

LISTEN TO YOUR MESSAGES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vaera

Listen To Your Messages

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 621, Kosher Cheese Continued - Cottage Cheese and Butter. Good Shabbos!

The plague of Hail is foretold in this week's parsha with the following words: "Behold at this time tomorrow I shall rain a very heavy hail, such as there has never been in Egypt, from the day it was founded until now. And now, send forth; gather in your livestock and everything you have in the field. All the people and animals that are found in the field and will not be gathered into the house - the hail shall descend upon them and they shall die." [Shemos 9:18-19]

The Torah testifies in the very next two pasukim [verses]: "Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart - he left his servants and livestock in the field."

In the Medrash, Chazal state that the expression "whoever feared the word of Hashem" refers to Iyov and the expression "whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart" refers to Bilaam (both of whom - we learn elsewhere -- were advisors to Pharaoh).

We previously mentioned that the pasuk "and whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart..." provides a fundamental insight into the personality of Bilaam. Hail was already the seventh plague. By this time, one would have to be very obtuse in order to not understand that Hashem means what He says. If Moshe Rabbeinu threatened a catastrophic hailstorm that would kill all animals and livestock left out in the open, one could bank on that storm coming. After six previous plagues, how could anyone, at this point, doubt that what Moshe predicted was certain to occur?

The answer lies in the words "did not take the word of G-d to heart". There is a capacity among humans to be totally immune to stimuli. People can totally shut themselves out from messages that

are constantly occurring. A person has the ability to be so insensitive to obvious facts that if someone banged him over the head with a baseball bat, he still would not get it! He simply does not take the words of G-d to heart.

If Bilaam is the personification of this type of individual who just does not get it no matter what he sees, Moshe Rabbeinu is at the opposite end of the spectrum.

The Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yakov Weinberg, zt"l, once noted the following: From Parshas Shemos through Parshas Zos HaBracha (which is the bulk of Chumash), the Torah's main narrative centers around the personality of Moshe Rabbeinu. With the exception of Parshas Tezaveh (as is discussed by the commentators) Moshe's name appears prominently in each of the parshios of the last 4 books of Torah. However, there are very scant details in the pasukim of the Torah that introduce this central figure in our religion. In fact, we are told very few details of the first 80 years of his life! Therefore, said Rav Weinberg, every time the Torah DOES tell us some detail about Moshe's life and about how he became who he was, the detail must be significant.

One of the first times the Torah mentions anything about Moshe is at the Burning Bush. After describing the phenomenon of the thorn bush which was burning without being consumed, the Torah states: "And Moshe said: 'Let me go and investigate this great sight - why will the bush not be burned?'" [Shemos 3:3]. Rav Weinberg said that we see from this incident that part of what made Moshe Rabbeinu the great person who he was, was his sensitivity to stimuli that are constantly occurring. Moshe Rabbeinu stands in stark contradistinction to Bilaam. Moshe was always seeking out messages from G-d. Whenever a noteworthy event took place, Moshe was certain to investigate, analyze and see what meaning and interpretation he could draw from that event.

The Chofetz Chaim once pointed out something unique about Parshas Balak, which is really the story of the wicked Bilaam. There is not a single "break point" (indicated by a Samech ["closed break"] or a Pay ["open break"]) in the entire narrative from the time Balak invites Bilaam until the time Bilaam leaves and returns home. Uncharacteristically, approximately four consecutive columns of Torah script do not contain a single "break" in the flow of the text.

The Chofetz Chaim explained that the "Samechs" and "Pays" in the Torah mark the places where Moshe was given time to reflect when the Torah was transmitted to him on Har Sinai. Moshe needed time between sections to reflect and introspect, to pause and digest the material just covered. Moshe Rabbeinu - the personification of "let me investigate what this (burning bush) is telling me - needs pauses in the text. Bilaam, who is so obtuse that he is characterized by the expression "the one who does not take to heart" (in connection with the plague of Hail), Bilaam who is so insensitive to Divine messages that he can have his donkey talk to him and still not react to it, does not need pauses in the text. Regardless of whether pauses were present or not, Bilaam would run right through them without pausing to reflect and introspect.

This is what the Torah is trying to teach us here. A person must be open to stimuli. He has to listen to

his messages.

A woman recently wrote a nice letter to me in response to my book ("Listen to Your Messages"; Mesorah 1999):

"This year, the week after Succos, I was in Newark airport to see our son and his family off to Eretz Yisrael where they live. We have a daughter that was in need of a shidduch. Standing ahead of our son, waiting for security clearance stood a young man with his father. A few people had proposed this young man as a possible match for our daughter. Somehow, however, it was always felt that it was not a good match and promptly disregarded. For some reason the security setup at the El Al counter in Newark Airport that day was different than I had ever seen it there, either before or after. I was standing in position to observe this young man and since security was exceptionally slow, I observed him for quite some time. I began to think of your book and its title and maybe this was a message to listen to. The rest is history. We called one of the shadchanim who gave us the details. Everything sounded wonderful. It did not take long for the shidduch to take off, for the couple to get engaged, and for the wedding to take place."

I don't mean to say this as a plug for my book, but there certainly is a concept that a person must be open to what is happening around him. Like everything else in life, it can be overdone. If the checkout bagger at a local supermarket compliments one on his tie, he should not necessarily waste a lot of time trying to figure out what that means. It probably means nothing more than that he has a nice tie on.

On the other hand, one cannot be obtuse. One does not want to find himself in the category of the person "who does not give heart to the word of Hashem." One who - when the occasion warrants it - will seek to determine what Hashem is telling him, will be following in the footsteps of our great teacher Moshe, about whom it is written "let me go and investigate the meaning of this great wonder I am seeing."

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Va'eyra are provided below:

- Tape # 039 - Shabbos Emergency: Who Do We Call?
- Tape # 082 - Astrology: Is It For Us?
- Tape # 130 - The Issur of Entering a Church
- Tape # 177 - Magic Shows: More Than Meets the Eye
- Tape # 223 - Learning in Kollel: Is It Always Permitted?
- Tape # 267 - Do Secular Names of G-d Have Kedusha?
- Tape # 313 - Converting a Church Into a Shul
- Tape # 357 - Birchas Hamotzi

Tape # 401 - Kadima B'brachos -- Hierarchy of Brochos

Tape # 445 - Shoveling Snow on Shabbos

Tape # 489 - Denying Jewishness

Tape # 533 - Shin Shel Tefillin & Ohr Echad

Tape # 577 - Davening For Non-Jews

Tape # 621 - Kosher Cheese Continued - Cottage Cheese and Butter

Tape # 665 - Checking Out Families for Shidduchim

Tape # 709 - Kavod Malchus & Secular Kings

Tape # 753 - Making Hamotzei - Not As Simple As It Seems

Tape # 797 - Sheva Brachos at the Seder

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