Decoding Two "Miracles" of the Buddha

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Although the Buddha forbade his disciples from performing supernatural acts, the Tipitaka shows the teacher himself performing miracles in several places. Some Buddhists may take these literally, while others ignore or dismiss them as fanciful hagiography. This article proposes to "decode" two such miracles – namely, the twin miracle and the miracle to convert Aṅgulimāla – as refutation of rival karma theories, and to examine their relevance to the modern world.

The Twin Miracle[1]

In Lap-Lae district at the edge of Uttaradit town in Thailand, there is an important group of three temples. While the most prominent one, Wat Phrataen Sila-at (Temple of the Buddha's Rock Seat), houses a rock seat the Buddha is said once to have sat on, Wat Phra Yuen (Temple of the Standing Buddha) keeps a stone base imprinted with what are believed to be his footprints and Wat Phra Non (Temple of the Reclining Buddha) is home to a rock bed that the Buddha supposedly reclined on.

The author had visited these temples many times since childhood without realizing their significance as a group, until one day he looked at the newly repainted murals inside Wat Phra Yuen.

Among the many wall paintings depicting scenes from the Buddha's life, one panel shows multiple Buddhas in three postures - sitting, standing and reclin-

[1] A revised version of the author's articles published in *The Nation* newspaper (Thailand) on July 25-26, 2010.

JOCBS. 2012 (2): 209–222.

ing. The scene is an important episode long considered paradoxical. The story, according to the *Dhammapada* Commentary, goes like this.[2]

A non-believer put a precious bowl on top of a pole made of a series of bamboos, and challenged anyone who claimed to be enlightened – if such a person existed – to fly through the air to retrieve it. The bowl was coveted by all the teachers of the six rival schools. One – Niganṭha Nātaputta – was singled out as trying the hardest – although unsuccessfully – for the "bowl of contention" by pretending to be on the verge of trying, only to be stopped by his disciples, as previously rehearsed. In the end, a senior Buddhist monk performed a flying miracle and took it in order to show Buddhism's superiority. When he found out, the Buddha admonished the monk and laid down a rule forbidding the performance of supernatural acts.

The heretics were delighted to hear the news and started blowing horns about their own superior powers. So the Buddha raised the bar with a promise to perform a miracle himself under a mango tree in the city of Sāvatthī. The heretics then went ahead and uprooted all the mango trees in that city. When the time came, however, the Buddha miraculously made a giant mango tree spring up from the seed of a mango he had just eaten.

At this point, Sakka the chief of gods, ordered the deity Wind-cloud to uproot the heretics' pavilion and blow dust and rain at them, and the Sun deity to scorch them. The heretics were said to flee completely demoralized. One rival teacher, Pūraṇ a Kassapa, was said to commit suicide.

The Buddha then performed what is known as the "twin miracle", involving the creation of a double. As one Buddha stood, sat or lay down, the other would take a different posture, both taking turns asking each other questions concerning the Dhamma. It was said that as a result, thousands gained stream entry. This episode is considered the turning point when Buddhism won a decisive victory over rival religions.

Some Buddhists may take such a miracle literally, while others ignore or dismiss it as fanciful hagiography. Whether one believes it or not, there remains the fact that the Buddha seemingly broke his own rule, and this needs explanation. According to tradition, the Buddha answered this charge of inconsistency by insisting that the owner of a mango garden can consume all his mangoes while prohibiting others from doing so. This traditional way of answering one paradox

[2] *Dhammapada Commentary*, Book XIV, Story 2

with another is hardly satisfactory, especially in light of the Buddha's condemnation of miracles elsewhere in the *Tipiṭaka*.[3]

Even when we consider the thousands who benefited from the event, the miracle still appears un-Buddhist, because for the Buddha a charitable end can never justify an undesirable means, as the Dhamma is known to be "lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle and lovely in the end".

It could be argued that the purpose of the miracle was to ready the minds of his audience for the Dhamma being taught. Ironically, the content of the Buddha's teaching on that occasion was not recorded by tradition. Some may even counter that the miracle is more distracting than conducive to absorbing a sermon.

Since the text has nothing further to say about the miracle and leaves us with a paradox, the author would like to take this as a departure point and propose a context-based interpretation to augment the traditional text-based reading.

