

[MIRACLES](#)

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MIRACLES

Miracle is almost another word for religion.
For once one witnesses a miracle,
The worship of God follows effortlessly.
Here we explore some of the wondrous stories
Of Sanatana Dharma and beyond.

By any measure the milk miracle which began September 21, 1995, was an unusual religious event. The experience cut across the entire social strata--the most simple of people to the most educated of doctors, lawyers and engineers. The most ardent and consistent worshippers had the experience, as did those for whom religion meant little and God was a dim concept. Christians, Muslims, Sikhs and atheists shared in having their offerings accepted by Lord Ganesha, who even obliged TV news cameras with live coverage in many countries. In Sanskrit the "milk miracle" would be called kshira chatmatkara. All observed the miracle in speechless wonder. "It was like union with God," said one engineer. This was not the result of any mere human's entreaty.

What is a Miracle?

The term miracle can be simply defined as "that which causes wonder." A miracle is something that contradicts or is beyond ordinary experience, and is caused by some kind of supernatural force or being--God or a God. In one view of miracles, God suspends the laws of nature to produce an astonishing happening. In the other, a miracle is an effect in our world of the natural forces of a higher plane of reality. Hindus reject the notion that miracles contradict science. The

so-called "science" of today has limited its knowledge by rejecting a priori any reality beyond that perceived by the physical body's five senses.

Three worlds are spoken of by Hindus--the Bhuloka, this Earth plane in which we live in our physical body; the Antarloka, the in-between world of the devas or angelic beings; and the Brahmaloika, the highest heaven world of God and the Gods. In normal day-to-day life, we live peacefully in our Bhuloka, unaware of the greater reality of the Antarloka and Brahmaloika which exist within this plane. The inner-world beings--the devas, Gods such as Ganesha and the 330 million other Gods--assist in our evolution in this universe in manifold but unseen ways.

But from time to time there is more obvious, even publicly shared interaction. In its simplest form, this can be the answering of a prayer, or a sudden precognition of a danger ahead. In more developed forms it can be the powers of an accomplished yogi, the siddhis. These siddhis are listed in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, and include such miraculous abilities as becoming invisible, flying through the air, seeing the past and future, entering another's body and the ability to command and control everything. The most impressive miracles, like the milk miracle, result from the direct and unbidden intervention of God.

Hindu Miracles

There are countless examples of miracles in Hinduism from the most ancient of times right to the present day. There are the miracles of the Gods, such as Lord Krishna and Lord Rama, coming to live among men. There are miracles of saints and yogis in thousands of stories.

The following are examples of direct interventions by God which were witnessed by many people, as in the case of the

milk miracle. Some people think such miracles are secondary to the songs, teachings or personality of the saint with whom they are associated. A more realistic evaluation is that, as in the case of other world religions, it was the miracles that established the saint's "saintliness" among the people. At the same time, the witnessing of the miracle raised the general religious consciousness of the people.

A most relevant case of a Hindu miracle is that of Nambi Ambar Nambi, who lived about 1,000 ce. His father was priest of a small Ganesha temple in South India. One day he had to go to another village and asked his son Nambi to do the daily puja for Ganesha at the temple. Nambi did the best he could. But, assuming Ganesha always took the food his father brought, he became disheartened when Ganesha would not eat his food offerings. Nambi cried and cried and started to beat his head against the shrine wall. Suddenly Ganesha said, "Stop, Nambi, stop," and then proceeded to eat the food. Nambi was delighted to see all the food in front of Ganesha disappear and asked Ganesha to teach him all there was to know of religion. Later, when his father returned home, Nambi told him what had happened. Not believing his son's story, the father went to the temple and witnessed Ganesha's actually eating the food offerings.

Nambi went on to become one of the foremost seers of Tamil Nadu, personal advisor to King Rajaraja Chola. Nambi located by divine intuition the lost songs of the ancient Tamil saints stored in a sealed room at Chidambaram temple, retrieved them with the king's help, codified and set them to music. Nambi's extraordinary experience contributed to a massive religious renaissance at that time.

Saint Jnanadeva is revered for his Bhagavad Gita translation and commentary in the Maharastrian language. Among several miracles that established this 13th-century saint's reputation,

the most famous involved a water buffalo. Challenged by the arrogant brahmins of Paithan that he was not qualified to recite the Vedas, Jnanadeva replied, "Anyone can recite the Vedas." He placed his hand upon a nearby water buffalo, which proceeded to correctly chant Vedic verses for more than an hour. Not only Jnanadeva but the buffalo itself was thereafter revered--its samadhi shrine is today a place of pilgrimage.

The Bengali Vaishnava saint Chaitanya wrought many miracles in his lifetime. But one in particular stands out. He had gone with his followers to witness the great chariot festival of Lord Jagannath in Puri. Suddenly, the towering chariot of the Lord came to a stop. Thousands of people pulled at the ropes but could not budge it. Elephants were brought, but they too failed. Finally Chaitanya came to the back of the chariot and devotedly leaned his head against it. The chariot began to move! By such miracles and his personal saintliness, Chaitanya inspired a religious revival which continues to this day.

