

# The Lazy God's Guide to Miracles

Steve Cuno

**T**oday's gods are lazy. And it's our fault.

Back in the day, gods established their *bona fides* by staging spectacular miracles. Lotuses sprouted from the baby Buddha's footsteps. Zeus hurled thunderbolts, reversed Earth's rotation, and turned infants into adults. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob parted the Red Sea, split the moon, and, millennia before the United States Congress made it commonplace, gave speech to an ass.

Thrilling audiences with large-scale miracles was a matter of routine. Entertainment value aside, the show of power helped keep the faithful faithful. Wise gods understood that with too much time between miracles, followers might go "a-whoring after other gods," as Yahweh, who liked sexual metaphors, was fond of putting it.

Yet recent years have seen a dearth of big-production miracles. By "recent years," I mean roughly two millennia. Horn players hardly ever demolish cities anymore, and I cannot recall the last time I saw a messiah pull his tax liability out of a fish. Fortunately, faith does not wane, due to the scientifically proven fact that for every absent miracle there are several hundred apologists with as many explanations. Some apologists say grandiose miracles served their purpose and are no longer needful. Others say miracles are ongoing but do not garner the kind of mass media attention they did thousands of years ago. And, for those who take their religion with a side of shame, there's always the reminder that seeking signs makes you wicked and adulterous.

Loath as I am to contradict people who are experts at bending Occam's razor, I think the apologists have it wrong. Large-scale miracles have ceased because *we no longer demand*

*enough of our gods*. We are too willing to call any convenient happenstance a miracle. When a tornado that happens not to destroy a believer's home draws no fewer hallelujahs than lightning sent down to consume a water-soaked sacrificial bull, you can hardly blame a god for dispensing with the bull. As long as no one troubles to study tornados or statistics, why not sit back, crack open a beer, and accept the praise?

One thing about tornadoes: at least they have pizzazz. Some gods have no more self-respect than to capitalize on the utterly banal. Take, for instance, the *I Prayed and Found My Glasses Miracle*, the *Someone Called When I Felt Lonesome Miracle*, the *My Car Collision Broke Only My Arm and Not My Neck Miracle*, and the *My Toast Looks Like Mary Miracle*. (NOTE TO GODS: As of this writing, the *My Toast Looks Like Muhammad but No One Has Beheaded Me—Yet—Miracle* is still available.)

Granted, it isn't for me to say what is and isn't a real miracle. For all I know, all the above qualify. Miracles by lesser-known deities may qualify, too. A celebrated one involved a Woody Allen poster that survived a fire in Venice's *Teatro La Fenice*. Since we're talking Italy, it would be natural to assume that none other than the Roman Catholic god had stepped in. Not so. Scholars credit the miracle to Cinemaes, god of movies and a known Allen fan. Well, most scholars. Some attribute the miracle to Tabloidysses, god of gossip, thanks to whom people still obsess over Allen's marriage to Soon-Yi.

A pilot once told me he'd spotted from the air a solitary pipe reaching several stories up from the rubble of a recently demolished high-rise. Atop the pipe was an intact commode. Here I suspect the work of Defecles, god of potty humor, so named because Uranus

was taken, who surely made certain that some unfortunate was putting the commode to good use at the moment the wrecking ball struck.

I myself was once on the receiving end of a lesser-known deity's miracle. At the midway in Circus Circus Las Vegas, my kids talked me into purchasing five tries at tossing a ring onto an upright Coke bottle. The fifth toss landed true, winning us a teddy bear about twice the size of a self-defrosting refrigerator with side-by-side doors and automatic water and ice dispenser. I deem the event a miracle for two reasons. One, the bottle seemed an order of magnitude larger than the rings. Two, I had carelessly tossed the winning ring over my shoulder. Which god had intervened became clear when I paid the exorbitant cost of shipping the bear home. It was the work of Browneus, god of UPS Stores, most likely assisted by Bottomlineas, god of corporate revenue.

I daresay most people have had encounters with Profanites, god of swearing. The most active and consistently successful of the off-brand gods, she often teams up with Ouchies, god of stubbing your toe; Stainux, god of spilling red wine on new carpet; and Golfus, god of shanks.

So, good news if you're considering a career as a god. Thanks to human gullibility and to ignorance of the laws of probability and chance, you need do nothing at all to add miracles to your resume. It's so effortless, I bet you could do it even if you didn't exist. **FI**

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Steve Cuno is the as-told-to author of Joanne Hanks's memoir, *It's Not About the Sex My Ass: Confessions of an Ex-Mormon, Ex-Polygamist, Ex-Wife*. A recovering marketing writer, Cuno lives and writes in Utah. Why they let him stay is beyond him.