

Do Miracles Prove the Station of God's Messengers?

When asked, "Why do you believe in your religion?" most people think first of miracles. For instance, Muslims attribute astonishing miracles to Muhammad. And they have testimonials (traditions) to support their claim. When confronted with the same question, many Christians think of the birth and resurrection of Jesus. They believe these were His ultimate proofs. More liberal Christians think of Jesus Himself: His words and deeds. Of course, many base their faith on both Jesus as a person and His miracles. Those who consider miracles the prime proofs become disappointed when they learn that many "pagans" also try to prove their beliefs by miracles. For the "pagans" present glowing testimonials about their gods; they attribute to them the most astonishing wonders. How can we tell who is right, who is wrong? We face an impasse, an impossible task. Miracles are definitely unreliable, especially for those who have not witnessed them.

Jesus performed many miracles, but He repeatedly asked people to keep them secret.

See that no one knows about this.
Christ (Matt. 9:30)

See that you don't tell anyone.
Christ (Matt. 8:4)

People were so fascinated by Jesus' miracles, they disobeyed His instructions. "But they went out and spread the news [of miracles] about him all over that region" (Matt. 9:31). We can discern a sense of desperation in this question by Jesus:

Will none of you ever believe without seeing signs and portents?
John 4:48

Would God use as evidence of His power and presence something that He condemns?

Why do you quarrel with Me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?
Exodus 17:2

A wicked and adulterous [disloyal] generation asks for a miraculous sign!
Christ (Matt. 12:39)

Do not put the Lord your God to the test.
Christ (Matt. 4:7)

If our purpose is to please God, we should not ask for proofs He does not approve:

...it is incumbent upon a lowly servant to acquiesce to whatever proof God hath appointed, and not to follow his own idle fancy. If the wishes of the people were to be gratified not a single disbeliever would remain on earth...May God save thee, shouldst thou seek any evidence according to thy selfish desire; rather it behooveth thee to uphold the unfailing proof which God hath appointed. The object of thy belief in God is but to secure His good-pleasure.¹ The Báb

As the Book of Exodus reports, Aaron performed some incredible miracles, far more difficult than the phenomenon of the empty tomb. "But the magicians did the same thing by their secret arts" (Exodus 8:7). What is the value of a faith that rests on proofs with such a fragile foundation—proofs that can be copied by mere magicians?

Unfortunately, many Christians have built their faith entirely on miracles. While traveling in India, I encountered several cults who attributed astonishing miracles to their leaders. Should we accept those cults by such evidence?

In a TV sermon, a famous Christian leader recently said, "Christ has risen! That is the most important fact in human history. The Christian Faith stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Some Christians do not believe in *physical* resurrection of Jesus, among them is a distinguished biblical scholar, Bishop John Spong, who has written a book titled *Resurrection: Myth or Reality?* to disprove it. Is it fitting to build a great religion on a miracle that even some of its devoted and distinguished supporters deny?

The question is not whether Jesus rose from the dead. ***He had the power to raise not only Himself but all the peoples of the earth.*** He was, as Bahá'u'lláh calls Him, "the Lord of the visible and the invisible." And as He Himself declares, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). The question is this: Is it dignified and credible to

base the evidence of the One who has transformed our planet for 2,000 years, and created one of the greatest civilizations the world has ever seen, on an empty tomb? No, the greatness of Christ does not lie in rolling a stone and rising from a tomb, but in His celestial powers to raise a sublime civilization and to lift the hearts and minds of countless millions of spiritually starving and dead to an abundant and everlasting life.

By glorifying miracles, we put a weapon into the hand of every impostor, every cult leader, every deceiver who can manipulate gullible people with a long list of testimonials to his astonishing and miraculous powers.

No, the greatness of Christ does not lie in reviving a body but in restoring the souls of millions for centuries. The evidence of His greatness must be sought in His supreme love and sacrifice, in His character, in His faith, and in the wondrous fruits He brought forth. No one can claim a knowledge and wisdom equal to His, no one can bring forth fruits as fragrant and nourishing as His.

Jim says, "I am the greatest man in the world." "What makes you so great?" Sally asks. "Look," Jim says, "I can lift a truck with one arm." "Does that make you the greatest man?" Sally asks. "Yes," Jim responds, "no one else can do it."

A mighty arm is no proof of greatness. Before the astonished eyes of millions of people, the famous magician David

Copperfield caused the Statue of Liberty to disappear. He also caused a train surrounded by people holding hands to suddenly vanish. Do these achievements make him a great man? Only a great magician, and no more.

Aside from this, all those who wrote or left records of the resurrection were believers and sympathizers. Would a jury be able to come to a convincing decision simply by the word of sympathizers? And if they did, how credible would it be to people living 2,000 years later?

Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb both performed numerous miracles that are well-documented. Yet the Bahá'is refer to them only historically, and not as evidence.

The purpose of showing the irrelevance of miracles to the mission of Messengers is not to undermine the faith of the believers, many of whom have been taught to base their beliefs primarily on demonstrations of miraculous powers by their Savior and Redeemer, but rather to strengthen their faith and devotion. Recognizing the true standards by which God's Messengers distinguish themselves will only validate our beliefs. It will shift our faith from shaky ground to a firm foundation. It will move the evidence from the world of magic to the world of meaning. It will raise the evidence of divine Mission to such supreme heights that no cult leader, no magician, no impostor, no deceiver can ever approach.

Under future topics, we will study the true standards of divine mission again. As we shall see, those standards are infinitely more reasonable and reliable than that of miraculous records.

If miracles are not proofs, then what purpose do they serve? Only this purpose: They can awaken the truth seekers. People will say, "If someone is capable of doing these wonders, maybe I should look into his claim." If used for this purpose, miracles serve a positive function: They awaken and move the slumbering masses to investigate the truth.

We are all attracted and impressed by the glamour of the magical and the miraculous. The popularity of magic throughout history is an evidence of this. As long as we use miracles for inspiration and motivation, we have not done wrong. ***It is the abuse that must be avoided.***

1. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 122.



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