

Miracles: Great and Small
by Rabbi Norman Lamm

The whole month of ניסן is dominated by Pesach. The preparations for Pesach, as the ארבע פרשיות are accelerated, and the "cooling off" period in its aftermath -- reflected in the prohibition of eulogizing and fasting and the absence of תחנון during this period -- color the whole month with its theme of miraculous redemption. No wonder that one of the great Hasidic masters, insightfully if unscientifically, saw in the very name ניסן an allusion to נסים (miracles).

Most blatant, of course, are the supernatural miracles: the Exodus and the splitting of the Red Sea. All this was, as it were, G-d's show: ה' ילחם לכם ואתם תחרישון (שמות יד: יד), the Creator works His miracles for us and we are invited to be silent, passive beneficiaries of divine providence and special intervention.

But there is another kind of miracle that ought not be overlooked: the miracle performed by our ancestors themselves, one commemorated by שבת הגדול. That occurred on the tenth of ניסן when, at the behest of the רבונו של עולם, they tied to their bed-posts the lamb, preparing to sacrifice an animal the Egyptians considered a deity. That yesterday's slaves -- frightened, disheartened, and apprehensive -- dared to defy their taskmasters by humiliating their deities and risk an open confrontation with these powerful pagans, required a measure of courage and brio that is nothing less than a miracle. Wherefrom this newly found fearlessness, this incredible collective pride, this demonstration of בטחון? Nothing less than a miracle!

This ניס, however, is an altogether human one. No suspension of mute nature occurs here, but there is the miracle of human beings transforming their own natures. And that is no less a miracle than the divine show of supernatural power. Indeed, it is in honor

of this miracle that the day is referred to as שבת הגדול. Why גדול? Many interpretations are offered, but the one I prefer is that the greatest miracle was that of Jewish courage and faith. Which means, of course, that if there is a ניס גדול there must have been a ניס קטן -- or many of them! And these "small miracles" are those of the Exodus and the splitting of the Red Sea. There is nothing sacrilegious about such an interpretation. For the כל-יכול (Omnipotent) to split the sea is a miracle only from the merely human point of view; from the view of the omnipotent Creator of nature, a change of its course is perfectly acceptable. But for a human being, an ordinary בשר ודם (flesh and blood), to rise to such heights of self-transcendence and self-transformation -- that is a ניס גדול.

ניסן and Pesach, therefore, are invitations to us to aspire to such greater miracles. Difficult as they are, they are not beyond the limits of possibility. It is an adventure worth pursuing. And for the bnei Torah it is a "must" -- for what is Torah if not a summons to reach for the heights of our human capacities in the service of Hashem?

please review and make
any corrections.

If there are corrections
you can reach me at

923-9627 - Uriel Lubetski

Please have done by Monday
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Thank you.-