

STOP AND THINK! BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

PARSHAS VAERA

In the 7th plague, of *barad*, hailstones would rain down and kill all the people and animals that remained outside. Before beginning the plague, Hashem told Moshe to warn the Egyptians to protect themselves and their animals by staying indoors. The **Torah** (Shmos 6:9) says, "He who feared the word of Hashem among Pharaoh's servants, made his servants and his livestock flee into the houses but he whose heart did not heed the word of Hashem, left his servants and his livestock in the field." Apparently, only those Egyptians who feared Hashem heeded this warning.

It is very strange that all the Egyptians, after seeing the damage that occurred during the first six plagues, did not listen to the warning, deliberately exposing their livestock and servants to death by hail. The **Ohr HaChaim** (Shmos 9:21) says that the Egyptians did that as an act of defiance to Hashem.

Rabbi Yissachar Frand ([Rabbi Frand on the Parashah](#)) quotes the **Midrash Rabbah** (12:2) that "He who feared the word of Hashem among Pharaoh's servants" refers to *Iyov*. The **Eitz Yosef** adds that it was not only *Iyov*. Rather, it was also other Egyptians who followed *Iyov's* advice to bring their servants and animals inside before the plague of hailstones. **Rabbi Frand** says that the one who didn't fear Hashem and left his property outside, was *Bilaam* [I could not find the source for this, as the *Midrashim* that I had read, say those who did not listen were *Pharaoh* and his people].

Rabbi Frand says that although *Bilaam* was brilliant, he was so focused on himself that he paid no attention to what was going on around him. Many years later, *Bilaam* mounted his donkey, on the way to *Balak*, to curse the Jewish People. *Bilaam's* donkey acted strangely, going off the trail, then squeezing between a narrow opening, and then stopping completely. Each time, the donkey ignored *Bilaam's* beatings. Then Hashem miraculously allowed the donkey to speak to *Bilaam*. "Am I not the very same donkey that you have been riding on all your life until this very day? Was it ever my habit to do this to you?" And he [*Bilaam*] said, 'No.'" (*Bamidbar* 22:30)

*"Moshe spoke [these words] to B'nei Yisrael, but they would not listen to Moshe because of [their] shortness of breath and hard labor."
(Shmos 6:9)*

The donkey was basically telling *Bilaam* that its actions were atypical and *Bilaam* should have realized.

The **Chofetz Chaim** *zt"l* ([Biurei Chofetz Chaim on the Torah](#) by *Yisroel Yosef Braunstein*) says that the entire episode of *Bilaam* that is written in the Torah

appears as one long narrative, without any breaks (called *psuchos* and *setumos*). The **Sifra** (*Vayikra* perek 1) says that the purpose of the breaks throughout the Torah was to give *Moshe Rabbeinu* a chance to stop to think, reflect, and understand the Torah that Hashem was teaching him. The **Chofetz Chaim** *zt"l* says that *Bilaam*, on the other hand, never stopped to think about what he was doing or the wisdom of his actions.

Rabbi Frand says that when *Moshe* gave the warning about the impending hailstorm, *Bilaam* couldn't "be bothered" to consider *Moshe's* words. *Bilaam* was absorbed in his own thoughts. **He did not stop to reflect and think.**

Pharaoh employed a similar strategy against the Jews. *Moshe* came to the Jews with a message that Hashem was going to redeem them from Egypt. "...but they would not listen to *Moshe* because of [their] shortness of breath and hard labor." (*Shmos* 6:9) The **Ibn Ezra** explains that the Jewish People did not pay attention to the words of *Moshe* because of the length of their exile and the hard labor which had recently been imposed upon them. The **Ramban** says that the taskmasters pressed them and hurried them, giving them no chance to hear anything and think about it. They had no time to **stop to reflect and think.**

by Rabbi Yaakov

The **Mesilas Yesharim** (perek 2) tells us that this is the strategy that the *Yetzer Hara*, evil inclination, uses with us. The *Yetzer Hara* knows the powerful effect that contemplation and reflection of our actions can have in our avoiding sin and improving our actions. The *Yetzer Hara* knows that if we would find a few moments to think about what we are doing or have done, then we would immediately start regretting our misdeeds and eventually abandon them. To thwart us from doing this, the *Yetzer Hara* keeps us exceedingly busy with our

many burdens and responsibilities. We are so distracted with our daily routine and all the extra burdens, that we don't stop to contemplate our actions and our life's goals.

A businessman once approached **Rabbi Yisroel Salanter** zt"l. He said that he was so busy with his business affairs that he only had 15 minutes a day to learn Torah. The businessman wanted to know what he should learn during that time. **Rav Yisroel** zt"l told him to learn mussar (sefarim on character refinement) and then he would realize that he actually had even more time to learn Torah than he had initially thought.

The years of our lives pass quickly. We are so busy with life that we don't always stop to think and to reflect. Are there important goals that we want to accomplish, that we are "too busy" to think about, no less fulfill. Are there family relationships that we want to nurture? Are there topics in the Torah that we still want to learn? Are there areas in which we want to improve as a human being?

The *Yetzer Hara* tries to keep us so busy that we don't take the time to think. It's time to stand-up to the *Yetzer Hara* and say I WILL! I WILL take 10 minutes every day to stop, reflect, and improve. I WILL start doing some of those things that I want to, by going forward slowly, perhaps spending only a few minutes every day. I WILL become a better person and I WILL be happier for it!

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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