

2007-05-28 The Real Miracle

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

buddha, passing, womb, arise, thought, mother, world, permanence, miracle, mind, story, perceptions, arising, wonderful, cling, thoughts, marvelous, hear, heaven, transparent

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

The title of this talk, the real miracle was given by Gil Fronsdal. On May 28 2007. It's based on the middle length discourses number 123.

So we're a smaller group than usual, which could allow us for to do Monday evening a little bit different than the holding forth here where the talk so I'm prepared to give a talk rather than usual talk. So you're warned. Or we could all kind of sit closer and we can have a discussion, kind of intimate tech that you know, you can ask questions and we can discuss the Dharma in some way together. What would you like? which parts of both but I also like the idea of

Little bit of all, I think the talk was, I don't know how long the talks gonna take, but once I start, I have to get to the end of it. So I can't just kind of, you know, sometimes talks doesn't matter where you are in this talk, you know, has an ending, either yet as as a punchline go for the talk. Yeah, it's risky because it's reading from this book. And it's a sutta and it's a sitcom might be boring. And it also might. It's really strange, this, this text. And so it's kind of it's a different ways of interpreting it. So, I kind of thought about this because on Sunday, we're celebrating Buddhist birthday. And so first, first I thought, oh, tell us some come Monday night and I know every every every we always celebrate Buddha's birthday. The stock on Sunday. And every time we do it, I tell some aspects of the Buddha's life story. But I never do it Monday, because we don't sell it by the second Monday. But oh, this year I'll come and say something about Buddha's life. And, and then I got a little bit bored in my mind, you know, the Buddha's life again. So I thought, okay, I'll tell you part of his life story that comes from the suttas from ancient discourses that it's a rather bizarre text about his life. You know what the word hagiography is? Hagar Griffey is the story, the stories of saints. It's how they're, you know, how wonderful the saints are. So, all religions seem to have geographies. And, and Buddha Buddhism has that as well. So there's all these gifts gets, you know, amazing stories. Miracle stories and things they're told about the Buddha. And here in our tradition, generally we tend to focus on the Buddhist being a historical person. And we're kind of down to earth and Buddhism being kind of, you know, for ordinary people, and we kind of dispense with a lot of the part of the tradition, which is kind of supernatural, but that it is there in the Buddhist tradition, you can, you know, it's there. And the question is, what do we do with it that's there. And I know some, some very prominent teachers have asked them what you do with this parts, you know, in here, and they say, Oh, we just ignore it. And so we're kind of, you know, we're partly the ignoring school. And you can argue, well, this is later additions, you know, as the centuries as Buddhism, just in India, this Hager graphic material kind of crept in, and it's later so later corruption. It's a later kind of fantasy that people put in. It was later propaganda because in order to kind of for Buddhism, to survive In its Indian environment, it had to kind of show that its founder was as great as other religions, great founders, they had their wonderful, hey, geography is great stories, miracle stories of their founders. And so who doesn't have to show that third teacher was just as great, right? Otherwise, you know, it's doesn't count.

So who knows all these interpretations of why this exists. And so I'm gonna read part of it, and hopefully you'll stay. And, and then but you have to kind of hang in there for the punch line. And I think the punch line is, for me, makes the whole thing humorous, in part, and, and also, my image is that some monks and nuns were sitting around, and they were kind of like, jiving each other with these kind of sit, you know, look with my teacher, you know, my founder, you know, what he was able to do, what he was able to do and then they add this But I think you'll probably fall flat on you until I explain it. But the zinger at the end? Are you ready for that? Kind of. So the monks are sitting around talking and with an under and they're saying how wonderful the Buddha is. It's how wonderful he is, how mighty and powerful is the Buddha for he's able to know about the Buddha's that the past who have attained Nirvana know all about you know, the look into the past and remember past Buddha's, you know, eons he hasn't go in that wonderful, it's a miracle. And, and an under says, Yeah, he's really wonderful. He has wonderful qualities. The Buddha is marvelous and has marvelous qualities. However, their discussion was interrupted by the Buddha And he asked What are you guys talking about?

