

Never again has there arisen in Yisrael a prophet like Moshe. (34:10)

Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 14:32) note the Torah's statement concerning Moshe *Rabbeinu* that *Klal Yisrael* would never produce a *Navi* of the stature of Moshe. This does not preclude the gentile nations from producing a prophet whose gift of prophecy would parallel that of Moshe. This prophet was Bilaam. *Ramban* explains that, under no terms, was Bilaam comparable to Moshe. No prophet approached Moshe's level of *nevuah*. Bilaam achieved his communication with Hashem only after exhausting preparation and only concerning the specific subject that he had selected. Moshe, however, could be summoned at any time to discuss anything. The fact that Bilaam was acutely aware of the nature of his anticipated prophecy is inherently an inference to his inferiority to Moshe.

Comparing Moshe, the *Adon ha'Neviim*, master of all prophets, to a low-life such as Bilaam is, in and of itself, shocking. To mention the two names in one breath is an insult to Moshe. Nonetheless, *Chazal* are teaching us that the gentiles have no excuse for their base character, ethical and moral bankruptcy, which results from a lack of leadership. After all, they had a leader whose level of prophecy is comparable to that of Moshe. Interestingly, *Chazal (Pirkei Avos 6)* ask what is the difference between the students of Avraham *Avinu* and those of Bilaam *ha'rasha*. They explain that Bilaam's students follow him to *Gehinom*, Purgatory. Why do *Chazal* compare Bilaam's students to Avraham's students? Why not compare them to Moshe's students? After all, Bilaam and Moshe had similar prophetic powers. In *Parashas Balak*, we read about the dialogue that ensued between Bilaam and his donkey, which was one of the ten wondrous creations that came into being during *ben hashmashos*, dusk, of the sixth day of Creation. We wonder why it was imperative to alter nature to create a talking donkey. If the purpose was to delay/halt Bilaam from going forward with his plan to curse the Jewish People, Hashem could have just as well sent an angel.

Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl (L'Maan Achai v'Reiai), explains that while Bilaam possessed extraordinary prophetic powers, we can find absolutely no comparison between him and Moshe. Our quintessential leader and *Rabban Shel Kol Yisrael* was the *mekabel haTorah*, having received the Torah from Hashem. The Torah which Moshe received, which includes our 613 *mitzvos*, purifies and elevates the Jewish soul (and especially Moshe) to unprecedented and unsurpassed spiritual and moral pinnacles. Moshe represented the meridian of spiritual achievements. Bilaam lived and represented the opposite. To have reached the pinnacle of speaking with Hashem, and yet continue to wallow in the moral filth which was his trademark, was an indication that Bilaam and Moshe had parted ways in their relationship to the spiritual sphere.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was suffused with and enhanced by the Torah. Thus, any comparison between him and Bilaam was absurd. Avraham *Avinu* did not receive the Torah and was not bound by its 613 *mitzvos*, yet he developed his *ayin tovah*, good eye, subdued spirit of humility, and modest personality. Bilaam was the exact opposite. Apparently, the students of these two contrasting leaders followed their teachers in their personal and public demeanor. Thus, the *Mishnah* focuses

on the contrast between Avraham's disciples and Bilaam's disciples. It was not about Torah, it was about personal spiritual development. Bilaam let himself descend to the pits of infamy and moral profligacy.

With regard as to why the Torah sees fit to include Bilaam's dialogue with his donkey, and why it was necessary to include the donkey in the ten wondrous creations of *bein ha'shmashos*, Rav Sorotzkin explains that this wondrous donkey saw a Heavenly angel, and he remained the same donkey as before. This not only describes the donkey's failing, but it also characterizes the failing of Bilaam, who was a man who spoke to G-d and achieved the apex of distinction in the spiritual sphere; yet, he remained the same immoral, uncouth and spiritually deficient Bilaam.

He was a perfect fit for his followers.