

## DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

### “Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Bo  
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[darchai.noam@gmail.com](mailto:darchai.noam@gmail.com)  
[www.darchai-noam.com](http://www.darchai-noam.com)

How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

### Parashat Bo – The miracle of the apple seed

In this week's Parasha of Bo we read about the final three plagues and Pharaoh's capitulation. Let's consider the eighth plague, the plague of locusts, and the Torah's description of how that plague came about.

*“So Moshe stretched his staff over the land of Mitzrayim, and Hashem sent an east wind in the land all that day and all that night and in the morning the east wind had brought the locusts” (Shmot 10:13)*

Why did Hashem need to send a wind to collect the locusts over the course of a whole day and bring them to Mitzrayim? Obviously, he could have brought the locusts instantly, without the need for this wind.

We see a similar phenomenon in next week's Parasha when Hashem splits the sea to save Bnei Yisrael and drown the Egyptians:

*And Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea, and Hashem led the sea with a strong east wind all night, and He made the sea into dry land and the waters split. (Shmot 13:21)*

Why did Hashem send a wind to perform these miracles? One explanation is that Hashem likes to work through nature. Even when performing a wondrous miracle, Hashem's hides himself behind nature as much as possible. Why is this so? If Hashem's involvement was always clearly manifest, we would no longer have free will. By remaining hidden behind nature we can explain everything as “nature” and thus have the chance to deny Hashem's involvement. But the flipside is that if we choose to exercise emunah and see Hashem's hand behind it all, then we can be rewarded for seeing the truth behind nature and acting accordingly.

Interestingly, even with the open miracles, man can still choose to ‘see’ what he wishes and thereby deny the miracle. The following quotes have been published by ‘serious journalists’ based on ‘reputable scientists’<sup>1</sup>:

*“Researchers suggest that ‘wind setdown,’ in which strong offshore winds can temporarily lower water levels in shallow coastal areas, could explain the famous biblical tale. The researchers at the National Center for Atmospheric Research and the University of Colorado at Boulder made their discovery as part of a larger study of wind's impact on water depths... In what is often recounted as a divine miracle, an east wind blows the waters of the Red Sea back, creating a passageway that enables the fleeing Israelites to safely pass through to the other shore. Then, the story goes, the waters engulf and drown Pharaoh's pursuing army. Using 14 computer models, they found that 63mph winds, lasting for 12 hours, would have pushed back waters estimated to be 6 feet deep. This would have exposed mud flats for 4 hours, creating a dry passage about 2 to 2.5 miles long and 3 miles wide. The water would have been pushed back into a surrounding lake and river channel, creating water barriers on both sides of the exposed mud flats and thus creating a land bridge people could have possibly walked across.”*

Other scientists have tried to apply scientific explanations, such as volcanoes and earthquakes, to explain away all of the ten plagues. Even if (and it's a very big ‘if’) the splitting of the sea could be explained scientifically, the fact that it happened at precisely the right time to save every single member of Bnei Yisrael and to drown the entire Egyptian army<sup>2</sup> should be enough of a miracle to convince even the most hardened non-believer, if they were honest with themselves.

In his commentary to our Parasha,<sup>3</sup> the Ramban explains that the open miracles of Yetziyat Mitzrayim should remind us about the hidden miracles that happen all the time. Sometimes Hashem performs open miracles. But

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnet.com/news/wind-may-explain-red-sea-parting/>

<sup>2</sup> According to the Midrash, not a single Egyptian survived, except perhaps Pharaoh himself. According to some views he was saved so that he could bear testimony to the miracle. See Mechilta on Parashat Beshalach.

<sup>3</sup> Shmot 13:16.

we have to take those miracles as reminders that everything He does is really miraculous. Hashem is constantly performing miracles, but they are usually hidden behind nature. It is up to us to see His hand behind it all.

