

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Lech Lecha

“AND HASHEM APPEARED TO AVRAHAM AND HE SAID TO HIM, ‘I AM E-L SHA-DAI...’” (BEREISHIS 17:1)

AMONG THE DIFFERENT NAMES of Hashem, we rarely find the name *Sha-dai* used in the Torah. In the above *pasuk*, Hashem identifies Himself to Avraham by this unusual name. Why? The Ramban (ibid.) states that Hashem uses the name *E-l Sha-dai*, “To do hidden miracles for the righteous: To save their lives from death, to sustain them in times of famine and to rescue them in times of war from the sword; as He did with all the miracles that were performed for Avraham *Avinu* and the other forefathers.”

The miracles that Hashem performed for Avraham were extraordinary

The miracles that Hashem performed for Avraham were extraordinary and amazing: Avraham was saved from the fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim; Avraham and just 318 of his men (some say he was only accompanied by his servant Eliezer) defeated the armies of the four kings – the superpowers of that time; Avraham and Sarah had a child at a very advanced age after a lifetime of childlessness; and many more astonishing miracles. How can the Ramban describe these as “hidden miracles”? These miracles were done in public and blatantly defied the laws of nature. How can they be considered “hidden”?

We know intellectually that Hashem orchestrates the symphony of world events

With this one word, the Ramban is revealing a common flaw in human nature – the need to explain events in simplistic, natural terms. We know intellectually that Hashem orchestrates, with infinite precision and control, the symphony of world events, and yet we tend to interpret it as a complex series of coincidences. The *yetzer hara* knows all too well that if we recognize Hashem’s active involvement in our lives, it will bring us closer to serving Him. Therefore, our nemesis will suggest to us the most outlandish rationalizations to explain away even an open miracle. Avraham *Avinu* walked around in the fiery furnace of Nimrod at Ur Kasdim and emerged without even a singed hair, and yet people could have convinced themselves that it was perhaps an illusion or the furnace was cooled by a cold breeze, or some other far-fetched interpretation. The defeat of the four kings could have been attributed to clever military strategy, as many people have misconstrued the miraculous Israeli victory in the Six Day War. Giving birth to Yitzchak at the age of 100 – perhaps a change in diet or some rare herbs could explain that as well. Are these reasonable or probable approaches? Definitely not, but the alternative is to admit Hashem’s miraculous intervention, which the *yetzer hara* will fight at any cost.

We are seeing nothing less than Hashem pulling the strings

Let us learn to fight this tendency, and to actively seek out and notice Hashem’s *hashgacha pratis* – His Divine providence – in every aspect of our lives, especially the constant miracles He performs for us. In fact, the Ramban (Shmos 13:16) writes that there is no such concept as nature; everything that happens is a miracle, some more open than others. When we see that grass grows, our hearts pump and rain falls, we are seeing nothing less than Hashem pulling the strings in a seemingly natural way. If we can look beyond the facade of nature and coincidence, and recognize, as we say in the *Modim* prayer, “Hashem’s miracles each day for us,” we will live in a state of gratitude and joy, that brings us closer to our Creator.