

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Balak:*** **Numbers 22:21-38**
 Haftarah: **Micah 5:12-15**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Corinthians 1:26-27**

Vayakom Bila'am – i.e. *And Bila'am arose ...*
[Numbers 22:28]

Today's Meditation is Proverbs 16:3-5;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 12: *Sh'ma Koleinu* [*Hear our Cry*]

Vayakom Bila'am baboker – *And Bila'am rose up in the morning ...* ***vayachavosh et-
atono*** – *and he saddled his donkey ...* ***vayelech im-sarei Moav*** – *and he went with the
princes of Moav.* **Numbers 22:21.**

Bila'am is keeping bad company these days. He has been secretly wining and dining with some of the world's most virulent anti-Semites. He has spent hours politely indulging the paranoid delusions under which these men operate. He is even giving serious consideration to their heinous plot to remove the bloodline of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov from the planet forever. Careful now, Bila'am! You still have the power to stop this feeding frenzy of hate – or at least refuse to have any part in it; OR you can go with these men and become one of the most notorious criminals the world has ever known. Your fate, your legacy, and the honor of the family of Be'or are all hanging in the balance. So what will it be – and whose side are you on?

Meanwhile, Back at the Camp of B'nei Yisrael

In the meantime, back at the Camp of the Redeemed, the Covenant nation is oblivious to the discussions going on a few hundred kilometers to our northeast. We are finally out of the desert – and prospering. The Amorite warlords who threatened us upon our arrival on this plateau are now dead, and their minions have all run away with their tails tucked between their legs. With their departure, we suddenly have a plethora of cities, shuks, houses, and territory to explore. We find ourselves with a fresh infusion of livestock – not to mention gardens and fruit trees, to tend. The pastures here in Western Moav are lush and green. There is plenty of still, clear water. What a pleasant break from wilderness wandering!

We have no idea what Balak is plotting concerning us, our wives, and our children. We are just caught up in the reverie of being so close to the land of the patriarchs.

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We mean no harm to Balak, or the Moavi, or even the Midyani. We have no interest in disturbing – much less possessing – anything that belongs to them. We have not attacked any of them – and have no intention to do so. We have not so much as look sideways at them. Since their armies haven't come out and attacked us the way the Amorites did, we reasonably assume the goodwill we are feeling toward them is mutual. We have no idea how much rage Balak has got the people of Moav and Midyan feeling toward us. We have no idea how badly they want us and our little ones dead. We have no idea how much silver – and blood, if necessary - anti-Semites like Balak and his ilk are willing to invest in our Holocaust. We do not even know that Bila'am and his donkey have left Petor by the River and are heading our way. The Balakian paranoia epidemic and the Moavi/Midyani conspiracy that epidemic has spawned are part of the great *unseen realm*. Oh, the threat was real, of course. But the Holy One took care to keep us completely oblivious. He may have figured that *we couldn't handle the truth*. If we knew how much they hated us, and how determined they were to wipe us off the face of the earth, we might consider reluctantly drawing our swords and mounting a pre-emptive strike. The Holy One did not want that. He did not want us depending on our own strength, will, or armaments. So He made sure we did not *now*. For people of the Covenant, you see, *information, data, and education* are not what we are supposed to live or chart our course by. We are, instead, to live by *emunah* – i.e. the indwelling life force of the *nish'mat chayim* that was introduced into the world in Genesis 2:7². We have an unbreakable Covenant with the Creator of the Universe. We are called to know Him, to love Him, to walk with and serve Him, to steward Creation, to care for our fellow man as one would a brother, and to release a blessing of *shalom, simchah* [joy], and *tikvah* [hope] over every person, family, and geographical place we encounter. No matter what may be going on in the world – or whatever about to transpire around us – our King's Torah instructions are absolutely *all we need to know*.

There is therefore nary a hint given – even to Moshe and Aharon –that anything is in any way amiss. Even as Bila'am's caravan was winding its way through the mountains toward them, the sons and daughters of the Covenant awakened to songs of pure praise being sung over them by feathered friends. The sound of living water rushing from the Rock of Meribah through the heart of our Camp provided delightful percussion effects. The smell of breakfast manna cooking over an open fire bespoke wholeness, wellness, and *shalom*. The pleasing, fragrant aroma emanating from the *Mish'kan* filled the air. Blissfully ignorant of the alliances, plans, and weapons men have forged against us, we carried on with the ordinary affairs of life, family, and community. We loved our spouses – even

² Genesis 2:7(a) states: ***And the Holy One Elohim formed man of the dust of the eretz. And He breathed into his nostrils the nishmat chayim – i.e. the life force/breath of lives.***

through the flaws and idiosyncrasies. We taught our children the ways of the Holy One – and of course how to pitch tents, tend sheep, maintain hygiene, cultivate joy, steward *shalom*, deal with negative emotions, and make meals out of manna. As we sallied forth to gather wood, water, and manna for the day as usual, not one of us knew that a group of men we had never met was about to launch a campaign of genocide against us.

Fortunately, there was One Who knew. Fortunately, there is One Who is always watching – and Who *will always be* watching. There is One Who sees all. There is One Who knows exactly what is going on. He Who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps³. This is His World. These are His People. He has pledged His troth to us – and He is faithful to His commitments. The Holy One has therefore heard every whisper of fear mongering that has been spoken in the counsel rooms of Moab. He has listened in on the strategy sessions of the elders of Midyan. He has observed every movement - and is fully aware of every thought - of Bila'am, son of Be'or. The Holy One is our partner in Covenant, you see – and uncovering and thwarting conspiracies against us is part of His Covenant undertaking to us. Our part of the Covenant is simply to do what He has told us to do. Oh, that we would learn to let Him do what He has covenanted to do, and content ourselves with doing what we are supposed to do!

Beauty and the Beast

It is time we got introduced to two other fascinating characters in the great prophetic drama of Balak – the non-human ones⁴. First of all, the Holy One is going to make sure that Bila'am, the prophet of the nations, does not travel alone. He makes arrangements for the seer to be accompanied by one the Torah calls *Malach Adonai* - i.e. an Angel of the Holy One. Let's just call this unseen companion by the code name 'Beauty', shall we? Cue the music: '*Every breath you take, every move you make; every bond you break, every step you take ... I'll be watching you. Every single day, every word you say; every game you play, every night you stay ... I'll be watching you.*'⁵"

Secondly, Bila'am will not be coming our way on foot. He will be riding a *beast of burden*. Thus the first words of the aliyah we study today are:

Vayakom Bila'am baboker
And Bila'am rose in the morning

³ Psalm 121:4 says: "***Behold, Shomer Yisrael*** – i.e. *He who cherishes, watches over, and zealously guards Israel - neither slumbers nor sleeps.*"

⁴ The second non-human character in the story will be the *Angel of the Holy One*. See **Numbers 22:22**.

