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Shemos 5781

Michael J. Novack
MaayanHaTorah.com

Doing the Impossible

I regularly use headphones when working at my computer, but Sunday night no sound was coming out of them. I tried a different pair of headphones – nothing. I tried just the computer speakers without the headphones – nothing. I unplugged and plugged back in the wires to my speakers – nothing. I tried different music and audio files – nothing. I changed the settings on my audio settings – nothing. I restarted my computer – nothing. I searched online for other suggestions and went through the troubleshoot section of Windows – nothing. I spent 20 minutes doing everything I could think of, but nothing worked.

Finally, I said, “I don’t get it. I tried everything I could do myself. Hashem, do You want me to ask You for help? Ok then. Hashem, please make my computer speakers and headphones work properly.”

I opened the audio file I was trying to listen to and... music to my ears. My headphones worked. My speakers worked. Loud and clear. No issues. First try.

Sometimes in life we do as much as we can ourselves, then Hashem completes the job for us.

In our parsha, Shemos, Pharaoh’s astrologers pinpointed the day that the savior of B’nai Yisrael would be born. Consequently, Pharaoh ordered that male babies be drowned. Miriam, Moshe’s sister, had a prophecy that her parents would give birth to the savior of the people. Six-year-old Miriam placed three-month-old Moshe in a wicker basket, and with the confidence that he would be saved, placed the basket among the reeds at the bank of the Nile River. The only question was how Hashem would save Moshe.

Pharaoh’s daughter saves Moshe when she goes out to bathe in the Nile as the pasuk says, *וַתֵּרֶד בַּת־פַּרְעֹה לָרְחֹץ עַל־הַנָּהָר וַנַּעֲרֹתֶיהָ הֹלְכֹת עַל־יַד הַנָּהָר וַתִּרְאֶה אֶת־הַתִּכְיָה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת־אֲמָתָהּ וַתִּקְחָהּ – *Pharaoh’s daughter went down to bathe by the River and her maidens walked along the River. She saw the basket among the reeds and she sent her maidservant and she took it.* (Shemos 2:5)*

Our pasuk says that *her maidservant* – אֶת־אֲמָתָהּ – was sent. The plain meaning is that Pharaoh’s daughter, Princess Batyah, or Bisyah according to Divrei Hayamim I (4:18), sent one of her maidservants to retrieve the basket with Moshe.

Rashi cites the Midrash Rabbah and Gemara Sotah (12b) that the words אֶת־אֲמָתָהּ (*her maidservant*) are translated as *her arm* because the word אֲמָתָהּ is similar to the word אַמּוֹת (*amos* – cubits, used in measurements). According to these Rabbis’ interpretation, Batyah extended her arm, and her forearm miraculously became lengthened by many אַמּוֹת (*amos* – cubits) – long enough to reach the basket of Moshe and draw him out of the river.

Many commentators see a deeper lesson in this Midrash: If it took an obvious miracle for the arm of Pharaoh’s daughter to reach the distant basket by the River, then how could she have thought she would reach it when she extended her arm to begin with?!

The answer is that she did *not* think she could reach it. But she did her best, nonetheless. She saw a desperate need to save a little child, and she did what she could to set the process of

rescue into motion. And then Hashem granted her noble efforts with miraculous success according to Rav Meir Shapiro.

The Chafetz Chaim teaches that we can learn from this episode with Pharaoh's daughter saving Moshe that whatever danger or trouble we encounter, we must trust that in the end salvation will come, although, for the time being the way that it will come is hidden from us. We must anticipate and hope for speedy deliverance, placing our trust in Hashem knowing that He will come to our aid and save us and rescue us from troubles.

