

## **Miracles should only refer to truly supernatural**

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In religious thought, the term *miracle* involves supernatural causes of an event. By definition, a miraculous event is not explicable by natural causes or human-made causes but as a belief that upholds and supports divine intervention in theological religious convictions. Some religious followers normally do not attempt to account for their belief in miracles through science or other evidence-based causes.

Religious leaders regard their adherents' strong faith in miracles as good support for the maintenance of a vibrant religious community and normally may not encourage members to seek hard evidence or alternative natural explanations for miracles.

When good events happen, such as fine weather for an outdoor picnic or a narrow escape in a traffic collision where a devout believer's vehicle causes the death of an occupant in another automobile but saves their own life, they may mischaracterize these events as miraculous. They believe they escaped injury by divine intervention rather than normal natural causes even when there was no divine intervention for the victim who was killed. This event may encourage believers to commit their efforts to serve God more fervently and it may strengthen their belief in future miracles. The event may also encourage them to serve God more devoutly and to accept future supernatural events which may result in additional miracles in their lives. Pursuing this way of thinking, miracles will become more common occurrences and may strengthen believers' faith in future divine intervention.

There will be times however, when some events will not turn out favorably. The onset of cancer or injury or loss of one's job, viewed in supernatural terms will be more or less an evil curse. In ancient times some devout believers thought such unfortunate events were indications of divine displeasure. These events were like miracles in reverse, but they still persuaded adherents to appease God and appeal for favorable miraculous supernatural intervention in their lives.

As knowledge of science and evidence-based thinking gradually grew, some events which were originally regarded as miracles, or curses, caused by supernatural intervention slowly emerged as everyday events which in modern times are now regarded as having their own set of natural causes.

Past failures in medical cures have presently improved to the point of eliminating some types of previous illnesses or misfortunes. Causes for climate change and environmental variations are now better understood as knowledge about excessive carbon dioxide and global warming become presently accepted by most informed citizens. Many of our ancient views about good luck and bad luck are now recognized as having natural causes, some of which have also human causes.

Diseases such as malaria, diabetes, scarlet fever, lung cancers, infantile paralysis and plagues are now understood as having natural causes rather than supernatural causes. While prayer, worship and generous offering of alms were regarded as effective cures in the past, today only extreme biblical literalists refuse to use our best modern medical procedures.

Severe drought and expanded desertification and pervasive human under-nourishment are now more likely seen as caused by human-made neglect rather than supernatural rewards or punishments. When people smoke cigarettes heavily for 60 years of their lives become afflicted with lung cancer, it is now more commonly accepted that they are masters of their own misfortune.

There are words that ought to replace an over-use of the theological term *miracles* when we experience good luck. Wonder, awe, gratefulness, fulfillment, joy, contentment, happiness, satisfaction and marvelous accomplishments express feelings of good luck without attributing good fortune to supernatural causes or uniquely divine interventions. The birth of offspring whether in human life or animal life or biological life is indeed marvelous but reproduction of species is now better understood as wonderful, joyous, and precious, but above all are the results of natural causes rather than miraculous causes.

When bad luck comes to us if we can stop attributing misfortunes to God's displeasure, we free ourselves from guilt and anxiety. We can recognize our

human actions have a part to play in our unfortunate situations as well as in our times of happiness and good fortune.

I am not suggesting the term *miracle* should be completely abandoned. Instead, let us use *miracle* sparingly in our everyday conversations and limit its etymological meaning to appropriate but limited supernatural contexts.