

Mussar HaTorah

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

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Parashas Vayishlach

“FOR WITH MY STAFF I CROSSED THIS JORDAN [RIVER]...”
(BEREISHIS 32:11)

B’nei Yisrael could have crossed the river without a miracle

THE MIDRASH (Bereishis Rabba 76:5) tells us that when the B’nei Yisrael traversed the Jordan River on their way into the Land of Israel, it was a miraculous event performed in the merit of their forefather Yaakov. The commentary Yefei To’ar points out that the Jordan River is not really very wide and in truth, B’nei Yisrael could have crossed the river without a miracle. Nevertheless, Hashem performed these miracles to remind the Jewish nation of Yaakov’s merit, to increase our *emunah* – faith – in Hashem, the G-d of Yaakov.

Wouldn’t a miracle done specifically for us have been more effective?

We can understand that Hashem would perform extra miracles to enhance our *emunah*. B’nei Yisrael’s belief in Hashem certainly increased when the waters of the Jordan split – as it had when the Red Sea’s waters split – as they were crossing over to conquer *Eretz Yisrael*. Why, however, would Hashem do this miracle specifically in the merit of Yaakov? Wouldn’t the goal of increasing our *emunah* have been better served had the miracle been done directly for us – in our own merit? Wouldn’t a miracle done specifically for us have been more effective in strengthening our belief in Hashem?

Apparently, there is a significant difference, and a real benefit, in having a special relationship with Hashem through our connection with the previous generations. Imagine a royal butler who is a personal attendant to the powerful king of a vast empire. Not only is he the faithful servant of the king, but his father and grandfather have served the king before him. There is a unique love and relationship created by viewing his own connection to the king in the context of this dynasty of loyalty and devotion, this mutual love and affection between his forefathers and the king. The king often recalls the dedication and selflessness of the grandfather when he speaks to the grandson. It creates an entirely different bond and a more profound feeling of love for the king.

As we begin our *shmoneh esrai*, we take three steps forward and enter the presence of the King of all kings. What is the first thing we say after we beg Hashem to open our mouths and let our lips speak His praises? We speak of Hashem as our G-d, and the G-d of our forefathers. We proceed to specify each unique relationship: the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov. Apparently the key to opening our interaction with our Creator is to understand Him through the perspective of His relationship with our *avos*. Each forefather’s unique approach in laying the foundations for this millennia-long love between the Jewish people and Hashem needs to be mentioned, because it is upon those deep foundations that our relationship with Him is built.

If we can see ourselves as the proud bearers of a torch

Perhaps this is why a miracle done in our forefather’s merit can leave a more profound impact on us than even a miracle done specifically in our own merit. If we can see ourselves as not merely isolated servants of Hashem, but rather the proud bearers of a torch, of a legacy dating back thousands of years to our patriarchs and matriarchs, it will transform our relationship from a fleeting moment of here and now, and create a breathtaking, sweeping panorama of a chosen people fulfilling our historic destiny as His representatives on this earth, the pinnacle and the purpose of all creation.