

Families

WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH



How Brigit Got Lands for the Poor

What Are Miracles?

Long ago in Ireland, a few wealthy landholders owned great tracts of farming land, while the peasants were forced up into the rocky hills to eke out a living from the sparse soil. One year the crops went bad. The poor peasants could barely scrape together an onion or a carrot for their supper. Brigit went to one of the richest landholders and said, "The harvest is grim this year, and the peasants need your help."

The landholder replied, "Ah, Brigit, I'll think on it, but in truth, if the people would only work harder they surely could fend for themselves."

A few weeks passed. The situation grew worse. Brigit went again to the landholder and said, "The peasants have no food. They've taken to the hills to eat shamrocks and grass. What will you do for them?"

"Now, Brigit," said the landholder, "Why is it you're up here talking to me, when you should be talking to the peasants about what they can do for themselves? I've no

*A Celtic pagan story
from Ireland, told
by Erica Helm Meade in
her book of wisdom tales,
The Moon in the Well.*

time for this, now be gone with you."

Another week passed, and the situation became grave. Brigit went again to the landholder. In a rage she cried, "You've done nothing to help and now the children are starving! I demand

that you give land to the poor!"

"Well, Brigit," said the landholder, "It couldn't be that bad. 'Tis a fine wool cloak you wear on your back. Let it not be said I'm stingy. Here's what we'll do: You go out to the plain. Choose any spot. Spread your white cloak on the ground, and the farmland it covers, I'll donate to the poor."

"Tax free?" asked Brigit.

"All right, tax free," said the landholder, "but don't ask for anything more."

So that day Brigit and three of her sisters went out to the center of the fertile plain. Each took hold of a corner of the white cloak.

Brigit said, "All right now, pull it taut." They did so, and then Brigit cried, "Now take a step backward." Each of them took

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The Families pages are adapted from Tapestry of Faith lifespan faith development programs. uua.org/tapestry

a step back, one to the north, one to the south, one to the east, and one to the west, and as they did, the cloak expanded. Then Brigit cried, "All right, keep walking!" They did, and the cloak continued to expand until it covered the whole expanse of the plain.

That afternoon, the landholder went up into the tower to look out and survey the lands. At first glance it looked as if a snow had fallen. "The cloak," the landowner whispered, quite in awe. A great, mysterious power was at work.

Seeing Brigit striding up the walkway, the landlord leaned out the window and cried, "Mercy, Brigit, I'll keep to my word! The whole of the plain belongs to the poor, and I'll throw in a hundred bags of oat seed that they might prosper by it!"

"That's fine for tomorrow," said Brigit, "but what will you do for today?"

"For today?" said the landholder. "Why, a feast for today, a feast for all." "What sort of a feast?" asked Brigit.

"Why, a feast of stews, and roasts, and compotes, and mashes, and stuffings, and jellies, and cakes," replied the landholder.

"And bags to take home?" asked Brigit.

"Why of course," assured the landholder.

"Very well, then," said Brigit, "I'll spread the word."

"Aye, Brigit, I'm sure you will, and I don't mind saying, that if you spread the word as efficiently as you spread the cloak, not a soul will miss this feast."

Think about this story. Is it a miracle that Brigit and her sisters stretched the cloak across more and more farmland? What made the landowner change from selfishness to giving? What "great, mysterious power" amazed the landowner?

EXPLORING TOGETHER

What amazes you? What "blows your mind?"

Early humans may have thought it miraculous when a seemingly dead branch grew leaves again in the spring. Today, we understand a lot about the cycles of life. Does that mean there aren't as many miracles?

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Miraculous Meditation

Sit comfortably and take a few deep breaths. Imagine yourself getting up in the morning. What do you do first?



Then what? In your mind, move through a typical day. Now, imagine yourself coming to a stop. Where are you? What is around you? Feel the

The Mystery of the Sliding Rocks

Would you believe that large, heavy rocks can move, apparently on their own?

In Death Valley, Arizona, a large, flat area known as Racetrack Playa has many of these moving rocks. People puzzled over this for years! A writer in National Geographic magazine said:

Rocks as big as microwave ovens go zipping across the desiccated [dry] mud for distances of more than half a mile. ... There are over 150 of these roving rocks. But no one has ever seen them move.

