

Sparks

by Rabbi David Aaron
*Founder and Dean, Isralight
Rosh Yeshiva, Orayta*

Where is G-d, the Miracle Maker?

People often say, “If there is really a G-d, why doesn’t He do outright miracles anymore? I would believe in G-d if I saw the ten plagues in Egypt, the sea split or some other supernatural event.”

In the past, G-d did miracles in order to prevent some terrible tragedy from happening. G-d overruled the laws of nature to keep the story going—otherwise, it would have ended. But this type of intervention is not the ideal way that G-d wants to act. G-d prefers not to do miracles. He only does them when there is no other way to teach us about His control of nature.

People do not really change by witnessing a miracle. Of course, at first they are strongly moved and seem to change. But the awe quickly wears off, and they return to their old ways. We see this human pattern many times in the stories of the Torah.

The Israelites witnessed the ten supernatural plagues topped off with the miraculous splitting of the sea and were saved from destruction by the hands of the Egyptian armies. However, not too long afterward, their faith deteriorated, and they began to complain about their conditions in the desert. Miracles don’t change people, only people can change themselves; and to accomplish that, they have to make choices and get proactive.

There is another reason why G-d is reluctant to do miracles. And that is because the story of life is about the evolving manifestation of the G-dliness within us. Miracles actually stifle the growth of the expression of the divine from within us; manifest through our choices, our commitments, and our hard work.

This explains the bizarre behavior of the Israelites who wrestled with the significance of their identity in the desert for forty years. The desert was a miraculous place for the Israelites. They enjoyed a daily portion of manna, the heavenly bread that fell daily from the sky. They also drank water that flowed abundantly from a rock. For forty years the Israelites sojourned in a miraculous desert where everything was upside down. Generally wheat comes from the ground and water from the skies, but for forty years it was just the opposite.

In the desert the Israelites lived in a divine womb, like a fetus whose needs are completely cared for. And yet with all these comforts they complained and rebelled over and over again. Why?

Because under these miraculous conditions, their inner stature was dwarfed. It was like you and I living under the shadow of our parents. There is a spirit within us that is restless and demands to be established and expressed. This spirit is the manifestation of the G-dliness within us that must evolve and emerge. This is why the miraculous desert was not the destination of the Israelites. It was only part of their process and journey.

Their original destination was the Promised Land. The funny thing, though, is that when they were about to get there, they started to have second thoughts. They sent in a group of spies to check it out. This group returned after a quick look and told the people that the Promised Land consumes its inhabitants. In other words, it was a place that demands a lot of work. The people wondered, “Why should we leave the comfortable womb of G-d that encompasses us with daily miracles? Why leave this wonderful desert and go to a land that demands so much human effort and hard work? What is so promising about the Promise Land?”

This was their dilemma: On the one hand, the G-dliness within them wanted to become manifest through their choices, determined efforts, and hard work. Therefore, they resented all the freebies in the desert. But then again, it was also very nice to have it all miraculously handed to them on a silver platter and to bask in the light of G-d. Why should they soil themselves with the labors of this physical world when they could stay in bliss and enjoy the supernatural desert? Why leave the spiritual life of the desert and go to work?

The forty years in the desert was a time for the revelation of G-d the miracle Maker, showing that G-d is the Power who is above and beyond the laws and limitations of nature. During that time the Israelites developed a profound belief in divine transcendence. But then the time came for the manifestation of divine immanence—that aspect of G-d which is expressed from within humanity.

The problem with the miraculous life in the desert was that the light of divine transcendence eclipsed the light of divine immanence. But the danger in the Promised Land was that the light of divine immanence could eclipse the light of divine transcendence. In the Promised Land, the Israelites could come to think that all their success was really their own and had nothing to do with G-d.

The challenge of the Israelites just before they entered into the Promised Land sheds light on our own challenge. Every day we witness amazing advancements in science and technology. We, too, are creators of worlds. We seem to be ascending to the stature of G-ds. Will we let this power go to our heads and fool us into thinking that we are G-ds and do as we please? Or do we graciously accept these powers as gifts from G-d, signs of the growing light of the G-dliness within us and yet humbly obey and follow G-d’s commandments?

Before we can get out of our oppression in Egypt and get to our freedom and empowerment in the Promised Land G-d performs miracles to remind us who’s Boss. But God then wants us to actualize our godliness and perform miracles with the divine power of love within us.

Rabbi David Aaron

Author of *Endless Light, Seeing G-d, The Secret Life of G-d, Inviting G-d In, Living A Joyous Life, The G-d-Powered Life, and Tefilla Training*