

NO MAGIC KINGDOM

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

When I will proclaim the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d.

Meshech Chochmah: We can conceptually telescope the function of the Jewish people into a simple, neat formula: Our purpose is to live within the natural world, but to demonstrate the imprint of Hashem's providential supervision of our individual lives. We are to sow and plant and reap – but to then take the first portions of our crops to the *beis hamikdosh*, and to G-d's holy servants there. Three times yearly, we are to entrust our possessions to Hashem's protection, as we show ourselves before Him in the Temple. The enmity of surrounding peoples is held in check by their fear of Hashem. In all of our doings, we invoke and bless the name of Hashem. The upshot of living this way is that when we act properly, the earth itself acknowledges our behavior by more generously yielding its produce. This happens within the laws of nature, and does not require altering them through miraculous intervention.

This kind of life style is, despite its physical and material trappings, a spiritual existence. To those who understand, it is dearer that *olam habo*.

Such, however, was not the life the *Bnei Yisrael* lived in the time of Moshe. That life tore asunder all laws of nature. The ordinary conventions of life did not operate. The *mohn* fell daily; the Pillar of Cloud and the Presence of Hashem were open and manifest.

G-d truly walked before them. It was a grand moment – but did it have anything to do with the actual purpose of life that we outlined above? They lived in a kind of *olam habo* – not in this world! Chazal^[2] emphasize how surreal was their existence. “‘Grace is false’^[3] – this refers to the generations of Moshe and Yehoshua; ‘Beauty is vain’ – this is the generation of Chizkiyahu; ‘The woman who fears Hashem – she is to be praised’ – this is the generation of R. Yehudah b'rebi Ela'i.” The grace shown to the generation of the Wilderness is false, as we showed above. Chizkiyahu's time was also punctuated by the miraculous, including the incredible defeat of Sancherev's army. But in the time of R. Yehudah b'rebi Ela'l, six yeshiva students shared a single garment and studied Torah. They lived entirely within the confines of natural law, and elevated it by their decision to study Torah even in poverty. In those other generations mentioned in the *midrash*, there was almost no room left for the exercise of free will; Hashem and His Will were so apparent, that the room for struggle was constricted.

If commonplace miracles make life artificial, what was the point of those generations? The answer is that they placed our people on a firm footing for the future. Just as the first two commandments of

the Ten establish the most important foundational elements of the Torah, the forty years in the wilderness created an experiential basis for *emunah*. It was not the miracles *per se* that accomplished this (other than for the least astute among them), but what the *Bnei Yisrael* were able to do with their time, once their needs were miraculously provided. They had four magical decades to pore over the Torah, to explain it well and deeply, and in so doing, acquire a bedrock faith which they transmitted to their offspring.

For this, they needed a Moshe. Moshe redirected their energies to the task of deeply comprehending Torah. This was a very different role from that of previous greats. The *avos* did not generally see Hashem as a constant worker of miracles. Avrohom, our Founding Father, was not even granted a burial plot for his wife through G-d working out a miracle or a deal for him. He had to acquire title the hard way, paying a premium price. Not so Moshe, who was entirely at home with miraculous existence – and understood its place and its value.

Thus, the Zohar^[4] calls Moshe the “spouse of the matron.” The latter, according to the Gra,^[5] means the *Shechinah*, which relates to the world through natural means, in accordance with the name *Elokim*, the aspect of G-d that uses fixed law.

Moshe is the complementary spouse of the fixity of law. Through his mastery of the miraculous – the opposite of law – he instructed the *Bnei Yisrael* to be able to live lives within the limitations of natural law, but to live them so richly as to bring blessing and abundance even within the world of *teva*.

This, then, is the meaning of our *pasuk*: When I (singular, i.e. Moshe) will proclaim the Name of Hashem – the Doer of miracles, who breaks the laws of nature at will – then you (plural, i.e. the *Bnei Yisrael*) – ascribe greatness to *Elokenu*, to the aspect of law. The life you lead in the here and now, in the ordinary non-miraculous world will lend power to the Heavenly Court to shower blessing in return, even within the confines of the laws of nature.

1. Based on Meshech Chochmah, Devarim 32:3
2. Sanhedrin 20A
3. Mishlei 31:30
4. Zohar 236B
5. Aderes Eliyahu, Devarim 33:1 in the second approach