

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 15

Chaye Sara (5)

Shabbos Mevorchim Kislev

The Context:

The sages teach that Sarah and Rivkah both experienced several miracles in their homes. One of which was “a candle burned from one Shabbos eve to the next...” (Rashi to Bereishis 24:67)

The miracle of Sarah and Rivkah’s enduring Shabbos candle is reminiscent of the miracle of Chanukah. Yet from the fact that we celebrate the Chanukah miracle so extensively, it is clear that that miracle is quantitatively greater than the matriarch’s candles.

The Explanation:

There are two general ways to explain the mechanism of the Chanukah miracle:

1. The quantity of the oil was miraculously replenished after being consumed.
2. The potency and quality of the oil was miraculously intensified. Thus, an amount of oil that should have lasted

only one day lasted for eight, as each day only an eighth of the oil in the cups was consumed.

Each of these explanations is problematic: If the oil was miraculously replenished, then it was not “natural oil” but oil that was miraculously engineered. The law states that the Menorah must be lit with “olive oil” not “miraculously generated synthetic oil”?! And if the natural olive oil had its potency intensified and was consumed at a slower pace, then it follows that the Menorah’s cups were not full after the first night, defying the regulation that the cups of the Menorah should be filled every night. According to both explanations, therefore, the miracle did not result in a proper fulfillment of the lighting of the Menorah.

A third explanation for the miracle is as follows: The natural process of combustion occurred with the oil in the cup, yet, simultaneously, the oil was not depleted. The miracle was this impossible paradox. That the oil was being consumed naturally, without actually being consumed. Thus, the fire that was produced was from “naturally” burning oil, and the cups remained full,

satisfying both halachic issues with the previous explanations.

This miracle of the impossible conflation of nature and the supernatural is qualitatively different, and deeper, than the miracle of the long lasting candles, which “burned from one Shabbos eve to the next” through being endowed with greater longevity.

The Deeper Dimension:

In spiritual terms, “nature” alludes to the normative service of G-d with our natural faculties of reason and emotion. “Miracles” allude to the suprarational devotion of the soul that transcends the limits of normative human intellect and emotion. The foundation of every person’s Divine service must be “miracles,” a firm, unquestioning devotion to G-d. The “natural” service of mind and heart can only be trusted if it follows that devotion. The question is, to what extent must the miraculous devotion be present in a person’s day to day life?

The three possible mechanisms for the Chanukah miracle represent three possible answers to this question:

1. If the miracle was that the quantity of the oil was replenished, then the miracle only took place once, at the moment of the replenishing. True, the oil that continues to burn does so miraculously, but no outside observer can detect anything different about the oil. In spiritual terms this means that a person builds a foundation for their Divine service with “miracles,” with

suprarational devotion to G-d, yet the aftereffects of this devotion are not noticeable in the person’s “natural” service of mind and heart that comprise his actual daily service.

2. If the potency of the oil was miraculously intensified, then, again, the miracle took place once, at the moment of its chemical rearrangement, yet, its miraculous quality remains noticeable for one can see that the oil is burning at a much slower pace than expected. In spiritual terms this means that a person’s miraculous devotion is persistently recognizable in their daily, natural, life. Yet the act of the miracle, the awareness of the radical devotion, only takes place at the outset of the day.
3. If the miracle was the paradox of simultaneous consumption and non consumption of the oil, then the miracle is taking place every second. In spiritual terms this means that the person is constantly renewing their radical devotion to G-d, at every moment of consciousness.

This third paradigm corresponds to the theme of the Chanukah struggle: the antagonism of the Greeks to Jewish conviction and devotion to G-d required the Jews of the time to consciously choose to live “miraculously,” with immovable, irrational devotion to G-d, every moment of their day. This is why they were given a miracle that emulates this passion.
