

Hashem opened up the mouth of the she-donkey. (22:28)

At times, the truth can be painful. It can be brutal. Why? Because it is the truth. Unembellished truth can be enlightening – but, sadly, not all of us are able to withstand the power of illumination. Balak sought to defeat the Jewish People. He hired Bilaam, an evil pagan prophet, to curse them. Bilaam was a powerful individual who had been blessed with being the pagan world's response to Moshe *Rabbeinu*. In the end, Bilaam's intended negative intent was transformed into positive results.

Bilaam was not supposed to accept Balak's offer, but, true to his evil, weak nature, he proceeded anyway. As he rode his donkey on the way to cursing the Jews, his donkey saw an angel three times – and moved aside. Bilaam did not care to have his donkey take charge of the journey, and he indicated his displeasure by striking the donkey repeatedly. Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey, granting it the power of speech – a power generally reserved for human beings – and allowing it to rebuke Bilaam for planning to curse the Jews.

The donkey is not considered the “swiftest” of animals. Why did Hashem select the donkey to convey His message to Bilaam? Interestingly, when the donkey opened his mouth to rebuke Bilaam, the pagan prophet had no answers for his errant behavior. What about the donkey's rebuke stunted Bilaam?

In his *Bircas Peretz*, the *Steipler Gaon*, *zl*, explains that the donkey knew no *chochmos*; he spoke whatever came to his “mind,” which was pure, unembellished truth. No one can stand up to the truth. No one can argue with the truth. The donkey had no personal desires that influenced him. Thus, he was able to give a straightforward, honest critique, untainted by personal interest. The wisest pagan, the individual who had reached the height of prophecy (or perhaps its nadir), was unable to justify his behavior when confronted by the less-than-swift donkey. Why? The truth is glaring and pierces right through one's misconceived rationalizations.

How often do we qualify our actions by self—prevarication? Lying to oneself is the most common, and probably most injurious, form of dishonesty. We rationalize activities that are less-than commendable by convincing ourselves that what we are doing is in the best interest of an individual, the community, our family, our self. If, at the end of the day, it is a lie – it is in no one's best interest.