

Do You Believe In Miracles?

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Yesterday, I met with our eighth grade children, and they asked many thoughtful questions about the nature of God as you understand Him in a scientifically oriented age. For some reason, many of the children had developed the idea that if you believe in "science" or "evolution," you cannot believe in God or in religion. Central to the discussion was the question, "Do you believe in miracles?" My answer is, "Of course." But some of the children understood the word "miracle" entirely differently from myself.

The children still cling to the idea that a miracle was an event that seemed to be contrary to the normal process of nature. When they thought of miracles, they thought of the Biblical description of the time Joshua "made the sun stand still," or when "manna fell from heaven." They seemed not too much aware of the central theme in the Bible and in Judaism that the greater miracles are those very laws which operate regularly and which make the universe and human life possible. The emphasis in our Bible and in our tradition is on Torah. Torah means law, the law woven into the fabric of the universe. The miracle which points to God is the miracle of the order of the universe, not the deviations from that order.

Our Prayer-book emphasizes the miracle of the order of nature. God is praised as the Creator of the processes of the universe which cause the sun to shine regularly and night to come consistently with its blessings of rest. The laws of nature are, to the Jew, evidence of a Planner. The physical universe is the result of law, just as the moral universe is guided by law. This is the continuing miracle.

Judaism has evolved progressively into a most sophisticated religion. Some of our ancient fathers thought a miracle was something that seemed to violate the laws of nature, an exception. Later Biblical teachers, like the prophets, interpreted a "miracle" differently. They understood God differently. As man grows in understanding and knowledge, he looks at the universe with broader eyes. If he is sensitive, he does not see less of God, but more of God. God is He who planned the atom and the galaxies, the Author of the small and large, the pervading Presence of the universe. The poet says, "a presence and a spirit that rolls through all things."

Reform Judaism looks at God as the "more" beyond our best nature. He is that stuff from within ourselves that moves us to just and loving deeds, and He is a "more of the same" beyond ourselves. He is not detached from us, but not merely contained within ourselves. We add to His power, but we are not the limit of His power.

Is the theory of evolution (unproved) consistent with the notion of God? Why not? Certainly, man was not made with a lump of clay in one moment. Man is a complicated being, the nexus of the universe. Maybe we took six billion years to evolve. Does this make our creation any less marvelous? God is the author of law, the law of the continuing creation. Our task is to learn that law, if possible, and to make ourselves a conscious part of that creation. This is what religion means.