It helps to recall that when the Buddha condemned miracles, he made an exception for one: the supernatural ability in the art of teaching (*anusāsanī-pāṭihāriya*).[4] During the twin miracle, the Buddha reportedly "looked into the hearts of the great multitude… and preached dharma and performed a miracle in accordance with the temper and disposition of every such person".[5]

Many in the audience must have been followers of the rival schools, especially the Nigaṇṭhas or followers of early Jainism, eager to humiliate the Buddha after their teacher had been defeated by the Buddha's disciple . (Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta himself was not reported to be present, however.)

The Nigaṇṭhas have their own theory of karma and liberation. For them, karma encompasses all physical, verbal and mental acts regardless of intention. In order to attain deliverance from the cycle of rebirths and suffering, they practised non-performance of new karma and annihilation of past karma by asceticism including fasting and various kinds of self-torture.

Sanskrit scholar Johannes Bronkhorst writes: "Probably the earliest surviving detailed description of the road leading to liberation in the Jaina texts occurs in the so-called *Ācārāṅga Sutra*… The ascetic who decides that he is ready for it takes up a position – *lying, sitting, or standing*[6] – abstains from all food, and faces death with complete indifference. He starves to death in a state of total restraining with

[3] Particularly in the Kevaṭṭa Sutta (DN I 211-223).

[4] See, for example, the Kevaṭṭa Sutta (DN I 214).

[5] Burlingame, Eugene Watson, *Buddhist Legends Part 3*, Harvard Oriental Series Vol 30, p. 47.

[6] Author's italics.

regard to all activity and movement…We read repeatedly in the *Acārānga* that suffering is the result of activity. 'He knows that all this suffering is born from activity"; "No action is found in him who has abandoned activity, the condition for rebirth originates on account of activity."'[7] We read in another Jain text, the *Uttarādhyayana*, that as part of his internal austerities, "if a monk remains motionless when lying down, sitting, or standing upright, this is called abandoning of the body."[8]

In *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta*, the Buddha similarly described the practice of a group of Nigaṇṭhas, "Now, Mahānāma , on one occasion I was living at Rājagaha on the mountain Vulture Peak. On that occasion a number of Nigaṇṭhas living on the Black Rock on the slopes of Isigili were practising continuous standing, rejecting sitting, and were experiencing painful, racking, piercing feelings due to exertion."[9] Before enlightenment, the Buddha experimented with similar ascetic practices (*dukkarakārikā*) in seated position.[10]

But once enlightened, he re-defined karma as the motivations behind actions, pointing out in *Nibbedhika Sutta*, "It is volition, monk, that I declare to be karma. Having willed, one performs an action by body, speech or mind."[11] The contrast between Buddhism and Nigaṇṭha belief is further elaborated in *Upāli Sutta*.[12] Therefore, rather than the Nigaṇṭ has' ascetic practices of physical and mental immobility, the Buddhist way out of suffering involves the eradication of moral defilements (*kilesa*) – the root cause of karma, rebirths and suffering.

The twin miracle may seem innocuously content-free to a Buddhist, but its connotation would not have been lost to the Nigaṇṭhas. Not only was the Buddha challenging their non-action approach to karma every time he changed postures between standing, sitting and lying – the three positions in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, as may be recalled; he even seemed to be happily doubling it when he created a doppelgänger! From the Buddhist perspective, however, the Buddha had superseded all karma at enlightenment under the Bodhi tree.

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[7] Bronkhorst, Johannes, *Karma: Dimensions of Asian Spirituality*, 2011, University of Hawai'i Press, p 10.

[8] Uttarādhyayana XXX www.sacred-texts.com/jai/sbe45/sbe4532.htm

[9] MN No 14

[10] For example, *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* (MN No 36) and *Bodhirājakumāra Sutta* (Mn No 85).

[11] AN III 415. (*cetanāhaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi. cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti – kāyena vācāya manasā.*)

[12] MN I 371-387 (No. 56)

So if we are to take it literally, the miracle can be understood as a visualized koan which the Buddha used to jolt the predominantly Niganṭha audience into questioning their view of karma and opening the way for an alternative theory. (It would not be surprising if the Buddha on that occasion gave a sermon along the line of *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta* mentioned above or the *Sīvaka Sutta* and *Tittha Sutta* cited below.) The miracle, therefore, would fall under the rubric of educational tool, which is praised rather than condemned by the Buddha.

However, a better reading is to regard the episode as a teaching device directed at Buddhists. Seen in this light, it is a brilliant refutation of the Niganṭhas' rival karma doctrine, so that latter-day Buddhists will not fall for the doctrine of karmic determinism.

