

Zera Shimshon

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Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter VI: Toldot (Gen. 25:19-28:9)

Essay 11. Miracles for an individual or for many people

מִדְרָשׁ על פסוק "מה־נָּה מֵהֵרֵף לְמִצָּא בְּנִי", אם לְזוּוּגָה הַמִּצָּא לָהּ, דְּכַתִּיב : "הִקְרַהֲנָא לְפָנַי הַיּוֹם", לְמַאֲכֵלָה¹ על אַחַת פְּמָה וְכַמָּה. הַקִּשָּׁה הָעֵינִין יַעֲקֹב בְּפָרֶק י' דְּפָסְחִים דְּפָאן מִשְׁמַע שְׁמַאֲכָל יוֹמֵר קַל מִן הַזְּיוּג וְהֵתָם אֲמַרִּינֵן קְשִׁים מְזוּנָתִיו שֶׁל אָדָם בְּקָרִיעַת יָם סוּף, וְכַהֲגֵרְסָה אֲמַרִּינֵן בְּסוּטָה וְקְשִׁים לְזוּוּגָם בְּקָרִיעַת יָם סוּף, אִם בְּן שְׁנַיִם הֵם, וְתִירֵץ הוּא לְפִי דְרָכּוֹ וְעֵי"ש.

There is a **Midrash** (Gen. Rabbah 95:19) on the verse, **“How did you succeed so quickly, my son?”**² Esau had told his father, Isaac, that he was going hunting. Jacob disguised himself as his older brother, Esau, and approached their father, who asked him that question. The Midrash says that Jacob responded: **“‘If for your marriage match, [G-d] created it for you’—as it is written, when Abraham sent his servant Eliezer to find a wife for you, and Eliezer prayed, ‘Grant me good fortune today’³—then for your food it should be the same.”**

I.e., Eliezer had said, “Here I stand by the spring as the daughters of the townspeople come out to draw water. Let the maiden to whom I say, ‘Please, lower your jar that I may drink,’ and who replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels’—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac.” Thus, he called for a miracle, and G-d allowed it to happen that way.⁴

Therefore, Jacob, disguised as Esau, say saying, “If G-d performed a miracle so that Eliezer was able to easily find a wife for you, then why shouldn’t He also perform a miracle allowing me to quickly bring food to you?”

The *Iyun Ya’akov*⁵ on the 10th chapter of tractate Pesachim (118a) asks: Here in Gen. Rabbah, the meaning is that food is easier to obtain than a marriage match, but there in Pesachim, it is said, “[Obtaining] a person’s food is as difficult as the splitting of the Red Sea,” and according to another version they say in Sotah that making a marriage match is as difficult as the splitting of the Red Sea.⁶ If so, they are equal in difficulty. The solution is

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¹ The first edition read לְמַאֲכֵלָה, “to make him hungry.”

² Gen. 27:20.

³ Gen. 24:12.

⁴ Gen. 24:13–14.

⁵ Jacob ben Joseph Reischer (Bechofen) (1661–1733), Austrian rabbi. His sefer, *Iyun Ya’akov* (Wilmersdorf, 1729) is a commentary on the *En Ya’akov*.

⁶ Sotah 2a; Sanhedrin 22a.

according to [the *Iyun Ya'akov's*] way, and see there, where he says that if the food is already created, and it is only necessary to hurry to bring it to Isaac so that he wouldn't suffer discomfort [from hunger], then it is accomplished more quickly than making a marriage match.

עוד מקשים העולם מה ראה אליעזר לסמוך עצמו על הנס "והיה הנער" וכו', ומה שתירצו ו"ל שהואיל שפבר נעשה לו הנס של קפיצת הארץ סמוך עצמו גם על נס אחר. קשה דהא במקדש מקום דשכיחא ביה נסים הוא, כדתנו עשרה נסים נעשו לאבותינו בבית המקדש. ואפלו הכי בפרק ה' דפסחים פליגי אבני ורבא, וקנימא לן פרבא דנועלין תנו, ולא סמכינן אנפסא, וכן פסק הרמב"ם בהלכות קרבן פסח.

