

A good argument can be made that the luckiest human being in the world lives in Florida. You probably never heard of him, but last year, 67 year-old James D. Bozeman Jr., won the multimillion dollar Lotto jackpot -- a second time. What an unbelievable miracle!

In 2012 the real estate agent and pensioner overcame odds of 13,983,816 to one to win a \$10 million jackpot. In August 2013, Mr. Bozeman won a \$3 million jackpot, for a second time. And get this: Both of the winning tickets were purchased at the same Edgewood, Fla., 7-Eleven. Store owner Jim Hemani said,

*"We're the only convenience store in the state of Florida that sold two winning lotto tickets since the inception of the Florida Lotto."*

The odds of cleaning up twice were 195,547,109,921,856 to one. Two hundred *trillion* to one! What does a number like that mean? Imagine one life preserver thrown somewhere in some ocean and there is exactly one turtle in all of those oceans, swimming underwater somewhere. Someone with a bit too much time on his hands calculated the probability of that turtle sticking its head out of the water — in the middle of that life preserver. On one try. The odds are 700 trillion to one -- just about three times less likely than twice winning the Florida lottery.

What is the lucky Mr. Bozeman doing these days? He says he is now figuring out the next set of numbers in hopes he'll score big again.

Do you believe in miracles?

Have you ever had a miracle happen to you?

If your answer to one of these questions is 'yes', then Chanukah is the holiday for you. A central theme of Chanukah is miracles.

-- In our three daily prayers we recite *al ha'nissim* ('For the miracles') that focuses primarily on the miraculous victory of the Maccabees.

-- We light the Chanukah menorah to recall the miracle of the small flask of oil that lasted eight days

-- When lighting the Chanukah menorah we recite *she'asah nissim* ('The One Who performed miracles'). So important is this blessing that in the event a person will be unable to light a menorah on a given night, should he happen to see any lit menorah while walking, he is obligated to recite the blessing of "*she'asa nissim*," acknowledging and praying that G-d, who performed miracles for our ancestors once, may do so again today.

This topic of miracles raises a question: Just what is a miracle? Upon brief reflection, the answer to this question doesn't appear so clear-cut. Doesn't it seem that at times, the word 'miracle' is thrown around somewhat casually?

In 1933 Kraft Foods developed a new dressing similar to mayonnaise, but as a less expensive alternative. Ever hear of 'Miracle Whip'? The machine that made sure that the ingredients -- including 20 different spices -- could be thoroughly blended was called 'The Miracle Whip'. And so too, the product. Is 'Miracle Whip' really a miracle?

A 1960's/70's musical group produced a tune, "The Tracks of My Tears", that was chosen as one of the Top 10 Best Songs of All Time. The group itself was ranked # 71 on Billboard's 100 Greatest Artists of All Time. Ever hear of Smokey Robinson and the Miracles? A great rock group? Sure. But was there really anything miraculous about 'The Miracles'?

The "Miracle on Ice" is the name in American popular culture for a men's ice hockey game during the 1980 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid, New York. The United States national team, made up of amateur and college players and led by Coach Herb Brooks, defeated the Soviet Union national team, which had won the gold medal in six of the seven previous Olympic games. In his emotional countdown to the conclusion of the game, announcer Al Michaels exclaimed, " Five seconds left in the game. *Do you believe in miracles?! YES!!!*" In 1999, Sports Illustrated named the "Miracle on Ice" the Top Sports Moment of the 20th Century. But was it a 'miracle'?

On the other hand, there are some things out there that REALLY get our attention and are much closer to what most of us consider to be a miracle.

This past September, Florida woman Ruby Graupera-Cassimiro "died" when her heart stopped and doctors exhausted efforts to revive her. In a flash, hospital personnel from many divisions arrived and began CPR to save the woman's life. This went on for nearly three hours, and at some point, the woman's heart stopped beating for nearly an hour. Staff took turns pumping Ruby's chest and used defibrillators and shock paddles, to no avail.

Family members were called into the room after the delivery of the shocking news. At the precise moment doctors were about to make the official announcement of death, the heart monitor machine registered an audible and visible "blip." It was then followed by a succession of beats, which indicated life. The woman appeared to be resurrected from the dead.