I guess it's a kind of a transparent gem of purest water. Eight faceted well cut and a person with good eyesight where to take it in his or her hand and review with us. This is a fine barrel gem of purest water. Eight faceted well cut and through its strong a blue, yellow, red, white and blue thread. So to when the boy had descended into his mother's womb, she saw within her womb that he had all his limbs lacking no faculty. So it goes on and on. With these wonderful qualities of the Buddha, a board you wish we did the other option this evening now near the discussion. Seven days after the birth of the Buddha his mother died and she appeared in two seats I have one other woman give birth after carrying the child in the room. for nine months, but not so the Bodhisattvas mother, she carried him for 10 months. Other women gave birth cedar lying down but not so at the Bodhisattvas mother. She did it standing up. When the bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, first Gods received Him, then human beings. When he came forth from his mother's womb, he did not touch the earth. For young God's received Him and set him before his mother saying, rejoice. So Queen, a sign of great power has been born to you. When the body starts, came forth from his mother's womb, he came forth unsullied and smeared by water or blood or any kind of impurity clean and unsalted. And the stuff that came forth from his mother's womb, two jets of water up here to pour from the sky. One cool and one warm for bathing bodhisatta in his mother. This too is a wonderful and marvelous quality. This is a miracle As soon as the Bodhisattva was born, he stood firmly with his feet on the ground, that he took seven steps north. And with a white parasol held over him, he surveyed each quarter of the world in order to hit either the words of the leader of the herd. I am the highest in the world, I am the best in the world. I am the foremost of the world. This is my last birth. Now there is no more renewal of being for me. That's pretty amazing. I mean, the first step seven steps and then just you know, staying, you know, I'm the best. Like Muhammad Ali, right, I'm the best. So this story, slightly better version of it. I say every time I teach the Buddha's birth story to children, I say that he was born and he said he took seven steps. And then he be made a statement. You know, he said, a little different version of heaven above earth below, I alone, and the World Honored One, I'm the best. And then I say this. It's because it's used in zen, I said, this is the kind of Zen story and way supposed to use a story is you have to understand that you can say this for yourself. And that each person can in some way say that they are themselves wonderful, and especially the best, not just in the eyes of the parents, but you know that somehow that each person is so precious and so valuable, that each person is the best person, the most wonderful person. So I don't know what I'm conditioning these young kids, but but I hope it's a good, good one. And then sometimes when I've done it, in classrooms and stuff, when my kid was in preschool, I'd go around and point to each kid and say their name, you're the best, you're the best. And it would probably the idea that they feel like they will be special, but also that everyone else is special as well. So anyway, so we use these myths, sometimes for the purposes. Remember, there's a punch line coming right get to put up with it to kind of feel feel good. theother creciendo that tension the Marvel the miracle the Wow, you have them

always like believe it's like wow, can you believe it? You know, well this is amazing. When the bodhisatta came forth from his mother's womb, then a great immeasurable light surpassing the splendor of the gods appeared in the world with its Gods its Mars and its Brahmas in this generation with its direct closes and Brahmins with its princesses and its people, and even in those abysmal world interspaces of vacancy gloom and utter darkness for the moon and the sun mighty and powerful as they are cannot make their light prevail there to a great in measurable lights are passing this on to the splendor of the gods appeared, so it goes on. Okay. So we're almost done with the miracles. So you have to kind of be on the edge of your seat. This being so now Ananda has finished his third we don't ask the Ananda to recount To the wonderful quality symmetrical qualities of the Buddha, and then send Ananda has done this.

And now he's finished. And he's and so now the Buddha's jumps into getting hurt, all this is returned to reply or the Buddha says, that being so inanda remember this too, as a wonderful and marvelous quality of the Buddha. So he's heard all these wonderful things said about him, is them now, I'm going to tell you one more thing that you should remember that's really marvelous, it's a miracle. Hear, Ananda, for the Buddha, feelings are known as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear. perceptions are known as they arise, as they are present. And as they disappear. Thoughts are known as they arise as they are Present and as they disappear, remember this to Ananda as a marvelous and wonderful quality of the Buddha.