To confirm this interpretation of the miracle, one remembers that the heretics tried to destroy all the mango trees before the Buddha's arrival. In Buddhist literature, trees and fruits are frequently used as metaphors for karma and its result. The Buddha's miraculous mango tree, therefore, was an in-your-face reminder to the heretics of this failure to uproot karma despite their strenuous efforts. As a result, they were "blown away" by the miracle (symbolized by their wind-ravaged pavilion). In particular, Pūraṇa Kassapa, must have been so humiliated that he committed suicide, because he taught the doctrine of non-action (*akiriyā*), which denied altogether that good or bad actions had any result for the doer.[13]

This reading also explains why the Buddha rejected one fantastic miracle after another when his disciples proposed to perform them on his behalf – rather than forbidding them all in one go with the established rule. None of them would have the effect of the instruction he intended to give. This also explains the conventional belief that only a Buddha can perform a twin miracle: only the Buddha himself can play the role of decisively vanquishing heretical beliefs.

Miracle to convert Aṅgulimāla[14]

In light of the twin miracle interpretation above, it seems likely that at least some other miracles of the Buddha can be similarly interpreted as teaching devices, bypassing the question whether they were actual occurrences or later invented on.

[13] The Buddha was also misunderstood by Niganṭha Nātaputta as teaching this doctrine in the *Sīha Sutta* (AN iv 180).

[14] A revised version of the author's article published in *The Nation* newspaper (Thailand) on Feb 17-18, 2011.

A case in point is the famous miracle in the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* in which the eponymous brigand exhausted all his speed and strength while trying to catch up with the serenely-paced Buddha.[15] Aṅgulimāla shouted for the Buddha to stop, only to be perplexed and converted at the Buddha's pronouncement, "I've already stopped, Aṅgulimāla. You stop too." Tradition explains that the Buddha was referring to cessation of violence against other beings, and the *Sutta* is considered as the supreme demonstration of the compassionate Buddha's redemptive power and the universal human potential for spiritual progress.

Buddhist scholar Piya Tan adds depth to this miraculous scene by describing Aṅgulimāla's chase after the Buddha as a Sisyphean run in which what went nowhere was not only Aṅgulimāla's feet but also his spiritual development.[16] This recalls a verse in the *Sutta Nipāta* describing the Buddha, "Whatever sectarians there are, whether Ājīvikas or Jains, not one of them surpasses you in wisdom, just as a man standing still does not pass one going quickly."[17]

The shortcoming of the traditional explanation is that it doesn't sufficiently deal with the intention behind Aṅgulimāla's gruesome acts.[18] Like in the twin miracle above, an even bigger problem is that it doesn't explain the fact that the Buddha here performed a miracle despite his own prohibition of them elsewhere.

Again, the key to interpreting this miracle is to remember that the Buddha is known for his skillful means, tailoring his teachings to suit the audience's predispositions. Aṅgulimāla was said to be among the brightest students at Taxila, the "Oxford of ancient India". That he was not an average robber but a philosopher-brigand seems to be confirmed by his utterance at finally discovering the Buddha's teachings, "Of all the Dhammas known to men, I have come to the very best."[19] To such a man, therefore, a simple message on the unwholesomeness of murder is too painfully obvious to be worth spelling out - much less accompanied by a miracle. So what was the Buddha's actual message to him?

By meticulously studying the variant Pali readings of the *Sutta*, Richard Gombrich convincingly concluded in his article *Who Was Aṅgulimāla?* that Aṅgulimāla

[15] MN II, 97-105 (No 86). The story is also told in the *Thera-gāthā* 866-891.

[16] Tan, Piya, 2003, "Discourse on Aṅgulimāla". Available online: http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/5.11-Aṅgulimāla-S-m86-piya.pdf

[17] *Sutta Nipāta*, II.14, verse 381, *The Rhinoceros Horn*, trans. K R Norman, Pali Text Society, 1985.

[18] These explanations were not found in the Aṅgulimāla Sutta or the Thera-gāthā, but described in the commentaries to them – *Papañca-sūdanī* and *Paramattha-dīpanī*, respectively

[19] *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* (MN ii 105)

was in fact an early worshipper of Śiva, the god of destruction.[20] The author believes that the following interpretation of the Buddha's miracle corroborates Professor Gombrich's discovery.