⁵ The familiar lyrics are from a song called '*Every Breath You Take*', written by Sting, and performed and released by his band 'The Police', in 1983.

vayachavosh et-atono vayelech
and he saddled his donkey, and he departed . . .
[Numbers 22:21]

Well, at least he's an early riser! But a *donkey*? Really? We might have expected a notable figure like Bila'am to ride in on a majestic steed – or maybe an elephant. But he chose instead a lowly creature. The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as 'donkey' in this infamous passage is *aton*⁶ - composed of the letters *alef* and *tav* followed by *vav* and *nun sofit*. I hope you are seeing Hebraic pictographs! The Hebrew word pictures of this phrase, as Yeshua applied them in Revelation 1:8 and 1:11 respectively, tell an amazing story to all who desire to listen.

The noun *aton* refers to a *female donkey*. A male donkey, in contrast, is called a *chamor*. see **Genesis 22:3, 5**. *Aton* is derived from a verb meaning to be *perennial and ever flowing*; hence *plodding, methodical, constant, and continuous, and trustworthy*.

Why did Bila'am eschew a majestic Arabian and take this journey into infamy on the back of a lowly donkey? Why did Messiah choose to do the same? A female donkey is best suited for *humble, hard, work*, not for *battle*. She plods. She perseveres. She endures. She finishes the course. Riding a donkey – particularly a female donkey - declares clearly that the rider is coming to *do a job* – not fight a war. Bila'am does not claim to be a *warrior* – he is just a *workman* – a *laborer for hire*. And, of course, a female donkey is going to be the animal upon which Messiah appears. **Zechariah 9:9**.

The Trail of Seven Crucibles – For Bila'am and For Us!

We have already spent some quality time this week discussing Bila'am. We are by no means through. It seems that this very gifted and charismatic seer/prophet lived his life under the intense magnifying lens of a Heavenly microscope. But then, so do we all. There is nothing hidden about your life – or mine - that will not be revealed. Can you handle that? Well, before you answer that question, we probably need to talk a little about the '*way of Bila'am*'. To understand this we need to fast-forward past today's aliyah to II Peter 2:9-15. In that passage Kefa says these very important things that we know about the '*way of Bila'am*':

***The Holy One knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations
and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,
and especially those who walk according to the flesh
in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed.
They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries,
whereas angels, who are greater in power and might,
do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Holy One.***

⁶ *Aton* is written as *alef, tav, vav, nun sofit*, Strong's Hebrew word # 806.

*But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed,
speak evil of the things they do not understand,
and will utterly perish in their own corruption,
and will receive the wages of unrighteousness,
as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime.
They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you,
having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls.
They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.
they have forsaken the right way and gone astray,
following the way of Bila'am the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.*

This is not a flattering picture. How does such a good gift such as was in Bila'am go so horribly wrong? How can such a good gift as the Holy One has deposited in us do the same? Perhaps the answer to both of these questions lies in an understanding of the things that happened to Bila'am along His 'way'. Let's consider those things together, shall we?

The Holy One made sure that in the course of his journey from *Petor by the River* to the high places of Moav Bila'am had to face an unnerving series of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges. I therefore call this part of his journey the TRAIL OF SEVEN CRUCIBLES. The FIRST challenge that Bila'am faced – and which everyone who presumes to speak on behalf of the Holy One has to face as well – is *the crucible of flattering tongues*. NOTE: flattery is the first fundamental tool used by practitioners of Babylonian/Eastern-Style Occultism!

Beware the Flattery of Men!

Proverbs 27:21: *Fire TESTS the purity of silver & gold, but a person is TESTED BY BEING PRAISED.*

Whenever people want something from someone else they tend to use 'praise' as a tool. They *fawn* over anyone from whom they want something. They *wine and dine* him. They make him or her feel important. They make him/her feel wanted, needed, respected, admired, and UNDERSTOOD. They play his or her ego like a fiddle. Flattery is, you see, at essence a *form of witchcraft*. It is an ancient '*mark*'-*seduction methodology* used by practitioners of Neo-Babylonian/Eastern Occultism to condition a '*mark*' for manipulation. It is all just smoke and mirrors, of course; but because the hapless '*mark*' desperately wants to believe it is true, and think that he/she is really getting the appreciation and admiration he/she has always craved at last, he [or she] drinks it in. He/she enjoys the sudden attention – and the pleasant flesh-stroking – way too much. He/she becomes addicted to the flattery, then enslaved by it. Flatterers know that weak people tend to *care more about what their peers say about them than they do what the Holy One directs them to say and do*. They know that *insecure people tend to be more responsive to flesh-stroking by their fellow humans than by either the wisdom or the favor of their Creator*.

Everyone who carries on any form of public speaking, performance, or public service must pass through the crucible of flattering tongues. If you are wise, you will never read your own fan mail, or hate mail, or press clippings. If you are wise you will learn to ignore the fawners, flatterers and sycophants – even as you learn to shrug off the critics, hecklers, and harsh judges. Just do what the Holy One redeemed, called, empowered, and commissioned you to do – and look to Him for all the feedback you will ever need. People of Covenant are called to do everything we do for *an audience of One*. Men are merely third-party beneficiaries of our labor and service. All honor and glory and service belong to the Bridegroom-King. His praise – or loving correction – are the only two responses that should affect what we do.

Be Wary of Offers of Enrichment, Empowerment, and/or Increased Influence

Exodus 23:8: ... *take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.*

Practitioners of Neo-Babylonian/Eastern Occultism follow flattery with a series of tempting offers, promises, and/or incentives of reward. They sweeten the pot. They stir up lusts, appetites, and Welcome to the obstacle course of *quid pro quo*. If people want something bad enough for themselves they are more than willing to offer to pay for it. Note that I said *offer*. Rarely are the people who make the offers really willing to pay what they offer – at least without changing the terms of the deal to their own advantage multiple times, in multiple ways, in order to assure you remain under their thumb. They are like children who delight to dangle a string of yarn in front of a kitten, then jerk the string back as soon as the kitten decides to pounce.

