

Miracles

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I have seen a Miracle. Something that couldn't have, shouldn't have happened Something that defied the laws of nature. Some of you saw it too - 32 years ago.

Bottom of the 10th, two out, the ball goes through Bill Buckner's legs – the 1986 Mets win Game 6 of the World Series!

I'm sure the Red Sox players and fans didn't see it as a miracle. The next day in the Boston Globe, they wrote that the "Red Sox walked off the field with the dumbstruck look of accident victims. The worst. The absolute worst."¹

We are fond of calling things Miracles in sports. The 1969 World Champion Mets were known as the Miracle Mets. Bobby Thompson's Home Run to win the pennant for the New York Giants was called a miracle as was Kerri Strug's gold medal winning vault, Doug Flutie's Hail Mary, the 1980 US Olympic hockey team's win. Think Al Michaels calling, "Do you believe in miracles? Yes!"

But it's not just in sports. Sully Sullenberg and The Miracle on the Hudson. Annie Sullivan, The Miracle Worker, who once lived right...here with Helen Keller. The rescue of the 33 Chilean miners after 69 days was called a miracle. Even Santa Claus gets a movie called *The Miracle on 34th Street*.

Judaism is a faith centered on miracles. The most popular holidays - Passover and Chanukah - are miracle-based. How should we explain them? How do we understand these incredible events that defy reason?

Some people strive to explain away miracles. The 10 plagues and the parting of the Red Sea they argue are due to a single natural disaster, a huge volcanic eruption on the Greek island of Santorini. But even if volcanic shockwaves caused the Sea to part at the exact moment the Israelites needed it and closed it back on the Egyptians at the perfect time to save the Jews, that'd be pretty miraculous too. Their argument would be taking God out of the direct equation, but not the miraculous nature of the event..

Albert Einstein supposedly said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is." Einstein is also often credited with saying, "Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous." Figuring out miracles, debunking them, confirming their divine origin are an activity that seem to fascinate many,

especially on biblical miracles. And what do we say about the meaning of miracles in our time? How should we think about miracles?

We need to embrace that our lives are filled with miracles. The *Hoda'ah* prayer found in the Amidah section of the service thanks God "for Your miracles with us every day, for Your wonders and goodness that are in every moment, evening, morning, and afternoon." There is a Jewish view that miracles and wonders surround us all the time. The trick is to notice them, to have eyes made for wonder. As Rabbi Jeff Goldwasser considered, "The parting of the Red Sea may seem like a big miracle, but how big is it really compared to the intricacies of a sunflower?"

One would think a miracle would be easy to notice. But we can miss the beauty of the world easily. Even the big miracles of the Bible weren't always seen. There is a tradition that the Burning Bush was there long before Moses walked by. What distinguished him was that he noticed it and saw that the fire wasn't burning away the leaves. It was not until Moses noticed the bush that God spoke to him.²

When Jacob realizes God through a dream, he learns that God was there all along, he just discovered it in his life saying, "Surely God is in this place; and I did not know it."³

In a beautiful poem, Rabbi Sidney Greenberg reflected on this thought.

"We look for miracles in the extraordinary, while too often we remain oblivious to the miracles which abound in the ordinary moments of our lives.

Our lives are drenched in miracles. Miracles are all around us — and within us. We are each walking miracles....

Every springtime is a miracle; every snowflake is a miracle; every newborn is a miracle. The thoughts we think, the words we utter, the hopes we cherish — each is a miracle.

We live from miracle to miracle."⁴

We don't always acknowledge them, but miracles suffuse our world. We discover a miracle when we fall in love, when we see our child for the first time, when we make a new friend, when we take a first step, learn to read, or make a difference in someone else's life.

And yet “Miracle” is tossed around pretty frivolously. The miracle of finding your keys that you misplaced earlier that morning might not match up with an acorn becoming a giant oak.

Waiting for miracles is a hopeful task. Any maybe once in a while something good does happen to us that we can't explain and we only understand as “miraculous.” A standard way of thinking about miracles is just to believe really hard. The 1998 animated classic *The Prince of Egypt* lays out a common understanding about miracles.

There can be miracles
When you believe
Though hope is frail
It's hard to kill
Who knows what miracles
You can achieve?
When you believe somehow you will
You will when you believe

Waiting. Believing. Hoping. It's it is the desperate wish of a person who has otherwise given up. If a miracle is the only option, life has reached a terribly sad, painful moment. Without other perceived options, we turn to a miracle from God as our only solution. Rabbi Rifat Sonsino once wrote, “God, as the energy of the universe, does not interrupt the flow of nature for the benefit of anyone, no matter how sincere or hopeful. It is always good to hope for the best, but one cannot depend on it. As one rabbi said in the Talmud: ‘Never depend on a miracle.’”

