

1

WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

- **Oxford English Dictionary**
 - o “A marvelous event occurring within human experience, which cannot have been brought about by human power or by the operation of any natural agency, and must therefore be ascribed to the special intervention of the deity or of some supernatural being. An act exhibiting control over the laws of nature.”
- **Rav Hutner zt”l** – *retzonos* of God
- **Ramban** (Shiur #23: Miracles, Nature and what Lies Between: Ramban on Hashgacha - Rav Joshua Amaru)
 - o “The Ramban places great emphasis on miracles which come in two types. The first are public, revealed miracles such as those associated with the Exodus. These serve to testify to the fact of *hashgacha*. They can affect both individuals and whole nations and are easily identified in that they involve an explicit breach in the laws of nature. They do not happen frequently, and therefore the Torah instituted many *mitzvot* to commemorate them and thus maintain the consciousness that God is involved in the world. Vigilance is needed precisely because the world most often proceeds along its natural course.”
 - o “There is another, more subtle way that God interacts with the world. The Ramban calls these interactions “hidden miracles” and it is on this level that *hashgacha peratit* and reward and punishment are mostly manifest. These too are *miracles* – interruptions in the natural order of events, but they differ from revealed miracles in that they appear to be cases of things proceeding in accordance with ordinary natural cause and effect. It is in this way that reward and punishment, both on a national and on a personal level, are integrated into our lives. We do not see God interfering with nature – perhaps because if we could it would undermine our ability to even conceive of nature as a stable entity, but he does interfere nonetheless and causes people to receive both reward and punishment.”

2

CHILDREN’S UNDERSTANDING OF MIRACLES

- Vaden, V.C. and Woolley, J.D. (2011). Does God make it real? Children’s belief in religious stories from the Judeo-Christian tradition. *Child Development* 82, 1120-1135
 - o Children by age 7 already do not believe in magic
 - o 6-year-old children likely to believe that a *familiar* story of unusual events happened especially if it involves God.
- Woolley, J.D. and Dunham, J.A. (2017). Children’s beliefs about miracles. *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 17, 73 – 93.
 - o Two divergent hypotheses:
 - “... due to their growing disbelief in magical events, children will exhibit difficulty believing in miracles as real-world events, and so will refrain from using them to explain events.”
 - “...at least among children from religious backgrounds, their growing knowledge of God and his involvement in miracles may enable belief in the real-world existence of miracles and legitimize them as explanatory devices.”

- “Perhaps the most striking aspect of children’s conceptions of miracles was the extent to which children viewed miracles not just as rare events that happened in the Bible, but as real events that were potentially intertwined with their everyday lives.”
- “...events without natural explanations are more likely to be considered miraculous, but children may still assign a role to God in rare or unexpected events, even when another explanation is present.”
 - “Some children in our sample even explicitly attempted to merge science and God in their explanations, for example suggesting that, ‘God gave scientists the idea,’ and that ‘God told the scientists what to do at a certain time and they put it together and it was formed.’”
- “We have shown that children consider violations of causal regularities and the financial status of the recipient most critical in their judgement of the miraculous nature of an event, and presence of an alternative explanation and involvement of prayer as also important but to a lesser degree.”

3

MIRACLE OF CHANUKAH

(1) Begin the eight days of Chanukah. /These days are observed/ because at /the time of/ the second *Beys Ha-Mikdash*, when evil kings ruled, they imposed decrees upon the Jews and banned their religious observance and did not let them engage in Torah /study/ and /the performance of/ mitzvos. /The oppressors/ wrested their possessions and their daughters from them, they entered the Temple and acted in violation of its /sanctity/ and they made all the /halachically/ clean articles unclean. The Jews suffered greatly from them and were hard-pressed by them.

/This continued/ until the God of our fathers had mercy on /the Jews/ and delivered them from the hands of those /evil kings/ and saved them. The sons of Chashmonai, the chief *kohanim*, prevailed /over those kings/ and killed them and delivered Israel from their hands. The throne returned to Israel for /a period of/ more than two hundred years /thereafter/, until the second destruction /of the *Beys Ha-Mikdash*/.

When the Jews prevailed over their enemies and annihilated them, it was the twenty-fifth of Kislayv. They entered the Temple and did not find /halachically/ clean oil in the *Beys Ha-Mikdash*, except for one jug, which was lying /unspoiled/ with the seal of the chief *koh-hayn*. Its /contents/ were insufficient for kindling /the lights of the *Beys Ha-Mikdash*/, except for one day only. A miracle occurred and the lights of the array /there/ were lit from it for eight days, until olives were crushed and /halachically/ clean oil was extracted /from them/.

