



I Know of Nothing But Miracles

A Hadar Hanukkah Companion

The time of the Bible was a time brimming with miracles beyond human comprehension. Everywhere the Israelites looked, God's divine hand was discernible. In the Bible, Moses' rod miraculously transformed into a snake, the great Nile bled blood, rocks broke forth to bring water, and the sky brought down gifts of sustenance. This was a world in which, for better or worse, to our salvation or to our demise, great seas might part to save us, or the earth might open its mouth to swallow us whole.

It was a world in which God's clear and palpable presence could not be denied.

This is not our world today.

Rabbi Meir Simḥah Ha-Kohen of Dvinsk, known as the Meshekh Hokmah, writes that this transition from a world driven by miracles to a world where we hardly see them anymore occurred when the Israelites left behind their wandering and entered into the Land of Israel (comments on Deuteronomy 29:3). In the wilderness, in the formative stages of coming into relationship with this strange and foreign Divinity, all of the Israelites' affairs were governed miraculously. It was through miracles that they would come to know and trust God. When they needed food, manna fell. When they suffered from thirst, rocks burst forth. Clouds led the way and fire protected them at night. However, once they entered the Land of Israel, when their relationship with the Divine matured so that their faith no longer depended on miracles, these Divine acts ceased—or at least, they took on a different, and less apparent form. No longer were they provided for through the miraculous, God's hand present in their every step. Now they were to fight their own wars, work their own land, and provide for themselves and their families. For the Meshekh Hokmah, this move from divine interventions to human enterprise marks a healthy and necessary stage in the development of the Jewish people's relationship with God.

And yet, despite this overall transformation, we experience the miraculous creeping into our history and our lives. In his aptly-titled poem poem "Miracles," 19th century American poet Walt Whitman writes:

Why, who makes much of a miracle?
As to me I know of nothing else but miracles,
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of the water,



Or stand under trees in the woods,
Or talk by day with any one I love, or sleep in the bed at night with any one I love,
Or sit at table at dinner with the rest,
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer forenoon,
Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of the sundown, or of stars shining so quiet and bright,
Or the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon in spring;
These with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,
The whole referring, yet each distinct and in its place.

To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same.

To me the sea is a continual miracle,
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the waves—the
ships with men in them,
What stranger miracles are there?

Whitman rejects the idea that we live in a world without miracles. For Whitman, the world is nothing but miracles. Miracles are not about defying nature, but rather they are bound up in the ordinary events of nature itself.

On Hanukkah, we celebrate the two-part miracle of the Maccabees' underdog military victory over the all-powerful Greeks, as well as the miracle of the oil that burned for eight whole days instead of just one night. On this Hanukkah, as we reflect on these two different miracles, we invite you to reflect on the question: what is the place of miracles in our lives today?

As you light the Hanukkah candles each night, bringing a moment of light into darkness, we invite you to use the texts and questions in this reader as an opportunity to reflect on your own relationship to miracles today. Ask yourself: do we still live in a world in which God's presence can be discerned through miracles? To the extent that our relationship to miracles has shifted since the time of the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, how do we experience God's presence today? How do you experience and define the miraculous? Lastly, where does God end in the miraculous and where does human agency begin?



However you define the miraculous, may this be a year of beauty and awe as we look at the world with eyes of wonder.

R. Avi Strausberg and the Hadar Faculty



We say all three blessings in the order below before lighting the candles for the first time.
Before lighting candles on subsequent nights, we say only the first two blessings.

First Blessing

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר
שֶׁל חֲנֻכָּה.

*Barukh attah Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, asher kid'shanu be-mitzvotav
ve-tzivanu le-hadlik ner shel Hanukkah.*

Praised are You, Our God, Ruler of the universe, Who made us holy through Your
commandments and commanded us to kindle the Hanukkah lights

Second Blessing

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם
בְּזִמַּן הַזֶּה.

*Barukh attah Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, she-asah nisim la-avoteinu
ba-yamim ha-hem ba-z'man ha-zeh.*

Praised are You, Our God, Ruler of the universe, Who performed wondrous deeds for our
ancestors in those ancient days at this season.

Third Blessing (First night only)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהֵחֵיָנוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמַּן הַזֶּה.

*Barukh attah Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-olam, she-hehayanu, ve-kייyemanu,
ve-higi'anu la-z'man ha-zeh.*

Praised are You, Our God, Ruler of the universe, Who has given us life and sustained us and
enabled us to reach this season.



Below are short texts to study each night of Hanukkah as you watch the candles burn. You might read and discuss these questions with other members of your household. You might read alone and meditate on the questions. You might choose to call a friend. We offer this collection to accompany you through the eight nights.

NIGHT ONE

Exodus 14:10-18; 21-31

¹⁰As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to God.