We say in the bracha of אֶת־צֶמַח דָּוִד (*Et Tzemach David*) in Shmone Esrei - כִּי לִישׁוּעָתָךְ קוִינֵנו כָּל הַיּוֹם - [Hashem] *we hope for Your salvation all day long*. The Shaarei Teshuvah (on Orach Chaim 118) says that when we recite these words, we should have in mind to ask Hashem to save us daily from all our personal problems and troubles. He assures us that these words are a proven method of deliverance from difficult times.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, the Kotzker Rebbe (1787-1859), once said this world is compared to a ladder. Hashem put out a ladder that we all came down on and then He took it away and then He told us to come back. Some people look up and say, "There's no ladder – it's impossible!" And they just continue on with their business. Others jump and jump until they get tired and eventually they fall out. But there are those who say, "He's telling us to come up, but He took away the ladder. The only way to get there is continue to jump until He lifts us up." Those are the ones who get lifted up.

Many times we want to do the right thing and there are so many obstacles. Our job is to forget about the obstacles and do as much as you can. And when you can't go any further pray to Hashem to carry you the rest of the way.

Imagine what would have happened if Batyah would say, "It's too far away. What can I do?"

The Kotzker Rebbe commented that Batyah's example teaches us that one should never assume that a task is impossible. Just try. As it says in the Midrash on Shir HaShirim (5:2), *Open up for Me an opening like the eye of a needle, and in turn, I [Hashem] will enlarge it to be an opening through which wagons can enter*. Princess Batyah was far from the basket, yet she reached out for it – and Hashem enabled her to attain her goal.

We have to do our part, then Hashem takes over.

Ultimately, Moshe's life was saved by Pharaoh's daughter, and he was raised under the doting care of the very king who had ordered him killed to prevent the salvation of B'nai Yisrael. The pasuk in Mishlei (19:21) states: רַבּוֹת מִחֲשָׁבוֹת בְּלִב־אִישׁ וְנִעְצָת ה' הִיא תְקוּמָה: - *Many designs are in a man's heart, but it is Hashem's plan that is accomplished*.

The Gemara Sanhedrin (39b) states, that *from the forest itself comes the handle for the ax*. The Gemara points out the irony that the handle used to chop down the trees comes from that very forest. Pharaoh had a decree that Moshe should not have survived. But what happened? Pharaoh's own daughter saves Moshe and basically adopts him and raises him as royalty.

Hashem controls the world. If Hashem wants something to happen, there's no way to stop it.

In Rabbi Dovid Hoffman's sefer Torah Tavlin, it's written that Princess Batyah, as brought down in Kabbalistic tradition, was a *gilgul neshama* – soul reincarnation of Chava, the mother of all human life. This is alluded to in her name Batyah – *the daughter of Hashem*. Just as Chava was not born from a father or mother, but rather was a direct manifestation of G-dliness, her soul was reincarnated in Batyah, who was beloved by Hashem as His own daughter.

Rabbi Eliezer Friedman furthers this idea. Batyah was chosen to be the one who would save Moshe when he was a little baby. Batyah's soul contained the spark that originated from Chava, and it was Chava who had given her husband to eat from the forbidden fruit, thereby bringing upon them banishment from Gan Eden, a life of toil and hardship, and eventually, death. By introducing the concept of death into the world, Chava's burden would seemingly last for eternity. However, Moshe Rabbeinu, was the one who was able to restore life to the world. Torah is life, and *Toras Moshe* is the legacy that our greatest leader left for us.

Thus, Batyah was specifically chosen as the one to physically save Moshe's life, since by doing so, she not only saved him certain death, she literally restored life – the life of Torah – to the world. By doing so, she was able to expunge the sin of Chava.

What was Princess Batyah doing at the Nile that day? The Midrash Rabbah (1:23) explains that she went down to cleanse herself from the idolatry of her father's house.

According to the plain meaning of our pasuk, that she went down to bathe, it should have stated *in the River* rather than *by the River*. The Midrash therefore understands our pasuk to mean that she was rejecting the idolatry of Pharaoh and the Egyptians who worshipped the Nile River. Princess Batyah decided to rid herself from her father's idolatrous ways, so she went down to the River for the purpose of establishing to herself and to others that the River had no Divine powers according to the Yefeh To'ar.

