

SHELACH
SIMPLE FAITH,
THE KEY TO THE DOOR
TO ERETZ YISRAEL

A
The Spies' Debacle

This week's *parsha* deals with the great sin of the *meraglim*, the spies Moshe sent to investigate the Land of Israel prior to Am Yisrael's entry into the land. The spies brought back a terrifying report, saying how frightening it would be to fight these nations, that the land is a difficult land to live in, how they saw diseases and death there, and claiming that only giants could withstand the apparently harsh conditions. The people cried and refused to enter the Land of Israel, preferring to rebel against Moshe and return to Mitzrayim. Yehoshua and Kaleb, the two spies who remained loyal to Moshe, tried and failed to convince the people otherwise by extolling the virtues of the land and reminding Bnei Yisrael that Hashem was with them. But the people wouldn't listen, prompting Hashem to pronounce the terrible decree that they would all die in the desert while wandering there for forty years, and only their children would enter the land.

B

Puzzling Denial

This is a very puzzling episode. As Moshe himself told the Jews, Hashem did so many miracles for them: the ten plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea, the miracles at Har Sinai. The nation had survived more than a year of living in a desert without any food or water. They were supernaturally supported by the *mann*, miraculous bread that fell daily from the sky, and water that came from a rock that Moshe hit. How could the spies and the people feel that Hashem was weaker than the seven nations living in the land of Canaan? How could they deny the reality of Hashem's miracles?

C

Two Kinds of Miracles

The Shem Mishmuel explains this story based on a fundamental idea developed by the Ramban in Parshas Va'eira. When Hashem first charged Moshe with the mission to speak to the Jews in Egypt, He explained that He was adopting a new approach in dealing with the people. "I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov as Keil Shakai, but I did not let them know My name Havayah (*Yud Kei Vav Kei*)" (Shemos 6:3). Ramban notes, however, that we do find the name Havayah in Hashem's communications with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Clearly, then, Hashem did not mean that He had never before used the name Havayah. Instead, He meant that His primary method of interacting with people had changed. Hashem interacted with the *avos* using the name Keil Shakai. Now, in taking the people out of Egypt, Hashem told Moshe that He would primarily interact with them using the name Havayah. What is the significance in the name that God uses to relate to people?

Generally speaking, God runs the world according to the

rules of nature, which include the laws of physics, biology, chemistry, etc. Occasionally, though, Hashem will perform a miracle, essentially violating these natural laws.

There are two forms of miracles. One kind of miracle makes a complete break with natural law, the ten plagues being a good example. God changed the molecular composition of water into that of blood. The dust of the land of Egypt turned into lice. These are miracles wherein the basic laws of nature are broken. When Hashem performs this kind of miracle, He uses the name Havayah, which means He is the source of existence and as such He was, is, and will be. He always existed, He exists now, and He always will exist. Just as He created existence and willed the natural laws into existence, He can also break those laws and make existence work in a different way. This type of miracle is rare.

Other miracles function within natural law. These are called hidden miracles. For example, in order to save Lot from being a prisoner of war, Avraham fought a war against a powerful coalition of four kings that had conquered the whole region. He took about 300 people and attacked the great armies of the four kings. With Hashem's help, these 300 people were able to vanquish the kings' much larger armies. Avraham won a battle against the odds, but no natural laws were suspended or broken, making this a hidden miracle.

Miracles in the first category, which Moshe produced in Egypt, are called *nissim geluyim*, revealed miracles. Everyone witnessing one of these events would have to agree that the laws of nature had been suspended. The hidden miracles, the *nissim nistarim*, occur within the rules of nature and seem to be peculiar, coincidental occurrences. A *neis nistar* happens just at the right time to save the Jews.

This is the meaning of the statement, "I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov as Keil Shakai." *Keil* means power, and *Shakai* means the formulator of the rules of nature, *she'amar*

la'olam dai. Within the rules of nature, God has the power to manipulate events.

D

Revealed Miracles and God's Kindness

The exodus of the Jewish People from Mitzrayim stood on *nissim geluyim*, the source of which was Havayah, the four-letter name of God that represents His role as Creator and Source of existence. We also know from the Midrash and *halacha* that this name is the name of God's mercy, *rachamim*.

Hashem created and runs the world with two pillars. One pillar is *middas hadin*, the rule of justice and law. The basic rules of nature come from *din*, unchanging and unchangeable. The second pillar is *middas harachamim*, the trait of kindness, mercy, and compassion. Different names of Hashem represent different *middos*, different modes of His interactions with the world.

