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WEEKLY SHMUESS CHANUKAH

Miracles Within

**DRASHA FROM THE
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<http://www.bilvavi.net/sugya/chanukah>

Miracles Within¹

Miracles – When Nature Is Overcome

On Chanukah, we make a blessing of שְׁעֵשֶׂה נִסִּים וּמִוֹתֵינוּ לְאַבְרָהָם, expressing our thanks to Hashem for this time where He performed miracles for us. Although we also experienced miracles on Pesach, only the Rabbinical festivals of Chanukah and Purim contain a blessing where we thank Hashem for the miracles performed, which we express in the prayer of *Al HaNissim* in *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Hashem runs the world through a system of laws He created which we know as “nature” (*teva*), and He also built into this a system that works above the normal laws of “nature”: miracles (*nisim*). Hashem has allowed the laws of “nature” that He created to be the system of the normal “laws” (*chukim*) which He runs the world with.

When we analyze Creation deeper, there are actually different kinds of “nature” in creation. There are four classifications in Creation: the non-living objects (*doimem*), plants (*tzomeiach*), animals (*chai*), and people (*medaber*). Each of these has their own specific natures. Human beings, animals, plants, and inanimate objects each have their own specific kind of “nature”.

Each of the creations has their limitations. If Hashem enables a rock to grow and have life to it, it would be a miracle for the rock, because the nature of a rock is that it cannot grow. If Hashem were to allow a plant to move from place to place like an animal can, this would be a miracle for the plant, because a plant’s nature is that it does not grow. If an animal is allowed by Hashem to talk, such as the donkey of Bilaam who was allowed to talk, this is a miracle for the animal, because an animal’s nature is that it cannot talk.

Thus, what is the depth of a miracle (*nes*)? It is when a different “nature” is revealed in something. A miracle is not simply that Hashem changes the rules. Rather, as the Ramban and others explained, the definition of a “miracle” is when a lower level creation is allowed to function on a level that is normally above its natural level. When a rock can grow, when a plant can walk, when an animal can talk, these are all miracles, because they would be functioning on a higher level than they are normally on. Thus, in the days of Chanukah, we experienced “miracles” in the sense that a higher level of creation was revealed within this lower realm that we dwell on.

Becoming Uplifted To A Higher Level

When one has a difficulty (*nisayon* נִסְיָוֶן), either his *avodah* is to find a way to run away from it (וִינִס), such as what happened with Yosef when he had to run away from the wife of Potiphar; and sometimes the *avodah* of going through a *nisayon* is to bear through it and thereby become uplifted from it (לְהִתְנוֹסֵס).

When the family of the *Chashmonaim* had to go to war with the Greeks, it was a *nisayon* for them, and they passed the test, becoming uplifted from it and rising to a higher level than before. That was the miracle. The *Chashmonaim* faced some difficulty in their *avodah* in their own individual souls, and because they passed the difficulty, they were elevated to a higher level, where miracles were performed for them.

In clearer terms, as mentioned earlier, a miracle is when a lower level creation is allowed by Hashem to function on a higher level. This can apply within human beings as well: what is considered nature for one person might be considered a miracle for another person, and vice versa. If Shimon is on a lower spiritual level than Reuven, and Shimon rises to the level of Reuven (which is a natural level for Reuven to be on), this is a miracle for Shimon.

¹ <http://bilvavi.net/english/chanukah-055-miracles-within>

Thus, every year when Chanukah returns, where the spiritual light of “miracles” is revealed, this does not simply mean that the miracles of Chanukah are revealed to us in the very same way it was revealed to us last year. Rather, the definition is that if we have risen to higher levels since a year ago, last year’s miracle isn’t considered a miracle anymore for us, because it has now become our natural level.

The spiritual light of the miracles are shined upon us during this time of the year, as our Sages explain, but the depth of this concept is that it depends on the level we have reached since last year. If one has passed more *nisyonos* (difficulties) since last year, he merits a greater level of “miracle” this year, because now that he has become more elevated since last year’s level, the miracle of last year is now his natural level, and he is now ready to receive greater miracles than the year before.

