

Shayla: What was Balaam's sin in Numbers 22:34?

Extended: If Balaam didn't know the Angel of the Lord was there, why was it a sin for him to beat his donkey that seemed to be rebelling and injuring him?

Midrash:

- [Numbers 22:34 HCSB](#) Balaam said to the Angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know that You were standing in the path to confront me. And now, if it is evil in Your sight, I will go back."

First of all, the fact that wicked Balaam defined his sin in such a manner doesn't make it so. He'd already been told to not go with the Balak's men and to not curse us¹ and Hashem was incensed that Balaam was going anyway.² So he was sinning long before he beat his donkey.

Second, I believe Balaam sinned in not knowing that the Angel of the Lord was there. Was he not supposed to be a prophet? Was he not the "man whose eyes are opened", the "one who hears the sayings of God, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls into a trance with his eyes uncovered"?³ Surely if he had stopped for even a moment to ask himself what was causing the donkey to act so uncharacteristically he would have realized what was going on. Had he not just had a miraculous conversation with Yahweh? Surely everything around him should have been particularly sharp, clear and potentially a word from the Lord! The problem was that he was so caught in his greed that it blinded him. Truly his name should have been Maher Shalal Hashbaz, "Hurry to spoil!" or "He has made haste to the plunder!"⁴

A person who is in tune with the Ruach' ha Kodesh, the Holy Spirit of God, should be able to discern the voice of God in the newspaper articles he reads, in the conversations with others throughout the day, in the movement of the wind and the circling of a hawk. Each of these things can relay the will of God or some characteristic of God to us.

- [Psalms 19:1-4 HCSB](#) For the choir director. A Davidic psalm. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky proclaims the work of His hands. (2) Day after day they pour out speech; night after night they communicate knowledge. (3) There is no speech; there are no words; their voice is not heard. (4) Their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the inhabited world...
- [Romans 1:20 HCSB](#) From the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse.

This blindness caused by materialistic sensuality was Balaam's mistake and we should try to not fall into it as well. Anything that happens to us in this world is a potential message from Hashem. We may have to stop and think for a while but it's necessary to do so.

¹ Numbers 22:12

² Numbers 22:22

³ Numbers 24:3-4

⁴ Isaiah 8:1-4