

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

The Torah's narrative takes a thirty eight year leap as it reports the death of Moshe's older sister, Miriam, and the loss of the miraculous well that accompanied the Jewish people through the wilderness in her merit. To remedy the dearth of water, G-d instructed Moshe, "Take the staff and gather together the assembly, you and your brother Aaron, and speak to the rock before their eyes that it shall give its waters; you will bring forth for them water from the rock and give drink to the assembly and to their animals." (Bamidbar/Numbers 20:8) Rashi quotes the Midrash Tanchuma (9) which notes that G-d's mention of the flocks teaches us of His concern not only for the welfare of the Children of Israel but for their property as well.

What is the imperative for the Midrash to state that the animals were saved specifically because they were the chattel of the Jews? Can it not be explained that G-d maintained a concern for all His creations, thus He wished to provide for the animals in their own right?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1) expounds that notwithstanding G-d's general provision for all His creatures, He does not perform miracles exclusively for the animal kingdom. These animals found themselves in the wilderness because they were the property of these humans; if the people lost their merit for miraculous water, the animals' innocence would not suffice for supernatural intervention. Their renewed sustenance came only as beneficiaries of the congregation's renewed merit.

But could it not be understood that the renewed merit of the Jewish people was so great that they earned sustenance for themselves and their animals? Why does the Midrash explain that the Jews merited for themselves and the animals received exclusively because G-d maintained a special concern for Jewish possessions?

Rabbi Feinstein concludes that had that been the case G-d would not have explicitly instructed Moshe to provide to the animals; rather there would have been a later parenthetical mention that the animals were given. The direct instruction indicates that the Jews did not merit this care for the animals; rather, once G-d decided to save the Jewish nation, He, in turn, saved their possessions.

As physical creatures in a physical world, it is too easy to forget that G-d is attentive to all the physical minutiae of our lives, that He (and only He) calculates and provides all our physical needs. We dream of how much better life would be if only we could win that mega-lottery jackpot, forgetting that G-d, in His unfathomable, infinite wisdom, very carefully orchestrates our life's

circumstances to provide each individual the ultimate environment for personal growth and development. There is no way for us to even begin to comprehend the Divine rationale for each of the details in our lives.

Rabbi Avrohom Pam (2) related the story of a Jew who, in spite of having lived his entire life in dire poverty, remained steadfast in his faith, and prayed with intense concentration. Someone once overheard this man reciting the morning blessing, "Blessed are You...who has provided me my every need," with great joy. Asked the passerby, "Can you really say that your every need has been provided for? You are among the poorest of the poor!" The man replied, "Can one really know, on his own, what his particular needs are? If G-d has made me poor, then obviously this condition is necessary for me to fulfill my purpose in life. Poverty is what my soul needs, and I have been granted this in full measure!"

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) 1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor of his time and one of the principal leaders of Torah Jewry through much of the last century

(2) 1913-2001; for some six decades, as Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Yeshiva Torah VoDaas in Brooklyn, New York, he was an anchor for thousands of students deeply attached to him with strong bonds of love; he was known for his outstanding diligence in Torah study, as well as for his work on his character and his study of mussar.

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