Through Professor Johannes Bronkhorst's works on Brahmanical philosophies, the author came to glimpse Aṅgulimāla's mind, which the Buddha must have read. According to Professor Bronkhorst, at the foundation of Brahmanical philosophies, including Śaivism, is the belief that no karma is incurred if one does not attach oneself to the actions or their results. He explains, "A right attitude secures that material nature acts without involvement of the self. Non-involvement is central. It is fundamental that one dissociate oneself from one's actions, or rather from their fruits. Actions which are not inspired by the desire to obtain happiness or to avoid suffering do not produce karmic effects. They are as good as complete inactivity."[21] In other words, not committing oneself to an act is as good as not committing it. For example, the *Bhagavadgītā* reads, "Holding pleasure and pain alike, gain and loss, victory and defeat, then gird thyself for battle; thus thou shalt not get evil."[22] Professor Bronkhorst adds, "Obtaining this mental attitude can be facilitated in various ways." In the *Bhagavadgītā*, it was recommended to regard one's act as an offering to Krishna.

According to Professor Gombrich's insight above, it is likely that Aṅgulimāla similarly made his killings acts of sacrifice to Śiva, hoping to attain liberation from the cycle of rebirth and associated sufferings. Explaining how Aṅgulimāla came to wear a garland of fingers, he wrote, "Tantra rests on the idea... that a worshipper can somehow identify with his god in a literal sense… This idea underlies most of the sophisticated theology, both tantric and devotional, of Indian theism."[23]

This would explain why, according to the commentaries, the hitherto intelligent Aṅgulimāla, son of a Brahmin chaplain, came to blindly follow his teacher's instruction to kill a thousand victims. If his education was the doctrine of detaching himself from his actions, a gruesome mission with a high death toll would be a perfect proof of his success.

Had Aṅgulimāla only been emotionally insensitive to blood, then the Buddha's statement that he hadn't ceased violence would have sounded blatantly obvious – like a butcher being told that his hands are bloody. But if, rather, Aṅgulimāla

[20] Gombrich, Richard, 1996, 'Who was Angulimala?', *How Buddhism Began*, pp 135-164

[21] Bronkhorst, Johannes, "Ājīvika doctrine reconsidered", *Essays in Jaina Philosophy and Religion*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 2003.

[22] Bhagavadgītā 2.38

[23] Ibid, p 155

had been ideologically desensitized to violence, then the Buddha's argument would truly have caught him by surprise – like a high priest being told that his lifelong worship actually leads to hell. It would jolt Aṅgulimāla into an awakening – like a "moon coming out from behind a cloud".

So when the Buddha said that Aṅgulimāla had not stopped accumulating karma, it was not just Aṅgulimāla's violence that was rebuked but, more importantly, its underpinning philosophy of moral suspension. By saying, "I've already stopped, Aṅgulimāla. You stop too," the Buddha was making the point that Aṅgulimāla did not stop accumulating new karma despite his non-attachment philosophy, while the Buddha had already done so. The Buddha's presentation of the converted Aṅgulimāla to the king, therefore, declares not only a triumph of compassion over violence but also a philosophical victory. This also explains why the Buddha seemed to be purposely seeking out Aṅgulimāla in the first place.

Other things that previously looked out of place now make better sense. The Buddha gave Aṅgulimāla two statements to proclaim. [24] Why did he bother to give Aṅgulimāla the first version, "I have not intentionally committed violence against any being", which both knew full well to be false? The key word here is "intentionally" (*sañcicca*). This first statement can be considered an opportunity for Aṅgulimāla openly to disavow his former belief.

Aṅgulimāla the Śiva worshipper would have no problem in uttering it because he would claim to have had no intention against his victims. However, the converted Aṅgulimāla would not be able to say it. Moreover, the second version the Buddha gave allowed Aṅgulimāla to confirm his transformation, declaring that he had not intentionally committed any violence after being (re)born into the Buddhist order.

This reading also explains the *Sutta*'s rather unusual ending. Most stories about the Buddha's disciples end when nibbāna is reached. However, the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* goes on to tell how Aṅgulimāla suffered a painful fate after enlightenment.[25] Upon seeing his injury, the Buddha uttered, "Bear it, Brahmin! Bear it, Brahmin! You are experiencing here and now the result of deeds because of which you might have been tortured in hell for many years, for many hundreds of years, for many thousands of years."[26] This was likely intended – not unlike the

[24] *Aṅgulimāla Sutta*, MN II 103.
[25] *Aṅgulimāla Sutta*, MN II 104.
[26] *Aṅgulimāla Sutta*, MN II 104. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 715.

mango tree in the twin miracle – to reaffirm that Aṅgulimāla's murderous acts indeed bore fruit, despite what he had previously believed.