¹¹And they said to Moses, “Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt? ¹²Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?’”

¹³But Moses said to the people, “Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which God will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴God will battle for you; you hold your peace!”

¹⁵Then God said to Moses, “Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. ¹⁶And you lift up your rod and hold out your arm over the sea and split it, so that the Israelites may march into the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷And I will stiffen the hearts of the Egyptians

שמות יד:י-יח, כא-לא

¹⁰וּפָרַעְהָהּ הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶת-עֵינֵיהֶם וַהֲגִהוּ מִצְרַיִם | נֹסַע
אֲחֵרֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ
בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-ה':

¹¹וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה הַמִּבְלִי אֵין-קָבְרִים
בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לְמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר
מֵה-זֹאת עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם:
¹²הֲלֹא-זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ
בְּמִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר חַדְל מִמֶּנּוּ וְנַעֲבֹדָה
אֶת-מִצְרַיִם כִּי טוֹב לָנוּ עַבְדָּ אֶת-מִצְרַיִם
מִמֹּתֶנּוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר:

¹³וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָעָם אֶל-תִּירְאוּ
הַתִּיצְבוּ וּרְאוּ אֶת-יְשׁוּעַת ה'
אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲשֶׁר רְאִיתֶם
אֶת-מִצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם לֹא תִסְפוּ לִרְאֹתָם עוֹד
עַד-עוֹלָם: ¹⁴ה' יִלְחָם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם
תִּחַרְשׁוּ:

¹⁵וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה מֵה-תִצְעַק אֵלַי
דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְסַעוּ: ¹⁶וְאַתָּה
הֲרִם אֶת-יָדְךָ וְנִטְתָּ אֶת-יָדְךָ עַל-הַיָּם
וּבָקַעְתָּהוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם
בַּיַבֵּשׁ: ¹⁷וְאַנִּי הִנְנִי מַחְזֵק אֶת-לֵב



so that they go in after them; and I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his warriors, his chariots and his horsemen. ¹⁸Let the Egyptians know that I am God, when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”...

²¹Then Moses held out his arm over the sea and God drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split, ²²and the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and horsemen.

²⁴At the morning watch, God looked down upon the Egyptian army from a pillar of fire and cloud, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. ²⁵He locked the wheels of their chariots so that they moved forward with difficulty. And the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for God is fighting for them against Egypt.”

²⁶Then God said to Moses, “Hold out your arm over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians and upon their chariots and upon their horsemen.”

²⁷Moses held out his arm over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state, and the Egyptians fled at its approach. But God hurled the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸The waters turned back and covered the chariots and the horsemen—Pharaoh’s entire army that followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.

²⁹But the Israelites had marched through the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

מִצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאִכְבְּדָהּ בְּפָרְעָה
וּבְכָל־חֵילוֹ בָּרַכְבוֹ וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו: ¹⁸וַיִּדְעוּ
מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֱנִי ה' בְּהַכְבִּדִי בְּפָרְעָה
בָּרַכְבוֹ וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו:....

²¹וַיִּטֵּן מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיּוּלֶךְ
ה' אֶת־הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קָדִים עֲזָה
כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּשָּׁם אֶת־הַיָּם לַחֲרָבָה
וַיִּבְקְעוּ הַמַּיִם: ²²וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ
הַיָּם בַּיְבֻשָׁה וְהַמַּיִם לְהֵם חוֹמָה מִיְמִינָם
וּמִשְׁמָאלָם: ²³וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ
אַחֲרֵיהֶם כָּל־סוּס פָּרְעָה רֶכְבוֹ וּפָרָשָׁיו
אֶל־תּוֹךְ הַיָּם:

²⁴וַיְהִי בַּאֲשֶׁמֶרֶת הַבֹּקֶר וַיִּשְׁקֹף ה'
אֶל־מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ וְעַנַּן וַיִּהְיֶה
אֶת־מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם: ²⁵וַיִּסָּר אֶת־אֶפְן
מִרְכַּבְתָּיו וַיִּנְהַגְהוּ בְּכַבְדָּת וַיֹּאמֶר
מִצְרַיִם אֲנוֹסָה מִפְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי ה' נִלְחַם
לָהֶם בַּמִּצְרַיִם:

²⁶וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נָטֵה אֶת־יָדְךָ
עַל־הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁבוּ הַמַּיִם עַל־מִצְרַיִם
עַל־רֶכְבוֹ וְעַל־פָּרָשָׁיו:

²⁷וַיִּטֵּן מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיִּשַׁב הַיָּם
לְפָנוֹת בִּקְרָ לְאִיתָנוֹ וּמִצְרַיִם נָסוּ
לְקִרְאָתוֹ וַיִּנְעַר ה' אֶת־מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ
הַיָּם: ²⁸וַיִּשְׁבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת־הָרֶכֶב
וְאֶת־הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכָל־חֵיל פָּרְעָה הַבָּאִים
אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם לֹא־נִשְׁאָר בָּהֶם עַד־אֶחָד:
²⁹וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ בַיְבֻשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם
וְהַמַּיִם לְהֵם חוֹמָה מִיְמִינָם וּמִשְׁמָאלָם:



³⁰Thus God delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians.

Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea.

³¹And when Israel saw the wondrous power which God had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared God; they had faith in God and God's servant Moses.

וַיִּנְשַׁע ה' בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד

מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִצְרַיִם מֵת

עַל־שַׁפַּת הַיָּם: ³¹וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַיָּד

הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיֵּרָאוּ

הָעָם אֶת־ה' וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ בָּהּ וּבְמֹשֶׁה עַבְדּוֹ:

1. As the Israelites flee Egypt, following their new leader Moses at God's command, they are overcome with panic and doubt. They ask, "Did you bring us out only to die?" God responds to their fear and uncertainty with a miracle that defies nature performed by Moses' hand. How do you imagine the Israelites' felt witnessing this miracle? Do you think there was a way for God to earn their faith without the use of nature-defying miracles?
2. Can you imagine a miracle of this nature being performed before you today? How would you feel? What would this do to your experience of faith and your relationship with God?
3. God says to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward." How do you understand this line? Are the Israelites right to hesitate at the edge of the sea? What's the relationship between divine miracles and human agency? What is the human role in this miracle?



NIGHT TWO

1. Talmud Bavli Ta'anit 24b-25a

Rav Yehudah said Rav said: Every day, a *bat kol* goes out and says: The entire world is sustained by Hanina [ben Dosa], my son, but for Hanina, My son, a *kav* of carobs, is sufficient from Friday to Friday (i.e. he and his family were very poor).

His wife would heat the oven every Friday and create smoke, due to embarrassment (to make it appear that she was baking). She had a certain evil neighbor. She said: "Now, I know that they have nothing, so what is all this?" She went and knocked on the door. [Hanina ben Dosa's wife] was embarrassed, and she went into an inner room.

A miracle was performed for, that [the neighbor] saw the oven filled with bread and the kneading basin filled with dough. She said to her, calling her by name: "Bring a shovel, for your bread is burning." She said to her: "I actually went inside for this (to get the shovel)."

A *tanna* taught: She actually [went] to bring a shovel, because she was accustomed to miracles.

1. תלמוד בבלי תענית כד:-כה.

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: בכל יום ויום בת קול יוצאת ואומרת, כל העולם כולו ניזון בשביל חנינא בני, וחנינא בני דיו בקב חרובים מערב שבת לערב שבת.

הוה רגילא דביתהו למיחמא תנורא כל מעלי דשבתא, ושדייא אקטרותא משום כסופא. הוה לה הך שיבתא בישתא, אמרה: מקדי דענא דלית להו ולא מידי, מאי כולי האי? אזלא וטרפא אבבא. איכספא ועיילא לאינדורנא.

איתעביד לה נסא דחזיא לתנורא מלא לחמא ואגנא מלא לישא. אמרה לה "פלניתא פלניתא אייתי מסא דקא חריר לחרמיה! אמרה לה: אף אנא להכי עיילי."

תנא: אף היא להביא מרדה נכנסה מפני שמלומדת בנסים.

1. Thanks to Hanina ben Dosa's greatness, not only is the whole world sustained on his behalf, he and his family are the regular recipients of God's miracles. In this first story, Hanina ben Dosa's wife heats the oven up on Shabbat so that her neighbors will think she has enough food, even though they're so poor that she's unable to make bread for Shabbat. Why is Hanina ben Dosa's wife embarrassed in this story? What's the role of her neighbors in this embarrassment? How else might her neighbors have responded to their lack



of money and bread in the oven? Is a miracle necessary for this story to have a happy ending?

2. At the end of the story, Hanina ben Dosa's wife claims that she was just at that moment bringing a shovel to remove the burning bread from the oven. Why does she say this?
3. There is a short, clarifying *baraita* at the end that reinforces that she did indeed go to get the shovel, that she was not lying, because "she was accustomed to miracles" and expected the oven to fill with bread, in order to save her from embarrassment. How do you understand the last line? What does it mean to be accustomed to miracles? Is this a good thing? A bad thing?
4. How do you think Hanina ben Dosa feels about her situation? On one hand, they are too poor to afford to bake bread for Shabbat and, on the other, they are the regular recipients of miracles due to her husband's merit.

