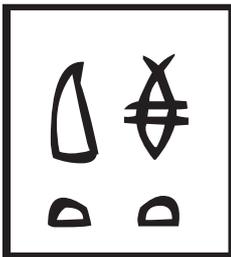
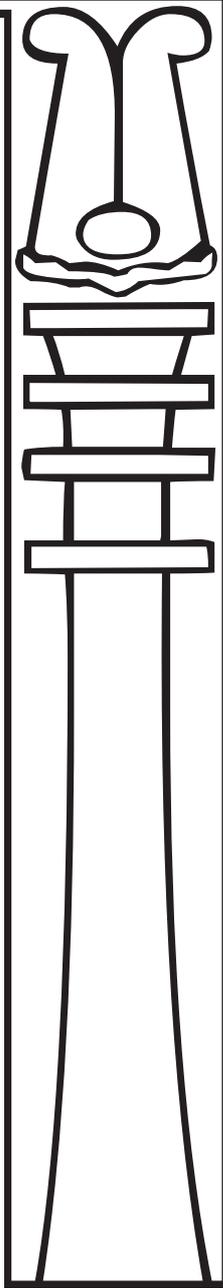


THE  
MIRACULOUS  
ELEMENT  
IN BUDDHISM

BY  
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When, in the magic crystal of imagination we evoke the mental imagery of our earlier childhood's years, and recall how then we saw and heard and felt and thought; how life appeared, appealed, and called to us, then fresh from its re-making, one feature stands out clear and vivid. Even amidst our dimmest memories of those bygone days there dominates each pictured recollection-the all-pervading, ever present sense of the keen *wonder* of it all; that wonder in which the noble thinker of ancient Greece perceived the root and source of all our human wisdom.

Later in life, indeed, we may encounter things more seeming new and strange. We may travel into distant lands and live amidst conditions utterly different from all that we have grown accustomed to. But never, if we make exception of a man's first penetration into the interior spiritual realm, never after those first early years can aught that life brings us so move our hearts to wonder, so thrill our very being to the core, as did the common sights and sounds that life brought us in our early childhood. In those days the mere scent of flowers in the springtime, the sight of some familiar scene by moonlight, the voice of a singing bird in summer woods, could call forth an answer in a very passion of wonder, till the veil of the visible seemed trembling to the point of rending. The veil of matter seemed about to part to make clear the way for childish feet and eager, opened arms to reach forth into a world of never-ending glamour, into the faery realm where all is marvelous and beautiful beyond dreaming, into the land of undying Youth, where there is joy for evermore.

Such is childhood's dream, the leaping and the laughter of the little stream new sprung from the dark confinement of the earth, rejoicing in the freedom of its careless movement, each fall and turning of its way the harbinger of new joys, new wonders yet to come. As we have learned during this past few generations, wherein so vast a field of knowledge has opened to the gaze of man, the child but recapitulates, and in its smaller scale epitomises, all the great common story of the growth of the whole human race. So the babe of a few days growth, so helpless and weak-seeming, can yet support its weight and will cling to and hang from the stick we place within its grip. Thus he enacts the story of its half-simian

and arboreal ancestry: reverting to the age when the forerunner of the human species was compelled in infancy to cling to boughs of trees, or to its shaggy mother's breast as she bore it through the woods. So the healthy boy of a later age delights in woodcraft, in playing the Red Indian, in mimic warfare. So, too, the younger child delights in playing with stones, in dim race-memory of the paleolithic age. Thus all young children love to mould the clay into some dim resemblance to man's earliest attempts at pottery. Every natural child finds fascination in a seashell, earliest adornment of mankind, and listens with wonder, as his remote adult forbear listened, to the murmuring voice within the shell, telling of the music of the waves it never can forget.

Thus, then, we learn that that keen sense of wonder, that thrilling sense of imminent, marvelous happenings, of inner doors about to open on a world of fantasy and of enchantment which we have seen so dominating all our earlier life, must have surely been the common feeling, the common attitude, even of adult humanity in the ages that have passed away. Even lacking other evidence, we should know it must have been so. But in fact there is evidence enough and to spare to just that same effect. The earliest of human literatures that have come down to us, all tell this selfsame story of an all-pervading wonderment at life; of marvelous happenings; of wholesale miracles and magic powers. If one can see the wonder in the world, that life is full of mystery, then there are "miracles" enough and to spare!

