

Do You Believe in Miracles?
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Pesach Day VII

About three weeks ago, the phone rang in my office. I don't remember what I was doing- in all likelihood, it was preparing the Shabbos Hagadol drasha, but regardless, I was busy. The caller was a college student who was interested in speaking with a Rabbi. While it was not exactly a slow day, I figured that whatever conversation was about to transpire would probably be good material for a Pesach sermon, and boy, was I right. He explained that he was a student at the Southwest Assemblies of God University, in Waxahachie. After identifying himself by name, he told me that he is doing a project on the views of different religions on miracles. "I've already spoken to Presbyterians and to Armenian Orthodox people, but I haven't yet found out the Jewish view on miracles. Do you have a few minutes to speak?" I was a little taken aback. First of all, that was a pretty random assortment of Christian denominations. Second of all, the subject he wanted to discuss with me has been the subject of extensive debate over the centuries. Distilling all that into a five minute conversation- now *that* would be a miracle! What could I tell him?

The sixth chapter of the book of Shofim recounts the suffering of the Jewish people were experiencing under seven years of crushing occupation Midianite occupation. In response to the cries of the Jewish people to God to end the oppression, A prophet comes and tells them that these conditions were the result of their lack of faith in God, who had repeatedly told them He would save them and yet they continued not to listen to Him. Unlike other prophetic portents of destruction, the unnamed prophet did not give them any advice on how to ameliorate their

condition or whether they would experience salvation of any kind. Instead, he leaves, and sits under a tree in Ofra that belonged to a man named Yoash. It is there that he sees Yoash's son Gideon threshing grain, and he tells him, "God is with you, mighty warrior." Gideon almost seems like he was waiting for this exchange. "Oh yeah? You say there is a God? If that is the case, why is all this happening to us? Where are all the miracles our forefathers told us about? God took us out of Egypt, but now He has abandoned us, placing us in the hands of the Midianites." (א) וַיְבֹא מִלֶּאךָ יְקֹוֹק וַיֵּשֶׁב תַּחַת הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּעַפְרָה אֲשֶׁר לְיוֹאֵשׁ אָבִי הָעֶזְרִי וְגִדְעוֹן בְּנוֹ חֵיטִים) (Midianites).
בְּגַת לְהַנִּיס מִפְּנֵי מִדְיָן:

(יב) וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו מִלֶּאךָ יְקֹוֹק וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְקֹוֹק עִמָּךְ גִּבּוֹר הַחַיִּל:

(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו גִּדְעוֹן בִּי אָדֹנָי וַיֵּשׁ יְקֹוֹק עִמָּנוּ וְלָמָּה מְצַאֲתֵנוּ כָּל־זֹאת וְאֵיךְ כָּל־נַפְלֹאֲתָיו אֲשֶׁר סָפְרוּ־לָנוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לֵאמֹר

הֲלֹא מִמִּצְרַיִם הֶעֱלָנוּ יְקֹוֹק וְעַתָּה נִטְשָׁנוּ יְקֹוֹק וַיִּתְּנֵנוּ בְּכַף־מִדְיָן:

(יד) וַיֹּפֶן אֵלָיו יְקֹוֹק וַיֹּאמֶר לְךָ בְּכַחַךְ זֶה וְהוֹשַׁעְתָּ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכַּף מִדְיָן הֲלֹא שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ:

In commenting on this exchange, Rashi says that it took place on Pesach, and Gideon was issuing a challenge to the angel:

אשר ספרו לנו אבותינו - פסח היה אמר לו אמש הקרני אבא את ההלל ושמעתיו שהיה אומר בצאת ישראל

ממצרים ועתה נטשנו אם צדיקים היו אבותינו יעשה לנו בזכותם ואם רשעים היו כשם שעשה להם נפלאותיו חנם

כן יעשה לנו ואיך כל נפלאותיו:

It seems strange; similar to that which we discussed on the first day of Chag, Rashi is describing an event as taking place on Pesach but there is no textual basis for it. From where does Rashi derive this extended diatribe?

Perhaps we can suggest that Pesach is a time when we reflect on miracles, and recount the story of miracles God has wrought for the Jewish people in overt ways throughout our history.

But when we recount these miracles, especially on the Seder night, it's easy to begin thinking in a dramatically different direction. Instead of thinking of the miracles God had *already* performed, we may begin asking where *our* miracles are. Gideon had spent the evening recounting God's miracles and was transported out of his bleak reality for just one night, but the next day, he realized that those miracles were in the past. Does God still work miracles at all, and why weren't the Jewish people the beneficiaries any longer? The Navi records that God himself responded, "Use this strength, and you will be the one to save the Jews from the Midianites. What does *this strength* mean, and what kind of answer is that, anyway? I believe that God was teaching Gideon an important lesson. You, Gideon, clearly think a great deal about miracles. You are a person of spiritual sensitivity and you understand that miracles exist- and want to know where your miracle is. That is your strength- you are attuned to the miraculous. And if you are attuned to the miraculous in the world, you will not be merely a recipient of miracles- you will be an *agent* of miracles as the leader of the Jewish people.

This is what I told the student at the Southwest Assemblies of God University. In life, we cannot expect miracles; many times, Chazal tell us אין סומכין על הנס- we cannot rely on miracles happening for us. Not *relying* on them, however, is entirely different from them saying they never happen. After all, three times a day we thank God for על נסרך שבכל יום עמנו- your miracles that are with us each day. The Ramban in Parshat Bo outlines his philosophy, in which the order of nature itself is an expression of the miraculous at all times. The fact that we wake up each day is a miracle, as is our ability to walk, talk and breathe. The birth of a healthy child into the world is nothing short of miraculous. As Walt Whitman put it, "*A mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.*" If we are attuned to the miraculous that surrounds us at all times, we can heighten our own sensitivity to our ability to perform miracles for others. I've been

thinking about this quite a bit after the torrential rains in Houston that have walloped the United Orthodox Synagogue community days before Pesach, only months after the last flooding event. Thank God, everyone is safe but many people have lost many of their possessions...again.

Three days ago, Rebbetzin Gabi Gelman posted the following on her personal facebook page:

After waiting all day yesterday for the rain to stop and the water to recede, [Rabbi Barry Gelman](#) and I walked late last night to see our house, the shul, and visit with a few friends and neighbors. It was hard and the deja vu feeling of last May returned as we once again put on our boots and rain gear to walk around. The exhaustion and despairing feelings came back quickly but the overwhelming kindness and generosity of our community continues and gives us chizuk.. Small "miracles" too... After finding all the shmura matzah boxes wet on the floor in shul, we discovered that in many of the wet boxes, the matzah was totally dry and we managed to salvage almost 30 pounds of shmura matza...

thank you to everyone on fb for your kind messages. This will be a long week..

Yes, the dryness of the Matzah might be miraculous, but what is really miraculous is the amount of *chesed* that is going on, whether the bucket brigades of students from the Robert Beren Hebrew Academy who removed water from the shul's sanctuary and the homes of their teachers, or the people who went in canoes to the houses of families with young children to rescue them, or a woman named Cathy Allen Rude. As reported by the Dallas Morning News, Cathy Allen Rude is a 63 year old midwife who was able to hitch a ride on an inflatable swan to brave the waters that otherwise would have prevented her from delivering a baby. We all have the ability to be the miracle for someone else, providing crucial assistance at exactly the right time, if we refine our miracle antennae. Let us learn the lesson of Gideon. We can all ask "where's my miracle!" The real challenge is to answer, "I'm your miracle."