

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Post of the Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

The beginning of the new school year offers a good time to review the purposes and uses of *Torah Talk*. In *HaShavua* each week, and on the school blog, in anticipation of Shabbat, you will see a synopsis of the weekly Torah portion, a discussion of that portion geared towards adults, and a selection of age-appropriate questions which you can use as a springboard for a Torah discussion with your children. You can read through *Torah Talk* with your children and explain to them in developmentally appropriate language anything they do not understand in the *Dvar Torah*.

All 3<sup>rd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> graders will continue to learn the *parasha* (Torah portion) together at *tefilah* (prayer) on Monday mornings, taught each week by myself, or a member of the Judaic Studies staff or of the local clergy.

Second graders will learn the weekly *parasha* with their Judaic Studies teachers in their classrooms. Pre-Kindergarteners and Kindergarteners will learn about the stories and characters in the Torah and first graders will learn the stories and characters in the *TaNakh* (*Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim*—Bible, Prophets, and Writings.) They, too, can and certainly should be included in whatever discussions you have at home on the *parasha*.

We hope you will find this material enlightening and helpful and that you will talk with your family about the wealth of concepts and values found within the Torah. We welcome feedback—comments and questions—on the *Divrei Torah*. Please contact [Sharon Freundel](#), the Director of Jewish Life, with any such feedback.

Happy Learning!

Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 11:26-16:17  
*Maftir* for *Rosh Chodesh: Bemidbar* (Numbers) 28:9-15

In this *parasha*, Moshe instructs *Bnei Yisrael* (the Israelites) regarding idolatry, false prophets, pure and impure foods, tithes, freeing slaves, and pilgrimage festivals.

The section about false prophets reads as follows (13:2-6):

ב כִּי-יָקוּם בְּקִרְבְּךָ נָבִיא, אוֹ חֵלֶם חֲלוֹם; וְנָתַן אֵלֶיךָ אוֹת, אוֹ מוֹפֵת. ג וּבָא  
הָאוֹת וְהַמוֹפֵת, אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר: יִלְכֶה אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים,  
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּם--וְנִעַבְדָּם. ד לֹא תִשְׁמַע, אֶל-דִּבְרֵי הַנְּבִיא הַהוּא, אוֹ אֶל-  
חֹלֵם הַחֲלוֹם, הַהוּא: כִּי מִנְסָה ה' אֶ-לֵהֶיכֶם, אֶתְכֶם, לְדַעַת הִישָׁשְׁכֶם  
אֲהָבִים אֶת-ה' אֶ-לֵהֶיכֶם, בְּכָל-לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם. ה אַחֲרֵי ה' אֶ-  
לֵהֶיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ, וְאֵתוֹ תִירָאוּ; וְאֵת-מִצְוֹתָיו תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּבְקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמְעוּ, וְאֵתוֹ  
תַעֲבֹדוּ וּבּוֹ תִדְבָּקוּן. ו וְהַנְּבִיא הַהוּא אוֹ חֵלֶם הַחֲלוֹם הַהוּא יוֹמֵת, כִּי דִבֶּר-  
סָרָה עַל-ה' אֶ-לֵהֶיכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְהַפְּדֶה מִבֵּית  
עַבָדִים--לְהַדְיחֶה מִן-הַדֶּרֶךְ, אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶ-לֵהֶיךָ לָלֶכֶת בָּהּ; וּבַעֲרַת הָרַע,  
מִקִּרְבְּךָ.

2. If there arises among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, 3. And the sign or the wonder, comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, Let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them; 4. You shall not listen to the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams; for Hashem your God tests you, to know whether you love Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 5. You shall walk after Hashem your God, and fear Hashem, and keep the commandments, and obey God's voice, and you shall serve Hashem, and hold fast to Hashem. 6. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he has spoken to turn you away from Hashem your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to thrust you out of the way which Hashem your God commanded you to walk in. So shall you purge the evil away from the midst of you.