The name *Havayah* represents *rachamim*; it is the name of Hashem's *chesed*. When Hashem created the world, it was an act of pure kindness. Creatures have no demands on Him, no right to request of Him that we exist. The name that signifies His role as Creator and Provider of existence therefore is also the name of *rachamim*, implying that He is full of mercy and kindness.

E

The Motivation Provided by *Kiddush Hashem*

The Shem Mishmuel teaches a deeper idea related to this concept based on the writings of the great Chassidic Rebbe the Chozeh of Lublin. The Chozeh said that the greatest motivator for Hashem to do something in this world is *kiddush Hashem*. This is the process that an open miracle sets in motion. When people see an

event and become overwhelmed by the goodness of God, they will praise and glorify Him. Sanctification of God's name may be the most important thing that can happen in this world.

When God performs a revealed miracle, even children and uneducated people see that it is His work and praise Him in response. In contrast, however, when a miracle is hidden, the event can also be written off as a coincidence. A person must have faith, insight, and sensitivity to realize that an occurrence was God's work concealed within natural law. You need a certain amount of spiritual and religious development in order to realize that an event was, in fact, a *neis*.

The Shem Mishmuel expands on this idea and develops a deeper understanding of the concept of miracles. The mercy of Hashem is more focused on *kiddush Hashem*; it produces *kiddush Hashem*. He wants people to realize that He is their Creator and to praise and thank Him. The revealed *neis* achieves this goal very quickly. Therefore, in heaven, the angels do not oppose these kinds of miracles as they, too, want people to appreciate Hashem.

However, when Hashem in His infinite wisdom does not use the trait of mercy, but instead uses the name Keil Shakai, the name of hidden miracles within nature, the *kiddush Hashem* is not so clear. People may not react with adulation, since the miracle is not so obvious. If someone was in a car accident and walked out unscathed, he might just say, "I was lucky." You need sensitivity to see the miracle.

This kind of miracle, therefore, does not get a free pass in heaven. The angels of *din* may express reservations. They challenge, "Why should you make a miracle for this person? Will he appreciate it? Will he recognize it?" When a *neis nistar* is on the agenda, it is a time of *din* in heaven, and a decision has to be made whether it should take place or not. Some angels say, "Save this person! Make the miracle." Others say, "Don't do it, the person does not deserve it. He will not recognize that he is receiving a miracle." Then God has to decide whether the person deserves the

miracle or not. It is a time of divine judgement. This judgement can be tempered by mercy, but it remains justice.

F

Secrets for Successful Prayer

The Shem Mishmuel explains that the miracles Hashem did for Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov were hidden and thus miracles of *din*. Accordingly, the names that Hashem used to communicate with the *avos* were names of *din*. When the name Hashem uses is Havayah, pure mercy motivates the action and an open miracle can take place. Then there is no judgement. When the Jewish People left Egypt, they were on the forty-ninth level of defilement; they didn't deserve any miracles. They were serving idols like the Egyptians. They were doing all kinds of sins, and if *din* had been involved, there would have been no Exodus. In His mercy, though, Hashem took them out of Egypt with great miracles. This is the level of pure kindness of Hashem without any justification or judgement.

This is the difference between the miracles of Moshe, which were supernatural miracles of the *chesed* of the name Havayah, and the deserved miracles of the *avos*, which were based on the *din* of the name Keil Shakai.

Now that we understand this aspect of the inner workings of miracles, we can apply this to our personal *davening*. When a person has a problem and *davens* to Hashem, it is important to invoke the concept of *kiddush Hashem*. When you do this, you will elicit a divine response from the side of *chesed* rather than of justice. After all, who can say to God, "In all fairness, I am deserving in front of You?" We want our requests to be processed on the *chesed* side.

The Chozeh proposed a strategy to achieve this goal. Instead of *davening* for yourself, *daven* for Hashem Who feels your need.

When you are in need and have a problem, you should know that Hashem feels your problem just as you do. When a child cries, the parents cry inside together with the child. When we are in trouble, our Father in heaven feels pain with us. When we *daven* for a solution, we can say, “I know that I do not deserve this. But certainly Your holy name is deserving, and You are suffering with me. Have mercy on Yourself and take away the trouble by giving me the salvation that I need.”

Chazal knew this secret. In every Shemoneh Esrei that we pray, we conclude with the words, “*Asei l’ma’an sh’mecha, asei l’ma’an yeminecha*. Do it for Your name, do it because of Your great right hand [of mercy].” We ask that He fulfill our wishes because of His love for the Jewish People, “*L’ma’an yeichaltzun y’didecha*.” We make Hashem’s needs the focus our prayers. This prayer is more powerful because it will produce a *kiddush Hashem*, the most powerful force in creation.

