

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

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Two Kinds of Miracles

The miracles of the Bible are mostly survival miracles: water splitting so the Israelites can cross, manna dropping in the desert so they can eat, the sun stopping in its course so Joshua can win a battle. But there are also what we might call miracles of extravagance — Samson's strength or Jacob's striped sheep. These are not miracles designed not to help human beings survive, but to help them thrive.

For understandable reasons, miracles of survival tend to be more dramatic and seem more

powerful. In our own lives, when someone is cured, or escapes disaster, we feel a tremendous rush of gratitude. There is a prayer, the gomel prayer, designed to mark such wondrous occasions.

But the awake soul will not ignore the miracles of extravagance. Our ability to fly across the world in hours, or grow more food than we will ever need, or hold all of human knowledge in our pocket — these things should call up gratitude as well. Abundance is, in its way, as praiseworthy as deliverance. We have been given minds and resources that can accomplish astonishing things. As Rav teaches in the Talmud, we should even give thanks that we are able to give thanks.