Also, everyone asks what Eliezer saw to decide to rely upon a miracle, as he said, “Let the maiden to whom I say, ‘Please, lower your jar that I may drink,’ and who replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels’—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac.” Also, why did [the rabbis] of blessed memory conclude that since [Eliezer] had already experienced the miracle of the Land contracting before him so that he could reach his destination quickly,⁷ he relied also upon another miracle. A question on this is that in the Temple it was common for miracles to occur, as it is taught in a Mishnah, “Ten wonders were wrought for our ancestors in the Temple.”⁸ So why shouldn't Eliezer have expected a miracle?

Even so, in the fifth chapter of tractate *Pesachim* (64b), Abaye and Rava disagreed on a matter, and we hold in accordance with Rava, for while Abaye said that the doors of the Temple closed by themselves, and we relied upon the miracle, Rava said that we learned that [people would] close [the doors], and we do not rely on a miracle. The Rambam similarly ruled this way, in the *Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Passover Sacrifice*.⁹ So we see that it is unusual to expect a miracle.

ויש לומר שפשהדבר הוא צורך רבים מותר לסמוך על הנס, כדאשפחן בנחום איש גם זו בפרק ג' דתענית שפסמו עצמו על הנס אף על פי שהרגיש בעצמו שגני המלון גנבו ממנו המרגליות ומלאו לספטה עפרא ואפלו הכי קם ואזל לבי קיסר הואיל שהיה הדבר לצורך רבים, כמו שכתב העיון יעקב בפרק ט' דברכות על ההיא דאניסא דרבים מברכינן, דבגס דרבים ליכא כל כך נס, דזכותא דרבים עדיף, אבל נס דזחיד דלא נפיש זכותיה זה הוא נס גדול ועיי"ש.

It can be said that when the matter is the necessity of many people, it is permissible to rely upon a miracle. We found this with Nachum of Gam Zu, in the third chapter of tractate *Ta'anit* (21a), when the Jewish community asked him to deliver a gift to the Roman

⁷ Sanhedrin 95a: “The Sages taught [in a *Baraita*]: For three [people], the land contracted [and each one miraculously reached his destination quickly]: Eliezer, servant of Abraham, and Jacob our forefather, and Abishai, son of Zeruiah. . . . [For] Eliezer, servant of Abraham, as it is written: ‘And I came that day to the well’ (Gen. 24:42). [I.e., in telling his story to Rebecca’s family, he intended] to say that on that day he left [Canaan, he arrived to them, stressing that a miracle had occurred for his work on behalf of Abraham].”

⁸ *Pirkei Avot* 5:5.

⁹ Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Passover Sacrifice* 1:1: “How is the Paschal sacrifice slaughtered? The first group enters the Temple Courtyard until it is full. They lock its gates and they begin slaughtering their Paschal sacrifices.” I.e., the gates are locked by people, not through a miracle.

emperor. **He relied upon a miracle: Even though he discovered that the hotel staff had stolen the jewels and pearls from him and filled the chest with earth, he rose and went to the palace of the emperor to deliver the chest, since the matter was for the need of the community.** When the emperor saw the chest filled with earth, he became angry, believing that the Jews were mocking him. Nachum suggested that the earth was a weapon that Abraham had used, and that if it were thrown at enemies, it would turn into swords and kill them. The emperor tried to use the dirt in this way against a province that he could not conquer, and found that it was indeed as Nachum had suggested. The emperor then had Nachum's chest filled with jewels and pearls, and allowed him to leave in peace.

This is as the *Iyun Ya'akov* wrote on the ninth chapter of tractate Berachot (54a), which teaches that for a miracle that occurred for many people, we recite a blessing. He says that a miracle for many people is not such a miracle, i.e., is not so unexpected for the merit of many people is preferred. But a miracle that occurs for one person, who doesn't have such a great merit compared to the merit of many people in need, this is indeed a great miracle.

וְאִם בְּעֶזְרָה הָיָה נִקְרָא גַם דִּיחִיד שְׂמָא יִתְמַעַד אֶחָד מֵהֶם כְּמוֹ שְׂאִירַע שְׁקִרְאוּהוּ פֶסַח מְעוּכִין. אָבֵל הֵיאָה דְאֶלְיֶעֶזֶר הָיָה נִקְרָא גַם דְּרַבִּים דְאֶמְרִינֵן בְּפִרְקָא ד' דְרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה (דָּף ל"ב) דְלֵר' יוֹסִי דְסַבִּירָא לֵיהּ פְקֻדוֹנוֹת — הָרִי הֵן כְּזִכְרוֹנוֹת "נָה" פְקֻד אֶת־שָׂרָה" אִף עַל גַּב דְּפְקֻדוֹן דִּיחִיד הוּא כִּינֵן דְאֶתוּ רַבִּים מִינֵהּ כְּרַבִּים דְמֵיָא, וְשִׁפִּיר סְמַךְ עַל הַגִּס מְשׁוּם שְׁהֵיָה כְמוֹ גַם דְּרַבִּים דְאֶתוּ רַבִּים מִינֵיהּ.

