

מאמרי תורה – Torah Talk



The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Va'era
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פרשת וארא
כ"ו בטבת תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Shemot* (Exodus) 6:2-9:35

In this *parasha*, God brings the first seven plagues upon the Egyptians through Moshe and Aharon, but Pharaoh repeatedly refuses to allow the *Bnei Yisrael* to leave.

Were the plagues miracles, or did nature behave serendipitously at this time leading up to the Exodus?

According to the Malbim (Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Weiser), a nineteenth century Eastern European commentator, the two ideas are not mutually exclusive. Says Malbim, "God conducts business with the world in two ways – through established nature and through providential miracles which occur according to the need of the hour." However, he continues, these two ways are flip sides of the same coin. Nature simply consists of ongoing, regularly-occurring miracles, and miracles are merely episodic instances of nature occurring in the right place at the right time.

This is a wonderful way to look at miracles. It explains how in the *Amidah* we can thank God for "יְסִידְךָ שֶׁבְּכָל יוֹם עִמָּנוּ" – Your miracles which are with us every day." According to the Malbim's view, the fact that the sun rises, that our bodies function, that cures for diseases exist, and that technology advances are all functions of the miraculous nature of God's world. Indeed, anyone who has been fortunate enough to witness the birth of a baby can understand the miraculous nature of the "normal" occurrences in the world.

The idea of supernatural miracles distances us from God in that, from humanity's point of view, it amplifies the distance between what God is capable of and what humans are capable of. If, however, one sees "supernatural" miracles as the Malbim

does – as nature occurring in the right place at the right time – it lessens that distance between us and God. We, too, can arrange for things to happen in the right place at the right time. Granted, not on a level equal to that of God's, but nonetheless we can plan and manipulate events to our own benefit or the benefit of others. The concept of episodic nature occurring in the right place at the right time illuminates a God who is always in control of the world, but never violates the Divine laws of nature as they were established at Creation.

It enriches us spiritually to recognize each and every day the miracles around us, both those of an ongoing nature and those of an episodic nature.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What is a miracle?
- Have you ever seen a miracle with your own eyes? If so, what?
- How does the idea of miracles relate to *Birkot Hashachar*, the blessings that we make first thing in the morning?
- Name three things that could constitute ongoing, regular miracles, and three things that could constitute episodic miracles.