



Ask The Rabbi...



December 3, 1994 Issue #45

This issue is dedicated Z''N Golde B''R Mordechai - Gertrude Feinberg Guy
A mother and grandmother who inspired her son and her grandchildren to lives of Torah and Mitzvot

This edition contains:

1. Miracles: "In those days" yes, but what about "these days"
2. Polystyrene Chanukia — "Now that's a fire!"

Michael @McGill wrote:

Shalom Rabbi,

Why doesn't G-d speak to us today, the way He did in the days of Moses? I know that He indirectly performs miracles (saving us from the destruction of our nation in the Spanish inquisition and the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel...) but if He really wanted us to follow His commandments, why doesn't He simply come in a show of fire, and tell us that He's still around?

Dear Michael,

Your question is timeless, and timely – while we are currently celebrating Chanukah 5755 — "...Who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days in this time." I'd like to offer two possible answers:

According to the Ramban, miracles such as the "splitting of the sea" were performed in the past to teach that G-d is Omnipotent and is always ruling over all of Creation. But, G-d doesn't perform miracles in every generation just to impress non-believers. Rather, He performed the miracle(s) then, and afterwards He commanded us to remember them via numerous *mitzvot*, such as *mezuza*, *kriat shema* and *Pesach*. By recalling these "open" miracles a person can also become aware of the "hidden" miracles. A basic tenet of the Torah is the belief that all occurrences are miraculous and are not merely "nature".

So, in answer to your question, Michael, G-d is in fact "speaking" to us all the time, and it's our job to be attentive!

Another possible answer is the following:

When the Biblical generations experienced miracles, they were impressed and showed their recognition of G-d's hand by living according to G-d's word. The miracles taught a lesson to a People prepared to learn. They possessed a pure and wholesome faith.

Today, however, if miracles were to occur, we would explain them away scientifically. We would lose sight of the miracle and be satisfied with some natural explanation. So, what effect would miracles have today? Miracles are a means of communication, and communication requires two sides. When we are ready for miracles, when we can recognize one when it hits us, we will have them.

Our Sages teach us to "Praise Him for each breath we draw." We are supposed to be grateful for each heart-beat, for all of our vital functions, and, for that matter, all of the day-to-day workings of nature. This teaches us that there are miracles all around us, even if they occur seventy times a minute. "But it's perfectly natural" is the usual rhetoric. Yet, this is exactly the point. The ordinary, the natural and the commonplace are as much the works of His hands as the splitting the sea and Creation itself.

Science seeks the natural in the supernatural; whereas the Torah shows the supernatural in the natural.

Sources:

- Ramban-- *Shemot* 13:16.

Bruce Becher of Studio City, California wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is it permissible to use flammable substances in order to construct a Chanukia, e.g. sticking candles into polystyrene foam blocks? I caught my kids in the backyard the other evening with a giant Chanukia made from these highly flammable blocks. I told them "Not only is this dangerous, but it is forbidden by Jewish Law to make a Chanukia that goes up in flames." To which my kids – who have only been in Hebrew School for 2 years – responded "Prove it!!" Well, needless to say I was not prepared for their response. Any suggestions?

Dear Bruce,

There are no Halachic restrictions on substances that can be used for the construction of a Chanukia when candles are used. In the case of an oil Chanukia it is not recommended to use non-glazed pottery as oil and wick containers, since they become unfit for use after one lighting.

However, that doesn't mean you are defenseless against your kids. Because there is a real danger of the fire spreading and causing damage and injury, you should cite the well known injunction "*ein somchim al ha'nes*" -- one should not rely on a miracle. This is true even when celebrating a "nes" (a miracle). Halachah forbids a person to create a fire hazard, even in order to fulfill a *mitzvah*.

As a last resort, you can always cite the California Environmental Code (I've forgotten the exact section) which restricts most outdoor fires, and imposes severe penalties on violators.

So tell your kids that Hashem made a miracle with a fire more than 2000 years ago; they can't be so sure that He will make another one for them.

Sources:

- *Shulchan Aruch -- Orach Chaim* 673:3.
- *Chayei Adam*-- 154:9.

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Ask The Rabbi is written by **Rabbi Yehoshua Karsh**, Rabbi Benzion Bamberger, and other Rabbis at Ohr Somayach \ Tanenbaum College, Jerusalem, Israel.

General Editor: **Rabbi Moshe Newman**

Production Design: **Lev Seltzer**

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