Offers/promises/incentives of material reward are all about manipulation. They are all a subtle form of witchcraft. Fallen human beings who want control love to offer gifted people deals they seemingly cannot – or would be considered a fool to - refuse. Call these things *gifts* if you like. Call them tokens of appreciation if you prefer. Call them wages. Call them ‘perks’. Call them ‘fringe benefits’. Whatever you call them, though, all they really are is *bribes*.

When Balak wanted something from Bila’am he offered him more silver than Bila’am had ever seen. How could he resist? Of course, all offers, promises, and incentives of material reward come with a series of subliminal if not visible strings attached. Whether or not the strings are clearly stated, however, rest assured that they are there. Bila’am will find out about that soon enough - and so will we all.

***Beware of Ignoring – or Testing the Limits of –
the Specific Instructions of the Holy One***

Exodus 16:4: *Adonai said to Moshe, Behold, I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. And the people will go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may TEST them, whether they will walk in My Torah or not.*

The THIRD tool of practitioners of Neo-Babylonian/Eastern Occultism is to tempt the ‘mark’ that they have flattered and promised enrichment or empowerment to *cross a line*. Some define the ‘line’ they seek to have the ‘mark’ cross as ‘morality’; others as ‘ethics’, or ‘custom’, or ‘law’. Ultimately, however, it always involves the contravention of the Holy One’s instructions in Torah. That means that the critical crucible that all those who are called by the Holy One will face in life is the challenge of tuning to, listening for, receiving, internalizing, meditating upon all the implications of, maintaining focus upon, and then thinking, speaking and acting in accordance with the specific instructions of the Holy One. I call this the crucible of the *strait gate* and the *narrow road*. The Neo-Babylonian/Eastern wizards and warlocks of this world want you to forget that the strait gate and narrow road even exist – much less apply to you; they want you to cross a line. They know that if they can entice you to cross even one line drawn in the sand by the Holy One, with just the right persuasion they can get you to cross them all. They know that if they can get you to eat the pork today, they can get you to take the mark tomorrow.

The Holy One is not the least bit silent when it comes to how He wants us to live, prioritize our time, energy, and passion, and utilize our gifts. He has given us the Torah and the Brilliant Sinaiatic Lifestyle Model. He has given us the Wisdom Books, especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. He has given us the warnings and directives written by the Prophets. He has given us Yeshua’s so-called Sermon on the Mount. **Matthew 5-7**. He has given us the *Letters of the Glorious Risen, Ascended Messiah/Melchizidekian High Priest to the Seven Kehillot*. **Revelation 2:1 – 3:22**. And most of all He has given us *the precious gift of the Father* – i.e. the *Empowering Breath of Wisdom and Revelation*. See **Acts 1:8; Romans 8:14-26, and Ephesians 1:15-23**.

These precious gifts are available to us at all times. We have not in any wise been left defenseless. We have not been left at the mercy of the manipulators of this world. We have not been left helpless against the tyranny of our own fleshly appetites, urges, and drives. We have not been left powerless against the attitudes, ideologies, philosophies, opinions, so called ‘scientific theories’, doctrines and theologies with which the unclean spirits that control the geographic area, culture, and time in which we live seek to brainwash, confuse, and disarm us. The question we must answer in the crucible of the strait gate and the narrow way is whether we

know and trust the Holy One enough to do things His Way or would rather ‘wing it’ independent of Him, preferring to rely upon our own vastly inferior but more comfortable and socially acceptable levels of wisdom, understanding and capabilities of *getting by with a little help from our friends* – and then blaming the Holy One for the inevitably unsatisfying if not catastrophic outcome.

Delight in and Respond Humbly to Divine Chastening/Rebuke

Job 5:17: ... *Happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty.*

The FOURTH crucible that those called and gifted by the Holy One must learn to navigate is *the crucible of Divine Chastening*. The Holy One will not surrender a single soul He loves to the wiles of Neo-Babylonian/Eastern Occultism without at least one dramatic intervention attempt. In Bila’am’s case this intervention attempt came into play with the sound of an Angelic voice and the point of an invisible sword. Seldom in our lives will the agent of Divine Chastening be so blatantly supernatural. Most will probably never hear the Voice of either an angel or a donkey. But Deuteronomy 8:5 and Hebrews 12:6-8 make it very clear that everyone whom the Holy One loves will experience His discipline. The Holy One deals with His partners in Eternal Covenant as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? Indeed, if He does not chasten us, then we are not in any real form of relationship with Him. The question becomes how we will respond to the intervention attempt, the chastisement, the warning, the rebuke, or the discipline. The Holy One does not will for any of us to perish; but ultimately, if we refuse His discipline, He will back away and allow us to suffer the consequences of our misuse of free will. Practitioners of Neo-Babylonian/Eastern Occultism watch for our response to such subtle things as pangs of remorse, conviction, and even community approbation. If they can get us to the point of seared conscience, as proven by abandonment of home, family and community, they know they own us – and can use as pawns, as saboteurs, as co-conspirators, as mules/donkeys, and even, should they choose, as self-sacrificing suicide bombers.

The Crucible of High Expectations

The FIFTH crucible through which those commissioned by the Holy One for service to the world have to traverse is the crucible of high expectations. Sometimes those expectations come from within, as when we expect perfection from ourselves or immediate positive response from others. Just as frequently however the high expectations we must circumnavigate are those imposed upon us by others. Titles and positions and offices – indeed all labels – come with an *extremely high price tag*. Every person interprets the responsibilities and of any titles, positions, offices, and labels we take upon ourselves or allow to be placed upon us according to their own needs and ideologies. What is a ‘teacher’? It depends on who you ask. What is a ‘prophet’? The title is a theoretical construct

the parameters of which are colored differently by the mind and frame of reference of each person who uses the term. The same holds true for ‘apostle’, ‘pastor’, ‘evangelist’, and every other title, position or label men may try to apply to a gifted, commissioned servant of the Most High.

The sooner we realize that there is no way we – or any man for that matter can – possibly live up to everyone’s or perhaps anyone’s expectations of a title, position, office, or label, the sooner we can get on with what we are called, commissioned, and empowered by the Holy One to do. We are fallible humans. We are created to exercise our giftings, to flow in our callings, and to serve real people in real time just for the sheer pleasure of co-laboring with our Bridegroom-King. We are not to covet, accept or assign high-sounding titles, positions, and offices. That is one of the reasons Yeshua taught us not to give ourselves or others titles, positions, offices, or other leadership labels. **Matthew 23:8-10.**

The Holy One, of course, has far greater expectations for us than we could ever have for ourselves or others. But He also has an eternal perspective – and the full confidence in His own amazing ability to make everything beautiful – just *in Time*.

