

## This Week's Parshah - Parshas Bamidbar

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of

Perel bas Avrohom a"h

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

### Publicizing – and Concealing – Miracles

#### Lions in the Mikdash (Sanctuary)

An interesting correlation exists between the lion (*ari*) and the Sanctuary, as portrayed in the following Mishnah (*Middos 4:7*):

וְהַיְקָל צָר מֵאַחֲרָיו, וְרָחֵב מִלְפָּנָיו, וְדוֹמָה לְאַרְיֵי, שְׁנֵאמַר הוּי אַרְיֵאל אַרְיֵאל קְרִיַת סָנָה דָּוִד, מָה הָאָרִי צָר מֵאַחֲרָיו וְרָחֵב מִלְפָּנָיו, אַף הַיְקָל צָר מֵאַחֲרָיו וְרָחֵב מִלְפָּנָיו.

“The Sanctuary was narrow in back, yet wide in front, resembling a lion. (In keeping with that) which states: ‘Oh, **Ariel, Ariel** (referring to the Mikdash) – the city of David’s encampment’ (*Yeshayah 29:1*). Just as a lion is shaped with a narrow end (the body) protruding from a wide front (the mane), so, too, the Sanctuary was narrow in back and wide in front.”

The Maharal explains (*Gur Aryeh, Bamidbar 4:13*) that the “lion” quality accounts for yet another convention of the Mikdash. The sacrificial altar was fed (in part) by a fire that descended from Heaven. This fire took the form of none other than a crouching lion (*Yoma 21b*).

This “lion-crouching” served a practical purpose. The verse (*Bamidbar ibid.*) tells us that upon resuming the desert journey a purple garment was placed over the altar – while the Heavenly fire there continued to burn. It did not consume the garment, however; Rashi mentions that the fire remained in its lion-like crouching position, enabling its containment by a shielding copper pot inserted between the fire and the fabric. As the Maharal explains, fire is generally an unwieldy element, shifting from place to place. This fire cooperated, however, remaining crouched and stationary; as such, the flames would not dart out from under the pot to ignite the garment.

What seems so interesting about this arrangement is its apparent superfluity. That is, here we have a Heavenly fire burning on the altar and continuing to do so for the duration of the journey. One would have thought, perhaps, that supernatural fires don’t require conventional safety measures such as metal safeguards. Even with the pot as a covering, another miracle was still required to keep the flames from shooting out from under the shield. So – one might ask – what was the need for the extra precaution of a shield in the first place? Let the miracle go just one step further; surely the fire could take care of itself without any natural precautions!

#### “Toning-Down” Supernatural Wonders

Actually, we find a similar perplexity regarding the very essence of the altar’s fire. The Torah mandates that the Temple officiators must supply their own fire to burn on the altar (*Vayikra 1:7, 6:6*) – despite the fact that the altar was already fueled by the Heavenly fire (*Yoma ibid.*). Why the overlap?

The *Chinuch* (§ 132) contends that this is actually indicative of a general trend in Hashem’s employment of

miraculous intervention. Often, when orchestrating supernatural events, Hashem will *purposely attempt to limit the scope of the wonders*. The splitting of the sea (as B'nei Yisrael were fleeing Egypt) is another case in point. No one (sane) would argue that this event was entirely the result of natural processes. Yet, the verse tells us that prior to the waters' separation, "Hashem conducted a strong east wind against the sea for the entire night; and (then) the sea became like dry land" (*Shemos 14:21*). Obviously, the Almighty could just as easily have split the sea with a simple "snap of the fingers" (in our parlance). But He specifically introduced at least a token element of "nature" into the picture, somewhat obscuring the wondrousness of the miraculous event.

In contrast to the above, *halachah* (ritual law) mandates an apparently opposite approach. Especially regarding such events as the Chanukah and Purim miracles, there is an operative concept of *pirsumei nisa* (publicizing the miracle). Thus, the Chanukah menorah is strategically placed to be viewed by the public, and Megillas Esther is read amidst a large crowd, all with the intent of increasing the visibility and knowledge of Hashem's miracles.

How can we reconcile these conflicting ideas? On the one hand, the desert travelers must insert a metal fireguard to contain the Heavenly fire; and regular fire must be supplied to the altar, despite the Heavenly one already present – all efforts to "play down" the miraculous. Yet in other instances, we go out of our way to bring as much attention to the miraculous as possible.

### **Make Your Own Miracles**

R' Yeruchem Olshin elucidates the issue. Indeed, there are two different notions at play, each applicable in its own circumstances.

Why, indeed, does Hashem seek to somewhat obfuscate the supernatural, even in the midst of performing a miraculous event? The reason for doing so, explains the *Chinuch*, has to do with the stature (or lack thereof) of the miracle's beneficiaries. So as not to mistakenly conclude that the acts were wrought due to their own merit, the supernatural display is deliberately restrained.

But there are times when an individual or community not only merits that a miracle be wrought on its behalf but is actually *the catalyst for its occurrence*. This novel idea is advanced by the venerated Mashgiach of Mir, R' Yerucham Levovitz. He quotes the Gemara in Berachos (*20a*), which asks the poignant question: "Why is it that miracles occurred much more readily to the earlier generations, while they do not happen for us?" In its answer, the Gemara explains that the earlier generations possessed an attribute that is unfortunately lacking today – *mesiras nefesh* (exertion and self-sacrifice). Apparently, when one "puts himself out" for His Creator, Hashem reciprocates by likewise deviating from "the norm" and suspending the laws of nature for that person's benefit.

Such occurred in the incidents cited above. For example, at the time of Chanukah, the Jewish people rose to the occasion, risking their lives to restore Divine service. As this is the ingredient for effecting miracles, miracles were performed on their behalf. Only miracles of the "freebee" variety need be downplayed; those that were generated through the exemplary dedication of man to Hashem are indeed worthy of increased publicity.