Mishnah Berurah 670

א (א) מתחילין שמונת ימי חנוכה. כי צמח שני (א) כשמלכו מלכי רשעה גזרו גזירות על ישראל ונטלו דתם ולא הניחו אותם לעסוק בחורה ומצות ופשוטו ידם בממונם ובנשותיהם ונכנסו להיכל ופרצו בו פרצות וטמאו הטהרות וזר להם לישראל מאד מפניהם ולחטום לתן גדול עד שריחם עליהם אלהי אבותינו והושיעם מידם והצילם וגברו בני חשמונאי הכהנים הגדולים והרגום והושיעו ישראל מידם וחזרה מלכות לישראל יתר על מאתים שנה עד החורבן השני וכשגברו ישראל על אויביהם ואיבדום כ"ה צבאליו היה ונכנסו להיכל ולא מצאו שמן טהור במקדש אלא פך אחד שהיה מונח בחומתו של כ"ג ולא היה בו להדליק אלא יום אחד בלבד ונעשה נס והדליקו ממנו נרות המערכה ח' ימים עד שכמשו וימים והוציאו שמן טהור. ומפני זה התקט חכמים שבאותו הדור שיהיו הימים האלו שמחלתן כ"ה צבאליו ימי שמחה והלל ומדליקין בהן הנרות בערב על פתחי הבתים בכל לילה ולילה משמונת הלילות (ב) להראות ולגלות הנס. והוא מצוה מד"ס בקריאת המגילה וימים אלו הן הנקראים חנוכה ר"ל חנו כ"ה שביס כ"ה חנו מאויביהם. ומפני שהן ימי שמחה והלל לכך אסור בהן ההספד והתענית (ג) ונהגין העניים לסבב מחנוכה על הפתחים (ד) יש טעם לזה: (ב) ואסורים בהספד ותענית.

Gemara Shabbos 22a

... ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים לשנה אחרת קבעום ועשאוּם ימים טובים בהלל והודאה

And there was sufficient oil there to light the candelabrum for only one day. A miracle occurred and they lit the candelabrum from it eight days. The next year the Sages instituted those days and made them holidays with recitation of *hallel* and special *thanksgiving* in prayer and blessings.

Rambam Hilchos Chanukah 3:3

ומפני זה התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שבתחלתן כ"ה בכסלו ומי שמחה והלל ומדליקין בקו הנרות בערב על פתחי הבתים בכל לילה ולילה משמונת הלילות להראות ולגלות הנס. וימים אלו הן הנקראין חגכה...

Because of this, the sages of that generation ruled that the eight days beginning with the twenty-fifth of *Kislev* should be observed as days of **rejoicing** and **hallel**. Lamps are lit in the evening over the doors of the homes, on each of the eight nights, so as to display the miracle. These days are called *Hanukkah*...

4

QUESTIONS TO ASK CHILDREN

- Thanksgiving
 - o When is it appropriate to say, "thank you?"
 - o What is something for which you have gratitude?
- Simcha
 - o What makes you happy?
- Praise
 - o Why are we praising God? Does he really need it?
 - o How does praising God change us?
- Miracles
 - o What do you think a miracle is?
 - o Have you ever seen a miracle?
 - o Are miracles in real life or just in the Torah?
 - o Why do you think miracles happen?

EXPRESSING OUR VALUES TO OUR CHILDREN – REASONS FOR GELT

5

GIFTS

Gemara Pesachim 109a

ת"ר חייב אדם לשמח בנו ובני ביתו ברגל שנא' (דברים טז, יד) ושמחת בחגך

- o **The Sages taught: A man is obligated to gladden his children and the members of his household on a Festival, as it is stated: "And you shall rejoice on your Festival, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow that are within your gates" (Deuteronomy 16:14).**

Questions to consider:

- o How do you feel when you get a gift?
- o Why give gifts to other people?

