

Appreciating The Miracles In Our Lives

The Haftora¹ for parshas Tazria is not read often, because in most years Tazria and Metzora are read together, and when that happens, the Haftora for Metzora is read. Even in a leap year, when Tazria is read by itself, it is often also parshas Hachodesh, and the Haftora for Hachodesh is read instead.

The Haftora tells of two miracles of our prophet Elisha.

In the first miracle, a man brought Elisha 20 bread rolls made of the barley flour that recently ripened. Elisha told his helper to give it to his students whom he supported. His helper asked him, "How can I give this to a hundred men? (It's simply not enough)."² Elisha responded, "Give it to the people to eat, for Hashem said, 'They will eat and have left over.'"³ He gave it to them, they ate and there was leftover, just as Hashem said.

The second miracle was how he cured Naaman from Tzaraas. Naaman was the commander of the king of Aram's army, he was very well respected, because Hashem gave him many victories, but now he couldn't go out to war because he was afflicted with Tzaraas.

One of Aram's raiding parties captured a young girl from Israel, and she became a servant to Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If my master's request will be brought before the prophet in Shomron (Elisha), then he will cure him of his Tzaraas."⁴ We see here, the power of a young Jewish girl's simple faith in the Tzadik of the time, that brought about such a beautiful miracle and positive geopolitical ramifications as well, as we will soon see.

Naaman went and told the king what the young girl said. The king told him to go to the prophet, and

that he would send a letter to the king of Israel, telling him to instruct the prophet to cure Naaman.

Naaman took a tremendous amount of silver, gold and garments, as a gift for the prophet, and he brought the letter to the king of Israel. When the king read the letter he rend his garments, because he was afraid that it was a trick, and that the king of Aram was using this as a pretext to go to war. Aram was the superpower of the region at that time, so the mere thought of going to war with them was terrifying.

When Elisha heard that the king rend his garments, he sent a message to him, "Why did you rend your garments? Let him come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel."⁵

Naaman came with a whole entourage to Elisha's house and stood at the door. Elisha didn't come out to meet him, he just sent a messenger to tell him to wash in the Jordan seven times, his skin will be restored and he will be ritually pure.

Naaman got angry and left, he expected Elisha to honor him by coming out to greet him, call out to Hashem, wave his hand over the Tzaraas, and it would miraculously go away. But instead, he told him to bathe in the Jordan. He said that the rivers in Damascus are better than any of the waters in Israel, he often bathed in them, and it didn't help him.

His servants approached him and respectfully suggested, that if the prophet would have told him to do something difficult, he would surely have listened to him, so now that he said to do something easy, shouldn't he try it? He took their advice and bathed in the Jordan seven times like Elisha said, and his skin became like that of a young boy.

Naaman and his entourage returned to Elisha. Naaman stood before him and said, "Now I know that there isn't any G-d in the whole world other than in Israel, now, please accept a gift from your

¹ II Kings 4:42-5:19.

² II Kings 4:43.

³ Ibid.

⁴ II Kings 5:3.

⁵ II Kings 5:8.

servant."⁶ But Elisha refused to take anything, he said, "By the Living G-d before Whom I stood (as a soul in the higher realms, before entering into the body),⁷ I can't accept (any gift)."⁸ Naaman begged him to take something, but he refused. Then he asked for two mule loads of earth from Israel, so that he could make it into an altar for Hashem, and he proclaimed, "For your servant will no longer offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to other gods, but only to Hashem!"⁹

Then he asked for forgiveness in advance, because he will have to go with his king when he goes to serve his idols, and he won't have a choice, but to bow with him. He said, "May Hashem please forgive your servant for this."¹⁰ And Elisha said to him, "Go in peace."¹¹ From here we learn, that a gentile who accepted on himself to serve only Hashem, and to keep the Seven Laws that were given to the Children of Noah,¹² is not obligated to sacrifice his life to sanctify Hashem.¹³ If he would be obligated, Elisha would have told him so, and that he could not bow. Instead he just told him to "go in peace."

This, of course, was a great geo-political victory for the Jewish people, because now Naaman, the commander of the most powerful army in the region, became an ally to Israel. Also, I am sure that the story of the miracle reverberated throughout the region, and was a great sanctification of Hashem's name.

⁶ II Kings 5:15.