Modern Resonances

The interpretations of both miracles may sound esoteric and irrelevant to the modern world, but in fact beliefs similar to those of the Niganthas and Aṅgulimāla are still at work in today's societies.

Blaming It All on the Past

Lacking knowledge of competing karma theories in the Buddha's time, many Buddhists fail to grasp how the Buddha revolutionized the concept of karma, turning it from an all-oppressive cosmic force to an agency to command one's own life and make spiritual progress in this life. Oblivious to the Buddha's emphasis on the here and now, they regress to the pre-Buddhist belief that everything in life is determined by the past. This kind of karmic navel-gazing – identical to the Niganṭhas' *pubbekatavāda* – allows all of today's predicaments to be conveniently blamed on deeds committed in previous lives. Therefore, instead of making efforts to improve one's conditions according to the Buddha's forward-looking doctrine, they are preoccupied with staring retrospectively into the karmic crystal and conducting charlatan rituals to "untangle karma".

Karmic determinism has done great damage not only to individual efforts but also to society as a whole, when karma is used to rationalize inequality and justify prejudices. According to this view, the disabled, the poor and women are said to deserve their present woes because they made too little merit or, worse, committed sins in their past lives. This list of second-class humans has in modern times extended to include homosexuals, transgenders, people with HIV, sex workers, victims of crimes, the frail and even tsunami victims.

In the *Sīvaka Sutta*, the Buddha clearly rejected this heretical view that "whatever a person experiences, be it pleasure, pain or neither-pain-nor-pleasure, all is caused by previous karma." Instead, he gave examples of physical, biological and social factors as additional causes for present phenomena and concluded that holders of that deterministic view "go beyond what they know by themselves and what is accepted as true by the world."[27]

[27] SN IV 230. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 1279.

In the *Tittha Sutta*, the Buddha reasoned that this kind of determinism would also mean that people do good and bad deeds as a result of past karma. Such fatalism would mean that nobody is responsible for their acts, and there would be no desire or effort to do what should be done and avoid what should not be.[28] Such a view obviously does not constitute a religion – let alone the Buddha's.

In a society revelling in karmic fatalism and cosmic retribution, rigid norms and communal sanctions are enforced to preserve the social – and cosmic – order. It is thought righteous to maintain prejudice and discrimination against marginalized minorities, while empowering measures provided for them are seen as undue approval and encouragement for those with allegedly undeserving moral characters.

Taken by believers into their own hands and institutionalized by society, karmic determinism, in effect, is turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, much of the ordeal suffered by the vulnerable is ensured by structural violence in the forms of public censure and social sanctions.

According to Buddhism, however, differences among people should be a cause for kindness and compassion. In fact, in the *Vāseṭṭha Sutta* the Buddha was the first religious teacher to proclaim the commonality of all humankind in an age when caste, sexism and racism prevailed.[29]

Therefore, the Buddha's karma theory should be used to improve societies for the benefit of all – not for blaming the victims. To use a science metaphor, the Buddha was not only the Newton who transformed the understanding of karmic gravity, but also the Wright brothers who led the way in navigating and even defying it.

Duty to Kill

Gītā verses such as "Holding pleasure and pain alike, gain and loss, victory and defeat, then gird thyself for battle; thus thou shalt not get evil," would be interpreted by most modern Hindu thinkers as addressing a spiritual battle inside oneself. However, fundamentalists see them literally as validation for actual wars, considering it righteous to kill in the name of dharma – much like Arjuna, who was advised by Krishna to follow his warrior duty by going to war with his own cousins. Unfortunately, this kind of thinking is not limited to India. Of all places, this

[28] AN III, VII.61.
[29] MN No. 98.

Aṅgulimāla-like belief manages to creep up in modern Buddhist societies in the guise of Buddhism.

"You did not have any intention; therefore you did not commit any sin." This would be in accordance with the Buddha's teachings if said about a doctor who lost a patient's life despite her best professional effort. However, it is chilling when used as "a license to kill" by Nuon Chea, Khmer Rouge's "Brother Number 2", to convince his subordinates of their innocence after their reign of terror had caused millions of deaths.[30] According to him, no bad karma is incurred if one merely follows orders without "taking it personally". This is clearly a modern variant of Aṅgulimāla's religion. The difference is Nuon Chea and his lieutenants were not worshipping Śiva but practised the faith of radical totalitarianism.

