

Parashat Beshalach

Miracles, Money Matters, Manna and Emunah

Why is it so Important to Believe in Miracles?

Most of my students at Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin are mystically inclined and have no problem with believing in Hashem and His Torah. However, I have also taught very rationally oriented students in other places, who have a much harder time believing in the miracles recounted in the Torah. I recall teaching such students about Sarah's miraculous conception and birth at the age of ninety, and encountering considerable opposition. "How do we know this really happened in historical reality? Perhaps the Torah is not to be taken literally?" were some of the questions they asked. In the Western World, we grew up believing in only what can be proven scientifically. Miracles don't fit into that category and it is the very fact that we can't explain or prove a certain phenomenon that defines it as a miracle. Believing in miracles are central in Judaism, because they are windows of light within the darkness of the world testifying to the belief in One Creator. If Hashem can create a new miraculous reality beyond nature, then He can also create the original nature. Giving birth when it is naturally impossible, proves the divine nature of even natural births. All religions are based on emunah (faith), as the existence of G-d cannot be proven. Yet, it also cannot be scientifically disproven (Rambam, *The Guide*). I always intuitively felt that there was more between Heaven and Earth than the naked eye can fathom. Just the fact that we have a soul with a yearning for something more than the physical world makes us believe in an otherworldly reality.

Emunah from the Exodus

The more we believe the more we attract Divine Providence and miracles to our lives. This is why the belief in the super-rational is so central in the Torah. On Chanukah, we place our candles in the doorway or window of our home and inside of the Synagogue in order to "publicize the miracle" (*Beur Halacha* 671). The Exodus from Egypt was replete with miracles that attested to the existence of G-d. Therefore, remembering the Exodus is one of the Six Remembrances, we are supposed to recall every day. We mention the Exodus in Kiddush on Friday night and the entire seven-day holiday of Pesach is devoted to commemorate the miracles of the Exodus and inculcate its lessons, for experiencing miracles strengthen our emunah:

ספר שמות פרק יד (לא)

וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיִּירְאוּ הָעָם אֶת ה' וַיֵּאֱמְנוּ בְּהֹשֵׁעַ עַבְדּוֹ:
 "Israel saw Hashem's great hand in Egypt, and the people feared Hashem and believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant" (*Shemot* 14:31).

Imagine being trapped between the vast, raging Mediterranean Sea and the ferocious, violent Egyptians with their brutal, murderous spears, and then experiencing being miraculously saved by Hashem's hand splitting the sea at the split second when you were hanging between life and death. No wonder that after this experience, the Jewish people were strengthened in their emunah. The more we notice the small miracles in our lives the more we too can strengthen our emunah, that there is a G-d in charge, and our lives have meaning. Some people's rational

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mindset prefers downplaying the miracles. I remember learning as a child in school that the splitting of the sea was not a miracle in itself as it was incorporated within the nature of the world that the sea was going to split every thousand years or so. The miracle was only that it split exactly at the moment of need. Even according to this watered down version of the miracle, it is impossible to explain away the belief in the Creator behind the scenes Who directs what's going on at the stage.

The Four Categories of Emunah

Cultivating emunah is the main principle of the Torah.

There are four categories of emunah:

1. Believing in G-d who created the world and continuously keeps the world going.
2. Believing in the prophets and accepting their teachings. This includes keeping all the mitzvot mentioned in the Torah of Moshe, our greatest prophet.
3. Believing in the World-to-Come where the righteous receive their reward. The main thing that convinced me to believe in the World- to-Come is the notion that there needs to be a place to fill every lack and need.
4. Believing in the Redeemer (Mashiach), a fundamental principle in the Torah. Having emunah empowers us with great merit as it states, "He believed in Hashem, and He attributed it to him as righteousness" (*Bereishit* 15:6). It is through emunah that we merit the Garden of Eden and the World-to-Come. "A tzaddik lives by his emunah" (*Chabakkuk* 2:4). Those who don't believe in all this do not merit redemption (Rabbeinu Bachaya, *Shemot* 14:31).

Why Do We Need to Believe in Mashiach?

One of my students recently asked me, why we need to believe in the Mashiach. Why is believing in the final redeemer so fundamental in the Torah that Rambam enumerates it as one of the Thirteen Principles of Belief? The Torah teaches us that everything in our lives is for a purpose- to refine ourselves and become the very best we are created to be. Not just to develop our talents and land a lucrative job but to refine our character to become loving, giving, humble, happy and grateful etc. Likewise, the entire world needs to become rectified in order to achieve the purpose for which it is created. The purpose of Creation is to reveal G-d who is hidden in the world. This is why the Hebrew name for world is עוֹלָם/*olam*, which means concealed. The light of G-d is obscured behind the darkness of hunger, disease, war and terrorism. All this pain makes us ask, "Where is G-d? Why does G-d allow such suffering to exist?" The Ramchal answers that Hashem created us to earn our eternal blissful existence by engaging in holy actions that bring light into the dark reality in order to rectify the evil in the world. The Mashiach is a person of flesh and blood who will bring about the culmination of this rectification of humanity and the entire world. After having refined his own character to the best of human ability, he will renew the Kingdom of the House of David, build the Eternal Temple, and gather the dispersed exiled Jews back to Israel. He will restore a government built on Torah laws, including the laws of the land. He will then bring the entire world to serve Hashem together (Rambam, *Laws of Kings* 11:1,4). When the world achieves its final purpose with the help of Mashiach there will no longer be hunger or war: no more jealousy or competition, and the main occupation of all humanity will be only to know Hashem (Ibid. 5).

