

THE MOST MIRACULOUS IS THE ORDINARY

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

I will provide your rains in their time.

[Note: The single most famous and oft-quoted piece of Meshech Chochmah appears in this *parshah*, 26:44. It is too good to miss. However, because it has been translated elsewhere (e.g. Nechama Leibowitz's "New Studies in Vaykra" p. 618) I thought it better to work on a different piece with which fewer are acquainted.]

Meshech Chochmah: What is the nature of this *berachah*? Chazal^[2] see it as something beyond abundant rainfall when it is most needed for crop growth. Rather, they see this referring to rainfall on Friday evenings, when people are indoors celebrating Shabbos, and the needed precipitation does not come at the price of interference with other human activity.

Chazal mean to convey to us that what we call *teva* / nature contains a dimension full of wonder and surprise, and that is keyed to Man's obedience to G-d. When Man heeds G-d's commandments, Nature itself becomes more elegant and cooperative.

We would never refer to rain falling at times convenient to us as "miraculous," at least not in the strict sense of the word. We usually reserve that designation for events that are entirely inexplicable, not just improbable or serendipitous. The "real" miracle, we think, is the blockbuster event that rips pages out of the Divine rule book. It is this "real" miracle that we long for, but usually have to settle for the humdrum ordinariness of existence.

Chazal tell us that we are wrong. The greatest value lies in the ordinary and regular. Hashem designed incredible grandeur and beauty into His rules. Those fully take into account the actions of Man; they play out in synch with the laws of the Torah. They are nothing but a succession of less dramatic miracles to which we become accustomed. The opening words of our *parshah* – "If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments"^[3] – essentially state that untold richness presents itself when Hashem's laws of Nature are allowed full-throated expression. That richness represents the aim of Creation. When Man sins, those laws are muffled and stifled, resulting in a less than perfect world.

Because it is easy for Man to lose sight of the connection between a beneficent Nature and the Providence of G-d, He arranges at times what we erroneously look to as the "real" miracles – the complete reversal of the laws of Nature. They remind us Who is in charge, Who orchestrates

everything. While these are effective, they do not fit into the essential scheme of things. They are wake-up calls, necessitated by Man's blindness and smallness. The fullness of *teva*, of a world operating the way it was designed to, is essential and "real."

This is why the person who says Hallel every day is a blasphemer,^[4] while the one who recites Ashrei regularly is assured a place in Heaven.^[5] The former praises Hashem only for the events that violate the expected conduct of Nature (and apparently finds plenty of them); the latter praises G-d for the amazing richness of Nature operating the way it was designed to.

Given Hashem's ability to easily undo any laws He created, the obvious miracle, like supplying the *Bnei Yisrael* with *mohn*, is dramatic, but not so surprising. More wondrous is the system whereby all living things are constantly supplied with their needs and nourishment.

When the gemara^[6] extols *Ashrei* for following the *alef-beis*, it alludes to this natural system, in which many steps are interconnected to produce the final result, and no step is missing. Man, who is a partner to this system in that his actions are necessary in producing, gathering, and preparing different food items, nonetheless finds himself in a world which regularly produces the ingredients he needs.

A midrash^[7] explains the oft-repeated phrase "I am Hashem." It says that this (the Four-Letter Name) is His Name, and the one assigned by Adam. Adam comprehended how things took place, and how G-d fashioned nothingness into somethingness, and somethingness into the myriad form that surround us. Avraham, on the other hand, called G-d *Adon*/ Master - and was the first to do so.^[8] He looked at the world, and discovered G-d's mastery of it.

Adam (and others before Avraham) looked to G-d, and discovered through Him the workings of the world. Avrohom, however, looked at the world, and discovered G-d. The others knew the Cause - and comprehended the effect. Avrohom studied the effect, and came through it to know the Cause.

1. Based on Meshech Chochmah, Vayikra 26:4.
2. *Toras Kohanim* 1:1.
3. Vayikra 26:3.
4. Shabbos 118B.
5. Berachos 4B.
6. Loc.cit.
7. Bereishis Rabbah 17:4.
8. Berachos 7B.