Here we do not wish to be misunderstood to imply that, either then or now, there were or are no marvelous happenings; or that the bulk of the strange marvels that the old books record happened really only in the imaginations of those peoples of the childhood of our race. All the wonders of the Thousand Nights and One fade into insignificance before the daily, momentarily repeated mystery of life, of growth; to say nothing of the utter miracle of consciousness, that one is conscious. The more we learn of the nature of the mind of man, little as yet we know of it, the more do we see how all those ancient miracles might have happened, even if they did not happen in quite the way that their recorders -thought they did. If it comes to that, what now happens exactly as the wisest of us moderns think it does?

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Till man has no more to learn, he will never fully understand, or rightly see, the least and commonest of happenings in his daily life.

There is a very interesting theory which has of late years been put forward to explain the undoubted fact that animals, and even insects, are able to communicate intelligence, even of happenings that, to their undeveloped minds, must seem quite complicated. It is supposed that the method of communication, common to the animal world and to humanity before the development of language, lies in telepathy: in the direct transmission of ideas from mind to mind. Mankind also, it is suggested, was sensitive to mental images, till the growing use of speech, and its substitution for the earlier method of communication, superseded this more direct, but less certain, telepathic communication. By disuse this telepathy grew slowly atrophied, except, perhaps, in rare cases of reversion, or amongst very primitive communities, or under unusual conditions such as special training or the like.

This hypothesis, as has been said, was brought forward to explain certain undoubted facts. Into those facts, beyond the bare generalisation of animal communication, as into certain curious collateral evidence which goes far to lend support to the idea, it is unnecessary here to enter. The theory is only introduced at this point because, in connection with what we know of the subliminal self, the hypothesis casts a very illuminating sidelight on this subject of marvelous happenings.

The work of the more modern psychologists has demonstrated the fact that, besides the ordinary active and self-conscious mental faculties, of which we are all aware; and with which we now are functioning, there exists in each one of us a whole vast realm of mental functions. To these, since normally they remain, at our present stage of mental development, below the threshold of consciousness, the name of the Subliminal Self is given. With the normal human being in this age, this extensive realm of mental faculties (faculties which in some respects transcend by far those of the normal waking mind) remains as it were asleep, or inactive, during waking-life. It is only when the normal waking life is temporarily suspended, as may occur in ordinary sleep, in dreams, in somnambulism, and most notably in the hypnotic state, that these underlying powers of the

subliminal self are active and dominant. When this occurs, during the temporary abeyance of the normal waking mind, an entirely new and in many respects a most remarkable set of mental phenomena is found to occur. Take, for example, the faculty of memory. This, as we all know only too well, is in waking life a very imperfect and often unreliable faculty. It is, indeed, just when we most need to recall some particular event, name or idea, that it completely eludes our groping search. The memory of the subliminal self, on the other hand, appears almost miraculously perfect. It would appear as though no single impression of sense, no faintest conception of an idea, ever entered, even unconsciously, into the waking mind, into the content of our experience, but that it is promptly and perfectly registered in the subliminal realm. Thence it may be recovered when this subliminal self is in possession. If, for example, we have forgotten some important word or idea, our best way to recover it is, not to continue groping after it in the conscious mind, but simply to go to sleep whilst thinking of its associated ideas.

A better example, however, of this perfect memory of the subliminal mind is to be found in the old classic case of the woman who, when hypnotised, would recite with perfect accent and intonation the Hebrew text of various of the Psalms. As this woman was of the working class, and quite illiterate even in her own language, this appeared to the thinkers of that time (it happened about a century ago, before the nature of the subliminal self was known at all) well nigh a miracle, until, on going into the past history of that woman, it was discovered that she had formerly been maidservant to a clergyman, a great Hebrew scholar. He was in the habit of walking about his study and declaiming the text of various favorite Psalms! The maidservant, of course, could not understand a single syllable. If asked what her master was reciting she would probably have answered: "Oh, some old gibberish or other!" Naturally, in her normal mental state she could not have reproduced a single word of those, to her, unintelligible utterances. But every syllable and tone and accent of it all was perfectly recorded, perfectly registered by the subliminal mind; and so, when in later years it happened, through hypnosis, that this subliminal mind was in possession, the whole of that unconsciously stored knowledge could be tapped.