Overcoming Our Own Personal Natures

Applying this to us on a personal level, every person has his own “natures” which Hashem has implanted into his soul. There are four elements contained in our various “natures”: fire, wind, water, and earth. These are the roots of our negative *middos* (character traits). Fire is the root of conceit and anger, wind is the root of idle speech, water is the root of seeking hedonistic pleasure, and earth is the root of sadness and laziness, with their branching traits.² These are the natures of our *middos*. When one works to improve his *middos*, he is really working to uproot the various natures that Hashem has implanted in him.

The *nisayon*, the difficulty of man, is to rise above his nature contained in the animalistic layer of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*)³ - which will not improve on its own; just as an animal dies with the natures that it is born with.

² *Shaarei Kedushah (Rav Chaim Vital), 1:1*

³ *as explained extensively in Tanya, Nefesh HaChaim, Derech Hashem, and Maharal*

The Vilna Gaon says that if a person does not break his negative *middos*, there is no point of living. In other words, a person must work on himself to uproot the nature of his negative *middos*. In other writings of our sages, working on one’s *middos* means to acquire a “second nature”. But the depth of it is for one to break his very nature and to subjugate it, so that it slowly changes, and eventually the “second nature” that one acquires becomes his “first” nature.

Thus, it can be said that the *avodah* of a person is to rise above his own nature that he was born with and to elevate himself to a more “miraculous” level than before. When one changes his natural level, this is a *nes* miracle, just as Hashem performed a *nes* when He redeemed us from Egypt, where He changed nature for us. Just as Hashem runs the world through nature and also through miracles, so does our soul contain nature and miracles. Everything that exists in the world and in time exists as well in our own souls⁴, so if there can be miracles in the world, there can be miracles in our own soul as well.

This is referring specifically to our *avodah* of working on our *middos*. We have certain natures we are born with, which manifest in our negative *middos*, and when we deal with our *middos* and we deal with this *nisayon* – instead of running away from it, we deal with it and face it, by changing our nature – this elevates us from nature to miracles.

After that, what used to be considered a “miracle” for one’s personal level will now become “second nature” to him.

Changing A Personal Nature

To give a clear example of this concept, the nature of a person is that he is concerned for his own gain, and he feels competition with others who are getting in his way. “A craftsman hates those who are in his craft.” A person in the business will naturally feel competition with his competitor and he won’t love him. A person loves himself more than others and he

⁴ *Sefer Yetzirah 3:1*

will naturally put himself before others. His attitude will always be, “*Chayecha Kodmin*” – “Your own life comes first.” But when one works on his *middos*, on changing his nature, he will become more at peace with others who compete with him, and his love for others will grow, replacing the hatred he once had for them.

What used to be his “nature” has now changed for him, if he has worked on changing his natural *middos*; he has now risen to a “miraculous” level.

And vice versa: what used to be considered a “miraculous” level for him to access (in this case, to be able to love even his competitor) has now become “second nature” to him. As his love slowly grows for his competitor, he rises to a more “miraculous” level than before; it is a miracle for him, for a miracle is anything that goes above one’s natural level.

Harmonizing The Opposite Forces

When one reaches a more elevated, “miraculous” kind of existence, he is able to harmonize together contradictory forces within himself.

To give a simple example of this, the earth and the heavens are opposite realms of each other. On this earth we live in, fire and water cannot exist together. When fire and water meet, there is a clash of the elements, and one of them will overpower the other. But in the upper realms that extend beyond this earth, fire and water are united. The Gemara says that the word “*shomayim*” (heaven) is a combination of the words *aiish* (fire) and *mayim*⁵ (water), which hints to how fire and water can co-exist in the heavens. It would be a miracle on this earth if water and fire can co-exist together. By the story of Eliyahu HaNavi at Mount Carmel, fire and water came down together from heaven, and that was a miracle on this earth. In the heavens, though, it is natural for fire and water to be together.

Thus, what is a “miracle” on one level can be “nature” on another level, and what is “nature” for one level can be a “miracle” for another level.