That's the punchline. So you know, so you can imagine, you know, you're there sitting around having a great grand old time at the campfire, the monks and nuns and skinnymint make these wonderful, you know, making up these stories about the Buddha is, you know, or who knows why these stories are there. Maybe the Buddha made them up. But it's, it's all these wonderful, marvelous miracles in my interpretation, all these wonderful marvelous miracle stories are setting you up, to take you by surprise. By what's really marvelous, the miracle of it all. And that is a Buddha. When a thought arises, he sees the arising of a thought. He seizes, therefore worldly sees its passing. He sees a feeling arise. She's there for a while he sees his passing. He sees perception of something arise, persist and pass away. That is the ultimate miracle. Kind of like in Zen this these days, sometimes kind of talking about miracles in Zen to the hero, Buddhist miracle stories. And zen, they might say, the real miracle is chopping wood and carrying water. This is a little bit different, right? So this is, so this whole story kind of is kind of I interprets bs is a kind of setup to build up this tension so that when you hear this final piece of the story, it gets your attention. Oh, because if someone said, you know, it's marvelous to be able to see thoughts arise and pass away, you know, yes, but, but here, it's kind of putting it next to these amazing miracle stories. This is really significant. To be able to have the mindfulness, the presence, the concentration, to watch the arising of a thought, is persisting and passing away. So why is that? Why is that so special? There's a variety of reasons. A lot of things come from this kind of insight. First, I might say that this kind of insight doesn't come easily. Because to really kind of in a very clear, precise way, see something a thought arise. Persistent pass away is not our usual mode of being aware of thoughts. Often we're caught up in the thoughts. And our thoughts are sometimes our obsessive compulsive. They have a certain weight and importance to them. We're caught up in the ideas of them. It's kind of like going to a movie. And the movies may be really fascinating, captures you and it's scary, you're scared. Something funny happens in your life and you fall in love with the heroes and heroines and you can't wait You know, it's so real. And, and then someone slows down the projector and and, you know, So there's once one, one frame goes up on the screen is frozen there for 10 seconds, and then the next frame goes up, and the next frame goes up. And you realize that just still pictures up there. And because they're going fast, they look like movement and activity, but actually just a lot of steel frames. And you realize, you know what? heroin, but I fell in love with. I mean, just an actress, there's just the stories being told. And you don't hear chanted and you love the story. You don't

want this project to be slowed down. You don't want to be shown the truth that this is just, you know, the still shots you know, this kind of optical illusion, the mind that kind of mind kind of makes it into movement. And, however, in daily life, our mind sometimes operates the same way that we don't see how things come into being how things arise and pass away. So we're caught up in the drama of it all. We're caught up in the stories As if this is it. And when the mind gets very strongly concentrated, very calm and strong mindfulness, it becomes a little bit of kin to slowing down the moving picture, you actually see the arising of a thought floating by and going away and you can feel it as being very, very different experience than having a thought arise and latching on to it and adding another thought on top of it or reacting to it and doing all these things with our thoughts. They say sometimes that you can watch thoughts arise and flip through the mind, like clouds, an empty sky. So thought kind of goes through and you know, you know he's just kind of hasn't it's almost like it has no power over you. no authority over you. There's no it doesn't push you around. It doesn't know like billiard balls that kind of, you know, you hit one ball and hits the other and metrics and other and that's another, you know, the mind sometimes like billiard balls, you have one thought that bumps into another and creates another thought. But when you See the thought arise and pass in a very kind of calm way. It has no continue. It doesn't, it doesn't create a continuity of movement and motion in the mind. And you get a very different perspective on the