The Talmud in *Masechet* (Tractate) Sanhedrin says (90a):

It has been taught; R. Yose Hagalili said: The Torah understood the extreme depths [of depravity inherent in] idolatry, therefore the Torah gave him [the false prophet] power therein, that should he even cause the sun to stand still in the middle of the heavens, you must not listen to him. R. Akiva said, God forbid that Hashem should cause the sun to stand still at the behest of those who transgress the Divine will, but [the Torah refers to one] as Chananiah the son of Azur, [a false prophet who entered into a public debate with the prophet Yirmiyahu, (see the book of *Yirmiyahu*—Jeremiah, chapter 28)] who was originally a true prophet and [only] subsequently became a false prophet.

This Talmudic passage raises two questions: Is there such a thing as a human being who is able to cause miracles to happen? And, how could the performance of such miracles impact our faith in God?

The Torah is replete with stories of humans, both Jews and non-Jews, who change nature to serve their needs or the needs of the community. Three examples come immediately to mind:

1. The sorcerers in Egypt (*Shemot*—Exodus 7:10-11): “Moshe and Aharon went to Pharaoh, and they did as Hashem had commanded; and Aharon threw down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.”

2. Yehoshua [Joshua], during his conquest of the Land of Israel (*Yehoshua*—Joshua 10: 12-13): “Then spoke Yehoshua to Hashem on the day when Hashem delivered the Amorites before the people of Yisrael, and he said in the sight of Yisrael, ‘Sun, stand still upon Givon; and you, Moon, in the valley of Ayalon.’ And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the Book of *Yasher*? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day.”

3. King Shaul [Saul], when he went to the Witch of Endor to conjure up the spirit of the deceased Shmuel [Samuel] (I *Shmuel*—Samuel 28: 10-15): “And Shaul swore to her by Hashem, saying, As Hashem lives, no punishment shall happen to you for this thing. Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up to you? And he said, Bring me up Shmuel. And when the woman saw Shmuel, she cried with a loud voice; and

the woman spoke to Shaul, saying, Why have you deceived me? You are Shaul! And the king said to her, Do not be afraid; for what did you see? And the woman said to Shaul, I saw a godlike man ascending from the earth. And he said to her, What is his appearance? And she said, An old man comes up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Shaul perceived that it was Shmuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed. And Shmuel said to Shaul, Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up? And Shaul answered, I am in great distress; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me, and answers me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams; therefore I have called you, that you may make known to me what I shall do.”

The Torah clearly believes that human miraculous magic is possible; hence the prohibitions listed in *Devarim* [Deuteronomy] 18: 10-12: “There shall not be found among you any one who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or who uses divination, or a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination to Hashem; and because of these abominations Hashem your God drives them out from before you.”

We can now understand the Talmudic comment of Rabbi Jose Hagalili. He comprehended that it was possible for a false prophet to seduce an unsuspecting people with magical mumbo-jumbo. Rabbi Akiva agreed that it was possible; he just rejected the notion that God would allow it to happen. The possibility of a human such as a false prophet creating miraculous magic necessitated the strong punishment of death as a deterrent against a naïve nation being seduced into the worship of false gods through the false prophet’s sleight of hand.

When all is said and done, Jews reject the notion of belief in any spiritual system, even belief in God, based on miraculous occurrences. In contrast to some Christian groups, Jews consider sainthood a product of one’s human actions rather than one’s superhuman actions. In the movie *Oh, God!* George Burns (as God) says, “You people always ask for miracles, but all it does is create more distance between us.” Miracles point out how far we are from the Divine existence; mundane reality lived day-by-day by the word of God draws us closer to the Divine.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- If you go to a magic show, is the performer really doing “magic”? Why are these performers referred to as “illusionists”?
- How do you think you would have reacted if you had seen Aharon and the Egyptian magicians turning rods into live snakes?
- Why do you think the Jewish people might follow a false prophet who performed magic for them?