

## BUDDHISM AND MIRACLES

On one occasion, it is recorded in the Kevatta Sutta, the Blessed One was sojourning a vihara in the City of Nalanda. At that time Kevatta, the son of a leading citizen there, came to see the Blessed One and in the course of his conversation requested that He should send a Bhikkhu possessed of psychic powers to perform some miracles in Nalanda, so that the people of that City would be better convinced of the Truth of the Teaching of the Buddha. Kevatta made this request three times and the Blessed One refused to accede to this request all three times stating that He did not extort the Bhikkhus to perform miracles.

Thereafter the Blessed One proceeded to explain to Kevatta the reason for this refusal. "There are", said the Buddha, "three kinds of miracle namely, first, that kind of miracle where a Bhikkhu possessed of psychic powers can make one appear as many, many appears as one, walk in the air and through walls and rocks and on water as on land and performs such others acts. Then a person without Saddha would say that in Gandhara there were a number of ascetics living and amongst them was one who practised the art call Gandhari and therefore this was nothing new. "Therefore it is", proclaimed the Blessed One "that I disapprove of such cheap performances."

Secondly, there is also the miracle of being able to read other's thoughts. A person possessed of such a power is able to say when another has joy or sorrow or say the thoughts in the latter's mind. Such a person can also state how another's mind works. Then a sceptic would say that there is a practice known as Chintamani and it is by virtue of that power that a Bhikkhu is able to read another's mind. "Thus," said the Buddha "such a performance is also cheap and common, and therefore it is that I disprove of such a miracle."

"But, Kevatta," said the Blessed One, "the third kind of miracle which I call the Miracle of Persuasion. There, the Bhikkhu exhorts as follows, think thus, do not think thus, call to mind the following, do not call to mind these other, abandon these and lead your life for such and such attainments. Such a Bhikkhu proclaims that there has appeared in this world the Tathagatha who is the Blessed One, the All-Enlightened One, possessed of Knowledge and Virtue, Omniscient, Worthy, Knower of Worlds Well gone, An Incomparable guide of men, Teacher of Gods and men, Enlightened and Happy. Such a Bhikkhu also proclaims that the Blessed One has also by virtue of His Supreme Wisdom understood the entire world of beings consisting of Devas, Brahmas, Maras, Kings and men and all planes of living beings. This Bhikkhu also further sets forth that the Blessed One has proclaimed to the world the Dhamma which is excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle and excellent in the end,

which Dhamma provides, the path to the Unshakeable Deliverance of the mind and the attainment of Nibbana.

The attainment of the psychic powers which enable the performance of the First and Second kinds of miracles referred to above is possible outside the Teaching of the Buddha. There are the Iddhi Powers and the ability to read other's thoughts which are two of the five Supernormal Powers referred to as Pancha Abhinna in the Texts. These powers are gained by the practice of Samatha Bhavana or Concentration – Meditation, and the Attainments of the four Ecstasies or Absorptions. There were ascetics who gained these powers even before the time of the Buddha. In the Teaching of the Blessed One, the attainment of such powers is incidental and not the main objective. Therefore, it seems that the Blessed One did not approve of His Disciples performing miracles. In fact, He expressly forbade them to do so.

On the contrary what He extorted the Bhikkhus to do was to be virtuous, control of the senses, practise mindfulness and clear and then retire to a forest dwelling, the root of a tree or an empty place to practise concentration of mind. There his mind becomes tranquil and attains to one pointedness and gradually reaches the Four Absorptions or Jhanas. This is the Miracle of Persuasion “Thus, Kevatta”, said the Blessed One “the mind of the Bhikkhu being concentrated, free from defilements, agile, pliable, workable and not easily distracted turns to the attainment of Insight Wisdom. He contemplates thus – “This body of mine consists of the four Primary Elements, has come into being because of my parents and grows by means of food. It is impermanent, changing, breaking up and has the nature of ending in dissolution. This mind is associated with this body and tied to it”. Meditating thus, by virtue of the development of his mind the Bhikkhu proceeds to create another body like his own. This is also the Miracle of Persuasion. In his manner the Bhikkhu attains to the six Supernormal Powers, namely, (a) Iddhividhanna or the ability to perform miracles, (b) Dibbasotanana, the ability to hear sounds in the distance, (c) Paracittavijananana, ability to read others thoughts, (d) Pubbenivasanus-satinana or the ability to recall previous births, (e) Dibbacakkunana or the Divine Eye, (f) Asavakshayakkaranana or the Wisdom that annihilates all defilements and reaches Nibbana. This is the true Miracle of Persuasion. “Thus”, proclaimed the Blessed One, “the mind of the Bhikkhu is liberated from the desire for sense pleasures, from craving for existence and from ignorance. The Bhikkhu knows when his mind is thus liberated that his mind has been liberated, that rebirth is ended, that he has fulfilled the Noble Task, that he has done what has to be done, and that there is nothing further to do. In other words, he becomes an Arahant or Holy One and attains the Unshakeable Deliverance of Mind. “This is the miracle, Kevatta,” proclaimed the Buddha “which is the Miracle of Persuasion.”

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