The Crucible of the Wrath of Offended Authority Figures

The SIXTH crucible Bila’am would have to face – and that all who are gifted of the Holy One are destined to experience as part of our journey of maturation – is *the crucible of the wrath of offended authority figures*. In Bila’am’s case it was Balak, king of Moav, whose wrath he had to face. When Bila’am did not fit his giftings and callings into Balak’s agenda a mighty rage rose up in Balak. His supposed ‘benefactor’ went off on the prophet, letting him know in no uncertain terms that no one gets away with making him look bad. The Balak’s of the world, you see, really do not actually want the speaking or ministering gifts for the people; what they really want is to use the gifted one’s charisma to help sell their own program and enhance their own institutional standing.

In Balak’s case the ‘program’ he wanted the gifted servant to support and propagate was genocide. He wanted to ‘defeat’ the sons and daughters of the Living God. That meant to drive them into the Sea – *i.e.* to inflict upon them a ‘final solution’ protocol. Such a ‘program’ of extinction arises from time to time in the hearts and minds of deceived men. It will probably raise its ugly head and threaten us again one day soon - perhaps in our lifetime, or maybe that of our children. More frequently however the ‘program’ the leaders/authority figures get frustrated at us for not promoting to the extent and in the manner they envision is cloaked in a much more attractive and innocuous-looking wrapping paper of high-sounding rhetoric. Often it is cloaked in the vocabulary of ministry, and/or morality, and/or theological principle, and/or ideology, and/or political reform,

and/or social activism, and/or institutional superiority. All these wrappings however share one common thread with genocide – *they all represent man’s way, not the way of the Holy One*. The Holy One never couches His Actions in any of such terms. The words men throw around to justify their kingdom-building activities are just window-dressing – a part of their own self-deception.

All that matters is what the Holy One is saying and doing. The high-sounding – often very spiritually sounding - language in which manipulative men couch their own agendas and plans of action is just an essential instrumentality of the deception.

The Crucible of the Invitation to Join Forces With the Forces of Darkness

The SEVENTH crucible in which the Holy One has ordained that those who serve Him as His Earthly Ambassadors is the crucible of being asked to join forces with and use their darker abilities [*i.e.* the flesh counterparts of every spiritual gift in which we operate] to aid and abet men who are driven if not possessed by spirits of uncleanness. As it turned out, Bila’am was able to successfully navigate the first six crucibles mentioned above. The seventh one, however, turned out to be his undoing. When he was asked to use his fleshly gifts [manipulation, craftiness and seduction – the main tools of the Serpent] instead of his spiritual giftings and callings [*i.e.* to see in the spiritual realm to bless, and to prophesy], he dropped his guard and succumbed to the temptation. He did not – would not – could not - curse the Redeemed Community of the Holy One; he saw clearly in the spiritual realm the blessing and great potential for holiness with which the Holy One had empowered His chosen ones. But when he looked at Israel in the flesh instead of in the spirit he saw in us the natural realm the human frailty in all men. It had been there all along, as plain as the nose upon Balak’s face. All the haters of Israel had to do was find a way to exploit and manipulate the weaknesses of the flesh. What every man knew by his own nature that the flesh of a man craves they just had to parade in front of their enemies. Bila’am therefore counseled Balak and the Midyanim to send their most beautiful daughters into the Israeli camp and have them smile sweetly, dance seductively before them, excite their basest human instincts, and invite them to taste the kind of intoxicating blend of sensual pleasures they could be pretty sure a group of desert wanderers living in the Manifest Presence of the Holy One day and night for 38 years had never experienced.

This crucible manifests today through the realm 21st Century society has come to call entertainment. The media presentation of sensuality makes it almost irresistible – indeed, one is made to think of himself or herself as ‘abnormal’ or ‘dysfunctional’ if one does not succumb to it.

Is One or More of These Crucibles Presently Problematic for You?

So you see, the trials of Bila'am's journey are not really that different from the challenges of our own. We – like he - can lose our mission-focus very easily in these seven crucibles. We can wind up taking a detour down the way of Bila'am very, very easily. All we have to do is surrender to the voice of our flesh – or the voices of supposed friends – as we stumble through the dangerous territory of any one of the challenges we face along the *Trail of Seven Crucibles*.

How Are We Doing In the Holy One's Apprenticeship Program of Developing Discernment?

Yesterday's aliyah raised the issue of how we are supposed to tell the difference between a spiritually-gifted person like Bila'am – a guy who *talks a really good talk* but is actually out only to promote himself and his 'ministry' - and someone who is truly *filled with Divine Wisdom* and *flowing in the Spirit of our Divine Bridegroom*. Put another way the question is "How do we discern between a *divinely-appointed Friend of the Bridegroom* and a *wolf in shepherd's clothing*?" Here is one thing to keep in mind: Perfection of any kind – including perfection in discernment - is by no means a prerequisite to service in the Holy One's kingdom. Quite the contrary, *one cannot serve effectively in this World for any significant period of time unless he or she is fully aware of his or her imperfection – and begins to understand and humbly surrender each of his or her areas of vulnerability*.

Moshe did his best teaching on the plains of Moav after his sins toward the Holy One and His Betrothed people were publicly revealed and after his sentence [not entering into the Land with the people] was announced and accepted as right and just. No individual sin or an actual or perceived personality flaw in a messenger of the Holy One need disqualify his or her message. The Holy One can and sometimes does put words of true wisdom and stunning revelation in the mouths of even the most dim-witted donkeys and pompous pagans. That is after all one of the most fascinating messages of parsha *Balak*. Nor do I advocate or condone publicly exposing – or commenting upon – other people's private sins. This is *lashon ha-ra*, and it is simply not worthy of the Holy One's people. If the Holy One really wants someone's sins publicly exposed – i.e. if that will in a given circumstance serve some redemptive purpose - He can bring that to pass *quite without our help*. Ask Moshe. Ask Miryam. Ask David. But we as the Holy One's children not only have a responsibility to 'know the Good Shepherd's voice' and *sh'ma* it; we also have a corresponding responsibility to *lo sh'ma* the 'voice of another' – whether it be the voice of a *hireling* who will not lay down his life for the sheep or the voice of a *thief* who comes to steal, kill, and destroy.

