

# Miracles

The Blessing of  
Beginner's Mind

BY CARRIE GROSSMAN

When I was a little girl, every December my mother would take my sister and me to Macy's for our annual Santa Claus pilgrimage. First we would stroll through Santaland and marvel at the toy trains as they made their way to the North Pole. Then, at the end of the line, we would hop on Santa's knee and have our picture taken. It was pure magic in that winter wonderland where absolutely anything was possible: flying reindeer, happy elves, and a guy dressed in red who knew exactly what I wanted without my telling him.

This wild magic lasted a few good years, until the truth was revealed: Saint Nick didn't actually exist. I was devastated. *How could there be no Santa Claus?* At 10 years old it was like hearing Nietzsche say, "God is dead." To top it off, my mother informed me that not only was Santa unreal, but so was the tooth fairy. That was the last straw! It was time to enter adolescence and be miserable.

For most of us, there comes a moment when our childlike innocence rubs up against reality, and the result is a bit like switching from high definition to black and white. No longer do we search the sky for Santa's sleigh. Now all we want is a few moments of peace in between shopping, sighing, and scanning the radio for a station that doesn't play continuous Christmas music.

Although it's easy to forget, holidays like Hanukkah and Christmas are really about miracles: The oil that wondrously burned for eight days when it should only have burned for one, or the auspicious birth of Jesus. But in our crazy consumer culture, we rarely remember these miracles. If we do, they seem like the stuff of fairy tales—highly unlikely, if not impossible. In this day and age, whose mind hasn't been stained by cynicism? C'mon—walking on water, parting the Red Sea? Maybe at Universal Studios!



The word "miracle" is derived from the Latin verb *mirari*—to wonder or marvel. And wonder, said Aristotle, is the beginning of wisdom. Perhaps children who believe in Santa Claus are the truly wise ones, their minds untainted by prejudice and preconception. Without years of self-consciousness under their belts, children believe anything is possible, and they approach life with a beginner's mind. Such a beginner's mind—such an *innocent* mind—opens them to the magic of life. Sure, they don't have mortgages to pay or relationships to process, but perhaps we can learn a thing or three from them about embracing miracles.

While it's true that the school of hard knocks can make even the young at heart a bit somber, that doesn't mean everything has to be so *serious* all the time. We certainly don't have to pretend that Santa is real, but we can allow the childlike innocence deep within us to come out. The question is *how?* Instead of skipping merrily down the sidewalk, many of us feel guilty—like we keep messing up or doing things wrong. This subtle sense of guilt keeps us bound and small. We don't feel like we deserve grace, never mind miracles. But grace doesn't discriminate, and it certainly doesn't come because we deserve it. Isn't that the point?

Miracles are often thought to exceed the laws of nature—*supernatural* occurrences that sim-

ply cannot be explained. But when we get right down to it, can *anything* be explained? Sure, we can dissect the brain and figure out how neurons fire, but do we really understand where neurons come from? We know that the sun produces light through nuclear fusion, but can we explain with total certainty how and why that massive star was born in the first place?

If we break everything down, it all starts to make very little sense, which is far from comforting for the control freaks among us. Quantum mechanics says that everything is almost entirely just space. According to some, this space is permeated by Consciousness, but either way, this solid world is not what we think. The danger, of course, is not whether the *world* is solid, but whether *we* solidify it according to our mental concepts. When we think we know how everything is and should be, there is little room left for unexpected gifts.

Though we may want miracles—the spontaneous disappearance of disease or the freedom of forgiveness—we don't always want to give up the cozy comfort zone of our limiting beliefs. Sometimes it's easier to hold fast to the familiar. After all, miracles show us just how little control we have over our lives. While we can certainly influence our reality through our thoughts and actions, we can't always predict what's going to happen. Miracles are the perfect example: We can't explain them, so

we have to surrender reason and accept that sometimes things unfold by their own intelligent design, without much input from us.

In truth, miracles unfold all the time right before our eyes; we just don't always notice them. Our oh-so-grown-up minds are glazed over with years of conditioning, and many of us keep waiting for the Big Bang, blind to the small bangs that constantly occur. Sitting on our meditation cushion morning after morning, the experience may seem anything but miraculous—just one leg cramp after another, one never-ending train of neurotic thoughts. Maybe if our third eye blew open or we got a hit of clarity about the meaning of life, we would finally believe in miracles. But such experiences don't usually take place. When we wait for them, expecting grace to come in a specific form, we fail to recognize when something amazing actually does happen—say, the perennial paperweight stifling our heart disappears for no known reason.

Most days we forget about the "little" things: The fact that we digest food with no conscious effort, inhale oxygen made by trees, and walk around on a planet that is hurling through endless space. Just another normal day. Because we expect such things to happen, the ordinariness erases the awe. For many of us, a paper cut is just an irritating inconvenience; we rarely appreciate that the slice on our finger will soon vanish. But isn't it miraculous that our wounds heal themselves? When we overlook the ordinary, we miss out on the extraordinary.

If a flower shoots up out of the earth and instantly opens, we may consider that amazing. But isn't it incredible that a bud emerges on a branch, as if out of nowhere, and then slowly, almost imperceptibly slowly, opens its petals? Just like this flower, maybe some miracles unfold over time. Though we may want to transform ourselves right *now*, for all we know, transformation *is* taking place, but we can't see it yet.

Albert Einstein said: "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." The choice is up to us. We can certainly shut down and snicker at the first mention of Santa. But we can also peer beyond his jovial form and acknowledge his gifts in all that comes to us in life. No matter our age, we can become childlike and delight in the mystery of existence. As we open our minds to the unknown, something surprising may come to the fore: The miracle we seek is not outside of us—it *is* us. 🐾

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