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Another most remarkable faculty of the subliminal mind is its seemingly perfect sense of the lapse of time. All who have studied accounts of modern experiments in hypnotism will be well aware that if, to a hypnotised subject, the hypnotiser makes a post-hypnotic suggestion for a determinate time, for example, that the patient shall, after he or she is awake; perform such an action at precisely 1,567 seconds after being wakened, that patient, in nine cases out of ten, will carry out the suggestion exactly at the moment thus precisely designated. Needless to say, without constant reference to a very accurate clock, such a feat would be impossible to any ordinary person in the waking state.

This brings us to the point we wish to draw attention to. If we can, so to speak, give a command to this subliminal self whilst it is in a condition to hear us, that command will, even after a return to the ordinary mental state, be carried on. It is as though the subliminal mind had the power, as it were, of *dramatizing* an idea impressed upon it into an actual and seeming objective happening. Suggest to a hypnotised person that, after awakening, he will see on some blank sheet of paper some definite design, and his wakened mind will see it. More remarkable still, if you, say, trace on the patient's arm a cross with cold metal rod, having suggested that the simple figure so traced out will appear in a few hours as if the mark were branded, then, somehow or other, the very flesh of the body will obey the command in the designated time. This will happen long after the patient, utterly unaware of the command, has awakened, and that design will duly appear. Here the phenomenon is not merely subjective, but it actually objectivises. No doubt exists as to the possibility of this phenomenon. It has been produced hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times within the last few years.

To connect up what has been said concerning the subliminal mind with what has gone before, it may be pointed out that there is every reason for supposing that it is this subliminal mind which is concerned in telepathy; even as, in rather rare cases, that mind seems capable of sheer clairvoyance and even foresight.

There is, however, every reason for supposing that this great group of powers of the mind which we now, for the reason that has been mentioned, term the subliminal self or mind, was far more active, entered far more

completely into the normal waking mental life of mankind, in bygone ages than it does in our present times. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that that realm of mental action was nearer to the threshold of consciousness then than now; it was more readily susceptible of being evoked. To take one only of the many facts which point in this direction. We have seen how the mind of the child tends to a constant state of what we may term *expectancy*. It is ever ready to suppose itself on the verge of some great and marvelous happening. Now this state of expectancy, as those who have studied modern hypnotism well know, is just one of the conditions which predispose to the sudden lowering of the threshold to the inclusion of more or less of the subliminal realm. It has been noted that any condition which may characterise modern childhood is probably a reminder, a recapitulation, of the state in which the human adult of a thousand years or more ago commonly lived during his lifetime. So this tendency of childhood to expectancy, with its implication of ready suggestibility, must have been the normal state of mind some thousands of years ago.

Why is it, then, that when we make some suggestion involving the marvellous, the unusual or unexpected, to the normal adult developed mind as it is now, that suggestion altogether fails of its effect? Partly, no doubt, because the readily suggestible subliminal mind is then, the person being awake, dormant or partly inactive. But mainly it is because the awake mind, aware of the unusualness of the suggestion, strongly *inhibits* that idea from seizing hold upon the consciousness. If, then, we could by any means make our suggestion in such a fashion that it reached the subliminal self without reaching the awake mind with its sane tendency to veto the unusual, then we might be able to get our suggestion dramatized into subjective, or even objective fact, just as we now can with a hypnotised person.

But there is only one way now known to us of doing this, of speaking, as it were, to the subliminal mind direct, without the knowledge or the intervention of the waking mind. That means is by telepathic communication of the suggestion direct from mind to mind. We have seen how it is partly at least the subliminal mind that is concerned in such telepathy as now is possible, both in respect of the transmitter and the

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receiver of the idea. Bearing, then, in mind the fact that those ancient peoples lived, so to speak, far more in the subliminal realm than is now the case, we can at once come to see why it was that what we may term the miraculous was so much more common than it is now. Again we must not be misunderstood to imply that the so-called miracles did not happen, or rather that they happened only in the imagination of those childlike peoples. For we must remember how, even with the very little that we now know of the powers of the subliminal region, it is possible under proper conditions to produce actual objective happenings, like the appearance of the brand-mark on a person's skin. Once grant that the subliminal was in those early ages nearer to the surface than it now is, and we can understand how widely this opens the door for the relatively frequent occurrence of what are commonly termed miracles.