The question is really ‘how do we recognize whether what *appears* to be spiritual teaching, or is *cloaked in spiritual language*, is under the circumstances actually the ‘voice of another’ rather than the voice of the Holy One? *How do we avoid the spiritual deception that is so rampant, and which Messiah told us would only get worse as the end of days approaches.*

Criteria #1: Does This Particular Person’s Teaching or Method of Spiritual Pursuit Line Up With Torah?

The first and most critical test of course is *whether the message or practice others are proposing is or is not consistent with the Torah*. If you want to avoid spiritual deception the most important thing you can do is *study the Scripture for yourself* so much that you will recognize when someone takes even the slightest liberty with it. As Shaul put it to Timothy, “*Study to show yourself approved, a workman that needs not be ashamed*”. And keep your study *fresh* by conversing over His Word with Him daily.

Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips, but meditate on it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Then will you prosper in your undertakings and will you be successful.

[Joshua 1:8]

That concept is what these studies are about. They are not about you the reader learning what the author of these shiurim thinks or believes. They are about you the reader being called and inspired to search out the *real* truth for yourselves in the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings, and the B’rit Chadasha.

Kefa told us about the similarity in the deceivers we will see in our days to the deceivers referenced in Torah with these words:

There were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Holy One who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words

[II Peter 2:1-3]

Kefa warned us also about the methodology of these false prophets:

... when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, unbridling desires for that which is forbidden, in those who have previously fled from the aimless, undisciplined life. ... they promise them liberty

[II Peter 2:18-19 (a)]

Kefa was not alone in warning us concerning such persons in our midst.

Remember the warning Shaul of Tarsus gave to us regarding spiritual deceivers:

*Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions/dissension
and lay out stumbling blocks contrary to the torah teaching⁷
that you learned and practice⁸; and avoid them,
for those who are such do not serve our Lord Yeshua Ha-Maschiach, but their own belly,
and by smooth words and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the simple.*

[Romans 16:17-18]

And remember the ‘antidote’ to spiritual deception that Shaul taught us:

*. . . continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of,
knowing from whom you have learned them,
and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures,
which are able to make you wise for salvation
through emunah of/in Yeshua Ha-Maschiach.*

[II Timothy 3:14-15]

Y’hudah [Jude], as well, spoke to us of the deceivers we would encounter:

*Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Kayin,
have run greedily in the error of Bila’am for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korach.
Apostates Depraved and Doomed, these are dangerous rocks
in the path of your ways of chesed;
they come among you without reverence, serving only themselves.
They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds;
late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots;
raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame;
wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.*

[Jude 9-13]

Hence when you hear someone speak/preach/teach or read something someone has written in a book or on the Internet you might condition yourself to *ask yourself a series of questions*. You should test what the person is saying, not by whether it fits with the doctrines you have previously been taught by theologians, but *whether the theme the person is spouting meets each of the following four criteria*:

- [a] Is it *clearly revealed in Torah* [here meaning the first five books of the Bible],
- [b] Is it *emphasized by the prophets of the TaNaKh*,
- [c] Is it *present in the Psalms*, AND
- [d] Is it *reiterated in the actions and teachings of Yeshua and in the writings of Yeshua’s talmidim*?

If all 4 of these criteria are met by the message the messenger passes *spiritual*

⁷ The Greek word found here in the text is *didachen*, meaning ‘teaching’. The Hebrew equivalent of *didachen* is ‘*torah*’. The word commonly used in old English versions to translate the Greek word *didachen* is *doctrine*, but that term has, through centuries of ecclesiastical misuse, assumed a secondary meaning, at odds with Shaul’s use of *didachen*.

⁸ The Greek word found here in the text is a form of the word *manthano*, meaning to find meaning and value in repetitively doing something one was taught by a parent, sage or elder.

deception test no. 1 – i.e. he is following a proven vein of revealed truth as found throughout the Scripture. And that leads to spiritual deception test no. 2.

Criteria #2: Do Humility and Love and the Servant's Heart Shine as Brightly as the Hype and the Noise and the Charisma?

Here is another simple truth that will help us all to deal with spiritual deception:

The truth about a man's or woman's character and relationship with the Holy One is revealed not by how well he/she can spout religious talk, nor even by how well he/she can "read your mail" prophetically, but is revealed by how he/she behaves when the simple things of life do not go the way he or she would like.

If you want to get a reliable reading on the spirituality of the message of someone who wants you to follow them, buy their product, attend their meetings, and/or to provide finances for them, and to listen to them prophesy, teach, preach, sing, it's really pretty simple – just *watch how they behave on a really bad day when the kind of pressure that matters most is on.* The same criteria should be applied when considering if a person would be a good *mate*, a good *business partner*, or a good *friend*.

The proof of true spirituality is never going to be found in the person's preaching or teaching or prophesying or singing – it is found instead in the place where *the rubber hits the road* – in the person's *interpersonal relationships*. The proof of spirituality is found in *how a person treats his/her family, his or her co-workers, and folks like waiters and store clerks and flight attendants and beggars.* Here is *the test*: Does the person in question maintain the same level of spirituality when his/her children misbehave as when he/she speaking to a crowd? Does the person exhibit the same degree of joy, peace, and gentleness when his/her little brother or sister invades his/her 'space' as when he/she is providing counsel or delivering a prepared message? What happens when the person's parents or elders dare to offer him or her words of correction, point out a mistake he/she has made? And what comes out of the person's mouth if he smashes his thumb with a hammer, or if his wife burns the *challah*, or if he is selected by airport security for the intimate pat down, or if a waiter/waitress accidentally spills tea on his favorite suit?

The Holy One, you see, could care less how well a man or woman can talk, or sing, or play an instrument, or draw a crowd, or increase attendance, or put on a show. He made people, and knows that people who can do such things are – whether we believe it or not - a dime a dozen. He does not need any person's spiritual gifts. He AUTHORS spiritual gifts, and dispenses them however and to whomever He pleases. He can raise up stones – and donkeys - with spiritual gifts. What is truly a treasure to the Holy One is someone whose spirituality and faithfulness to

covenant can survive a little *trial by ordeal* – who can ‘*take a licking, and keep on ticking*’. Let’s see how well Bila’am the famous prophet measures up under that standard.

