

# APPRECIATING MIRACLES

*by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig*

After enumerating the tragic consequences to the Jewish people for deviating from the Divine will, the Torah offers a consolation. "I will remember My covenant with Yaakov (Jacob) and also My covenant with Yitzchak (Isaac), and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember, and I will remember the land." (Vayikra/Leviticus 26:42)

Rashi, noting the peculiarity that Yaakov's name is spelled with an extra letter vav comments that there are five places in the Bible where Yaakov's name is spelled this way. There are also five places where the name of Eliyahu (Elijah) is written with its vav missing. Rashi explains, "Yaakov took a letter from the name of Eliyahu as collateral, so that Eliyahu will come and herald the redemption of Yaakov's children." G-d promised His children redemption; it will happen with or without Eliyahu's announcement. Why did Yaakov insist that Eliyahu's announcement must herald the redemption?

Ramban (1), addressing why the Torah emphasized the miraculous birth of Yitzchak when his mother, Sarah, was 90 years old but did not even directly mention the greater miracle of Yocheved giving birth to Moshe at the age of 130, expounds that the Torah only emphasizes miracles that were preceded by prophecies of those events. Rabbi Shimon Schwab (2) explains that events that defy the laws of nature - what we call "miracles" - are impossible to identify with absolute certainty since we do not completely understand all of the laws of nature. Indeed, science often generates natural explanations for events that were previously thought to be supernatural. The only way we can be certain that the laws of nature are indeed being broken is when an event is preceded by a prophecy that the miracle will take place.

Thus, Yaakov wanted Eliyahu to herald the redemption to guarantee that we realize that the events are indeed miraculous and not chance.

But the requisite heralding only speaks to our inability to appreciate the unannounced miracles before us. In reality, Yocheved's pregnancy at the age of 130 was more miraculous than Sarah's. The Talmud advises that in the post-Messianic era the only holiday that will be celebrated is Purim - the one holiday that had no open miracle, but was a string of otherwise logically progressing events that in retrospect were undeniably miraculous. Finally, a subject of great discussion of the early Talmudic commentaries regarding the holiday of Chanuka is identifying the true object of our celebration: the miracle of the oil or the practically impossible vanquishing of the Greek army. Many conclude that, indeed, the military victory is the key miracle being celebrated, but that G-d had to construct the obvious miracle of the oil for us, in our appreciation of the miraculous nature of the season, to

recognize the miracle of that victory.

Indeed, G-d's miracles continue to abound. We need only see them.

*Have a Good Shabbos!*

(1) 1194-1270; acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, Nachmanides; native of Gerona, Spain, he was of the leading scholars of the Middle Ages, successfully defending Judaism at the famed debate in Barcelona in 1263

(2) 1908-1995; student of the great Mirrer Yeshiva and Rabbi of congregations in pre-war Germany and Baltimore, he is renowned for his leadership of the German-Jewish community in Washington Heights, Manhattan from 1958 through the end of the 20th century

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