2. Talmud Bavli Ta'anit 25a

One Friday, [Hanina ben Dosa] saw that his daughter was sad. He said to her: "My daughter, why are you sad?" She said to him: I switched a vessel of vinegar with a vessel of oil and I lit the Shabbat lamp with it (the vinegar)!" He said to her: "My daughter, what are you concerned about? He Who said to the oil that it should burn can say to the vinegar that it should burn.

A *tanna* taught: It burned continuously the entire day, until they brought from it light for Havdalah.

2. תלמוד בבלי תענית כה.

חד בִּי שְׁמַשִּׁי חֲזִייה לְבִרְתִּיה דְּהוּוּת
עֲצִיבָא. אָמַר לָהּ: בְּתִי אֲמַאי עֲצִיבִת?
אָמְרָה לִיה: כְּלִי שֶׁל חוּמָץ נִתְחַלֵּף לִי
בְּכִלֵי שֶׁל שֶׁמֶן וְהִדְלַקְתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ אוֹר
לְשַׁבֵּת. אָמַר לָהּ: בְּתִי מַאי אֲכַפֵּת לָךְ?
מִי שֶׁאָמַר לְשֶׁמֶן וְיִדְלֹק הוּא יֹאמַר
לְחוּמָץ וְיִדְלֹק.

תָּנָא: הָיָה דוֹלֵק וְהוּלָךְ כָּל הַיּוֹם כּוּלוֹ עַד
שֶׁהֵבִיאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אוֹר לְהַבְדֵּלָה.



1. Hanina ben Dosa's daughter is distraught that she accidentally lit vinegar instead of oil to burn for Shabbat candles. As a result, they'll soon lose light and will be in the dark for all of Shabbat. Hanina ben Dosa responds by comforting her, assuring her that God will perform a miracle, making the vinegar burn like oil. What would it be like to have Hanina ben Dosa's faith? Do you relate to his faith?
2. How do you think Hanina ben Dosa's daughter felt when he tries to comfort her with this assurance? How do you think she felt after seeing the candle stay lit all Shabbat? How might this affect her relationship with her faith and with God?
3. How are the miracles performed for Hanina ben Dosa's family different than the miracle performed at the splitting of the sea? Do you connect more to one story versus the other? What do you take away from these stories about Hanina ben Dosa's family? How do they affect your understanding of miracles and faith?



NIGHT THREE

Talmud Bavli Shabbat 53b

Our rabbis taught: It happened that a man's wife died, and she left a son to nurse, and he couldn't pay the wages of a wet-nurse. But a miracle was performed on his behalf, and he developed breasts like the two breasts of a woman, and he nursed his son.

Rav Yosef said: Come and see how great this person is that a miracle like this was performed on his behalf!

Abaye said to him: On the contrary, how dishonorable is this person that the order of creation was altered on his behalf!

Rav Yehudah said: Come and see how difficult is a man's sustenance, that the order of creation had to be altered on his behalf!

Rav Nahman said: Know that miracles happen, but food can't be brought into being.

תלמוד בבלי שבת נג:

תנו רבנן: מעשה באחד שמטה
אשתו והניחה בן לינק ולא היה לו
שכר מניקה ליתן, ונעשה לו נס
ונפתחו לו דדין כשני דדי אשה
והניק את בנו.

אמר רב יוסף: בא וראה כמה גדול
אדם זה שנעשה לו נס כזה.

אמר ליה אביי: אדרבה כמה גרוע
אדם זה שנשתנו לו סדרי
בראשית.

אמר רב יהודה: בא וראה כמה
קשים מזונותיו של אדם, שנשתנו
עליו סדרי בראשית.

אמר רב נחמן: תדע, דמתרחיש
ניסא ולא אברו מזוני.

1. While a miracle is performed on the father's behalf, God is absent from this story. The language is all in the passive, "a miracle was performed." Do you think God's absence is significant? What do you make of this choice to describe the performance of the miracle using passive language?
2. There's a debate in this story about whether it is an amazing thing or a problematic thing that creation is altered on this person's behalf so that he can feed his child. What do you make of this debate? What does this teach about what it means to be in need? How else might this person's needs have been met without creation needing to be altered?



3. The father-in-need doesn't ask for help in this story nor does the community offer it. What do you make of that? What might this teach us?
4. What is this story teaching us about miracles?



NIGHT FOUR

Talmud Bavli Ta'anit 20b

There was a dilapidated wall in Nehardea, under which Rav and Shmuel would not pass, although it stood in place thirteen years. One day Rav Adda bar Ahavah came there [to Nehardea]. Shmuel said to Rav;lpv: Come, Master, let us circumvent. [Rav] said to him: It is not necessary today, because Rav Adda bar Ahavah is with us, whose merit is great, so I am not afraid.