Bila’am’s Encounter with the Strait Gate and the Narrow Road

In today’s aliyah Bila’am will begin a series of tests I have above called *the crucible of the strait gate and the narrow road*. The Holy One is about to reveal what is in Bila’am’s heart. And it is all going to start by the simple Divine Strategy of sending a menacing angel to cause the prophet’s donkey to turn aside out of the narrow path to Moav that stretched out before him and step off into a field.

How will the renowned man of prophecy respond to this little unplanned detour along the road? Let’s see what Torah says.

Vatere ha-aton et-mal'ach Adonai nitzav b'derech
When the donkey saw the Holy One's angel standing in the road

v'char'bo shlufah b'yado
with a drawn sword in his hand,

vatet ha-aton min ha-derech vatelech b'sadeh
the donkey went aside from the road into the field.

vayach Bila'am et ha-aton l'hatotah ha-darech
Bila'am beat the donkey to get it back on the road.

[Numbers 22:23]

Bila’am’s response to the first test in the crucible of the strait gate and the narrow road: *yank hard on the reins, draw back the right hand, and administer a sharp backhand blow to the exposed face of the donkey!* Hmmm. Note that the prophet only sees what the Holy One allows him to see. In most regards he is totally blind to what is going on in the spiritual world around him.

We are, of course, not one whit better than Bila’am in this regard. I am not. Neither are you. Neither is the most anointed rabbi or preacher. Neither is any other man or woman you or I will ever meet. Get used to it. There is a lot more darkness than there is light, even in the best of us. So what do you say we give Bila’am another chance? At the mouth of two or three witnesses is a thing to be established – that’s Torah’s way. Let’s continue the narrative – and let Bila’am’s little trial by ordeal play itself out a little further. The Holy One’s angel next takes up a position squarely in Bila’am’s path at a place where the road leading to Kena’an passed between two walled vineyards.

Vatere ha-aton et-mal'ach Adonai vatilachetz el-hakir
When the donkey saw the Holy One's angel, it edged over to the side,

vatilchatz et-regel Bila'am el-hakir
*smashing Bila'am's foot against the wall*⁹.

vayosef l'ha-kotah
And [Bila'am] beat it (the donkey) even more.
[Numbers 22:24-25]

Bila'am's response to the strait gate component of the test: Pull even harder on the reins, make a tight fist, and *beat the donkey again – a little harder and a little longer this time*. Okay let's not be hasty. Everybody can have a bad day. Let's give Bila'am a little slack. How about one more chance, Holy One? No problem.

Vayosef mal'ach-Adonai avor
The Holy One's angel continued ahead [of Bila'am],
vaya'amod b'makom tzar asher eyn-derech lin'tot yamin us'mol
and he stood in a narrow place, where there was no room to turn right or left.

Vatere ha-aton et-mal'ach Adonai
When the donkey saw the Holy One's angel,
Vatirbatz tachat Bila'am vayichar-af
it lay down [refusing to budge] for Bila'am.

Bila'am vayach et ha-aton b'makel
Bila'am lost his temper, and beat the donkey with a stick.
[Numbers 22:26-27]

Bila'am's response to the third test of the narrow road crucible: *Blow a fuse, get a stick ... and beat the donkey one more time ... with feeling*. Someone once said: *The ultimate act of arrogance is to do the same thing over and over and expect a different result*. I wonder if that might just turn out to be true. But the next crucible of Bila'am's journey is already in the process of heating up. Are you ready for the crucible of the apprehension by the Angel of the Holy One?

Bila'am's Moments in the Crucible of Divine Correction

Remember that Bila'am is a *seer* and a *prophet*. He is supposed to see what is going on in the spiritual realm and then speak with the voice of the Holy One what he sees. Right now, however, he is too busy being angry - and beating his poor, faithful donkey – to see that all the donkey is doing is responding to the Presence the Angel of the Holy One. The Angel of the Holy One, however, is just about to make his presence known. And the Voice of the Almighty, like many waters, is

⁹ According to a Hebrew legend found in Midrash Tanchuma, the 'wall' against which Bila'am's foot was crushed was the heap of stones which Lavan and Ya'akov had erected when they made their covenant of peace, and Lavan said "***I will not pass over this heap to you, and that you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, for harm.***" (Genesis 31:52). The point is that Bila'am, who is considered by the sages to be like and/or a descendant of Lavan, was now violating this covenant by crossing the heap to come curse Ya'akov's descendents. Therefore the 'wall', or heap of stones, was punishing him, as it is written (Deuteronomy 17:7): "*The hand of the witnesses should be first in [punishing] him.*"

about to be heard. If Bila'am will not see Him or speak His Words the Holy One will find *another witness*. In this case the 'other witness' is going to turn out to be *the very donkey* upon whom Bila'am was taking out his rage. In the midst of the thrashing Bila'am was administering the Holy One gave the donkey the power of speech. The donkey opened its mouth and the voice that came out asked Bila'am:

Meh-asiti lecha ki hikitani zeh sh'losh regalim

'What have I done to you that you beat me these three times?'

[Numbers 22:28]

Alas, when the miraculous occurs and the Holy One supernaturally opens the mouth of the donkey and causes intelligible words to pour forth Bila'am chooses not to acknowledge the miracle and bless the Holy One. He decides instead to *curse the donkey*:

Bila'am said to the donkey, "How dare you make a fool out of me!"¹⁰

If I had a sword in my hand right now, I would kill you!"

[Numbers 22:29]

Bila'am's response to the crucible of the donkey's voice: *Ignore the sign and wonder, blame the donkey - and threaten to slay him with a sword!*

Whom will you curse, Bila'am - and whom will you bless? Trial by ordeal over. So there it is. The man who puts on a fancy suit and prophesies with the best of them - who everyone *thinks* lives by the Voice, it is revealed, when the chips are down, actually lives by *the sword*. "*If I had a sword in my hand right now ...*" he says. Now we understand perfectly what side Bila'am is on. Thank goodness it is the angel of the Holy One who had the sword instead!

A Talking Donkey – Really?