In the 9th century ce the Tamil saint Manikkavasagar was a king's minister [see pictures of this story below]. A series of miracles heralded his sainthood. He was sent by the king to buy horses from a neighboring state. On his way he met a most unusual saint who was later revealed to him as Lord Siva Himself. As Manikkavasagar sat at his guru's feet, he forgot the king's mission, renounced the world and eventually even spent the king's money, meant to buy horses, to rebuild a local temple. Upon hearing of this, the king abruptly recalled him to the palace and threw him in the dungeon. His guru told Manikkavasagar not to worry, that the horses, which he had failed to purchase, would be delivered in a day or two. The guru rounded up the jackals of the local forest, turned them into horses and, in the form of a horse dealer, personally delivered them to the king. The king was delighted and

released Manikkavasagar. But that same night the horses changed back into jackals and escaped. The enraged king again arrested Manikkavasagar, and this time chained him to the hot sands of the nearby River Vaigai.

Miraculously a great unseasonal flood came down the Vaigai upon the village, and Manikkavasagar was removed back to jail. All residents were required to either work on the embankments or to hire someone in their place. One poor old lady could do neither until Lord Siva in the form of a laborer appeared at her hut and offered His services in return for food. But when the laborer went to the river side He proceeded to laze about, dance and generally interfere with the work in progress. When the king came to inspect, he discovered the troublemaker and hit the laborer across the back with his cane. The laborer disappeared in a flash, but the blow was felt upon the back of the king, his ministers and servants, the villagers, indeed every living thing in the world including the imprisoned Manikkavasagar. Because of these miracles, the king realized it was Lord Siva Himself who had turned his former minister into a saint.

All through his initiation, trials and release, Manikkavasagar sang magnificent devotional hymns, the collection now known as the Tiruvasagam. He performed other miracles, such as making the dumb daughter of the Sri Lankan Buddhist king speak. That miracle resulted in the conversion of the king and all his followers to Saivism. At the end of his life Siva again appeared and personally wrote down his songs. Asked their meaning by the priests at Chidambaram, Manikkavasagar turned, walked into the Siva Sanctum and disappeared! To this day, his story is told and his exquisite songs sung throughout the Tamil-speaking world.

Miracles in Other Religions

All religions accept miracles, but accord them greater or lesser

importance. Within Buddhism, for example, miraculous healings occurred among the general population at the moment of Buddha's birth. Later in life he raised the dead, healed incurable diseases and walked across the mile-wide Ganges. The Jews have many miracles described in the Torah, especially Moses' parting the Red Sea as he led his people out of slavery in Egypt. The phenomenon is celebrated to this day during Passover.

Islam assumes Allah can do miracles, and popular Muslim religion abounds in miracles both of the prophet Mohammed and of wonder-working saints. Mohammed himself rejected proving his faith by miracles, saying his only miracle was the Koran itself. Christianity is based upon a miracle, specifically the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion on the cross. The theological centrality of this particular miracle for Christianity is unique among religions. Catholics and Protestants testify in modern times to tears being shed by icons of their saints and many unexplained healings. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, first gained public attention when he caused a dry water reservoir in drought-stricken Amritsar to be filled with water. Many converted to his new faith as a result.

The ancient sage Zoroaster was born of a virgin mother and his birth heralded by a star in the sky. With his spiritual power he strived for much of his life in promoting his new faith. Finally he cured the king's favorite horse of paralysis and gained the entire royal household (and later the kingdom) as converts. Confucianism and Taoism place limited importance on miracles, but accept their existence. The Jains, too, place no particular stress on miracles, though some are associated with their saint, Mahavira. The Japanese Shinto religion is miraculous in that it traces its origins to the Sun Goddess as the Grandmother of the first emperor. He received from Her

the Three Sacred Treasures: a mirror, a sword and jewels, which to this day are the most hallowed possessions of the Japanese Imperial family.

The tribal religions worldwide remain replete with miraculous happenings. Anthropologist Margaret Mead personally testified to the existence of "special supernatural powers" among the many tribes she studied and advocated additional systematic research.

Conclusion

Modern communication made possible the near instantaneous experience of the milk miracle around the globe. Unlike most miracles, it was not associated with a particular saint, but initiated in a dream to a devotee who chose to remain anonymous. In this divine revelation Ganesha, Lord of Obstacles, removed a very large roadblock in many hearts and minds: the doubt that God is real. He did it not only for a billion Hindus, but also for hundreds of millions of others who saw or read about the divine event. Truly Hinduism, having found a new Hindu solidarity, will not be the same again in our eyes, nor in the eyes of the rest of the world.

Photo Essay - Illustrations (left to right) on Saint Manikkavasagar's miraculous life. As a minister, he receives money from the king to buy horses; he meets the Siva guru in a glade; the guru disguised as a horse trader delivers the horses to the king; the king chains Manikkavasagar to the hot river bed; (below) the saint converts the Buddhist king of Sri Lanka; the hymns of Manikkavasagar are recorded at Chidambaram Temple; (below) asked the meaning of the hymns by the priests, an aged Manikkavasagar walks into the sanctum and disappears forever into the rahasyam to the left of Siva Nataraja!