Amen and Emunah

Rabbeinu Bachaya explains that since emunah is such a fundamental principle in the Torah, our Sages taught us about the importance of saying 'Amen' – derived from the same root as emunah. The word אמן/amen is in itself an acronym for אל מלך נאמן/El Melech Ne'eman – G-d, the faithful King. When we answer amen to a blessing, we verify our belief in Hashem Whose Name is the central part of the blessing. According to the Torah, a matter can be established only by means of two witnesses (*Devarim* 19:15). The one who answers amen, thus becomes the second witness who establishes the true belief in Hashem. Therefore, "The person who answers amen is greater than the person who makes the blessings" (*Babylonian Talmud, Brachot* 53b). One who answers amen loudly with all his strength is rewarded that the gates of the Garden of Eden will be opened for him as it states, "Open the gates, that the righteous nation that keeps אמונים/*emunim* – faithfulness may enter in" (*Yeshayahu* 26:2); (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 119b). It is interesting that the word אמן/amen has the numerical value of 91 – which equals the value of the four lettered name of Hashem yud-key-vav-key representing miracles (26) plus the way we pronounce it Ado-nai (65), (26+65=91). As we come closer to redemption, where the belief in Hashem will permeate the world, the 'Amen Party' has become very popular. We bring foods and drinks for each category of blessing: wheat crackers (*mezonot*), wine (*hagefen*), fruits (*ha'etz*), vegetables (*ha'adama*) and something with the blessing (*shehakol*). Each of the participants takes a cracker in her hand and we pray for people who need parnassa (money), then each one in turn recites her blessing and the remaining guests recite amen. We continue with the rest of the food in the order mentioned above, praying for people to find their soulmate before drinking the wine/grape-juice, for children prior to eating the fruits, for health followed by eating the vegetable and for anything before reciting the last blessing. Our students recently enjoyed such an 'Amen Party' and emerged strengthened in their emunah. I highly recommend it!

Emunah over Money

The pursuit of money is something that easily entices us away from emunah. When we think of all the expenses we need to pay, we may be enticed to working harder in order to make more money at the expense of Torah learning. Often people leave the Holy Land for the *Goldene Medinah* in order to increase their monthly salary. What they forget to consider is that the expenses also increase in North America especially for the most important thing in life: Jewish Education. This week's parashah teaches us to have emunah that when you keep Hashem's mitzvot, the Almighty will take care of you and provide you with the material blessings that you need to live a quality life. During the forty-year wilderness wandering, Hashem fed us daily with the heavenly manna. We had to live from hand to mouth, picking only as much as we needed for that very day, in order to develop emunah that Hashem would provide for us again tomorrow. If we tried to save up for the future it would become wormy (*Shemot* 16:19-20). The one exception was when Hashem specifically instructed Moshe to save a small jug of manna to teach emunah to the future generations:

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ספר שמות פרק טז (לב) ויאמר משה זה הדבר אשר צוה השם מלא העמר ממנו למשמרת לדורותיכם
למען יראו את הלחם אשר האכלתי אתכם במדבר בהוציא אתכם מארץ מצרים:

“Moshe said, This is the thing which Hashem commands, fill an Omer of it to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you up from the land of Egypt” (*Shemot* 16:32).

Rashi explains, “In the days of Jeremiah when he was rebuking the people saying, “Why do you not engage yourselves with the Torah? They answered him. If we leave our work and occupy ourselves with the Torah, how will we be able to make a living?” He then, brought out to them, the cruse of manna and told them, “O Generation, see the thing of Hashem (*Yermiyahu* 2:31). He didn’t say, “hear the word” but “see the thing!” This thing is what your fathers were fed. The Almighty G-d has many messengers to provide food for those who fear Him” (Rashi, *Shemot* 16:32). This lesson is pertinent today more than ever, when many Jews exchange the slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt with the slavery to money. When we work on doing Hashem’s will and chose emunah over money then we will never lack in Hashem’s bounty, just as we recite in the Grace after Meals, “...a righteous person will never be forsaken.” Manna actually has the same last two letters of amen – the root of emunah. Furthermore, money and manna sounds alike and have many things in common. Just as the manna sustained us, so do we need money for our sustenance. Just as the manna would taste like whatever you wanted, so can you buy many different things that you want with money. As long as we have manna we don’t need money. Reading the section about the manna in this week’s parasha, this Tuesday is a *segulah* (spiritual remedy) for receiving money! Just as Hashem provided the Israelites with manna in the desert so will He provide us with all the money we need as long as we keep up our steadfast emunah!