Though it varies from person to person, on average 3 minutes is the maximum time where person can stay alive without oxygen.. After three minutes, severe brain damage is likely. After the 10-minute mark, most brain cells are dead and the patient is unlikely to recover. And after 15 minutes, survival is virtually impossible. However, just a day without a pulse and circulating oxygen in her body, Ruby Graupera-Cassimiro was not only resuscitated and "brought back from the dead," she was up and talking to family and friends. Doctors and scientists are calling it a modern-day medical miracle.

Dr. Anthony Dardano, president of the hospital's medical staff in Boca Raton, said Ruby's case is among the most rare things he's ever witnessed.

*"There's very few things in medicine that I've seen, working in the trauma center myself and doing all the things that I do, that really were either unexplainable or miraculous. And when I heard this story, that was the first thing that came to my mind."*

So. What in essence is a miracle in Judaism?

Here are the words of the Rav, Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik:

*"The word 'miracle' in Hebrew does not possess the connotation of the supernatural. It has never been placed on a transcendental level. 'Miracle' describes only an outstanding event which causes amazement."*

In other words, a miracle does not necessarily have to be understood to involve a change in or a suspension of the laws of nature. A miracle can be an occurrence that is wondrous, outstanding, or amazing. And this idea is reflected by the origin of the English word 'miracle.'

The word 'miracle' belongs to a small family of English words originating from a Latin derivative of \*mirare, to 'look at.' This was closely related to classical Latin mirari 'wonder at' (a derivative of *mirus* 'wonderful'), which passed into Old French as *mirer* 'look at', source of English mirage. Based on *mirari* were Latin *mirabilis* 'wonderful' -- source of English admire, marvel and miracle. Also, etymologically related is 'mirror', something you 'look at' yourself in.

The Tenach is filled with supernatural miracles; the 10 Plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the sun standing still in the sky. Many open miracles are described in the Talmud, like the story told of one Friday eve before Shabbos, and the great Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa asked his daughter why she appeared sad. She responded that she mixed her oil and vinegar canisters, and accidentally poured vinegar into the lamp, thereby extinguishing their only flame. Rabbi Chanina responded to her, "Why should this matter? The One who said oil should ignite, can say that vinegar should ignite." The Talmud records that in fact the lamp did ignite, and remained lit through Shabbos, until Saturday evening.

If the word 'miracle' describes any outstanding event that causes amazement, what are we to make of supernatural miracles? According to the Ramban (Nachmanides, 13th century Spain), at times, G-d provides supernatural miracles in order to teach us that everything we experience is a miracle. Is the birth of a child less miraculous than the splitting of the Red Sea? Everything is a miracle; the miracles we've become used to we call 'nature.' Our task is to open our eyes and simply look at ('mirer') the hand of Hashem in all occurrences.

I'd like to conclude with the following story.

The day following Chanukah, Chaim decided he had gained a few too many pounds from over-indulging in sufganiyot and latkes. Chaim took his new diet seriously, even changing his driving route to avoid his favorite bakery. One morning, however, he arrived at work carrying a gigantic coffee cake. Chaim's co-workers scolded him, but a smile remained on his face.

This is a very special coffee cake -- a MIRACLE coffee cake," Chaim explained. I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning, and there in the window was this beautiful looking cake. I felt that it wasn't an accident, so I prayed, and said, 'Hashem, if you want me to have the coffeecake, let me have a parking place directly in front of the bakery.'

"And sure enough," Chaim continued, "the eighth time around the block, there it was!!"

In our daily prayer of Modim, we thank Hashem for *nisecha sh'bchol yom ee'manu* -- the miracles that are with us, daily. While we might not often see miracles of the magnitude of multiple lottery winners and improbable medical recoveries, that doesn't mean we aren't surrounded by the regular occurrence of smaller miracles.

Miracle Whip *is* also a miracle! Let us open our eyes to the miracles that occur *b'zman ha'zeh* -- *in this time*, as we say in the blessing for lighting Chanukah candles.