

why do people believe and want to believe in miracles?

There is no important or needed benefit in believing in a miracle or in a spell. The person who thinks they believe is scared into believing or simply just wants to believe. Either way belief in the supernatural is bad for it is not to be trivialised like that. Even if the supernatural exists you only truly respect it by believing in it for solid and carefully checked reasons.

Some think that, "Nobody just wants to believe for the hell of it. It is about wanting the miracle to be evidence to attract sceptics to the religion which amounts to wanting people to go under the authority of the religion's leaders. Most of us have no interest in miracles and get by without thinking of them and even live excellent lives." So that would be bad too. It is using miracles to win an argument and to spite others.

Religion and occult and psychic beliefs are all about wanting to believe in the supernatural. Why do people want to believe in it when it may not benefit them? The supernatural obviously does not help everybody. Or is it about advocating something that gives you an excuse for telling others what to think and do? The supernatural is a power that claims to have authority. Its bigger than you so it demands respect and maybe reverence and obedience. The supernatural being bigger than us and more informed thereby gets the right to be obeyed. It makes sense to obey it even if it is not always truthful. Those who say they do not believe in the supernatural show by their actions that they do. For example, take the Communists who treat The Communist Manifesto and other works as infallible and to be obeyed. Nothing human is necessarily error-free. But to treat any leader or book as inerrant shows that the supernatural is at the back of your mind and somehow they are guided by something to make them infallible. Belief in the supernatural opens the door to accepting a leadership or authority as worthy of blind faith. It does that intrinsically so it is always bad. It is also intrinsically about authority. And you want there to be an authority principally so that you can co-operate with it to control others. We sceptics then do the right thing in mistrusting devotees of the paranormal and supernatural.

The crave for the infallible supernatural authority is behind even ostensibly secular totalitarian regimes. There would be great peace on earth if this crave were recognised and if people grew out of it.

Inexplicable is one thing. Unexplained is another. There is no way to tell the difference. The religious guess that certain things are inexplicable. They guess that they are or may be miracles. What is inexplicable is not necessarily a miracle. A miracle is a supernatural act performed by a supernatural being such as God.

Religious people accuse people who assume there are no real miracles at all of making assumptions and of being unfair and biased. They ignore the fact that it is rational and human to react with doubt to miracle tales. What do they expect? Doubt is the default and natural reaction. So religion expects us to suppress our natural instinct in order to believe what it wants. That is neither good or fair. It would be dangerous if we suspended doubt upon hearing miracle tales. We would soon have no reality check.

Religious people are only guessing what is a miracle and what is not and they have the audacity to criticise those who suspect all miracles are really not miracles at all as being biased. They even accuse them of refusing to admit the evidence for miracles. But that is exactly what they do themselves! If you do not let the evidence tell you what is a miracle and only judge something a miracle if it suits you and your religion that is blatant disregard for evidence. It is better to be dissatisfied with the evidence for miracles like sceptics are than to take the religious approach. The religious only use evidence as window-dressing not as a reason to believe. So who is the most honest? The religious person or the sceptic?

Many people want to believe in miracles so badly that they end up becoming superstitious fools.

Why do people want to believe in a supernatural sign or miracle? For one or more of these reasons.

We have already seen how belief in the supernatural means belief in authority - that is useful to those who have an agenda. If you have no power, you can satiate much of your crave for it by seeing yourself as a co-worker with a god who has authority. You share in it. This pride is the driving force behind institutions such as the Catholic priesthood.

Because they fear that there is no power out there bigger than nature that can save them from harm so they want to see evidence that it exists. Some do not care if the evidence is really there as long as it looks like it is there. The evidence for a claim must be in proportion to the strength of the claim. A supernatural event needs evidence of an exceptional standard.

Because they want to feel special and favoured by being a witness to a supernatural sign from God so that they can feel they are better or wiser than other people.

Because they see their moral flaws and want a sign from God that he doesn't really care about those flaws and has forgiven or ignored them. They want assurance that they can hurt others and avoid consequences.

Because they want a miracle cure for themselves or others.

