

"And Bilam lifted up his eyes." (24:2)

Rashi explains that Bilam desired to bring upon the *Bnei Yisroel* an evil eye and here you have his three traits, an evil eye, and an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul.

Rashi refers here to the *Mishna* in *Avos* (5:19) which delineates between the disciples of Bilam and the disciples of Avrohom. The disciples of Avrohom possess the attributes of a "good eye", a humble temperament, and a lowly spirit, while the disciples of Bilam possess an evil eye, a haughty temperament, and an *insatiable spirit*. Two prototypes are contrasted in the *Mishnah* - Avrohom and Bilam. Yet, had these individuals been contemporaries, their people would have found it difficult to discern between them. Both were dignified, and spoke with the Divinity. Regarding each as individuals, some might have had trouble discerning who was truly good and who was evil. Throughout our history we have had many "pairs" who have had strong external resemblances, both perhaps acting piously, both claiming to be on the side of Heaven. How are we to discern between the one who is sincere and reputable to the one who is not?

Reb Yitzchak Bunim Z"tl remarks that the *Mishna* offers a very penetrating view to discern between the two. "*By their disciples*" it suggests you shall know them. Bilam was an excellent prophet. His famous statement, "*how good are your tents Yaakov, your dwelling places, Yisroel*" is recorded in the *Torah*. But to truly judge him, examine his "disciples", they were the ones who learned from him to lead the Jews to sin, causing Hashem's decree of death on 24,000 of the *Bnei Yisroel* at Shittim. Today as well this problem exists. How can we tell the good from the bad when both seem equally worthy? The *Mishnah's* formula remains valid; look at the disciples, study their followers. Look at what the leaders' philosophies spawned. Many have attempted to reach for the mantle of authenticity and authority. Those who produced followers who were *Torah* true Jews were the authentic, sincere disseminators of *Torah* values. The other produced half-baked leaders who made up with arrogance what they lacked in knowledge. "Look at the disciples."

Why should a disciple's habits and actions reflect so on his teacher? The response is that a leader's philosophies and approach to life so permeate his student that they become ingrained in him to the point that student and teacher become unified. If a student or follower exhibits tendencies in conflict with the teacher's true philosophy, he is guided back on the proper path. If the teacher does not succeed then the symbiotic relationship ceases. A leader doesn't permit his followers to expound principles in his name unless he is in agreement. Look at the disciples and the teacher's ideology will be mirrored in their actions.