

## Have I become accustomed to do such a thing to you? (22:30)

Bilaam's arrogance was on the same level as his evil. He acted upon his base desires and thought nothing of it. Yet, he took umbrage with anyone who had the audacity to call his malevolent actions to his attention. He was Bilaam, the greatest pagan prophet. As such, he had license to do whatever he pleased. All went well until Bilaam's donkey gave him *mussar*, rebuked him. The donkey refused to go forward, because it saw an angel impeding its path. Bilaam, the prophet, did not see the angel. Thus, he struck the donkey three times for its unwillingness to move forward. The donkey miraculously opened its mouth and rebuked its master, who wanted to kill the animal. Ultimately, the donkey did not really reprove Bilaam. It just called his attention to the fact that it had been devoted to its master and did not deserve to be treated so harshly. Bilaam's reaction was a typical reaction of an arrogant despot. He was livid. All the donkey had intimated was, "Is this the treatment I should receive after all my years of loyal service?" Bilaam's response was what has become expected of his ilk: threaten the rebuker, but never accept the possibility that he was wrong and certainly never apologize. The *Brisker Rav*, *zl*, derived a powerful lesson from Bilaam's "dialogue" with the donkey. His reply, "If I had a sword with me, I would kill you" demonstrates the nadir of depravity to which a person can descend. To argue with a donkey? Sounds absurd, but that is exactly what Bilaam did. When they are not thinking rationally, people resort to making fools of themselves.

*Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk, Shlita*, quotes an explanation he heard from his father which sheds light on the conversation that ensued between Bilaam and his donkey and the lessons we can derive from it. *Chazal* (*Pirkei Avos* 5:6) teach that three things were created *erev Shabbos/bein ha'shmashos*, during twilight time, following the Six Days of Creation. The third creation is the *pi ha'ason*, the donkey's ability to express itself orally. *Rav Turk* describes that auspicious Friday evening of Creation. Every creation -- animals, beasts, fowl, insects, flowers, produce and the luminaries -- was waiting eagerly for the start of *Shabbos Kodesh*, the day of rest, which would conclude Creation. *Chavah* held the candle in her hand prepared to *bentch lecht*, light candles, in honor of the First *Shabbos*. Suddenly, *Adam HaRishon* told her to stop -- "We must wait a few more moments. Hashem has not yet created the *pi ha'ason*." The question is obvious: With so much happening, was it that important to create the speaking donkey that would one day rebuke Bilaam? How would the world be a better place with a talking donkey in it?

*Rav Turk* derives a powerful lesson from this. Apparently, it was of critical significance for Hashem to create an entity (the donkey) to show to the world for all posterity that an animal not known for its exceptional "intelligence" was created for the purpose of demonstrating the lowliness and base nature of Bilaam, the greatest and wisest of all pagan prophets. Like a child, Bilaam argued with and threatened the donkey. This teaches us with whom we are dealing -- and whom we should never fear.