

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

*Rashi* explains that Bilaam desired to bring upon *Bnei Yisrael* an evil eye. Here Bilaam's three character traits - an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and a greedy soul are exhibited.

*Rashi* is referring to the *Mishna* in *Avos* (5:19) which contrasts the disciples of Bilaam to those of Avraham. The disciples of Avraham possess the attributes of a "good eye," a humble temperament, and an insatiable spirit. Upon concluding the three comparisons between Bilaam's and Avraham's disciples, this same *Mishna* questions the difference between the disciples. The *Mishna* responds with the statement that Avraham's disciples enjoy the fruits of their virtue in this world and ultimately inherit the world to come, while Bilaam's disciples inherit Gehennom and descend into a pit of destruction.

*Horav Yechezkel Levinstein Z"l* notes an apparent redundancy in this question. Did not the *Mishna* explicitly state the various divergent character traits of these two contrasting student-bodies? Why does the *Mishna* ask, "*What difference is there between the disciples of Avrohom to those of Bilaam?*" He gleans from this repetition that it is feasible for one to study *Torah* and achieve an exemplary level of erudition but still not know to which school of thought he subscribes. Bilaam was a wise man, who had attained the level of prophesy. In the final analysis, however, where did wisdom bring him? To a terrible destruction! We should be cognizant of the fact that anyone who inherently possesses the three evil character traits by which Bilaam's disciples are identified is one of Bilaam's disciples. This holds true even if he plays the role of an observant Jew! In addition to this, we should remember that until our very last breath it is incumbent to beware of these traits. Until we actually share in the world-to-come, it is difficult to know whose students we really are. In the eyes of one's peers it is not clear what really motivates an individual's deeds. Only in the end do we separate the disciples of Avraham from those of Bilaam.