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Parshas Yisro ✍️ Rabbi Ephraim Hochberg

A Part or Apart

“And Yisro said, ‘Blessed is Hashem who saved you from the hand of Mitzrayim and from the hand of Pharaoh...’ (Shemos 18:10)

The Mechilta explains this posuk as an indictment against the B’nei Yisrael. Since the day that the B’nei Yisrael had left Mitzrayim, not one of the six hundred thousand men of the B’nei Yisrael took the initiative to bless Hashem. Hashem had to wait for Yisro, a non-participant that had not witnessed the miraculous events of B’nei Yisrael’s rescue from Mitzrayim by Hashem, to bless Him.

This Mechilta, however, is rather puzzling. True, the B’nei Yisrael may not have “blessed” Hashem, but they did thank Him for the miracles that he had performed for them. After all, they sang shira by the Yam Suf, praising and recognizing the Midah K’neged Midah that Hashem performed for them by drowning the Mitzriyim. Why is it considered a failing of the B’nei Yisrael for not having “blessed” Hashem?

Rav Shimon Schwab zt”l answers as follows: The expression “*Boruch Hashem*” is a personal expression of gratitude. This is evident from our davening. When the Chazzan says, “*Borchu es Hashem Hamevoruch*” – “Let us (each and every one of us) bless Hashem,” each person responds – on a personal level – “*Boruch Hashem...*” Shira, on the other hand, is a public act of praising Hashem in unison. In fact, we describe the shira by the Yam that the B’nei Yisrael sang with the term “*Yachad*” – together.

B’nei Yisrael were under the impression that each member of *Klal Yisrael* was merely part of a group – *Am Yisrael*. They were focused on the collective, on serving Hashem not as separate individuals, but rather as one nation. They didn’t see the need for each individual to personally bless and thank Hashem.

Yisro, on the other hand came to become part of the B’nei Yisrael. He recognized that each and every person is obligated to thank Hashem personally for the *Nissim* that He performs for the nation. (Perhaps this is hinted to in the words that Yisro says. “*Boruch Hashem asher hitzil eschem* – Blessed is Hashem who saved you (plural) ... *Asher hitzil es h’am metachas yad Mitzrayim* – that saved the nation (together) from under the hand of *Mitzrayim*.”)

This was *B’nei Yisrael’s* flaw. They failed to recognize on their own the importance of each person praising and thanking Hashem. Yisro had to come and show them how each individual must also “bless” Hashem.

May we be *zoche* to fulfill our obligations of praising and thanking Hashem both as individuals as well as part of the entire *B’nei Yisrael*.

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Birchas HaNes

Akiva Niehaus

Although man's very existence is miraculous, one is occasionally able to witness overt miracles. When one sees the place where such a miracle occurred to *Bnai Yisroel* (e.g., the *Yam Suf*) he must recite the following *bracha*: *Baruch atah Hashem, Elokainu Melech Haolam, she'asa nissim la'avosainu bamakom hazeh*. We learn this from the account in this week's *parsha* (*Shmos* 18:10) of Yisro praising Hashem after hearing about the miracles performed for *Bnai Yisroel* by declaring: "*Baruch Hashem asher hitzil eschem*" (*Brachos* 54a). If an individual merits experiencing a miracle himself, he must recite a different *bracha*: *Baruch atah Hashem, Elokainu Melech Haolam, she'asa li nes bamakom hazeh*. His children and descendants must also recite a *bracha*, *she'asa nes la'avosai*, when passing that location. (If many children recite the *bracha* simultaneously, they recite *she'asa nes la'avosainu*. If one experienced numerous miracles, he should incorporate the other locations in his *bracha*. His descendants, however, need not do so.)

Children and grandchildren recite *birchas hanes* regardless of whether they were born before or after the miracle occurred, in order to show honor to their father/grandfather. However, a further descendant recites the *bracha* only if his particular family line was born after the miracle occurred because then he personally benefits from the miracle. Although children recite the *bracha* for a father or mother's miracle, a parent does not recite the *bracha* for a child's miracle. Additionally, a husband does not recite the *bracha* for his wife's miracle, and vice versa (*S.A. O.C.* 218:4, *M.B.* and *B.H. ibid.*).