G

The Spies’ Counterargument

When the spies returned with their frightening report, Moshe argued with the people, noting that they were benefiting from revealed supernatural miracles. Why didn’t the people accept Moshe’s claims?

In Beha’aloscha, we read about Eldad and Meidad, the two mysterious prophets who uttered a terrible prophecy: “Moshe will die, and Yehoshua will bring the people into the land.” As punishment for Bnei Yisrael complaining about the *mann*, Hashem decided that Moshe would not be the one to bring Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael.

Eldad and Meidad pronounced this prophecy in the camp. This decree occurred before the sin of the spies, but no one ever told Moshe because they were afraid. Moshe remained unaware

of this prophecy. During the forty years of wandering in the desert, Moshe dreamed of entering Eretz Yisrael. Just before he left this world, Moshe prayed 515 prayers to enter the land, unaware of God's decree that he would die.

The people therefore knew that Yehoshua would be the one to bring them into Eretz Yisrael. As great as Yehoshua was, he was not Moshe. They thought that Yehoshua would not be able to merit the same miracles that Moshe did. With Moshe gone, Hashem would deal with them not with the name Havayah, with pure kindness, but rather with Keil Shakai, as the powerful God Who works within nature, only making hidden miracles.

In this case, there would be a *din* in heaven about whether we are deserving or not. If we were to go with Moshe, then even if we didn't deserve the miracles, Hashem would save us. But if we would go in without Moshe, we would revert to the limitations of nature. We would have a judgement in heaven about whether we are deserving of these hidden miracles or not.

The people felt that they were not deserving. They knew their weaknesses. Recently, they had worshiped the golden calf. They had complained about the *mann* and were carried away with hysteria about the lack of meat. They worried, "We questioned Hashem and Moshe for taking us into the desert. We don't have the level of faith necessary to deserve hidden miracles. God will expect too much from us, and God forbid we will be destroyed."

H

Fear of Our Own Worth

This is the reason the people were not impressed with Moshe's arguments about the miracles of Mitzrayim and the desert. Moshe wanted these miracles to give the people more faith that Hashem would be able to take them into Eretz Yisrael just like He had cared for them in the desert. The people agreed, but felt that only Moshe

was worthy of such miracles. At the lower level they perceived themselves to be on, the level of *din*, they were afraid that they would fail.

This argument has merit. How can a person expect miracles based on judgement and justice in a heavenly court?

The people's terrible mistake was that Moshe, who was God's messenger, told them to go to Eretz Yisrael. Even if Moshe didn't realize that he would not go with them, he still conveyed this message from Hashem. If God tells you to go, you will succeed.

Sometimes, we feel unworthy or incapable of performing a certain mission. However, when God gives you a commandment, even if you feel that you are incapable or unworthy of this *mitzva*, you must know that you can succeed. Some people feel, "I don't deserve to succeed in this *mitzva*." Even if you feel the *mitzva* is too difficult for you, you have to do your best. This was our commitment at Har Sinai when we said *na'aseh v'nishma*, we will do it and try to understand. Even if our current understanding tells us that it is impossible to do this *mitzva* now, we try to do it anyway.

I

Faith in the Promise

Avraham had this thought process as well. In Bereishis 15:6, the Torah says that Avraham believed in Hashem, and Hashem considered this belief *tzedaka*, an act of charity. In other words, Avraham said to himself, "Eretz Yisrael will indeed be given to me, even though I think it is impossible, because God said that He will give it to me."

In the Torah, sometimes Hashem tells us things that we think cannot happen. But we must have faith that they will indeed happen.

Everything that Avraham received was with *din*, judgement, not with pure kindness. Nevertheless, there was *tzedaka* in the

din. The Shem Mishmuel says this is the idea of the *pasuk*, “*Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha*. You have to be simple with Hashem” (Devarim 18:13). When Hashem tells you to do something, be simple—just do it. Don’t start calculating whether it makes sense or not.

Bnei Yisrael’s problem at the time of the *meraglim* was that they didn’t have simple faith. With their sophisticated faith, they underestimated their own abilities.

J

Impossible *Mitzvos*

We live in a time when many people think that various *mitzvos* are impossible. People express this feeling using many different phrases. “It’s above us.” “We’re not on that level, we can’t do it.” “How can we succeed in certain things that the Torah expects us to do?” When it comes to being honest in business, some people say, “I can’t do it. There are so many crooked people around me, and I have been so dishonest until now. How can I be as honest as the Torah wants me to be?” The question is mistaken. Just do it; try, and you will see success. Have simple faith in Hashem’s commandments.