It was not, then, in respect of fancy observation, or the pure imagination, of these strange phenomena that most of the ancient peoples went so far astray. The case, indeed, was closely comparable to that of modern so-called spiritualistic phenomena. The miracles, we may quite comfortably with our modern knowledge grant, did happen; just as (apart from cases of fraudulent "mediums") the modern phenomena of the seance-room do occur. One must, however, admit these to be very feeble beside the effects of the old-time workers of marvels. It was, then as now, in respect of the *interpretation* placed upon those events that men made the profoundest error. Then, the common misapprehension was that the miracle-worker produced his effects through the agency, compelled or voluntary, of the gods-just as now the common error of the modern spiritualist is to imagine the phenomena of the seance-room to be the work of spirits of the dead. And most of the marvel-workers, then, themselves believed in, and attributed their wonders to their gods-just as now most mediums believe in, and attribute their phenomena to, their so-called "spirit guides".

And, since those ancient peoples naturally attributed to their gods the possession in an enhanced degree of all their own higher mental characters, they fell into a far more profound and more far-reaching error in respect of the marvels of which they deemed them the prime movers. In the gods, they thought, was the spirit of Truth. The marvels were the direct work of

the gods. Therefore they were the proof of the truth of whatever doctrine the gods servant, the visible miracle-worker, gave utterance to.

Here, of course, we moderns, with our logically trained minds, altogether part company with those old-time thinkers. If a man should come to us, and perform some seemingly marvelous feat before our eyes, we should, if we were seized of the scientific spirit, be intensely interested in the phenomena. But however many, and however great and wonderful, were the phenomena, we should not on that account be in the least inclined to accept as true whatever doctrine that wonderworker might be pleased to teach. We should, indeed, regard the claim, that *because* he could work wonders, *therefore* his teaching was true, as wholly illogical and absurd. But it was far otherwise with the ancients. To them, the proof of true doctrine lay in good, sound miracles. The proof that a man had real knowledge of the nature of the deeper things of life lay in his capacity to produce these wonders. So much so, that with most of the old-time religions, like Christianity; the marvels were adduced in proof of the divine mission and true doctrine of the Founder. Even modern Christians, for example, would, we think, agree in admitting that, if the crowning miracle of the resurrection of their Founder did not happen as an historical fact, then Christian teaching loses its claim to being inspired Truth.

In ancient India, the very home of high spiritual development, and of the most wonderful of miracles, this wrong view of the value of the miracle as a proof of doctrine was of course most widely spread. So much so, that we find in our Buddhist Scriptures many a tale of how this or that religious teacher (in one celebrated case a whole body of such teachers) came to The Buddha to propose a sort of contest in miracle-working, as a proof of the superiority of their respective doctrines, be it understood.

As might be expected from what has already been said in connection with the underlying mental faculties, it is a part of Buddhist Teaching that a person can gain control over the hidden forces of his own mind as they develop, and the power to affect the minds of others in various ways. Certain of these would distinctly come under the heading of the so-called miraculous. But although these powers over the minds of others, and even over what we should term objective phenomena, are said to come naturally

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to most in the normal course of their interior development towards Arahanship, it must not be supposed that, according to Buddhist Teaching, the possession of these powers, or their exercise, proves a man to be of high and spiritual development. Rather, indeed, in some ways it is the opposite. To the aspirant himself, the development of these powers is regarded as a possible snare, because, he may become so interested in them, and in the new worlds which their possession opens to his investigation, as to forget the higher teaching, and to neglect his training for the Path itself. On the other hand (these powers being simply powers, and therefore like all powers, capable of being put to ends either good or bad) they may be developed by quite selfish and worldly persons. Thus their possession proves nothing at all save a certain degree of mastery over one's own mind, and over the forces of Nature.

