



ILLUMINATING THE DARKNESS

BY ILAN HERRMANN

What happens when the miracles dry up?



WHEN YOU MENTION the word miracle in the context of Judaism, you find yourself in pretty good company. After all, not many a page in the Jewish bible, the Torah, finds itself absent of the phenomenon. Nary is a chapter in the epic novel that is Jewish history from the earliest inception of this people not frequented by the miraculous.

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Indeed, from Abraham and the patriarchs to the twelve tribes of Israel, to Moses through Joshua and the early and latter prophets, all have a claim to being associated to events and occurrences that defy the laws of nature. But perhaps the miracle that stands out as a national event that is celebrated annually on a global scale, and bears the name ‘the festival of lights’, is Chanukah. >



“ WHEN G-D PERFORMS A MIRACLE, AS WAS SO OFTEN THE CASE, WITH ALL THAT WAS GAINED, SOMETHING WAS LOST. MAN’S DRIVE AND INITIATIVE TO FAITH. ”

The miracle of Chanukah occurred when the ancient Greeks had sacked the temple and contaminated the oil in all the temple storage houses. The Jewish defenders, known as the Maccabees, valiantly rose up and defeated this enemy and reclaimed the Temple. They searched for pure oil and found but one small flask that was as yet not contaminated, to be used to rededicate the Candelabra. Though the flask had sufficient oil to burn for only one day, a miracle occurred and the oil lasted for

eight days. Thus we celebrate the eight days of Chanukah, ‘the festival of lights’.

Chanukah thus became another in the long sequence of Divinely inspired moments that openly revealed the Hand of G-d among Israel.

But then an abrupt halt! No more miracles; or at least no more nature-defying ones. No splitting of the sea, no ten plagues, oil burning eight times its natural capacity. All the miracles dried

up. The obvious question is why? And why is Chanukah and its miracle the one that leads the Jewish people into the darkest hour of her history, where G-d no longer neutralises the forces of nature to impose a Divine manifestation.

To answer, we must first expand on what a miracle is and the function it fulfils.

In essence, a miracle is no less an act of G-d than is nature. After all, both are an expression of the creative force of a being that is omnipotent and all powerful. Nature and its properties – which include all elements of creation, both the actual material substance and more scientifically, the laws that govern the operational mechanism of that entity – are not fundamentally a fact, but they are created to be one.

Thus a miracle, which is a super-imposition on nature and suspends its process with a non-rational and inexplicable event, is of the same source and creativity as the identity it is suspending.

Their difference lies not in the fact of one being of Divine handiwork more than the other, for they are one in that regard. Rather, it is in their manifestation that they differ. A miracle is a revelatory incident, while in nature, G-d conceals His presence!

The purpose of a miracle is the impressing on the observer the dominion and supreme power of the Divine. It states emphatically that nothing obstructs the volition of G-d Almighty, who can at will and whim suspend the course of life and existence that tends to so often become the cushion or protective comfort of one’s reassurance and the object of man’s trust and faith. It shakes the undisputed assumptions that belie a hidden scepticism or desensitisation to the presence of a creator.

Knowing what a miracle is and that essentially it comprises no substantial difference to nature and to the source that creates and animates it, we can >



now understand why the 'open miracle' has gone into a hiding for so long, that being about 2 200 years and counting.

When G-d performs a miracle, as was so often the case, with all that was gained, something was lost. Man's drive and initiative to faith.

When G-d's presence is so overt then one is almost overwhelmed or seduced

match. It's like mechanically elevating a mountain climber to a few metres before the peak to make the climb.

To bring out the best of the student, athlete or mountain climber, the experience must be geared to challenging the deeper strengths and talents that he or she possesses.

No less the Divine input.

The final challenge of Jewish history is to demonstrate the greatest miracle of all, that the miracle is not out there, but – as Rabbi Manis Friedman once framed it – that **'we are the miracle!'** That Jewish identity is upheld not because we are impressed or dumbstruck by a supernatural otherworldly spectacle. Jewish identity, faith in G-d, the pursuit of a relationship with the Divine, is the fibre of our being and the truth of our lives.

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into adopting a belief in His being. By withholding the overt miracle, G-d enables the inner working of man's own effort to be exercised in recognising and embracing the Divine. The difference is infinite and the value is so much greater, far more precious and complimentary to man.

Waiting for G-d to do a miracle before applying the principles of faith and observance is like asking the teacher to reveal the answer to the question that the student is posed. It is like giving a team a 10-goal advantage in a challenge

For centuries, G-d provided the motivation and inspiration to affirm and reaffirm our belief and devotion in part through periodic miraculous nature-shattering events. Now G-d is telling us to be the inspiration. To be driven by the voice within and moved by the Divine music that resonates inside of us. He is saying that embedded in our nature is the miracle we need to seek. In it is contained the essence of who we are and of the simple expression of the creator, devoid of all the fanfare and theatrics. Just Him and the opportunity to embrace that!

What more appropriate miracle to embark on history's phase of trial and ordeal than Chanukah and the 'miracle of lights'. It reminds us that the darkness of exile and the doubt and uncertainty of a nature submerged reality is merely the tool and medium to elicit the recognition that the most miraculous light of all is that of the inextinguishable Divine soul that we carry inside of who we are. **IL**

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