Many people fight with others, speaking *lashon hara* and feeling *sinas chinam*. People say, “I’ve done so much to hurt others. My relationships with certain people have been ruined. How can I straighten this out?” Have simple faith; you can work on those relationships. Try it, and you’ll see it will work.

People say, “I have children to raise. I myself am flawed in character. Can I possibly make a child better than me? They are rebellious, I don’t know what to do!” God said you must try to raise your children. Have simple faith. Don’t fret too much, just do it. *Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha*. Hashem will help you even if you think you can’t do it.

Whom Do You Trust?

At the time of the *mergalim*, the Jewish People used human estimations of their abilities. They didn't understand that Hashem knew them better than they knew themselves. He knew that if they went into the land, they would succeed. They would merit hidden miracles within nature to conquer the land and fight against the Canaanite nations in Eretz Yisrael.

The Gemara (Chullin 5b) cites a *pasuk*, “*Adam u'vheima toshia Hashem*. God saves man and animal” (Tehillim 36:7). The Gemara interprets this as a reference to brilliant, sophisticated people who make themselves like a simple animal. We have a lot of sophistication. Sometimes, this sophistication blinds us to simple truths. Hashem runs this world, and if He tells us to do something, then we can do it. We can be like an animal who has a yoke and does exactly what his driver tells him to do. This is the simple faith that a Jew should have, that we can do it just because Hashem told us to. The Shem Mishmuel adds that this simple faith itself will be the merit for the judgement in heaven to come out in our favor, merit enough to deserve a miracle.

Bnei Yisrael could go into Israel and rely simply on Hashem Himself. He is the greatest thing we can rely on. We like to have *tzaddikim*, great people, family, and friends to rely on. We have to realize that Hashem is our greatest friend. We can rely on Him more than on anyone else. Even when you feel that there is no one upon whom to rely, Hashem is always there, and you can rely on Him. This is a simple truth. Our sophistication sometimes blinds us to simple truths. It is possible to think too much, to the exclusion of having simple faith.

Kaleiv and Yehoshua simply said, “Let's go!...because we can. *Alo na'aleh...ki yachol nuchal lah...Im chafeitz banu Hashem v'heivi osanu el ha'aretz hazos*. If Hashem wants, He will bring us into this land” (Bamidbar 14:8).

The Shem Mishmuel says that the word “*chafeitz*” refers to the Divine will. It is an important word. In Kabbala, there is a concept called *ratzon elyon*. We do a lot of things that Hashem wants. And we study His Torah and think about the things He tells us. We might think we have it all figured out. But the *ratzon elyon* is above our understanding. There are things that Hashem does because of His inscrutable will.

Even if Bnei Yisrael were right that they didn’t deserve Eretz Yisrael, Hashem can still do things even above the *din*. It can come from the level of *ratzon*. When we have the simple faith to do Hashem’s will despite our logic, then Hashem may do things for us that also go against logic. It may be against the logic of the heavenly court, but Hashem will do it anyway. There are certain secret decisions Hashem makes that no one understands. This was the argument of Kaleiv and Yehoshua.

The great merit of the Jewish People throughout history has been *emuna peshuta*, simple faith. We have so many blessings today. We have the Land of Israel and Yerushalayim. We have physical and material bounty wherever Jews live all over the world. We haven’t had this since the times of Shlomo Hamelech. This is because we have faith. Even though there are so many critics of the Jewish nation around the world, we have a simple faith in our Father in heaven. We do the *mitzvos* simply. For example, we keep Shabbos despite all who make fun of us. With this *emuna peshuta* and commitment to Hashem and His Torah, we are fixing the sin of the *meraglim*.

We hope and pray that the full rectification of the sin of the *mergalim* will come speedily in our days, and we will see all of our people back home in Eretz Yisrael.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What two types of miracles are there?
2. Which name of Hashem relates to each type of miracle?
3. How do *chesed* and *din* interact with miracles?
4. What is a great motivator for Hashem to perform a miracle?
5. What is the best strategy for a successful prayer?
6. Why didn't the Jews accept Moshe's arguments that Hashem would help them conquer Eretz Yisrael?
7. What type of faith is the best?

EXERCISE

1. For a week, do things with *emuna peshuta*—simple faith. See if you are able to do more *mitzvos* than before.