Even regarding the Temple courtyard, where “the people stood pressed together, yet bowed down and had enough room,”¹⁰ it was considered a miracle for an individual, lest one of them be crushed, as happened in one incident in the days of Hillel, when an old man was crushed by the throngs, and they called that Passover “the Passover of the crushed.”¹¹

But the incident of Eliezer was called a miracle for many people, for it says in the fourth chapter of tractate Rosh Hashana (page 32b), that on Rosh Hashana, one should recite a certain number of verses of kingship, remembrances, and *shofarot*. The Gemara states that “one does not recite [a verse dealing with] the remembrance of an individual, even [if it is] for good.” **Rabbi Yossi is of the opinion that revisitings [*pikdonot*] are [equivalent] to [verses] of remembrances [*zichronot*], and therefore they may be counted as the required number of verses of remembrances. As an example, he presents the verse, “And the L-rd revisited [*pakad*] Sarah.”¹² Even though this is a revisiting of an individual, and we have learned that a remembrance for an individual should not typically be recited on Rosh Hashana, since many descendants came from her, as Sarah is the mother of the Jewish people, she is considered like many. Therefore, this verse is effectively dealing with the remembrance of the entire Jewish people, and is allowed to be used as one of the remembrances on Rosh Hashana.**

¹⁰ Pirkei Avot 5:5.

¹¹ Pesachim 64b.

¹² Gen. 21:1.

It's fine that [Eliezer] relied upon the miracle, because this was like a miracle, as many people came from [Isaac].

ובנה יובן קושיית מדרש הנ"ל, אם לזווגה המציא לה דרך נס פדכתיב "הקרה-נא" וכו' משום דאתו רבים מינה אף על גב שהנה עתיד לצאת ממך אף עשו שהנה רשע. למאכלך פלומר למאכל זה, שמחמתו תבאנה הברכות לישראל ולא לרשעים, שהוא צורך גדול לרבים, על אחת כמה וכמה. וכל זה הוא לפי האמת. אמנם לפי פנונת יצחק שהיתה לברך את עשו והנה פירושו כה, אם לזווגה וכו' משום דאתו רבים מינה אף על גב שעתיד לצאת ממך נמי רשעים הרבה, למאכלך וכו' פלומר למאכל זה שפנונתה היא לזכותני ולגרום שהרשעים יחזרו בתשובה על אחת כמה וכמה.

In this way, the question of the above Midrash will be understood. “If for your marriage match, [G-d] created it for you.” I.e., by way of a miracle—as it is written, when Abraham sent his servant Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac, and Eliezer prayed, “Grant me good fortune today . . . Let the maiden to whom I say, ‘Please, lower your jar that I may drink,’ and who replies, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels’—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac.” That is because many people will descend from you, even though Esau too, a wicked man, will also come from you.

“For your food.” This is as if to say, it should be the same for this particular food, for through [Esau’s] anger at losing his birthright, the blessings came to Israel and not to the wicked, for this was a great need for many people.

“It should be the same.” I.e., it wasn’t just an individual who needed a marriage match, and who needed the food, but the future of many people depended upon both of these things. Thus, a miracle was enabled in each case.

All this is according to the truth. Indeed, according to Isaac’s intent to bless Esau, his explanation would be thus, “If for your marriage match” etc., because many will descend from you, even though also many wicked people will descend from you.

“For your food” etc., as if to say, for this food, that your intention is for my merit and to bring about that the wicked will return in repentance, all the more so.

והיינו שפיתבו המפרשים שיצחק היה מכיר כל רשעתו של עשו ועיין באלשיך. והטעם שהנה רוצה לברכו פתב הש"ך לפי שהנה סובר שפשירא הוא וזרעו תגבורת חסדי שמים עליהם מחמת הברכות בלי טורח וכלי עמל יתנו אל לבם לשוב בתשובה שלימה ומעתה התחיל לצותו במצוה זו שצנה עליו להכין לו המאכל.