When we attribute a moment, even an incredible moment, as a “miracle,” we can dismiss the incredibly hard work of individuals who made that moment happen. We don't know why sometimes someone has an extraordinarily positive and unexpected change in their medical diagnosis. We do know that the doctors and nurses who cared for them played some role in it. Their family and friends who cared for the person, drove them to doctors' appointments, helped them with their treatment. Their greater community that called and visited and shared prayers helped them find strength all were a part. So if we call a wondrous medical success a “miracle,” we must include all those doctors, nurses, family, friends, community, and more who helped make it happen.

Hope for a miracle, but don't depend on one.⁵ An alternate version of this comes from the movie *Bruce Almighty*, where Morgan Freeman, playing God, advised "Be the Miracle."

Being a miracle means doing things to bring about a difference. Kerri Strug was a miracle by trying the final vault, even with an injured leg. If she never tried, it would never have happened. Sully Sullenberg landed that plane on the Hudson, but the miracle of everyone aboard finding safety was also due to his crew, co-pilot Jeff Skiles, flight attendants Sheila Dail, Doreen Welsh, and Donna Dent. If Gary Carter, Kevin Mitchell, and Ray Knight hadn't gotten hits, Mookie never would have his chance in Game 6. A miracle usually celebrates a moment, but it was a team of people acting that ultimately made it occur.

If you go to the website Baseballmiracles.org, it doesn't have a list of amazing plays, but pictures of men and women who donate their time and love to significantly disadvantaged kids all over the world. They write about the miracles they make, "Our mission is to serve others and see the joy of a child hit and catch a ball for the very first time. We truly believe in miracles."⁶ Miracles they help make.

This summer we saw what everyone said was a miracle. Twelve Thai teen boys on a soccer team and their 25-year-old coach were rescued by an international effort. They were trapped exploring a cave by sudden rains and flooding of water that rose 10 feet in one hour. Most of the boys couldn't swim and the divers have to lead them through a six-hour perilous journey to safety. Sadly the miracle was tinged with sadness as Saman Gunan, a 38-year-old retired Thai Navy SEAL, died in an attempt to save the boys. The miracle wasn't that the waters all suddenly drained or the cave supernaturally cracked open an escape. The miracle was that experts from across the world pooled wisdom, skill, and resources to overcome incredible obstacles to save all of these teens.

Such miracles bring us together. Sadly, they don't happen often enough. People working side-by-side can make wondrous things happen. Yet neighbors live for decades isolated and alone. We see pain and hunger every day. We think, I can't do anything to really change this. This year, maybe we can try, 'Together we can make miracles.'

So let's make some miracles. Our synagogue is acting to help one new family in Queens. Adolfo is from Guatemala. He came to the US legally years ago. He tried to bring his family here: his wife Juana, their 15-year-

old daughter Joselyn, and their nephew Allan. They were intercepted and incarcerated at the US-Mexico border. Joselyn and Allan were separated by the government from Juana. Adolfo was eventually able to regain custody of Joselyn. For Allan it took much longer.

Now the family lives in Jamaica. Recognizing the miracles of freedom and helping the stranger that are the core of Judaism, RTFH is working with the family to settle into America by finding an apartment, school, and their new life as immigrants in the United States. The family needs assistance in many areas and one of them is having enough food. To make our own miracle, we are focusing our food drive this High Holy Days to help the family. In your High Holiday handout, you'll find the link:

rtfh.org/task-force

which lists the foods that family would stock their pantry with. As you come to services on Yom Kippur, voluntarily fasting from food, bring one of the foods on the list, to help Juana, Adolfo, Joselyn, and Allan. When they see all the food we will bring them, they might say "It's a miracle," or I suppose they'll probably say, "Es un milagro." But we'll know that miracle didn't just happen. It was individual people; it was each of you, making that miracle a little bit at a time. It was everyone one us making a miracle.

There are miracles surrounding us in the sky above in our hearts that we need to notice more often. When faced with obstacles, we can wait for miracles or hope for miracles, or we can make miracles. All around you – in your families, our community, our neighbors, ourselves, be the miracle and together let's make some miracles.

¹ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/sports/1986/10/26/they-were-just-one-pitch-away/Afy6EpQNou82rna9E8CCDM/story.html>

² Exodus 3:2, 4.

³ Exodus 28:16.

⁴ Rabbi Sidney Greenberg, *Siddur Hadash*, as quoted in "Entrances to Holiness are Everywhere."

⁵ Talmud Megillah 7b.

⁶ <https://www.baseballmiracles.org/about-us.html>