No one saw them move. But people noticed tracks, hundreds of feet long, that the rocks left in the ground. Sometimes the tracks showed two rocks had traveled side by side, until one abruptly took another direction to the left, to the right, or even backward.

What do you think makes these stones slide?

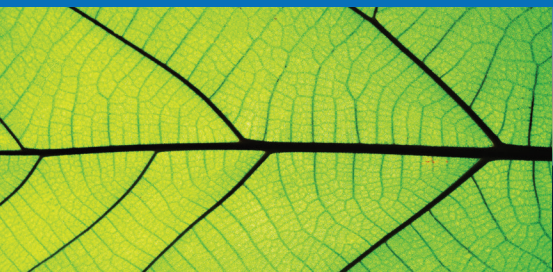
Five years ago, scientists figured it out: A pond formed on the playa, then froze. As the ice broke apart, the wind pushed the pieces in different directions, and the ice pushed the rocks. When the ice melted and evaporated, the only evidence was tracks in the mud and rocks in new positions.

Technology, including video cameras, GPS, and weather analysis software, helped solve the mystery.

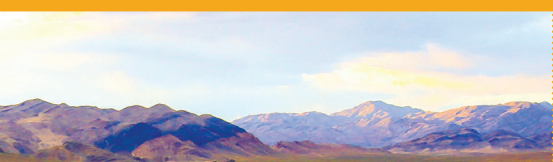
How do you feel after reading this story? Are you happy to have a rational explanation for the sliding stones? Are you disappointed that the mystery has been solved? Somewhere in between?

Mark how you feel.

Unitarian Universalism celebrates the awesomeness of sliding stones AND using cameras and computers to learn how they slide.



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Happy!



10

9

8

7

6

5

4

3

2

1



Disappointed!

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Wow! How?

Pick a scenario that some would consider a miracle. Talk with siblings, parents, friends about how it may have happened. Is there any way to know the ultimate answer?

- A sports team you follow had a disappointing season. They fell out of the competition early, but drew a “wild card” to play in the finals! Then, they won first place.
- Suddenly, a big, bright rainbow appears in a cloudless sky.
- Human life exists.



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Crossing “State” Lines

Get a piece of ice and explore the states of water.

1. Look closely at the ice. Look for lines or shapes inside it.
2. The ice is melting. Can you make it melt more quickly? Touch it. Try something else. What makes it melt? Why?
3. With adult help, heat the ice in a pan. Watch as ice changes to water and then to vapor.



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How can one thing, water, take such different forms?



What Do We Make of the World's Wonders?

A sunflower's bloom. A tyrant's change of heart. An online fundraiser that overwhelms a family with community support. Any of these might inspire wonder and awe. Yet, if asked to define any of these as a "miracle," UUs may hesitate.

Some UUs grew up in faith traditions that ascribe miracles to God or Providence. Are you someone who has come to a liberal, creedless faith because such explanations fell short? Someone passionate about the power of human agency?

Others feel uncomfortable with "miracles" because the concept seems to challenge rationality. Some may think our fourth Principle, "a free and responsible search for truth and meaning," means UUs prefer science to mystery.

In a scientifically knowledgeable, technology-heavy culture, even children know there are physical explanations for seemingly miraculous events such as an elevator ride or the appearance of a rainbow. Knowing how things work—from atom to universe, from cell to brain—is good. However, at this moment in human history, where religious ideas fiercely compete and scientific advancement accelerates, our faith has something important to say about miracles.

Embrace the two truths of a miracle: its mystery and the "how and why" of a rational explanation. Acknowledge different kinds of miracles, from the ordered beauty of Earth and all life on it to the human capacity to transform oneself and others to bring forth love and justice.

■ How can we support children to experience the miraculous religiously while affirming the power of human agency to make things happen?

■ How can we help young people understand there is no conflict between the awe we might feel and the science and history behind an awe-inspiring thing?



Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child—our own two eyes. All is a miracle.

— Thich Nhat Hanh

Miracle:
An unexpected event
or revelation that brings
an outcome one has
hoped for, despaired of, or
possibly never even
imagined

FAMILIES: WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

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