6

FAMILY'S STATION IN LIFE AND TZEDAKAH

Shulchan Aruch 671

תרעא סדר הדלקת נר חנכה ומקום הנחתו, ובו ח' סעיפים:

א (א) אצריך לזהר מאד בהדלקת נרות חנכה. (ב) *ואפלו (ה) עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה (ג) שואל או מוכר כסותו ולוקח שמן להדליק: ב כפמה נרות מדליק, *בלילה הראשון מדליק אחד, (ד) מכאן ואילך (ז) [נ] מוסיף והולך (ה) אחד בכל לילה, (ו) עד שבליל אחרון (ז) יהיו

Even a poor person who is supported by charity must solicit aid or sell his garment and buy oil to kindle.

Magen Avraham 670

נוהגין הנערים העניים לסבב בחנוכה על הפתחים

Belzer Rav – give to all children so as not to embarrass any one

Questions to consider:

- Why is publicizing (showing other people) the miracle so important?
- What do you most value in the world and why?
- What is something you have that you could live without?
- Why might it be embarrassing for a poor child to collect Tzedakah? How can we help children less fortunate than our family?
- What are the most important tzedakos (charities) to our family? To you personally?

7

MINDFULNESS – being present – aware of your space, your environment, the timing, etc.

קמב

הלכות חנכה סימן תרעג

מותר להדליק בנר חנכה השמנים והפתילות שאסור להדליק בהם נר שבת הגה (ו) אם אינו נותן בנר רק כדי שיעור מצותו (תשובת הרשב"א סימן קע), (ז) לפי שאסור להשתמש (ח) בנר (ז) חנכה (ט) בין בשבת בין בחול. (י) *ואפלו לבדק (ג) [ג] מעות או למנותן לאורה (יא) אסור. (יב) *אפלו תשמיש של קדשה, כגון ללמד לאורה, (יג) אסור. *ה"י מי שמתיר בתשמיש של

Questions to consider:

- How does our environment affect our behavior?
- What makes one space appropriate to play in and another more appropriate for davening?
- Why is the *Ner Chanukah* so special? How does the *Ner Chanukah* change our environment?

8

PRIORITY OF TORAH AND CHINUCH

Parshas Mattos

Reuven and Gad make a request to remain on the other side of the Jordan and not enter Israel like the other tribes.

16. They approached him and said, "We will build sheepfolds for our livestock here and cities for our children.

טז. וַיֵּגְשׁוּ אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ גְדֵרְתָּ צֹאן נִבְנֶה
לְמִקְנֵנוּ פֹה וְעָרִים לְטִפְנוֹ:

Moshe's response:

24. So build yourselves cities for your children and enclosures for your sheep, and what has proceeded from your mouth you shall do."

כד. בָּנוּ לָכֶם עָרִים לְטִפְכֶּם וּגְדֵרְתָּ לְצֹאֲנְכֶם
וְהַיָּצָא מִפִּיכֶם תַּעֲשׂוּ:

Rashi 32:16

We shall build sheepfolds for our livestock here:

They were more concerned about their possessions than about their sons and daughters, since they mentioned their livestock before [mentioning] their children. Moses said to them, "Not so! Treat the fundamental as a fundamental, and the matter of secondary importance as a matter of secondary importance. First 'build cities for your children,' and afterwards 'enclosures for your sheep'" (verse 24) - [Mid. Tanchuma Mattos 7]

נבנה למקננו פה: חסים היו על ממונם
יותר מבניהם ובנותיהם, שהקדימו
מקניהם לטפם. אמר להם משה לא כן
עשו, העיקר עיקר והטפל טפל, בנו לכם
תחלה ערים לטפכם ואחר כך גדרות
לצאנכם:

Emes L'Yaakov on Shulchan Aruch

⁵⁸³ שאלה: מה שנהגו בימינו ליתן מתנות לילדים בימי
חנוכה, האם יש בזה משום חוקות העכו"ם שעושים כן
בימי אידם?

תשובה: נראה שלא, שמקור המנהג נובע מזה
שנתנו מעות חנוכה למלמדים, והיו שולחים המעות על
ידי התלמידים, ומזה נשתרבב המנהג שנותנים מתנות
לילדים ג"כ, ואדרבה יותר מסתבר שהגויים לקחו מנהג זה
מהיהודים [ומנהג רבינו לחלק מעות חנוכה כליל חמישי
של חנוכה] - מפי השמועה.

Sifte Chayim - Rabbi Chaim Friedlander (Moadim, Volume 2: p. 134)

Greeks forbid learning Torah so children couldn't learn. After the war with the Greeks, parents reintroduced Torah to their children but had to bribe them to learn.

Questions to consider:

- How does Torah support us and how do we support Torah?
- How do we make Torah a priority in our home? In our community?