

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Acharei Mos - Kedoshim

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Chayah bas Shmuel a"h

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

The Logic behind Wonders

A senior *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar) from the previous generation related the following about the Baba Sali, the venerated Sephardic Kabbalistic figure:

Start Your Engines

The Baba Sali, saintly and much removed from the materialistic plane, was once en route to a certain function. The vehicle that was transporting him started experiencing some trouble and eventually broke down. Turning to the driver, the Baba Sali asked what the problem was. Of course, the technical explanation of the mechanical failure didn't mean much to him.

So the Baba Sali tried a different tack: "Could you show me where the issue lies?" he queried. Shrugging his shoulders, the driver pointed at one of the mechanical features of the car. The sage then removed his handkerchief, recited a Kabbalistic formula and pressed the handkerchief to that part of the vehicle. The car revved up, and they were back on their way.

Needless to say, even if we were somehow privy to whatever formula the Baba Sali used, this method probably wouldn't work if you or I tried it. When we hear accounts like this, we may be left feeling somewhat wistful, marveling at the "power" of some of these angelic figures.

Without any intent, G-d forbid, to minimize the stature of those individuals who are truly great, the truth of the matter is that such instances may not necessarily be such a "wonder." Consider, for example, Chazal's remarkable description regarding those who attain the exalted level of learning Torah *lishmah* (for its own sake). As the Mishnah states (*Avos 6:2*):

רבי מאיר אומר כל העוסק בתורה לשמה, זוכה לדברים הרבה. ולא עוד אלא שקל העולם כלו כדאי הוא לו... ומגדלתו ומרוממתו על כל המעשים.

"R' Meir says: Whoever engages in Torah study for its own sake merits many things. Furthermore, the (creation of) the entire world was worthwhile for his sake alone... And it causes him to become greater and uplifted over 'all of the works.'"

The *Medrash Shmuel* elucidates the meaning of this curious phrase – "uplifted over 'all of the works.'" He explains it as referring to the works of Creation; that is, this exalted individual gains mastery over the entirety of Creation – "all of its works," including even the *malachim* (angels). He states further that one who attains the level of which the Mishnah speaks is literally able to do anything he wants and put any plan into action. "Even if he would want to create under the sun that which was not created during the six days of Creation," the *Medrash Shmuel* asserts, "he would be able to do so."

The Rules of Nature Were Meant to be Broken

To a large extent, this ability was granted to Klal Yisrael at the time of the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. The Gemara (*Berachos 5a*) contrasts Hashem's giving of the Torah with a seller whose pressing financial circumstances force him to part with one of his beloved possessions: "Come and see how Hashem's attitude differs from that of people... When a person must sell his possession to his fellow, the seller is saddened, and only the buyer is happy. Hashem conducts Himself differently; He remained joyful even as He gave the Torah to Yisrael, as it states (*Mishlei 4:2*), 'For I have given you a good purchase; do not abandon My Torah.'"

R' Elazar Moshe Horowitz (*commentary to Berachos*) wonders about the comparison. Aren't the two instances completely dissimilar? In the case of the desperate seller, he was sad because he had to part with his favored object. How does this apply in the case of Hashem's giving of the Torah? When someone teaches Torah to another, does the teacher "lose" the Torah? Certainly not; he simply imparts and shares his knowledge with his students. How could the Gemara imply that there was equivalency in the case of Hashem's granting the Torah to Yisrael?

R' Elazar Moshe clarifies the Gemara's intent along the lines discussed above. Yes, he explains, in a sense, Hashem did "lose" something by giving the Torah to Yisrael. He lost exclusive dominance over Creation. Previously, this was His domain alone. With the giving of the Torah, however, Klal Yisrael also gained the ability to wield influence and control over Creation.

The notion that, through Torah, a Yid gains "supernatural" ability is manifest in our *parshah*. Parshas Kedoshim, of course, opens with the theme of *kedushah* (sanctity): אֲלֵלֹהֵינוּ ד' אֵלֵינוּ קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ד' אֵלֵינוּ קָדוֹשׁ—“Be holy, for I, Hashem your G-d, am holy” (*Vayikra 19:2*). The *passuk* seems to link Yisrael's need for sanctity with the fact that Hashem is holy, as the Sifra to this verse expounds: “If you make yourselves holy, I will consider it to you as if you made Me holy. If you do not make yourselves holy, I will consider it to you as if you did not make Me holy.” The Sifra's rendering seems difficult to understand. What does it even mean to “make Hashem holy”? And what is this interrelationship implied by the Sifra?

The Malbim explains that herein is contained a very fundamental principle regarding the workings of the world. There are, in fact, two types of “*hanhagos*” – two ways in which Hashem conducts the communal and individual affairs of men. One is the “*hanhagas hateva*,” the conduct of the world through the “natural” order. The other way in which Hashem runs the world is through the “*hanhagah nisis*” – miraculous conduct, which transcends the laws of nature.

What determines which “*hanhagah*” Hashem will employ? This, explains the Malbim, is dependent on Yisrael themselves. And this is what the Sifra means by “sanctifying Hashem,” even though He is already the epitome and essence of sanctity. What is “sanctity” as it applies to a person? A mode of conduct in which a person elevates himself against and above his natural inclinations. If a person chooses to remain subservient to his innate desires, allowing his “nature” to dictate his path in life – Hashem will follow suit. He will also conduct affairs according to the “natural order” of things. This arrangement, history shows, does not always work out so well for the Jewish people, as the nations of the world are naturally aligned against the Jews and yearn and strive for their destruction. But if a person fights against and subdues his “*teva*,” then Hashem will respond in kind. He will also be “sanctified,” entailing a transfer from the *hanhagas hateva* to the *hanhagah nisis*.

Our *parshah*, then, contains the key to miracles – which is also the key to the existence of the Jewish people. This key is *kedushah*: transcending one's nature. The results can be wondrous.