

Geulas Yisrael #87 B'shalach

Miracles, Nature and Redemption

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Keriyat Yam Suf was a dazzling spectacle, unlike any of the previous miracles. Quieting a riotous ocean and paving a smooth marine route for three million people was incomprehensible to the human imagination. Hashem's presence was palpable, and as we witnessed this wonder unfold, our national mood was transformed.

Throughout the process of yetziat Mitzrayim, we had been inactive and were even skeptical of Moshe and his promises. Initially, we had embraced him, believed in his redemptive proclamations, and rallied to his revolution. Unfortunately, Moshe's preliminary efforts at liberation were met by Pharo with stiff resistance, scorn and retaliatory policies. Suffering an intensified work-load, we gradually abandoned trust in this "false prophet" and, for most of the year-long process of liberation, sat by idly, as Moshe dueled with Pharo.

As redemption neared, our spirit awakened, and we actively contributed to the redemption. In the final days leading up to the actual exodus we defied Egyptian traditions by sacrificing cattle, which were the object of pagan worship. This courageous defiance of Egyptian culture sparked the final stages of our emancipation. We finally played a small part, in our own redemption. We were now invested in our own freedom.

However, we were still dubious. Rushed out of Egypt without time to even bake our bread, we were more confused than convinced. Everything happened so quickly, it was difficult to determine if this was real or just a mirage. Would we return to Egypt after a three-day religious festival or was this the first leg on our journey home to Israel? It was a strange turn of events and the entire first week felt surreal.

A week later, standing at the shore of the ocean, even the non-believers were convinced. The stilling of a roaring ocean and the stiffening of the rushing waves provided incontrovertible proof that Hashem had descended into history to redeem his enslaved children. Viewing the bodies of the fearsome Egyptians washing up on the sea-shore provided closure, finality, and faith.

וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְקֻנָּק בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיֵּרָאוּ הָעַם אֶת־יְקֻנָּק
וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְּיַקְנֹק וּבְמִשָּׁה עַבְדּוֹ

At this point our belief in Hashem and in His redemption was so deep-rooted and pervasive that we instinctively burst into song. Finally, we believed with a full heart, and finally, we found the voice to articulate that belief. Observing Hashem descend into our world and wreck Nature was too much to ignore.

A Different Miracle

The midrash narrates a very different timeline and progression for the miracle of splitting of the ocean. Hashem did not *suddenly* intervene in Nature to invert the natural system. Rather, this miracle was pre-programmed into Nature at the dawn of creation. During creation, when Hashem fashioned the seas, he programmed the waters of the Yam Suf to spontaneously split and harden as the Jews neared. He arranged for the chemical structure of the water molecules to solidify 2448 years into history. Though it appeared dramatic and breathtaking, it was all planned and engineered ahead of time.

The Rambam applies the midrash's comments about keriyat Yam Suf to all major miracles. For example, Hashem didn't meddle with the orbit of the sun to grant Yehoshua more time to rout his enemies. Instead, Hashem pre-choreographed the sun's orbit to *naturally* halt precisely on the day that Yehoshua required additional time for his military exercise. Though miracles appear to be divine interventions, they are, in truth, divine pre-calculations stitched into the fabric of Nature. They were conceived and implemented before history began and well before the actual miracles occurred. Miracles are baked into Nature.

For some, this description of miracles reduces their drama and their spiritual force. After all, the radical image of Hashem swooping in and overwhelming the natural order is captivating. However, though sudden interventions may seem more appealing, ironically, the Rambam's model of a miracle distills several important themes of Jewish redemption.

Plan Ahead

The gemara in Shabbat chronicles a poor man who lost his wife and was left attending his nursing infant. Miraculously, he began to lactate and to

nurse the baby. An amora, Rav Yosef (who was blind), assumed that this person was *distinguished*, based on his benefitting from divine intervention. Abaye, his student, retorted that, evidently, this person was not as esteemed as his teacher had asserted. Had this father been more admired by Hashem he would not have experienced this anatomical deformity. Had he been important enough, perhaps Hashem would have spared his wife, or supplied female volunteers to nurse his infant. Ad hoc and inelegant solutions didn't speak well of this man's character. Important needs should be planned ahead of time, rather than solved in a last minute and graceless fashion.

Miracles of Jewish redemption weren't supplied as last minute solutions, but were prefabricated from the beginning of time. Jewish history is important enough to merit divine attention, even as the entire cosmos was being formed. Hashem's preprogramming of Jewish miracles demonstrates His great love for us. Preprogrammed miracles may feel less wonderous, but they demonstrate Hashem's great love for our people. We are not a last-minute agenda for Hashem, but a high priority of His.

Redemption is Inevitable

וְהָאָרֶץ הַיְתֵהּ תִּהְיֶה וְבָהּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

Prior to creation, reality was still inchoate and dark, as the “spirit of G-d” hovered above the chaos. Chazal decode this spirit as a Messianic potential which was created prior to the formation of our universe. As redemption is the inevitable terminus of history, it was preestablished before the world took shape. Before creation was launched the conclusion of history was already conceived.

Slotting miracles into Nature at the inception of history also reflects redemption's inevitability. Redemption may take a while, but it is inexorable. Its trajectory is woven into the foundation of our world and marches on to the drumbeat of Nature.

Astonishingly, at the sea we began to sing about a future we hadn't yet been informed of. We sang about the mountain of Jewish heritage or נחלתך and about a Mikdash we would one day construct on its peak . פעלת ה' מקדש . Watching Nature cooperate with Redemption assured us of Redemption's unavailability, and suddenly the overall

trajectory of Jewish history became obvious: we would enter the land of God and construct a place for His presence. Though we were hundreds of years away from these visions and we hadn't been informed of these dreams, everything seemed perfectly clear. Pre-ordained miracles provided confidence in the certainty of redemption.

Redeeming Nature

Finally, the Rambam's version of miracles assumes symmetry between Jewish redemption and Nature. The synchronicity between Nature and Jewish history underscores that Redemption is not a parochial Jewish experience, but has broader and more universal connotations. As Redemption affects all reality, Nature isn't sidelined, but is a willing accomplice in the process.

Our redemption launches a period of universal welfare in which an entire global population perceives Hashem through our own religious experience. Humanity gathers in Yerushalayim to encounter Hashem and to herald the Jews, whose faith and courage outlasted history. Weaving redemptive miracles into the texture of Nature demonstrates the broader impact of Jewish redemption. For Nature to serve humanity it must collaborate in Redemption.

Not only is human history advanced by redemption, but the condition of Nature herself is enhanced. By designating homo sapiens as the pinnacle of creation, Hashem hitched the state of His Natural world to the religious condition of Man. When human behavior aligns with divine will Nature thrives. If human will deviates from divine will, Nature deteriorates. When human behavior plunged into a moral abyss, Nature collapsed, the world was flooded and had to be rebooted through Noach.

Nature has a *vested interest* in Jewish redemption, which rejuvenates the natural order and restores the pristine state of Hashem's creation. Miracles of Jewish history do not ransack Nature, but serve Nature. Jewish History and Nature live in perfect harmony. Redemption changes everything.