

Death, Love, and Life in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig

The Impossible Miracle of Revelation

Rabbi Zach Truboff

Do You Believe in Miracles?

Star of Redemption, 93-99

If miracle is really the favorite child of belief, then its father has been neglecting his paternal duties badly, at least for some time. For at least a hundred years the child has been nothing but a source of embarrassment to the nurse which he had ordered for it—for theology...

For once upon a time miracles were no embarrassment to theology, but on the contrary its most effective and reliable confederate. And it is a fact that today we are barely willing to believe that there was once such a time, and that it has only just passed into history. Just what has happened in the meantime? And how did it happen?...

The entire debate about miracles, beginning with Voltaire and continuing without interruption for an entire century, amazes us today by its almost total lack of principle. The major achievements of the critique—by Voltaire himself, by Reimarus and Lessing, by Gibbon—are always directed at a very specific segment of the miraculous event. The attempt is there made to demonstrate the tradition as incredible, the reasons hitherto advanced for its credibility as inadequate, whatever held out against the critique as explicable by natural causes, that is, without the assumption of a foreseeable and therefore foreseen evolution...

The attempt to explain miracles away rationally is a confession that this belief is beginning to be ashamed of its child. Belief would rather have, precisely, as little of the miraculous to show for, and no longer as much as possible.

The Revelation of Love

Star of Redemption. 169

Love is as strong as death. As strong as death? Against whom is it that death shows its strength? Against the one whom it seizes. And love—certainly, it seizes both, the lover as well as the beloved. But the beloved differently from the lover. It is in the lover that it originates. The beloved is seized; her love is already a response to the being seized, it is Anteros the younger brother of Eros. It is true first for the beloved that love is as strong as death...

Star of Redemption. 177

So love is not attribute, but event, and there is no place in it for an attribute. “God loves” does not mean that love belongs to him like an attribute, like the power to create for instance...

Revelation does not know of any father who is universal love; God’s love is always wholly in the moment and at the point where it loves; and it is only in the infinity of time, step by step, that it reaches one point after the next and permeates the totality with soul.

Star of Redemption. 47-48

It is precisely these lost ones, these hardened ones, those uncommunicative ones, that is to say the sinners, whom the love of a God had to seek, a God not merely worthy of being loved, but who himself loves, independently of the love of men; no, it is just the reverse: a God who is the very One who awakens the love of man. But of course for that, the infinite God would have to become so finitely near to man, so face to face, a named person to a named person, that no reason of the rational ones, no wisdom of the wise ones could ever admit. At the same time it would be necessary that the abyss between the human-worldly and the divine, an abyss which indicates precisely the impossibility of effacing proper names, be recognized and acknowledged so deeply, so really, and as so impossible to leap across by all the ascetic powers of man and all the mystical powers of the world, that no arrogance of the ascetic and no self-conceit of the mystic would ever recognize it in their contempt for the “sound and smoke” of names, be they earthly or heavenly.

Letter to Edith Hahn. January 6, 1920 (His Life and Thought. p. 90)

Do you know why you were unable at that time to know “the meaning of love”? Because one only knows it when one both loves and is loved. Everything else can, at a pinch, be done one-sidedly, but two are needed for love, and when we have experienced this we lose our taste for all other one-sided activities and do everything mutually. For everything *can* be done mutually; he who has experienced love discovers it everywhere, its pains as well as its delights.

Journal, June 19, 1922

A person is able in practice to “educate himself,” “to redeem himself,” etc. However, he is able to do this only at the cost of his human wholeness. In order to remain whole, the I needs its You. One is unable to rid themselves of a headache on their own by placing their hand upon their head, rather they are in need of hand of their beloved—the hand to which they can be drawn into without remainder. (Within his own hand one cannot be drawn into without remainder, for what remains at least is the hand.)... Self-respect, self-education, self-redemption - all perversions. There is a predisposition to it, like self-love, but life should lead people out of this predisposition.

Talmud Bavli, Berachot 5b

R. Hiyya b. Abba fell ill and R. Johanan went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward. He said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand and he raised him. R. Johanan once fell ill and R. Hanina went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward. He said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why could not R. Johanan raise himself? — They replied: The prisoner cannot free himself from jail.

R. Eleazar fell ill and R. Johanan went in to visit him. He noticed that he was lying in a dark room, and he bared his arm and light radiated from it. Thereupon he noticed that R. Eleazar was weeping, and he said to him: Why do you weep? Is it because you did not study enough Torah? Surely we learnt: The one who sacrifices much and the one who sacrifices little have the same merit, provided that the heart is directed to heaven. Is it perhaps lack of sustenance? Not everybody has the privilege to enjoy two tables. Is it perhaps because of [the lack of] children? This is the bone of my tenth son! — He replied to him: I am weeping on account of this beauty¹⁷ that is going to rot in the earth. He said to him: On that account you surely have a reason to weep; and they both wept. In the meanwhile he said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? — He replied: Neither they nor their reward. He said to him: Give me your hand, and he gave him his hand and he raised him.

Letter to Gritli Rosenstock. November 16, 1919

Dear Gritli,

If you go to both of them as you thought, Helene pulls herself together; that then belongs in their theological system of suffering that the dear God inflicts on them. But you have to break the system. You, too, must break their "system". Dearest — if that doesn't happen, nothing has happened at all. She must not fall in love with her sufferings when she already knows that they are sufferings that divine love inflicts on man — "to increase his heavenly reward" as the Talmud says...

Said the visitor: Are these sufferings dear to you? The sick man replied: Neither she nor her wages. Then he shook his hand. He got up and was safe. A system breaks! A question is asked about one of the previous versions - because the persons are in each other, and therefore the one who heals through his hand in one is the sick in another, so the Talmud asks about this version: Then he would have himself can heal?! No prisoner frees himself. So have courage and go to Helene.

The Call of Love

Understanding the Sick and the Healthy, 80-82

When, then, is a name required, and what happens to man when his name is spoken? Here, again, the answer is simple. It can be seen most clearly in the case of the somnambulist [one who is sleep-walking] or a person only half alive. He is forced into the presence of mind, to the internal, to himself. And where was he before? He dwelt in the past, in the “external,” completely dominated by it. He was a particle in the world, ruled by its laws— laws which are always laws of the past and which always act from without. His name liberated him from these laws. It recalls him from the world in which he was imprisoned, and returns him to his Self which, once his name is uttered, is free of the past, devoid of the external. Suddenly, hearing his name spoken, man knows that he is himself. He recognizes that he has the ability to begin again...

תולדות יעקב יוסף דברים פרישת כי תצא

כי הנשמה הוא בחינת השם, כמו ששמעתי ממורי, ונתן מופת – בקריאת שמו והוא ישן נתעורר מהשינה וחזרת הנשמה לגופו וכו'. והוא שרימז הרמב"ם עוררו ישינים, והכוונה כאמור.

Star of Redemption, 201

With the call of the proper name, the world of Revelation enters into real dialogue; in the proper name, a breach is opened in the fixed wall of thingliness. That which has its own name can no longer be a thing or everyone's thing; it is incapable of being entirely dissolved into the genus, for there is no genus to which it could belong; it is its own genus unto itself. It no longer has its place in the world, or its moment in the becoming; rather, it carries with it its here and its now; the place where it is a center, and the moment where it opens its mouth is a beginning.