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Living Faith & Natural Law

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One of the dangers facing peoples of all religious faiths is the blurring of boundaries between the realities of physical living and the wishes for spiritual intervention to either stretch or to entirely override such boundaries.

Believing as we do all the stories of old, how Heaven would intervene in people's lives, we believe that if Heaven did it once, it can do so again, and maybe in our specific cases. Well, religiously speaking, we acknowledge the possibility of miracles all the time. However, our Sages were men of wisdom and saw the harsh realities of everyday life. They knew very well the truth of a maxim that they coined, "we must not rely on miracles."

In one way or another, so many people have become so heavenly minded that they are in danger of becoming no earthly good. Indeed, all their book learning, like the study of abstract mathematics, has taken their eye off the harshness of reality in this world. Instead of facing harsh realities, many religious individuals have placed themselves in a fantasy world, where they expect everything in life to materialize in accordance to their preconceived religious beliefs. Of course, reality always rears its "ugly head" and brings to be that which is real and not that which is religiously hoped for.

Granted, Heaven does intervene in our lives constantly. Indeed, every breath we breathe and every beat of the human heart is, for me, a Divine miracle. However, there are miracles and there are miracles. There are miracles within the very fabric of natural living and then there are miracles outside the framework of nature, at least from our present perspective.

G-d is the G-d of the supernatural, but at the same time, G-d is also the G-d of nature. G-d did not create the natural world so that natural law could be whimsically violated. On the contrary, even when G-d does intervene supernaturally in our world, He does so using the same forces of nature that He Himself has ordained. This is clearly expressed in almost every supernatural occurrence recorded in Scripture. These events came about through an uncanny application of natural law.

In Scripture, G-d is called by two Names, Elohim and YHVH. To distinguish between the two, most English translators, with the exception of Aryeh Kaplan's Living Torah, translate Elohim as G-d and YHVH as L-rd. Kaplan reverses this trend. Yet, either translation is fine. It is the application of the original Hebrew Names that we must understand.

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We all know that in the beginning G-d/Elohim created the Heavens and the Earth (Gen. 1:1). The Name Elohim is therefore associated with the creation of nature and natural law. Only later in the Torah narrative is the Name YHVH introduced. This unique Name of G-d is said to correspond to His supernatural nature. Therefore, whenever something natural is occurring, Torah refers to it as the act of Elohim. When something supernatural happens, Torah refers to this as an act of YHVH. This is the general rule and when Scripture is read in this light, it opens our eyes to many subtle spiritual teachings that may have been overlooked before.

It is important in light of current social and political events to recognize that while G-d is always in charge, He is executing His charge through natural law and not through a supernatural "sound and light show." This lesson is clearly taught to us in one of the final books of the Bible, the Book of Esther. This is the only book in the Bible where G-d is not even mentioned, not even once. The commentators agree that this was no accidental omission on part of the book's author. Rather it was a subtle message to teach us that while G-d is always there, He is working concealed, behind the scenes.

Just as G-d is working behind the stage to make things work out all right, we are on center stage and we have to act our parts and each contribute our shares in order to get everything done right. G-d does His share and we each have to do ours. Wisely and correctly did American founding father Benjamin Franklin say, "G-d helps those who help themselves." No Biblical prophet, Rabbinic Sage or later Kabbalist could have said it any clearer or more simpler than this.

The grave danger facing religious individuals today is not the hostility of a growing secular public. The greatest danger to the religious today is their unrealistic approach as to how to deal with such anti-religious hostilities. This battle will not be won with prayer alone. Neither will it be won with political or social actions alone. However, with the two powers combined, we will find two powerful arms working in harmony that can then launch and execute an awesome assault. Fantasy cannot make this happen. Waiting for G-d to intervene cannot make this happen. Only proper action guided by proper wisdom, grounded in the harsh realities of everyday living, will enable one to see the invisible Hand of G-d guiding us through the Valley of the Shadow of Death (Psalm 23:4).

As long as your head is in the clouds, your feet will not be on the ground. Get grounded, live on the earth that G-d has made. Know it and its ways well. In this way we come to see that which Elohim has made. By being grounded and realistic, we can embrace the natural world, created by Elohim, and navigate its natural courses through life. In ancient Persia, Mordechai and Esther did just this, so too today must we follow in their footsteps of practicality, wisdom, courage and self-sacrifice.

Those who are waiting for G-d to save them, will most likely not be saved. G-d has already granted us all the power we need to enable us to get out of the holes that we have dug for ourselves. Granted, G-d's metaphorical Hand is there to help us pull ourselves out of the hole, but, unless we do our share, we are in essence preventing G-d from doing His share! There is no greater sin than this, than being the barrier that prevents Divine intervention from materializing.

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We do not live in a time of supernatural miracles. This modern period is what the Bible calls exile. It is a time when YHVH hides His Face from us. Of course, G-d still sees all and knows all from Heaven. Exile is just a time when we are not going to receive supernatural intervention. Natural intervention, however, occurs all the time. In a way, exile is a blessing in disguise because it requires of us to stand up and act like mature human beings, taking responsibility for ourselves. In this way, we achieve materializing our inner-most potential, this being a being created in the Image of G-d (Gen. 1:26).

In the Christian Bible, Book of James (2:17), (written by a Jewish author), it is taught, faith without works is dead. You can't get more Jewish than this! Every Sage since Talmudic times knew this and James being a Jew merely recorded it. This concept has thus become a foundation stone for both religions.

It is all well and good to talk about faith in G-d. But, as the old saying goes, "talk is cheap" and "action speaks louder than words." People of religion have a moral obligation to righteousness, to always act righteously, with high morals and impeccable character. This is putting faith into action. Faith in action embraces Elohim, recognizes the harsh realities of the natural world and lives accordingly, not seeking supernatural miracles as a quick fix for man-made natural problems.

Real life is hard and harsh. Real problems require tough and often hard solutions. Our Sages taught us not to rely on miracles. It is wise to heed their advice and to get our heads out of the clouds. If we want to ever make our world a better place, one worthy for the coming of a Mashiah, then we had better get busy and making it ourselves. G-d in Heaven will bless our endeavors. He will bless the work of our hands. But, if we do not do the work, then He has nothing to bless. If we do not do our share, then neither can G-d do His! We then become the greatest impediment to our own personal salvation.

While no one individual can change the entire world, we can each change the personal world around us. All we have to do is to act properly, with wisdom, caution and care. Nature is one tough "mother" and it is wise to give natural law all the respect it is due. Live within your means. Do what you can and do not fret over that which you cannot do. Be who you are and not who you are not. Don't look up to Heaven until you first look down to make sure your feet are firmly planted on the ground.

G-d is with you, but are you with Him?

Pirkei Avot 5:21 in the name of Ben Hei Hei, sums it up nicely, "*L'fum Tza'arah Agra*," which roughly can be translated as "no pain, no gain!" Now, as the Sage Hillel said (T.B. Shabat 31b), "*Zil Gamur*," go do it!

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