They could be very proper, even respectful and kind, when it was for their own benefit. They were hypocrites of the lowest order. Their hatred for the Jews knew no bounds. They were prepared to coddle the contemptible Bilaam as long as he would curse the Jews. This attitude manifests more than a character flaw. This is an indication of a profound pathology in their souls. People who maintain such a condition cannot coalesce with the Jewish People.