Editorial
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The Editor

Miracle: An extraordinary and astonishing happening attributed to the presence and action of an ultimate or divine power. An event that appears inexplicable by the laws of nature

All religions are endowed with supernatural happenings. Some more than others. It's an integral part of religious experience, the cachet that inspires votaries, reminding them that there are mysteries beyond our ken, sometimes assuring them that their faith is true and holy. Most religions begin with miracles, yet many are thereafter conservative about acknowledging them. Commonly, they are relegated to history, and the farther followers find themselves from the founding moments of a faith, the fewer the fantastic feats. Yet, in Buddhism the opposite was true. The Enlightened One deprecated his own miraculous powers as utterly devoid of spiritual significance. Times changed and today, especially in Mahayana Buddhism, there are elaborate recountings of extraordinary events during his life and surrounding his relics and the saints who followed him.

In Hinduism the Vedasprovide the original understanding, their verses containing copious accounts of the Gods and their phenomenal deeds. That changed during the period of the

Upanishads,which pooh-poohed powers and claimed that the direct spiritual experience of Reality and the subsequent transformation of consciousness were the only miracles worth pursuing. But accounts of the fantastic flourished in India and today supernatural happenings are commonplace, practically pass. That's not to say they are all authentic. Many might be called into question by thoughtful believers.

Somewhere it is written (the actual text has eluded us) that to be a Hindu holy man one has to possess magical powers. It is thought to be part and parcel of being intimate with the Infinite, a kind of seal of a holy one's authenticity, considered an all but inevitable outcome of a lifetime of ascetic spiritual disciplines. One famed swami claims that when he is in a room alone he can divide his body into nine separate parts and then bring them all back together, a kind of conscious dissection which is so traditional it has a name--navakandhasiddha, "nine-parts-power."

Some are buried alive for days at a time and survive. Others can bring the dead to life, sit cross-legged in the midst of a raging fire, accurately auger human events, live without food or water for years at a time, levitate in defiance of gravity and turn mercury into gold. While the rest of the world thinks of such things as largely unbelievable frauds, the Hindu considers them entirely natural and necessary. Sure, not all are what they seem, and imposters in India, as elsewhere, toil at their thaumaturgical tasks in imposing numbers. There is a little rule of thumb to help when faced with inexplicable feats: Miracles are always spontaneous, unbidden by man. Unlike their cousin magic, they never happen on a stage.

Despite charlatans, Hindus never doubt the reality of miracles. Many have, in fact, seen one or two, for India is the last major civilization on earth where magic and strange happenings have not been banned from the streets but still

wander free. When they do, they lift life out of the mundane into the sacred, into the realm of awe, wonderment hope. As Goethe noted: "Miracle is the dearest child of faith."

Observation suggests that the frequency of wondrous happenings is directly proportional to the distance between man and God defined in any belief system. For athiests and logical positivists (that's the technical term for the scientist's theology) there are no miracles. Not one. Everything can be explained logically, by resort to natural laws. Nothing ever offends those laws. On the other hand, if God is nearby, as He is in the tribal, pagan and shamanistic faiths (maliciously besmirched with the name primitive), then it is not inconceivable that people could fly or talk with animals or travel to the future. For God-intoxicated mystics, there is nothing but miracles. They are everywhere. Consciousness itself is a miracle. Walking, breathing, loving are all close encounters with the Divine. In between these extremes lies most of the little-explored terrain of human preternatural experience.

In our own monastic tradition, the Nandinatha Sampradaya, there are dozens of marvelous stories which some take to be merely that while we regard them as entirely true. Gurus in our lineage have sat in motionless meditation for seven years. They have been seen in two places at once, read the future, raised animals from the dead, turned iron rods to gold and stopped ships with a mere thought. So you will understand that we embrace miracles wholly. Nonetheless, there is a lighter side to them that should not go unreported.

For instance, it's a miracle that Hinduism survived 1,200 years of foreign conquest and dominion. It's a miracle so many in Delhi survive the daily traffic. It's a miracle that this newspaper has gone out on time for seventeen years. It's a

miracle that humanity hasn't annihilated itself and is actually coming to its senses enough to rediscover the old values and wisdom ways. It's a miracle that miracles still happen in this rabidly skeptical Kali Yuga. You probably have a few amazements that happened in your life to add to the list. We can all be grateful for them, and for the Unseen One toward whom they so subtly and certainly point.