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Miracles – “Strive for Truth” on Nature and Miracles

“The truth is that there is no essential difference between the natural and the miraculous. Everything that occurs is a miracle. The world has no other cause but the will of Hashem... We call G-D’s act a “miracle” when He wills an occurrence which is novel and unfamiliar to the hand of G-D. We call G-D’s acts “nature” when He wills that certain events should occur in a recognisable pattern with which we become familiar. This familiarity presents us with a challenge... The whole concept of “nature” is thus nothing but a test for the human being. Nature has no objective existence; it is merely an illusion which gives a man a choice to exercise his free will: To err, or to choose the truth.”

Rav Dessler in Michtav Me-Eliyahu (Strive for Truth)

A discussion on Miracles based on Rav Dessler's ideas

Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What are your thoughts on Rav Dessler's idea on the difference between miracles and nature in terms of Hashem's will?
- What are your thoughts on the idea that nature is a miracle?
- How can we, as humans, try to stop the idea of familiarity and use our free will for good?

Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What defines a miracle?
- Do miracles still happen today?
- Does our increased understanding of science lessen what miracles mean?

Some Personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Do you feel that not seeing open miracles means you have a different relationship to Hashem?
- Do you have any examples of things you might consider to be miracles from your life?
- How can we all better learn to recognise miracles in our daily lives?
- Do you think you could be capable of performing miracles?

Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Mesechet Taanit 25a

חד בי שמשי חזייה לברתיה דהוות עציבא אמר לה בתי למאי עציבת אמרה ליה כלי של חומץ נתחלף לי בכלי של שמן והדלקתי ממנו אור לשבת אמר לה בתי מאי איכפת לך מי שאמר לשמן וידלוק הוא יאמר לחומץ וידלוק תנא היה דולק והולך כל היום כולו עד שהביאו ממנו אור להבדלה

The Gemara relates that **one Shabbat evening**, Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa **saw that his daughter was sad. He said to her: My daughter, why are you sad? She said to him: I confused a vessel of vinegar for a vessel of oil and I lit the Shabbat lamp with vinegar.** Soon the lamp will be extinguished and we will be left in the dark. **He said to her: My daughter, what are you concerned about? He Who said to the oil that it should burn can say to the vinegar that it should burn.** A *tanna* taught: That lamp **burned continuously the entire day, until they brought from it light for havdala.**

Pirkei Avot 5:5

עשרה נסים נעשו לאבותינו בבית המקדש. לא הפילה אשה מרים בשר הקדש, ולא הסריח בשר הקדש מעולם, ולא נראה זבוב בבית המטבחיים, ולא ארע קרי לכהן גדול ביום הפורים, ולא כבו גשמים אש של עצי המערכה, ולא נצחה הרוח את עמוד העשן, ולא נמצא פסול בעמר ובשתי הלחם ובלחם הפנים, עומדים צפופים ומשתחיים רוחים, ולא הזיק נחש ועקרב בירושלים מעולם, ולא אמר אדם לחברו צר לי המקום שאלין בירושלים:

Ten miracles were performed for our forefathers in the Temple: No woman had a miscarriage from the scent of the meat; and no holy flesh ever went putrid; and a fly was not seen in the room of slaughtering; and a High Priest did not have an accidental emission on Yom Kippur; and rain did not extinguish the fire of the wood pile; and the wind did not overpower the pillar of smoke; and there was not found a disqualification in the *omer* (a special barley offering, offered the day after Pesach, which permits grain harvested in the new harvest to be eaten) or in the two breads or in the showbreads; they would stand up crowded and bow down with [enough] space; and a snake or scorpion never hurt a person in Jerusalem; and a person did not say to his fellow, "The place is too cramped that I should lodge in Jerusalem."

A Related Story - How to work miracles – The G-D Factor by Sara Yocheved Rigler:

On the third day of Chanukah, 1997, nineteen-year-old Israeli soldier Menachem L. and his buddy Donny were stationed at a military outpost in the northernmost tip of the Lebanese Security Zone. Menachem, a religious Jew, was carrying in the pocket of his battle vest a laminated card. His father had typed out in Hebrew part of a verse from the Torah: "Hashem is God; there is nothing besides Him." (Deut. 4:35) He gave his son the quote when Menachem went off to war, with the admonition to say the verse whenever his life was in danger.

Now Menachem and Donny were being shot at by Hizbullah terrorists positioned on a nearby mountain above them. Suddenly Menachem saw an anti-tank missile hurtling directly toward him. Such missiles are two meters long and carry about six kilos of warhead, sufficient to easily penetrate a tank -- or the concrete outpost where Menachem was standing.

Menachem thought, "For sure I'm dead." He quickly recited the verse, "Hashem is God; there is nothing besides Him," thinking, "Whatever God wants will happen. If He doesn't want it to happen, it won't."

Suddenly, a few meters in front of Menachem, the missile changed direction in midair, as if it had struck an invisible force field. In full view of Menachem and eight other soldiers stationed on adjoining hilltops, the missile veered upwards, against gravity, and flew 20 meters straight up, then made an arc over Menachem's head and landed behind his outpost.

The force of the explosion knocked Menachem and Donny off their feet, but the only injuries they sustained were some shrapnel in the back of their knees.

When the battle was over, the platoon held a debriefing. The eight soldiers, including a few top officers, who had witnessed the missile's astonishing trajectory were at a loss to explain what had happened. In their entire military careers, they had never seen a missile behave like this. Their unanimous appraisal was that it was... a miracle.

Some Interactive Resources:

Pictures: Miracles today are less obvious and open but are still miracles. For example, the 6-Day War (as seen above on the right). Which of the pictures do you think are miracles?



Song: We are a miracle – Yaakov Shwekey

Youtube: Miracles from Heaven – official trailer

Poem: "miracles" by Walt Whitman