Rav Huna had some wine in a dilapidated house and he wanted to move it. He brought Rav Adda bar Ahavah there. He drew him out with tradition (i.e. kept him talking about Torah) until they had removed [all the wine from the house]. As soon as they exited, the building collapsed. Rav Adda bar Ahavah realized and became angry.

[He was angry because] he holds by what Rabbi Yannai said: A person should never stand in a place of danger and say: "A miracle will be performed for me!" lest a miracle is not performed for him. And if you say that a miracle will be performed for him, they will deduct it from his merits.

Rav Hanan said: What is the verse? As it is written: "I have become small from all the mercies and all the truth [that You have showed Your servant]" (Genesis 32:11).

תלמוד בבלי תענית כ:

כי ההיא אשיתא רעיעתא דהוא
בנהרדעא דלא הוה חליף רב ושמואל
ותתה, אף על גב דקיימא באתרה
תליסר שנין. יומא חד איקלע רב אדא בר
אהבה להתם, אמר ליה שמואל לרב:
ייתי מר נקיף? אמר ליה: לא צריכנא
האינדא דאיכא רב אדא בר אהבה בהדן
דנפיש[א] זכותיה ולא מסתפינא.

רב הונא הוה ליה ההוא חמרא ברהוא
ביתא רעיעא ובעא לפנוייה, עייליה לרב
אדא בר אהבה להתם, משכיה
בשמעתא עד דפנוייה. בתר דנפק נפל
ביתא. ארגיש רב אדא בר אהבה איקפד.

סבר לה כי הא דאמר רבי ינאי: לעולם
אל יעמוד אדם במקום סכנה ויאמר,
עושין לי נס, שמא אין עושין לו נס, ואם
תימצי לומר עושין לו נס - מנכין לו
מזכותיו.

אמר רב חנן: מאי קרא? דכתיב "קטנתי
מכל החסדים ומכל האמת" (בראשית
לב:יא).



1. The text above brings two stories in which people are in close proximity to a crumbling wall that is in danger of injuring someone close by. In the first story, Shmuel wants to walk around it in order to avoid danger while Rav says he isn't afraid; he relies on the merit of Rav Adda bar Ahavah who is with them, and assumes that a miracle will be performed saving them from potential collapse. Similarly, Rav Huna, when needing to move wine out of a house that is in danger of collapsing, relies on the merit of Rav Adda bar Ahavah to protect them from any danger. Why is Rav Adda bar Ahavah so angry when the building collapses after they just make it out in time?
2. What do you think Rabbi Yannai meant when he taught, "A person should never rely on a miracle"? How else might you apply this idea? Can you think of circumstances in which people seem to rely on miracles? Is this ever appropriate? When should one not rely on a miracle? How does whether or not one relies on miracles relate to the question of one's faith and belief in God?
3. How does Rabbi Yannai's teaching about reliance on miracles connect to the people's wandering in the wilderness and God's command at the sea to go forward? How does Rabbi Yannai's teaching relate to Hanina ben Dosa's trust that God will transform the vinegar to oil and the statement that his wife was accustomed to miracles (from two nights ago)? Is there a difference between having faith in the performance of miracles and relying on miracles?



NIGHT FIVE

<p>1. Al Ha-Nissim for Hanukkah</p>	<p>1. על הנסים לחנוכה</p>
<p>We thank you for the miracles, for the redemption, for the mighty deeds, for the saving acts, and for the wars that you waged for our fathers in these days, at this season.</p>	<p>על הנסים ועל הפרקו ועל הגבורות ועל התשועות ועל המלחמות שעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה.</p>
<p>In the days of the Mattityahu, son of Yohanan the High Priest, the Hasmonean, and his sons, when the wicked Greece stood over Your people Israel to make them forget Your Torah, and to force them to transgress the statutes of Your will, then did You in Your abundant mercy rise up for them in the time of their trouble; You did plead their cause, You did judge their suit, You did avenge their wrong; You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the arrogant into the hands of them that occupied themselves with Your Torah: for Yourself did You make a great and holy name in Your world, and for Your people Israel You worked a great deliverance and redemption, as at this day. After this, Your children came into the hall of Your house, cleansed Your temple, purified Your sanctuary, kindled lamps in Your holy courts, and fixed these eight days of Hanukkah to thank and to praise Your great name.</p>	<p>סז בימי מתתיהו בן יוחנן כהן גדול חשמונאי ובניו כשעמדה מלכות יון הרשעה על עמך ישראל להשכיחם מתורתך ולהעבירם מחקי רצונך ואתה ברחמיך הרבים עמדת להם בעת צרתם רבת את ריבם דנת את דינם נקמת את נקמתם מסרת גבורים ביד חלשים ורבים ביד מעטים וטמאים ביד טהורים ורשעים ביד צדיקים וזדים ביד עוסקי תורתך ולך עשית שם גדול וקדוש בעולמך ולעמך ישראל עשית תשועה גדולה ופרקו כהיום הזה ואחר כך באו בניך לדביר ביתך ופנו את היכלך וטהרו את מקדשך והדליקו נרות בחצרות קדשך וקבעו שמונת ימי חנכה אלו להודות ולהלל לשמך הגדול.</p>

