

A Fakir's "Miracle" and the Prayer of Jesus

By Archimandrite Nicholas Drobyazgin

The author of this testimony, a new martyr of the Communist Yoke, enjoyed a brilliant worldly career as a naval commander, being also deeply involved in occultism as editor of the occult journal Rebus. Being saved from almost certain death at sea by a miracle of St. Seraphim, he made a pilgrimage to Sarov and then renounced his worldly career and occult ties to become a monk. After being ordained priest, he served as a missionary in China, India and Tibet, as the priest of various embassy churches, and as abbot of several monasteries. After 1914 he lived at the Kiev Caves Lavra, where he discoursed to the young people who visited him concerning the influence of occultism on contemporary events in Russia. In the autumn of 1924, one month after he had been visited by a certain Tuholx, the author of the book Black Magic, he was murdered in his cell "by persons unknown," with obvious Bolshevik connivance, stabbed by a dagger with a special handle apparently of occult significance.

The incident here described, revealing the nature of one of the mediumistic "gifts" which are common in Eastern religions, took place not long before 1900, and was recorded about 1922 by Dr. A.P. Pimofievich, lately of Novo-Diveyevo Convent, N.Y. (Russian text in Orthodox Life, 1956, no. 1.).

ON A WONDROUS early tropical morning our ship was cleaving the waters of the Indian Ocean, nearing the island of Ceylon. The lively faces of the passengers, for the most part Englishmen with their families who were travelling to their posts or on business in their Indian colony, looked avidly in the distance, seeking out with their eyes the enchanted isle, which for practically all of them had been bound up since childhood with so much that was interesting and mysterious in the tales and descriptions of travellers.

The island was still scarcely visible when already a fine, intoxicating, fragrance from the trees growing on it more and more enveloped the ship with each passing breeze. Finally a kind of blue cloud lay on the horizon, ever increasing in size as the ship speedily approached. Already one could notice the buildings spread out along the shore, buried in the verdure of majestic palms, and the many-colored crowd of the local inhabitants who were awaiting the ship's arrival. The passengers, who had quickly become acquainted with each other on the trip, were laughing and conversing animatedly with each other on the

deck, admiring the wondrous scene of the fairy-tale isle as it unfolded before their eyes. The ship swung slowly around, preparing to moor at the dock of the port city of Colombo.

Here the ship stopped to take on coal, and the passengers had sufficient time to go ashore. The day was so hot that many passengers decided not to leave the ship until evening, when a pleasant coolness replaced the heat of the day. A small group of eight people, to which I joined myself, was led by Colonel Elliott, who had been in Colombo before and knew the city and its environs well. He made an alluring proposition. "Ladies and gentlemen! Wouldn't you like to go a few miles out of town and pay a visit to one of the local magician-fakirs? Perhaps we shall see something interesting." All accepted the colonel's proposition with enthusiasm.

It was already evening when we left behind the noisy streets of the city and rolled along a marvellous jungle road which was twinkling with the sparks of millions of fireflies. Finally, the road suddenly widened and in front of us there was a small clearing surrounded on all sides by jungle. At the edge of the clearing under a big tree there was a kind of hut, next to which a small bonfire was smouldering and a thin, emaciated old man with a turban on his head sat cross-legged and with his unmoving gaze directed at the fire. Despite our noisy arrival, the old man continued to sit completely immovable, not paying us the slightest attention. Somewhere from out of the darkness a youth appeared and, going up to the colonel, quietly asked him something. In a short while he brought out several stools and our group arranged itself in a semi-circle not far from the bonfire. A light and fragrant smoke arose. The old man sat in the same pose, apparently noticing no one and nothing. The half-moon which arose dispelled to some extent the darkness of the night, and in its ghostly light all objects took on fantastic outlines. Involuntarily everyone became quiet and waited to see what would happen.

"Look! Look there, on the tree!" Miss Mary cried in an excited whisper. We all turned our heads in the direction indicated. And indeed, the whole surface of the immense crown of the tree under which the fakir was sitting was as it were gently flowing in the soft illumination of the moon, and the tree itself began gradually to melt and lose its contours; literally, some unseen hand had thrown over it an airy covering which became more and more concentrated with every moment. Soon the undulating surface of the sea presented itself with complete clarity before our astonished gaze. With a light rumble one wave followed another, making foaming white-caps; light clouds were floating in a sky which had become blue. Stunned, we could not tear ourselves away from this striking picture.

And then in the distance there appeared a white ship. Thick smoke poured out of its two large smokestacks. It quickly approached us, cleaving the water. To our great amazement we recognized it as our own ship, the one on which we had come to Colombo! A whisper

passed through our ranks when we read on the stern, traced out in gold letters, the name of our ship, Luisa. But what astounded us most of all was what we saw on the ship — ourselves! Don't forget that at the time when all this happened cinematography hadn't even been thought of and it was impossible even to conceive of something like this. Each of us saw ourselves on the ship's deck amongst people who were laughing and talking to each other. But what was especially astonishing: I saw not only myself, but at the same time the whole deck of the ship down to the smallest details, as if in a bird's-eye view — which of course simply could not be in actuality. At one and the same time I saw myself among the passengers, and the sailors working at the other end of the ship, and the captain in his cabin, and even our monkey "Nelly," a favorite of all, eating bananas on the main mast. All my companions at the same time, each in his own way, were greatly excited at what they were seeing, expressing their emotions with soft cries and excited whispers.

I had completely forgotten that I was a priest-monk and, it would seem, had no business at all participating in such a spectacle. The spell was so powerful that both the mind and the heart were silent. My heart began to beat painfully in alarm. Suddenly I was beside myself. A fear took hold of my whole being.

My lips began to move and say: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" Immediately I felt relieved. It was just as if some mysterious chains which had bound me began to fall away. The prayer became more concentrated, and with it my peace of soul returned. I continued to look at the tree, and suddenly, as if pursued by the wind, the picture became clouded and was dispersed. I saw nothing more except the big tree, illuminated by the light of the moon, and likewise the fakir sitting in silence by the bonfire, while my companions continued to express what they were experiencing while gazing at the picture, which for them had not been broken off.

But then something apparently happened to the fakir also. He reeled to the side. The youth ran up to him in alarm. The seance was suddenly broken up.

Deeply moved by everything they had experienced, the spectators stood up, animatedly sharing their impressions and not understanding at all why the whole thing had been cut off so sharply and unexpectedly. The youth explained it as owing to the exhaustion of the fakir, who was sitting as before, his head down, and paying not the slightest attention to those present.

Having generously rewarded the fakir through the youth for the opportunity to be participants of such an astonishing spectacle, our group quickly got together for the trip back. While starting out, I involuntarily turned back once more in order to imprint in my memory the whole scene, and suddenly — I shuddered from an unpleasant feeling. My

gaze met the gaze of the fakir, which was full of hatred. It was but for a single instant, and then he again assumed his habitual position; but this glance once and for all opened my eyes to the realization of whose power it was that had produced this "miracle."

Eastern "spirituality" is by no means limited to such mediumistic "tricks" as this fakir practiced; we shall see some of its more sincere aspects in the next chapter. Still, all the power that is given to the practitioners of Eastern religions comes from the same phenomenon of mediumism, whose central characteristic is a passiveness before "spiritual" reality that enables one to enter into contact with the "gods" of the non-Christian religions. This phenomenon may be seen in Eastern Meditation" (even when it may be given the name of "Christian"), and perhaps even in those strange "gifts" which in our days of spiritual decline are mislabeled "charismatic.."