

Parashat Miketz & Chanuka: The Miraculous Essence

Dear Friends,

Be warned: this drasha is not for cynics. It deals with miracles!

Two miraculous events illuminate our Jewish week. One, of course, is the wondrous story of Chanukah. The second takes place in this weeks' parasha, Miketz - the miraculous realization of Yoseph's dreams.

The first has been deemed a miracle by Our Sages, but the second has never been defined as such, and I think the time has come!

For starters, let's define what a miracle is. Wikipedia defines it thus: ***A miracle is an event not explicable by natural or scientific laws. Such an event may be attributed to a supernatural being (especially a deity), magic, a miracle worker, a saint, or a religious leader.***

With all due respect to Wikipedia, I would like to suggest that quite the opposite is true: a miracle is NOT "an event not explicable by natural or scientific laws." In my humble opinion, a miracle is a very natural occurrence. In fact, the universe, nature, life in all of its forms - breathing, a sprout making its way towards the light, the binding of sperm and egg, the human nervous system, the big bang, and on and on - are all a miracle.

Miracles do not contradict nature. Miracles are the very essence of nature and of Creation!

Miracles also do not contradict science. The existence of an explanation for a phenomenon, be it scientific, sociological, historic, or logical, does not detract at all from its miraculous nature.

The difference between those who see the miraculous and those who don't is very simple but also very deep, and it has to do with the direction one is looking.

Most people see things and objects. The miracle, however, is not the object itself, but rather in what constitutes its existence - the invisible, formless, life energy that constitutes everything in Creation. On the metaphorical level it can be called "the space between things." There, and only there, the miracle may be found!

Our Sages called this life energy “the concealed light”, referring to the light created on the first day, the first flash of the big bang: **“And God said let there be light and there was light”** (Bereishit 1:3). But, this light was created long before the appearance of the sun. Thus, the sun is not the source of the light of creation. The light of Creation - the energy of life - is the source and essence of the sun.

This life energy - or “the concealed light” - is formless, yet it constitutes all forms - it forms the giant elephants of the Greek (Syrian) army, it forms the pit into which Yoseph’s brothers throw him, and it forms the bars of the prison in which he is placed.

The Maccabees were not deterred by the mighty elephants, or the enemy’s superior weapons. Focusing on the elephants would have discouraged them. Yoseph was not deterred by his brothers’ jealousy, or the lust of Potiphar’s wife who saw his external beauty, or the bars of his prison cell. Such focusing would have caused him to despair, as most people do in the face of adversity.

The Maccabees and Yoseph knew the great secret of seeking out that which is far more powerful than the visible reality around them. They were focused on “the concealed light” - the formless energy of life - rather than the forms it takes, because only within it can strength of spirit and of life be found.

Only within it are miracles to be found.

The name of the God of Israel is Y.H.V.H., meaning “the one who constitutes.” When Moshe asks God to reveal his identity to him, the answer he receives is **“Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.”** [I will be what I will be] **He continued, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites, ‘Ehyeh sent me to you.’”** (Sh’mot 3:14)

Y.H.V.H. or Ehyeh can never be seen. It is not an object or a thing. It is not even an “it”. There is no word in the human language that can describe His existence. Even phrases such as “the concealed light” or “the energy of life” are only metaphors. But they give us tools with which to conduct our discussion.

Though formless, “The One who forms” or “Ehey Asher Ehey” or “the concealed light” is always more powerful, more forceful, more compelling than any object or thing that it forms or constitutes.

Unfortunately, most people never see “the concealed light” which constitutes everything, and therefore they never know the miracle. They look in the wrong direction. Their attention is on objects - be they beautiful, ugly, impressive, simple, large, or small - and not towards what forms them. They will even say they are “objective”. Indeed, they are object oriented and not essence oriented. This is the human tragedy. It is the cause of all human despair, pain, sorrow, and cynicism.

Miracles don't "happen." Miracles ARE the essence of Creation. Everything is a miracle, everything is made of "the concealed light". But only for those who are willing to look in the right direction!

A very popular Hebrew Chanuka song - loosely translated here - is one of the most beautiful, deep, and important Zionist songs written. It contains the secret of the pioneers who enabled the renewal of our national independence, 2200 years after the Maccabees did the same. Notice the second verse in particular.

אָנוּ נוֹשְׂאִים לְפִידִים
בְּלֵילוֹת אֶפְלִים.
זוֹרְחִים הַשְּׂבִילִים מִתַּחַת רַגְלֵינוּ
וּמִי אֲשֶׁר יֵב לּוֹ
הַצֵּמָא לְאוֹר -
יִשָּׂא אֶת עֵינָיו וְלִבּוֹ אֵלֵינוּ
לְאוֹר וַיָּבֹא!

We are bearing torches
on dark nights.
The paths beneath our feet shine
And he who has a heart
Thirsty for light -
will raise his eyes and his heart to us
to the light, and will come!

גַּם לֹא קָרָה לָנוּ -
פֶּךְ שֶׁמֶן לֹא מָצָאנוּ.
לְעֵמֶק הַלְכָנוּ, הֵהָרַ עָלֵינוּ,
מֵעֵינֹת הָאוֹרוֹת
הַגְּנוֹזִים גְּלֵינוּ.

A miracle did not happen for us
We did not find a tin of oil.
We went to the valley, ascended the mountain,
We discovered
the springs of light.

גַּם לֹא קָרָה לָנוּ -
פֶּךְ שֶׁמֶן לֹא מָצָאנוּ.
בְּסֹלַע חָצַבְנוּ עַד דָּם -
וַיְהִי אוֹר!

A miracle did not happen for us -
We did not find a tin of oil.
We hewed the rock until we bled -
And there was light!

A miracle did not happen to us! We discovered the springs of hidden light in everything. We discovered our own true nature.

And there was light! And all was miraculous.

Wishing you a happy festival of lights, a good new month, and Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha