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PARSHAS
VAYISHLACH 5778

בְּשִׁיטְיָחָא

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS

Natural Miracles

Yaakov is finally heading back to Eretz Canaan, after having been away from home for 22 years. Before he can safely travel, though, he has to contend with Eisav and his army. With a strategy of appeasement, Yaakov sends gift bearing messengers to Eisav. The nature of the messengers is a subject of dispute, but there are those who say that these were actually angels, not messengers of flesh and blood.

Reb Moshe Feinstein¹ poses the question – why did Yaakov choose to send such messengers? What purpose was there in using celestial beings for this cause, especially in light of the fact that one shouldn't rely on miracles for their wellbeing. It doesn't seem that these angelic messengers did anything extraordinary, nothing that couldn't be accomplished with living men.

Reb Moshe explains that miracles are events that are out of the ordinary – happenings against the laws of nature. Our perception is that there are certain 'rules' that govern the world, and miracles occur when those rules are broken. Yaakov Avinu had a different perspective. He recognized that with Hashem's total mastery over the world, there are no rules. Any event was just as much nature or miracle as any other event. The grass grows, the sun shines, and the rivers flow only because of Hashem's constant input. The orbit of the planets, the laws of gravity and motion only exist because of Hashem's will. And if Hashem were to will these things to stop, they would.

With that perspective, there is no distinction between 'miracle' and 'nature.' They are all the same manifestation of Hashem's doings, with the same amount of 'exertion' for each. So why did Yaakov Avinu choose to send angels? Well, why not? For Yaakov, the choice between sending angels or men is the same as the choice between sending a man named Jimmy or Henry. There may not have been anything extraordinary needed from the angels, but they were available, so he sent them.

This concept is not just for great people like Yaakov Avinu. Translated for us, this thought is life changing. For Yaakov Avinu, the practical application was recognizing miracles are 'normal.' For us, we can use this to recognize that 'normal' is miracles. Hashem's constant attention to us and our lives is a series of amazing marvels, phenomenons that we take for granted - but don't have to.

¹ Darash Moshe s.v. וישלח יעקב

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Hashem controls the entire universe, from the gravitational pull of black holes, to the nourishment an amoeba receives from its environment. However, we often have a hard time perceiving, let alone feeling, that Hashem is in our lives. Is there a technique that we can use to help us recognize Hashem's complete mastery?

As with all self-growth, a steady step-by-step process is better for long term retention than any 'quick scheme.'

Here are two possible methods that help us allow Hashem into our daily lives. There are times when we are forced to acknowledge Hashem's mastery - when we are awed by a beautiful lightning storm, or a marvellous sunset. At those times, we can try to remember that the same One who is controlling the storm clouds also controls the mundane aspects of our lives.

Additionally, when we *Daven*, it is worthwhile to reflect for a moment – I'm praying to the Being who can truly change my life. Health, wealth, happiness is all up to the One who I am speaking to right now! Doing so will not only change our prayers, but also change our perspectives.

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A CANDLE IN THE FOREST

Rabbi Yosef Yozeel Horowitz ("Alter of Novardok" 1847-1919) was one of the early pioneers of the Mussar movement. He became a student of Reb Yisroel Salanter at the age of 27, and through study and effort rose to be one of the Mussar greats of the previous generation.

He was known to seclude himself for long periods of time, only leaving his abode when absolutely necessary. In 1880 he locked himself in a room which he didn't leave for a year and a half. He received his meals through a small window, allowing him to continue his studies unabated.

In addition to his intense studies, 'the Alter' would do what he can do open up kollels and yeshivos across Europe. Thus, at times he would hide away for intense study, and other times, teach students and disseminate Torah.

Once, while studying in a cabin in the forest, the candle he was using burned out. Without fanfare, he stood up, and headed outside. Upon opening the door, a man ran over to him with a fresh candle, and then ran away!

After using the candle, he saved the stub to show others the power of *Bitachon* - trusting in Hashem. About 25 years after this incident, a fire broke out in his home, and many of his belongings, including the candle, were lost. After reflecting on the matter, he commented that one should not need a physical object to teach *Bitachon* - it is obvious that Hashem provides, and the same One Who provides candles in the city can provide candles in the forest as well.

**Based on various sources. See Sefer Madreigos Ha'Adom, page 189, footnote 30*

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DID YOU KNOW?

- Vinegar was accidentally substituted for oil as fuel in the Shabbos candles, in Rebbi Chanina ben Dosa's home. He commented, "He Who told oil to burn can tell vinegar to burn," and indeed it did - for 24 hours!¹
- The idea that there is absolutely no difference to Hashem between 'nature' and miracle is the foundation to the entire Torah!²
- The efficacy of prayer is so compelling, that if one prays properly, the occurrence of miracles is as normal as nature.³
- The idea of reward or punishment in this world only makes sense if 'nature' and miracles are the same. Otherwise, how would someone's behavior change what happens to them in this world?⁴

1 *Ta'aanis* 25a

2 *Ramban Bo* 13:16

3 *Maharsha* s.v. אפשר דאתרחש *Kiddushin* 29b

4 *Ramban Vayigash* 46:15