

Foundation of Faith

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

For many people, when tragedy strikes, faith is challenged. But as the late David Hartman wrote: "If one's whole sense of the life of faith depends upon a miracle-based conception of providence and the biblical promises of reward and punishment, then one risks exchanging God for alternative sources of well-being and security. The fundamental issue in the battle against idolatry is to prevent this from happening."

To believe in God to get stuff is less belief than bargain. If the store is out of stock you will shop elsewhere. To believe in God because of biblical miracles is to make your faith hostage to trumpery and prestidigitation. Do we suppose for a moment that had the stick not turned into a snake Moses would have stopped believing?

Bitachon, trust in God, is not a tent on poles of reward or miracle, but an orientation toward the world. It is understanding that the intangible is behind all we can see; that human beings are greater than stuff alone; that the pageant of life is itself a miracle beyond fathoming. What we get, what we lose, and the stories we are told are powerful and important. But God exists beyond all reckoning and God's wonder beyond all earthly marvels.