We are all familiar with 'fairy tales' in which animals are given voice. The three bears. The three little pigs. The tortoise and the hare. Need I go on? Have you ever wondered, though, what animals would say if they really *could* talk? Torah is no 'fairy tale'. In Torah, as in our lives, ordinarily it is humans who speak. And animals ... well, you know – they just *make animal sounds*. Not since the Garden has a creature spoken with a human voice. Then it was the Serpent. As I recall, nothing he had to say was particularly worth listening to. Maybe letting animals talk is not such a good idea. But then along comes *Bila'am's donkey*. Let's listen to the things that she has to say when the Holy One again gave her the power of speech:

¹⁰ Note that Bila'am's first worry is about *being made a fool of*. His concern is not the Holy One's will but *his own reputation and standing* – *i.e.*, how others will think of him. His worry is a loss of status in the eyes of men. This is FEAR OF MAN in its most insidious form. And he who fears man does not truly fear the Holy One – however well he 'talks the talk'.

Meh-asiti lecha ki hikitani zeh shalosh regalim

"What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

halo anochi atoneicha asher-rachavta alay

"Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden,

me'odcha ad ha-yom hazeh ha-hasken

ever since I became yours, to this day?"

hiskanti l'asot lecha koh

Was I ever disposed to do to you [the kind of thing of which you accuse me]?"

[Numbers 22:28, 30]

Notice that all this donkey does with the gift of speech is to *ask questions*. She does not *threaten Bila'am*. She does not *respond in anger*. She *makes no accusations*. She *offers no opinion or counsel*. She *does not preach or pontificate or prophesy*. And yet she is every bit *as eloquent as any speaker I have ever heard*. Oh the power of asking *the right question at the right time*.

A Very Real Revelation About the Way of Bila'am

The Holy One knows exactly how to reveal every man's heart. It doesn't take a talking donkey in most of our cases – given a fair chance we usually fill the role of the talking donkey quite nicely ourselves, thank you - without much help at all from the Holy One or anyone else. It also does not ordinarily, in most of our cases, take an angel wielding a sword in our direction to reveal our weaknesses. The wagging tongues of friends and neighbors perform that function very effectively indeed.

Do you truly want to fulfill your Divine destiny to live the *sh'ma* lifestyle, speaking our Divine Bridegroom's words as you lie down and as you rise up, as you sit in your homes and as you walk by the way? Then you must learn Beloved to *reserve your respect and allegiance for those who, however "gifted", do not "lose their religion"* when:

- [a] their kids misbehave in public,
- [b] their lawnmower won't start no matter what they try,
- [c] someone challenges one of their doctrines, or the validity of their "ministry";
- [d] the last flight home gets canceled and they get stuck in Podunk, Iowa,
- [e] the waitress spills the iced tea in their lap,
- [f] they are the one randomly sampled for an airport security pat down,
- [g] the hammer hits their thumb for the fourth time in 5 minutes, or
- [h] the water or electricity goes out.

Again, the point is not that an isolated flaring of the temper or a tendency toward selfishness disqualifies a person's message. It doesn't. If it did no human could

ever speak on the Holy One's behalf. Look at Moshe. The point is that if we are ever to fulfill our destiny as the Holy One's *k'doshim* and avoid chasing after religious activities that appeal to the eyes and the flesh ... well ... if we are ever going to do that we simply must *grow up a little*. We have to keep our focus on the Holy One and on Torah-grounded truth – not on charismatic speakers and eloquent teachers.

We must learn not to sit awestruck when we run into someone who can “read our mail”, preach a sermon that makes us want to cry, or talk on the street to strangers he or she will never see again ‘til the cows come home’. We must learn not to get so excited over “worship leaders” who ignite the crowd with flashy vocals set against perfectly played licks on the keyboard or guitar. We must not be dazzled by charismatic personalities. We must learn, at long last, to search for *substance* - and be satisfied with nothing less. In determining who to get close to and walk alongside on life's pathway we must *learn to watch not what people do on stage, when they are playing to an audience, but what happens to people when the real rubber hits the real road*. You see, Dear Reader, almost anyone with a minimum of talent can put on a good show for a few hours a week. Only someone intimate with the Holy One however can faithfully, consistently, gently and steadfastly live out a covenant relationship with God in the midst of sticky real life situations, day after day, year after year, in good times and in bad, and in sickness as well as in health.

A Tale of Two Pathways

The sages of Israel have considered the contrasts between Bila'am and the patriarch Avraham – into whose covenant with the Holy One we have all been engrafted. Here is the conclusion of the sages on the matter:

*Whoever has three particular traits is counted
among the disciples/sons of Avraham,
and whoever has three opposite traits is among the disciples/sons of Bila'am.
He who has a good eye, humility and contentedness is a disciple/son of Avraham,
while he who has an evil eye, arrogance and greed is a disciple/son of Bila'am."*

[Talmud, Pirkei Avot 5:22]

Is your eye ‘good’ or ‘evil’? In Hebrew thought the idea of having a good or bad eye speaks to the way a person looks at, thinks about, and treats the other people around him. One who has a *good eye* looks favorably upon others. He is not jealous of their wealth or accomplishments but is happy for them and theirs. He treats them with due honor, deference, and respect. In Hebraic thought, you are like Avraham – i.e. you have a ‘good eye’ - if you look upon other people in your life with goodwill, you will seek to locate and bring out what is good in them, and will

therefore treat them kindly and generously¹¹. If however you look upon the other people in your life critically and selfishly, as obstacles to your success, as objects to use to further your own interest, or as competitors for scarce resources and coveted affections, you are like – and are a disciple/son of - Bila'am.

Are your interactions with those around you – and with the Holy One – characterized by *humility* [the way of Avraham], or by *arrogance* [the way of Bila'am]? True "humility" is *to know one's place in relation to others – particularly vis-à-vis the Holy One*. The way of Bila'am however is *to do the absolute minimum necessary to pacify or placate the Holy One* so that the Holy One will leave him alone to do what he really wants to do. Bila'am's goal is to make the Holy One irrelevant and to focus all attention on *himself* and on *his 'ministry'*.

Do your thoughts, words and actions reflect an inner attitude of *contentedness* [the way of Avraham]; or do they reflect *greed* and *covetousness* [the way of Bila'am]? Avraham forsook all his family's wealth and prestige in Charan to heed the *Lecha Lecha* [*go out ...*] calling of the Holy One. Bila'am, on the other hand, chaffed and ultimately refused the Divine instruction that he was not to go with Balak's messengers, all for Balak's 'reward' and the prestige and flattery of men.

So, Dear Reader ... if I may ask ... *whose son* are you? The ultimate and most deadly form of spiritual deception, you see, is not that which others practice upon us – it is *that which we practice upon ourselves*. Act justly. Love mercy. And walk humbly before the Holy One your God. And do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.