A person, within himself, also has the ability to harmonize together his opposing, contradictory forces. That is a revelation of a “miracle” for the soul, and then this miracle can become second nature to him, where it is no longer miraculous. In the example we brought of one who was used to hating his competitors, he is able to develop a love for them, and he is able to transform his character traits of hatred, jealousy, and competition into their opposite: love. This is but one example of a miracle that can take place in the soul, and there are many more examples as well, of this concept.

Depth of The Chashmonaim Victory

By the miracle with the family of the *Chashmonaim*, where the “few overcome the majority, the impure were defeated by the pure, the wicked were defeated by the righteous” – the depth of the Chanukah miracle was because the *Chashmonaim* must have overcome their own nature, and that was precisely how they merited miracles.

How do we see that the *Chashmonaim* overcame their nature? They were “few against many”. When a person sees that he is outnumbered, his nature is to feel incapable of winning. When going out to war against our enemies, the Torah commands those who are afraid to return home, because they will not be able to fight in the war when they are afraid. Human nature is to be afraid when we were outnumbered by enemies. But the *Chashmonaim* went to war with the Greek army even though the odds were against them; they went against the human nature to be afraid.

Simply speaking, they received *siyata d’shmaya* (assistance from Heaven), and that was how they succeeded. But there is really a deeper reason. They realized their natural limitations, and indeed they were afraid, but they were able to penetrate into a deeper part of their souls, which felt *emunah* in Hashem, and they felt the belief that Hashem is in

⁵ שמים = אש ומים 5

charge and that He can fight our wars for us and defeat our enemies.

They knew that they could not naturally win. But the light of *emunah* was shining in their souls, and it penetrated into even the physical, animalistic layers of their soul. When a person's *emunah* is strong enough, it can uplift even the *nefesh habehaimis* and elevate it to a higher level, filling it with confidence that it can defy one's natural limitations.

When there is such a "miracle" within one's own soul, it is only "natural" that there will be miraculous results. The miracle that happens afterwards in the physical realm is a result of the *inward* miracle which has just taken place in one's *soul*.

That was what happened with the *Chashmonaim* – because they reached a miracle within themselves, by elevating their *nefesh habehaimis* to have firm *emunah* that Hashem can save them, they merited miracles in the physical realm, because they had now become elevated to the level of miracles.

The Depth of The Miracle

Now we can understand the following deep point.

The *Chashmonaim* found the flask of pure olive oil sealed by the *Kohen Gadol*, amongst all the many oils that were contaminated by the Greeks. Besides for the simple understanding of why this was a miracle – the fact that they found one flask of oil that was still pure – there is also a deeper meaning to this miracle.

There are many layers to a person's soul. When a person works on his character and he uproots his own natures, he uncovers deeper parts of his soul, which shed light onto the external layers of the soul and raises them to higher levels. The external layers of the soul can be improved by the inner layers of the soul that a person reveals. The inner layers of the soul are really a person's inner nature, which has been concealed all along until he improves himself and he uncovers it. In the inner layers of the soul, there is a more inner nature of a person, which contains vast

strength. This is also referred to as the "*Aisan*" (giant) of the soul, the true inner strength of the soul, which has no fears and is fully reliant on Hashem's help.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that when a person firmly establishes in his mind the knowledge that there is nothing besides for Hashem and that only He is running the world (*Ain Od Milvado*), he receives Hashem's protection. When one truly reaches this deep place in the soul, the external layers of his soul are removed, and are replaced with the inner layers of the soul.

This was the depth behind the one flask of oil that was found by the *Chashmonaim*. The "one flask of oil" they found represents the inner essence of the soul, which was revealed to the *Chashmonaim* then, where they overcame the external reality and they revealed the inner reality, within themselves. What was at first concealed from them now became revealed to them. They found their own inner essence, which is above nature, above the power of the Greeks who were operating within nature.

On a more inner level, the war of the Jews against the Greeks represented the war of Greek *chochmah*, their wisdoms and ideologies, versus the holy *chochmah* of the Torah. The Greeks were on an agenda to make the Jews forget the Torah, and when the *Chashmonaim* found the inner essence of their own souls, they merited an elevated existence, of miracles, and this is what is represented by the flask of oil that they found.