This brings us to what is the most remarkable circumstance of all: namely, that whilst Buddhism, like all ancient teachings, declared the existence of these mental powers, and indeed used them in its own curriculum of interior development, it yet put them exactly in the place that the modern scientific and logical mind would put them. It denied that they proved anything at all as to the truth or otherwise of the doctrine that might accompany them. The Buddha Himself, indeed, was said to possess (as would naturally follow from their connection with interior mental control) these powers in a more exalted degree than any other saint or sage. We are told how, on one occasion, a whole body of fire-worshipping ascetics challenged the Great Teacher to one of those contests in the miraculous which have been referred to, with the usual illogical object of proving, by their superior miracles, the superiority of their doctrine over His. The Master accepted the challenge, wishing, once and for all, to put an end to these continued and unreasoning claims, and to place, by a supreme object lesson, this matter of miracles in its proper place.

So, tradition tells us, the contest was held, in the presence of a vast concourse of people, attracted by the very human desire to see who would get the best of it. As the challenging party, the fire-worshippers, whose piece de *resistance* was making the fire of sacrifice kindle by their magical mastery over the fire element, first took the field. But the far greater power of The Buddha altogether prevented, or even reversed, the effect that they

were wont easily to produce. And then, after an altogether unparalleled display of marvels, so wonderful that even the fire-worshipping ascetics themselves became His followers, the Great Teacher preached a sermon to the assembled multitude on the Wrong Marvel and the Right. He showed how all these marvels were beside the point of true Religion, of Right Understanding; how they proved nothing for or against the truth of any body of teaching. Such things, He said, were mere worldly powers, which anyone who chose to take the needful trouble could acquire. What, then, He asked, was the Right Miracle? It lay, He said, in the incomparable power of Truth itself, which, apart from any really unconnected display of wonders, could so seize upon and move men's hearts as to make them altogether change their lives. *That* was the Right Marvel, as He saw it: just the power of Truth to endure, to triumph in men's hearts and live forever, even when all these worlds, that are in themselves such miracles, will have perished utterly.

Such, then, is the attitude which Buddhism (in this, as in many other respects, so singularly modern in its outlook upon life) takes up towards the question of the miraculous. The Buddhist sacred books, like all other ancient literature, teem, indeed, with tales of the miraculous and marvelous. But, according to the understanding of even the most unenlightened of Buddhists, it relies in no least degree upon these wonders for its own support. Take away, if you care to do so, every marvel recorded in the Buddhist books, and in The Teacher's own words, the greatest miracle of all will yet remain -the miracle of the power of Truth to conquer falsehood; even when the Truth is bard to bear, when the falsehood appeals to every hope and passion in our hearts.

Fundamentally, of course, here as in other contexts where this word *Dhamma*, which I have translated Truth, is concerned, it is rather the great spiritual power which, reigning behind all consciousness, lies at the back of every form of progress. At its highest it is manifested in the Path of Attainment; in its lowest aspect, perhaps it is responsible even for physical evolution. But, in a secondary degree, it means just what we moderns mean by Truth -a body of knowledge which is in harmony with the facts of life. And how great a wonder is even that lower, manifested Dhamma, all the story of humanity but goes to prove. Looking back on the history of our

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own civilisation, we see that dim reflection of the Truth Supernal conquer in face of all the hopes and fancies and desires of man. We see it, in the Middle Ages, dammed back, crushed down by every power of Church and State, yet conquering in the end, in spite of all that Church and State could do. Against the very hopes, the keen desires of man, we see it triumph even over rack and stake. It is that great miracle of Truth which here today has emptied and is emptying the Churches which preach a creed whose very sanction lies in that old error that a miracle proves Truth.

Not so indeed. As an ancient Buddhist saying has it: "*Truth verily is deathless speech.*" Deathless and unconquerable, whether it has sprung from intensest interior spiritual attainment, or from the patient study of the Universe which our outer senses present, Truth will spread and grow amongst the hearts of men, till all our ignorances, our errors, shall have passed away ; until at last, after all this weary round of cyclic transmigration, it shall come borne to each one of us in its highest, holiest form. Whoso wins that Highest Truth knows that he has no more to do; that the hidden purpose of his being is fulfilled at last; that for him there is no more of living as we know it. For, as The Master said, it is only "*By not-knowing and not-understanding that I've have come to live so many pain-filled lives.*"