Because they want to use the sign as sectarian propaganda in favour of their religion.

Because the signs call for prayer and prayer makes you feel good about doing nothing. You feel you are giving the responsibility for caring for others to God. And so you are. When you ask him to help people it becomes his responsibility so you can put your feet up in your ivory tower and relax. To ask God to help people is not to help them yourself. Joan asks Jeff to help Andrea and he helps her. She does not make Jeff do it so it is Jeff that is helping Andrea and Joan has done nothing to help. One sign of the danger of prayer is how long it took Christians to do much good - the good was really done by heretics and those who mixed their religion with humanism - and Islam which prays far more is still way behind. Praying to do well in an exam should make you less likely to do as well as you can. You would not be praying if you trusted your own ability. And so you think divine magic will help and it makes you a little lazy. Prayer feeds on our doubts about ourselves and helps cause religious bigotry. If prayer helps, it helps in spite of itself.

Because they are irrational and want to be deluded. The only thing that can prove there is a God is the miracle of the future being foretold in great detail. You need the names of the people, the times and the places. But nobody cares about that. They want apparitions and holy water and bleeding statues.

Every single one of these reasons is a disgrace. The first one seems the least harmful but the problem is that if you need a miracle to feel that God cares for you then there is something amiss. It shows you don't really have faith. You don't have faith in your own adaptability in the turbulence of life. You will fear challenges and threats to your faith. You are well on the road to becoming a bigot. Indeed your attitude is already bigoted.

The only right reason to believe in a miracle is that the evidence tells you it probably happened. You will believe whether you want to or not if the evidence is good enough. In fact, people who believe for the right reason are rare and often misguided. Most people want to believe and when they talk about the evidence, it is about justifying the miracle because they want to believe and not because they want it to be the truth.

People are afraid of the way the universe works. Its frightening to think that some terminal illness, for example, can befall us. We want to be able to control what can happen so that we will be safer. But we cannot control very much. So we then attach ourselves to a power that we believe can take control and protect us. It makes us feel safer.

People either hope they will be saved by a miracle or that the power will take control so that they will never need one and will be looked after.

They are comforted by this thought.

To summarise, they may think that miracles show us something of the goodness of God.

Those are the heart reasons for believing.

They are not reasons at all. Your child fearing the dentist does not mean the child should live in hope that the agony of toothache will go away by itself.

The heart reasons tend to make those who profess to believe in miracles very intolerant of having their miracle beliefs criticised or examined. They tolerate superficial examinations but they do not like anything deeper.

They are intolerant and choose to distort what the critics say.

They intolerantly reject critical views without considering them properly.

They provoke hatred against the critics.

They claim that the critics are disrespecting their views by examining them - utter bullying nonsense. We can be perfectly good people and put things to the test.

A small minority believe in miracles not because they want to but because they think there is really sufficient evidence for them. They will not argue and get angry if their belief is criticised as they are open to new ideas and to changing their mind. All who regard evidence highly are like that.

People want to believe in miracles because they want proof that some power can intervene when the time is right and stop

life getting too bad or the world from getting too bad. The mature approach is to deal with this fear and not be telling yourself that magic is going to help. You don't want to end up with a new fear - that the miracles might be nonsense and lies. Nor do you want using faith as an opiate. You need to be realistic about what can happen and consider what the worst outcome could be and learn to cope with that. Faith in miracles does not help - it may make you feel better but it is not about your feelings but about what you are going to do to help the world.

People want to believe in the supernatural for it is comforting to think there are powers that can overcome evil and suffering. This is actually appalling because instead of looking for beliefs to comfort ourselves with we should go out and comfort people. "To comfort rather than be comforted." That way we will start to feel better. Human nature prefers to feel good without having to rely on dwelling on it. Dwelling on it takes the fun out of it.

Encouraging belief in miracles then is a terrible thing. That miracle claims are intrinsically irresponsible matters as much as whether or not a miracle really happened. Consider people not just the evidence allegedly in favour of miracles. If the evidence says a miracle happened then we may believe, but we cannot be happy about it.