

# EXPRESSED FAITH

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

Is faith an integral part of our lives or do we use faith as a convenient answer and escape? Does belief in G-d and His interventions play an active role in our decision-making, or is belief in G-d either a thin veil for our own successes and someone to blame for our failures?

In his essay on Nature and Miracles Rav Dessler suggests that the true level of our faith in G-d is revealed in our common expressions. So, before you conclusively answer the opening questions let's do a simple test.

What do we think when we meet a truly successful businessperson? Do we say, "Look how lucky! G-d must have something very special in mind for this individual. G-d must truly trust this person to grant him such wealth and success!"

Or, do we say, "How impressive! He's absolutely brilliant! It just goes to show you how much it pays to work hard, go to the right university, and get the correct early experiences and exposures. Did you see the Wall Street Journal's analysis of his latest deal? "Ruthlessly brilliant yet uniquely compassionate! His economic strategy is rewriting the science of power-mergers and industrial politics!"

What did we think when Israel pulled off the raid on Entebbe? Did we say, "What did I tell you! Only Israel could have done it! Did you know that they built an exact replica of the Entebbe airport in the Judean desert and practiced their daring plan until they could do it in their sleep? Sure, America sold them their latest weapons and technology but it is the Israeli's who are training the Americans in how to use that technology. The Israeli's are known to be the best military strategists in the world. They are the modern day Bar Kochva's - strong, courageous, resilient, determined, and the best trained! I bet you someone is going to make a movie about this one!"

Or, did we say, "Chasdei Hashem! (By the mercy of the Almighty!) Amazing! Who would have thought that we would merit to witness the revealed hand of G-d! "Shehechianu V'kiyemanu V'higeyanu, Lazman Haze!" - (Bless be G-d Who has sustained us until this day!)

Be honest! Is our tendency to attribute success to human talent and chance or do we attribute all success to the intention and intervention of G-d? Rav Dessler goes on to challenge the honesty of common expressions such as, "Baruch Hashem (Thank G-d), Im Yirtzeh Hashem (G-d willing), and B'Ezras Hashem (With G-d's help)." He suggests that the liberal sprinkling of such expressions in our speech is often a cover up for a lack of faith in G-d's absolute providence rather than a affirmation of

our faith.

Most of us do not really believe that G-d is in charge. We are quick to give lip service to the concept of divine providence however it does not reflect our true feelings and beliefs. When we are successful we believe that we are responsible for the success and we magnanimously share some of the credit with G-d. What we really believe is, "My strength (not G-d's) and the power of my hand (not G-d's) created this great host!" But when we fail we are quick to lay the blame on His doorstep. "G-d did not will this to be! If it were the right thing for my family and me it would have happened. The fact that it didn't means that it didn't fit into the bigger picture." Seldom will we say, "I made a mistake, a serious misjudgment. I take full responsibility!"

Soon after the Parting of the Sea the Jews complained about being hungry and thirsty. G-d heard their concerns and provided both food and water. My Grandfather Zt'l explained that had they not complained, had they trusted G-d more, G-d would have suspended their need to eat and drink. They would not have been hungry and they would not have been thirsty! Just as Moshe Rabbeinu did not eat or drink for the 40 days that he was on Mt. Sinai, so too the Jews would have survived for 40 years without eating and drinking. The proof is that at the end of the 40 years (Divarim 28:4) Moshe pointed out, "â€|your garments did not wear out from on you and your shoe did not wear out from on your foot." How is that possible? Forty years in the desert and their clothing and shoes did not need to be replaced? The answer is that it was a miracle! Because the Jews had not complained about not having new clothes or sandals, G-d performed a miracle and their clothing and sandals never wore out! So too it would have been had they not complained about food and water!

It is very fashionable in the observant world to talk about G-d and faith. Over the past 35 years there has been an ever growing religious reawakening and return to tradition; however, has there been a true understanding of what it means to trust in G-d and have faith in His goodness?

At the beginning of this week's Parsha, G-d commanded the Jews, "Make for Me a Mikdash (sanctuary) V'Shachanti (and I will dwell) in their midst." Rav Hirsch explained that the Shechina (derived from the word V'Shachanti) - the presence of G-d in our lives - is a consequence of how we live our lives.

"I will dwell (V'Shachanti) in your midst" is specified in our text as a direct result of, "They shall make Me a sanctuary - a Mikdash... These cooncepts are Mikdash (Sanctuary) and Mishkan (Dwelling Place). Mikdash denotes the mission we are to discharge for G-d: Mishkan expresses the fulfillment of the promise made to us by G-d in return for our discharging that mission.

This mission is epitomized in Mikdash: We are to consecrate all of our lives, both public and private, to the fulfillment of G-d's law. The promise implied in Mishkan is simply the protection and blessing to be provided by the Divine presence and demonstrated in the flourishing of our outer and inner lives."

