

## **"And Bilaam smote the donkey to turn her into the way... And the angel of Hashem said to him, why have you smitten your donkey these three times?" (22:23-32)**

When Bilaam set out on his journey to Balak, who desired his services in order to curse the Jewish nation, Hashem sent an angel with an unsheathed sword to hinder him. The donkey was miraculously able to see the angel, while Bilaam could not. The angel blocked the donkey's path three times. After the first time, the donkey veered off the path, Bilaam hit him. This recurred when the donkey pressed Bilaam's foot against a fence. The third time, the donkey, having nowhere to turn, settled down on the ground only to be hit again by Bilaam. When the donkey was miraculously granted the power of speech, it admonished Bilaam for embarking upon a journey which was against Hashem's will. Finally, Hashem permitted Bilaam to see the angel, who immediately rebuked him for hitting the donkey three times. Bilaam's reply was simply that he was not aware of the angel's presence. Thus, he now conceded his guilt in not noticing the angel's presence.

The *Sefer Chasidim* questions this "sin". Is it wrong for a rider to strike his donkey when he veers off the correct path or pushes him against a fence? Secondly, what was Bilaam's sin in not noticing the angel? He explains Bilaam's sin in the following manner: Bilaam should have realized that the donkey's unusual behavior was a sign of Hashem's displeasure with Bilaam's intended journey. Thus, Bilaam appropriately conceded his guilt in not recognizing these repeated messages to him.

One who complacently travels on the path of life, never reflecting upon his personal life or noting unusual events, is guilty of sinful behavior. A Jew is obligated to use his G-d-given mind to be cognizant of the lessons that should be gleaned from a particular situation. Nothing occurs in this world by chance. In His beneficence, Hashem offers us these subtle messages to protect us from misfortune.