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Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

ד"ר

The Sun, the Moon and the Mundane

At Yehoshua's command, the sun stood still in Giv'on and the moon stopped in its path at the Valley of Ayalon. The Talmud (Berachot 58a) enumerates this episode as a link in the chain of miraculous victories on the historical continuum from Creation to the ultimate battle between Gog and Magog, including the downfalls of Rome and Amalek. Why highlight this particular miracle, rather than the cataclysmic collapse of the walls of Yericho upon the entry to the Holy Land?

In fact, one might question why this miracle was necessary at all - the battle was well in hand, with victory already in sight. Why did Yehoshua find it necessary to interfere with the course of nature and stop the sun and moon in their tracks? Moreover, what was so

extraordinary about this event that prompted the text to record it as a day unique in all of history, prior and subsequent? Malbim offers a profound answer to this question. The uniqueness of this miracle was twofold: First, it is singular in that it was brought about by Yehoshua's direct decree to the sun and moon, rather than through prayer or divine instruction. Secondly, the purpose for which this miracle was effected sets it apart from all other miracles. In most cases, a miracle occurs at Hashem's behest, either to publicize His Name or to save the Jewish people from an immediate threat. In no other instance do we find a Navi requesting a miracle for the sole purpose of demonstrating that Hashem is in control of the battle being fought by the army of Israel. In this case, the army was already winning the war, whether by natural means or a miracle cloaked in nature, so there was no pressing need for supernatural intervention. It is singular that Yehoshua decreed that the sun and moon cease their movements solely for the sake of declaring that it is Hashem, and not the army, who is in control of the battle.¹

Yehoshua, the figure most representative of the transition from the openly miraculous existence of the forty year sojourn through the desert to the new era of human endeavor in the Land of Israel, recognized that military victory gives rise to tension between acknowledging the greatness of God and attributing success to man. At the height of battle, he felt compelled to exercise extreme measures to prevent the swell of ego he may have perceived burgeoning among his men. The midrash identifies

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Yehoshua's proclamation as one of the ten Shirot, songs of praise, found in all of Tanach.² Shira is mandated when one experiences supernatural salvation. According to Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch: "שיר means: to give external form to thoughts and emotions that have been awakened within oneself; generally, to give ardent expression to what some external event has revealed to the inner self, that which is invisible to the eye, but which is clearly seen by the mind's eye. Hence, שיר primarily denotes words singing of God's work in history."³

Yehoshua was sharing with his people what he himself perceived in battle but they were failing to apprehend. By singing Shira at this juncture, Yehoshua was demonstrating that *all* victories are attributed to Hashem, even those that appear to be "natural". Hashem is in constant control of *all* natural phenomena. This message was intended to guide the Jewish army in all of its future battles, for all time.

The commentators debate whether the miracle wrought by Yehoshua was manifest throughout the world, or only in the locations specified by the text. According to the Maharsha, the miracle was experienced worldwide, magnifying the glory of Hashem and Yehoshua.⁴ According to the Maharal, the

miracle was perceived by those in Giv'on and Emek Ayalon, but no further. The purpose of the miracle was fulfilled in its appreciation among the Jewish people alone - it was intended as a particular message for them. Time stood still for one nation in one place while continuing as usual for the rest of the world, serving to magnify Hashem's power and His wonders. The fact that two antithetical things can be true at the same time is an inherent quality of miracles.⁵

May we merit to follow in the footsteps of Yehoshua, and see the Hand of Hashem manifest in all circumstances, and to join together in singing the penultimate song celebrating the final Geulah. ■

5. Gevurot Hashem Second Introduction

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program

In the **OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi series**, which just began its fourth cycle, women scholars deliver a daily shiur on the books of Prophets (Neviim) and Writings (Ketuvim) at the pace of a chapter a day. Shiurim are geared toward learners of all levels who would like to participate in the two-year Nach Yomi study cycle. Visit the OU Women's Initiative to register for additional content.

2. Mechilta Beshalach

3. Shimshon Refael Hirsch Shemot 15:1

4. Maharsha Berachot 58a

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