

From Aram, Balak, King of Moav, led me, from the mountains of the east, "Come curse Yaakov for me, come bring anger upon Yisrael." (23:7)

Bilaam begins his curse/blessing. His opening remarks convey a profound message. Bilaam lived in Aram, which was northeast of *Eretz Yisrael*. He says that Balak led him from the mountains of the east, which, according to the *Midrash Tanchuma*, is an allusion to the Patriarchs who were the spiritual "mountains" of the eastern world. He claims that Balak distanced him from the feelings of gratitude they both should have felt towards our ancestors. Balak's kingdom of Moav descended from Lot, Avraham *Avinu's* nephew, who lived to father children only as a result of Avraham's intervention. Bilaam's ancestor, Lavan, was blessed with sons only after Yaakov *Avinu's* arrival at his home. In other words, Bilaam was criticizing Balak, asserting that his people had no animus toward *Klal Yisrael*. In fact, they owed their very existence to this nation's ancestors. How could they curse this People?

Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, takes note of *Chazal's* words. These base people feared nothing and no one. They had no compunction whatsoever about cursing an innocent, harmless nation who had done nothing to harm them. They were prepared to villify *Klal Yisrael*, wishing upon them disaster and annihilation. What prevented them from achieving their goals? What was there that evoked their conscience for what they were about to do? *Ha'koras ha'tov*, appreciation/gratitude, compelled them to refrain from following through on their malevolent intentions.

Let us momentarily focus on the reason for their gratitude. One would think that it was a saint who was making these remarks. They felt that they were indebted to the Jews, because indirectly their ancestors had been responsible for their existence. This is an incredible statement. Yet, this is what Bilaam said. He was not a saint, but a *rasha merusha*, evil and wicked individual, who was bent on destroying the innocent Jews. Nothing prevented him from seeing his evil objective reach fruition, other than *ha'koras ha'tov*. The lesson that applies to each of us is overwhelming. A pagan prophet, who represented consummate evil, felt he should refrain from cursing the Jews because of a sense of appreciation he should have to their ancestors. Need we say more regarding our responsibility towards *ha'koras ha'tov*?