The building of the Mishkan provided the means for engaging in sanctity and the mechanism that

would allow for G-d's Shechina to dwell in our midst. However, G-d's Shechina is intended to be far more than the focus of our devotion and traditions. The Presence of G-d is intended to frame and direct every action and thought. This is the meaning of "And I will dwell in their Midst."

What more can we do to consecrate our public and private lives? We keep Shabbos, keep Kosher, study Torah, teach Torah, and pay tuition. We put on Tefillin (phylacteries), give Tzedaka (charity), keep the laws of Mikvah (family purity), and try not to speak Lashon Harah (slander). Yet, there appears to be a dimension of Mikdash that we are not attaining and consequently a level of Mishkan that we have not yet experienced. Clearly there is a level of sanctification that transcends the basic expectation of Mitzvah performance and enters into the rarified level of true awareness of G-d.

When the Bnai Yisroel complained about food G-d introduced the miracle of Maana. The miracle of Maana was so overtly profound that Moshe was inspired to compose the first Bracha (blessing) of Birkat Hamazon (Grace After Meals). "He sustains the entire world through His goodness... He gives bread to all living flesh... never is there anything lacking... because of His great Name..."

Unbeknownst to them at the time, the Manna would continue to sustain them for 40 years. During that time an entire generation would be raised on the miraculous Manna, which in effect would result in the demoralization (to all my loving critics - I know!) of the Manna. At the same time, the generation who left Egypt would be challenged to remember that Manna was a miracle.

Manna came with a few specific instructions.

1. Collect one portion per member of the household.
2. Do not leave over any of the Manna for the next day.
3. On Friday collect two portions per person. One for Friday and one for Shabbos.
4. Do not go out to collect Manna on Shabbos day.

The Yalkut Shimoni in Parshas B'Shalach tells us that every single day G-d sent down enough Manna to sustain the Jewish People for 2,000 years! If the Bnai Yisroel were prohibited from taking more than their allotted amount, and they were forbidden to save the Manna from day to day, why did G-d send down such abundance? Why create so much waste?

Rav Dessler points out that the incalculable abundance of G-d's bounty is not restricted to Manna. "The earth and all the planets together utilize only an infinitesimal fraction of the light, heat, and energy given off by the sun. Man, animals, and the whole bio-system of the earth use only a tiny fraction of the available air. For every seed that develops into a plant there are countless millions whose potential is never fulfilled." (Strive for Truth; Part Two pg. 245)

This is certainly part of the intended meaning of the Modim prayer that we say toward the end of the Amidah. "We thank You for... Your miracles and wonders that are with us every day, morning afternoon and evening." If we would only spend a moment to contemplate our own limited reality we would be overwhelmed by the greatness of G-d's revealed greatness. However, there is a far more profound lesson to be learned from recognizing G-d's seemingly unlimited largess that will

answer the question of the Manna's abundance.

Imagine the following two scenarios:

You are up for a position that will give you greater responsibility, position, and income. However, there are two of you going for the same job. In the end you do not get the job.

You are contemplating going into a certain industry. You have the desire and the talent to succeed. However, it's an industry that has become very popular and there seems to be more talent than jobs. Should you still go for it?

Rav Dessler explained that these scenarios are a clear test of our faith in G-d. Obviously we live in a world that demands our active participation. (Hishtadlus) However, it is not our involvement that determines the outcome; rather, it is the presence of G-d in our lives that determines the outcome. What we see as a world of cause and effect is not really so. It appears to us that the smarter and the better prepared seem to get the worm, but that is not so. The worm goes to the one whom G-d decided the worm should go to. G-d is the cause, not anything else.

The person who did not get the better position goes home and tells his family, "The position went to the competition because the boss decided to give it to him - and frankly it wasn't fair!" Externally the person claims to have been cheated out of his rightful and deserving position, internally he feels like a failure. However, if he were looking at life from the perspective of faith in G-d he would understand that the boss who decided was really the Boss, and not just the boss! Is there anything that G-d cannot do? Do all of life's opportunities boil down to that one position? Isn't the Boss the same G-d Who sent such extraordinary bounty in the form of the Manna? If he didn't get the position it was because G-d did not want him to have the position!

Should you train for an industry that you love but which is seemingly over-crowded? Why not! The world represents such an abundance of G-d's loving bounty that our limited perceptions cannot possibly conceive of the opportunities available. The abundance of Manna taught us that limitations are only in the minds of mortals, not in the reality of the Divine!

Integrating the Shechina into our lives demands far more than "doing Mitzvos." Making G-d a part of our lives means making our lives into a Mikdash - a sanctuary wherein which G-d can dwell. The essential ingredient for doing so is confronting the reality of our faith beyond the level of our performances. To the extent that we believe that G-d controls the world and all that happens is the extent to which our lives are sanctified. The greater our faith the greater His presence.

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The author is Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA.