Zen Buddhism underpinned Japan's Code of Bushidō – "the way of the warrior" – and instilled samurais with bravery in the face of death, as well as the determination to carry out their bloody tasks. Brian Victoria, author of *Zen at War*, summarized: "There is a Zen belief that you can transcend good and evil. And once you've done this, you act in a spontaneous and intuitive manner. Once you believe that discriminating thought is no longer important – in fact, that not only is it not important, but that it has to be discarded – then all ethical concerns disappear."[31]

Zen-inspired Bushidō is, therefore, actually closer to Aṅgulimāla's religion than the Buddhism of which it claims to be a branch, as nothing can be further removed from the Buddha's teachings than war and violence. Even before World War II, Japanese religious leaders cited Buddhism to support the country's militaristic expansion. Soyen Shaku, teacher of D.T. Suzuki, defended the Russo-Japanese war by calling it a just war against evils that "must be unflinchingly prosecuted".[32]

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[30] "Enemies of the People", *The Economist*, Jul 29, 2010. http:// www.economist.com/ node/ 16703377.

[31] Stephens, Christopher. "Zen's Holy War: Christopher Stephens speaks with priest and historian Brian Victoria," *Kansai Time Out*, April 2003. Also quoted in Metraux, Daniel A., *A Critical Analysis of Brian Victoria's Perspectives on Modern Japanese Buddhist History*. Available online: www.globalbuddhism.org/5/metraux04.htm.

[32] Shaku, Soyen, "At the Battle of Nan-Shan Hill", *Zen for Americans*, 1906. Available online: www.sacred-texts.com/bud/zfa/zfa23.htm

Also cited in Loy, David, "Is Zen Buddhism?", *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Autumn 1995), pp. 273-286. Available online: www.thezensite.com/ ZenEssays/ CriticalZen/ Is_Zen_Buddhism.html.

Most recently, in 2010 many Thais were calling for the government to crack down on the tens of thousands of "red-shirt" protesters who were camping for weeks in the heart of Bangkok. To justify the foreseeable bloodshed, one violence-monger published a *Gītā*-alluding poem dedicated to the then prime minister entitled, "Go to war, Abhisit!"

Although the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* obviously censures violence, it is more importantly a rebuttal of moral suspension, of which murder is but one possible manifestation. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the scientific director of the Manhattan Project, is believed to have read verses from the *Gītā* to calm his mind and justify his central role in building the world's first nuclear bombs.[33] After the first explosion, he quoted the *Gītā*, "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."[34] His case is an example of how one man's moral suspension can affect the lives and deaths of millions, even though he was "just doing his job".

Buddhism, on the other hand, would allow no such moral vacuum, emphasizing mindfulness over actions at all time. For the Buddha, we can never detach ourselves from or deny responsibility for our deeds because we are the sum of all volitions reflected in them. Committing actions in the name of a god, belief, ideology, cause, regime or institution doesn't lessen our moral responsibility.

The *Aṅgulimāla Sutta*, therefore, is a story not only about the Buddha's compassion but also his wisdom, countering moral suspension with mindfulness and moral responsibility. To read it merely as a tale of an evil man's spiritual U-turn deprives Buddhists of the moral foundation that Buddhism has to offer.

Conclusion

In retrospect, it is no surprise that the Buddhist Canon would contain some visualized – as opposed to purely verbalized – versions of the Buddha's challenge to rival religions. His debates with the Niganṭhas are well represented in the *Tipiṭaka*. This interpretation of the twin miracle, if correct, provides graphic visuals to buttress his arguments.

In regards to Brahministic beliefs, the Buddha was shown to be criticizing its social construct – namely, the caste system – in many places. But little seems to

[33] Hijiya, James A., "The Gita of J. Robert Oppenheimer", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* Vol. 144, No. 2, June 2000. Available online www.amphilsoc.org/sites/default/files/Hijiya.pdf.

[34] A video clip of Oppenheimer citing the *Gītā* after the first explosion can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuRvBoLu4to.

be said about its soteriology, particularly its karma theory. This interpretation of the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta*, if correct, will go in some way to change that.[35]

Figure 1: *Aṅgulimāla*

[35] While in these two miracles the Buddha may have shown what his karma theory is not, another less well known "miracle" demonstrates what it is. Interested readers may want to read "The Legend of the Earth Goddess and the Buddha" by the present author in the *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* (JOCBS), Vol 1.

Figure 2: *Twin Miracle*