

To Rely on Miracles or Not?

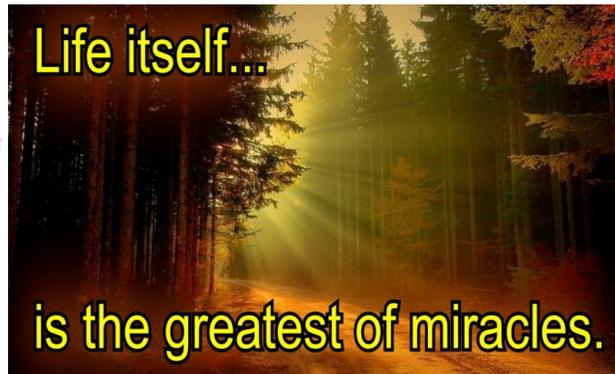
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By Ariel Bar Tzadok

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Long ago the Sages of Israel revealed to us a great secret about the Ways of G-d. Knowing well that G-d acts for the sake of His Great Plan and not for the sake of mere mortal personal fulfillment, the Sages (T.B. Pesh. 64b) proclaimed the statement, "one should not rely upon miracles." It is true that G-d can perform a miracle and override the natural order at any moment. Nevertheless, we see that G-d does not often intervene in such supernatural ways to override the natural order than He Himself has created.



While we acknowledge theologically that G-d can do anything He wants, whenever He so wishes, this does not mean that G-d will do whatever it is that we wish, whenever we so wish it. All the prayers in the world and all the sacrifices we make of any and all types do not guarantee for us that G-d is going to do our bidding, especially if and when our personal desires may very well contradict the Will of Heaven.

Yes, G-d can perform for us a miracle of any kind at any time, but what makes us think that G-d is ready and willing to do this? To think that our mere mortal behavior can somehow influence Divine decisions is rather arrogant of us. No human being at any time has ever been able to manipulate G-d. All we can ever do is to submit to the Will of Heaven, kneel in subservience and prayer, hoping for the best of G-d's great mercy.

Yet, whether or not that mercy will materialize in the form of some supernatural miraculous event, is the decision of Heaven, and is beyond our influence. Knowing this, the Sages taught us wisely not to put ourselves into any position so bad that the only way out of such a bad situation would be to have no choice but to rely upon supernatural Divine intervention. For once we make of mess of things, it is not G-d's job to clean up our messes. Cleaning up after ourselves is our own responsibility. It is something that G-d expects of us. So, never should we ask, "why is not G-d doing something about this," but rather we should be asking, "why are we not doing something about this."

Humanity has been called "partners" with G-d in the ongoing process of creation. While indeed, G-d alone is the Creator and Former of all things, past, present and future, nevertheless He has delegated to humanity a great responsibility, to take care of the creation that He has made. In this regards we are called G-d's "partners" in that we are obligated to upkeep and maintain that which our blessed L-rd has made. Our contributions are considered in the Eyes of Heaven as if we

are actual partners with G-d in the ongoing maintenance of creation. This is a great and awesome burden, responsibility and privilege all rolled up into one. Indeed, this is the purpose of humanity's creation and the purpose of our sojourn here on Earth in our mortal physical bodies.

In the beginning G-d created the natural world. G-d ordained the laws of nature and to this day maintains them. Natural laws are the laws of G-d. While nature is not G-d, it is created by G-d and thus serves G-d's purposes. Natural law is not in contradiction to G-d, on the contrary, it is His servant. Therefore whenever G-d has to intervene and act in the physical world, He usually acts through the natural laws that He has created.

Even something as overwhelming as the parting of the Red Sea for the Israelites after they left Egypt was accomplished through the manipulations of natural law (ref. Exodus 14:21). For the waters did not simply part magically, the scripture is clear that a mighty wind blew against the waters for hours causing them to part because of the power of wind against water. The miracle here is the timing. The action of the miracle was nevertheless an expression of the laws of nature in action. In all due respect, winds can and do part waters, it is the nature of the relationship between strong winds and passive water. G-d could have indeed just made the waters magically part, or for that matter He could have made them magically disappear, but He instead chose to honor and respect the natural laws that He Himself had made and acted through them. As it was with this most magnificent of miracles so too is it with almost all others.

Granted, it is hard for us to ascribe natural causes to such an event as Joshua (10:12-13) holding the sun still over the battlefield for a full 24 hours. If the Earth had literally stopped, the momentum of Earth's movement would have caused everything on the planet's surface to rocket into outer space at close to 1000 miles per hour. So, how did this miracle actually occur, we may never know. However, in light of modern discoveries in Quantum Physics we may be able to postulate that maybe, somehow the entire battlefield area was somehow transported into a parallel dimension or that there are a local time-bubble created or some similar (or dissimilar) application of natural law that maybe one day we will be able to explain scientifically.