The commentators wrote that Isaac had recognized all the wickedness of Esau. See the Alshich¹³ on Gen. 26:35. As for the reason that [Isaac] had nevertheless wanted to bless [Esau], the Shach wrote on Gen. 27:1 that it was because he was of the opinion that when he

¹³ Rabbi Moshe Alshich (1508–1593), prominent rabbi, preacher, and biblical commentator. Born in 1508 in the Ottoman Empire, he later moved to Safed where he became a student of Rabbi Joseph Caro.

and his descendants saw the increase of the grace of Heaven upon them because of the blessings, without trouble and without toil, they would let their hearts return in complete repentance. Thus, he now began to charge him with this commandment with which he commanded him, to prepare food for him.¹⁴

ואם תאמר אם כן איך אמרו ז"ל קשים מזונותיו של אדם פקריעת ים סוף, והא לא דמו, דהתם הנה צורך רבים והכא הני צורך יחיד. והדין נותן שיהיו המזונות יותר קשים מקריעת ים סוף.

If you'll say: If so, how do [the rabbis] of blessed memory say, "[Obtaining] a person's food is as difficult as the splitting of the Red Sea," for they are not similar. For there, at the splitting of the Sea, there was the need of many people, while here, regarding obtaining food, there is only the need of an individual. The judgment is that obtaining a person's food is harder than the splitting of the Red Sea.

יש לומר דהתם בפרק י' דפסחים נפקא לן מדכתיב "לגזר ים-סוף לגזרים" וסמיה ליה: "נתן להם ללחם לכל-בשר" והאי "לגזר ים-סוף לגזרים", היינו שנקרע הים לי"ב גזרים לכל שבט ושבט לבדו, ולא היה הגם מוצרך לרבים, שעיקר צורך הרבים היה לעבור הים בנבשה, כמו שאמר הכתוב "ניגער בים-סוף ויחרב ויוליכם בתהמות" וכו'. וזה היה גם אחר שעשה הקב"ה להגדיל הגם של קריעת ים סוף, ואם כן שפיר מצי למילף שיהיו המזונות שהם צורך והכרח ליחיד דומיא דקריעת הים לי"ב גזרים שלא היה בו כל כך צורך לרבים.

It can be said that there in the 10th chapter of tractate Pesachim, the difference is as it is written, "Who split apart the Red Sea,"¹⁵ juxtaposed to which is, "Who gives food to all flesh,"¹⁶ that the sea was divided into 12 pieces, one for each of the tribes respectively. I.e., G-d created 12 dry channels through the sea. This was not a miracle that was needed for many people, as the principal need that the many people had was for them to cross the sea on dry land, and this could have been accomplished by a single dry channel. As the verse states, "He sent His blast against the Red Sea; it became dry; He led them through the deep as through a wilderness."¹⁷ This creation of 12 separate channels, one for each tribe, was a different miracle that the Holy One, Blessed be He, fulfilled to enhance the miracle of splitting the Red Sea. If so, it is fine to teach ourselves that the food, which was for the need of an individual, is similar to the splitting of the Sea into 12 pieces, even though there wasn't such a great need for many people.

¹⁴ Rabbi Mordechai Ha'Cohen of Safed (1523–98), *Siftey Cohen on Torah* (Venice 1605).

¹⁵ Ps. 136:13.

¹⁶ Ps. 136:25.

¹⁷ Ps. 106:9.

וְאֶתִי שְׁפִיר נָמִי מֵהַ שְׁפִירָשׁוּ הַמְּפֹרָשִׁים בְּזֶה שֶׁבְּקָרִיעַת יָם סוּף הִתְחַהּ מִדַּת הַדִּין מִקְטָרְגָת וְכוּ', וְכֵן לְכָל יְחִיד וְיְחִיד וְכוּ'.

It's also fine what the commentators explained on this (see Zohar, parashat Teruma, II:170a), **that in the splitting of the Red Sea, the trait of judgment was prosecuting** Israel and Egypt alike. I.e., G-d had to judge between Israel and Egypt, and at the time all were guilty of sins, each and every individual. Because of the merit of Abraham, G-d chose to save Israel and destroy the pursuing Egyptians.

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