Let's now focus on the 'hidden miracles' of daily life. These miracles require more work on our part to notice Hashem's hand in them. Rav Avigdor Miller<sup>4</sup> was well known for focusing on these hidden miracles and explaining them in such a way as to make it clear that there is a Creator with infinite wisdom hiding behind the veil of nature. This is how Rav Miller explains the rain cycle:<sup>5</sup>

*The water of the earth is in continuous use by means of a marvellous cycle composed of many factors, and this cycle operates because the factors complement each other. If one factor was missing, then the entire cycle would not function. The sun, like a mighty pump, raises great masses of water vapour from the seas and they are stored in the clouds. The winds are the conveyor belts which transport clouds over the face of the earth. The rain which falls waters the land and the forces of gravity cause the surplus water to run back down to the sea where it is ready to repeat the cycle. If the sun was smaller or more distant from the earth, the rate of evaporation would be too small to supply the earth with rain. If the sun was larger or closer, the rate of evaporation would make life impossible for every living thing would dehydrate. If the winds did not function, the distribution of rain would be so unequal that the interior of the continents would be desert. If the force of gravity was lighter, the rain would not fall and the excess water would not flow back to the sea. If the force of gravity were stronger, the rain would pelt down like hail and destroy the vegetation. If the earth turned more slowly on its axis, the day would be so long that the vegetation would be dehydrated by the sun. Here is a machine cycle complete with pump (sun), reservoir (sea) and conduits (wind and gravity).*

Rav Miller goes on to describe the amazing benefits of snow and the role of lightning which combines atmospheric nitrogen and oxygen to create nitrate, which dissolves into the rain and rains down to fertilise the earth. Rav Miller concludes: If men are so irresponsible as to ascribe to accident these intricately planned devices, then I fear nothing could move them.

Rav Miller also discusses how we can clearly see the existence of Hashem by contemplating fruit.<sup>6</sup> While fruit is unripe it is green so that it hides amongst the leaves and doesn't fall down from the tree. When the fruit is ripe and ready to be eaten, it changes to a bright colour so that it stands out. It also loosens its grip so that it falls to the ground with a gentle shake of the branch, or it falls down by itself. Why? So that it is more accessible to us! And there is a built in protection for the seeds. For example, the core of the apple is inedible, and it protects the seeds within. It's like eating a box of cereal and when you get to the bottom of the box, there's a coupon there entitling you to another free box. And the seed itself is remarkable. A seed contains the blueprints for a new apple tree, telling it how to produce leaves, and how to produce sap and bark and flowers – and how to produce more apples. More apples with more seeds inside them. All of these plans are in the blueprint of the seed! Simply considering an apple is enough proof of Hashem's existence. Nobody can dispute this proof that there's a Creator with an intelligence that is far beyond the ability of all scientists put together.

The Rambam<sup>7</sup> teaches us that it is a mitzvah to love and fear Hashem. What is the path to attain love and fear of Him? When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and creations and appreciates His infinite wisdom that surpasses all, he will immediately love, praise, and glorify Him. And when he continues to reflect on these matters, he will immediately have awe and fear, appreciating how lowly he is, standing with his flimsy, limited, wisdom before He who is of perfect knowledge. We can access this love and fear through both the open miracles and the hidden miracles – through reading about the Hashem's open miracles, and by noticing and contemplating the hidden miracles that we can see every day.

Let's try something this week:

1. When reading about Hashem's open miracles, remember the Ramban's teaching that these should remind us about the hidden, daily miracles He performs.
2. Notice the intricate and detailed nature of the world around you and the fact that you can clearly see Hashem hiding behind nature when you search for Him.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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<sup>4</sup> August 28, 1908 – April 20, 2001, a well-known American rabbi, author, and lecturer. He served simultaneously as a communal rabbi, mashgiach ruchani of Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin, and as a teacher in Beis Yaakov.

<sup>5</sup> Taken from "Rejoice O Youth", by Rav Miller, re-published in 2015, pages 53-56.

<sup>6</sup> <https://torasavigdor.org/rav-avigdor-miller-on-the-proof-is-in-the-fruit/>

<sup>7</sup> Yesodei HaTorah, Chapter 2, Halachot 1 and 2.