

## And an angel of Hashem stood on the road to impede him. (22:22)

It is well-known that the *Shem Hashem*, Name of G-d, *yud-kay, vov-kay*, denotes the *middah*, attribute, of *Rachamim*, Mercy. In other words, the angel of Hashem/*Rachamim*, who was sent to prevent Bilaam from going to curse the Jews, was sent on a mission of mercy. Since when is reproof attributed to mercy? It is much closer to *Din*, Strict Justice. *Horav Chaim Toito, Shlita* (*Torah V'Chaim*), explains this with the following story. During the tenure of the *Alter, zl, m'Kelm*, there lived a wealthy man whose enormous wealth was overshadowed only by his miserliness. He absolutely refused to share any of his fortune – even a dry piece of bread – with the unfortunate. Once a poor man came to his door and begged for food. The wealthy man replied, “We have no food to give out here.” The poor man did not despair. He stood on the steps waiting for some scraps, leftovers, anything that would placate his hunger.

Passersby told him that he was wasting his time. The wealthy man would never give him a morsel of food. The poor man refused to give up hope. He stood there all day. At night, when the wealthy man left for *shul*, he saw the poor man and he reiterated, “There is no way I will give you a drop of food. You can wait here forever... Your waiting will not change my mind.” The poor man’s response threw the wealthy man for a loop. “You will give me meat and bread – an entire meal!” was the poor fellow’s emphatic reply. When the wealthy man heard this, he became so angry that he pushed the poor fellow down the stairs. This did not deter the poor fellow. He was used to humiliation. He was also starving and needed to eat. He brushed himself off, walked up the stairs and assumed his original position at the top of the stairs. It would take more than a push down the stairs before this fellow would give up.

When the neighbors observed how penurious the wealthy man was, their hearts opened up to the plight of the poor fellow, and they brought him food. His reaction was unusual: “I am grateful to you for your kindness; however, I will only eat from the wealthy man’s home. I will starve until he feeds me.”

Time passed, and the poor man became faint and disoriented from hunger. At this point, the miser took pity on him, brought him into his home and fed him a large, filling meal. Word spread through the community until it reached the ears of the *Alter*, who, when he heard the story, broke out in copious weeping.

His *talmidim*, disciples, wondered why their revered *Rebbe* was reacting in such a manner. “Why is *Rebbe* crying over the poor man? He received a full meal and left satiated.” The *Alter* was not one to react. Everything that he did, every action, was the result of deliberate consideration. The *Alter* explained, “I am not weeping for the poor man. I derived a powerful *mussar*, ethical character, lesson from this incident. The wealthy man clearly had a hard heart, closed to any reason, without compassion for his poverty-stricken brother. Yet, in the end, he acceded to the poor man’s request

and fed him. *Avinu Malkeinu*, our Heavenly Father, our King, is compassionate, kind and slow to anger. Surely if one of His children would say to Him, "Hashem, I rely on no one other than You to return me to You, to once again be Your servant, I have no question in my mind that Hashem would listen and accept him back." End of story.

A similar idea applies concerning Bilaam. I have no question that Bilaam's actions were not unintentional. He was shrewd, calculated and evil. Whatever he did was purposeful with conscious aforethought. Nonetheless, Hashem compassionately dispatched a Heavenly angel to prevent him from cursing the Jews. Hashem did not want Bilaam to commit a sin. Thus, the Torah uses the Name of Hashem which specifically denotes mercy. This should inspire our brain to reconnect with our body and realize that, if Hashem acted compassionately to an evil degenerate, to a pagan whose moral bankruptcy brought about the downfall and eventual deaths of 24,000 Jews, surely Hashem will shine His countenance upon us and welcome us back home. All we must do is ask.