The Inner "Flask Of Oil" In The Soul

Such a flask of oil could never be "found" by the Greeks – and that is the depth of why they weren't able to find it and contaminate it. It wasn't simply because the Greeks overlooked that flask and that the Divine Providence of Hashem arranged for this to happen. It is true that it was all Divine Providence, but the Divine Providence was only activated because the *Chashmonaim* revealed a deep *emunah* in their own souls.

The *Chashmonaim* removed their own nature contained in their *nefesh habehaimis*, and they revealed the purity of the *neshamah*, which can never be touched by impurity. This deep place in the soul of the *neshamah* is the “oil” which the Greeks can never “find”. The Greeks would never be able to “see” it in the first place. Even if this one “flask of oil” would be sitting in front of the Greeks when they pass by it, it would be invisible from them. This is because the inner essence of the Jew’s soul cannot be “seen” by any forces of impurity.

The same would be true for a Jew who hasn’t yet uncovered his own inner essence, and he is still living life on the level of the Greeks. He would also not be able to find this one “flask of oil” in the *Beis HaMikdash*, even if it would be right in front of him....

The only one who can find this one “flask of oil” is one who has uncovered his own inner essence. He has already found it within him, so he wouldn’t have to go looking for it anywhere.

This “flask of oil” within a person is the true “oil” of these days of Chanukah. But it is only revealed to one who connects himself to the level of the *Chashmonaim* throughout the rest of the year, when he works to overcome his own nature. When one overcomes his nature and he rises to the next level in character improvement, he finds a true “flask of oil” there. It is not the oil you see in the physical world; it is an inner purity found in the depths of the soul. It is hidden and concealed deep in the soul of a Jew. The more one has uncovered his own inner essence during the rest of the year, the more it is revealed to him the inner “flask of oil”.

This “oil” is essentially the fact that the Jewish people were “the first thoughts of Hashem” before Creation, as the Sages state. A gentile therefore can never know of this pure, untouched “oil” in the Jew’s soul. The wisdom of the Greeks was at war with the wisdom of the Torah, but this war only exists on an external plane, where wisdom is pitted against wisdom; the Torah’s wisdom is but its external layer. The inner layer of the Torah, the actual essence of the

Torah, cannot be attacked by any outer forces. The inner layer of the Torah is the intrinsic essence of the Jewish people, who were the first thoughts of Hashem before creation. Nothing can attack that point.

In the external dimension of Creation, in the external layers of the soul, there is a war between good and evil. There is a rule of “The shell comes before the fruit” (*kelipah kodemes l’pri*), and similarly, “there is no light unless it is preceded by darkness”, but this is true only in the external dimension. When one reaches the inner essence of his soul, there is no longer a battle between the forces of light and darkness in the soul; of that point it is said, “*Even as I sit in darkness, Hashem is a light to me.*” The “beginning point” of Creation, the fact that the Jewish people are Hashem’s first thoughts that preceded creation, is above all the concealment and darkness.

Two Facets To Chanukah

This is a deeper understanding of Chanukah than what we explained earlier.

One facet of Chanukah, as we explained until now, is that if one has worked during the rest of the year to uproot his own natures and to reveal his inner essence, he merits more revelation of miracles during these days of Chanukah. He finds the “one flask of oil” within.

But even more so, it brings a Jew into his “beginning point” of the soul, the fact that he was part of Hashem’s first thoughts before creation, and then he reveals a new beginning for himself. His own first thoughts, and his own will, will then become aligned with Hashem’s thoughts and Hashem’s will.

Reaching The Depth of the Soul

When one reaches that place of his soul, there are no outer, impure forces that can attack him there. Evil cannot take hold there.

To reach that place in oneself, we explained that one needs to work on uprooting his own natures, and to reveal more and more inner layers of his soul. How far, indeed, will one have to go into his soul, in order to get there?

The first step, trying to uproot one's nature, is a concept that anyone can work on, as long as he desires true life. It can be worked on by anyone who wishes to change, on any level he is on. At any level that a person is on, he can work on uprooting his nature and to reveal more depth of his soul.