While today we do not know or understand the underlying laws of nature that underlie what we view as supernatural miracles, this does not mean that we will not be able to understand such principles tomorrow or as our knowledge of G-d's natural laws increase. Thank G-d for technology for it helps us strip away religious superstition and to better understand the glory that our blessed creator has instilled in His creation.

Are there miracles today? I say absolutely yes! But the miracles of which I speak are not so spectacular a show as are the parting of the sea or the standing still of the sun. In my opinion, every breath we breathe and every beat of the human heart is a miracle. In my opinion, life itself is a miracle. The fact that each of us are able to make it through the day with all the trials and tribulations we daily face, in my opinion, is a miracle. While these miracles might not be considered to be such by others, in my opinion, these are the most spectacular miracles of them all. In my opinion, they are clear and obvious proof of G-d being real and being with us.

Now, we all know that bad things, even really bad things, happen to good people. There seems to be no rhyme or reason as to who is stricken with a terrible debilitating disease or who becomes subject to a terrible accident or, G-d forbid, an act of random violence. Those of us who are religious believe that G-d is with us in everything and everywhere. It is definitely a serious challenge to faith to justify why these bad things happen to good people. Yet, the bad things happen to good people and bad people alike. We all get sick, we all suffer and eventually we all die. That is the ultimate truth from which there is no escape.

Religious people tend to forget their mortality and their fragility. Some religious people believe that being that G-d is with them that this somehow gives them license to act in unsafe and unwise manners. They believe, falsely I might add, that being that G-d is with them, therefore they can indulge in almost any activity and G-d will protect them from any natural consequences that might occur. This attitude is spiritual arrogance and is the definition of spiritual blindness.

Nowhere in religious literature is it recorded that G-d promises to redeem the stupid from their stupidity. On the contrary, G-d demands of us to be wise, to use the faculty of human intellect that He has endowed within us to make our choices in life with caution and discretion. Seldom do those who act wisely find themselves in an unwise position. G-d guides them and blesses them through their use of their rational thinking minds. And as such, G-d works with the thinking man (and woman) to protect, safeguard and move wisely through life avoiding most pitfalls. While being wise and smart is no absolute assurance that nothing bad will ever happen to one, it still is a "sure bet" that it will eliminate mishaps that occur due to human stupidity.

G-d does not intervene in human affairs with supernatural miracles on any regular basis. While G-d is interactive with us at every single moment, the nature of this interaction is through the medium of the natural laws that He has created and ordained to rule over us. This is a fundamental truth of the Bible. One who denies this in either word or deed cannot be said to be living in accordance to the Way of G-d.

Those who dig themselves into proverbial holes and then expect G-d to pull them out are sadly mistaken. Unfortunately, this superstitious belief that G-d will override the natural order so that those who are so-called religious can practice their irresponsible behavior under the guise of religious piety is epidemic. Unfortunately we have all too many so-called religious people who are religious externally, but as expressed by their actual lack of common sense and wisdom show clearly that there is no religion, knowledge or fear of G-d in them at all.

The Sages of Israel warned us since Temple times that the proper expression of our faith in G-d is to be practical and realistic. We are not supposed to rely upon the supernatural, or any other kind of out-of-the-ordinary type of behavior or miracles. Those who twist and turn this most common sense advice unfortunately are many. Those who twist and turn this most common sense advice cannot in any way be considered to be authentically religious.

Religion is clearly about being down-to-earth, practical and realistic. Religion is built upon the premise that we human beings have an obligation to built and make our world a better place to live. In order to accomplish the Divine mission for humanity, the first thing we must be aware of is or humanity. We must realize our limitations and pursue our aspirations within the contexts and parameters that Heaven itself has ordained for us.

Indeed, when we help ourselves, G-d in turn helps us. Although these words were penned by American founding father, Benjamin Franklin, the sentiments were expressed hundreds of years before Franklin in the mystical writings of the famous Safed mystic, the Ari'zal.

The concept that "G-d helps those who help themselves" is not just common sense and clear logic, according to the mystical Jewish tradition it is one of the great secrets of the Torah. A secret, I might add, that was well known to the Sages in Temple times and to every other sincerely devote and religious person, regardless of when and where they lived. The Ari'zal only gave us a profound mystical insight as to why this is so.

Indeed, the Arizal wrote (Sha'ar HaKavanot, Lectures on Purim) that whatever supernatural miracles that were possible in Biblical days can still be accomplished today through the works of man. However, such supernatural outcomes will take place through natural events. The Arizal gave as his example the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon/Persia and the building of the Second Temple. The Bible records these events as they unraveled politically, but nevertheless, behind the human hands and minds deciding the course of human events lies the spirit of G-d that moves deep inside the hearts and minds of men.

When we tap into G-d within us, we unleash G-d into the world. As such we become G-d's vessels of action to rectify, restore and make our world a fitting place for free, independent human beings, created in the Divine Image, to live and prosper. Thus we fulfill our purpose for coming to Earth, we honor Heaven and serve our blessed Creator. Where this will take us in the future, only G-d can tell.

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