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Now some people might complain and say well, I want to I want to go back to the enchantment speed of the movie again because I prefer to be enchanted. Isn't, you know, enchanted is very closely connected to being diluted, you know to be under a spell. And there might be pleasure in enchantment. But there's also danger and enchantment, the Chinese painter who spent a lot of time painting a very realistic dragon, and then you step back to take a look at what he's created. He saw the dragon as a whole for the first time he got frightened and ran away. Sometimes our minds create amazing images, you know, that we believe and get caught and we get frightened by and some of them have to do about the world around us, sometimes has to do about ourselves, we create whole worlds images, pictures of who we are, and we frightened ourselves or we pour ourselves over critical of ourselves or we build ourselves up in some kind of conceivable way. That's not very realistic and set up for suffering. So to speed up the film again, and get back get re enchanted is a setup, to suffer again, to take our thoughts of being really serious, weighty. And so to be able to kind of see the arising of a thought, and let it just be arising, just be a thought that appears. You don't even say it's my thought. You don't have to believe the thought might be a good thought, but you don't have to believe it. You don't have to assume that because a thought arises because you think something that has to result in something happening because of it. I have to react to it, I have to believe it have to do something about it. I have to fix it something fixed into something is that a thought arises and it goes away. You see, it's arising and passing, whatever is nature of being born into existence, as a nature to pass away. You really see that arising and passing and seeing the arising and passing, then the mind has less and less tendency to cling. And as it releases this tendency to cling to consciousness, the mind is free countries it is a set loose in a sense from the shackle the fetters of being tied to thoughts, perceptions, feelings, the way that conscience is often shackled or tied or connected. This is not a dismissal of thoughts, not a dismissal of feelings and perceptions. In fact, very clearly in the Buddhist tradition, it said when when a person sees the arising of phenomena, they can no longer hold of you in the holistic world view, a view that somehow or other dismisses, or sees phenomena as being non existent or sees phenomena as being a dream. However, when you see the passing of phenomena, you can no longer take phenomena as being permanent, as being substantial as being you know, fixed. And the idea of permanence. The whole philosophy of permanent sir, doesn't, doesn't doesn't can't be sustained. In the mind, because you see passing away as well. And back in the time of the Buddha, there were two very prominent philosophies of religion. One was more realistic, that nothing exists and nothing counts, everything just disappears once and for all. And another philosophy of permanence is a permanent

soul. There's a permanence to this world is permanence to certain things. And, and that was a worldview. And the Buddha said, No, if a person is clearly sees that everything in your experience as a nature of arising and passing away, don't take me to the extreme of Neel ism, nor the extreme of permanence. And rather you'll see what's called the emptiness of phenomena. But here the emptiness of phenomena here is not meant to be vacuous. It's meant to be somehow transparent, or not insubstantial in the sense that it doesn't count but insubstantial as it's not something that's worthy. clinging to, of holding on to, or making a sickness making a stand standing on something. This is what I believe.

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meant to be somehow transparent, or not insubstantial in the sense that it doesn't count but insubstantial as it's not something that's worthy. clinging to, of holding on to, or making a sickness making a stand standing on something. This is what I believe. So one of the delusions that

I've seen that I've fallen into periodically is the delusion of permanence. And so for example, it happens with my kids all the time. My kid is going through some kind of difficulty. And my mind kind of has this idea, this is it. This is a visit difficulty is gonna have for the rest of his life. And you know, if I think about it, I realized that's not the case. But I'm operating through this kind of this kind of kind of vague delusion of permanence. This is it. And actually, over and over and over with my kids that oh, this is it. This is the way it's gonna be. I got it. Then next day or next hour, next month in whole new phase of their life and things change, you know. So, you know, like, there was a nine year change my son became so you know, finally became settled after nine years settled and calm and friendly and helpful and couldn't believe the same kid. Finally, we got a good kid now that's great. Well,