<p>2. Talmud Bavli Shabbat 21b</p>	<p>2. תלמוד בבלי שבת כא:</p>
<p>What is Hanukkah? Our Rabbis taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the days of Hanukkah are eight. One may not eulogize on them and one may not fast on them. When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary they</p>	<p>מאי חנוכה? דתנו רבנן: בכ"ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון דלא למספד בהון ודלא להתענות בהון. שכשנכנסו יונים להיכל טמאו כל השמינים</p>



defiled all the oils that were in the Sanctuary. And when the Hasmonean monarchy overcame them and emerged victorious over them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil that was placed with the seal of the High Priest. And there was there only enough to light [the *menorah*] for one day. A miracle occurred and they lit from it eight days. The next year, they fixed them those days and made them holidays with Hallel (*lit.* praise) and thanks.

שְׁבַה־יְכֹל. וְכִשְׁגָּבְרָה מַלְכוּת בֵּית
חֲשִׁמוֹנָי וְנִצְחוּם, בְּדָקוּ וְלֹא מָצְאוּ אֶלָּא
פָּה אֶחָד שֶׁל שֶׁמֶן שֶׁהָיָה מוֹנַח בְּחוֹתְמוֹ
שֶׁל כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל, וְלֹא הָיָה בּוֹ אֶלָּא לְהַדְלִיק
יוֹם אֶחָד. נַעֲשֶׂה בּוֹ נֶס וְהַדְלִיקוּ מִמֶּנּוּ
שְׁמוֹנֶה יָמִים. לְשָׁנָה אַחֲרַת קִבְעוּם
וַעֲשׂוּם יָמִים טוֹבִים בְּהִלָּל וְהוֹדָאָה.

1. On Hanukkah, we celebrate the two-fold miracle of the surprising military upset and victory of the Maccabees' over the more powerful Syrian-Greek army, as well as the miracle of the vessel of oil that burned for eight days instead of just one. How are these two miracles different? What is God's role in the performance of these miracles? What is the role of human agency? Which miracle would you say defies nature? In which miracle is God more active? In which miracle are human beings more active?
2. In our liturgy, we choose to commemorate the military victory over the miraculous burning of the oil for eight days. Why do you think we choose to focus on the military victory? What might that teach us about miracles?
3. Often in our personal storytelling of Hanukkah, we tend to focus on the miracle of the oil. In our personal storytelling, why do you think we choose to focus on the miracle of the oil that lasted for eight days?
4. Do you personally feel more connected to one miracle over the other? If so, why?



NIGHT SIX

1. Mishnah Avot 5:6

Ten things were created on the eve of the Sabbath at twilight, and these are they: [1] the mouth of the earth (that swallowed Korah and his congregation), [2] the mouth of the well (that followed Miriam), [3] the mouth of the donkey (that spoke to Balaam), [4] the rainbow (of Noah), [5] the manna, [6] the staff (of Moses), [7] the *shamir* (a tool used in the building of King Solomon's Temple), [8] the letters, [9] the writing, [10] and the tablets (of the Ten Commandments). And some say: also the demons, the grave of Moses, and the ram of our father Abraham (that he slaughtered instead of Isaac). And some say: and also tongs, made with tongs.

1. משנה אבות ה:ו

עֲשָׂרָה דְּבָרִים נִבְרָאוּ בְּעֶרְבַּי
שֶׁבֶת בֵּין הַשְּׁמָשׁוֹת, וְאֵלוֹ
הוּן, פִּי הָאָרֶץ, וּפִי הַבְּאֵר, וּפִי
הָאֲתוֹן, וְהַקֶּשֶׁת, וְהַמָּן,
וְהַמָּטָה, וְהַשְּׁמִיר, וְהַכְּתָב,
וְהַמְּכַתֵּב, וְהַלּוּחוֹת. וַיֵּשׁ
אוֹמְרִים, אֶף הַמְּזִיקִין,
וְקִבְרַתוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה, וְאֵילוֹ
שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ. וַיֵּשׁ
אוֹמְרִים, אֶף צַבָּת בְּצַבָּת
עֲשׂוּיָהּ.

2. Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel (Maharal), Derekh Hayyim on Mishnah Avot 5:6

Therefore, everything created on Friday evening before Shabbat during twilight were things that were above nature and not natural like the things that were created during the six days of creation, rather all of these things are not natural. And all of this is because the twilight of Friday evening is above the six days of nature in the same way that the holiness of Shabbat is above the days of creation.