If one comes to a location where a miracle was performed for his *rebbe*, he should recite the following *bracha*: *she'asa nes l'rabi bamakom hazeh*. This *bracha* is recited only for a *rebbe muvhak* (one's primary *rebbe*) and is not recited by the students' children (*S.A.* 218:6, *M.B. ibid.*). A story is related that the mother of the Vilna Gaon fell into an icy river when she was a baby. After being miraculously rescued, she was placed near an oven to warm up, where she subsequently singed her feet. She eventually recovered and later mothered the great Vilna Gaon. Whenever his disciple, Rav Chaim Volozhiner, passed by the site of the miracle, he recited the *bracha*, *she'asa li nes bamakom hazeh*. He recognized that he would not have merited such an amazing *rebbe* if that baby had not survived her ordeal (*Aliyos Eliyahu* pg. 68).

When is the *bracha* recited?

One should not recite a *birchas hanes* immediately after experiencing a personal miracle. (The *bracha* of *hagomel* may need to be said - see *O.C.* 219.) Rather, the *bracha* should be recited the first time he subsequently visits the site of the miracle, regardless of how much time has elapsed. During additional visits, the *bracha* is recited only if 30 days have elapsed from the previous visit (not including the day of the last visit and the present day) (*O.C.* 218:4, *M.B. ibid.*).

Where is the *bracha* recited?

Birchas hanes is recited only if one is in the exact location where the miracle occurred. If a miracle occurred on the second floor of one's house, he should recite the *bracha* upon entering that floor, even if he lives on the ground floor (provided that he has not entered the second floor in 30

days) (*Chayei Adam* 65:5).

What kind of miracle requires a *bracha*?

The *Shulchan Aruch* (218:9) quotes the opinion of the *Avudraham* that *birchas hanes* is recited only for a miracle involving a departure from the world's natural course, such as the emergence of a fountain of water for a man dying from thirst (see *Brachos* 54a). However, the *bracha* should not be recited for a miracle that follows the world's natural order (e.g., one was attacked by thieves at night but was saved from them). The *Shulchan Aruch* then mentions the opinion of the *Rivash* that a *bracha* must be recited even if one was saved from death in a natural manner, because the danger may not otherwise have been averted. After quoting both opinions, he rules that a *bracha* is recited with Hashem's name only if the miracle involves a literal change in nature, similar to the miraculous emergence of water. If the miracle did not change nature, a *bracha* is recited without mentioning Hashem's name, i.e., *Baruch she'asa li nes bamakom hazeh*. However, if the danger was so extreme that survival cannot be explained by normal means (e.g., a loaded cart rolled over someone), this is considered a change in nature and a *bracha* with Hashem's name is recited (*S.A.* as explained by *Mishnah Brurah* and *S.H. ibid.*).

The *Chayei Adam* (65:4, *Nishmas Adam ibid.*) has a different take on this issue. Based on a different reading of the *Avudraham* mentioned earlier, he maintains that a "supernatural" miracle is entirely unnecessary. The mere fact that someone in danger of death manages to escape with his life is considered a miraculous occurrence and requires a *bracha*. Therefore, if a wall collapses on someone and he is saved by people clearing away the rubble, he recites *birchas hanes* with Hashem's name, even though the actual rescue is natural. If a person faces a danger that most people survive (e.g., childbirth), all agree that no *bracha* is recited (*B.H. d.h. v'yesh*).

The principles discussed above are illustrated by the following examples:

- 1) If one is involved in a serious car accident where some of the passengers were killed, the survivors recite *birchas hanes* with Hashem's name if experts say that all participants should have been killed (see *Avnei Yashfei siman* 46). Additionally, one who survived the concentration camps should recite the *bracha* upon returning to the camp (see *B'tzel Hachochma* 5:62). Surviving such dangers have no rational explanation and therefore require a *bracha* with Hashem's name.
- 2) If one is trapped in a building collapse and requires rescue teams to free him, he should recite *birchas hanes* with Hashem's name according to the *Chayei Adam* because his life was in danger. According to the *Mishnah Brurah*, however, the *bracha* is recited without Hashem's name unless the rescue involved a supernatural miracle. The *Shevet Haleivi* (7:28) writes that the *halacha* follows the *Chayei Adam* and a *bracha* is recited with Hashem's name.
- 3) If one is walking down the street and a brick falls off a nearby building and narrowly misses him, *birchas hanes* is not recited (*Chayei Adam ibid.*).

Let us *daven* that He who has performed miracles for *Bnai Yisroel* in the past will continue to protect all of us in the future.

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