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Your main commentary should be focused on *the progressive aspect*. Other topics may also be addressed.

I had been brought up in the Jewish religion—my family went to the temple every Friday, I was sent to what we called “Sunday school,” and I even studied Hebrew for a while—but at the same time, my father was telling me about the world. When I would hear the rabbi tell about some miracle such as a bush whose leaves were shaking but there wasn’t any wind, I would try to fit the miracle into the real world and explain it in terms of natural phenomena.

Some miracles were harder than others to understand. The one about the leaves was easy. When I was walking to school, I heard a little noise: although the wind was hardly noticeable, the leaves of a bush were wiggling a little bit because they were in just the right position to make a kind of resonance. And I thought, “Aha! This is a good explanation for Elijah’s vision of the quaking bush!”

But there were some miracles I never did figure out. For instance, there was a story in which Moses throws down his staff and it turns into a snake. I couldn’t figure out what the witnesses saw that made them think his staff was a snake.

If I had thought back to when I was much younger, the Santa Claus story could have provided a clue for me. But it didn’t hit me hard enough at the time to produce the possibility that I should doubt the truth of stories that don’t fit with nature. When I found out that Santa Claus wasn’t real, I wasn’t upset; rather, I was relieved that there was a much simpler phenomenon to explain how so many children all over the world got presents on the same night! The story had been getting pretty complicated—it was getting out of hand.

Santa Claus was a particular custom we celebrated in our family, and it wasn’t very serious. But the miracles I was hearing about were connected with real things: there was the temple, where people would go every week; there was the Sunday school, where rabbis taught children about miracles; it was much more of a dramatic thing. Santa Claus didn’t involve big institutions like the temple, which I knew were real.

35 So all the time I was going to the Sunday school, I was believing everything and having trouble putting it together. But of course, ultimately, it had to come to a crisis, sooner or later.

The actual crisis came when I was eleven or twelve. The rabbi was telling us a story about the Spanish Inquisition, in which the Jews suffered terrible tortures. He told us about a particular individual whose name was Ruth, exactly what she was supposed to have done, what the arguments were in her favor and against her—the whole thing, as if it had all been documented by a court reporter. And I was just an innocent kid, listening to all this stuff and believing it was a true commentary, because the rabbi had never indicated otherwise.

45 At the end, the rabbi described how Ruth was dying in prison: “And she thought, while she was dying”—blah, blah.

That was a shock to me. After the lesson was over, I went up to him and said, “How did they know what she thought when she was dying?”

He says, “Well, of course, in order to explain more vividly how the Jews suffered, we made up the story of Ruth. It wasn’t a real individual.”

55 That was too much for me. I felt terribly deceived: I wanted the straight story—not fixed up by somebody else—so I could decide for myself what it meant. But it was difficult for me to argue with adults. All I could do was get tears in my eyes. I started to cry, I was so upset.

60 He said, “What’s the matter?”
I tried to explain. “I’ve been listening to all these stories, and now I don’t know, of all the things you told me, which were true, and which were not true! I don’t know what to do with everything that I’ve learned!” I was trying to explain that I was losing everything at the moment, because I was no longer sure of the data, so to speak. Here I had been struggling to understand all these miracles, and now—well, it solved a lot of miracles, all right! But I was unhappy.