2. מהר"ל דרך חיים על משנה אבות ה:ו

לפיכך נבראו בערב שבת בין השמשות
דברים שהם למעלה מן הטבע ואינם
טבעיים כמו שנבראו בששת ימי המעשה
שכל אלו דברים אינם טבעיים. וכל זה כי
בין השמשות של ערב שבת הוא למעלה
מששת ימי הטבע כמו שהשבת מצד
קדושתו הוא למעלה מן ששת ימי
בראשית.

3. Dr. Aaron Koller, “Ten Things Created at Twilight and the World Without Miracle”

In sum, the mishnah presents us with a view of the world which is at turns comforting, terrifying, and empowering. It is comforting because, in a sense, all we will need is there already; of this we can have faith. It is terrifying because we can expect no further interventions. “There is nothing new under the sun,” as Kohelet says, and Maimonides quotes that in this context. Nature will not change for us, even if things are going naturally badly.



And it is empowering because God already made the first pair of tongs. With those in hand, we can begin to make more pairs, and truly make the world, which was given to us, a place worthy of God's creation.

1. This *mishnah* in Pirkei Avot teaches that there were ten things that were created at twilight on the eve of the very first Shabbat. The Maharal, in his commentary on Pirkei Avot, teaches that all of these things contain something of the miraculous. Because the twilight of Shabbat is already touched by the holiness of Shabbat and set above the six days of creation, so too anything created during this in-between time contains a touch of the miraculous, above and beyond the bounds of nature. Our Sages teach that these ten miraculous things were created and embedded in our world so that at the moment they would be needed, they would be ready for us to use without requiring further intervention by God. Dr. Aaron Koller writes that this *mishnah* is at turns “comfort, terrifying and empowering.” How do you understand his opening sentence? In what ways is the *mishnah* comforting to you? In what ways is it terrifying? In what ways is it empowering?
2. What does this *mishnah* and Dr. Koller's commentary teach us about the presence or absence of miracles in our world today? What's God's role in our world and in the miraculous? What is the role of human beings?



NIGHT SEVEN

1. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, pp. 46-48

As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder. Awareness of the divine begins with wonder. It is the result of what man does with his higher incomprehension. The greatest hindrance to such awareness is our adjustment to conventional notions, to mental clichés. Wonder or radical amazement, the state of maladjustment to words and notions, is therefore a prerequisite for an authentic awareness of that which is.

Radical amazement has a wider scope than any other act of man. While any act of perception or cognition has as its object a selected segment of reality, radical amazement refers to all of reality; not only to what we see, but also to the very act of seeing as well as to our own selves, to the selves that see and are amazed at their ability to see...

In radical amazement, the Biblical man faces “the great things and unsearchable, the wondrous things without number” (Job 5:9). He encounters them in space and in time, in nature and in history; not only in the uncommon but also in the common occurrences of nature. Not only do the things outside of him evoke the amazement of the Biblical man; his own being fills him with awe.

I will give thanks unto Thee
For I am fearfully and marvelously made;
Wondrous are Thy works;
And that my soul knoweth exceedingly (Psalm 139:14).

2. Marge Piercy, from “The Hunger Moon”

We walk all over the common miracles
without bothering to wipe our feet.
Then we wonder why we need more
and more salt to taste our food.
My old man, my old lady, my
ball and chain: listen, even the cat



you found starving in the alley
who purrs you to sleep dancing
with kneading paws in your hair
will vanish if your heart closes its fist.

1. In *God in Search of Man*, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel teaches that “awareness of the divine begins with wonder” (p. 47), and that we need to cultivate radical amazement and a sense of wonder at not only the “uncommon but the common occurrences occurring in nature” (p. 48). How might we apply this teaching to our thinking on miracles? How do you understand what a miracle is in light of this teaching?
2. The 21st century Jewish poet Marge Piercy writes “We walk all over the common miracles without bothering to wipe our feet.” What do you think she means by that? How does this relate to the next line, “Then we wonder why we need more and more salt to taste our food”? How do you understand the last line that even the cat “will vanish if you close your fist.” What does it mean to close your fist in the context of miracles?



