

Divine Intellectual Wonders

PARSHA INSIGHTS - NITZAVIM VAYAILECH (5757)

Overheard: “IF G-D WOULD ONLY SHOW ME A MIRACLE, I WOULD BELIEVE”

“Assemble the nation, the men, women, and children, and your *gair* [stranger] who is in your gates, so that they should listen, and so that they should learn, and they will fear Hashem your G-d, and they will observe to do all the words of this Torah” (*Perek Lamid Alef, Pasuk Yud Bais* [chapter 31, verse 12]). You probably know that the Torah is referring to the *mitzvah* [commandment] of *Hakhel* [gathering of the Jewish people to hear the king recite Torah]. (Just as an aside, the word “*gair*” refers either to a righteous convert or to a resident gentile who observes the seven *Noachide* laws [laws of Noah]. See the *Oznaim L’Torah* on our *pasuk* for details.)

First, let us review the basics of this *mitzvah*, using the clear and concise words of the *Sefer Hachinuch* in *mitzvah* number 612. We are commanded to gather all of *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel] on the year after the seventh year of the *shmita* [sabbatical year] cycle - the year after *shvi’is* [the seventh]. This is to take place on the second day of the festival of *Succos* [Feast of Booths]. Sections of *Sefer Devarim* [Book of Deuteronomy] are to be read. The king reads the Torah in the ears of the people, in the *Ezras Nashim* [women’s courtyard] of the *Bais Hamikdash* [Temple]. To start off, trumpets are blown throughout the holy city *Yerushalayim* [Jerusalem], and a large, wooden, *bimah* [elevated stand] is brought and placed in the center of the *Ezras Nashim*. The king sits upon it so that everyone will hear him reading. All the Jews present in *Yerushalayim*, who ascended there for the *Yom Tov* [holiday] of *Succos*, gather around the king. After being passed through the hands of certain prominent leaders, a *sefer* Torah [Torah scroll] is handed from the *Kohen Gadol* [High Priest] to the *melech* [king], who reads it aloud. These are the main parts of the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel*, though there is much more to it.

This is a “strong pillar...of our religion”, declares the *Sefer Hachinuch*. The specific *parshiyos* [Torah portions] of *Devarim*, read beautifully by the *melech*, instill genuine fear and love of G-d in a person. The glory and splendor of the king, plus the breathtaking sanctity of the *Bais Hamikdash*, with so many Jews gathered together, are bound to make an indelible imprint on the souls of all present.

What is it about this public presentation that so effectively inspires people to move closer to G-d? What is the focal point, which inevitably results in the Torah’s guarantee that “they will fear Hashem your G-d”? It appears from the *pasuk* quoted above that the reverence for Hashem is the result of “listening” and “learning”. How is this so?

We will approach it from one angle. A classic commentator, the *Sforno*, remarks on each phrase of the *pasuk* quoted in our first paragraph. Please refer back to that *pasuk* now. “So that they will listen”, means that the wise leaders of the nation should comprehend the words of admonishment proclaimed by the king. “So that they will learn”, indicates that the less learned people should be taught by those leaders. “And they will fear Hashem” - what is the profound interpretation of this phrase?

The *Sforno* states: “when they understand His greatness, WHICH COMES IN HIS TORAH, IN (THE FORM OF) INTELLECTUAL WONDERS”. The Hebrew phrase for “intellectual wonders” is “*mofsim sichli'im*”, an eloquent and splendid expression. In other words, the path to fear of Hashem is through hearing and understanding the Torah, which the leaders interpret accurately. This thorough comprehension of Torah demonstrates the incomparable majesty of G-d, through exposure to the intricate, astonishing wonders of the Divine Torah wisdom. The word “*mofais*” is frequently used to mean a miracle, something that transcends the natural pattern. The miracles are right here for us to grasp, through careful, diligent Torah study!

We see that miracles are accessible to us daily, if we concentrate on *limud* [learning] Torah. We can get a glimpse of miraculous, Divine brilliance if we apply ourselves sufficiently, putting forth the effort to learn Torah in its original form and texts. This suffices to strengthen our faith in Hashem; there is no need for Him to alter the course of nature regularly for us (although these miracles DO occur daily, if we would only notice them, as in the hidden miracles of *Megillas* [the scroll or book of] *Esther*).

A strong proof to this exists in the *Midrash Rabba* on *Koheles* [Ecclesiastes] 7:19. It will be shown to us again that the path to true faith in G-d is through delving into and understanding His Torah. Sufficient intellectual miracles are contained within its holy words. “Wisdom strengthens the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a

city”. What is the meaning of this metaphoric verse? The “wise man” refers to Hashem Himself. The *pasuk* is teaching us that wisdom gives more strength to G-d than the ten rulers in the city. Who are the ten rulers? These “rulers” are actually the ten statements used by Hashem to create the world. Thus, wisdom gives more power to G-d than the ten statements used to create the world. But still, what is the message?

Based on this *Midrash* and its commentators, the *pasuk* is to be read as follows. The wisdom of Torah reinforces (gives more strength to) Hashem, even more than the wonders of the universe, created with ten Divine utterances. In section 74 of the *Torah Temima*, Rav Baruch Halevi Epstein elucidates this in the following manner.

Even though the greatness of Hashem can be appreciated adequately by studying the phenomena of the universe, which was brought into being through ten Divine declarations, there is something even MORE effective in instilling faith in a person. By now, you know what this is. The Torah itself, with its complexities and intricacies, its puzzles and solutions, its written and oral components, its *halacha* [law] and *Agada* - the Torah itself, the expression of G-d’s will and eternal plan, when studied correctly, makes one a believer. In the words of the *Torah Temima*, “more than this (the wonders of the natural world), the Torah testifies to His greatness and might.”

In summarizing this *Midrash*, the wisdom of Torah reinforces our firm faith in Hashem even more than our study of the natural sciences. That is the meaning of the *pasuk*, that wisdom gives more strength to the Wise One - Hashem - than the ten rulers (declarations of creation) which are in the city (in the world).

The *mitzvah* of *Hakhel* is designed to renew our faith in Hashem and our reverence for Him and His *mitzvos* [commandments]. The procedure for this is intense study of Torah, heard from the mouth of the king himself. The “intellectual wonders” of Torah inspire the listeners to take its lessons seriously and observe all its precepts. These miracles of brilliance are more powerful and effective than those found in the physical world, as stated by *Koheles* and clarified in the *Midrash*. With these thoughts in mind, our devotion to Torah study will definitely be enhanced, and we will realize what a privilege it is to see miracles daily.

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