you know, and now he's in the middle of a different phase, starting to realize he has no complicated or private psychology going on. In this private psychological world. He didn't wasn't a private before. And he's mulling over things and concerned about things. It's Oh no, this is what we have now. The illusion of permanence. Oh, no. It's gonna be this way forever. And that had this with myself. certain feelings arise. You know, I get feeling kind of blue. I'll be blue for When I was 20, I remember having really ecstatic summer. And the end of summer I told a friend of mine, never to be depressed again. And then that fall, I was more depressed than ever in my life. I'll be depressed forever. So anyway, so the illusion of permanence, but also the delusion that nothing counts. The insight into the rising and passing is supposed to somehow help you overcome both the dismissal of reality and an excessive clinging to it both at the same time. So you see the arising and passing of things. So you see the rising of a thought. You see the passing of it. It's often our thoughts are claustrophobic. And we're so caught up in the story and the drama. It's hard actually to step back and see Oh, this is a thought. That's a Rising, we're living in the thought. We go live in a thought to step back and watch it. And if your mind is calm enough, you can see it arise and pass, then you might be able to be aware that there might there's space between your thoughts. And then the very interesting question you can ask yourself, and the question is, who are you? When you're not thinking? Well, then you can answer the question with another thought, or I am guilty as a thought. But who are you you're not thinking, Oh, you know, I'm Dharma Dharma teacher. Or I am a nice person, nice guy. Or I am a lousy person. I'm, you know, embarrassment to humankind. Whatever you know, but as soon as you say a thought like that, it's a thought who are When you're not thinking, My guess is most of the ways in which you suffer around your self identity. Those of us suffer some way or other about self identity, some concept of self that happens through the medium through the vehicle of your thinking. And if you're not thinking, but you're awake, and alert, and aware, and present, you know, thinking those thoughts, then who are you? And some people might say, Well, yes, I'm not those thoughts. I don't believe those thoughts. But those feelings of mind are so heavy and dark. But then you see the rising of passing revealing. Who are you? Are you not having a feeling? Oh, no, that's I can't go there. Because feeling is so closely tied to who I really am. That it just seems that Neil nihilistic not to have feelings. You're telling me I'd have any feelings? No. But do you really want us to Find yourself by the feelings you're having. What if you step back from those? And watch those arise and pass? And who are you when you're alert, present clear here? transparent but there's not a feeling won't be blah. No, that's a feeling. Oh, I feel kind of lost. That's a feeling. You can see that feeling that feeling of lostness arise and you might see it as Who are you, you know, having feeling. Who are you really not having a perception? In a space between perceptions, perception arises, it passes Who are you? You're aware, alert, energized present. And there's a space between perceptions. I mean, you know, well, there's no perception do not exist. Is it? You know, is it kind of a blank? No. What is that So, one of the things is is, is that it's non referential. So, like your eyes, so we can all try to do an

experiment here. Thank you all have good enough eyesight for this. So use your eyes, look at something. Now try to look at your try see your eyes. Can you see your eyes? What happens when you look for your eyes when you're looking?

If you're really fast, turn your head fast. There's no self referential ability in the eyes themselves to see themselves. It's kind of like, if you try to look behind your eyes with your eyes. You can't really say you see anything, this is great space or it's great to something, you know, you're there, right? I mean, all this mental functioning is going on right behind the eyes. But you know, you can't see it. There's transparency or translucency, there's nothing to cling to, because you can't see it. So I don't know if that experiment kind of points to it, but it's kind of like that you exist. And things are rising pass, but you don't take the rising and passing of things as, as a place where you hook your identity, claim, this is who I really am. But also you don't take that transparent awareness. Open awareness as who I am either, because two reasons. Because to do that requires you to think and then you're actually holding on to the thought requires you to perceive that you're holding on to the perception. And because you might also be aware that this translucent transparent awareness also arises and passes to this is not to leave us diminished. This insight. But to be enhanced, so enhanced, that the people who follow you might hear about you might sit around the campfire and say about you. Let me tell you about the marvelous and wonderful qualities of this person who was free. And it was, she was free because she could see the arising, the sustaining in the passing of these ordinary phenomena that make up our human life, perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and all that. And that's really a miracle, to have that ability, all the rest, earlier stuff that's just fluff. We don't have to ever talk about it again. That probably never will in a Dharma talk. So that's the story for today. I hope you I hope that you made the right choice, the beginning of the image you'll never know. So thank you very much