⁷ This expression, "By the Living G-d before Whom I stood," was said by both Eliyahu and Elisha. See I Kings 17:1, 18:15, II Kings 3:14, 5:16. See Zohar volume 1 p. 233b, volume 3 p. 68b. Torah Ohr parshas Vayeshev 30a. Lekutei Torah Chukkas 64d. Ohr Hatorah Bereishis 1045b. Derech Mitzvosecha 153b, and more. In several of these places this expression is explained as the soul above, before it came into the body.

⁸ II Kings 5:16.

⁹ II Kings 5:17.

¹⁰ II Kings 5:18.

¹¹ II Kings 5:19.

¹² Someone who accepts these things upon him/herself is called a "ger toshav." See Talmud, Sanhedrin 74b, that Naaman was a ger toshav. The term "ben Noach," is also used for this designation.

¹³ Talmud, Sanhedrin 74b. And see Reshimos binder 159 footnote 29. See previous footnote.

The second miracle seems to connect well with the parsha. Parshas Tazria talks mostly about the laws of the Metzora, and the miracle was how Elisha cured Naaman, a Metzora, from Tzaraas. But how does the first miracle, about the loaves of bread, connect to our parsha?

Rashi and the Radak provide the explanation. Rashi¹⁴ says that it was "During Pesach, when grain ripens." The Radak¹⁵ says, "It was from the first barley that was harvested, it was the time of the barley harvest." The Ralbag, Metzudas David and Metzudas Tzion¹⁶ say similar things. In this instance, the Haftora is also connected with the time of year.

Whenever Tazria is read by itself, it is in the month of Nissan, before Pesach, or on the Shabbos before, when we bless the month of Nissan. The month of Nissan is a time of miracles, the time when the barley ripens and is harvested, and on Pesach the Omer offering, which was from barley, was brought in the Temple. The first miracle is about barley in the month of Nissan.¹⁷

This also adds more meaning to the second miracle, because Tazria doesn't have anything to do with open miracles. So how does the miracle aspect connect to the parsha? It doesn't necessarily, rather, it is connected to the time of year, Nissan, a time of miracles.

I use the term "open miracles," because, of course, Tazria speaks about pregnancy and birth, which are miracles, but they are the kind of miracles that Hashem put into nature. Also, Tzaraas was not a natural ailment, it was not leprosy, it was a spiritual condition, that came because of spiritual reasons. So in a way, it was a miracle as well. But being that

¹⁴ Rashi to II Kings 4:42.

¹⁵ Radak to II Kings 4:42.

¹⁶ Ralbag, Metzudas David and Metzudas Tzion to II Kings 4:42.

¹⁷ The ideas found in this paragraph came to me as I was preparing this article. I don't know if it is brought down anywhere, perhaps one of the readers can enlighten me.

it was more common, it was not like an open miracle. However, though these kind of miracles are more common, they are still miracles, and perhaps the Haftora is highlighting the point of miracles, to let us know, that we should see and value the miracles in nature and the more common miracles we experience every day.¹⁸

May we experience and value the miracles in our daily lives. And may we merit to experience the greatest miracle of all, the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

We are left with a question. Why did Elisha refuse Naaman's gift? We have rules about when one may accept tzedakah from an idol worshipper,¹⁹ generally we shouldn't, but there are certain situations where we can accept it secretly, and in certain dire situations, one is permitted to take it openly. However, Naaman wasn't an idol worshipper, he proclaimed openly that he will only serve Hashem. The Rambam²⁰ says that from this kind of person, you can accept tzedakah and distribute it even to Jewish needy. So why didn't he accept it?

From the Rambam's words, "If... He gave, we accept it," we understand that only after the fact do we accept it, but to begin with we don't. The Rambam also says there, "If he wants to do a mitzvah... in order to receive merit, we don't stop him." Again, we don't stop him, but to begin with, if he wants to make it a regular thing, we would not allow it, because it is as if he is creating a new religion and the Rambam²¹ says, that this is not allowed.²²

And perhaps, the miracle and the whole experience was all the more powerful, and a greater sanctification of Hashem's name, because he didn't take the gift. And therefore, it had a greater effect on Naaman and all that heard what transpired.²³

¹⁸ See previous footnote.

¹⁹ See Rambam Hilchos Matnos Aniyim 8:9.

²⁰ Rambam Hilchos Melachim 10:10. And see footnote 12.

²¹ Rambam Hilchos Melachim 10:9.

²² Reshimos binder 159 par. 6-8.

²³ The ideas found in this paragraph came to me as I was preparing this article. I don't know if it is brought down anywhere, perhaps one of the readers can enlighten me.