But what is the end point that one should strive for? That is a higher level, which not everyone can reach. It is a lofty place in the soul for one to reach, where one truly realizes the “beginning point” of his soul, realizing that he is the first thoughts of Hashem and that his own first thoughts are aligned with Hashem's will, where he is not even struggling with the evil influences. That is a very high level to reach, a place of *peshitus* (simplicity) in the soul, where one's entire *ratzon* (will) in life is to do Hashem's will, and he does not even entertain any thought otherwise.

The Inner Point Is Above Oppositions

On the outer layers of our existence, we are at war with the evil in Creation, and it is there that it is said, “There is no light that is not preceded by darkness.” There we have to contend with the forces that seek to bring us down spiritually. This is also the depth behind why we begin to light the Menorah specifically at sundown, until the time where passerby are no longer walking in the streets; to fight the darkness with light.

But when we reach the deeper dimension of the Menorah and the oil, there our thoughts and desires are aligned with Hashem's thoughts and will; our “first thoughts” that enter our mind will then be aligned with Torah (this is also called *Ruach HaKodesh*).

That is the depth of the spiritual illumination that is contained in the days of Chanukah. But as we have

explained, this is a very lofty level, and it is the end goal of all our *avodah*. Yet, in spite of this, we must try to realize it somewhat even in the beginning of our *avodah* – for we need to have the aspiration of “*sof maaseh, b'machshavah techilah*” (“the end of action is first in the thoughts”).

Practically Speaking

Applying this concept on a practical level: What should be the order of steps a person should take when it comes to this? The order is as we explained until now. The first step is that a person must work on himself to uproot his nature, and then what used to be a “miraculous” level for him becomes nature.

As an example, at first when a person begins to exert his mind in Torah, he has a hard time grasping it, and his comprehension in Torah is weaker. But as he perseveres, the “gates of wisdom” become opened to him⁶ and he begins to understand his learning better. The miraculous levels then become more natural to him, and they are no longer miracles. It becomes easier for him to learn Torah with understanding, and it is not as difficult for him anymore. This is just an example of the concept, but it has more general applications in one's *avodah*.

As a person works on himself and he merits uproot his natural *middos*, he uncovers more of his inner essence, on a more continual basis. His growth is more permanent and it is not just temporary where it feels like a miracle; it has rather become more natural and permanent in his life.

This is the depth of *שעשה ניסים לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה*, where the “miracles” have more permanence in his life. When one changes his nature and he reveals his inner essence, what used to be a “miraculous” level for him now becomes “natural” to him.

⁶ As written in a letter of the Chazon Ish, in *Kovetz Igros Chazon Ish* (vol.I)

When Miracles Become Nature

The more a person merits, with help from Heaven, to overcome his nature, to change the natural bad habits he was born with, the more it becomes natural for him to live a more miraculous kind of existence, where the miracles within his inner character are no longer miracles, but nature.

It then becomes a natural part of his life, and he reaches deeper and deeper kinds of miracles within his inner character – until he eventually reaches the deepest place of the soul, where one truly believes that it is only Hashem Who runs everything, where His light fills all of existence. That is the goal of all our *avodah*, and it will be fully realized in the times of Mashiach, when Hashem's light will fill all of existence and bring equilibrium to all of Creation. This is the depth of the statement of the Sages, "All the festivals will cease in the future, except for Purim", and some of the opinions in the Sages included Chanukah as well in this statement.

In other words, the fact that miracles can become nature to us is a revelation of the light of the future, which will never cease. That is the depth of why Chanukah will never cease (according to these opinions of the Sages).

The parts of Chanukah that will cease in the future are the parts of our inner journey which we must traverse for the time being, which is but the external dimension of Chanukah. The deeper dimension of Chanukah, where it is realized how miracles can become nature, is the part of Chanukah that will never cease.

In Conclusion

May it be the will of Hashem that it be fulfilled in our times the time where miracles fill all of the world, where it will be revealed the deep, simple nature of the Jew's soul, which desires to do Hashem's will.