

## He saw the Keini and declaimed his parable and said, “Strong is your dwelling, and set in a rock is your nest.” (24:21)

After failing to curse *Klal Yisrael* successfully, Bilaam had one last prophecy which foreshadowed what would happen concerning both the surrounding nations and the Jewish People. He mentioned the Keini, who were Yisro's family. *Rashi* says that Bilaam recalled the history that he had with Yisro, heralding back to their both being Pharaoh's top advisors together with Iyov. Three men – Iyov, Yisro and Bilaam. Obviously, to have reached such a pinnacle to serve as advisors to the man who was probably the most powerful monarch in the world was truly an extraordinary achievement. Iyov and Yisro went on to achieve even greater distinction, while the evil Bilaam went down in infamy. This troubled Bilaam.

He saw Yisro's outstanding success, his position of prominence and royalty as Moshe *Rabbeinu's* father-in-law. “How is it,” Bilaam mused, “that I see prophetically that Yisro's descendants will one day occupy seats as members of the *Sanhedrin HaGadol* that sat in the *Lishkas HaGazis* which was within the *Bais Hamikdash*? Yisro's descendants will determine the *halachic* issues involving all of *Klal Yisrael*.” What happened? Yisro and he were once on the same level (or so he thought).

To say that Bilaam was envious would be an understatement. Did he have regrets that Yisro made it and he (although being the most distinguished pagan prophet) was nothing more than an abominable person who had no legacy other than evil and turpitude?

Bilaam (like most wicked people) conveniently forgot the evil that he had wrought. He was the one who suggested to Pharaoh that the Jews were a problem that would simply not go away by itself. They would have to “help” it along. Yisro, however, fled to Midyan because he wanted no part of Bilaam's diabolical plan. He gave up power and future because he fought for what was right, while Bilaam could care less about what was right as long as he had power, fame and wealth. Yisro's power and wealth would have to wait a few generations, but it would endure. Bilaam's fleeting fame earned him a place in the annals of evil persecutors.

*Horav Avraham Pam, zl* (cited by Rabbi Sholom Smith in his book, “Messages from Rav Pam”), quotes the *Shevet Mussar* (25:5) who notes that “the wicked are filled with regrets.” Bilaam spent a lifetime immersed in moral profligacy, hedonism and depravity. He thought that he was enjoying life, living it to its fullest, experiencing base pleasure at its nadir. Did Bilaam realize that it was all for naught, that physical pleasure does nothing for the person? Now, as he looked at Yisro's success in life, Bilaam realized that he at least wanted to die as the righteous. The Bilaams of the world do not realize that in order to die righteous, one must live righteous. Rather than being motivated to repentance, Bilaam struggled with -- and was consumed by -- envy. Why did he not do something – now? As long as one is alive, it is not too late.

Many Jews have led lives on the fringe of Judaism. They never identified with Judaism, opting instead for a life of abandon. Obviously, blame can be laid at the feet of a number of people, but, at the end of the day, these individuals are broken, filled with regret and self-loathing. Yet, they are unable to make that move to religious observance. They know that it is the right thing to do, but, like Bilaam, it is so much easier and convenient to rationalize away their guilt and not repent. For some, it is easier to keep on going the wrong way than alter their course. How sad.