Alternatively, according to the Gemara, our pasuk is understood to mean that she was immersing herself as an act of conversion using the River as a mikvah.

The lesson of Batyah is not only in the importance of human effort despite the odds, but also in the way that Hashem performs miracles. Most miracles do not appear in a vacuum. They are built upon the meager, but sincere efforts of human beings. It is to these efforts that Hashem grants miraculous power and success far beyond their natural limitations. One must never throw up his hands in despair. He must do what he can. Man does not have the power to perform miracles, but he does have the ability to create the conditions in which miracles will sprout according to the Maasai L'Melech.

Rabbi David Ashear writes in his Living Emunah email that when it comes to serving Hashem, we need to try our hardest, and then, when we cannot do anymore, Hashem will complete the job for us. Rabbi Gershon Aron said that he moved to a small town in Minnesota called Duluth, and worked tirelessly to bring religion to its Jewish residents. One of his first projects was to construct a mikvah in the town. After considerable work and effort, the day finally came when the cement trucks arrived to pour 40,000 pounds of concrete to make the basin.

When about two-thirds of the necessary concrete was poured, the engineer came to the Rabbi and informed him that there was a miscalculation. There were only three cubic yards of concrete left in the truck, which was not enough for the basin. If the concrete was not all poured at once, the chances of the mikvah being kosher would be very small.

“Pour every drop you have,” Rabbi Aron said to the man, “and in the meantime we are going to pray. This is all we can do.” The Rabbi ran to the beit midrash and brought out some Tehillim books for the people to use.

Miraculously, just like the oil in the Chanukah story that burned for eight days, the concrete continued to flow from the truck. Just when the basin was completed, the truck stopped, and it was bone dry. The engineer said he had never seen anything like this before in his life. He expected the truck to run dry 20 minutes earlier. But with Hashem’s blessing, there was enough concrete to build the only mikvah within a 220-mile radius.

Another miracle mikvah story was told by Mr. Alan Haber about a man named Aaron Abadi, who was born in Curacao, but lived for a period in Manhattan. During that time, he got married, and before his wedding he attended *taharas ha’mishpachah* (family purity) classes in Brooklyn with Mr. Haber. Shortly after his wedding, he moved back to Curacao, but there was no mikvah, so he made plans to construct a mikvah in his house.

He contacted Rabbi Isaac Triege, a leading expert in the field of mikvah construction, and the project began. There was, however, one serious obstacle. In order to be valid, a mikvah has to be filled directly by rainwater. Over the previous ten years, Curacao averaged less than one inch of rain per year. Very little rain falls over the island. It seemed impossible for the mikvah to be filled. When the neighbors heard about the project, they laughed, noting it would take some 20 years for enough rainwater to fall.

On the day Rabbi Triege came to inspect the mikvah and confirm that it was ready to be filled, Aaron was away on business. He instructed his wife to unplug the spout and wait for rain to fall, so the mikvah could be filled.

That night, a storm developed, and it rained for two days straight. Miraculously, the mikvah was completely filled. There was so much rain that the island’s small drainage system could not handle all the water, and large puddles formed everywhere. The event was unprecedented in the history of the island. Aaron did his part, and Hashem did His. The first mikvah ever in Curacao was ready for use.

We have to do what we can with true bitachon, then let Hashem take care of the rest.

How do we attain genuine bitachon? Rabbi Elimelech Biderman says the answer is simple: Try! We can accomplish more than we think. All we must do is try and Hashem will help us succeed.

Imagine living a life of bitachon that we rely on Hashem because He *wants* to help us and we are certain that He *will* help us. How would that feel?

Is there something you’ve been reluctant to try that you are now willing to start this week?

Shabbat Shalom and wishing you a week ahead of starting and trying and doing and succeeding.