NIGHT EIGHT

<p>1. Talmud Bavli Niddah 31a</p>	<p>1. תלמוד בבלי נדה לא.</p>
<p>Rabbi Elazar said: What is that which is written: “[Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel,] Who does wondrous things alone; and blessed be God’s glorious name forever” (Psalm 72:18-19)? Even the one for whom the miracle was performed does not recognize his own miracle.</p>	<p>אמר רבי אלעזר: מאי דכתיב (תהלים עב, יח) "עושה נפלאות לבדו וברוך שם כבודו לעולם?" אפילו בעל הנס אינו מכיר בנסו.</p>
<p>2. Talmud Bavli Berakhot 54a</p>	<p>2. תלמוד בבלי ברכות נד.</p>
<p>MISHNAH: One who sees a place where miracles occurred on Israel’s behalf says: Blessed is the One Who performed miracles for our forefathers in this place...</p>	<p>מתני' הרואה מקום שנעשו בו נסים לישראל, אומר: "ברוך שעשה נסים לאבותינו במקום הזה"...</p>
<p>GEMARA: For a miracle of many people we bless, but for a miracle of an individual we do not bless!? But wasn't there a man walking along the right side [of the river] when a lion attacked him, a miracle was performed for him, and he was rescued? He came before Rava, who said to him: Every time that you arrive there, bless, "Blessed is the One Who performed a miracle for me in this place."</p>	<p>גמי אניסא דרבים מברכין, אניסא דיחיד לא מברכין?! והא הוא גברא דהוה קא אזיל בעבר ימינא. נפל עליה אריא, אתעביד ליה ניסא ואיתצל מיניה. אתא לקמיה דרבא, ואמר ליה: כל אימת דמטית להתם – בריך "ברוך שעשה לי נס במקום הזה".</p>
<p>And Mar bar Ravina, was walking in a valley of willows and was thirsty for water, a miracle was performed for him and a spring of water was created for him, and he drank.</p>	<p>ומר בריה דרבינא הוה קאזיל בפקתא דערבות וצחא למיא. אתעביד ליה ניסא, איברי ליה עינא דמיא, ואישתי.</p>
<p>Furthermore, once he was walking in the marketplace of Mahoza and a wild camel attacked him. The wall cracked open, and he went inside it. When he came to the willows he blessed: Blessed is the One Who performed a miracle for me in the willows and with the camel. And,</p>	<p>ותו, זמנא חדא הוה קאזיל ברסתקא דמחוזה ונפל עליה גמלא פריצא. איתפרקא ליה אשיתא, על לגוה. כי מטא לערבות בריה: "ברוך... שעשה לי נס בערבות ובגמל". כי</p>



<p>when he came to the marketplace of Mahoza he blessed: Blessed is the One Who performed a miracle for me with the camel and in the willows!</p>	<p>מָטָא לְרִסְתָּקָא דְמַחֲזָא בְרִיהּ: "בְּרוּךְ שְׁעָשָׂה לִי נֶס בְּגַמְלָא וּבַעֲרָבוֹת!"</p>
<p>Let's say: on a miracle performed on behalf of many people, everyone is obligated to bless; on a miracle of an individual, [only] they are obligated to bless.</p>	<p>אָמְרִי: אֲנִיטָא דְרַבִּים — כּוּלֵי עֲלָמָא מִיחֲיָיְבֵי לְבְרוּכֵי, אֲנִיטָא דִּיחֵיד — אִיהוּ חַיִּב לְבְרוּכֵי.</p>

1. In the Niddah passage, Rabbi Elazar offers an interpretation based on the word “alone” in the verse. What does it mean that God performs these wondrous things alone? He answers that sometimes even the recipient of the miracle is not aware that a miracle was performed for them. What do you think Rabbi Elazar means by this? Are there times in which you may have been unaware that a miracle was performed for you? Is it inevitable that sometimes we are unaware that we are the recipients of miracles or is this something we can cultivate awareness around?
2. Whereas the *mishnah* in Berakhot focuses on the obligation of a person to say a blessing when passing by a place where a *mitzvah* was performed for the many, the Talmud offers several instances in which individuals offered the blessing “blessed is the One Who performed a blessing for me in this place,” when passing by a place where a miracle was performed for them individually. Why is it important to offer a blessing when passing by a place where a miracle was performed either for our ancestors or the Jewish people at large as well as where a miracle was performed for us individually? What impact might saying blessing have upon our religious lives? On our faith? Our relationship to God?
3. Are there places at which you feel it would be appropriate for you to offer this blessing as an individual? Are there events in our communal history that you experience as miracles? Are there events in your personal history that you experience as miracles?



While the Israelites may have experienced God’s miracles in a way that was different than we experience God today, our world is no less miraculous. We do not have seas that split nor manna that rains down from the heavens, but we do have everyday occurrences that can be filled with wonder. We also have the ability, through our own hands, with kindness, generosity, and skill, to be the agents of our own miracles. As a community, we can help provide for each other. In her poem, “In the Storm,” Mary Oliver writes:

I know what everyone wants
is a miracle.
This wasn’t a miracle.
Unless, of course, kindness—
as now and again
some rare person has suggested—
is a miracle.
As surely it is.

May we approach the world around us with Heschel’s sense of radical amazement, and may we look to find (and bring!) the miraculous to the everyday, marking those moments with blessing and gratitude.

Wishing you a Hanukkah that is nothing short of miraculous.