Where Angels Fear to Tread

The Holy One's point has been made. Bila'am is – we are - walking where angels fear to tread. It is time to sweep away the darkness and make the spiritual reality of what has been going on around us perfectly clear. It is time for Bila'am – and the Bila'am in all of us - to put down our puny little donkey-beating sticks, shut our foul, self-righteous mouths, and 'come to Papa'.

Vayegal Adonai et-eynei Bila'am

Then the Holy One opened Bila'am's eyes,

vayar et-mal'ach Adonai nitzav b'derech v'charbo shlufah b'yado

and he saw the Angel of the Holy One standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand;

vayikod vayishtachu l'apav

and he [Bila'am] bowed his head, and fell flat on his face.

¹¹ Having a good eye towards others stems from possessing a healthy attitude about oneself. If a person sees himself as capable and worthy in the Holy One's eyes he will not begrudge others their achievements.

Vayomer elav mal'ach Adonai

And the Angel of the Holy One said to him,

al-mah hikita et-atoneicha zeh shalosh regalim

"Why have you struck your donkey these three times?"

hineh anochi yatzati l'satan

For behold, I have come out to stand against you as an adversary,

ki-yarat ha-derech l'negdi

because your way is perverse before Me.

Vatir'ani ha-aton vatet l'fanai zeh shalosh regalim

The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times.

ulay natetah mipanai

If she had not turned aside from Me,

ki atah gam-otchah ha-ragti v'otah hecheyeyti

surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live."

The mighty Bila'am is now totally humbled. He who is supposed to *see all* - saw nothing. He who was supposed to *know all* - did not even know enough to realize he was inches away from death. What will the neighbors think?

All the starch has gone out of Bila'am - for now. Hence we read:

Vayomer Bila'am el-mal'ach Adonai Chatati

And Bila'am said to the Angel of the Holy One, "I have sinned,

ki lo yadati ki atah nitzav likrati b'derech

for I did not know You stood in the way against me.

v'atah im-ra b'eyneycha ashuvah li

Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back."

That's better Bila'am. If you'll just keep an attitude of humility like that you'll be amazed – indeed, generations of scholars will be stunned - at how much insight you will receive from the Holy One. And the wisest among them will give glory and honor for it *to the Holy One* - and *not to you*. If you can accept that Bila'am, you may *sally forth*.

*Then the Angel of the Holy One said to Bila'am, "Go with the men,
but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak."*

If the Holy One can empower a donkey to talk Beloved He can just as easily make an arrogant self-centered confidence man like Bila'am with an evil eye speak truth - despite himself. So please resist the temptation to find the nearest stick and beat the poor donkey.

Questions For Today's Study

1. Let's continue our study with a few questions.

[A] In the first encounter between the princes of Moav and Bila'am, what is Bila'am's reply to the invitation to come and prophesy on behalf of Balak?

[B] How do you explain the fact that the Holy One speaks and reveals His counsel to Bila'am, who is clearly "not of the people"?

[C] What does the fact that the Holy One spoke to Bila'am - and even revealed His counsel to him - tell you about the Holy One?

[D] In verse 20, what did the Holy One instruct Bila'am to do?

[E] Why in verse 22 was the Holy One angry with Bila'am?

[F] What three things did Balaam's donkey do that led Bila'am to beat him?

[G] How did Bila'am react when he finally saw the Angel of the Holy One?

[H] Do you think Bila'am's repentance was genuine?

[I] What were the Angel's instructions to Bila'am?

[J] What does the first one-on-one conversation between Balak and Bila'am tell you about the personalities and motivations of those two men?

2. In today's aliyah from Micah the Holy One instructs His people regarding spiritual witchcraft (such as that which Balak was practicing in today's aliyah by hiring a renowned 'prophet' to shore up his *kingdom*). The Holy One says:

I will destroy witchcraft from your hand; and you will have no soothsayers.

I will cut off your engraved images and your pillars out of your midst;

And you shall no more worship the work of your hands.

I will uproot your Asherim out of your midst;

And I will destroy your cities. I will execute vengeance in anger,

And wrath on the nations that didn't sh'ma."

[Micah 5:11-14]

[A] What instructions did the Holy One give in the Torah regarding what was to be done with prophets/seers? [Cite the book, chapter, and verse, and describe the Holy One's instruction].

[B] Why do you think the Holy One is so seriously against fortunetellers, mediums, and the like?

[C] What instructions did the Holy One give in the Torah regarding what was to be done with the engraved images and altars of the Kena'ani (much like the totem poles of some Native American cultures? [Cite the book, chapter, and verse, and describe the Holy One's instruction].

[D] Why does the Holy One say He will destroy the cities where His people are living? Is this for their own good? If so, how is it for their good? [Hint: read the verse in the full context of chapter 5].

3. In today's reading from the B'rit Chadasha Shaul of Tarsus continues his

discussion concerning the difference between those who live by *the Voice* and those who live by other means. His words could very well be considered a commentary on the aliyah we read in the Torah, involving the Holy One's humiliation of Bila'am by showing even his donkey to be more spiritually alert and astute than he, the renowned prophet. Here is a personal paraphrase of Shaul's words:

*Among those who respond to the Holy One's Voice, brothers,
You do not find many are considered "wise" men in the world's estimation,
not do you find many whom the world considers to be powerful,
nor do you find many whom the world holds in high esteem;
God chooses the things the world considers foolish
[and people whom the world considers fools] to accomplish His purposes,
in order that he might put to shame those whom the world considers wise.
God chooses things and people the world considers weak and powerless,
in order that he might put to shame those whom the world thinks hold all the power.*

[A] What three categories or classifications of persons does Shaul indicate tend not to respond to the Holy One's Voice?

[B] What does Shaul say is the Holy One's way of dealing with persons whom the world considers - or who consider themselves - as "wise"? Why is this the Holy One's way - what is the Holy One's objective?

[C] What does Shaul say is the Holy One's way of dealing with persons whom the world considers - or who consider themselves - as "powerful"? Why is this the Holy One's way - what is the Holy One's objective?

[D] In today's aliyah what instrument does the Holy One use to "put to shame" Bila'am, who the world considered "wise" and "powerful"?

*May you know true wisdom, true power, and true nobility.
And may you never fall victim to spiritual deception.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation For Today's Study

Proverbs 16:3-5

*Commit your works to the Holy One,
and your thoughts will be established.*

*The Holy One has made all for Himself,
Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.*

*Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Holy One;
Though they join forces, none will go unpunished.*