

## Now go and curse it for me. (22:11)

In Bilaam's dialogue with Hashem, he related that Balak, king of Moav, had petitioned him to curse the Jewish people. The word Bilaam used for curse is *kavah*, imprecate, which is a stronger, more emphatic, tone of curse. *Rashi* observes that *kavah* is stronger than *arah*, which was the actual term which Balak employed. Bilaam changed the word from *arah* to *kavah*, because Bilaam's enmity for the Jews was more intense than that of Balak. Balak feared the Jews. He was anxious lest they overrun his country, as they did to the other pagan kings in the area. Bilaam's animus, however, was pure, devious hatred for no reason other than he despised the Jews. Such loathing is unforgivable, because it is implacable and unrelenting.

In the next *perek* (23:11), Balak said to Bilaam, *Lakov oyivai l'kachticha*, "To imprecate my enemy have I brought you." Apparently, Balak ratcheted up his hatred of the Jews to the level of *kavah*, imprecation. Balak and Bilaam were now on the same page, both focused on delivering the most efficacious, powerful curse against the Jews. Did Balak really change his stripes?

The *Zera Shimshon* says that he did not. Balak remained Balak; his hatred continued on the same level as before. The Moavite king told Bilaam, "Why do you think I commissioned you to curse the Jews? Do you think that I am incapable of issuing a curse? I called you, because your hatred of the Jews exceeds even mine. Your hatred is real, perverse and unrelenting. Hatred without ulterior motives instigates a curse that has a powerful effect on our enemies. You were supposed to issue a curse with the power of *kavah*. Not only did you not intensify your curse, but you blessed them! What got into you? Where is all the hatred for which you are infamous?"

*Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, observes that when an act is executed *lishmah*, for its sake, not bound by ulterior motives, it has much greater efficacy than one not carried out *lishmah*. This is true even if the act that is performed is ignominious in nature, an evil act, purely for the purpose of causing harm to the other person, etc. When one's act is driven by personal gain, revenge, the intensity of the act is diminished.

So, what happened to Bilaam? Did his hatred of the Jews decrease? Certainly not. The simple answer is that, just as Hashem controls the speech of a donkey, He can control the speech of a pagan prophet as well. Perhaps we might suggest another insight. Those who claim to hate do not really hate the subject they purport to hate. They actually hate themselves. They are self-loathing, and they express their self-disgust by directing it towards others, rather than admitting to their own deficiency. Thus, their hatred is really not *lishmah*. On the other hand, in many instances, they are so disgusted with themselves that they manifest a hatred toward others which is entirely irrational. Bilaam looked at himself and realized how great he could have been. Then he looked at his contemporary, Moshe *Rabbeinu*, and acknowledged how great he had become. This contrast was too much for Bilaam to absorb. His only outlet was implacable hatred toward everything that Moshe represented. At the end of the day, however, the one whom he hated most was himself.